

# Kids in cars

FACT SHEET

Kids in cars

Media enquiries 02 9716 2804 (B/H)  
or 02 9214 0653 (A/H)



*If you leave your car, take your children with you.*

*Parked cars kill kids.*



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Reports where primary reported issue was child left unattended in a vehicle:

YEAR	REPORTS
July 1999 – June 2000	61
July 2000 – June 2001	140
July 2001 – June 2002	166

What are the risks?

- On a typical Australian summer day, the temperature inside a parked car can be as much as 30-40 degrees hotter than the outside temperature i.e. on a 30-degree day the temperature inside the car could be as high as 70 degrees.
  - 75% of the temperature rise occurs within five minutes of closing the car and leaving it i.e. on a 36-degree day, within five minutes the car will have reached 55 degrees.
  - 90% of the temperature rise occurs within 15 minutes.
  - Dark coloured vehicles reach slightly higher temperatures than light coloured vehicles.
  - The greater the amount of glass in the car (e.g. hatchbacks) the faster the rise in temperature.
  - Larger cars heat up just as fast as smaller cars.
  - The colour of interior trim of the car has no effect on cabin temperature.
  - Having the windows down five centimetres causes only a slight temperature drop (78 degrees in a closed car, 70 degrees in a car with the windows down five centimetres).
  - The temperature inside the car begins to rise as does the humidity while the airflow decreases.
  - As the temperature rises, the child begins to develop heat stress (hyperthermia) and also to dehydrate.
  - Young children are more sensitive to heat than older children or adults and are at greater risk of heatstroke.
  - The younger the child, the faster the onset of heatstroke and dehydration.
  - Hyperthermia, dehydration and asphyxia can all lead to death.
  - Concurrently, the child may also become distressed and try to get out of the restraint. If the harness on the restraint is loose, the child is at risk of strangulation on the harness
- \* The above section 'What are the risks?' is based on information supplied by Kidsafe (Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia).

What to do if you see a child left alone in a car:

- Look for the parents.
- See if the child is able to unlock the car from the inside so you can get them out.
- If no parent can be found, call 000. Other options are contact your local police, ambulance, DoCS or the NRMA for assistance. Give the following details: your location, the registration plate of the vehicle, the approximate age of the child and the condition of the child.
- If necessary or if the child is at serious health risk, break a window away from the child - remember flying glass is a safety hazard.

# Kids in cars

## The legislation

The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act was proclaimed in December 2000. However, chapters 1 and 14 were proclaimed in April 2000, including section 231 which covers the section about children left in cars/unattended. The maximum penalty is \$22,000. Section 231 of the Act reads:

A person who leaves any child or young person in the person's care in a motor vehicle without proper supervision for such period or in such circumstances that:

- (a) the child or young person becomes or is likely to become emotionally distressed, or
- (b) the child's or young person's health becomes or is likely to become permanently or temporarily impaired, is guilty of an offence.

## What's involved in prosecution

- Police and/or DoCS investigate.
- After the investigation, a decision can be made by DoCS to prosecute.
- The Crown Solicitor's Office is instructed by DoCS to file an information and summons in the local court.
- An information and summons is issued and served on the defendant.
- The matter is then dealt by a local court.

## Excuses parents/carers have given for leaving children unattended in cars:

- Woman admitted regularly leaving her three-year-old son in a car for up to four hours while working because she didn't have access to childcare.
- Father abandoned his car, leaving behind his five-month old son, to evade police.
- Mother admitted leaving her two children, aged 3 and 18 months, in a car while she drank at a hotel.
- A father admitted leaving his children aged fours and two in a carpark while he was shopping because he did not have access to childcare for that day.

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- Father admitted leaving his four-year-old daughter in a car while waiting in line to do banking.
- Parents claimed they left their children in the car because they were asleep.

## Some case studies

1. Police reported that a 6-week-old baby boy was found locked in a car in Penrith. Police were alerted by passers-by concerned for the welfare of the sleeping baby. Police organised for a tow-truck driver to smash the window and police removed the baby from the car. The baby had been locked in the car for approximately one hour. The father allegedly said he had been shopping for work boots and had checked on the sleeping baby as he passed the car to go to another store up the road.
2. Police reported that a 21-month-old girl was found by security at Westfield Parramatta. Security claim that the girl had been locked in the car for 30 minutes. The door was forced open to free the child. When the mother returned she claimed she forgot about the child because she was experiencing personal stress/ anxiety associated with a break-up with her partner.
3. A security guard at Westfield Parramatta contacted police and ambulance to attend to a 22-month-old boy who was locked in a car with the window down three centimetres. The child had reportedly been left in the car for one hour. He was red in the face, saturated with sweat and dehydrated. The mother allegedly said she had only intended to leave for 15 minutes, as the child was asleep when she left, but claimed not to have a watch and to have lost track of time.
4. Police freed a three-year-old girl from a locked prime mover parked outside a Cabramatta hotel. It is believed the girl had been in the truck for about an hour. The girl appeared dehydrated when rescued.