



AUSTRALIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Doctors and Physios Join to Battle Child Back Injuries

The Australian Divisions of General Practice and the Australian Physiotherapy Association have joined forces to help reduce the number of backpack-related back injuries suffered by children as they return to school.

With the start of the school year just around the corner, Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) National President, Katie Mickel, and the Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP), Dr Rob Walters, are concerned that children and young people are risking their health by carrying too much weight in their school backpacks.

Physiotherapy research has found that the typical student lugs more than five kilograms to and from school each day in their school bag. The study of over 1,200 students clearly showed a definite connection between the loads carried and reports of spinal symptoms including low back and neck pain.

“I’m alarmed when I see groups of students walking by with these big saggy weights hanging from their shoulders – it’s just not safe!” Mrs Mickel said today.

“It’s so important to carry loads properly, especially for younger students with developing spines which are more prone to damage.

“Heavy loads cause the body to make abnormal postural adjustments to accommodate the weight of the bag.

“We all have a duty of care to ensure that our children aren’t being subject to pain now and damage later by simply getting an education.”

“The Australian Physiotherapy Association has addressed this issue by working with physiotherapy researchers and a leading manufacturer to design PhysioPak – the only backpack endorsed by the APA,” Mrs Mickel said today..

Dr Rob Walters, Chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice, commented, “Many GPs are concerned that over time, this poor posture will lead to back, neck and shoulder pain, and cause other problems for students later in life.

“GPs acknowledge that young people are often required to carry heavy items such as musical instruments, laptops and sporting equipment as part of their curriculum requirements. However, fashionable brand name bags usually don’t have the support and features to enable students to carry their loads safely.

Media enquiries:

Michael Christo (APA National Media Officer) 03 9536 9315 or 0409 040276

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‘We are urging parents to ensure children’s backpacks meet the APA guidelines and that they talk to their children about correct lifting techniques, using both straps when using backpacks and packing bags to ensure even weight distribution.

“It is also important to encourage children to use lockers at school to store sporting equipment and other heavy items not needed at home, rather than lugging them to and from school every day. Schools need to ensure they provide students with adequate and secure locker facilities for storing text books and equipment.

“Parents and young people are encouraged seek advice from their GP and Physiotherapist if they are concerned about the prevention and/or treatment of back pain,” Dr Walters said today.

Fact Sheet

PhysioPak features a unique load limiting design – to ensure students don’t carry too much weight – and is made of semi-rigid material to limit the “sag” factor, which researchers found was a major cause of spinal symptoms.

The APA has the following tips to help students get back to school, safely.

Choosing the right bag

Make sure your backpack:

- Fits the body comfortably.
- Doesn’t extend above the shoulders when you’re seated.
- Has shoulder straps that are broad, well-padded and adjustable.
- Can be adjusted to suit individual posture needs.
- Has straps attached to the top of the pack at separate points.
- Has a waist strap to keep the load in place when moving.
- Has separate compartments to allow heavy items to be packed close to the body.
- Is padded where it touches your back, and made of firm material to prevent the load sagging backwards.

Top tips for safe load carrying

Pack smart!

- Lighten your load – try not to carry too many heavy books on the same day.
- Plan ahead – don’t carry lots of equipment at the same time, like sports gear, musical instruments or art materials.
- Pack the heaviest items – such as your laptop – closest to the body and the lighter, softer items further out.

Carry smart!

- When packed, make sure your pack doesn’t sag or pull backwards.
- Use both shoulder straps when you wear your backpack.
- Use your pack’s waist strap to keep the load in place when walking or cycling.
- Don’t carry your pack for too long – take a break and put it down.

For expert advice on carrying loads safely, consult your local physiotherapist.

For more information, visit the APA’s web site at www.physiotherapy.asn.au or visit www.physiopak.com.