



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Nobody Wins This Game*

*“Choking Game” Awareness and Participation Among 8<sup>th</sup> Graders — Oregon, 2008*

Recorded: February 9, 2010; posted February 11, 2010

*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I’m your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

It may be called a game, but there are no winners in this latest activity among U.S. children. Known as the “choking game,” the intent is to get high by causing a temporary lack of oxygen to the brain. Unfortunately, the activity can go too far and children can suffer permanent injury or death.

Sarah Ramowski is a researcher with the Oregon Public Health Division and she’s joining us today by phone to discuss the dangers of the “choking game.” Welcome to the show, Sarah.

[Ms. Ramowski] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Sarah, how prevalent is this problem?

[Ms. Ramowski] What we found is that, among eighth graders in Oregon, about six percent of them said that they have ever participated in the “choking game,” and about 36 percent of them had ever heard of it.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is it more common among any particular group of eighth graders?

[Ms. Ramowski] Yes, we found that youth who live in rural areas had a little bit higher rates of participation than youth who live in urban areas. We also found that boys and girls, there wasn’t much difference between them, which was a little surprising to us. And lastly, we found that youth who had mental health risks or substance use had a much, much higher rate of participation than youth who didn’t have either of those things.

[Dr. Gaynes] Sarah, how is this so-called “game” played?

[Ms. Ramowski] Youth will use either their hands or a belt or a tie or something to wrap around the neck, temporarily cutting off circulation and oxygen to the brain, functioning as a noose, and when that’s released, a temporary high sensation is created.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the potential health consequences of this so-called “game?”

[Ms. Ramowski] This is a very dangerous activity. Youth who participate in it could suffer death, permanent injury, or brain damage if they fall while they’re passed out and hit their head on the floor. There are a lot of health risks to participating in this.

[Dr. Gaynes] For parents, what are some signs that kids might be participating in this activity?

[Ms. Ramowski] First of all, we encourage parents to be aware of the other names that this activity goes by in case they hear their kids talking about it. Some of those names are the blackout game, the fainting game, seven minutes in heaven, flat liners. Some of the physical signs include unexplained marks on the neck, frequent headaches, bloodshot eyes, or ropes, ties, or scarves tied to bedroom furniture or door knobs.

[Dr. Gaynes] What should parents do to address the issue with their children?

[Ms. Ramowski] Well, if parents do notice any of the warning signs that I just mentioned, they should definitely talk to their kids, ask them about this, and if they feel like there's a concern, we encourage them to seek the advice of a health care professional for more help.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about the so-called "choking game?"

[Ms. Ramowski] The Centers for Disease Control has a good web page on the choking game. If you go to Google and type in CDC choking game, you will get the page that the CDC has put together.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Sarah. I've been talking today with Sarah Ramowski about the dangers of the choking game.

Parents, be aware of this activity and signs that kids might be participating, such as bloodshot eyes, marks on the neck, and ropes, belts, or scarves tied to bedposts or doorknobs. If you suspect your child is participating in the choking game, talk to them about the serious consequences of this activity and seek the advice of a health care professional.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.