

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Department of Health Advises Safety with Food and Fun for a Happy Halloween**

**TALLAHASSEE** –The Florida Department of Health (DOH) reminds parents of the importance of safety with food and activities for a Happy Halloween.

As kids hit the street to collect candy, the DOH cautions parents of the potential for unintentional injury in pedestrian accidents, burns and falls among children. In addition, the DOH urges parents and children not to be tricked by tampered treats.

DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H. reminds parents to sort through their children's candy. "If you find anything that you deem suspicious, go with the old adage of 'When in doubt, throw it out,'" Agwunobi said.

Agwunobi also stresses the importance of taking safety precautions to avoid other, more prevalent dangers. "While most parents are cautious about candy tampering, they're not aware of the many potential risks associated with the festivities. A few simple safety tips can help their children avoid injury."

Many of the risks children face can be avoided if parents discuss with their kids the following important safety precautions:

**FOOD SAFETY**

- Tell children not to accept or eat anything that isn't commercially wrapped.
- Inspect commercially wrapped treats for signs of tampering, such as an unusual appearance or discoloration, tiny pinholes, or tears in wrappers. Throw away anything that looks suspicious.
- Children shouldn't snack while they're out trick-or-treating, before parents have a chance to inspect the goodies. To help prevent children from munching, give them a snack or light meal before they go.
- When children bring their treats home, discard any homemade candy or baked goods. Parents of young children should also remove any choking hazards such as gum, peanuts, hard candies, small toys or candies in small cups or containers. Anything 1.75 inches or less can pose a threat.
- Wash all fresh fruit thoroughly, inspect it for holes, including small punctures, and cut it open before allowing children to eat it.
- If juice or cider is served to children at Halloween parties, make sure it is pasteurized or otherwise treated to destroy harmful bacteria. Juice or cider that has not been treated will say so on the label.

## **PEDESTRIAN INJURIES**

Halloween is the most dangerous night of the year for child pedestrians. The DOH cautions that children are four times more likely to be hit by a car on Halloween than any other night of the year. As children scurry from house to house collecting treats, it is important for them to take the following precautions:

### **Visibility**

- Decorate costumes, bags and sacks with retro reflective tape and stickers.
- Use costumes that are light or bright enough to make children more visible at night.

### **Traffic**

- Teach children to walk, not run, while trick-or-treating.
- Remind children to stop at all street corners before crossing. Tell them to cross streets only at intersections and crosswalks.
- Instruct them to look left, right and left again before crossing the street and to continue looking both ways as they cross.
- Teach them never to dart out into a street or cross between parked cars.
- Teach children to exit and enter the car on the curbside, away from traffic.
- Never let children under age 12 go trick-or-treating or cross the street without adult supervision.

### **Other Precautions**

- Attach the name, address and phone number (including area code) of children under age 12 to their clothes in case they get separated from adults.
- Teach older children his or her phone number, and supply change for a phone call.
- Instruct children to travel only in familiar areas and along a pre-established route.
- Instruct children never to enter a home or an apartment building unless accompanied by an adult.
- Set a time for children to return home.
- Restrict trick-or-treating visits to homes with porch or outside lights illuminated.

## **FALLS**

On Halloween night, cumbersome costumes and blinding masks can make walking safely through dark neighborhoods difficult. The National SAFE KIDS campaign, SAFE KIDS Florida and the DOH recommend the following tips to help prevent fall-related injuries:

- Apply face paint or cosmetics directly to the face. It is safer than a loose-fitting mask that can obstruct a child's vision. If a mask is worn, be certain it fits securely. Cut the eyeholes large enough for full vision.
- Give trick-or-treaters flashlights.
- Make costumes short enough to avoid tripping.
- Secure hats so they will not slip over children's eyes.
- Dress children in shoes that fit.
- Allow children to carry only flexible knives, swords or other props. Anything they carry could injure them if they fall.
- Teach children not to cut across yards. Lawn ornaments and clotheslines are "hidden hazards" in the dark. Tell your children to stay on the sidewalk at all times.

## **BURNS**

Fires and burns are the third leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children. For a safe Halloween, the National SAFE KIDS campaign, SAFE KIDS Florida and the DOH recommends children and parents:

- Look for "flame resistant" labels on costumes, masks, beards and wigs.
- Use fire resistant material when making costumes.
- Avoid costumes made of flimsy material and outfits with big, baggy sleeves or billowing skirts. These are more likely to come in contact with an exposed flame, such as a candle, than tighter fitting costumes.
- Keep candles, pumpkins with candles, matches and lighters out of children's reach.

Whether passing out candy or chauffeuring costume-clad children, adults can take the following precautions to ensure trick-or-treaters have a safe Halloween:

- Slow down in residential neighborhoods.
- Obey all traffic signs and signals.
- Watch for children walking in the street or on medians and curbs.
- Enter and exit driveways and alleyways slowly and carefully.
- Remove breakable items or obstacles such as tools, ladders and children's toys from steps, lawn and porch. Keep jack-o'-lanterns lit with candles away from landings or doorsteps where costumes might brush against the flame.

For information on child safety visit the DOH website at [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us).

SAFE KIDS Florida is part of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, the first and only national non-profit organization dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury—the number one killer of children ages 14 and under. The DOH is the lead agency for SAFE KIDS Florida. For more information and safety tips, visit [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org).

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