

In the first week of August, an epidemic of child deaths swept the country. Eight children perished under totally preventable circumstances in one week, and 15 others have lost their young lives in the same way already this year. In the last three years, one hundred children were killed under tragic conditions, children of parents who never thought this could happen to them, children lost to a simple but fatal oversight.

They were left in cars, alone, in the heat.

There is no reason, ever, to leave a child unattended in a vehicle. It isn't safe under any circumstances. In one case earlier this year, a child in California died from hypothermia in a car even though the temperature outside was only 67 degrees.

Even when temperatures are in the 60's, a car can heat up to more than 110 degrees.

Not only do children's bodies heat up at three to five times the rate of adults' bodies, but the temperatures in an enclosed car can rapidly rise to unsafe levels, even when the temperature outside is comfortable.

When the outside temperature is just 85 degrees, the temperature inside a car can easily go from 85 to 90 in ten minutes to 100 in 20 minutes, and to 120 degrees in 30 minutes. Once a child's internal body temperature reaches 107 degrees, the complications are fatal.

And these summer days, 85 degrees in Southern Missouri is a pretty darn cool temperature.

Cracking a window isn't enough to offset the increase in temperatures inside the vehicle, either. Cars are like very effective greenhouses, they absorb heat, distribute it and trap it very efficiently. No air is circulating, and no heat escapes. It's no place for anyone, let alone a child.

Not all these examples are the result of parental oversights or neglect, either. Some fatalities occur because unattended children are playing in hot cars, a caregiver is not responsibly watching the child, or caregivers simply don't "look before they lock."

The dangers of a hot car are not just limited to children. Elderly people are just as susceptible to the lethality of hypothermia. Please be mindful of these simple facts this summer, and any time a person (big or little) is in danger of being left in a hot car:

Never leave a child alone, unattended in a vehicle, even if the windows are partially open.

Disasters happen quickly.

Know the symptoms of heatstroke: red and hot skin, no sweating, a strong and rapid pulse or a slow and weak pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion or strange behavior.

It sounds like a list of small things, but these are the warning signs of a life-and-death situation. Leaving a child unattended in a car is not only dangerous, it is also illegal. It shouldn't take a law, however, all it should take is a simple measure of common sense.