

BUTLER EAGLE

It's like something out of a horror movie: a monster roams the countryside as families huddle behind locked doors in fear. But this Halloween, it isn't the wolfman abroad under Oct. 31's full moon. It's the coronavirus that's still stalking the land.

Dr. John Love, medical director of infectious disease at Butler Health System, said, "Parents, local leaders, schools, and kids have begun to wonder how to handle the tradition of trick-or-treating on Halloween night."

According to Love, the general rules that apply to public spaces and schools are a good starting point.

"We should be encouraging distancing as much as possible, and keeping activities outdoors and to small numbers of people," said Love.

"Masking is imperative as a way to prevent people, including children, from passing the virus to others.

"Good hand hygiene and avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth remain important when handling items, especially outside our homes," he added.

So how could these concepts be put into place to make trick-or-treating as safe as possible?

Love recommended incorporating face masks into children's costumes. Hiding the face is often part of many Halloween costumes anyway. While cloth masks may be bought or made to match a costume, avoid using paint or makeup on a mask as this may alter its integrity and limit airflow.

The pandemic concerns added to the usual spooks of Halloween can increase children's apprehension, said Andrea Anderson, coordinator of outpatient mental health for Butler Health System's Family Services.

"We have seen children with increased anxiety to COVID-19. Some children are experiencing anxiety due to the uncertainty of COVID and not being able to engage in normal activities and others have anxiety about wearing masks," she said.

"I have seen children struggle with decreased opportunities to socialize with peers, and it has impacted their mood and anxiety," she said.

Things for parents to watch for include increased isolation, difficulty with emotional regulation or crying, a change in how a child does with school work, and increased irritability.

"I find it helpful for adults to check in with their children and be observant to how their children are handling any anxiety or concerns about the current state of the world," said Anderson.

When activities can be held safely with coronavirus precautions, it helps children to have some sense of normalcy, according to Anderson.

And this includes Halloween trick-or-treating and other holiday traditions.

“Most children seem to enjoy spooky fun. If families typically celebrate Halloween, it would be nice to incorporate it safely for kids to continue their family tradition,” said Anderson.

For homes expecting little visitors, Love said consider ways to maintain distance between you and the trick-or-treaters

Some residents may leave a bowl of candy on their porch or stairs — a bottle of hand sanitizer next to it would be a terrific addition.

Homeowners then may sit inside or outside at a distance, and still enjoy the colorful costumes.

Love said, “Some people more creative than I are creating “candy tunnels,” using a stretch of PVC pipe to slide candy down to children from a distance.

“With the right decorations, this could end up being a big hit. Masks are also encouraged, when interacting with visitors,” he said.

Love added, “Events like Halloween bring people together. In most years, this is a good thing, but during a pandemic this can lead to illness. All participating in Halloween must think about the safety of others, so everyone can enjoy the traditions.

So, yes, handing out candy to trick or treaters has gotten a whole lot trickier.

For instance, Eau Claire has scrapped its annual Halloween parade in Eau Claire Area Community Park and trick-or-treating in the borough altogether.

Instead, according to borough Administrator Jennifer Rottman, there will be a Drive-Through Candy Crawl beginning at 2 p.m. Oct. 31.

Rottman said parents should follow the signs on Route 58 west into the borough where treats will be handed out through car windows by individuals stationed outside.

St. John Lutheran Church, 420 Beaver St., Mars, will host a “Trunk or Treat” event from 6 to 8 p.m. Oct. 31 to distribute candy in a fun, safe and socially distant manner.

The Butler County Parks & Recreation is bringing back its popular Haunted Trail with its ghouls, ghosts, and goblins running around the trails of Alameda Park.

The Haunted Trail will take place from 7 to 10 p.m. Oct. 23 and 24.

Registrations will be taken at the Masonic Shelter starting at 7 p.m. on both nights of the event.

While this is a family-friendly event, use of strollers and wagons is discouraged.