

HEALTH ALERT

Office of Developmental Programs
Office of the Medical Director

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SUMMER HEAT CAR AND VAN SAFETY

Heat related deaths and illness occur with high temperatures and are preventable. Recent high summer temperatures increase the risk of death and illness from extreme heat. More than 50% of people with heat related injury die. Cars and vans put people at particular risk because vehicles get much hotter than the air temperature. People and animals ***die*** when left in vehicles on a hot day even for short periods of time. More than half of heat related deaths involving vehicles occur when the caregiver has “*forgotten*” the person in the vehicle. In the last week there have been at least three reported episodes of neglect because individuals have been left unattended in a vehicle. *This kind of neglect can have serious consequences and could even lead to criminal prosecution.*

Why does this happen?

Cars and vans act like a greenhouse and keep hot air in raising the temperature inside the vehicle. The high temperature in the car then causes the person’s body temperature to rise.

Does opening the window or parking in the shade help?

NO! Vehicles with the windows open a crack or parked in the shade still get hotter than the human body can tolerate. *A vehicle can reach these temperatures in as short a time as 5 minutes. Temperature inside the car can rise 30 degrees in 20 minutes and the longer the vehicle is parked, the higher the temperature will be. Car temperatures can get to 200 degrees depending on how long the car has been in the sun.* From the table below you can see that the temperature inside a car with open windows on a hot day is no different from one with the windows closed and still too hot for a human to tolerate.

| Outside Temp* | Inside: windows closed | Inside: 2 windows open a crack | Inside: 4 windows open a crack |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 80-84 | 109 | 95 | 98 |
| 87/88 | 115 | 105 | 103 |
| 95-99 | 114 | 109 | 113 |

*All temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit.

What happens if a person's body gets too hot?

- Damage leads to death more than half the time and motor, sensory, and cognitive problems for those that survive.
- Body temperature rises quickly because the person can't sweat enough to lower their body temperature.
- High body temperatures damage brains and other vital organs.

NEVER leave anyone in a car or van unattended.

TAKE the person with you if you have to do an errand. Make the errand part of their program.

NOT enough supervision? **DON'T** make the stop.

Information for provider agencies:

- Have policies that address appropriate activities around vehicle and heat safety. Be sure to include:
 - Policies that staff do not leave people in the vehicle alone at any time.
 - Policies that staff check the vehicle at every stop to assure that no one is left behind in the vehicle.
- Put signs in all vehicles where the driver and passengers can see them reminding people of the following:
 - Not leave people in the vehicle alone at any time.
 - To check the vehicle at every stop to assure that no one is left behind in the vehicle.
- Remember and remind staff that injury or death from leaving someone in a vehicle unattended could constitute a criminal offense and lead to arrest, criminal charges and potentially prison.
- **Assuring health and safety is your responsibility.**

REMEMBER THAT PEOPLE DIE BEING LEFT IN CARS WHILE THEIR CAREGIVERS VISIT, SHOP, OR RUN ERRANDS!