



**Sunrise Fire-Rescue Department**

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Thomas DiBernardo, Fire Chief

## **Children, Older Adults, and Pets at Risk in Hot Cars**

(SUNRISE, FL)- As Floridians are now feeling the full brunt of summer heat, it takes little imagination to understand how deadly-hot it would feel inside of a car parked in the sun. However, children, pets, and even adults continue to perish from heatstroke after being left behind - or becoming trapped - inside of hot cars. This is because multiple factors can lead to these tragedies.

Whether due to a child being forgotten in the back seat (the scenario comprising most of these cases), or a caregiver intentionally leaving a child behind with the windows cracked open, or an unsupervised child entering a parked car, the clock is racing. Within just the first 10 minutes, the temperature inside the car can increase by 20°F. With an average year-round temperature of 82°F in South Florida, this is already within the deadly range for children, whose bodies heat up 3-5 times faster than an adult's. Children have even died in cars with outdoor temps below 60 °F. Cracking the windows or parking in the shade does not reduce the speed or degree to which the car interior heats up.

The heat can be just as deadly for the elderly and for pets left behind in the car. Like young children, their bodies cannot regulate core temperature efficiently. Adults with certain medical conditions and/or who take medications may also quickly overheat.

Ignorance of the danger is only part of the equation. Even informed parents and babysitters can become forgetful when tired, stressed, or distracted. Those dealing with a change in routine - like new parents or a caretaker who's not usually the one to watch the child - are especially susceptible to forgetting a dozing baby or toddler in the back seat. Thus, parents need to devise and use multiple reminders for themselves.

Visual cues (such as a toy placed in the front seat) or putting something in the back seat with the child that will be needed at the next destination can serve as reminders. Additionally, new technologies are emerging to prevent a child from being forgotten in the car. Phone apps, such as Precious Cargo and Kars 4 Kids Safety, utilize Bluetooth to prompt drivers to take their child with them. Devices like Sense-A-Life, specially-equipped car seats, and even some new cars use pressure sensors in the back and front seats to activate an alert for the driver when exiting the car.

Follow these tips to help prevent these heatstroke deaths and injuries:

- **Never leave a child, vulnerable adult, or pet alone in a car** - not even for a minute!
- **Look before** you lock. Always check the back seat before closing your car door.
- **Use reminders:** place a needed object in the back seat, and use a phone app or other alert device.
- **Call 911 immediately** if you notice a child, vulnerable adult, or pet left alone in a car.
- **Teach children not to play in cars.** Lock car doors and the trunk, keeping keys and remote fobs away from where kids can find them.

"These deaths are preventable," said Sunrise Fire Chief Thomas DiBernardo. "We want parents to know about the danger and what they must do to avoid it."

For more information on hot cars and heatstroke, go to [www.broward.org/LOVE](http://www.broward.org/LOVE) (coming soon).

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