

Be Cautious

About four times as many kids 5-14 are killed walking on Halloween evening

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THE CHRONICLE

Most people think of Halloween as a time for fun and treats. But roughly four times as many children ages 5-14 are killed while walking on Halloween evening compared with other evenings of the year, and falls are a leading cause of injuries among children on Halloween, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Many Halloween-related injuries can be prevented if parents closely supervise school-aged children during trick-or-treat activities.

Parents can help prevent children from getting injured at Halloween by following these safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Safety Council.

Children should: Go only to well-lighted houses and remain on porches rather than entering houses. Travel in small groups and be accompanied by an adult. Know their phone number and carry coins for emergency telephone calls. Have their names and addresses attached to their costumes. Bring treats home before eating them so parents can inspect them. Use costume knives and swords that are flexible, not rigid or sharp.

When walking in neighborhoods, they should: Use flashlights with fresh batteries, stay on sidewalks, and avoid crossing yards. Cross streets at the corner, use crosswalks (where they exist), and do not cross between parked cars. Stop at all corners and stay together in a group before crossing. Wear clothing that is bright, reflective and flame retardant. Wear comfortable shoes that fit (adult-size shoes can cause blistering or make a child trip and fall). Consider using face paint instead of masks (masks can obstruct a child's vision.) Avoid wearing hats that will slide over their

eyes. Avoid wearing long, baggy, or loose costumes or oversized shoes (to prevent tripping).

Parents and adults should: Remind children to look left, right, and left again before crossing the street. Supervise the outing for children under age 12. Establish a curfew (a return time) for older children. Prepare homes for trick-or-treaters by clearing porches, lawns, and sidewalks and by placing jack-o-lanterns away from doorways and landings. Avoid giving choking hazards such as gum, peanuts, hard candies, or small toys as treats to young children. Inspect all candy for safety before children eat it.

Parents and adults should ensure the safety of pedestrian trick-or-treaters: Make sure children under age 10 are supervised as they cross the street. Drive slowly. Watch for children in the street and on medians. Exit driveways and alleyways carefully. Have children get out of cars on the curb side, not on the traffic side.

And a few tips about pumpkins: Carve pumpkins on stable, flat surfaces with good lighting. Have small children draw a face on the outside of the pumpkin, then parents should do the cutting. (Under parents' supervision, children ages 5 to 10 can carve with pumpkin cutters equipped with safety bars.) Place lighted pumpkins away from curtains and other flammable objects, and do not leave lighted pumpkins unattended.

A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (showed that during 1975-1996, the number of deaths among young pedestrians was four times higher on Halloween evening when compared with the same time period during all other evenings of the year. Halloween poses special risks to young pedestrians. For example, most of the time children spend outdoors is typically during daylight hours. However, Halloween activities often occur after dark. Also, children engaged in "trick

or treat" activities frequently cross streets at mid-block rather than at corners or crosswalks, putting them at risk for pedestrian injury.

Many parents overestimate children's street-crossing skills. The pedestrian skills of children are limited by several factors related to their physical size and developmental stage. For instance, young children may lack the physical ability to cross a street quickly, and their small size limits their visibility to drivers. Children are likely to choose the shortest rather than the safest route across streets, often darting out between parked cars. In addition, young children do not evaluate potential traffic threats effectively, cannot anticipate driver behavior, and process sensory information more slowly than adults.

Progressive - headquartered in Mayfield Village, Ohio, and one of the nation's largest auto insurance companies - said in a news release that data from 1999 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports show that: fatal collisions between motor vehicles and young pedestrians (under 15 years of age) happen most frequently between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. - prime trick-or-treating time; 84 percent of deaths among young pedestrians occurred at non-intersection locations (indicating children are most likely to dart and dash from mid-block into the street); and of the 4,906 pedestrian/motor vehicle fatalities in 1999, 517 were young pedestrians. Of those, 62 percent were male.

Progressive offers these Halloween safety tips:

- Know when your neighborhood is holding Halloween activities. The actual holiday falls on a Wednesday this year, so some neighborhoods may opt to conduct trick-or-treating on the previous Friday, Saturday or Sunday evenings.

- Don't use a cellular telephone while driving through neighborhoods. A single distraction could lead to a tragedy. A



Trick-or-treaters should be especially cautious when going door to door on Halloween, according to a number of experts and surveys.

recent countrywide survey by progressive.com shows that 46 percent of respondents report having swerved into another lane and 41 percent say they sped up while driving alone and talking on their cell phone.

- Stay well below the posted speed limit during trick-or-treating hours.

- Do not pass other vehicles that have stopped in the roadway. Other vehicles could be dropping off children.

- Be intersection alert. Children could be crossing the street. Never assume a pedestrian approaching the roadway will yield to your vehicle. Children may not see your vehicle approaching or might not be familiar with crossing roadways.

- Make sure other drivers can see you. If you're driving a group of children, but staying in the running vehicle at curbside, be sure to put on your four-way flashers to alert other motorists.

- Take advantage of your community's Halloween safety programs. Most communities offer Halloween activities for younger children that keep them out of harm's way. Your community may also offer a service that inspects candy to ensure that it is safe for children to eat.

The following are some tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics: Serve kids a healthy dinner (with foods they like) before trick-or-treating, so they

won't fill up on candy. Offer trick-or-treaters something other than candy, such as colorful pencils, stickers, large erasers or decorative shoelaces. Set a number of days candy can remain in the house before it gets thrown out. Children shouldn't snack while they're trick-or-treating, and parents should check treats at home. Watch for signs of tampering, such as small pinholes in wrappers and torn or loose packages. Parents of young children should get rid of choking hazards such as gum, peanuts, hard candies or small toys. Parents should check outdoor lights and replace burned-out bulbs. Wet leaves should be swept from sidewalks and steps.

Halloween safety tips from the Los Angeles Fire Department: Plan ahead to use only battery powered lanterns or chemical lightsticks in place of candles in decorations and costumes.

This is also a great time to buy fresh batteries for your home smoke alarms. Teach children how to call 9-1-1 (or their local emergency number) if they have an emergency or become lost. (Remind them that 9-1-1 can be dialed free at any pay phone.) Review with your children the principle of "Stop-Drop-Roll," should their clothes catch on fire. Openly discuss appropriate and inappropriate behavior at Halloween time. Learn or review CPR skills to aid someone who

is choking or having a heart attack. Consider safe party guidelines when hosting an adult or office party.

The Los Angeles Fire Department also advises: Ask around your community and check your local newspaper for information on special events. (community centers, shopping malls and houses of worship often have organized festivities.) Do not overload electrical outlets with holiday lighting or special effects. Along with flashlights for all, older children and escorts should wear a wristwatch and carry coins for nonemergency phone calls. Confine, segregate, or otherwise prepare household pets for an evening of frightful sights and sounds. (Be sure that all dogs and cats are wearing collars and proper identification tags.) Adult partygoers should establish a designated driver.

The National Crime Prevention Council suggests: 1. Make sure older kids trick-or-treat with friends. Together, map out a safe route so parents know where they'll be. Tell them to stop only at familiar homes where the outside lights are on. 2. Make sure kids know not to enter strange houses or strangers' cars. 3. What to eat? Only unopened candies and other treats that are in original wrappers. Don't forget to inspect fruit and homemade goodies for anything suspicious.

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