



**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
JUSTICE SERVICES DIVISION, JUSTICE & SOLICITOR GENERAL**

Dr. Elizabeth Brooks-Lim, Chief Medical Examiner

INFORMATION BULLETIN

Death Investigation Update for Child & Youth Deaths: The “Choking Game”

PURPOSE

This information bulletin is intended to update police and medical communities in Alberta about the “choking game” and how it may form a role in the investigation of deaths of children and youth in the province of Alberta.

WHAT IS THE CHOKING GAME?

- The “choking game” is most commonly seen as an activity in children and youth aged between 12 to 17 years old but has been reported in children as young as 6 years old. Within Alberta only 1 case has been reported as potentially being associated with the choking game since 2014.
- It is very distinct and different from auto-erotic asphyxia (which is most often seen in adults for sexual gratification purposes).
- The ‘choking game’ involves self-inflicted games where deprivation of oxygen is undertaken in order to obtain a brief state of euphoria which can sometimes lead to voluntary or accidental fainting due to lack of oxygen.
- These “choking games” are generally learnt at school/online and have a number of different names depending on which country you are in.
- In North America it has been known as e.g. the choking game, blackout, space monkey, speed dreaming, ghost, rising sun, rush, the scarf game, gasp game, cloud nine, suffocation roulette, pass out and funky chicken. In French it can be known as: Jeu du foulard, Jeu de la tomate, Jeu du cosmos, 30 secondes de Bonheur, le reve bleu, le reve indien, jeu de la grenouille

- The names seem innocuous but conceal a variety of different and complex techniques. Sometimes it may simply involve competitive breath holding, seeing whose face goes reddest or direct compression of the neck with hands or a ligature sometimes after hyperventilating.
- The influence of peer pressure is believed to be significant; it is commonly practice in a group but can be seen in individuals practicing on their own (at an estimated rate of between 11 to 23% of participants).

WHAT INFORMATION CAN HELP DETERMINE A DEATH MAY BE RELATED TO THE CHOKING GAME?

- In child and youth deaths from what might appear to be at first impressions an accidental or suicidal hanging, the choking game may be a potential reason for their death.
- Parents, teachers or guardians of a child/youth may suspect that the choking game was being practiced. However, a study by the CDC (Centers of Disease Control in the USA) of 82 probable deaths from the choking game it was revealed 93% of parents were not aware of this activity until the death of their child.
- A review of social media associated with the child/youth, internet searches conducted by the individual or notations in personal diaries may indicate curiosity or engagement in the choking game.
- Friends of the child may or may not be aware of choking game type activities that the deceased child/youth engaged in. The CDC study indicated that in 95% of suspected deaths the death occurred whilst the child/youth was alone.
- Post mortem examination findings alone will not be able to determine whether the choking game was relevant to the death of the individual. The evaluation of the social history and circumstances of death are of much greater importance for these types of deaths.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT THE CHOKING GAME MAY BE IMPORTANT IN THE DEATH OF THIS CHILD?

- As a police officer or medical professional your concerns about the death should be reported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) for further discussion and direction. A suspected death from the choking game must be reported to the OCME under the jurisdiction of the *Fatality Inquiries Act* of Alberta.

CONTACT INFORMATION

OCME CALGARY

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
4070 Bowness Road NW
Calgary, AB T3B 3R7

Tel: 403 297 8123
Fax: 403 297 3429

OCME EDMONTON

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
7007 116 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6H 5R8

Tel: 780 427 4987
Fax: 780 422 1265

General Administrative Email Enquiries: OCME_Admin@gov.ab.ca

OFFICE HOURS

Routine administration services: 8:15 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday (closed on statutory holidays)

24/7/365 Investigatory Services for death notifications and emergencies.