



New York State School Safety Group 491

Safe Schools Agenda

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A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

Why Every School Should Have a Backpack Safety Program

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there were more than 21,000 backpack-related injuries treated at hospital emergency rooms, doctor's offices, and clinics between 1999 and 2000. Backpacks are a popular and practical way to carry schoolbooks and supplies. When used correctly, they are a good tool; they are designed to distribute the weight of the load among some of the body's strongest muscles.

However, backpacks that are too heavy or are worn incorrectly can injure muscles and joints, leading to severe back, neck, and shoulder pain, as well as posture problems. (The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recommends that a child's back-pack should weigh no more than 15 to 20 percent of a child's weight.)

Sooner or later, there will be a lawsuit brought against a school district because it should have known that children who carry all of their books around all day long because they don't have time to get to their lockers are susceptible to injury: a good reason for having a backpack safety program. A good program will also take notice of a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which found that it wasn't the weight of the backpacks that was the most common cause of injuries; it was tripping over the backpack, which occurred 28 percent of the time. Getting hit by the backpack caused 13 percent of the injuries. Thirteen percent of the injuries - to the neck, back and shoulders - were caused by wearing the backpack. Overall, tripping, hitting, etc, resulted in 77% of the injuries in the study. A good backpack safety

program will therefore train students to put their backpacks in a safe place and not use them as weapons against another person. The backpack safety program should also include an education program for parents.

There is a good deal of helpful information about backpack safety on the web. See: <http://kidshealth.org>, Backpack Safety (doctor approved health info.) and www.backpacksafe.com for Backpack Safety Student Survival Kit including Backpack Safety Video.

Don't Forget to Check Your Shop Safety Program

We are reminded of the importance of this aspect of school study by a study of injuries sustained in shop class in Utah public schools for the years of 1992 to 1996. A quick look at the findings:

- 7.1% of the grade 7-12 students studied were injured in shop class
- 88.4% of shop injuries involved equipment use
- Equipment was misused in 37.9% and malfunctioned in 3.5% of the incidents
- The leading injuries were lacerations, fractures, burns and abrasions.
- Table saws, band saws and other saws were involved in nearly one half of the equipment injuries.

Most of these injuries can be prevented by strong safety policies. Take a good look at the safety section of all lesson plans.

Visit our Website at www.nysgroup491.com

Email: info@nysgroup491.com

Program Administrator: Professional Underwriters 1-800-833-8822



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The Medical Emergency Response Plan for Schools

As we all know, life-threatening emergencies can happen in any school at any time. They can be the result of pre-existing health problems, violence, unintentional actions, natural disasters, and toxins. It seems that nearly every day we read about tragic premature deaths in schools from sudden cardiac arrest, blunt trauma to the chest, firearm injuries, asthma, head injuries, drug overdose, allergic reactions, and heatstroke. School leaders and staff deal with these emergencies on a routine but sometimes inconsistent basis. Consistency in response can be enhanced by developing an emergency response plan to deal with life-threatening medical emergencies in addition to your emergency plans for other threats.

In January 2004, the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) published a heavily endorsed policy statement on this issue (PEDIATRICS, Vol. 113 No. 1 January 2004, pp.155-168). If your planning team is unfamiliar with the document, take a look, and use it to build or audit your medical emergency response plan and procedures.

The AAP policy statement summarizes essential information about life-threatening emergencies, including details about sudden cardiac arrest, the components of an emergency response plan, the training of school personnel and students to respond to life-threatening emergencies, and the equipment required for the emergency response. Detailed information about sudden cardiac arrest and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillation (AED) programs is also provided.

Is it that important that staff members should be provided with training via the medical emergency response plan? AAP found that 18% of all teachers surveyed in elementary and high schools in the

academic year. Seventeen percent reported that they had responded to one or more life-threatening student emergencies during their teaching career.

A survey of school nurses in New Mexico revealed that each year 67% of schools activated the EMS system for a student, and 37% of the schools activated the EMS system for an adult.

Recommended Elements of the School Emergency Response Plan

1. Effective and efficient communication throughout the school campus, including outdoor facilities and EMS personnel.
2. Coordinated and practiced response plan.
3. Risk reduction through safety precautions, identifying students with medical conditions, and training of personnel to respond to those conditions.
4. Training and equipment for first aid and CPR.
5. Implementation of a lay rescuer AED program.

Download the AAP Policy Statement from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/> It is a very thorough approach to the subject and well worth using to audit your program.

Personal Safety Tips for the First Staff Meeting

For many years we have published a list of these tips in the September Agenda. It is based on experiences gained in 29 years of school administration followed by ten plus years in risk management. It can be accessed at www.nysgroup491.com/newsletters/491_SSagenda_9_04.pdf

Midwest had personally provided some aspect of emergency care to more than 20 students each