

Health and Safety Alert: Grapes & Cherry Tomatoes – risk of choking

There have been a number of queries on this issue and representation made to the County Council following recent press coverage on the death of a toddler who died after choking on a grape (the incident occurred at a restaurant in North East England).

This alert has been prepared jointly by Corporate Health & Safety and the Schools Meals Advisory Service to provide some information and advice on this.

Information:

- It is acknowledged that incidents of this nature are very rare and that therefore the risks in relation to this issue are low.
- For Schools the focus is not generally about eliminating all risks but managing risks in a sensible way and teaching pupils about risks and how they manage them.
- There are likely to be quite wide ranging views on whether this advice is perhaps 'over the top'.

However:

- Young children are the most likely to be 'at risk'.
- Grapes and cherry tomatoes are particularly problematic. They are round, slightly malleable, easy to swallow whole and just the right size to completely block the airway.
- A number of schools do currently ensure that grapes and cherry tomatoes are halved.

Action Required:

- In Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools - for Early Years and Reception grapes and cherry tomatoes **should** be cut in to halves. Grapes ideally cut lengthways. It is strongly recommended that Foundation, V/A, Academy and Free Schools follow this.
- A reminder could be included in newsletters for parents of Early Years & Reception pupils to ask them to do this if sending in these types of snacks for their children. Schools cannot be expected to check every lunchbox etc. and therefore this can only be schools asking for the parents support in doing this.

Additionally:

- Whilst it is very unlikely that a choking incident will happen, as well as reducing the risk of it happening through the above measures it is suggested that a reminder is given to staff of the procedure / response if a child is choking. This should have been covered on first aid training which a lot of school staff will have undertaken. A verbal reminder through staff meetings should be considered.

Queries:

For any question please contact the Schools Meals Support Service on Telephone: 01245 356218 / E-mail: school.meals@essex.gov.uk or the Corporate Health & Safety Team.