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Halloween Hazards Sometimes Come in Disguise

Ghosts, goblins and black cats will be the only bad luck this Halloween if parents promote good nutrition and follow a few simple safety precautions for all trick-or-treaters. These Halloween hints from the Tri-County Health Department will guarantee a fun, safe holiday for all the costumed critters.

Parents can easily prevent the three major causes of childhood Halloween injuries: eye abrasions from masks and costumes; minor skin irritations from face paints; and injuries from flammable costumes. Masks should fit comfortably, have good visibility, and have no sharp or rough edges that could scratch the eyes or skin. Face paints provide better visibility than masks, especially for kids with glasses, but the makeup must be washed off thoroughly afterwards in order to avoid skin irritation.

Fabric costumes should be labeled flame retardant and also be made of light-colored materials or have reflective strips for improved visibility to cars. Outfits should not have any dangling pieces that a child might trip over, and children should wear their own walking shoes, not mom's oversized high heels.

Swords, props and other accessories should be made of soft, flexible materials, not something that could poke or injure another child. Better yet, avoid all weapons completely, as children can get very aggressive if they act out their costume fantasies.

There are also alternatives to handing out Halloween candy. "Treats don't have to be sweets. Kids love getting stickers, colorful school supplies and novelties instead of candy," according to Anne Bennett, Director of Nutrition at Tri-County Health Department. "Since we recommend that only commercially-wrapped treats be accepted

by trick-or-treaters, serve other treats such as homemade goodies only at parties or in your own home. Banana bread, apples and pie are some healthier alternatives to candy.

“Adults should inspect all candy wrappers, throw out any that look suspicious and insist that kids brush their teeth after eating sweets. Also, send kids out only after a good meal, as they will be less tempted to eat candy along the way,” Bennett adds.

Remind kids to cross only at street corners, never run between parked cars, always remove masks for visibility before crossing the street, be aware of moving vehicles and never go into a stranger’s home. Concerned parents can also accompany children, set time limits and curfews, and instruct children not to eat any treats until they are examined by an adult. In addition, a flashlight provides light for dark sidewalks and increases visibility to passing motorists. It can even be decorated to coordinate with a costume.

Residents can also help increase Halloween safety. They should provide a well-lighted home and walkway, remove anything that might be tripped over, use battery-powered lights instead of candles in pumpkins, and protect their pets from pranks.

Pets are especially vulnerable and should be kept indoors. The constant doorbell ringing can be very upsetting. Even the most mild-mannered dog can get snappy when confronted with screaming children in strange costumes, so don’t let children pet the dog without adult supervision. Keep pets restrained or with another person so that they don’t dart out the open door, or keep them safe in a closed room.

Chocolate and raisins are poisonous to pets, and foil or plastic candy wrappers can be dangerous if swallowed by curious cats and dogs, so keep the trash tightly closed.

Following these simple tips can help make it a spooky-yet-safe Halloween for everyone. For other health, safety and nutrition information visit the Tri-County Health Department website at www.tchd.org.

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