

School Holiday Parent Kit

KIDS IN CARS

It may be easy for even the most loving and well meaning parent or carer to think "I'll just be a few minutes" and leave the kids in the car with the window down a bit. But even this has serious health risks for the children.

Shopping and running errands with children can be frustrating. In the case of babies and younger children, there can be added exasperation when you realise that your child has fallen asleep, just as you get to your destination and find that elusive car park.

Few people are aware of how little time it takes for the inside of a car to reach dangerously high temperatures, even with the window slightly open.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- Seventy five percent of temperature rise occurs within five minutes of closing the car and leaving it, ie. on a 36-degree day the car will have reached 55 degrees, within five minutes.
- Ninety percent 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 (eg. hatchbacks) the faster the rise in temperature.
- Larger cars heat up just as fast as smaller cars.
- The colour of a car's interior trim has no effect on cabin temperature.
- Having the windows down five centimetres causes only a slight temperature drop ie. from 78 degrees in a closed car to 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.
- Older children have the added danger of being able to touch the controls inside the car.

DID YOU KNOW?

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, ie. on a 30-degree day the temperature inside the car could be as high as 70 degrees.

As the temperature rises, children begin 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.

Children may also become distressed and try to get out of their restraint. If the harness on the restraint is loose, children are at risk of strangulation on the harness.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A CHILD LEFT ALONE IN A CAR

- Look for the parents or carers.
- 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, and the child is distressed, call 000. Other options are contact your local police, ambulance 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.
- Only if the child's health is at serious risk, break a window away from the child - remember that flying glass is a safety hazard.

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NSW Department of
Community Services



A NSW Government Initiative

THE LEGISLATION

Section 231 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* reads:

A person who leaves any child or young person in the person's care in a motor vehicle without proper supervision for such a 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 the NSW Department of Community Services investigate.
- After the investigation, a decision is made about whether to prosecute.
- The Crown Solicitor's Office is instructed to file any information and summons in the local court.
- An information and summons is issued and served on the defendant.
- The matter is dealt with in a local court.
- The maximum penalty is \$22,000.

REMEMBER

Before you start the car, first make sure children (and all passengers) are wearing seat belts or size appropriate child restraints.

TIPS WHEN TRAVELLING IN CARS WITH CHILDREN

- Dress your children appropriately in loose natural fibres and remove sun hats once in the car - especially for long journeys. If possible, try to travel in the cooler parts of the day such as early in the morning or later in the day.
- Take plenty of drinking water in suitable containers for children to drink from.
- Phone the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) on 13 22 13 if you have any questions about fitting or using a child restraint. RTA authorised fitting stations are located throughout NSW. Alternatively, check the Kidsafe website (www.kidsafensw.org) or phone Kidsafe on (02) 9845 0890 to ensure your child is using the correct and appropriate child restraint.
- The back seat of the car is the safest place for a child to travel.
- Sleeping children should remain buckled up into the appropriate seatbelt or child restraint.
- Children should get in and out of the car through the left rear door – the 'safety' door.
- Plan regular breaks in rest areas or other safe places well away from the road. Physical activity will make the journey less tiresome for all the family.
- Gather a selection of 'special' toys or other activities that are safe for use in the car such as storybooks, a book of word games, story cassettes and CDs or soft toys.
- Talk with your child as you drive, discussing things that can be seen out of the window. Play 'I spy', or games where children spot items in the environment.
- Praise your child or offer small rewards for safe passenger behaviour.

TIP

Physical activity will make your car journey less tiresome for all the family. Plan regular breaks in a rest area or other safe place well away from the road.

DoCS thanks these organisations for their contribution to this fact sheet and invites you to visit their websites for more information.



www.kidsafensw.org



www.rta.nsw.gov.au