

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Lindsay Hodges
850-245-4111

Take Safety to the Street this Halloween

Tallahassee –The Florida Department of Health reminds parents of the importance of safety and caution with food and activities for Halloween. As kids hit the street to trick-or-treat, the potential for unintentional injury rises, with increases in pedestrian injuries, burns and falls among children. Children are four times more likely to be hit by a car on Halloween than any other night of the year.

Florida Department of Health Deputy State Health Officer Bonnie Sorensen, M.D., M.B.A., reminds parents that if their children receive candy they deem suspicious, to go with the old adage of “When in doubt, throw it out.”

Sorensen also stresses the importance of taking safety precautions to avoid other, more prevalent dangers, which parents often don’t consider. “While most parents are cautious about candy tampering, they’re not aware of the potential risks associated with kids walking in the dark with unwieldy costumes in the streets and around jack-o-lanterns and candles. A few simple safety tips can help their children avoid pedestrian injuries, burns and falls.”

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--and, especially, not to eat--anything that isn't commercially wrapped.
- 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--don't send them out on an empty stomach.
 - 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 choking hazard to children 3 and under.
 - Wash all fresh fruit thoroughly, inspect it for holes, including small punctures, and cut it open before allowing children to eat it.
 - 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.

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. Darting out into the street is one of the most common causes of pedestrian death among children. 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 retroreflective 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.
- Teach 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.
- Never let children under age 12 go trick-or-treating or cross the street without adult supervision.

Motorists

- 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.
- Teach children to exit and enter the car on the curbside, away from traffic.

For kids ages 12 and under:

- Adults should accompany children under age 12 on their trick-or-treat rounds.
- 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.

For kids ages 12 and older:

- Teach your child his or her phone number.
- Make sure your children have change for a phone call in case they have a problem away from home.
- 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.
- Tell children to bring their treats home before eating them. Parents should check treats to ensure that items have not been tampered with and are safely sealed. Be careful with fruit. Inspect the surface closely for punctures or holes and cut it open before allowing a child to eat it.

All ages:

- Remove breakable items or obstacles such as tools, ladders and children's toys from your steps, lawn and porch. Keep jack-o'-lanterns lit with candles away from landings

or doorsteps where costumes might brush against the flame.

As parents and children take time to construct costumes and decorations, the National SAFE KIDS campaign, SAFE KIDS Florida, and the Florida Department of Health recommends the following:

FALLS

On Halloween night, cumbersome costumes and blinding masks can make walking safely through dark neighborhoods difficult. The following tips can 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. Adult shoes are not safe for trick-or-treaters. The larger size makes it easier for them to trip and fall.
- 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. On Halloween, the National SAFE KIDS campaign, SAFE KIDS Florida, and the Florida Department of Health recommends the following:

- 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.

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 Florida Department of Health is the lead agency for SAFE KIDS Florida. For more information, visit www.safekids.org

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