

# VEHICULAR *Hyperthermia*



## Reality Alert

*Milwaukee, Wisconsin – Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

“An infant boy was found dead Thursday afternoon in a sport utility vehicle outside a west side day care center, apparently left unattended by an employee of the center who picked him up Thursday morning, police and relatives said.

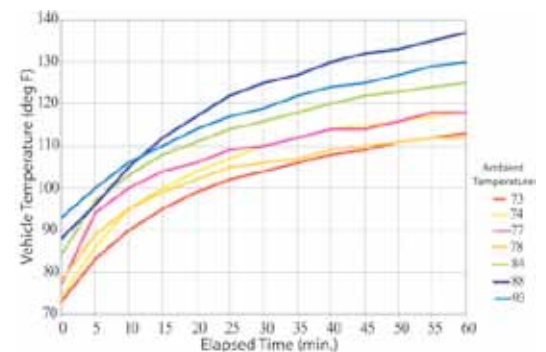
“The temperature was 81 degrees at 4 p.m. when a 911 caller reported that the baby, identified by family members as a 4-month-old, was found in a Dodge Durango outside the day care.

“Relatives, including one who is employed by the day care, said the infant was picked up from his home that morning but was never taken inside the center.”

Hyperthermia is an acute condition which occurs when the body produces or absorbs more heat than it can dissipate. A core body temperature of 107° is considered lethal as cells are damaged and internal organs shut down. Because a child's thermoregulatory system is not fully developed, their bodies warm at a rate three to five times faster than an adult's. Since 1998, 386 children under the age of four have died due to vehicle-related hyperthermia.

Studies have shown that in 10 minutes the temperature in a vehicle raises about 19°. Within an hour, the temperature jumps around 50°. Slightly rolling the window down has almost no impact on these temperature increases.

Most hyperthermia incidents occur when the child is forgotten by the caregiver. Stress and preoccupation are typically the greatest cause for such forgetfulness. In cases involving paid caregivers, 84% were prosecuted; 96% of which were convicted.



## Safety Recommendations

- **Never** leave a child unattended in a vehicle.
- Verify that all occupants leave the vehicle when unloading.
- Teach children not to play in or around cars.
- Always lock your car and ensure children do not have access to keys.
- Place items (purses, groceries, etc.) in the backseat as a reminder there is a child in the car.
- Check attendance at the daycare to verify that all children are present; investigate any missing children.
- Keep all vehicles clean; it's easier to spot children when no debris or trash is present.

## First Aid - Immediate Action

If you suspect a child is suffering from heat exhaustion, call 911 immediately. While waiting for medical authorities, it's important to quickly lower the body temperature of the child.

- Move the victim to a cool area (indoors or shaded area).
- Remove clothing to promote heat loss.
- Cold compresses to the head, neck, torso, and groin will aid in cooling.
  - Do NOT wrap the victim in wet towels; this can act as a heat insulator.
  - Immersion in ice or cold water is dangerous and should be avoided.

## Safety Activities

More than half of all vehicular hyperthermia deaths occur because the child is forgotten. Loving and responsible parents and caregivers can easily succumb to external distractions. Talking on a cell phone, driving in unfamiliar areas, and even hunger can cause a driver to forget the precious cargo.

This exercise has been designed to demonstrate how easily someone can be consumed by unnecessary distractions. Take time to individually run this activity with each of your employees and then have them read, initial, and sign the policy on the next page.

Cut out the image at the end of this page. Give the image to your employee and explain that you'd like them to spend 30 seconds remembering as many details as possible. After 30 seconds take the image back. Now ask the employee these questions. Explain that it's okay if they're unable to answer any particular question.

- What is the phone number of our daycare center?
- How many letters are in the word “education”?
- What is the first and last name of the vice president of the United States?
- If you have two sets of twins and one set of triplets how many children do you have?
- What two colors combine to make green?
- If you are driving east on a one-way street and then turn right, which direction are you heading?
- How many pepperoni pizzas – cut into 10 equal slices – must you buy if you need to feed 40 kids?



Finally, ask the employee to recall the number of children on the bus – correct answer: 3. Regardless of whether or not the employee is able to recall the correct number it is important to emphasize how easily someone can become distracted. While most drivers will not need to do arithmetic on command, a large variety of distractions do exist.

# WORKPLACE *policies*



[Name of Daycare] is dedicated to nurturing and sustaining the education, health, development, and safety of all children. In that regard, safeguards have been established to ensure they receive the greatest possible consideration, particularly in and around motor vehicles. Carefully read and initial each of the policies. If you have any questions, please contact management.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Thoroughly check any vehicle before and after use. All trash and miscellaneous objects should be removed.
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Once loaded, count the number of children in the vehicle twice. Write this number on the pad provided in the vehicle.
- \_\_\_\_ 3. Never, not even for a minute, leave a child unattended in a vehicle.
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Once all children have been accounted for, lock and do one final check of the vehicle (under seats, trunk, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_ 5. Never use a cell phone while driving. Conversations may cause you to lose focus when you arrive at your destination.

Violations of the above will result in a thorough investigation into driving practices. If it's determined that habitual neglect of these policies takes place, suspension may be considered. If, after a brief probationary period, it's determined that little progress has been made, temporary disciplinary actions will be taken.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee (signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Name (printed)