

Celebrating Halloween Safely

People across the country are gearing up for the holiday season. For many, Halloween marks the beginning of holiday celebrations and while All Hallows Eve officially occurs on October 31st, some Halloween devotees get things started early with parties, festivals, and visits to the pumpkin patch. While Halloween will look different this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it does not necessarily mean it is canceled. There are plenty of ways to celebrate the holiday with fewer risks.

“Drive-by haunted houses I’ve heard of where you stay in your car and drive by the haunted house – is something that we could do. Even some outdoor activities incur some significant risk, such as apple picking, corn mazes. If you’re gathering in groups of people, especially people that you don’t live with, that increases your risk even if it’s outdoors,” explained Dr. Bill Walsh, chief medical officer, OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center.

While many of these outdoor venues are going to be open to the public throughout October, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) does advise that visitors use hand sanitizer before handling any produce, wear cloth face coverings, and observe social distancing guidelines.

“A Halloween mask is not the mask we’re talking about. When we talk about a mask, we’re talking about (this) type of face covering that covers your nose and covers your mouth and it prevents droplets from being pushed out so that you can transmit the virus to others. So no matter what Halloween mask you’re wearing, you really should consider always keeping your nose and mouth covered by a proper face mask,” stated Dr. Walsh

In the new guidelines set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), activities such as crowded indoor parties and trick-or-treating are considered higher risk. However, for avid Halloween lovers eager to show off their costumes, there are ways to do that safely. Dr. Walsh suggests turning to technology.

“What we can do is have a virtual Halloween party or a virtual costume party. Now that we have all these avenues such as Zoom to record and transmit video, a virtual Halloween or costume party can be done quite easily,” Dr. Walsh said.

In addition to virtual celebrations, other at-home activities can offer fun family bonding time while also keeping you and your loved ones safe. If you want to participate in pumpkin carving but prefer to avoid going to the pumpkin patch altogether, a standard grocery store is a safe alternative.

“Buying a pumpkin at a grocery store is the same risk as going to the grocery store for other essential items. If you’re going to have a pumpkin carving session at your house, you should do it with your family and those you live with only. It’s not a good idea to have a party where you are carving pumpkins indoors – that will be a high risk activity,” explained Dr. Walsh.

He continued, “Doing things at home with your family such as carving pumpkins and decorating your home is certainly something that can be done safely.”

The CDC advises that if there is a possibility that you are COVID-19 positive, or have been exposed to someone who is, you should not participate in any in-person Halloween festivities. And most importantly, stick to the three W’s throughout the Halloween season: **W**atch your distance and maintain six feet between yourself and others, **W**ear your mask, and **W**ash your hands.