

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HYPERTHERMIA



- 1. What is hyperthermia?** Hyperthermia is a condition that occurs when a body's thermostat is overloaded by heat. It can happen to people of all ages. You may have heard this condition called "heat stroke". Symptoms may include: dizziness, disorientation, agitation, confusion, sluggishness, seizure, hot dry skin that is flushed but not sweaty, loss of consciousness, rapid heartbeat or hallucinations. It can be prevented by keeping a person cool and hydrated.
- 2. Who is affected by hyperthermia?** Children are at great risk for this as a child's body heats up 3 to 5 times faster than an adult's. When the body temperature reaches 104 degrees the internal organs start to shut down. When it reaches 107 degrees the person dies.
- 3. Why are we hearing so much about this now?** We are coming into the warm and hot weather seasons across the country. Weather experts tell us we are having longer warm weather seasons and that it is expected to continue. When the sun is out, and sometimes even on cloudy days, the inside of a car heats up a lot faster than the temperature outside. In just 20 minutes the car can heat up by 29 degrees. On a day when the temperature is just 80 degrees, the inside of a closed car could reach 109 degrees in just 20 minutes. Cracking a window does little to keep the inside of a car cool.
- 4. Why are children at such great risk in cars?** When young children are unattended in cars there is no one there to be sure the inside temperature is safe for them. Children are unattended in cars in one of three ways: 1) in over half the cases (51%), they are "forgotten" by a very distracted driver when they arrive at their destination; 2) in about 30% of cases, they climb into an unlocked car or trunk to play and are overcome by heat and can't climb out and 3) in about 20% of cases, they are intentionally left alone by a driver as they run an errand.
- 5. How many children die from hyperthermia or heatstroke?** In general an average of 38 children die this way every year. Last year, however, 49 children died – the record high since records have been kept. The first two deaths occurred when the temperature outside was just 73 and 72 degrees. It does not have to be hot outside for the car to heat up to a dangerous level. Light pouring through the windows of the car stays within the car and cracking a window does little or nothing to let heat escape.
- 6. How can a driver be sure not to "forget" a child in the back seat?** The best way to remember the child is to leave something they will need at the destination on the floor of the back seat. This could be their cell phone, purse, briefcase, gym bag or something else they always carry. They can set their computer in the office to ask the question, "Did you drop off at daycare today?" Some people have their daycare provider call them if they are more than a half hour late with the child. It is not hard to become distracted when you are a new parent and are sleep deprived or when your routine is disrupted (you don't usually drop off at daycare but are doing it for this one day).
- 7. Are there other dangers to unattended children in cars?** Yes, children have been known to put a car in gear, could wander away from the car or could be kidnapped.
- 8. What should people do to avoid hyperthermia for their children?** The best thing to do is to NEVER LEAVE YOUR CHILD ALONE IN A CAR – not even for a minute. Take your child with you

when you leave the vehicle. People have been known to run into a store for milk, meet a neighbor and lose track of time. It takes very little time to place a child at great risk for death or injury when they are alone in a car. Make sure you make it clear to your babysitter that it is never okay for them to leave your child alone in a car either.

9. **Are there laws about this?** Yes, in 18 states there is a law on the books but each state law is different. Other states may consider this action to be child neglect if a child is injured or killed. The best thing to do is to know how dangerous it is to leave a child unattended in a car no matter what the law states. It is never safe for a child to be alone in a car. This happens to people of all races, social class and profession. It can happen to you!
10. **What should I do if I see a child alone in a car?** The best thing you can do is to call 911 (EMS) immediately. Wait by the vehicle so EMS can find you quickly. EMS personnel are trained to assess a situation and determine if the child is in serious trouble. If you determine that the child is severely impaired from outside the car, you could provide bystander care, remove the child from the car and begin to slowly cool and lower the body temperature by using a cool water mist or wipes until help arrives.
11. **How do very young children gain entry to a car?** Many kids gain entry into a car because the trunk is open or the doors are open. Parents should also keep key fobs out of reach of children. Once they get inside they are quickly overcome by heat and they do not know how to problem solve and climb out. People with kids should check to be sure everyone is out of the car before they lock it. Just because the car is in the driveway they should not leave the car unlocked. People without kids should also lock their doors and trunks to keep neighborhood kids from climbing into their vehicles.
12. **What can I do to help?** First, you can make a personal commitment to never leave your child alone in the car. Second, urge your community to do the same. You can share information by posting flyers at your child's nursery, school, local grocery, or anywhere you can think of. You can also help spread the word by sharing information on your facebook, twitter, or any other social media profiles. You can even send an eCard telling your friends and community about this issue. Always remember to check a car FIRST if your child is missing.