

Heatstroke Deaths Are Preventable: Take Action as Summer Heats Up



Safe Kids Grand Forks is working hard this summer to spread the message about the dangers of heatstroke deaths from kids in hot cars. We share the simple message to [Stop. Look. Lock.](#) when parking vehicles. Together with our partnership with State Farm, North Dakota's Vision Zero and the Minnesota Safety Council, our message and display is traveling around the region, providing not only parents, but anyone with a vehicle of the dangers that present themselves to young children when a car is unlocked, and children could gain access to it.

In 2024, 39 children died from vehicular heatstroke, an increase from the 29 children who died in 2023. Heatstroke remains one of the leading causes of non-crash vehicle-related fatalities among children, killing more than 1,000 children since 1998. On average, one child dies from heatstroke every 10 days in the United States by crawling into an unlocked vehicle or being left in a car, intentionally or unintentionally.

Tragedies such as this often occur when there is a change in routine, such as taking a different route to work, maybe because of road construction or when one parent typically does the drop off and that pattern gets switched. They also occur when kids get into parked cars that are not locked and become trapped inside. Because of that, this topic is important to share with all vehicle owners, so they make sure to lock their car when it is not in use, even if it is parked in a driveway or garage.

Often when discussing deaths by heatstroke, parents feel "they are good parents and would never forget their child in a vehicle". Sadly, those are the ones most at risk for something like this as they don't take the necessary steps to prevent such tragedies.

Vehicles can heat up very quickly, with temperatures rising 20 degrees in as little as 10 minutes and up to 40-50 degrees hotter than outside within just an hour, creating a deadly situation for a child locked inside. Even on a cool, 60-degree day, a child can die in a hot car. Cracking the windows or parking in the shade does little to protect a trapped child, as children's bodies warm three to five times faster than adults' bodies.

Safe Kids Grand Forks and our partners at NHTSA offers these tips to help keep children safe:

- Always lock your vehicle when you're not using it. Even if you don't have a child of your own, a child in the neighborhood could get into your unlocked vehicle.

- Never leave a child alone in a vehicle, even if you think you'll only be gone for a minute. Many newer vehicles automatically shut off after an extended period of idling so the car you thought was running with the A/C on, may have shut off during your time away from it.
- Make it a habit to check your entire vehicle – especially the back seat – before locking the doors and walking away. Place a stuffed animal in the passenger's seat or your purse or briefcase in the back seat to help you remember that a child is there.
- Ask your childcare provider or school to call if your child doesn't arrive as expected or have an alert system amongst parents where you text one another once the child is dropped off or picked up.
- Teach children that a vehicle is not a play area and store keys out of their reach.
- ACT if you see a child alone in a vehicle by calling 911 immediately and getting help. A child experiencing heat-related distress should be removed from the vehicle as quickly as possible and rapidly cooled.

We thank our partners at State Farm for the heatstroke temperature display that is making sharing this message very dynamic and impressive. To have this display set up at your business or community, contact our office at safekids@altru.org.

