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The Dark Side of Halloween

Illinois Poison Center offers safety tips for trick-or-treating

(Chicago) - As Halloween approaches thousands of kids are gearing up to hit the streets in search of treats. The reality is Halloween does come with potential dangers, every season the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) receives hundreds of telephone calls regarding ingestion of liquid in glow sticks, suspicious candy, face paint and much more.

“Many poisonings occur when normal routines are disrupted,” says Dr. Michael Wahl, managing medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. “Despite yearly warnings, the Illinois Poison Center still receives calls about Halloween products that seem harmless but can actually be very harmful.”

Illinois Poison Center Halloween Safety Tips:

- ***Candy- When in Doubt, Throw it Out***

Parents should inspect candy collected along the trick-or-treat route for safety. Check all candy wrappers for puncture holes – a sign that someone may have tampered with the candy – and discard all punctured, unwrapped or partially wrapped candy.

- ***Costumes- Use Caution, Think Safety***

Use non-toxic face paint or makeup. Be careful when purchasing face paints, some products may contain emollient laxatives, talc or hydrocarbons, which can be toxic if accidentally ingested by young children. Home food colorings are not recommended because the tint may be difficult to wash off.

Glow sticks and necklaces are popular Halloween items and help make children visible at night. In small amounts, the glowing liquid inside will not cause severe poisoning. If punctured or chewed on, however, the plastic tubes may leak and cause a rash or irritate the eyes; if ingested, it may cause nausea and burning. Parents should call the poison center for first aid treatment recommendations.

▪ ***Party Favorites- Be Careful of Seemingly Harmless Products***

Dry ice is often a decorating tool that creates a “fog” effect. It is safe to use in punch bowls, but not in individual glasses. If swallowed, dry ice can burn the mouth and throat. Direct contact with the skin can cause a frostbite-type injury, which may result in the discoloration of the skin, along with burning, tingling, numbness, and possibly severe pain. Wash the affected area immediately with water if skin contact occurs.

The IPC also offers these safety tips and poison prevention recommendations:

- Call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222 with questions regarding all Halloween poisoning concerns. If you suspect a poisoning, call the IPC immediately; do not wait for symptoms to appear.
- Feed children before taking them out to Trick or Treat reduce the urge to snack on the route.
- Allow your child to eat homemade treats only from someone you know and trust. Most people who make treats have good intentions, but it’s not worth the risk.

For a free copy of IPC’s Halloween Safety brochure and other educational materials, log onto the Web site at www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org or contact the IPC at 1-800-222-1222.

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The IPC is the only certified, regional poison center in Illinois, serving more than 12 million residents in 102 counties – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222.

Calling the toll-free hot line will connect callers with their designated local poison center at any time from anywhere in the United States; all calls placed in Illinois are routed to the IPC. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice to the public and health care professionals on alcohol and drug misuse, medication problems, bites and stings, occupational accidents and other poisonings. The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association of more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the quality of health care services in the Chicago area.