



California School Nurses Organization

Position Statement

TITLE

Backpack Safety

POSITION STATEMENT

Credentialed School Nurses serve as advocates for children and adolescents by educating students, families, and staff in appropriate interventions to reduce the incidence of back pain and posture problems due to improper use of backpacks.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE

Backpacks used by children and adolescents to carry books and supplies to and from or within schools. Backpacks are designed to distribute the weight of the load among some of the body's strongest muscles (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2015). Many children carry very heavy backpacks and there is concern that this might contribute to back and shoulder pain and posture problems in children that can last into adulthood (U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission [USCPSC], 2017). According to the USCPSC (2017), in 2013 more than 22,000 sprains, strains, dislocations, and fractures were treated in across the country. Children are particularly susceptible to orthopedic injuries from wearing backpacks because their bodies are still growing and developing (Lavigne, 2014). Such injuries can contribute to loss of educational time.

Recommendations to avoid injury include the following:

- Select a lightweight backpack with two wide, padded shoulder straps, a waist strap, and a padded back
- Instruct children to wear the backpack correctly on both shoulders and tighten the straps so the backpack is close to the body.
- Limit the weight to 10-20% of the child's body weight
- Pack the bag correctly, with heavier objects at the bottom and close to the back
- Take a break from wearing the backpack for too long
- Use a rolling backpack

(AAP, 2016; Lavigne, 2014).

Credentialed school nurses can advocate on behalf of students for schools to provide lockers or a second set of textbooks to avoid the need for heavy backpacks. Children should be encouraged to report any pain or discomfort to the Credentialed School Nurse for further assessment.

REFERENCES

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Lavigne, V. (2014). Weight limit recommendation in backpack use for school-aged children. *Journal of Clinical Chiropractic Pediatrics*, 14(2), 1156-1159.

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CSNO BOARD APPROVAL HISTORY

Adopted: 2001. **Revised:** 2010, 2017