

BACKPACK USE AMONG AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL CHILDREN

The CAA conducted an in-field observational study of more than 340 school children on high-traffic school commute routes in late 2011 to evaluate how children are carrying their backpacks. This study ran alongside a commissioned parent survey to examine how parents think their children are using their bags.

Key finding: The study revealed 90 per cent of school children have bad posture when carrying their bags and could experience spinal damage as a result, while 75 per cent are not using their backpack's ergonomic features which could prevent such damage.

Carrying too much and in the wrong way

- On average, parent's estimate junior school children are carrying the equivalent of 17 per cent of their body weight in their school bags which is almost double the maximum recommended weight.
- While many children are using both backpack straps, 20 per cent continue to wear their backpacks slung over one shoulder and 33 per cent are wearing their backpacks too low on their backs.
- Backpacks are being overfilled with extra items such as sports clothes, with 79 per cent of school bags full to the point of bulging.
- One in three parents report their children wear their backpacks positioned too low.
- Junior school children are carrying the heaviest backpacks compared to their body weight while middle school children are most likely to carry a backpack on one shoulder rather than both.

Ergonomic features ignored by students but important to parents

- School children are reluctant to use their backpack's ergonomic features with 75 per cent failing to use these features.
- While the majority of school children carry backpacks with ergonomic features, 35 per cent are carrying backpacks without any supportive features.
- Despite more than 85 per cent of parents saying it is important their child's backpack is ergonomically sound, 26 per cent were unsure if their child's backpack had basic design features to prevent spinal damage.
- Ergonomic features are an important consideration for parents with nearly one in five parents saying ergonomic features were their primary consideration when purchasing a backpack.

Posture taking a back seat

- While 90 per cent of school children had bad posture when carrying their backpacks, 50 per cent of parents felt their child's posture was good, highlighting a lack of education among parents in how to identify poor posture.
- A quarter of parents observed their children to have slumped head/shoulders while carrying backpacks.