

The "Choking Game" **Learning about the dangers**

Nationally, a growing number of pre-teens and teenagers are participating in a dangerous practice, known as the "choking game." Although this game has reportedly been going on for generations, it appears to be on the rise among young people. According to one website, the choking game has claimed the lives of more than 50 children nationally in the past year alone.

What is the choking game?

Those playing the choking game attempt to achieve a brief high or euphoric state by stopping the flow of oxygen-containing blood to the brain. Children or young adults sometimes choke each other until the person being choked passes out. The pressure on the arteries is then released and blood flow to the brain resumes, causing a "rush" as consciousness returns. These activities can cause permanent and cumulative death of large numbers of brain cells, and the variations in blood pressure may result in strokes, seizures and retinal damage.

The danger becomes even greater when a rope, shoelace, belt, leash or other type of cord is used and the activity is performed by a lone child or young adult. If someone loses consciousness and there is no one there to immediately release the pressure, the person is unable to help himself or herself. This person will suffer brain damage and death after three minutes.

According to national websites, the choking game has been around for generations. The recent modification of using a rope or other item and playing it alone makes it especially deadly.

Symptoms of this dangerous activity

Unfortunately, those participating in this deadly activity do not always show symptoms. Watch for the following:

- Unexplained marks or bruises on the throat
- Frequent or severe headaches
- Redness of the eyes
- Belts, leashes, ropes or shoelaces tied in strange knots or found in unusual locations
- Unexplained cuts or bruises caused by falling
- Disorientation after spending time alone
- Locked bedroom doors.

Does the choking game have any other names?

The choking game has also been called space monkey, fainting, pass-out game, black-out game, American dream, flatliner, space cowboy, knock out, gasp, rising sun or airplaining.

What can parents and other adults do to prevent this activity?

Parents and other adults are encouraged to talk to children about the deadly risk involved in the choking game. Children do not know that this activity can kill them or leave them brain damaged, and many of those who have admitted to participating believed that the activity was safe.