



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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### When Summertime Turns Deadly for Infants and Children

**RICHMOND, Va. (June 20, 2013)** Although summer is not officially here, Virginians recently saw temperatures climb into the 90s. With more sweltering hot days on the horizon, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) reminds parents and caregivers that hot vehicles and children can be a deadly combination.

On average, 38 children die in hot cars each year from heat-related deaths after being trapped inside motor vehicles according to [Kids and Cars](#), a non-profit organization that tracks national statistics on child injuries and deaths. Experts say that car temperatures can rise as much as 19 degrees in an enclosed car within 10 short minutes. Over time, and even when the outside air temperature is only 70 degrees, the interior of a car can reach 125 degrees. Infants and young children are 3-5 times more susceptible than adults to this “greenhouse effect”, which can cause serious injury to the brain, liver and kidneys, and result in death.

“Our children are absolutely dependent on us for protection while transporting them in vehicles. Young children are secured in car seats without the ability to escape, they typically can’t talk yet, and they frequently fall asleep during car rides,” explained Kathy Gillikin, Quality Child Care Program Manager with VDSS. “It is the adult’s responsibility to plan in advance what steps to take to remind themselves that there is a child in the car and then implement those safety prevention steps.”

This year already, there have been at least seven infants and children who have died nationwide as a result of being left inside a hot vehicle. Last year, there were at least 32 such fatalities in the United States.

**VDSS officials recommend these tips to protect your children this summer:**

- Never leave a child alone in a vehicle, NOT even for a minute or with the windows down.
- Engage your child or baby by singing songs or talking to her/him while driving—this will help you remember to focus on your child.
- Do not be distracted by using your cell phone while your child is in the car.
- When parking your vehicle at home, always lock car doors and trunks, and keep keys out of children's reach; teach children that cars are not places to play.
- Watch children closely around cars, particularly when loading and unloading.
- Make sure that all children leave the vehicle with you when you reach your destination - don't forget sleeping infants (parents and caregivers should always count heads twice to make sure all children have exited the vehicle before leaving.)
- Busy parents have a lot on their minds, so give yourself a reminder: get in the habit of placing your purse, briefcase or other important items in the back seat next to your child's car seat to help you remember to check the back before leaving the car.
- Purchase new technological devices that can signal when your child has been left in the vehicle.
- If you see a child or pet left unattended in a vehicle, call 911 immediately.
- Have a plan for your child care provider to call you if your child does not show up for school or child care site within 10-15 minutes of your usual arrival time.