COVID-19: Trick or Treat
By Dr. Michele Dikkers, Chair of Clayton County Board of Health

Trick or Treat!!

It’s October. Halloween is right around the corner; you could even say it’s here.

Halloween is frequently equated with scary stuff—ghosts, goblins, chainsaw murderers, talking scarecrows and the like. Whether the threats are perceived or real, they are out there, lurking around the next corner. So, we travel in groups, stay on streets that are lit well, avoid abandoned houses, and, unless we are reckless, we steer clear of cemeteries after dark.

As we prepare for the ghosts and goblins that will be knocking at our doors, don’t forget the unseen that can be lurking there as well. COVID-19 is spread unintentionally, especially when in groups of people, excitedly shouting and clambering for attention. Preventing its spread can be easy, simple even.

As we get ready for Halloween, incorporating the recommended mask/face coverings with our costumes can make the mask fun. The old plastic masks with a hole for the mouth and nose were never comfortable. The cloth mask can be decorated with the theme of the night. And there will be less face make-up to scrub off later!

Embrace the mask! Decorate it and be who you want to be for the day! The masks can be an opportunity for fun. Just as there are pumpkin carving contests, maybe add a mask decorating contest to the family fun. Challenge the neighbor or other relatives to a competition. The masks can be shared on social media, sent as emails or other electronic means of communication.

Trick or treating can be done safely with a few adjustments this year.

- avoid traditional costume masks and wear the recommended cloth mask
- make the cloth mask part of your costume
- trick or treat with your family, avoid large groups
- stay 6 feet away from trick-or-treaters not in your family group
- wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before eating your treats

Make things safer for the trick-or-treaters. If you intend to give out treats, avoid offering a bowl full of treats that everyone grabs from. Consider individually bagged treats that can be set out and picked up by the trick-or-treaters. Hand out the treats outdoors, maybe consider setting them out individually at a “station” for the treaters to pick up. Wear a cloth mask when they come to your door. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer frequently when handling the treats.
As I reflect on 2020, it seems we may have had more tricks this year than treats, given the pandemic, forest fires, hurricanes and the derecho. I also see the similarity on how we handle disasters. Some would say to start with a check list.

I’m not much for making check lists but agree that tackling something that is overwhelming or scary takes a plan. It typically goes like this:

- Step back and size up the situation.
- Decide what can be controlled and what can’t.
- Once you have determined what can be controlled, determine how that can be done safely.
- Move forward when able.

When we look at a mess that is left behind by a storm, we take a deep breath, pick up a stick from the tree, then a limb, start a pile and continue, one piece at a time.

We do what we can.

The same can be true for the mess of the pandemic.

It’s here. We can’t change that COVID-19 is now a part of our lives, but we can determine what we can control, and what we can’t. We don’t have to come up with the plan on our own, guidance has been laid out for us by the CDC, Dr Fauci and the White House Task Force. Sometimes those details can become daunting, so stick to the basics.

Wear a mask, Wash your hands often and Watch your distance.

We may have to make adjustments to how we would “normally” do things but embrace it as an opportunity to start a new tradition or an opportunity to celebrate uniquely.

Turn the trick into a treat.

Be well, be safe and be kind.

Remember, we are all in this together.