

THE RISK OBSERVER

BACKPACK RELATED INJURIES

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 carried 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 backpack should weigh no more than 15 to 20 percent of a child's weight.

When students do not have enough time to get to their lockers they rely upon backpacks and the potential for related injuries increases. Backpacks placed on floors result in many unnecessary trips and falls. A backpack safety program can reduce the potential for injury to students, teachers, and anyone traveling the halls of your school.

BACKPACK INJURY STATISTICS

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. An American Academy of Pediatrics study 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.

Suggested Resources:

There is a good deal of helpful information about backpack safety on the web:

- <http://kidshealth.org>, Backpack Safety (doctor approved health info)
- www.backpacksafe.com, for Backpack Safety Student Survival Kit including Backpack Safety Video.



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