

CHILD SAFETY BLOG

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Warning Labels Urged on Foods that Can Choke Children

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Popcorn and hot dogs can pose a deadly choking hazard for children under four, and the risk isn't lowered by parents monitoring their kids' eating of these foods, says the official group representing American pediatricians. So experts are saying the best thing is to avoid risky foods before age four. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' [policy statement](#) on the prevention of choking among children, choking is a leading cause of death in children and is most frequently caused by food, coins and toys. However, unlike with toys, there are not yet requirements for warning labels on foods that present choking hazards. The Academy's new policy statement urges the Food and Drug Administration to impose safety requirements on foods that are known to be choking hazards, [Laurie Tarkan reports in a New York Times article](#). In addition to putting warning labels on food packaging,

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the Academy also suggests that manufacturers redesign the foods to reduce dangers of children choking on them. Toddlers, especially those under 4 whose throat at its narrowest has the diameter of a straw, easily choke on small pieces of foods, among which popcorn and hot dogs are considered high-risk foods. The risk is not reduced by parents being present and watching when children ingest these foods. “The only way” to prevent kids choking on small objects and food is to keep the items out of their mouth, according to Chrissy Cianflone, director of programs for Safe Kids USA, an advocacy group. Currently, only two-thirds of hot dogs have warning labels on the packages, says the National Hot Dog and Sausage Council. And even on the packages that do carry warning messages, the labels are not always obvious to consumers. The FDA in a statement indicates that “it was reviewing the pediatrics academy’s new policy and was considering steps to prevent further deaths,” according to the NY Times story. Dr. Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Ohio, suggests that parents wait till children turn 4 or 5 years of age to allow them to eat high-risk foods such as popcorn, hot dogs, and grapes.

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