

Health and Safety E-News for Caregivers and Teachers

January 2011



Reducing Choking Risks: Tips for Early Education and Child Care Settings

Choking is a top cause of injury and death among children, especially children 3 years of age or younger. The risk for choking remains significant until the age of 5. The most common items that children choke on are food, coins, balloons and other toys. This is because children put objects in their mouths as they explore new environments.

In February of 2010, the American Academy of Pediatrics published a policy statement that contains recommendations for parents, teachers, child care workers and health care professionals to help prevent choking among children. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/peds.2009-2862v1>

This quarter's newsletter is dedicated to reducing the risk of choking in early childhood settings.

High risk foods and food characteristics

- ✓ Hard candy
- ✓ Peanuts/nuts
- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Whole grapes
- ✓ Raw carrots
- ✓ Apples
- ✓ Popcorn
- ✓ Hot dogs
- ✓ Chunks of peanut butter
- ✓ Marshmallows
- ✓ Chewing gum
- ✓ Sausages
- ✓ Foods that are round and could conform to a child's airway

Since 60% of non-fatal choking incidents result from food, let's examine some ways to reduce the risk of choking while children are eating.

Reducing Food Choking Risks

1. Children should be seated when eating— Caregivers/Teachers should ensure that children do not eat when standing, walking, running, playing, lying down, or riding in vehicles.
2. Children should not be allowed to continue to feed themselves or continue to be assisted with feeding themselves if they begin to fall asleep.
3. Active supervision is a must—
 - Watch children for "squirreling" of several pieces of food in their mouth. This increases the risk of choking.
 - Remember a choking child may not make any noise, so adults must keep their eyes on children who are eating.

(continued on page 2)



The "Health and Safety E-News for Caregivers and Teachers" is funded through a grant (U46MC04436) from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau and the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to the AAP.

4. Children at this age require increased supervision when eating because they are easily distracted and may not pay full attention to the task of eating.
5. Food should not be used for children's games that involve catching the food item in the mouth or stuffing large numbers or amounts of food in the mouth.
6. Cut foods such as grapes and other fruits, meat, cheese, and raw vegetables into small pieces and shapes that will not block the airways. Cut hot dogs lengthwise and well as widthwise.
7. Cook vegetables so they become softer and easier to swallow
8. Give only small amounts of peanut butter or other similar foods to prevent them for blocking the child's airway.
9. Offer plenty of liquids to children when eating, but make sure liquids and solids are not swallowed at the same time.
10. Remember, foods do not contain warning labels about possible choking hazards.

It is up to the caregiver or teacher to know what steps to take when preparing and serving food to reduce choking risks.

Non-food choking risks

Because young children put everything into their mouths, small non-food items are also responsible for many choking incidents. Coins and toys account for most nonfood-related choking events among young children.

Of all children's products, latex balloons are the leading cause of choking death, and most of these fatalities are among children younger than 6 years of age. Other products such as safety pins, coins, marbles, small balls, pen or marker caps, small button type batteries; items from the trash such as



Resources

eggshells, and pop-tops from beverage cans have been associated with choking.

Manufacturers often indicate the appropriate age range of a toy on the box to convey safety hazards. These are just general guidelines in selecting toys, it is important to use your own judgment concerning the children in your care.

Before you buy a toy, you need to be aware that just because a toy is on the market does not guarantee its safety. Toys sold in retail bins, vending machines, and on the internet, may not be marked with appropriate warning labels.

Finally, it is impossible to prevent all choking episodes among children. All caregivers of young children should be taught CPR and first aid.

Keep dangerous toys, foods, and household items out of reach!!

Websites

Healthy Child Care America
www.healthychildcare.org

Healthy Children
www.healthychildren.org

New AAP Policy on Choking Prevention
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/New-AAP-Policy-on-Choking-Prevention.aspx>

Choking Prevention
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Choking-Prevention.aspx>

CDC website on choking
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Choking/default.html>

Publications
<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;125/3/601.pdf>

AAP Policy Statement: Prevention of Choking Among Children
PEDIATRICS Vol. 125 No. 3 March 2010, pp. 601-607

The Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention wrote this policy to illustrate the recurring risks of choking in young children.

<http://aapnews.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/31/3/26-g>
AAP News Vol. 31 No. 3 March 2010, p. 26