

Halloween Safety Tips

What to Do and Why

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Preface

"The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow"
Keep them safe.

Every year children are hospitalized with injuries, some of which have proved fatal, that could have been avoided with just a few simple precautions. Most are from falls and being hit by vehicles. I have endeavored to provide as comprehensive a list as possible in this short report. There is a lot of information out there about what to do and you will find a lot of it here. What the others don't tell you is why.

Tips for Safe Costumes

- Make sure the costume does not obstruct vision in any way. Use (Halloween) makeup or face paint. Make sure that whatever you use is clearly labeled as non-toxic. You may want to use a hypoallergenic product if your child has sensitive skin.
- Ensure all wigs, hats, helmets and other head gear fits properly and does not fall down over their eyes.
- Ensure all scarves and other parts of the costume that are going to be around their face or neck is not too tight as to inhibit proper breathing.
- Send them out in shoes that fit. Dad's old work boots or Mom's high heels are a tripping hazard. Decorate their own shoes instead keeping in mind how the decoration will affect their ability to walk or run. Use only softer materials. Anything that is hard and pointy can cause injury to others as well as to your child if they trip or fall.

- Use reflective strips on all costumes, even if they are light in color. These come in a variety of colors and can be cut into shapes and incorporated into the design of the costume so as not to deter from the look of the costume in the light. They can be used as the main part of the costume. For example: cut them into bone shapes and make a skeleton on a black shirt and pants.
- All costumes should be fire retardant/resistant. Check labels on purchased costumes and accessories.
- Costumes should be large enough to wear warm clothes underneath but not so large as to be baggy. Extremely baggy costumes can be a tripping hazard and are more likely to get caught on things. The same applies to the length. You can camouflage their shoes to match the costume.
- Never send hard, sharp objects as part of a costume. Make all swords, tridents, wands, etc. out of soft plastic or cardboard. All need to be proportionate to the size of the child.
- Don't send simulated weapons that are too realistic looking.
- Your child will have more fun if they are not wrestling with or tripping on oversized props and improperly fitting costumes.

Some Things to Do Before the Big Night

- Plan your route. If possible walk the route with your child beforehand in daylight and after dark. Things can look significantly different at night.
- Make sure you have fresh batteries for flashlights or a fresh supply of glow sticks.
- Go over all the safety rules with your child. I am referring to the "rules of the road" such as don't cross from between parked cars, always cross at crosswalks, intersections or traffic lights and walk not run. Stay away from parked vans. Never approach a person in a vehicle that offers them candy or a ride. Don't talk to strangers. This, of course, may lead to a bit of debate since they will not know most of the homeowners they will be getting treats from. Make sure

your children clearly differentiate this. People don't "shell out" from their cars.

- You might be able to arrange a visit to your local police and fire departments. Or you may be able to make arrangements through your school or day care center for an officer of these departments to visit there a few days before Halloween.

Safety Concerns

- Leave bicycles, rollerblades and skateboards at home. Bicycles can not only be stolen while your child is at the door but create a tripping hazard for others. Have you ever tried to get up or down stairs quickly with rollerblades on? Inconvenient at best.
- Make your children eat a good meal before they go out. Not only will this ensure they have sufficient energy it will lessen the temptation to snack on uninspected treats along the way.
- Provide each child with a flashlight with fresh batteries or a glow stick. This ensures they can be seen easily by drivers and they will be able to see any obstacles that might otherwise be tripped over. Flashlights should be bright enough for them to see with but not so bright as to blind a driver if pointed into a car window. (i.e.: large camping style spotlights)
- Accompany younger children. If it is impossible for you to go with them yourself get an older child (over the age of 12) or another adult to go with them. Alternatively, you may send them with a supervised group. Follow this guideline inside your own apartment building too.
- Instruct your children to only approach well lit premises and only use the front door. Never go around to the back of any building.
- Make sure they know to never go inside a house unless you are with them. Before you enter dial 911 (or emergency number for your area) and keep your finger on the send button. There are situations where older or handicapped persons who enjoy handing out treats and seeing the costumes but are unable to be close enough to the door to do so. Make sure this is the case before entering.

- Older children who are out with a group of their peers should never enter a house regardless of circumstance.
- Pin your child's name and your phone number and/or the cell phone number of the adult(s) accompanying the group inside a pocket in case they get separated from the group.
- If your child should get separated they should go to a designated "safe house". Discuss this with your child before Halloween and choose the houses for them. Make sure they will be able to find the right house. This is where a walk along the route a few days prior to Halloween is helpful.
- There should be at least two adults with each larger group of younger children. One to stay in the lead and one to bring up the rear. This will ensure none of the children get lost by lagging behind or getting too far ahead of the others.
- Walkie-talkies can be used to keep in touch with other members of the group. These work for adults supervising young children and groups of older children out there with their peers.
- Cell phones are a great method of communication. Either provide your (older) child with a cell phone or make sure at least one of the group has one and the battery is fully charged. Most cell phones can be pre-programmed with phone numbers. Put in your home number and emergency numbers. (i.e.: 911 or whatever the emergency numbers are for your area.)
- The old adage "safety in numbers" is a very good rule of thumb on Halloween. If you are accompanying your own children either go with a group or use the "buddy system". Remember, the predators out there are not limited to pedophiles. I know this may sound a bit ominous but you need to keep yourself safe too. Most of us don't even think about these things while we are out there on Halloween. Stay alert all the time.
- Inside your apartment building you may keep an eye on your child by staying in the hallway while handing out treats. You could arrange for a designated hall watcher on all floors. This way you will be sure your older children are safe too without "embarrassing" them by your presence.

- Get the names and phone numbers of the other children in the group they will be going with.
- Go over their route and make sure they understand they must adhere to it. If their peers want to go somewhere else they should go to the prearranged safe house, use a cell phone or a pay phone to call you so you can meet them and either bring them home or accompany them on the rest of their route.
- If you are unable to provide your child with a cell phone make sure they have enough change for at least two calls from a pay phone in case they get the answering machine or wrong number on the first try. Try to stay off the phone at home just in case.
- Make sure your child knows how to dial 911 or whatever emergency number is in effect in your area.
- Instruct your children to walk not run from house to house.
- Make sure they know to use the sidewalk and not cross lawns. There may be obstacles for them to trip over. There is always the possibility that the lawn was recently sprayed with pesticides or herbicides. These chemicals are toxic. Most lawn care professionals will place small signs on the lawn. However these are only placed along the sidewalk not the sides where children would cross.
- Make sure they bring home all treats to be inspected by a parent or other responsible adult not an only slightly older sibling.
- Throw all fruit (apples) and unwrapped candy directly into the garbage unless you are absolutely certain where it came from. (apples or cookies from Grandma are probably OK) The National Safety Council (NSC) recommends that fruit be cut into thin slices but this will only reveal any hard objects not anything (drugs) that has been injected. Throw them out.
- Inspect wrapped candy with a magnifying glass for pinholes and any other sign of tampering with the packaging.
- Check ingredients for any your child is allergic to.

Tips For Drivers

- SLOW DOWN. Even though the children have been told over and over to look both ways and not to run out from between parked cars they will be excited and may forget. Especially if they see their friends getting ahead of them. Some costumes limit visibility. They may have difficulty seeing you.
- Watch for children in dark costumes. The only indication you may have that they are there is a moving shadow.
- When turning into driveways, alleys and other entrances stop to make sure there are no little goblins about to run past you.
- It's always better to take a few more minutes to get to your destination than harbor guilt the rest of your life for a tragedy that could have been avoided.
- Report all unusual or suspicious activity to the authorities immediately. Get a licence plate number and/or house address.
- Never ask one of the children out there for directions. Find an adult. You could be reported to the police as a potential pedophile by an astute passerby or home owner.

Tips For Home Owners

- Remove unlit lawn ornaments, garden hoses, toys, flower pots, lawn sprinklers, etc. that may be a tripping hazard.
- Decorate or otherwise make visible all low hanging branches.
- Make sure the front of your house is well lit. If you are more than a few feet away from the sidewalk consider placing lights along each side of the walk. There are many "cordless" lights available including those powered by batteries and solar. These are also very portable for use anywhere during the rest of the year.
- If you are displaying a candle lit jack-o-lantern do not place them on steps or on walkways. Use the shorter votive candles or tea lights. These are less likely to fall over if the pumpkin gets bumped.

Ideally, candles should be replaced by small flashlights, night lights or glow sticks.

- Avoid having your lawn sprayed with pesticides and herbicides for several weeks before Halloween. These chemicals are toxic. Children are more susceptible to experience adverse effects from these.
- If you have had your lawn sprayed place clearly visible, large signs along the sides of your lawn as well as at the front.
- The law in most areas places the responsibility of all injuries that occur on your property directly on you, regardless of the circumstances. I am not a lawyer and this report is not meant to give or replace any legal advice. Contact your local municipal office and your lawyer to find out exactly what your liabilities are.
- If you are not planning on having trick or treaters coming to your door keep your outside lights off. Outside lights are a traditional signal that you are offering treats and all costumed youngsters are drawn to them like moths to a flame.
- When you have finished "shelling out" turn off outside lights including your walkway lights.
- Bring in all pumpkins and large decorations. Leaving these out only tempt tricksters to throw them into the street where they become a hazard for drivers. Pumpkins make the road slippery and larger things can cause damage to vehicles. (Have you ever run over a scarecrow? At least I think that's what took the exhaust pipe off my car. There wasn't much left to properly identify it)

Alternative Treats – It Doesn't Have To Be Candy

- Consider giving out non-food treats. These can be small toys, balloons, pencils, erasers, small pads of paper, small coloring or activity books, stickers, coins and other inexpensive things.
- You can usually find a treasure trove of small treats in the birthday party section of discount/dollar stores. Pencils, paper, etc. will be in the stationery department.

- Another option is small single serving packets of microwavable popcorn – not popped they can do that at home for a fresh healthy snack
- Don't waste your money on apples and unwrapped candy. It will most likely end up in the garbage.
- If you feel you must give out food treats put a label on each one with your name, address and/or phone number. It stands to reason that if you are willing to give the parents your contact information then the treats are safe for their children to eat.

Keeping Your Pets Safe

- Keep your pets in a separate room without access to the door. Especially those that are prone to run outside every time the door opens.
- Bring pets indoors even if they are used to being out to prevent them from being teased or otherwise harmed or stolen. Not as uncommon as you may think.
- Even pets who are normally very docile may be stressed by the additional commotion.
- Some animals, although very friendly with people at all times are sometimes confused and frightened by the costumes. (Our own dog, who had proved over several years wouldn't hurt anything, attacked my husband one time when he came in with a gorilla mask on. Proof that animals identify us by sight as much as by smell.)
- Contact your veterinarian for more information on keeping your pets safe on Halloween

A Few Alternatives to Going Door to Door

- Have a party for your kids and their friends. Invite the parents and encourage them to send enough treats for the entire group. The larger the group – the more each one will go home with. Obviously,

home made treats and apples are acceptable in this case. They could also include cookies, bars, carrot sticks or anything else that children like to eat.

- If you live in an apartment building ask your building manager about the use of a common/recreation room. Many buildings have large rooms for the use of their tenants for personal gatherings and tenant meetings. Put up signs (with permission) on all floors near the elevators inviting all the tenants. You will probably want to get the help of several of the other tenants and the building manager to help you arrange a party of this size. Chances are the building manager will be more than willing to help out if not take over. Make sure all the tenants are aware that treats will only be given out in the common room and none of the children will be going to their doors. The same safety rules apply here as to the inspection of treats unless you personally know everyone in your building.
- Try a rotating party. The more friends and neighbors you can get involved in this the more fun it can be for all. This involves some organized travelling but can be a lot of fun. Start at the first house with a few games and treats. Go to the next house for more games and treats. Repeat until all houses have been visited. At the last house have the children vote for the best costume. Award a prize for it. Have smaller prizes for all the other children so no one feels left out.
- If you can get permission from your municipal office and don't live on a major thoroughfare close off part of your street and have a street party. Invite the adults to dress in costumes and bring their treats rather than handing them out at the door. Fill the treat bags from a central location.
- Consider visiting retirement homes and/or senior centers.
- Involve local college students or service clubs for a mini carnival with games and face painting.

The most important thing is to stay safe and have fun.
Have a safe and happy Halloween

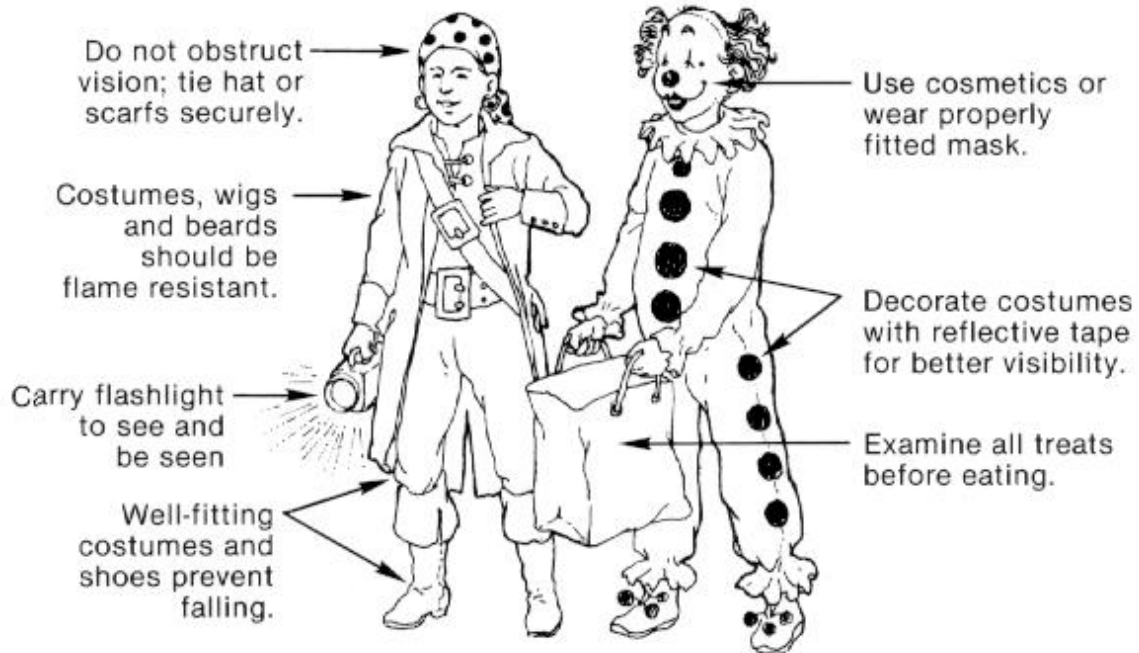
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For some fun stuff visit:

<http://theworldofcolor.com/halloweenfun.htm>

where you'll find links to assorted resources for party ideas, games, recipes and more safety tips for day to day living.

Here is a diagram to illustrate safety of costumes



References:

National Safety Council

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

American Academy of Pediatrics