

Halloween Health and Safety: Checklist and Tips

Written by Megan Anaya

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Review this list as the sun rises on Halloween and make sure all are checked before dusk.
(Many thanks to the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta)

Home

- Remove hazards from front porch and yard, such as pots, branches, candles and hoses.
- Confine household pets, and make sure they are wearing collars.
- Leave jack-o-lantern carving to adults and use battery-powered lights.

Food

- Talk to children in advance about boundaries for how many pieces of candy will be eaten Halloween night (three to five recommended).
- When choosing candies to give on Halloween, select ones with nutritional value like chocolates (the darker the better) or candies with nuts.
- Send kids trick-or-treating on a full stomach by planning an easy meal, like a bowl of whole-wheat pasta or a quick peanut butter and banana sandwich.

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Costumes

- Make sure masks have eyeholes large enough for full vision.
- Check for loose clothing that could easily brush up against jack-o-lanterns.
- Read labels to make sure fabrics are flame resistant—remind to stop, drop and roll.

Accessories

- Test props to make sure they are flexible and confirm face paint is non-toxic.
- Add reflective tape and stickers if costumes are not bright.
- Ensure kids carry a flashlight and cell phone.

Route

- Chaperone children age 13 and younger.
- Remind kids to stay on sidewalk; walk facing traffic and avoid shortcuts.
- Set a rule to visit only well-lit houses and remain on porch.

FOR KIDS: Halloween Safety and Health Tips from the Experts

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Included:

- Safety
- Nutrition and Health

SAFETY:

Halloween is one of the most exciting holidays for children because they can dress up in elaborate costumes and act out of character. However, as the sun goes down and trick-or-treaters start roaming the streets of your neighborhood, there are several things to worry about as a parent or guardian. Potentially hazardous costumes or accessories, tainted candy and crossing the street at night without supervision are only a few concerns that should be addressed prior to a child leaving the house.

Children ages 5-14 are four times more likely to be killed while walking on Halloween evening compared with other evenings of the year. Falls are the leading cause of injuries among children on Halloween. Halloween is a fun time for children, but it also is an important time to be extra vigilant for possible safety hazards—so that your children have a fun and safe Halloween.

- Avoid costumes with excessive flowing fabric, such as capes or sleeves. Loose clothing can easily brush up against a jack-o-lantern or other open flame, causing your child's costume to catch on fire.
- Make sure your child's costume fits properly. Oversized costumes and footwear, such as clown or adult shoes, can cause your child to trip and fall, bringing them home with more scrapes and bruises than candy. Avoid wearing hats that will slide over their eyes.

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- Accessorize with flexible props, such as rubber swords or knives. Inflexible props can cause serious injury in case of a fall.
- Apply face paint or cosmetics directly to the face, and make sure it is non-toxic and hypoallergenic. A loose-fitting mask can obstruct a child's vision. If a mask is worn, be certain it fits securely. Cut the eyeholes large enough for full vision.
- If possible, choose a brightly colored costume that drivers can spot easily. If not, decorate his costume with reflective tape and stickers.
- Always supervise children under the age of 13. Older children should trick-or-treat in a group, and a curfew should be established for them. Attach the name, address and phone number (including area code) of children under age 13 to their clothes in case they get separated from adults. Have each child carry a cell phone or some loose change in case they need to call home or get lost.
- Children should only go to well-lit houses and remain on the porch within street view. Teach your child to cross the street only at crosswalks or intersections. Make sure he understands never to cross between parked cars and to always look both ways before crossing. Remind your child to stay on the sidewalk, if possible, and to walk facing traffic. Children should walk, not run, and avoid using shortcuts across backyards or alleys. Use flashlights when trick-or-treating in the dark.
- Remind your child not to eat any treats before you have a chance to examine them thoroughly for holes and punctures. Throw away all treats that are homemade or unwrapped. To help prevent your children from munching, give them a snack or light meal before they go trick-or-treating.
- Parents of food-allergic children must read every candy label in their child's Halloween bag to avoid a potentially life-threatening situation for the child.

HEALTHY:

Kids Consume 1.5 Cups of Fat, 3 Cups of Sugar and 4,800 Calories at Halloween Time

Many of us spend hours decorating the house and creating the perfect costume for a spooky Halloween, but the spookiest part of Halloween is not the scary costumes or the spider web on your front porch – it's the amount of fat, sugar and calories consumed by trick-or-treaters.

By visiting 15 houses, the average trick-or-treater can collect up to 60 pieces of "fun-size"

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candy on Halloween night. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta looked at the calories, fat and sugar content of a bag of typical Halloween treats and found it to be equivalent to 4,800 calories, one-and-a-half cups of fat and three cups of sugar.

"Allowing your child to consume three cups of sugar is like standing by and watching them eat 200 packets of sugar," said Dr. Stephanie Walsh, Medical Director of Child Wellness at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. "Halloween and candy are synonymous, but it's important to provide sweets in moderation and focus on the fun and family time of the event – not the candy."

According to Dr. Walsh, candies with rich ingredients such as chocolate and peanut butter have the highest sugar and fat content. And many specialty Halloween candies, such as candy corn, contain unhealthy amounts of sugar if not consumed in moderation.

Childhood obesity has become a threatening epidemic in Georgia. Weighing in just below Mississippi, Georgia has the second highest rate of childhood obesity in the United States. Nearly one in three children ages 10 to 17 in Georgia is considered to be overweight or obese (National Survey of Children's Health, 2007), and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is continuing to witness a steady rise in obesity cases at all three of its hospitals.

To combat this chronic illness, Dr. Walsh offers several tips to help Georgia's families have a fun and healthy Halloween:

- Offer to "buy back" the candy from your kids in exchange for a small toy.
- Provide plenty of water with the sweets, and set aside time to be active to help burn the extra calories consumed.
- Provide a nutritious meal that includes fruits and vegetables before going to gather candy. This will lower your child's appetite for the sweets they are about to collect in the hours to come.
- Distribute candy with lower sugar and fat content to trick-or-treaters in your neighborhood.
- Talk to children in advance about boundaries for how many pieces of candy will be eaten Halloween night (three to five recommended).
- When choosing candies to give on Halloween, select ones with nutritional value like chocolates (the darker the better) or candies with nuts.
- Send kids trick-or-treating on a full stomach by planning an easy meal, like a bowl of whole-wheat pasta or a quick peanut butter and banana sandwich.

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About Tips Provider:

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, one of the leading pediatric healthcare systems in the country, is pleased to offer Health and Safety Tips for parents and children. You can view a variety of expert tips at www.choa.org/healthandsafetytips. Children's is a not-for-profit organization that benefits from the generous philanthropic and volunteer support of our community. Operating three hospitals with more than half a million patient visits annually, Children's is recognized for excellence in cancer, cardiac, neonatal, orthopaedic and transplant services, as well as many other pediatric specialties. Visit our Web site at www.choa.org to learn more about Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.