

It's no treat when children hurt: Halloween poses safety risk

Careful drivers and smart parents can set the stage for a safe and enjoyable evening for young trick or treaters

OK, I think we're set for Halloween. We've got two pumpkins, a carving "kit", eight patterns and zero consensus on which ones we're going to attempt to carve. My two year-old son has a lion costume he's terrified to look at, never mind wear. And we have enough candy for nothing short of a goblin invasion.

Now, since I doubt we'll convince our little lion to take to the streets on Halloween night, we don't have too much more to worry about. But parents of braver little souls have a few more things to consider.

An American study conducted between 1975-1996 showed that the number of deaths among young pedestrians was four times higher on Halloween evening compared to any other evening throughout the year.

Halloween poses special risks for kids. For example, most of the time



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children spend outside is typically during daylight hours. Halloween activities generally occur after dark, making it harder for princesses and cowboys to see what's going on around them.

Risks heightened

Remember, children are already at risk in traffic. Their field of vision is 1/3 narrower than an adult's and they can't determine the direction of sounds. Younger children believe headlights are "eyes" and the car can "see." They overestimate their own abilities, are easily distracted, and are prone to sudden movement.

Of course, darkness makes it harder for drivers to spot little people, too, and when you factor in that those little people are excited and eager to get to the next house, you've got a recipe for trouble.

But, it's not all bad news. Careful drivers and smart parents can set the stage for a safe and enjoyable evening, where the worst-case scenario is an unexpected snowfall.

If you are planning to drive anywhere on Halloween, you need to be particularly careful, and keep a few goblin behaviour patterns in mind.

Remember that smaller children can be especially hard to spot; they also need extra time to cross the street, so patience is an absolute must.

Older kids tend to be in a big hurry to "make the rounds" and often cross the street at mid-block rather than at corners and crosswalks. They're likely to take the shortest route, rather than the safest.

Drivers, slow down

So, *slow down*, and expect the unexpected. If you drive like there could be a Buzz Lightyear behind every parked car, you'll be OK.

Parents, your main responsibility is to ensure your children aren't acting like the ones I've described above. Drill it in to their heads; just because it's Halloween doesn't mean the rules go out the window. They should still cross at crosswalks or at corners, and make sure drivers see them before they step out on to the roadway.

You can also make sure that your child's costume doesn't obstruct their vision, and that there is some sort of reflective material on the back. A flashlight or glow stick is an even better idea. MPI teamed up with the Manitoba Brain Injury Association last year to distribute glowsticks free of charge to school-age children across the province. This program was very

well received by parents and children alike and best of all, there were no injuries to young pedestrians reported last Halloween night.

If you can, move vehicles from the roadway into your driveway or garage and light up your yard so drivers have a better view of what's going on.

You could also consider signing up a few adults for "crossing guard" duty at busy or dark intersections.

Of course, the best way to keep your child safe is to trick or treat with them. Younger kids won't mind, but you may have to hang back a bit from your older children. Superman never went anywhere with his mom.

Have a safe Halloween, and until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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