

-- MEDIA RELEASE --

Halloween can be dangerous to children

Halloween is a time of year when children are at an increased risk of preventable injuries, according to BC Children's Hospital (Children's).

Though people tend to associate Halloween with candy and cute costumes, it is also a time when there's a marked increase in burns from fireworks, cuts, falls and injuries involving cars and pedestrians.

According to Safe Start, the injury prevention program at Children's, BC accounts for nearly two-thirds of all fireworks injuries to Canadian children. Nearly nine out of ten such injuries occur close to Halloween. The most frequent injuries from fireworks are burns to the hands and face.

Fireworks, except sparklers are illegal for use by anyone under 18 in most BC municipalities. Safe Start recommends not using fireworks at all. If you must use fireworks, they should be handled by adults only. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby.

"Even a seemingly harmless sparkler can burn as hot as 1,800° F, and will not extinguish when placed in a container of water," warns Lidia Kemeny, Executive Director of Safe Start.

Kemeny also advises parents to monitor their child's internet use. Information on homemade explosives and fireworks is readily available on the internet.

Some rules for using fireworks include:

- Never hold fireworks in your hand when lighting them.
- Keep water, sand or a garden hose nearby at the firing site.
- For backyard fireworks, keep spectators at least 20 metres away from the firing site.
- Do not attempt to re-light a piece of fireworks. It is dangerous.
- Select a site free of overhead wires and obstacles such as trees.
- Do not wear nylon, loose clothing or materials that burn quickly.

Safe Start also recommends the following general safety tips to keep you from having to take your child to the emergency room on Halloween.

- Put reflective tape on the front and back of costumes to make children more visible to cars.
- Ensure costumes are short enough so your child won't trip over the material.

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- 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.
- Make sure hats and wigs are securely fastened so they won't slip over the eyes.
- Children should wear their own shoes. While wearing mom's high heels or dad's boots may look cute, they can result in a trip or fall.

If you're expecting trick-or-treaters to show up at your door, here are some tips for you:

- Keep pets away from the door when greeting children. Even a well-trained pet may be spooked by the costumes.
- Avoid handing out treats that could cause a young child to choke. Not recommended for children under the age of five are popcorn, nuts, hard candy and rubber balloons.
- Use flashlights instead of candles to light your jack-o'-lanterns. Candles could be a fire hazard.

If your child is injured in a Halloween-related incident and you are concerned, check with your family physician or your local hospital's emergency department.

For safety tips and information on making your home safe for your child, call Safe Start toll free at 1-888-331-8100.

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