



For Immediate Release:

October 30, 2009

Don't Let the Flu Ruin Your Halloween

Wash Your Hands to Avoid Spreading Germs While Trick-or-Treating

LOS ANGELES – Halloween night can be a fun opportunity for children and parents to show off creative costumes, spend time with friends at parties, and participate in the traditional trick-or-treat outing for candy and other goodies. But can also be an opportunity for germs, such as the flu virus, to spread.

“The H1N1 flu is affecting residents throughout Los Angeles County,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “By practicing good hygiene and these healthy habits, you can avoid being tricked into passing out germs along with your treats.”

- Wash your hands before handling or eating candy.
- If you are sick, don't hand out candy.
- If you or your child are sick, don't go out trick-or-treating or to parties. Consider staying home and watching a scary movie.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. If you do not have a tissue, do the “Dracula” and cover your nose and mouth with your arm.

Germs aren't the only health concern on Halloween night. The average-size trick-or-treat bucket can hold up to 9,000 calories worth of sugary candy. Parents should keep in mind that limiting access to Halloween sweets will prevent children from eating too many calories and developing health problems such as obesity and tooth decay.

“Halloween night is also a great night to incorporate other healthy habits, such as getting physical activity through neighborhood trick-or-treating, and teaching children how to be safe around moving traffic when walking through the neighborhood,” said Dr. Fielding.

Follow these tips to help make the festivities fun and safe for everyone:

Offer Healthy Treats

According to the California Milk Processor Board and the California Dietetic Association, an average-size Jack-O-Lantern bucket fits about 250 pieces of small chocolate bars and candy, which adds up to 9,000 calories (4.5 times the recommended daily amount for a grown person), 200 grams of fat and 1500 grams of sugar. Just eight mini-candy bars contain as much as 506 calories and 31 grams of fat. That is almost the equivalent of a quarter-pound cheeseburger (510 calories, 26 grams of fat). Children and adults can unconsciously eat all this candy and more in one sitting. Limiting access to sugary candies, chocolates, and other edible goodies are a great way to avoid excessive calories and problems that can lead to tooth decay or other dental issues.



Provide healthier treats for trick-or-treaters, such as individual packs of raisins or pretzels. Alternative gifts, such as stickers, crayons or other inexpensive novelties, can be a great way to reward children.

Inspect all treats before eating them for choking hazards and tampering. **When in doubt, throw it out.** For party guests, offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, and cheeses, as well as non-alcoholic drinks.

Enjoy Physical Activity

Use trick-or-treat time and Halloween party activities to get your daily dose of physical activity. Children should get 60 minutes and adults should get 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily.

Plan Safe Costumes

Make sure masks fit the head so your child can see clearly. If your child wears face paint or make-up, test a small area of the skin before applying to make sure they do not have an allergic reaction to the make-up. Help children select costumes that are soft and fit well so they can avoid blocked vision, trips, and falls. Swords, knives, and similar costume accessories should be short, soft, and flexible. Make sure costumes are flame-resistant. If colored contact lenses will be used as part of the costume, make sure to check with an eye doctor first. Never share contact lenses with another user.

Ensure Safety on the Streets

Avoid trick-or-treating alone, have children walk in groups or with a trusted adult. Decorate treat bags with reflective tape. Have each child carry a flashlight so vehicle drivers can see them. Walk on sidewalks or on the far edge of the road facing traffic. Use designated crosswalks wherever possible.

Keep porches, walkways, and stairs well-lit and clear of candle-lit jack-o'-lanterns, luminaries, and other decorations that could trip people. Place jack-o'-lanterns on sturdy tables, keep them out of reach of pets and small children, and never leave lit jack-o'-lanterns unattended. Teach children that they must not enter homes for treats. Be sure your child has a phone number where you can be quickly reached and knows how to call 9-1-1 if they have an emergency or become lost.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov> or visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>.