

Dept. of Health Says it Will be Contacting Halloween Event Planners as Preemptive Move Against Possible Covid-19 Outbreak

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As many families and organizations begin to plan for Halloween and other holiday celebrations, Justa Encarnacion, commissioner of the Department of Health, urged residents to contact the Dept. of Health for guidance when planning the events.

During the Bryan administration's weekly Covid-19 update held Monday, Ms. Encarnacion gave community-specific advice in regards to Halloween activities such as trick-or-treating, haunted houses, and parties.

“We’ve actually gotten word that several organizations have planned and organized events like these,” said Ms. Encarnacion. According to the commissioner, D.O.H. will contact those organizations personally, not to stop the event, but to better guide them and to ensure that all those

in attendance are safe. “We are still in the midst of a pandemic, and we have to change the way we celebrate,” said the commissioner.

In her briefing, Ms. Encarnacion highlighted CDC strategies and activities individuals should keep away from since they have the greatest possibility of spreading the virus. These functions include:

- Door-to-door traditional trick-or-treating
- Trunk-or-treating events featuring groups of vehicles
- Indoor functions, like haunted houses and costume parties

“These events are usually crowded, and people may scream and spread particles in the air,” Ms. Encarnacion said.

Additionally, the commissioner stated that those who plan on participating in less risky activities should keep a couple of things in mind. D.O.H. has advised residents to wash their hands and wear the proper face coverings if they are preparing and/or giving out goodie bags. “Always wear a surgical mask or facial covering when celebrating with anyone who you don’t live with,” stated Ms. Encarnacion.

“A costume mask like a character mask is not an appropriate substitute for protection against Covid-19. Please be careful not to restrict your breathing by wearing a protective mask and a costume mask,” she said.

According to the C.D.C., “a costume mask should not be used unless it is made of two or more layers of breathable fabric that covers the mouth and nose and doesn’t leave gaps around the face.”

According to Ms. Encarnacion, the following Halloween activities are lower risk and are safer alternatives:

- Having a virtual Halloween costume contest
- Having a Halloween movie night with people you live with
- Carving or decorating pumpkins with members of your household and displaying them outside, on social media, or simply at home
- Decorating your house, apartment, or living space
- Having a scavenger hunt-style trick-or-treat search with your household members in or around your home rather than going house to house

Ms. Encarnacion recommended that people who are sick or have been exposed to the virus should not host or participate in any in-person festivities. “You can still have a good time, but safety must come first,” said the commissioner.