



Pet safety tips for a happy Halloween

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Halloween traditionally sparks familiar stories of dogs sensing ghostly presences and black cats signaling bad omens or good luck. This Halloween, your animal friends need help with earthly spirits instead of supernatural ones.

Ghosts, goblins and witches, especially those in the form of costumed children who trick or treat, may excite normally calm pets. This creates a need for special precautions, according to Clark County Animal Control.

Make sure pets are securely tied or confined away from the front door or yard. If pets are tied or chained, be sure the chain cannot reach any walking areas, including areas where children may cut across yards between houses.

Costumes or uniforms sometimes excite or frighten even the friendliest animals, so don't count on pets behaving themselves. It is best to prevent any possibility of a bite or escape.

Dogs should always wear their current licenses to help identify them if they run away or bite someone. Clark County Animal Control advises children to stay on sidewalks and in well-lighted areas to avoid startling pets or walking into unfriendly dogs. If confronted, children should slowly back away from aggressive animals rather than turning to run.

If bitten, immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water. This can significantly reduce the risk of rabies or other infections. Contact a doctor for treatment and then contact Animal Control to report the bite.

Indoor animals may be curious about the commotion outside and may be anxious about the front door frequently opening and closing. Even content house pets occasionally decide to check out "Halloween spirits" first hand. Take care to restrain your pet before opening the door. Since chocolate can be toxic to dogs and cats, candy should never be offered to pets.

If your pet should escape, check all local animal shelters in person. Clark County Animal Control recommends visiting the shelters every three days in order to see all of the animals turned in and to eliminate unnecessary trips. Sometimes animals are held in private homes for a few days before they are turned in to shelters.

Every Halloween, unrestrained dogs are involved in bites to children while they are trick or treating. Clark County Animal Control reminds everyone to keep all pets strictly confined to make this a safe and happy holiday for all.

For more information on shelters or to report an animal bite call Clark County Animal Control at 455-7710.

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Coalition offers tips for safe Halloween

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Halloween is the season of ghouls and frights where little ghosts and goblins roam the neighborhood in search of "tricks and treats."

One of the reasons this holiday is so enjoyed is because the frights typically aren't real. But for thousands of the nation's children and their families, Halloween can be a harrowing experience due to accidents and injuries. The majority of injuries that occur during Halloween are caused by falls, contact with motor vehicles, burns and poisonings from collected treats.

"Halloween could be one of the most dangerous nights of the year for young children," said Barbara Ludwig, executive chair of the Clark County SAFE KIDS Coalition. "It is important for parents and caregivers to not only outfit children in safe costumes, but to review important safety tips with them before they go out trick-or-treating or to parties."

As part of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, the local non-profit organization participates and spearheads a multitude of injury prevention programs under the direction of lead organization Columbia Sunrise Hospital. Members include individuals and businesses committed to reducing unintentional injury — the number one killer of children ages 14 and under.

The Coalition recommends the following safety information and tips:

Falls. On Halloween night, children may find it difficult to walk safely through dark neighborhoods due to cumbersome costumes and blinding masks. To prevent a child from sustaining a fall-related injury:

- Apply face paint or cosmetics directly to the face.
- Give trick-or-treaters flashlights.
- Make costumes short enough to avoid tripping.
- Dress children in shoes that fit.
- Allow children to carry only flexible knives, swords or other props.
- Teach children not to cut across yards as lawn ornaments and clotheslines are "hidden hazards" in the dark.

Pedestrian injuries. Darting out into the street accounts for the majority of pedestrian fatalities among children ages 14 and under.

Visibility. Decorate costumes, bags and sacks with retro-reflective tapes.

- Use Halloween costumes that are light or bright enough to make them more visible.

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Traffic. Never let children under age 12 go trick-or-treating without the supervision of an adult or older responsible sibling.

- Tell children to walk, not run, while trick-or-treating.
- Instruct kids to cross the street only at intersections and crosswalks and to look left-right-left.

Motorists. Slow down in residential neighborhoods while obeying all traffic signs and signals.

- Watch for children walking in the street or on medians and curbs.

- Enter and exit driveways and alleyways carefully.

- Teach children to exit and enter the car on the curb side, away from traffic.

Burns. Fires and burns are the third leading cause of unintentional injury-related death to children.

- Look for flame-resistant labels on costumes and accessories (beards, masks, etc.) whether purchasing them or making them.

- Avoid costumes made of flimsy materials with big, baggy sleeves or shirts.

The Coalition also reminds parents and caregivers to:

- Accompany young children on their trick-or-treat rounds.

- Attach the name, address and phone number (including area code) of children under age 12 to their clothes.

- Teach your child his or her phone number. Make sure your child has change for a phone call in case they have a problem away from home.

- Instruct children to travel only in familiar areas and along a pre-established route and to return home at a set time.

- Instruct children never to enter a home or an apartment building unless accompanied by an adult and only go to homes whose outside is illuminated.

- Tell children to bring their treats home before eating them. Parents should check treats to ensure that items have not been tampered with and are safely sealed.

"Halloween is a holiday that allows us to touch upon several different topics — from trauma to poisoning," Ludwig said. "When we're able to empower kids and their families with valuable information, we're enabling them to make behavior choices that could potentially save their lives."

For more information regarding the Clark County SAFE KIDS expansive and free programs, call Sharon Chayra, public relations chair at 658-3236.

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