

# Should I send my kids trick-or-treating this year?

29 September 2020, by Lauren Barker



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The kids are begging to partake in one of their favorite holiday traditions of the year—trick-or-treating. But we are still deep in the global pandemic. So do we skip the door-to-door candy festivities this year or is there a safe way to trick-or-treat?

Dr. Benjamin Chapman, a professor and food safety extension specialist at North Carolina State University, sits down with The Abstract to weigh in on the do's and don'ts of Halloween trick-or-treating during a pandemic.

## **The Abstract: Is it safe to send kids out trick-or-treating this Halloween?**

Ben Chapman: The biggest risk for transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 remains being around other people. Halloween festivities including trick-or-treating could certainly be risky if kids and parents are in close contact with others (within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes total over the course of the night). Sending kids out is riskier than not, but there are [management practices](#) including face coverings, limiting interactions with

people outside of their family (other trick-or-treaters and the folks who are handing out candy) and [hand hygiene](#) can reduce the risk. Certainly, CDC has recently highlighted this issue and has also suggested that traditional festivities are risky.

## **TA: Can COVID-19 be transmitted on packaged candy or food? What about homemade treats like brownies or cookies?**

Chapman: Eating food or touching food packaging of any kind (candy or otherwise) has not been identified as a transmission route for SARS-CoV-2. We don't have any examples in the hundreds of clusters of illnesses worldwide where either food or packages have been identified as [risk factors](#).

## **TA: Should kids wear gloves when receiving the "treats" and should the parents spray the candy or food off with a disinfectant before eating?**

Chapman: It's always very hard for me to tell people what they should and shouldn't do. What I will say is that wearing gloves and disinfecting treats aren't practices that I would say reduce risk of transmission. Gloves are not going to decrease risk over good hand hygiene (sanitizer use or hand-washing). However, spraying [food](#) with disinfectants could certainly increase risk of other toxicological issues (and this is something we've seen since the pandemic started). I would recommend against that. If someone does choose to have their children trick-or-treat, I would suggest wearing face coverings (in addition to any halloween mask) and carrying hand sanitizer and applying it multiple times.

## **TA: How do people avoid touching each other when giving out/receiving the "treats"? If you leave a bucket of candy out, shouldn't people be concerned about all of the hands touching that bucket and the candy inside of it? What about leaving out individual baggies of candy?**

Chapman: As a parent of a couple of pre-teens, the hardest thing we've encountered is how to have my kids comply with many of the individual recommendations. We're constantly reminding them to keep their distance from others, to use sanitizer/hand-wash and avoid playing with or removing masks. I think that highlights our Halloween challenges as well—having kids self-serve candy is certainly less risky when it comes to being around others but the tradeoff is that they need to practice good hand hygiene. Individual baggies would reduce some risks, but I also worry about the congregation of people on doorsteps, waiting in line to find that perfect [candy](#) bag. Unfortunately there are no simple answers on this one.

**TA: Are there other steps that parents and kids can take to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19? Or of inadvertently spreading it to others if they don't know they are carriers?**

Chapman: Keeping kids home if they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or if they have COVID-19 symptoms is also important to keep in mind. But the best way to manage the risks are not participating this year.

**TA: Are there other steps that people who are giving out candy should take to reduce risk for themselves and trick-or-treaters?**

Chapman: I would certainly reconsider giving out treats if I was at a high risk for severe symptoms group (elderly, immunocompromised, other underlying conditions). Using the approach of contactless/interaction-less treat bowls or baggies would be my suggestion.

For more information please see the [CDC's Halloween guidelines](#).

Provided by North Carolina State University

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