

Confectionery sales a Halloween horror story

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With the rising popularity of Halloween among Australian children, Public health specialist Dr Nathan Grills ask us to consider who is being tricked, and who is being treated.

Halloween may constitute a serious public health risk to Australian children, according to an article published today in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Public health specialist Dr Nathan Grills, from Monash University's Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, said Halloween was an imported American celebration that was being exploited by confectionery companies both in the US and in Australia.

"In the US each year, US\$8 billion is spent on Halloween-related items, including US\$2.4 billion on confectionery", a number that exceeds sales at Easter, Christmas and Valentine's Day," Dr Grills said.

"In 2012, leading Australian supermarkets recorded increases of up to 30 per cent in sales of such merchandise in the lead-up to Halloween."

The authors reported that targeted advertising of confectionery towards children has been shown to encourage consumption of ultra-processed products high in salt, sugar and fat, contributing to overweight and obesity levels in children.

Confectionery is not the only [public health](#) hazard of Halloween, according to the authors. Food allergies, contaminated food, foodborne disease, burns and house fires from pumpkins used as candelabras, and a fourfold increase in the rate of children being struck by cars are among the other dangers.

"Australians should be aware that profit-driven corporate manipulation of our cultural choices could damage our health. Instead, we should promote healthy and family-friendly events that are consistent with our own cultural identity", Dr Grills and his coauthor said.

"As we consider the rising popularity of Halloween among Australian children, we should ask ourselves: who is being tricked, and who is being treated?"

The *Medical Journal of Australia* is a publication of the Australian Medical Association.

Provided by Monash University

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