



## **Franklin Lakes Police Department Helps Families Avoid Heatstroke Tragedies: *Look Before You Lock***

Vehicle heatstroke is one of the leading causes of traffic-related death for children in the United States, resulting in the deaths of 883 young children since 1998.

The Franklin Lakes Police Department is working closely alongside the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to reduce these deaths by reminding parents and caregivers about the dangers of vehicular heatstroke and leaving children in hot cars. NHTSA hopes to remind parents and caregivers that before ever walking away from a vehicle: *Look Before You Lock*.

In 2019, there were 53 preventable deaths of children in vehicles. But in 2020, there were 24 deaths, nearly half that number. Families staying home throughout 2020 likely contributed to this decline. Unfortunately, the percentage of children playing in and around the car increased.

“We have to impress upon our children that the vehicle is not a playground, and that playing in and around the car is actually very dangerous,” said Chief Carmine Pezzuti. “Most years, one child dies from heatstroke nearly every 10 days in the United States from being left in a car or crawling into an unlocked vehicle. What is most tragic is that every single one of these deaths could have been prevented.”

“Forgotten” circumstances account for nearly one half of all total child heatstroke fatalities. In approximately half of these deaths, specifically, the child was being taken to either childcare or preschool. Oftentimes, this accident occurs when the child is younger than one. Toddlers or mobile young children are also at risk, as they can gain access into a vehicle. Some children gain access into a vehicle without the knowledge of an adult, and may be unable to get out of the car, especially if child locks are activated.

The bottom line is this: We are all susceptible to forgetfulness. We live in a fast-paced society, and our routines are often upended at a moment’s notice. It is during these moments of hurriedness and change in routine that many of these preventable tragedies occur. For this reason, it is more important than ever to *Look Before You Lock*.

The Franklin Lakes Police Department urges all parents and caregivers to do these three things to help prevent child heatstroke:

- Make it a habit to look in the back seat EVERY time you exit the car.
- NEVER leave a child in a vehicle unattended.
- ALWAYS lock the car and put the keys out of reach.

If you are a bystander and see a child in a hot vehicle:



- Make sure the child is okay and responsive. If not, call 911 immediately.
- If the child appears to be okay, attempt to locate the parents or have the facility’s security or management page the car owner over the PA system.
- If there is someone with you, one person should actively search for the parent while the other waits at the car.
- If the child is not responsive or appears to be in distress, attempt to get into the car to assist the child – even if that means breaking a window. Many states have “Good Samaritan” laws that protect people from lawsuits for getting involved to help a person in an emergency.

Know the warning signs of heatstroke, which include red, hot, and moist or dry skin; no sweating; a strong rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse; nausea; confusion; or acting strangely. If a child exhibits any of these signs after being in a hot vehicle, quickly spray the child with cool water or with a garden hose – NEVER put a child in an ice bath. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

A child’s body temperature can rise up to five times faster than an adult’s, and heatstroke can occur in outside temperatures as low as 57 degrees. On an 80-degree day, a car can reach deadly levels in just 10 minutes.

“More than half (54%) of all vehicle-related heatstroke deaths in children are caused by a child accidentally being left in the car, and 26% are from a child getting into a hot car unsupervised,” said Sergeant Denny Knubel. “We want to get the word out to parents and caregivers: please *Look Before You Lock.*”

