



Halloween Safety:  
**A National Survey of Parents' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors**



October 2011





## Overview

Halloween is among the most joyfully anticipated holidays for children in the United States. Carving pumpkins, donning festive costumes, and trick-or-treating are popular activities in most communities nationwide. Yet, Halloween can be rife with potential injury dangers, too, ranging from pedestrian accidents to falls to burns to poisonings. Assuring safety while participating in Halloween activities should be top-of-mind for every parent and caregiver in America.

More than twice as many children are killed in pedestrian/vehicle incidents on Halloween between 4:00 pm and 10:00 pm as compared to the same hours on other days throughout the year.<sup>1</sup>

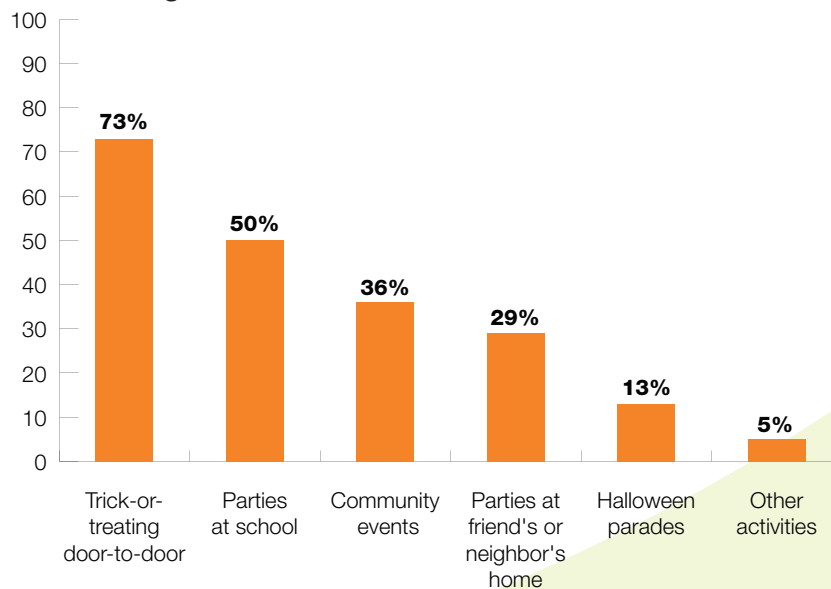
## Methodology

To assess adults' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to Halloween safety, Safe Kids Worldwide commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a poll of parents of children ages 12 years and under. In early September 2011, 935 parents responded to this first-of-its kind study on Halloween safety.

## Reported Activities Findings

Nine in ten parents (89%) report that their child participates in Halloween activities. Three-quarters (73%) go trick-or-treating door-to-door, half (50%) attend parties at school, one-third (36%) participate in a community event at venues such as shopping malls or recreation centers, three in ten (29%) attend parties at a friend's or neighbor's home, and one in eight (13%) march in a Halloween parade. Participation in Halloween festivities is a popular pastime for children in the United States, and many celebrate with more than one observance.

**Figure 1: Children's Halloween Activities**



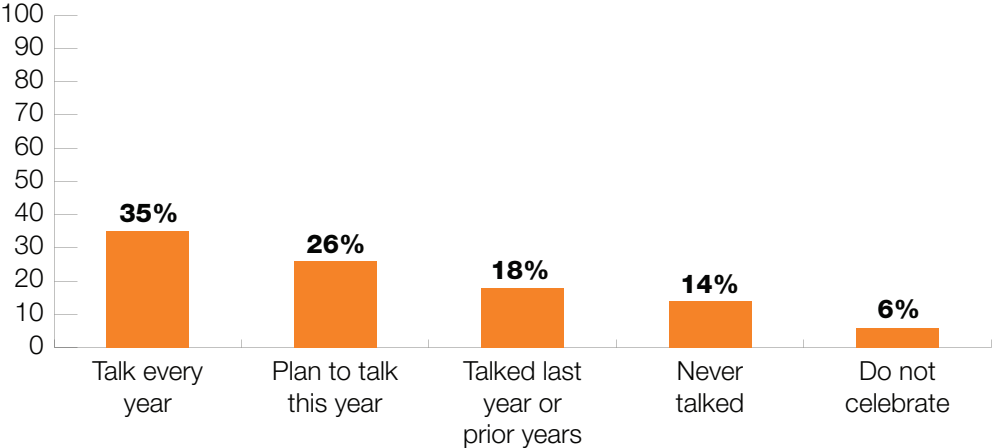
# Communication and Behavior Findings

The good news is that virtually all adults (79%) have talked to their child about Halloween safety while trick-or-treating. In addition, three-fourths (75%) of parents have never let their child trick-or-treat unsupervised without a parent or other adult.

Alarming, more than one in nine (12%) parents report that their child ages 5 years or younger is permitted to trick-or-treat without adult supervision. It may be that parents are allowing older siblings to trick-or-treat with their younger siblings, yet this is a dangerous practice because pre-teens and teens tend to be impulsive and easily distracted.

Only one third (35%) talk to their child every year about Halloween safety concerns. Parents should trick-or-treat with children under age 12 as well as engage in repeated discussions with all of their children about Halloween safety each year to reinforce the safety messages and promote desired behaviors.

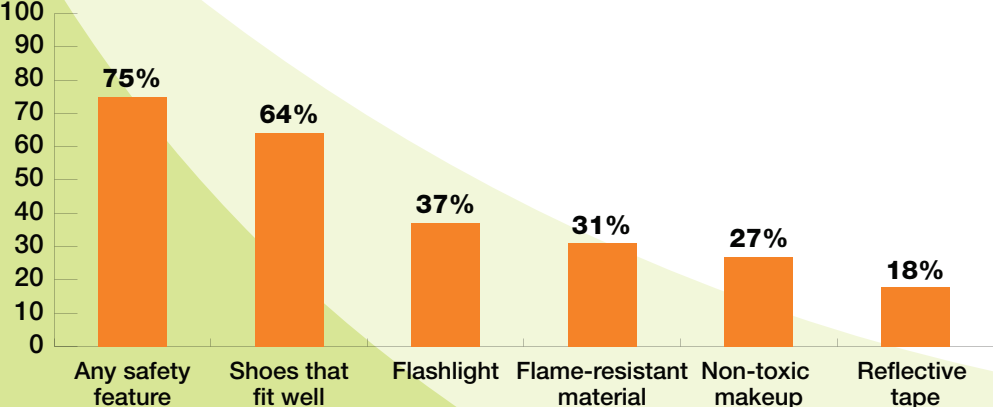
**Figure 2: Parents' Reported Discussions with Children about Halloween Safety**



# Costumes Findings

Parents vary in their attention to the safety features of their child's Halloween costume. Overall, three quarters (75%) insist upon selecting a costume with safety in mind. While two-thirds (64%) ensure that their child's shoes are comfortable and fit well, fewer require use of a flashlight (37%), flame-resistant material (31%), non-toxic makeup (27%), or reflective tape or stripping (18%).

**Figure 3: Parents' Use of Safe Features for Children's Halloween Costumes**



Yet two-fifths (40%) of parents allow one or more unsafe items to be used by their child, including a mask (24%), long, baggy or loose clothing (20%), and/or a sword, cane, stick or other sharp object (8%).

Parents should be mindful of selecting a costume with safety features to ensure that their children do not experience falls, burns, or pedestrian injuries while celebrating Halloween.



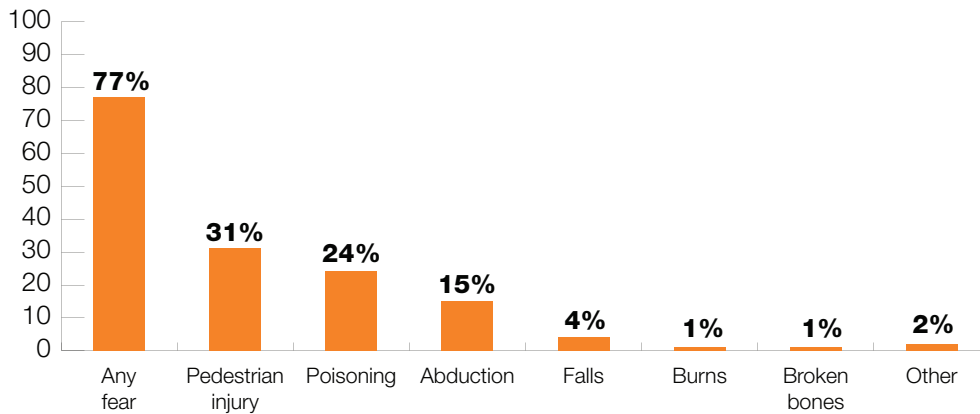
**SAFE**

**NOT SAFE**

## Perceptions of Risk Findings

Parents’ Halloween-related fears are widespread, with nearly four in five (77%) expressing one or more specific concerns. These concerns include being hit by a car or truck (31%), poisoning from tampered or spoiled treats (24%), abductions (15%), falls (4%), burns (1%), broken bones (1%), or other fears.

**Figure 4: Parents’ Reported Halloween Fears**



Parents appear to be getting the message that children are in excess danger of pedestrian injuries by walking on dark streets and in unfamiliar neighborhoods on Halloween night. Yet the fear of poisoned or tampered treats persists strongly, despite research that indicates that few incidents occur each year.<sup>2</sup>

Of the families stating that they celebrate Halloween (94%), one in six (17%) report no fears at all, despite the fact that on average, more than twice as many children are killed in pedestrian/vehicle incidents on Halloween between 4:00 pm and 10:00 pm as compared to the same hours on other days throughout the year.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, only 5% of parents in the study report that their child has been injured on Halloween night, and only 1% of these injuries (e.g., hit by a car or truck, fall, poisoning, broken bone or burn) were severe enough to require medical attention.

The fear of poisoned or tampered treats persists strongly, despite research that indicates that few incidents occur each year.<sup>2</sup>

## Call to Action

When it comes to childhood injury prevention, repeated and consistent messages are the keys to safety. This research reveals that parents may be placing their children in harm's way by failing to talk to them each and every year about Halloween safety. Given children's limited attention spans, as well as their ever-evolving cognitive abilities, parents must review all the correct behaviors with their children annually to help prevent pedestrian injuries, falls, poisonings, and other threats each October. To ensure a safer celebration of Halloween, Safe Kids Worldwide recommends the following tips to parents and caregivers:

### Child Pedestrians

- Children under 12 should trick-or-treat and cross streets with an adult.
- Always walk on sidewalks or paths. If there are no sidewalks, walk facing traffic as far to the left as possible.
- Cross the street at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks. Parents should remind children to watch for cars that are turning or backing up.
- Look left, right and left again when crossing and keep looking as you cross. Walk, don't run, across the street.

By following these simple tips, every parent and caregiver can help their child experience a fun – and safe – Halloween.

### Drivers

- Slow down and be especially alert in residential neighborhoods. Children are excited on Halloween and may move in unpredictable ways.
- Anticipate heavy pedestrian traffic and turn your headlights on earlier in the day so you can spot children from greater distances.
- Remember that costumes can limit children's visibility and they may not be able to see your vehicle.
- Reduce any distractions inside your car so you can concentrate on the road and your surroundings.

### Costumes and Treats

- Decorate costumes and bags with reflective tape or stickers and choose light colored costumes to improve visibility.
- Choose face paint and make-up instead of masks, which can obstruct a child's vision. Look for non-toxic designations when choosing Halloween makeup.
- Avoid carrying sticks, swords, or other sharp objects.
- Have kids carry glow sticks or flashlights in order to see better, as well as to be seen by drivers. Liquid in glow sticks is hazardous, so parents should remind children not to chew on or break them.
- Check treats for signs of tampering before children are allowed to eat them. Candy should be thrown away if the wrapper is faded or torn, or if the candy is unwrapped.

### Endnotes

1. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting, System, National Center for Statistics and Analysis' Information Services Branch. Pedestrian fatalities in motor vehicle crashes occurring between the hours of 4:00 pm and 10:00 pm by crash year, hour, age, and Halloween time period, Washington, DC, 2006.
2. Halloween Poisonings <http://www.snopes.com/horrors/poison/halloween.asp> Retrieved September 26, 2011.

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Safe Kids Worldwide  
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Suite 1000  
Washington, D.C. 20004  
202.662.0600

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