

Trick-or-Treat Message – Halloween or Quarant-ween?



Image: Joe A. Anzaldua

Well, Halloween festivities are just around the corner. Trick or treat...or stay home? Given our current situation with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, this halloween may seem a little different, and for good reason. I know that there may be parents that would prefer that their kids not participate in trick-or-treating this year. Understandable. But I also know that there are those that want their children to be part of this event.



The good news is that our local county officials have lowered our community risk for coronavirus transmission, indicating that there has been improvement with containment and mitigation of viral transmission. So at least in our

community, I think it's okay to indulge in this time-honored American tradition, but with some important considerations and caveats. (Source: Fort Bend County HHS Website)

We should all remember, however, that our Texas state officials are still “recommending” limiting social gatherings and encouraging social distancing whenever and wherever possible, as well as donning a properly worn face mask (covering the nose and mouth)

Halloween Parties

Let’s face it. It’s really not possible (and probably impractical) to don a face mask and practice social distancing in a party setting, where people are mingling about as well as eating and drinking. Although outdoor social gatherings are recommended over indoor events, I suspect that there will be a lot of the latter. Please consider taking a pass on a Halloween party this year. But if you must:

- I would strongly encourage that indoor parties be limited to 10 people or less, as this would allow for better social distancing - this is especially true if there will be non-household guests in attendance
- For indoor parties, please ensure adequate space and ventilation.
- Individuals 65 years and older and/or those with medical conditions that may predispose them to COVID-19 illness should be discouraged from attending such social gatherings
- And above all, PLEASE stay home if you are feeling ill, whatever the symptoms!
- For those hosting parties, show your guests that you care about their safety:
 - Please have hand hygiene supplies such as hand sanitizer or soap readily available
 - Have extra face masks on hand
 - I don’t think wearing gloves is necessary , unless it’s part of your costume or unless specifically instructed to do so. I don’t think they really do much in terms of prevention and may even spread germs. Hand hygiene and avoiding touching your face is a much better idea
 - Keep food and beverages covered such as closed-lid bins or even sneeze-guards
- As far as indoor parties for the kids, I would discourage it – this year anyway. As any parent will tell you, it is really hard to manage a bunch of excited children full of energy and enforce social distancing!
- Alternative to indoor parties to consider include:
 - Consider neighborhood parades, trunk-or-treating, reverse trick-or-treating. Information and suggestions are readily available on the web
 - Also, hosting an online party (Zoom) is a great idea and trendy option

Trick-or-Treating

I remember those days! How much fun we had as children, but also as parents taking our own kids trick-or-treating. I’m sure that many share those same sentiments. I think trick-or-treating can be fun, but this year we must all take extra precautions for the safety and well-being of our children, ourselves, our neighbors, our community!

- Above all, please practice social distancing and correctly wear a face mask, covering nose and mouth! Most young trick-or-treaters able to walk independently, can and should wear a mask – even outdoors! Face masks become even more important if 6 feet social distancing can’t be avoided. Parents, that includes you too!
- Be creative! Make the face mask part of the costume
- A lot of Halloween plastic masks have holes in them. Safety face masks can easily be placed underneath such mask

- Try and keep your trick-or-treat group as small as possible, and keep the group socially distant from other groups. A group of 3 to 4 kids can easily be managed with respect to physical distancing
- Please have your group wait in line until the group before you has safely passed to the next house. Avoid cross traffic as much as possible
- Parents, please bring along hand sanitizer and tissue wipes
- Encourage kids not to touch outdoor/front yard Halloween props, doors, door knobs or other frequently touched surfaces
- This year, I would recommend leaving Halloween props such as toy swords, light sabers, crowns, tiaras at home
- For those generous homes that will be passing out treats:
 - Please correctly wear a face mask (covering nose and mouth)! No doubt this will be appreciated by all the adults managing trick-or-treaters! Again, I do not think wearing gloves are necessary, unless specifically instructed to do so. It is my contentions that this is just another potential source of surface contamination – but please practice hand hygiene frequently and avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, mouth)
 - This year, I would not recommend leaving a bowl of treats out by the front door or patio, as this encourages many little eager hands to touch the container and the candies therein. Kids reaching into a communal bowl should be avoided if at all possible
 - If the decision is made to hand out candy, please designate one responsible adult (at a time) to do this, respecting the need for wearing a face mask, frequent hand hygiene and avoiding touching the face (eyes, nose, mouth).
 - As an alternative, consider grouping treats in grab-n-go party bags so that each trick-or-treater can take one
 - And remember to disinfect any doorknobs, doorbells, or any frequently touched surfaces outside your home, once the Halloween festivities are over.

One more thing...

I think that it is reasonably safe to eat candy that has been scored throughout the Halloween evening, but please have the kiddos hold off until they get home, have washed their hands, and only after adults have inspected the treats.

All treats should be individually wrapped by the manufacturer. Although it is true that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can last up to 3 days on such surfaces, please know that current data suggests that viral transmission remains low.

If parents are not comfortable or satisfied with this, then I would suggest buying the kids candy to hand out at the end of their evening as a reward for all their effort. The candy procured throughout the evening from other homes can be stashed away for 3 days and then safely handed out after that.

Happy Halloween!

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