

Kids' deaths in hot cars are preventable

Special to The Clinton Courier

American Medical Response (AMR) has released tips and advice for Clinton parents regarding summer safety and leaving children in hot vehicles.

Ryan Wilson, clinical services manager for AMR in central Mississippi, said, "Children fall victim to the heat faster than adults. That's because children, relative to adults, have more body surface area, which means they absorb more heat and absorb it faster than grown-ups. In just minutes, a child's body can reach temperatures that can cause heat stroke, which can lead to permanent brain damage or death."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports some forty children per year die in the U.S. from heat stroke when left in cars. Many more are disabled.

"Such tragedies can happen to any parent or caretaker, but there are ways to reduce the odds of kids' dying in hot cars," said Wilson. "Research has shown that, even when outside temperatures are in the seventies, vehicle interiors can quickly get hot enough to kill a child. The temperature inside a vehicle can climb twenty degrees in ten minutes. The bottom line is: Never leave a child unattended in a car or truck, no matter what the outside temperature is."

Wilson, a paramedic, advised:

- Leaving a window open or the air conditioner on does not adequately protect children left inside a vehicle. Take the child out, every time, no matter how soon it's planned to return to the vehicle.
- Get in the habit of checking vehicles' interior, front and back, before walking away. Child passenger safety experts use the expression, "Look before you lock."
- Teach children not to play in, on or around cars.
- Always lock car doors and trunks, and keep keys out of children's reach.
- Watch children closely around cars, particularly when loading or unloading items. They can slip into a vehicle unnoticed and get trapped inside.
- Make older children who can get in and out on their own to exit the vehicle at each stop.
- Be wary of child-resistant locks. Teach older children how to unlock the door if they become trapped in a motor vehicle.

To avoid overlooking a smaller child restrained in a car safety seat, use these tips:

- Tie one of the child's small toys or a pacifier to a string and hang it around your

neck. When you leave the vehicle, even if you forget the toy is hanging from your neck, someone else is likely to mention it.

• Place an unmistakable reminder of your child's presence where you'll be sure to see it before you leave the vehicle. For example, place a brightly colored stuffed toy in plain sight on the passenger seat next to the driver. Clear off all other items on the seat, so you are more likely to notice the reminder when you exit the vehicle.

• Keep a large Teddy bear in the child's safety seat when the seat is empty, and move the bear to the front seat next to the driver when the child is in the safety seat. Clean off the front passenger seat so the bear is the only object in it.

• Put in the back seat next to the child an item you have to take with you when you leave the vehicle, such as a cell phone, purse or briefcase.

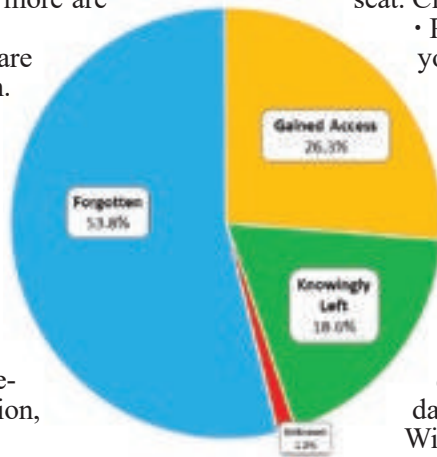
• Do not rely solely on electronic devices designed to alert you that you have a small child a safety seat in the back of your vehicle. Some years ago, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that such devices can malfunction due to a variety of causes. If you use an electronic alert device, be sure to use additional methods to remind you of the child's presence.

• In most households with children in daycare, the same parent takes the child to the daycare center almost every day. When the other parent takes the child to daycare, the parents should agree to call each other right after the time the child should have been left at daycare, to make sure the "drop" went as planned.

Wilson said car trunks are especially hazardous for children who can get out of booster seats or safety belts on their own. **To prevent a child's getting trapped in a scorching trunk, he advised:**

- Keep the trunk locked at all times, especially when the vehicle is parked in the driveway or near your home.
- Some cars have fold-down rear seats that, when lowered, allow access to the trunk. Keep rear fold-down seats closed up against the trunk to keep kids from getting into the trunk from the passenger area.
- Some newer vehicles have a safety latch inside the trunk. Teach older children where that latch is and how to use it.

For more information, visit www.safecar.gov/parents/heatstroke.htm.



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