



NEWS RELEASE

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System
Serving New Jersey Since 1983

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Halloween Safety Tips for Children and Pets from New Jersey Poison Control Center

— October Good Time to Raise Year-Round Candy Caution Awareness —

Newark, N.J., October 12, 2009— It's easy to be scared about Halloween, especially if you're a parent trying to supervise your child's safety. The key concerns about safety, however, particularly in regard to candy poisonings, are no different in October than during the rest of the year, according to NJPIES, the New Jersey Poison & Education System. Five key rules to protect against Halloween poisonings and mishaps are:

1. **Never take candy from strangers.** As much as children like to trick and treat far and wide, even during Halloween a parent should only allow kids to go to homes in which they know the residents.
2. **Homemade is not preferred.** Some web sites recommend homemade options for giving children more healthful treats.¹ Unless you're sponsoring an in-home or classroom party, don't bother with the kitchen equity. Parents are advised to only allow trick or treating children to eat candy that has been pre-packaged by a reputable manufacturer. For healthy alternatives, consider mini-versions of prepackaged foods such raisins and nuts.²
3. **Safety trumps health.** Halloween, by definition, is not a holiday that promotes healthy eating and most children are generally being given a pass for the day in optimal nutrition. Safety, however, can never be compromised. Safe Halloween practices include fire-retardant clothing for costumes, reflective clothing for trick or treating in the dark, non-toxic face paints, and adult inspection of all candy before it's eaten by children.
4. **Pet concerns.** Many candy items, including chocolate, are poisonous to pets. Dogs, in particular, love chocolate, which is not only prevalent during Halloween, but life-threatening to canines. If necessary, buy special pet treats that a child can give to domesticated animals as a holiday indulgence. Use this as opportunity to teach children about pet safety and the need to properly store candy.
5. **Lock your stock.** Halloween is a great time to instill new household habits for separately locking away candy and medications. Locked candy keeps it away from pets, and also allows parents to teach children about portion control and indulging in small doses. Locked medicine cabinets keep look-alike prescription and over-the-counter medications away from children who can easily mistake them for candy.

Appearances are Tricky

Halloween is a time when everyone or everything is not as it seems. Witches and goblins are children in disguise, perceived dangers are frequently media myths, and real disguised dangers can be easily overlooked. Information available through the NJPIES hotline (**1-800-222-1222**) and web services (**www.njpies.org**) can help parents differentiate between very real dangers and hype.

“At Halloween, there are always hospitals which offer to X-ray candy. This is not warranted,” comments Dr. Steven Marcus, Executive and Medical Director of NJPIES, noting that is not the most efficient use of either medical resources or a parent’s time to gain needed information.

“The phone is your first line of defense in assessing a danger, because our hotline gives you 24-hour access to trained medical professionals with resources not readily available to the general public,” states Alicia Gambino NJPIES Director of Public Education. For instance, poison control centers throughout the country have special access to the National Candy Makers Association and other national resource centers to determine if a public alert has been posted on any item and recommended remedies or medial action.

No Substitute for Vigilance

According to NJPIES health officials, Halloween is an ideal time of the year for parents to be reminded to stay vigilant about food safety throughout the year. Most calls received at the center about candy and food tend to fall into three categories:

- **Allergies.** Candy that includes an allergen to the child such as peanut butter.
- **Look-Alikes.** Children ingesting medications or other household items that look very similar to candy such as Ex Lax mistaken for chocolate, or cleaning agents mistaken for Apple Juice.
- **Taintings.** Candy that has been tainted by being close to a more toxic substance such as a medication or drug already in the household that inadvertently gets on the candy.

“If someone gets sick on Halloween, they should not immediately think it is because they ate too much candy,” Marcus states. He adds that food poisonings frequently go un-reported because people assume the illness is attributed to the quantity rather than the quality of the food eaten. “If we get the call, we can catalogue the incident in case there become multiple victims.” In addition to providing immediate intervention information, NJPIES is New Jersey’s centralized toxicology center, tracking statewide public health occurrences that may need to be reported to legal or national health care authorities. If reported, a seemingly unrelated incident, such as a stomachache from food poisoning, can be a clue for NJPIES trained professionals to a larger potential public health issue.

During Halloween if you suspect your child has ingested tainted food or treats, immediately call the NJPIES hotline (**1-800-222-1222**) to report the incident and receive trained medical advice on proper courses of action. Officials also recommend putting the number in all family cell

phones as well as programming it as a speed dial number on landlines, and prominently posting the number near house phones.

About NJPIES

As New Jersey's official Poison Control Center, The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hotline services and the web. Medical professionals including physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies, poison prevention information, drug information, food poisoning, animal bites, and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

NJPIES coordinates State poison education and research, and is the designated regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the FDA and CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of UMDNJ, its state-of-the-art center is located on the Newark campus.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies should call the toll free hotline **1-800-222-1222** anytime. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **(973) 972-9280**.

About UMDNJ

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) is the nation's largest free-standing public health sciences university with more than 5,500 students attending the state's three medical schools, its only dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health related professions, a school of nursing and its only school of public health, on five campuses. Annually, there are more than two million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at campuses in Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a Level I Trauma Center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction services network.

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Cited Sources:

¹ "Healthy Halloween Treats Kids Will Love," Susan Gilbert, Nutritionist, iVillage, updated Sept. 29, 2009, <http://parenting.ivillage.com/gs/gscelebrations/0,,bwg,00.html>

² "Healthy Halloween Treats – Food for Thought," University of Illinois Extension, <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/foodforthought/0110.html>