

Beware of Choking Hazards During the Holidays

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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You may go over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house with your young children during the holidays, but have you checked to make sure her house is properly childproofed when you get there?

Every year there are tragic stories of children dying or suffering permanent brain injury because they put something in their mouth and it causes an obstruction to their airway. According to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, nearly 90% of injuries and deaths from airway obstructions are in children ages four and under, with most of those happening at home. There are more than 22,000 emergency room visits nationally each year from such injuries.

It's important to be even more vigilant during the holidays when you may be visiting friends and family who might not be as vigilant as you – or aren't used to the curiosity of a young child.

SOT DR. SARAH ZALLEK, NEUROLOGIST - OSF HEALTHCARE ILLINOIS NEUROLOGICAL INSTITUTE

(If you think of certainly toys and little moving parts, ornaments and other decorations around the house, doodads that grandma has and foods – grapes, nuts, things like that the kids often aspirate or get stuck in the airway. Even jewelry so earrings and other little bobbles that are around watch those things because they can very easily - they're interesting and little kids can pick them up and put them in their mouth, you want to watch that very carefully :28)

V/O: Dr. Sarah Zallek is a neurologist who has seen what the lack of oxygen to the brain can do to a person. She says six minutes is how long the brain can last without oxygen, but there can be some damage in less time than that.

Dr. Zallek says it's easy for a person to get distracted running around doing all you have to do during this time. But everything that makes the holidays festive – the decorations, food, and family - can also lead to tragedy for your toddler if you're not vigilant.

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(If you have a child who has had an airway obstruction from a small part, that brain injury lasts likely forever. There are many times when there's those things don't recover and so the child may survive but have permanent and very significant brain injury from a small part being lodged in the airway, so you want to be very careful with those things. :24)

V/O: Take a few minutes during this busy time to remind yourself and family members about [preventing airway obstructions](#) and how to [identify high risk situations](#).