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Summer Temperatures + Heat Index = Danger Zone
especially if an infant, child, or other person is left in the car

The summer sunshine encourages families to enjoy the beach, barbecues, parks and other outdoor activities. Nevertheless, that same beautiful sun brings with it high temperatures and an elevated heat index, creating potentially dangerous situations, especially inside vehicles.

A vehicle's windows react like a greenhouse, trapping the rising heat and sunlight, while also heating up the individuals inside the car. The sun can heat the car to deadly temperatures in a matter of minutes, even if the outside temperature is less than 75 degrees. For instance, studies have shown that when it is 85 degrees, it takes less than 10 minutes for a car's temperature to reach the triple digits (100s) and less than 30 minutes for it to exceed 120 degrees (<http://www.crh.noaa.gov/>).

Tragically, the average annual child fatality rate, associated with being left inside a hot car, has increased by more than 57 percent in the last decade, according to national statistics (<http://www.kidsandcars.org/>), with even more children facing near-tragic situations. As of June 22, eight children this year have been the victims of vehicular heat stroke deaths. A child's body temperature rises three to five times faster than adults, thus making them more susceptible to heat stroke.

Unfortunately, as society continues in a fast-paced fashion, more and more parents and caregivers are at risk of forgetting their child in a vehicle or thinking a quick stop at the store will be okay with the child inside the vehicle. Leaving a child in a car for any amount of time is unacceptable and poses a greater risk to the child. Not all vehicular heat stroke fatalities are because the child was forgotten or left, some occur when a child crawls inside an unlocked vehicle to play or hide.

Santa Rosa County Emergency Management and Lifeguard Ambulance Service would like to provide the local community with safety tips in order to eliminate these **preventable** tragedies.

Car Safety Tips:

1. **NEVER** leave anyone (infant, child, elderly, pet, etc) in a parked car, no matter what or for how long:
 - a. Temperatures rise very quickly in a short amount of time
 - b. Rolling down or cracking the windows does not alleviate or decrease the temperature significantly, thus creating a danger zone for the individuals inside
 - c. Parking in the shade does not protect the enclosed individuals from the heat
 - d. Always check for occupants before locking and leaving your vehicle
2. **Do NOT** leave a vehicle unlocked:
 - a. Children sometimes think of vehicles as "playgrounds" and may crawl inside to play or hide if a vehicle is unlocked or the door is open. They can then become trapped in the vehicle or fall asleep and become at risk of heatstroke.
 - b. Teach kids that vehicles are not play areas
 - c. Keep keys out of the reach of children
3. **If you see an unattended child in a car:**

- a. Look through the window to see if they are in distress
- b. Call 911 and alert the authorities that a child is left alone in a car
- c. If you have a friend with you, one should stay with the child, while the other searches for the parent or guardian.

Parent/Guardian Tips:

Often times, children are left in the car by accident, such as when a parent or guardian is in a hurry or is not following their daily routine. Regardless, it is important to create a safety check system to assure that this does not happen to you.

1. *Establish a system to remind you that the child is in the back seat:*
 - a. Place a cell phone, purse, briefcase, or even one shoe that you would need at your next stop in the backseat next to the child.
 - b. Keep a stuffed animal in the unoccupied child seat. When the child is in the seat, keep the stuffed animal in the front seat, so you are visually reminded that the child is in the rear seat.
 - c. If necessary, set an alarm or alert on your phone for a daily audio reminder about checking the car.
2. *Request the childcare provider to give you a call if your child does not show up at the usual time*
3. *Verify that someone brought the baby or child inside the house when returning home as a family*
4. *Always check the backseat prior to leaving a vehicle unattended*

The summer heat can be very dangerous, especially for anyone left inside a vehicle. Always be alert when you are transporting individuals, especially infants, children, and elderly adults.

If you see a child unattended in a car, call 911 for help immediately.

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