

UC San Diego Medical Center Toxicologists Offer Halloween Tips: The Trick to Treating Children (and Adults) to a Safe Halloween

October 21, 2008 |

The Emergency Department staff at UC San Diego Medical Center- along with the California Poison Control System-San Diego Division located at UCSD Medical Center- offer the following safety precautions to help parents and guardians make Halloween safe.

“The Poison Center does tend to see an upswing in calls around the Halloween season,” said Lee Cantrell, Pharm.D., director of the California Poison Control System-San Diego Division, at UCSD Medical Center, “but with a few reminders and by taking some precautions, parents can stay ahead of most dangers.”

Emergency physicians in UC San Diego Medical Center’s Emergency Departments also say they experience an upswing in alcohol-related incidents, and this year they expect even more.

“Unfortunately, we can almost always count on an increase and this year, Halloween falls on a Friday night,” said Theodore Chan, M.D., Medical Director of UC San Diego’s emergency department. “Those numbers can be reduced if adult partiers take a moderate approach to alcohol consumption and designate a driver before the evening’s festivities begin.”

A few safety tips from UC San Diego Medical Center specialists:

Pumpkin Carving/Jack O’Lanterns

- → Let the kids draw a face on your pumpkins and get covered in the gooey guts when scraping out the pumpkin contents, but an adult should ALWAYS do the carving.
- → Keep an eye on Jack O’Lanterns with burning candles inside. Make sure they’re placed where they cannot start a fire.

Treats

- → Feed children before they go trick-or-treating. Select a small amount of candy or other food to eat while trick-or-treating so they won't be tempted to eat from the bag before their treats can be checked.
- → Look carefully at all treats to detect signs of tampering. Throw away unwrapped candy or treats not in the original wrapper, candy with faded or torn wrappers, and candies that show signs of rewrapping.
- → Parents with children of different ages should sort the candies to make sure that younger kids don't get hold of small hard candies, peanuts or other objects that may get lodged in a youngster's throat.
- → Remember, some treats, especially chocolate, can be poisonous to pets.

Costumes

- → The UC San Diego Regional Burn Center reminds parents to look for costumes, wigs and masks that are flame resistant and with room enough to allow a child to dress warmly underneath. Flame resistant does not mean the fabric won't catch fire, only that it will resist burning.
- → Face paints, glues and glitters should be made of non-toxic materials. Some children have allergic reactions to these products, such as a rash or itching. If this occurs, remove the make-up immediately and thoroughly cleanse the skin with mild soap and water.
- → If your child wears a mask, make sure it does not impair the child's vision or breathing.
- → Physicians recommend kids wear flat shoes with their costumes and make sure the costumes are short enough to prevent the child from tripping.

Tips for Trick-or-Treating

- → Never let a child trick-or-treat alone. An adult should accompany young children in familiar neighborhoods, visiting known areas.
- → Carry a flashlight after dusk and watch for cars.
- → Make walkways and lawns safe by removing obstacles and leaving outside lights on.
- → Stay away from barking dogs or other upset animals.
- → Choose costumes with light or bright colors, which can be seen by drivers.
- → Use reflective tape on costumes and trick-or-treat bags so that they are highly visible.
- →

- Halloween also means parties for parents. Make sure all alcohol and cigarette butts are cleaned up as these items can poison small children.

“The Poison Center recommends that parents carefully check all treats before allowing their trick-or-treaters to taste anything,” said UC San Diego toxicologist Lee Cantrell. “This is the best way to prevent poisoning incidents.”

Parents who find any candy that has been tampered with should report the incident to the Police Department. If children are experiencing any symptoms following ingestion of food or candy, parents should call the California Poison Control System-San Diego Division at 1-800-222-1222. The Center is open 24-hours per day, seven days a week.

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