

Should kids go trick-or-treating? Here's how to make Halloween less scary

October 20 2020, by Catherine Marfin, The Dallas Morning News



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Halloween isn't really supposed to be scary, but COVID-19 has made trick-or-treating frightening for many parents.

There are safe ways to celebrate, but health experts say people need to accept that some traditions need to be adapted to the world today.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a complete list of recommendations for the Halloween season, ranking activities as low, moderate or high risk.

For example, modifying trick-or-treating to let kids grab individually wrapped goodie bags while they stay at least six feet away from other people, was described as moderate risk. Traditional trick-or-treating was placed in the high-risk category.

Although the face-to-face interaction children have when they knock on doors is brief, the risk of transmitting a virus increases as more houses are visited, experts say. And if you're trick-or-treating with large groups of children, the risk of transmission is even higher.

"If you're doing something that increases your contacts with other people, then you are automatically increasing their risk and your risk," Dr. Chris Smith, a virologist at the University of Cambridge, told the BBC.

Dallas County also released guidelines for celebrating this Halloween season that advised against traditional trick-or-treating. Also

discouraged: carnivals, haunted houses and parties with people who don't live in your household.

"It's unlikely that every door that is opened, that the person on the other side of that door, whether it be the trick-or-treater or the homeowner, will have the appropriate masking on," County Judge Clay Jenkins said. "If you don't have small kids, the best thing to do for Halloween for you to protect yourself is just turn that light off and don't answer the door for the evening."

The county said better alternatives are online parties and contests, car parades, movie nights at home or at drive-in theaters or outdoor scavenger hunts with people in your household. Eating outdoors at restaurants that comply with social distancing and masking guidelines may be another option.

The best ways to reduce the risks while trick-or-treating are to keep groups small, practice social distancing and frequently using hand sanitizer, health experts say.

People who want to lower their risk with people outside their families should pick groups that also have been observing safe social-distancing, Dr. Sandra Kesh, an infectious disease specialist and the deputy medical director at New York's Westmed Medical Group, told Good Housekeeping.

It's important to wear masks, but the CDC cautions that costume masks aren't substitutes for those that are designed to limit the spread of disease.

"A costume mask should not be used unless it is made of two or more layers of breathable fabric that covers the mouth and nose and doesn't leave gaps around the face," the CDC's guidelines read. "Do not wear a

costume mask over a protective cloth mask because it can be dangerous if the costume mask makes it hard to breathe."

Although the virus isn't thought to be commonly spread by touching infected surfaces, Halloween does present some risk if children are knocking on doors, touching door handles or rummaging around in the same candy bowl as other children.

It's unlikely that a child will become sick after eating a piece of candy that was passed out to them, but health experts recommend parents plan for hand-sanitizer breaks and encourage kids to wash their hands before they eat candy.

Health experts say parents who are worried about virus exposure from candy wrappers can put the candy away for a few days before children eat it.

But the real risk is face-to-face contact.

"I am more concerned about COVID-19 exposure and self-contamination risks during trick-or-treating, compared to transmission of virus strictly from the wrappers," Dr. Kelly Cawcutt at the University of Nebraska told WebMD. "The reality is if the wrapper is contaminated with SARS-CoV-2, you came in close contact with someone who has it. That contact is the highest risk."

Experts urge visiting only homes that participate in one-way trick-or-treating—the moderate-risk method described by the CDC. Kids should grab their own individually wrapped goodie bags without risking exposure to homeowners or other children.

Some parents have planned creative solutions. For example, an Ohio father gained widespread attention after he designed a candy chute that

allows kids to trick-or-treat without coming to his door.

Some parents may bring their own candy and give it to their young children as they pass houses in the neighborhood.

But even before considering safer alternatives, families should carefully evaluate the level of community spread where they live, [health experts](#) say. Parents also need to be thoughtful about whether people in their homes are especially vulnerable to the virus because of their age or health.

"In an area where there's still ongoing community spread (and things) haven't gotten to the point where things are opening up again, I don't think trick-or-treating is a great idea," Kesh told Good Housekeeping. "In areas where the community prevalence is lower, I think it's OK to plan to trick-or-treat, but it's going to be a different experience than it was last year."

Halloween activities and their risk level, according to the CDC

Low risk

- Carving pumpkins with a small group outside while social distancing
- Doing a scavenger hunt outside with kids
- Having a virtual costume contest

Moderate risk

- Holding a costume parade with a small group outside while social distancing

- Having a costume party outside with social distancing
- Going to an outdoor, socially distanced haunted house while wearing a mask
- Going to a pumpkin patch or orchard where people use masks, stay socially distant and use [hand sanitizer](#) before touching pumpkins or apples
- Having an outdoor movie night while social distancing

High risk

- Participating in "trunk-or-treats" where candy is given out of the trunks of cars in parking lots
- Going to crowded, indoor costume parties or haunted houses
- Going on hayrides or tractor rides with people who don't live in your house
- Traveling to a fall festival outside of your community when the virus is spreading where you live

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Citation: Should kids go trick-or-treating? Here's how to make Halloween less scary (2020, October 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-kids-trick-or-treating-halloween-scary.html>

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