

The schoolbag & the burden of education

City Kids Haul An Avg 4.5kg On Their Backs

Barhat Yagnik and Ragini Bharadwaj | TNN

Rhea, a class VI student in a city school, was carrying not only her regular books in her large backpack – it also contained roller skates, drama costume, a hot pack and a water bottle – all coming together to weigh over 10kg.

Right from author RK Narayan to scientist Prof Yash Pal, experts have time and again insisted on the need for lighter schoolbags.

CUT THE LOAD

With the new directive by the Centre to rationalize the burden – making it a norm not to carry more than 10% of the child's weight – the state is also looking to make yet another attempt to save the students from backbreaking loads.

Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, state education minister, said the process to create a government resolution (GR) on the basis of the directives issued by the central government has been started. "We will soon come up with the regulations which would be binding on schools in Gujarat," he said.

Is the ground reality matching the expectations? Bhaskar Patel, president of Gujarat State School Management Association, said

that only passing rules might not change the scenario. "In the past, there were two such attempts, but the guidelines are ignored by schools," he said.

On Monday, a number of concerned parents approached schools about the rule regarding schoolbags. The schools said they are yet to get the directives. Experts pointed at the fact that the bags have also got heavier with tiffin boxes and water bottles getting replaced by hot cases and insulated bottles.

While a few schools have a 'No bag' policy and cafeteria, schools like Udgam School for Children are mulling a new strategy. An official said the school might introduce notepads and folders instead of notebooks to reduce the weight.

A school administrator said they are thinking of giving two sets of textbooks to the children so that they can keep one set at home and one at school. He added that few schools have a locker system where the students can keep their belongings.

"Parents should be cautious while purchasing schoolbags, tiffin boxes and water bottles for their child," says Sr Jennifer, principal, Mount Carmel School.



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SCHOOLBAG & PRACTICES

Organizations including the American Academy of Paediatrics have chalked out some ways to reduce the damage on children:

- > The backpack should have wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back
- > Pack light. Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closer to the centre of the back
- > Always use both shoulder straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles
- > If school allows, consider a rolling backpack
- > The size of the bag also matters. It should not be too broad or too low on the back
- > While riding a vehicle, it should be slung low so that it gets seat support
- > The bag should not cause any tingling sensation or numbness in arms or legs

Children face spinal and respiratory problems

Dr Nehal Shah, principal of SSB College of Physiotherapy, said that even the norm of restricting schoolbag weight to 10% of body weight might not work for everyone. "In a study conducted by us, even when we gave the weight of 10% of the child's body weight, we found angular changes in spine which are not good in the longer run. Imagine the child carrying such a weight daily. We also found that heavy bags even affected chest expansion – which can lead to respiratory issues," she said.

In studies conducted by Shah's team in 2010 and 2017, the results clearly showed that the bags altered neck and lower spine (lumbar lordosis). The postures got changed due to altered centre of gravity. "It surely is a dire situation and we have to watch our children's backs – literally," she said.



WHAT TOI HAD FOUND

In 2015, The Times of India had carried out a survey on 250 students – chosen at random from seven schools including H B Kadpadia School, Anand Niketan School (Satellite), St Kabir School (Drive-in), J G International School, St Xaviers Loyola, Mount Carmel School and Podar International School. It was found that from class I to XII, the average weight a child used to carry was about 4.5 kg with 0.5 kg being the lowest and 9.5 kg the highest on the scale.

