

CHILD SAFETY BLOG

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The Deadly "Choking Game"

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As deadly as some of the risky behaviors today's adolescents engage in, like drunk driving and drug use, is the much lesser known "choking game" that some physicians have never heard of. [Amina Khan writes in The Los Angeles Times](#) that the choking game, also known as "space monkey," "sleeper hold" and "funky chicken," can be played two ways:

One can be a solo operation, using a necktie, belt or other type of binding to put pressure on the carotid artery in the neck. The other method involves a partner, who can apply pressure to the neck or chest until the subject passes out, cutting off blood flow to the brain.

The resulting rush of oxygen once pressure is released generates a pleasurable sensation, or "natural high."

Statistics on the exact number of deaths over the years can be difficult to ascertain because such deaths are often mistaken for suicide. But the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated in February 2008, from surveying news stories, that the game probably resulted in 82 deaths from 1995 to 2007.

The relatively low incidence rate corresponds to fewer physicians being aware of the game than is ideal. In an Ohio survey, only 68% of responding physicians had heard of the game. However, there is plenty of reason for doctors to learn about and screen for the signs of patients playing this game: there have been at least 65 YouTube videos of the game, and according to surveys, many children do not realize the dangers associated with the game.

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An Injury prevention article reported that as many as 40% of students in a survey “said they perceived no risk from [the game].”

Doctors are encouraged to educate themselves and their patients about the game, and to look out for signs such as “unexplainable headaches, red marks dismissed as hickeys, bloodshot eyes, signs of depression,” says Khan in the Times story.

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