# Heatstroke Prevention Talking Points

Join the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for the *Once You Park, Stop, Look, Lock* heatstroke prevention campaign. NHTSA’s goal is to educate parents and caregivers about critical information regarding pediatric vehicular heatstroke. NHTSA, safety advocates, and academic institutions urge parents and caregivers to learn about the deadly consequences of leaving children in cars.

**Every death is preventable.**

* Pediatric vehicular heatstroke is one of the leading causes of non-crash, vehicle-related deaths for children 14 and younger.
* Before leaving a vehicle, stop, look for a child, and lock the car doors. It only takes a second.
* Since 1998, when safety advocates first began tracking, vehicular heatstroke has killed more than 965 children. Each death was preventable.
* In 2023, 29 children died due to vehicular heatstroke, a decrease from the 33 children who died in 2022. The death rate has been lower in recent years.
* On average, 37 children die per year due to vehicular heatstroke. The biggest risk factor in these cases is a change in routine.
* The three main scenarios in which heatstroke occurs are:
  1. Children are forgotten in vehicles by parents or caregivers.
  2. Children gain access to unlocked vehicles and become trapped inside.
  3. Children are knowingly left in vehicles by parents or caregivers.
* It is critical that all parents, caregivers, and drivers understand that children should never be left alone in a vehicle, not even for a minute.

**How this happens:**

* The primary way a child dies from heatstroke is from a parent or caregiver “forgetting” their child in a vehicle. There are many factors at play, but a common one is a change in routine. Every family experiences a change in routine at some point, so every parent or caregiver is susceptible to this mistake.
* This “forgotten” circumstance accounts for more than half of the total child heatstroke deaths that have occurred since 1998. In approximately half of these “forgotten” deaths, specifically, the child was on their way to childcare or preschool. A busy parent or caregiver may unintentionally forget that a quiet or sleeping child is in the back of the vehicle. This most often occurs with children under one year of age. Always remember: *Once You Park, Stop, Look, Lock*. These actions could save a life.
* Toddlers and young children are also at risk, as they can climb into a vehicle without supervision. Children may be playing or hiding, but if they enter a vehicle without the knowledge of an adult, they may be unable to get out of the car, especially if child locks are activated. It is essential to teach children that cars are not a place to play. Parents should get into the habit of storing keys and fobs out of a child’s reach.
* Sometimes, children are left intentionally by parents who do not understand the dangers of a hot vehicle and may have a quick errand to run, or who may not understand how quickly a vehicle can heat up to deadly temperatures. It cannot be overstated: Never leave a child in a vehicle alone, not even for a minute.
* The day of the week may have an influence on children who have been forgotten in a vehicle, or who have gained access: “Forgotten” deaths are most likely to occur on Thursdays and Fridays, while deaths in which a child has unknowingly climbed into a vehicle typically occur on weekends, with Sunday being the most at-risk day.
* Approximately 58% of heatstroke deaths occur when the child is at home, followed by 23% of deaths occurring at a parent or caregiver’s work.
* By the end of 2023, Texas and Florida had the highest number of child heatstroke deaths. Additional states at the highest risk for heatstroke deaths per capita are Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Arizona.

**High body temperature can cause permanent injury or even death:**

* Heatstroke begins when the core body temperature reaches approximately 104 degrees and the thermoregulatory system is overwhelmed. A core temperature of approximately 107 degrees is lethal.
* Children are more sensitive to heat than adults.
* Children are at a higher risk than adults of dying from heatstroke in a hot vehicle because their body temperature rises three to five times faster than an adult’s.
* The children most at-risk for heatstroke are those under 1 year, yet they make up one-third of heatstroke deaths.
* In 10 minutes, a car can heat up by as much as 20 degrees. Rolling down a window does little to keep a vehicle cool.
* Heatstroke fatalities have occurred even in vehicles parked in shaded areas and when the outside air temperatures were 80 degrees Fahrenheit or less.
* Summertime is the peak season for these tragic incidents, with children dying at an average rate of two per week. Unfortunately, heatstroke can even occur in outdoor temperatures as low as 57 degrees. The warning signs of heatstroke vary, but may include:
  + Red, hot, and moist or dry skin
  + Absent sweating, even though the child is warm
  + Strong rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse
  + Throbbing headache
  + Dizziness
  + Nausea
  + Confusion
  + Grouchiness or strange behavior

**These three tips could save a child’s life:**

* NEVER leave a child in a vehicle unattended.
* Make it a habit to look in the back seat EVERY time you exit the car.
* ALWAYS lock the car and put the keys out of reach.

For more information, visit [www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/safety-topics/child-safety/vehicular-heatstroke-prevention](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/safety-topics/child-safety/vehicular-heatstroke-prevention).