

# Tips to Safely Celebrate Halloween with Food Allergies

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**TAKE ALL FOOD ALLERGIES SERIOUSLY • TRACE AMOUNTS OF FOOD CAN CAUSE A REACTION**

## Halloween at Home

Halloween can be a fun and exciting holiday for children, but it is not without risk for those with food allergies. Families raising children with food allergies need to take extra precautions in order to keep their children safe. In addition, children with food allergies may also feel left out due to the fact that many candies contain allergens and many celebrations center around these foods. Fortunately, there are many ways your family can safely celebrate Halloween with food allergies.

**Consider hosting a party at your home.** Children can wear their costumes, create handmade crafts and dance to spooky music. There are many craft ideas available on sites such as Pinterest that are fun, easy to make and inexpensive. Hosting a party provides you the control to serve only food that is safe for everyone (if you choose to serve food). Check KFA's Safe Eats™ recipes for a variety of allergy-friendly treats.

**Enlist the help of others.** Talk to neighbors, family, and close friends about your child's food allergies and safe options they could offer your child on Halloween. You may even wish to purchase the items yourself so these trusted adults can have them on hand for your child. Depending on your child's age, needs, and your own comfort level, you may want to only go trick-or-treating at these prescreened homes.

**Trade unsafe treats.** If you choose to allow your child to trick-or-treat freely, offer to trade unsafe items for safe treats or a special prize, such as a book or toy. Let your child know that he or she will not be allowed to eat any treats without you checking the label and approving it first.\*

**Have a food-free Halloween.** Hand out non-food treats to trick-or-treaters. You may find that your house is the busiest house in the neighborhood by supplying fun and unusual treats.

\*Remember that Halloween candies may be manufactured in a different facility than their regular-sized counterparts. Be sure to check the labels and also find out the manufacturing practices of your favorite treats.

## Trick-or-Treating Checklist

- ✓ **Costume that is visible to motorists (add reflective tape if needed) and that allows your child to see (no masks)**
- ✓ **Flashlight**
- ✓ **Treat bag**
- ✓ **Epinephrine auto-injectors and emergency care plan**
- ✓ **Comfortable shoes**
- ✓ **Cell phone (make sure it's charged and emergency numbers are in your contact list)**
- ✓ **A trained adult to supervise**
- ✓ **A group of friends to walk with**
- ✓ **Wipes for hand washing on the run**

## Examples of Non-food Treats

- Glow sticks
- Glow necklaces, bracelets and rings
- Bouncing "eye" balls
- Spider rings
- Halloween-themed stickers, pencils, pens, and erasers
- Fake vampire teeth
- Mustache stickers
- Crazy sunglasses
- Headbands with antennas
- Whistles, kazoos and other noise-makers
- Small flashlights
- Halloween key chains
- Allergen-friendly slime or silly putty

# Halloween at School

Many schools are moving away from celebrating Halloween in class. If your school chooses to celebrate Halloween, here are some tips for ensuring that it is safe and fun for everyone. Partner with key school staff and families to plan holiday festivities in alignment with your school's wellness plan.

**Parents:** Have a discussion with the teacher in advance about making the celebration safe and inclusive for your child. Start this conversation early and with a written plan. If possible, help to organize the event and plan to attend. Make sure your child's emergency care plan is up-to-date and that the school has any prescribed emergency medicines your child may need during the school day.

**Teachers:** It is considered a best practice not to share food. Many Halloween candies and treats are unsafe for children with food allergies. Labeling can be inconsistent or unclear. (See note on bottom of page 1). The CDC recommends the use of non-food rewards<sup>1</sup>. Forty-five percent of allergic reactions requiring epinephrine in schools begin in the classroom. Also, 20-25% of allergic reactions requiring epinephrine in schools are for people without a prior history of food allergy.<sup>2</sup> By choosing non-food celebrations, you greatly reduce the risk of an allergic reaction in your classroom. In addition, it reduces the worry and extra monitoring the day of the celebration and allows you and the children to focus on the fun. A Halloween without food is also healthier and consistent with the wellness policies in place in many schools.

## Halloween-themed Crafts and Games

- Decorate a mask with glitter, jewels, stickers, paint, markers, feathers, etc.
- Decorate a small pumpkin with teal paints and permanent markers.
- Make a spider out of googly eyes, pipe cleaners and pom-poms.
- Make a necklace out of Halloween-themed beads and cord.
- Paint the inside of a canning jar white and add black eyes to make a ghost candle holder.
- Decorate a treat bag. Buy plain bags and decorate using paints, markers, stickers and other craft materials.
- Pin the nose on the jack-o-lantern.

### References:

1. Centers for Disease Control. 2013. Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies In Schools and Early Care and Education Programs. Retrieved online October 5, 2014 from [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13\\_243135\\_A\\_Food\\_Allergy\\_Web\\_508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf).
2. Massachusetts Department of Public Health. 2010. Data Health Brief: Epinephrine Administration in Schools. Retrieved online October 5, 2014 from <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/com-health/school/epi-data-health-brief-10.pdf>.

## Fun Ways to Celebrate!

**WRITING:** Work on a spooky story and share on Halloween.

**MATH:** Have students create math problems using a Halloween theme. Allow them to share and solve as a class. (e.g., Mark had 8 pumpkins. Julio had 11. How many did they have all together? Draw a picture to show your answer).

**STORY-TELLING:** Give children a scary writing prompt and allow each child to add a line to a class story. Allow children to choose a spooky or silly story to share with the class.

**COSTUME DAY:** Allow children to wear their costumes to school. Have each child create an award for a classmate based on his/her costume (ex. most creative, scariest, silliest costume) and have an awards ceremony.

**HELP OTHERS:** Donate extra change or items to a local charity for Halloween. Make Halloween crafts to give to a local senior center or to decorate a homeless shelter.

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES:** Do a "Spooky Scavenger Hunt." Create a Halloween-themed obstacle course complete with spooky music. Play Halloween musical chairs. Have a mummy-wrapping contest using toilet paper.

**NON-FOOD TREATS:** See list on page 1.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional ideas on school celebrations, see KFA's list of non-food rewards.

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