



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.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.

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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Halloween safety tips from BC Children's Hospital October 20, 2008

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

“Every year the majority of injuries we treat during Halloween are caused by the improper use of fireworks,” said Dr. Ran Goldman, Emergency Department Medical Director at BC Children's Hospital. “Often times a child is injured when they pick up a firework that hasn't ignited, only to have it explode seconds later. Across the country physicians treat injuries to eyes, burns to skin, and even fingertip amputations.”

It is important to know that it's illegal for anyone under 18 to handle fireworks (except sparklers) in most B.C. municipalities. This is due to their unpredictable nature which can contribute to considerable personal and property damage. BC Children's urges families that enjoy watching fireworks to find events in their community that are presented by professionals.

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, unpopped 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 eat nuts or raw carrots, apples or pears until they are at least three years old and able to chew and swallow crusty bread without choking,” recommends BC Children's Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist Jeff Ludemann. “Parents should also have children sit down and eat quietly at the table, rather than walking, playing or talking with food in their mouths.”

According to Dr. Ludemann, choking on coins which can become stuck in the esophagus are the most common reason a patient has to be taken to the operating room for treatment. Disc batteries pose an additional threat as they will burn the esophagus and can cause death.

It is recommended that all parents and caregivers learn what to do in a choking emergency, including the Heimlich manoeuvre, because the correct response can save a child's life. Information is available in the BC HealthGuide at www.bchealthguide.org.

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BC Children's has some safety tips to ensure everyone stays safe while trick-or-treating in their neighbourhood:

- A costume should not be longer than knee length to ensure children don't trip or fall while walking up and down stairs. Don't let little children wear high heels.
- 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.

An audio podcast interview with Dr. Ran Goldman is available for download and media use at <http://www.bcchildrens.ca/bcch/cwmedia/HalloweenSafety20081020.mp3>.

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