

# Take 'em, Don't Leave 'em

Why parked cars are no place for children and pets in warm weather

by *Jacqueline Simoneau*

**E**VEN WHEN THE OUTDOOR TEMPERATURE stays the same throughout the day, the heat inside a car parked in the sun can build up, and quickly. Not only are children susceptible to heatstroke under such circumstances, dogs and cats are also at risk.

The basic rule is simple: Never leave children or animals alone in a car, even if it is parked in the shade, even if the windows are slightly opened and even if you are gone for only half an hour. They could die! The experts at CAA Quebec conducted an experiment to determine a vehicle's interior temperature when parked in the sun. They concluded that when it is 22°C outside, the temperature inside the vehicle reaches 50°C; and during a heat wave, when it is 40.5°C outside, the temperature inside can get as high as 100°C. Leaving the windows slightly open is not enough to let the heat escape. Temperatures inside can climb from 35°C to 50°C in just 20 minutes, and to 65.5°C in only 40 minutes.

## Keeping Kids Cool

According to the Canadian Institute of Child Health, children's bodies are less developed than adults and therefore are less able to regulate internal temperature when it gets hot. This can result in a child's body temperature rising three to five times more quickly than an adult's, and twice as fast as normal on hot, muggy days. This puts children in an overheated car at high risk of becoming dehydrated and, worse, suffering heatstroke, which can lead to death. Signs of heatstroke include: warm skin suddenly turning red, high temperature, absence of perspiration, violent headaches, rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, confusion and loss of consciousness.

Make sure children don't suffer from the heat while travelling as well. Dress them in loose, light-coloured clothing made of linen or cotton. And if your vehicle does not have air conditioning, block the sun by covering



the windows on the sunny side with a shade or a towel. Always leave the window open a crack to let the air circulate freely throughout the car, and try running the car's ventilation system with the vents aimed toward the kids. Bring along bottles of water to prevent dehydration, and stop often so everyone can stretch their legs and get fresh air. One last thing: watch out for those hot metal seatbelts. They can easily burn your child's skin.

## Pets Can Only Pant

Dogs and cats are not built for heat. Dogs don't sweat, except through the pads of their paws. Panting is the only way they can maintain their body temperature, which makes them particularly vulnerable to heat. The same goes for cats, which usually keep cool by licking their fur; when dehydrated, however, they lack the saliva for this cooling method and resort to panting. In an overheated space, your pet can quickly become dehydrated and fall victim to heatstroke, a coma or death. Signs of heatstroke include: panting excessively, weakness, losing balance and vomiting.

In particular, the heat is harder on dogs with short muzzles (such as boxers, bulldogs

and terriers); young, sick or old pets; and those with dark or long fur. And because cats should travel in carriers for safety, this makes them more susceptible to overheating during trips. Keep an eye on their breathing holes during any journey to make sure they are not blocked. ▣

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**i** [aaa.com/petbook](http://aaa.com/petbook); *Traveling with Your Pet: The AAA PetBook is available at Chapters Indigo and other bookstores*

## heatstroke help

A child or animal suffering from heatstroke must be treated immediately. Remove your child or pet from the vehicle and lower his body temperature by sprinkling cold water on him and applying cold-water compresses to his body (in particular, to the armpits, neck, head and, in the case of a child, groin.) Better still: immerse him in a bath of cold water. Give him small amounts of tepid water if he is conscious and can swallow. Then get him immediately to a doctor or veterinarian. □