Fact sheet on Hyperthermia Deaths of Kids in Cars
(Kentucky State Safe Kids Coalition, July 6, 2012)

Recently, a baby died in a hot car in Louisville. Though the first such death this year in Kentucky, there have been eight deaths in hot cars nationally thus far in 2012. There have also been at least three Kentucky children rescued from hot cars who have survived. Please help us ensure that never again will a child die in a hot car in Kentucky! Never leave a child alone in a car. Even on a cool day (70s), heat inside a car can kill.

Fatalities from National Data: Deaths 1998-July 2012 = 535+. The number rose until 2010; intensive prevention efforts since then have led to a slight decrease. Deaths occur from February through December, with a peak in July and August, closely followed by June, May and September. The advent of airbags changed seating of babies and young children to the rear seat. Airbags are important for saving lives and babies are much safer in the back seat in a crash, but new strategies are needed to ensure that drivers check the back seat after they arrive at a destination and do not forget a sleeping, silent baby or child.

Hyperthermia Deaths in U.S. from 1998-2011:
- Texas- 80
- Florida- 58
- California – 36
- Arizona – 23
- Georgia- 20
- North Carolina- 19
- Tennessee – 18
- Louisiana - 16
- Ohio – 15
- Virginia- 15
- Missouri- 15
- Kentucky- 14
- Oklahoma- 14

Fatalities from Kentucky Data: Deaths 1998-2011 = 14 (we didn’t quite make the top 10 but we’re 12th). At least one death every year from 2004-2012, most deaths ever (3) in
2010. Deaths have occurred from May through October in the past, with peaks in June and August. Deaths have occurred both in cities and in rural areas. Repeat fatalities have happened in separate years in two counties, and one of those had another near-miss this year in which a child was rescued and survived.

Types of hyperthermia deaths and prevention strategies (KY has had all three types):

1) **Young children forgotten in cars (51% nationally)** - often professional people with a change in routine and a quiet sleeping baby in the back seat. (Null- 44% of forgotten children were to have been dropped off at childcare/preschool). **Prevention:** place your purse, briefcase etc in the back so you won’t be able to miss the baby. Make a plan with your daycare provider to call you if your child does not arrive in the morning and they have not received a call from you about illness or absence (see www.rayrayspledge.com). Day care providers may wish to consider a voluntary protocol to establish this policy for all children at their center. This also applies to daycare vans and school buses- monitors must walk through vehicle slowly/carefully, be sure that no sleeping children are left behind.

2) **Young children intentionally left in cars (17% nationally, but in 2011 accounted for almost all of Kentucky near-misses!)** - often people think that it is a cool day, just for a short while, or the windows are cracked, and do not really understand that even on a relatively cool day and even with windows cracked the interior of a car will heat up rapidly. **Prevention:** never leave your baby/child under age 8, elderly relative, or child of any age with a mental or physical disability that would prevent them from getting out of the car themselves alone in a car; help people understand the heat issue/how rapidly heat rises inside a car.

3) **Toddlers and older children who climb into cars, trucks or trunks to play and become trapped there (30% nationally).** **Prevention:** teach your children not to play in cars or with real car keys, but emphasize passive prevention measures-lock your car when not in it; if storing old unused cars on your land, consider removing doors just as you would for a refrigerator; and consider disabling the trunk lock (can keep rain out by fastening it with string).

Kentucky does have a strong law pertaining to heat related deaths in cars. Bryan’s Law was named after a child who died in 1999 after being left in a hot car by his babysitter. In Kentucky, a caregiver may be charged with manslaughter in the first degree (a felony) if a child under the age of 8 years, or a person with a physical or mental disability that precludes them from taking actions to protect themselves, is left in a motor vehicle without an attendant who is at least 16 years old. It is important to note, however, that more babies die forgotten in cars when a parent’s normal routine changes than die intentionally left in cars.

The Kentucky Safe Kids awareness campaign “Never Leave Your Child Alone in a Car-No More KY Kids Dead in Hot Cars” is a statewide program through which Safe Kids Coalitions and Chapters and Kentucky State Police, health departments, child care centers, health professionals, and many other partners are working to raise public awareness and prevent all three types of situations that have led to hyperthermia deaths.
Please contact your local Safe Kids for more information if you live in a county that has one and are interested in further prevention efforts. If you live in a county without a Safe Kids and would like to be involved with additional prevention efforts, please contact the Kentucky State Safe Kids Coalition office at 859-323-6194 or email Susan H. Pollack MD shpoll@uky.edu or Melanie Tyner-Wilson MS (mtyner@uky.edu). Thank you!!

Useful links:
http://ggweather.com/heat/ (Jan Null’s national statistics website)
www.safekids.org
www.4rkidssake.org
www.rayrayspledge.com (pledge between parents and daycare providers)
http://www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Press+Releases/2012/NHTSA+Unveils+Campaign+To+Prevent+Child+Heatstroke+Deaths+In+Cars