

School Backpack Safety

The Alabama Department of Education strongly recommends that all school administrators, teachers, parents, and students be educated about the potential impact of heavy backpacks. Therefore, proactive measures should be taken to avoid injury.

School backpacks when overloaded can cause an increase in back pain and spinal strain for students, because spinal ligaments and muscles are not fully developed until after the age of 16. Overweight backpacks are a source of repeated low-level stress that result in chronic neck, shoulder, or back pain in children.

More than 90 percent of students carry backpacks. Children's textbooks are much heavier now, and in addition to textbooks, student often carry computers, cell phones, water bottles, band instruments, and other equipment considered essential to have available.

Studies have found that backpacks weigh as much as 25 percent of the child's body weight, and are often not worn correctly. Backpacks are often slung over one shoulder or allowed to hang below the waistline, increasing the weight on the shoulders causing the child to compensate for the weight by leaning forward when walking or stooping forward when standing.

Recommendations for backpack safety include:

1. Backpack should weigh no more than a maximum of 10 percent of a child's body weight.
2. Encourage ergonomic backpacks with individualized compartments to efficiently hold books and equipment.
3. Encourage children to wear both shoulder straps and not sling the backpack over one shoulder.
4. Encourage wide, padded adjustable straps that fit a child's body.
5. Encourage the heaviest books be left at school and handouts or workbooks be used for homework assignments.

For more information regarding Act #2017-19, Backpack Safety, please visit the Alabama Secretary of State Legislative Acts website at: sos.alabama.gov/government-records/legislative-acts, or Alabama Department of Education website at: <http://www.alsde.edu/>. Information can also be obtained at www.bacsupport.com.