

District Attorney urges parents and caregivers: Look before you lock

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Madison and Rankin County District Attorney Bubba Bramlett wants to remind parents and caregivers about the dangers of pediatric vehicular heatstroke. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), pediatric vehicular heatstroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle-related deaths for children in the United States. Since 1998, 913 children aged 14 or younger have died from pediatric vehicular heatstroke.

A child's body temperature can rise five times faster than an adult's, and vehicular heatstroke can occur when outside temperatures are as low as 57 degrees. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, whether running or not, even for a few minutes. Before walking away from a car, always Look Before You Lock.

"It could happen to anyone, so please ensure it doesn't happen to your family," stated Bramlett. "Mississippi summer months mean dangerous temperatures. In just 10 minutes, the temperature inside a car can rise by 20 degrees. On a typical 90° day, the temperatures inside a car can exceed 110°, which is deadly for a child." On average last year, two children died each month from pediatric vehicular heatstroke.

Half of child heatstroke fatalities occurred when the adult driver forgot the child was in the back seat. Usually, the child was being taken to childcare or preschool, and the adult forgot they were in the car. In most cases, the child was under the age of one and asleep or just quiet in the back seat. A change in route is a common factor in many of these preventable tragedies. For this reason, make it a habit to Look Before You Lock every time. It only takes a second to check the back seat - a simple step that could save a life.

Toddlers and young mobile children are also at risk of heatstroke if they gain access to a parked vehicle. Some children get into an unlocked vehicle without the knowledge of an adult and may be unable to get out of the car, especially if the vehicle's child locks are activated. Talk to children about not playing in or around a car. Then make sure the vehicle is always locked, and keep the keys out of reach of children.

The District Attorney's office urges all parents and caregivers to do these three things to help prevent child heatstroke:

- **Make it a habit of looking in the back seat every time you exit the car.**
- **Never** leave a child in a vehicle unattended, even for a short time or

with the windows cracked.

- **Always** lock the car and put the keys out of reach.

If you are a bystander and see a child in a hot vehicle:

- **Make sure the child is okay and responsive.** If not, call 911 immediately.
- **If the child appears okay, attempt to locate the parents,** or have the facility's security or management page the car owner over the PA system. If someone is with you, one person should actively search for the parent while the other waits at the car.
- **If the child is not responsive or appears distressed,** attempt to get into the car to assist - even if that means breaking a window.

Know the warning signs of heatstroke, including red, hot, and moist or dry skin; no sweating; a strong rapid, or slow and weak pulse; nausea; con-



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fusion; or acting strangely. If a child exhibits any of these signs after being in a hot vehicle, quickly spray the child with cool water - NEVER put a child in an ice bath. It is always advisable to call 911 or your local emergency number to have the child assessed by professionals.

Bramlett said, "There is a simple way to end these avoidable deaths: please Look Before You Lock."

For more information on vehicular heatstroke, visit nhtsa.gov/campaign/heatstroke.

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