

Child safety expert gives Halloween safety tips

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For one night you get to be someone completely different, have a mission of collecting candy at every house you see and it's OK to be scared. It's no wonder Halloween has become one of the most exciting holidays for kids. But without some safety reminders, a child's dream come true could turn into a parent's worst nightmare.

"As parents, we hear the horrors of razor blades or poison in candy. Though it is important to check kids' candy before they eat it, a really scary part about [Halloween](#) is [pedestrian safety](#). [Vehicle accidents](#) are the No. 1 cause of injury for kids on Halloween," said Bridget Boyd, MD, pediatric safety expert and assistant professor in the Department of [Pediatrics](#) at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

To help make Halloween safer it's important for parents to establish rules and communicate expectations with their kids, no matter the age.

"Communication is extremely important in making Halloween safe. Make sure your kids know where they can go, how long they can be gone and with whom they can spend time in advance. Go over it a few times in the days leading up to Halloween and to make sure they remember, tell them right before they head out the door," Boyd said.

When trick-or-treating, she said, the best thing is for parents to go along. Still, for many kids this is their first foray into independence. Children should only be allowed to go alone if they:

- Can follow directions and understand a map so they won't get lost
- Know their neighbors and the neighborhood
- Know how to call 911
- Know their own phone number

"Kids in elementary school should still have a parent go along with them. Junior high is the age when you can begin to decide if the children are responsible enough to go alone, but having a parent is always a better idea," Boyd said.

If a child does go alone, she suggests the following rules:

- Always stay in a group
- Create a specific trick-or-treating route together beforehand and make sure your kids know not to stray from it
- Consider giving one of the children a cell phone in case of an emergency
- Stress pedestrian safety. Make sure they will use sidewalks and crosswalks

Though parents have heard it a million times, it is important to check all candy.

This means:

- Don't let kids eat candy while trick-or-treating. This will keep kids safe from eating candy whose package has been opened and tampered with. It will also limit the amount of sugar they eat. This is good advice for parents, too. If it's too much temptation, let them have one or two pieces, but make sure you inspect them first.

- If in doubt, throw it out. Throw away any treat that is homemade by someone you don't know, a choking hazard or not completely wrapped. It's always better to be safe than sorry.
- Make Halloween allergy-free. Another great reason to check candy is to ensure your child does not have an allergic reaction. Candy may not be well-marked so, again, if in doubt, throw it out. If your child has a nut allergy make sure hands are washed after trick-or-treating.

"Getting dressed up and pretending to be an amazing character is a lot of fun. Parents need to make sure costumes are exciting but safe. Many Halloween injuries are due to unsafe costumes," Boyd said.

She suggests helping your child choose a costume that is a bright color or reflective.

"Unfortunately, many of the most popular costumes for Halloween are dark colors. If your child chooses a dark-colored costume, make sure he or she wears some sort of reflector. Someone driving a car isn't going to see that shadowy figure and it could turn tragic," Boyd said.

She also suggests:

- Costumes need to be flame-resistant
- Use non-toxic makeup instead of masks since masks can obscure vision
- Try to stay away from capes and costumes that are too long. These can be a trip hazard or even catch on fire from candles in jack-o'-lanterns
- Decorative contact lenses can cause serious eye infections. According to Boyd, purchasing contact lenses without a prescription is dangerous for your health and illegal

- Be careful with accessories. If you have young children, make sure the necklaces, etc., are not a choking hazard and swords aren't sharp

"Teens love Halloween as well, but it's one of the most dangerous nights for driving. Try to convince them not to drive and consider holding a special Halloween event such as a scary movie night or haunted house at your house instead," Boyd said. "Whatever you do, make sure you know who they are with, where they are going, when they will be home and stay in contact throughout the night."

Carving pumpkins is one of the highlights of Halloween, but kids and sharp knives are an accident waiting to happen. If you have young kids, Boyd suggests using markers, stickers or paint instead of carving to change your pumpkin into a jack-o'-lantern. If you do carve the pumpkin, make sure it's done on a solid, flat surface and that there is always adult supervision to minimize the chance of injury.

"Candles and costumes are not a good combination. Look for battery-operated candles to use in the jack-o'-lantern or if you do use a candle, make sure it's a votive. Place the pumpkin on a sturdy table away from small children," Boyd said.

Boyd also said to check your house before the big night to ensure good lighting and that there is nothing for the goblins to trip on as they make their way to your door.

"Halloween is a lot of fun and it gives parents a great chance to talk to their kids about responsibility and safety," Boyd said. "With all the candy and costumes, it's hard for kids to control their excitement. That's where the parents come in."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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