PREVENTION IS THE BEST SOLUTION

- Always supervise eating. Children must be sitting down when eating. Up and down movements and walking make children lose focus and may cause food to slide down the throat before it is chewed. Sit down with children when they are eating. Do not allow eating or drinking anywhere other than the designated eating area.

- Eliminate outside distractions. Television, games, pets, etc. while eating distracts children from chewing and swallowing.

- Cut food into bite size pieces or thin slices (cheese, fruit, and meat). Grind, chop or mash foods.

- Cook food until soft, especially beans, meat, pasta and rice. Foods should be soft enough to mash between thumb and forefinger and to chew easily.

- Steam vegetables until soft. Cut into thin slices or strips not rounds, i.e. carrots, broccoli, zucchini.

- Do not allow eating in moving vehicles. Sudden stops can cause a food to lodge in the airway and it may be difficult for the driver to stop.

- Serve small amounts of food at a time. Keep portion size small. With babies be sure the mouth is clear before giving the child another spoonful of food.

Staff trained in CPR and First Aid must be present, and should be sitting with children when they are eating.

Public Health Seattle & King County
Mission Statement

Identify and promote the conditions under which all people can live within healthy communities and can achieve optimal health.

The Child Care Health Program is committed to supporting safe and healthy child care to children in Seattle and King county. Child care health consultants offer nursing, mental health and nutrition consultative services and trainings to early learning and school age care providers.

www.kingcounty.gov/health/childcare

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Young children can be at risk for choking on foods. Although children can choke on any food, foods that are hard or tough to chew, slippery, small, round, or sticky present an increased risk.

Older babies, (6 - 12 months) vary greatly in their developmental ability to swallow foods. It is important to proceed with caution when introducing foods for the first time. Babies should easily accept foods without gagging and grasp finger foods themselves. Watch carefully.

Toddlers (children learning to walk, typically 1 to 2 years old) have limited control of their mouth muscles and lack back teeth to grind up hard food. Food more easily slides back into the throat before it is completely chewed.

Children 3 to 4 years old may have back molars but are still learning to chew and can be easily distracted while eating.

Children choke either because a large object closes off the throat or because smaller objects block the airway into the lung.

Avoid Choke Hazards

Many nutritious foods can be hazardous for young children unless cooked or cut into thin, bite size pieces. Here are some foods that should be omitted or modified:

**SIZE**
- Both small and large pieces of food may cause choking. Small, hard pieces of food may get caught in the airway if they are swallowed before being chewed well. Larger pieces, more difficult to chew, are more likely to completely block the throat.
  - Nuts
  - Raw carrots, raw broccoli, raw cauliflower, etc. (steam and chop)
  - Hard fruit especially with peels such as crisp apples (slice fruit into thin pieces...not chunks)

**SHAPE**
- Food items shaped like a tube may cause choking because a piece may break off and are more likely to completely block the throat than other shapes.
  - Hot dogs and link sausage
  - Whole carrots or baby carrots
  - Frozen banana pieces
  - Grapes (OK if cut into quarters )
  - Whole berries (OK if mashed)
  - Cooked legumes (OK if mashed and moist)

**TEXTURE**
- Foods which are firm, smooth, or slick may slide down the throat into the airway.
  - Hard candy
  - Whole kernel corn
  - Peanuts and nuts
  - Raw vegetable sticks (i.e. celery, carrots, broccoli, zucchini)
  - Apple chunks

- Dry, hard food may be hard to chew yet easy to swallow whole. Omit these foods.
  - Hard pretzels
  - Tortilla chips
  - Popcorn

- Sticky foods can stick to the back of the mouth or roof of the mouth and block the throat. They are difficult to remove. Omit these foods.
  - Nut butters alone
  - Gummy bears, marshmallows
  - Fruit roll-ups
  - Cheese chunks (thinly sliced cheese and deli meats are OK)

- Hard to chew foods which are fibrous or tough. Omit these foods
  - Bagels, toddler biter biscuits
  - Meat jerky
  - Steak, roast, other fibrous meats (chopped or ground with moisture added is OK)

Be aware that teething medications can sometimes numb mouth and throat muscles. Check directions carefully.

Teething medications given to children in child care need to be authorized in writing by a parent and health care provider.
(WAC 388.150.230)