



NEWS RELEASE

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BC Children's experts warn of choking danger at Halloween

Vancouver, B.C. – Small children can become casualties of a serious choking episode this Halloween and BC Children's Hospital is urging families to prevent these injuries.

Between 1997 to 2003, doctors at Children's performed rigid bronchoscopy on 145 children who had aspirated food and non-food items into their airways; and rigid esophagoscopy on 185 youngsters who had swallowed foreign bodies. Despite efforts to raise public awareness about choking hazards for children, these trends have continued.

"Many of the items that cause these serious choking incidents are very popular at this time of year," says Dr. Jeffrey Ludemann, Attending Physician, Otolaryngology (Ear, Nose and Throat Medicine and Surgery), at Children's.

The incidence of choking is particularly high among children under three years of age. Physicians at Children's continue to be concerned about the number of children under two years of age who choke on pieces of nuts. Often these small pieces of nuts have been fed to them by their well-intentioned parents.

Pieces of nuts that are contained in chocolate and other candies can become lodged within the bronchi and cause wheezing, and even block a child's airway.

Perhaps the most deadly products are Mini-cup jelly products, also called fruit poppers or gel candies. These grape-sized products have been banned in Canada since 2002 due to the choking hazard they pose, but may still be found on some store shelves and offered as a Halloween treat by well-meaning neighbors.

Another extremely dangerous item is the small disc batteries contained in Halloween novelty items with flashing lights. They are similar in size and shape to a coin and may become lodged in a child's throat and severely burn the esophagus.

"Parents need to avoid Halloween toys that contain disc batteries if they have young children who tend to put anything and everything into their mouths," Dr. Ludemann cautions.

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“Always check your child’s Halloween treat bag carefully and remove any treats that may pose a choking hazard. Even candies with very small pieces of nuts can be dangerous. And keep coins designated for Unicef boxes out of reach of young children.”

“Most importantly, encourage your children to sit still and eat slowly at every mealtime, including when you are letting them indulge in these treats. Don’t feed nuts to children until they are at least three years old and can chew and swallow raw apple or crusty bread without problems. Finally, make sure you know what to do in the event that a child has a choking episode.”

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. For more information please visit www.bcchildrens.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information please visit www.phsa.ca.

Editor’s note: Dr. Jeff Ludemann is available for media interviews.

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