




BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. BC Children's is an academic health centre affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the Child & Family Research Institute. For more information, please visit [www.bchildrens.ca](http://www.bchildrens.ca).

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## PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

### Halloween safety tips from BC Children's Hospital October 22, 2009

Vancouver, B.C. – Halloween is a fun time for children, but it also puts them at a higher risk for preventable injuries like cuts from pumpkin carving, burns from fireworks, choking, falls, and injuries involving cars and trick-or-treaters.

“We treat many kids with injuries during Halloween every year,” says Dr. Ran Goldman, Medical Director, Emergency, BC Children's Hospital. “We used to see a lot of injuries from fireworks, but more and more kids are being treated for injuries from pumpkin carving or burns from the candle inside the pumpkin.”

Dr. Goldman advises that parents should not allow small children to carve pumpkins. Instead, they can be creative and draw a face on the pumpkin, or dress it up with colourful fall leaves or other safe materials. Parents should also ensure that carved pumpkins are lit with a flashlight or a light stick rather than a candle.

The best part of Halloween for many kids is all the candy they receive while trick-or-treating. Each bag should be checked for any sweets that are open, have been tampered with, or could pose a choking hazard. Choking occurs most frequently among children under three years of age, but caution should be exercised with children up to six years of age. Nuts, un-popped popcorn kernels and raw vegetables are some of the foods that pose a high risk of choking for young children. Whole grapes, uncut hot dogs, gel candies and popped balloons are also of concern as they can completely block air passages.

“Children should not be eating nuts or raw carrots, apples or pears until they are at least three years old,” recommends Alyson McKendrick, Coordinator of Safe Start, BC Children's injury prevention program. “Parents should also have children sit down and eat at the table, rather than walking, playing or talking with food in their mouths.”

It is recommended that all parents and caregivers learn what to do in a choking emergency, including the Choking Rescue Procedure (Heimlich Manoeuvre), because the correct response can save a child's life. Information is available in the BC HealthGuide at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org).

BC Children's has additional safety tips to ensure everyone stays safe during Halloween:

- A costume should not be longer than a child's ankles to ensure they don't trip or fall while walking up and down stairs. Select well-fitting footwear and avoid high heels for young children.
- Put reflective tape on the front and back of costumes to make children more visible to cars especially if their costume is made of a dark, non-reflective material.
- Makeup is better than masks, which can block vision. Test the makeup on your child's wrist for 24 hours in advance to make sure there's no allergic reaction. It's best for a young child not to wear a mask or head piece that reduces their vision.
- Inspect each Halloween treat bag carefully and remove any treats that look like they have been opened, tampered with, or pose a choking hazard.
- Parents should monitor a child's internet use because information on homemade explosives and fireworks is readily available on some sites.
- Listen to a podcast interview with Dr. Ran Goldman for more tips on how to have a safe Halloween. The podcast is available at <http://www.bcchildrens.ca/bcch/cwmedia/HalloweenSafety20081020.mp3>.
- Read the BC Children's Safe Start Halloween Safety Check List at [www.bcchildrens.ca/safestart](http://www.bcchildrens.ca/safestart).

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