

Children In and Around Cars

What you need to know to keep kids safe around vehicles.



Most parents know how important it is to have their children buckled up on every ride, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 10 percent of motor vehicle-related deaths to children do not occur in traffic. Such incidents happen somewhere other than a public highway, street or road — for example, when children are struck by vehicles in parking lots or driveways or when they are left unattended in vehicles. These entirely preventable injuries and deaths are a serious public health issue.

Safe Kids USA, in partnership with General Motors, wants to end these needless deaths and injuries by reminding parents and other caregivers about the dangers of allowing children to play in or around cars. Vehicles are not toys, and children of any age should never be alone around them.

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Never Leave Your Child Alone

How does a hot car put children in danger?

From 1998 to 2006, more than 320 children — most of them 3 years old and younger — died from heat stroke after being left or becoming trapped in a car.

These deaths fall into three main categories: children who were trapped while playing in a vehicle without supervision; children who were accidentally left behind; and children who were intentionally left alone in a car.

Leaving a child in a vehicle for a “quick” errand is a huge mistake. A delay of just a few minutes on a warm day can lead to tragedy.

Heat is much more dangerous to children than it is to adults. When left in a hot vehicle, a young child’s core body temperature can increase three to five times faster than that of an adult, which can cause permanent injury or even death.

According to research conducted by San Francisco State University, even with relatively cool temperatures outside — 70 degrees — the inside of a car can reach a dangerous temperature in just minutes.

Checklist for Parents and Caregivers

- Teach children to never play in, on or around vehicles.
- Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, even with the window slightly open.
- Always lock a vehicle’s doors and trunk, especially at home. Keep keys and remote entry devices out of children’s reach.
- Watch children closely around vehicles, particularly when loading and unloading. Check to ensure that all children leave the vehicle when you reach your destination. Don’t overlook sleeping infants.
- Be especially careful if you’re dropping off infants or children at a day care provider if that’s not part of your normal routine.
- Place something you’ll need at your next stop — for example, a purse, lunch, gym bag or briefcase — on the floor of the back seat where the child is sitting. This simple act could prevent you from forgetting your child.



Spot the TotSM

Each year almost 2,500 children ages 1 to 14 go to emergency rooms with injuries sustained from a vehicle backing up. On average, another 230 kids in that same age group die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Danger can come from any direction, and children should never play in driveways, in parking lots or on sidewalks when vehicles are present.

Parents, caregivers, drivers, and kids can all do their part to make sure that children do not share the same space as vehicles. Spot the Tot teaches simple ways to keep children safer around vehicles.

Checklist for Parents and Caregivers

- Walk all the way around your parked vehicle to check for children, pets or toys before getting in the car and starting the engine.
- Use a Spot the Tot window sticker as a reminder to walk around the vehicle before every trip.
- Make sure young children are always accompanied by an adult when getting in and out of a vehicle.
- Identify and use safe play areas for children away from parked or moving vehicles.
- Designate a safe spot for children to go when nearby vehicles are about to move.
- Firmly hold the hand of each child when walking near moving vehicles and when in driveways, in parking lots or on sidewalks.

SPOT THE TOTSM is a service mark of Primary Children's Medical Center Foundation.

Preventing Trunk Entrapment

For many kids, a car trunk looks like a fun place to play or hide. Tragically, many families have discovered that kids can get in but they can't always get out. A trunk can be deadly for an unattended child.

Children can access trunks in several ways, even without having the vehicle's keys. Most cars have a lever or button located near the driver's seat that pops the trunk open, while other cars also have fold-down seats or a "pass through" that enables children to climb into the trunk from the back seat. Always lock all vehicle doors.

Cars manufactured after 2001 must have an emergency trunk release — a glow-in-the-dark handle that will open the trunk from the inside in an emergency. Through our Preventing Trunk Entrapment program, Safe Kids Worldwide encourages parents to show children where the handle is located and how it works and remind them never to play with the device. Parents should also teach children that vehicles are not toys, and they should remember that unlocked cars are open invitations for children to explore.

Checklist for Parents and Caregivers

- Teach children that trunks are only used to transport cargo and are not safe places to play.
- Show children how to locate and use the emergency trunk release found in newer cars.
- If a child is missing, check vehicle trunks immediately.
- Always lock a vehicle's doors and trunk — especially at home — and keep keys out of children's reach.