



County of Sonoma
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
SERVICES

Rita Scardaci, MPH – Director

Prevention and Planning Division
Barbara Graves - Director

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Contact: Beth Dadko
(707) 565-6678
bdadko@sonoma-county.org

Kids and Cars Don't Mix

Parents: Never, Never Leave Kids Alone in or Around Cars

On July 14, 2006, Safe Kids Sonoma County premiered a video clip and campaign materials to alert parents to the importance of never leaving children unattended in or around cars. "With summer arriving, parents and caregivers need to be reminded that leaving children unattended in a car can be a serious risk to their health," says Beth Dadko, Safe Kids Sonoma County Coordinator. The clip, developed by Safe Kids Worldwide, includes a demonstration with thermometers inside and outside of a car parked in the sun. Even though it is just 77 degrees outside, the inside car temperature is as high as 114 degrees.

- Nationally, from 2001 through May 2006, over 640 children died after being left in a car. ¹
- The inside vehicle temperature can rise 19 degrees in 10 minutes, and as much as 34 degrees in a half hour.
- If the temperature outside has reached 90° F, the inside of the car can reach 120° F and more based on the time elapsed.
- Contrary to popular belief, cracking a window does not prevent superheating of the vehicle interior.
- Heatstroke occurs when the core body temperature reaches 104° F and a body core temperature of 107° F is usually fatal.
- A child's body warms 3 to 5 times faster than an adult's.

"Leaving children unattended is not just dangerous but against the law. Based on Kaitlyn's Law, it is a citable offense in California to leave a child 6 years of age or younger unattended in a car," says Barb Upham, CHP Officer. "During the summer months law enforcement agencies across Sonoma County see an increase in the number of kids left in cars. There is always a sense of urgency in those calls because we know that within minutes the situation can become tragic." Besides hyperthermia, an acute condition when the body is overwhelmed with heat and body temperature climbs uncontrollably, other dangers exist when children are left alone in cars. If the car is left on, there are risks of power windows or sunroofs closing on or crushing a child or carbon monoxide poisoning. If children play around cars, they are at risk for getting run over in a driveway or getting trapped in a car trunk.

¹ Kids 'N Cars, an organization which maintains a national database evaluating circumstances and consequences of leaving children unattended in cars



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Liam Paulsen, from Healdsburg, was an energetic little boy with a big grin and lots of spirit. He died of hyperthermia at the age of two in August of 2004, after being left in the family van by his mother. She was later prosecuted and is in a State prison. His father, Justin Paulsen wants Liam to be remembered so that no other child in our community should suffer the same fate. He reminds parents to:

- Never leave a child unattended in a car
- Always lock the car so that children cannot enter it to use as a play area
- If a child is missing, always check the car and its trunk first
- Keep a reminder in the car that a child is in the backseat such as a toy in the front seat or your house/ work keys in the back seat
- Have a “look before you leave” routine when you get out of the car

Greg Jacobs, retired Assistant District Attorney and Safe Kids member, says that parents can be prosecuted for child neglect for leaving a child in a vehicle, regardless of whether an injury occurs. As Chairperson of the Sonoma County Child Death Review team he is especially conscious that deaths such as Liam’s are entirely preventable. “There is no substitute for careful supervision of young children around cars and their home,” Jacobs says. “Leaving a child unattended in a car on a hot day is like placing the child in an oven.”

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