

Tricks, treats and safety

Halloween is the perfect time to decorate the house, have fun with the kids, meet the neighbours, and if it's done right you'll have a supply of candy that will last throughout the cold winter months. The holiday should be celebrated for what it is, while taking the appropriate steps to protect your family from preventable injuries. That's the message being shared by Southlake Chief of Paediatrics Dr. Charmaine van Schaik.

The fear that comes with Halloween should be the fun kind the scary tales about ghosts and goblins that have become synonymous with the event, she said. It's supposed to be an exciting celebration for the entire family, and one that is looked forward to.

As a mother to five children ranging in age from 8 to 17, Dr. van Schaik is no stranger to the fun and excitement that Halloween brings. But she's also familiar with what can go wrong when safety isn't a priority. Dr. van Schaik has five tips that promote safe trick-or-treating, and that will help families avoid a trip to the Emergency Department this October 31.

1. Choose or create a safe costume.

Whether helping to pick out, or making your child's costume, make sure it's not too long, and be sure to include elements that will reflect the light on a dark night. Reflective stickers and arm bands are available at many retail stores, and flashlights should be carried. Avoid masks that could potentially cover your child's eyes, or interfere with their vision. Instead, choose a hypoallergenic make-up or face paint.

2. Dress for the weather.

It's always better to be warm than cold. Be familiar with the forecast, and prepare your child and yourself for the elements. Warm footwear that can get wet is a must, and don't hesitate to layer your child's clothing, either underneath or on top of their costume. Don't forget the gloves and hat if it's expected to be chilly.

3. Travel in groups.

Go to the door of every household with your child. If you have an older trick-or-treater, make sure they're going out with at least two other people. Be familiar with the route your child or teen is taking, and agree on a time to meet after the trick-or-treating is done.

4. Prepare your house for visitors.

Whether or not you have kids out trick-or-treating, you should be prepared for visitors on Halloween. Be aware that kids are out running and having fun. Ensure your house is well-lit, and prepare a safe walking path for children and their parents.

5. Check the candy first.

Do not allow your child to eat any candy until you have inspected it fully. The candy wrapper shouldn't be open, and there should be no signs of tampering. Discard anything that has been, or appears to have been, opened. Children should not eat anything homemade such as a candy apple, cookie, or popcorn unless the source of the treat is a well-trusted family member or friend. If your child has an allergy, pay particularly close attention to the ingredients in the item.

Dr. van Schaik encourages parents to have a short safety plan in place for trick-or-treating, and to bring along a few supplies like a bandage and cleansing wipes in case of an injury.