

COVID-19 Vaccine Reduces Trick or Treating Concerns

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PEORIA - Halloween won't be as scary this year compared to last year for one big reason: COVID-19 vaccinations for those who are 12 and older. Federal officials who discouraged trick-or-treating a year ago now say it's OK as long as you take COVID-19 safety precautions.

Anyone 2 years old and older who isn't fully vaccinated should wear a mask in indoor public places, including Halloween gatherings. However, Lori Grooms, OSF HealthCare director of Infection Control and Prevention, says that since COVID-19 is spread

through the air, kids attending outdoor gatherings with others outside their own household should wear more than a Halloween mask, which isn't designed for protection against COVID-19 transmission. But because wearing a medical-grade or cloth mask under a costume mask could make it hard for a child to breathe, Grooms suggests finding a way to incorporate it into their costume.

“Let's say your child is going to be a cat, get a mask on which you can draw the cat's nose and whiskers. Or if they're going to be an angel, get a white mask. Somehow, try to incorporate it into the costume,” Grooms suggests.

Community trick-or-treating events, or “trunk or treats,” are great because they're outside and allow for droplets from someone's mouth or nose to dissipate in the air. But Grooms warns that kids should stay within their smaller group of friends and keep a three-to six-foot physical distance from others.

“If there's a group of kids at the door step, you may not want your kids going up to the door, especially if you don't know who the children are. You might want to step back and wait for them to exit before you go up; again avoiding those big, cluster groups.”

Kids often find it just as much fun handing out candy rather than doing their own trick-or-treating. Grooms says those encounters are typically brief, so the risk of exposure is minimized. She suggests additional precautions if there's someone at home who is immunocompromised.

“If you're comfortable with your child handing it (candy) out, another additional level of safety is having them wear a mask or have the treat set out but off to the side where they can interact and talk to the people as they come by.”

Grooms says infectious disease control experts have learned much since the start of the pandemic, including the fact that the COVID-19 virus doesn't live on surfaces long, so candy wrappers are not considered contagious. There's also no need to quarantine candy before eating it. However, kids should still wash their hands before they eat their candy.

“Eating Halloween candy is no different than eating a candy bar you pick up at the grocery store. You want to make sure your hands are clean because your hands are going to have more bacteria or viruses on them than you would pick up from the wrapper itself,” advises Grooms.

The bottom line – there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Parents should make decisions based on their family's individual circumstances, such as the vulnerability of children and others in the household, including older individuals and those who are immunocompromised and could be more severely impacted by COVID-19.

As with any virus, children who are showing signs of illness should be kept at home to rest and avoid exposing others to their germs.