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AMR News

For Immediate Release

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AMR MEDICS: PROTECT LATCHKEY KIDS BY PLANNING FOR SAFETY

(Jackson, Miss., July 25, 2018) – Youngsters who take care of themselves for a few hours each day while parents are away are called “latchkey kids.” In some communities, half of all children age five to 13 spend part of their day at home alone. When school resumes each year, numerous parents return to work outside the home and more children become latchkey kids.

To help protect children at home alone, AMR urges parents to eliminate household hazards and teach their children how to stay safe.

Stan Alford, operations manager with AMR in central Mississippi, said, “Latchkey children are at greater risk than those supervised by adults to suffer a serious injury, become victimized or engage in delinquent behavior. A solid plan emphasizing safety will help protect boys and girls on their own at home. Many states have laws against leaving children under a certain age at home alone and it’s a crime in every state to leave a child in a dangerous situation.”

“Ask yourself if your child has the judgment to stay at home alone safely,” Alford said. “Some younger kids are more mature and responsible than older children. Parents must assess each child individually and see how well he or she retains the parent’s safety instructions. It’s wise to build up gradually the time the child is at home alone.”

Parents who adopt the latchkey lifestyle must tend to these safety issues:

- Check your home thoroughly for hazards. Eliminate the risks or teach the child to avoid them. For example, you might teach the child never to use the stove, but, instead, to use the microwave. If there is a gun the house, be sure it is in a locked cabinet and make certain only grown-ups can open it.
- Teach the child when and how to call 911. Also enter a list of your emergency numbers in each cell telephone. Post the list near each of your ground line phones.
- Be sure each child knows his or her full name, complete home address and home phone number, your full name, the exact name of the place where you work and your work phone number. Write that information and, with your child, decide how you will keep it handy in items the child takes to and from school each day. With your child, post a copy of the information in at least two easy-to-see places in your home.

MORE

AMR: SAFETY ADVICE FOR LATCHKEY KIDS, 7-25-18, page 2 of 2:

- Develop and practice fire escape plans. Involve the whole family in designing AND practicing your escape plan. Child-friendly how-to advice is free at www.sparky.org.
- Require your children to take the same route to and from school each day. Walk that route with the children more than once, to be sure they know the way. Counsel them to come directly home. If possible, have them walk with friends.
- To know your child's whereabouts at all times, use a cell phone app such as GPS Phone Tracker. Developed by Family Safety Productions, it's free at Google Play.
- Establish a check-in routine so a responsible adult knows of the child's arrival home. If your child checks in with you at work, develop a back-up system in case you are unavailable. If you can't take calls at work, consider contracting with a call center specifically set up to receive check-in calls from latchkey children. Database Systems Corporation runs a call center of that nature (visit www.latchkey-kids.com).
- Discuss with your children how to respond to strangers. Practice with your child to shout "No!" if approached by a stranger, then to get away from him or her and immediately tell a trusted adult.
- Don't let children carry bags or other items with their names on them. Don't let them wear keys in a visible place. Be sure keys don't have a name and address on them.
- Assemble an age-appropriate first-aid kit with your child's help. Teach your child how to use its contents, such as band-aids.
- Practice with the children about how they would handle different situations, such as:
 - They lose their key.
 - What to do if they think they are being followed.
 - The door is open when they first get home or a window is broken.
 - Someone they don't know or expect knocks at the door or calls by phone.
 - How to answer the telephone without letting callers know they are alone.
 - They receive a prank telephone call.
 - A sibling gets injured or feels sick.

Technology can also help keep latchkey kids safe. Alford said, "Parents should consider installing door locks operated from cell phones, which ends the worry of lost keys. Such locks will alert the parent the moment the child gets home. Camera systems connected to cell phones enable the parent to keep close tabs on latchkey children. Video doorbells are also a smart investment. Parents should also set controls on laptops and other computers which protect children from inappropriate or dangerous online content."

AMR and MedStat EMS provide 911 ambulance service in 17 Mississippi counties. The Mississippi Department of Health has reported AMR companies transport more ambulance patients than any other services in the state.

About American Medical Response

American Medical Response, Inc., America's leading provider of medical transportation, provides services in 40 states and the District of Columbia. More than 28,000 AMR paramedics, EMTs, RNs and other professionals work together to transport more than 4.8 million patients nationwide each year in critical, emergency and non-emergency situations. AMR also provides fire services through Rural Metro Fire Department, www.ruralmetrofire.com. AMR is a subsidiary of Global Medical Response, www.GlobalMedicalResponse.com. For more information about AMR, visit www.amr.net and follow American Medical Response on Facebook @AMR_Social on Twitter and Instagram.

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