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Danger Lurking in Backpacks

Our schoolchildren are carrying too big a load.

August 15 -2007, Orleans. Who hasn't wondered whether small children lugging oversized, heavy backpacks to-and-from school might be risking serious injury to their growing spines and will one day suffer from serious back pain?

Apparently, there is real cause for concern.

According a recent U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission study, more than 75% of students ages 8-12 suffer from increasing back pain inflicted by carrying their schoolwork and supplies in backpacks or similar totes.

"I've been saying since the second grade that too much homework is bad for a student!" said a smiling Dr. Nathalie Beauchamp when contacted about the study. "On a serious note, some of our younger elementary school students are literally carrying one third their body weight for prolonged periods of time and distance. That puts a lot of stress on a body in the midst of development," added Dr. Beauchamp, whose chiropractic office is located in Orleans, Ontario.

And, the heavy burdens are not just affecting those students small in stature.

Student back injuries are now widespread. 96% of the pupils monitored regularly haul much too heavy a pack on their back. In 2001 alone, 7,000 children went to

– More –

Heavy Backpacks Risk Injury
June 1, 2007
Page 2 of 3

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Heavy Books Lands Students in ER, continued

U.S. emergency rooms for backpack-related injuries. And, 60% of orthopedic doctors contacted regarding the study reported that they have treated children suffering from back pain caused by their heavy bags.

The study alluded to this startling calculation: A child carrying a 12-pound backpack, and lifting it 10 times per day for the entire school year, has carried and lifted a combined load of 21,600 pounds — the equivalent of 6 mid-sized cars.

“Children should not carry backpacks that exceed more than 10% of their body weight — which translates into a 5 to 10-pound load for elementary students,” noted Beauchamp.

“Even with the continued progression of electronic learning – which one would think leads to fewer books – the backpack has become a survival kit for the action-packed lives that today’s children lead during and after school hours. Parents and teachers have to take an active role in limiting what we literally load onto these children. If we don’t address it now, the picture of a child carrying numerous books – which many have seen as a sign for a bright future – could foreshadow a painful outlook as well,” concluded Dr. Beauchamp.

– More –

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Page 2 of 3

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Editor's Note:

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Reference Material:

"Backpack-Related Injuries Send 7,000 to ER," *Ancaster News*, Ontario, Canada, Sept. 1, 2006.