[IMAGE]

Watch Their Backs

Children account for over 10,000 backpack-related visits annually to emergency departments or physicians. Backpacks cause acute injuries, such as bruises and sprains, and chronic problems, such as persistent low back pain. The daily stress of carrying a backpack on one shoulder may also alter a child's posture and gait. Despite all these potential problems, many parents aren't addressing the issue of backpack safety.

Researchers in a recent study gathered data on parental knowledge of their child's backpack weight by evaluating nearly 200 students, grades K-5, from three Texas schools. Only children with backpacks weighing at least 10% of their body weight were assessed.

Average pack weight was approximately 11 lbs., which represented about 15% of student body weight. Researchers found that fully one-third of students reported their parents had never once checked their backpack contents, and less than 5% of parents had ever actually weighed their child's backpack. In this report in the *Archives of Disease and Childhood,* the backpacks of students whose parents never checked the packs weighed significantly more than packs of students whose parents kept an eye on pack weight and contents.

As a parent, you are possibly the best source for backpack safety promotion for your child, and can do so simply by inspecting the backpack weight and contents. Physicians and parents should also ensure that student backpacks are the right size; carry no unnecessary or additional items; are worn on both shoulders; and weigh less than 10-15% of the student's body weight.

Reference:

Forjuoh SN, Little D, et al. Parental knowledge of school backpack weight and contents. *Archives of Disease and Childhood* 2003:88, pp. 18-19.

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