

ASK SAVA: Add Safety to Your Halloween Celebrations

Question: “Halloween is a wonderful holiday, but I recently read a study by the CDC (Center for Disease Control) that the potential for automobile related accidents with young pedestrians increases four times on Halloween. What can we each do to protect our children and ourselves as both drivers and parents?” J.F. East Hartford, CT

Answer: For many, Halloween is filled with festive costumes, glowing jack-o-lanterns and children running door-to-door yelling trick or treat. Children and adults tend to be preoccupied and may not pay as much attention to safety as they should. In many areas, people drive their kids into subdivisions and let them out to walk from house to house. Usually the parent follows behind in the car. This can cause traffic jams in small areas and much confusion as kids dart between cars on the streets. A driver is already distracted because they are trying to keep an eye on their own kids and usually aren't paying attention to much else.

Everyone wants to have a safe and happy Halloween for themselves, their guests and their children. Using safety tips and some common sense can help you make the most of your Halloween season, keeping it as enjoyable for your kids as it is for you. There are many simple ways to keep your children, your home, your guests and drivers safe from accidents and injuries.

CHILD SAFETY:

- Know the route your kids will be taking if you aren't going with them. Let them know that they are to check in with you every hour, by phone or by stopping back at home. Make sure they know not to deviate from the planned route so that you always know where they will be.
- Trick or treating isn't what it used to be. In most cities, it's not safe to let kids walk the streets by themselves. Your best bet is to make sure that an adult is going with them.
- Help your young child pick out or make a costume that will be safe. Make sure the costume is fire proof or treated with fire retardant. If they are wearing a mask of any kind, make sure that the eye holes are large enough for good peripheral vision.
- Know what other activities a child may be attending, such as parties, school or mall functions. If they are going to be at a friend's house, get the phone number and make sure that you've met the parents.
- Make sure you set a time that your kids should be home by. Make sure they know how important it is for them to be home on time or to call immediately if something happens and they are going to be delayed.
- Kids will be kids. Explain to kids of all ages the difference between tricks and vandalism. Throwing eggs at a house may seem funny but they need to know the other side of the coin as well, that clean up and damages can ruin Halloween for everyone.
- Serve your kids a filling meal before trick or treating and they won't be as tempted to eat any candy before they bring it home for you to check.
- Make sure that if your child is carrying a prop, such as a scythe, butcher knife or a pitchfork, that the tips are smooth and flexible enough to not cause injury if fallen on. Make sure that costumes won't get in the way when they are walking, which could cause them to trip.
- Teach your kids about not getting into strangers' cars or talking to strangers, no matter what the person says to them. Explain to them that some adults are bad and want to hurt children, that they should never go into a

house that they don't know, get into a car or go anywhere with a stranger. Also, tell them what to do should this happen, to scream as loud as they can to draw attention and to run away as fast as they can to someplace safe.

- Be sure to show your children how to cross a street properly. They should always look both ways before crossing the street and should only cross at corners or crosswalks. Make sure that if you have more than one child, they know to take the hand of the younger child when they cross a street.

DRIVING SAFELY:

- Don't use a cell phone or other electronic device while driving on Halloween night.
- Pay extra attention, particularly to crosswalks, intersections and the side of the road. Kids tend to walk along the curbs, cutting across the street to get to other homes. Keep scanning all around you as you drive.
- Drive below the posted speed limit in residential areas during trick-or-treating hours. This will allow you time to break if you see a child dart in front of you.
- Do not pass other vehicles that have stopped in the roadway, they could be dropping off children.
- Instruct your child never to get into the car of a stranger. It might be easy for your child to mistake someone else's car for your car with the excitement of Halloween. Put a lighted plastic Jack-O-Lantern on your dashboard to make your car more recognizable to your child.
- Make sure your child carries a flashlight, glow stick or has reflective tape on their costume to make them more visible to cars. Let them know if they carry a flashlight to never shine it in the eyes of a driver. This can cause temporary blindness and the driver may not see your child.
- If you are dropping off or picking up your kids in an area, pull off the road into a safe spot and turn on your hazard lights to alert other motorists. If you go with your kids from door to door, leave the hazard lights on so other drivers can see your car parked there.

HOME SAFETY:

- If you are out driving, enter and exit your driveway with extreme caution.
- Clear all debris and clutter from walkways, stairs and yard.
- Do not overload outlets when you decorate for Halloween.
- Turn on your front door light and light the walkway to welcome trick-or-treaters.

Make Halloween a fun, safe and happy time for your kids and they'll carry on the tradition, that you taught them, to their own families some day!

Sources: www.insurance.com; www.halloween-safety.com

Donna L. Yother, President

SAVA Insurance Group

www.savainsurance.com

"Protect what you value the most!"