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MEDIA RELEASE

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Don't let your education weigh you down!

It's important to choose the right backpack to help protect your child's health, the Australian Physiotherapy Association warned today.

With the start of the school year just around the corner, Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) president, Cathy Nall, said children 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!" Ms Nall said.

"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.

"Over time, this poor posture leads to back, neck and shoulder pain, and can cause other problems for students later in life. And fashionable brand name bags usually don't have the support and features to enable students to carry their loads safely.

"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.

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 also offers the following tips to help students get back to school, safely:

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Local spokespeople available. All enquiries:

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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.
- 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. The Find a Physio service on the APA website can help you locate a physiotherapist in your area.

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

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