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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTITIONERS ARE STOPPING PAIN AND DISCOMFORT, ONE BACKPACK AT A TIME

National School Backpack Awareness Day to be Held in September

Bethesda, MD — Did you know more than 23,000 trips to the emergency room in 2007** were backpack-related? Every year, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) raises awareness for proper backpack use during National School Backpack Awareness Day which is taking place on Wednesday, September 16, 2009. Across the country, occupational therapy practitioners will be holding weigh-ins and other events to help illustrate the harmful effects of backpacks.

“Because the number of backpack-related incidents is so large, we need to be more vigilant and persistent with getting the message of Backpack Day out to the public. In 2001, the number of emergency room visits related to backpacks was only 7,000. With 23,000 incidents reported in 2007, there has been a 328 percent increase in only six years. We have to stop these rising numbers,” said Dr. Karen Jacobs, EdD, an occupational therapy practitioner, former AOTA president and a board certified professional ergonomist.

With more than 79 million students in the United States carrying school backpacks, it is imperative they are properly educated on how to buy, pack and wear a backpack correctly. AOTA recommends that a loaded backpack never weigh more than 15 percent of the student’s total body weight (for a student weighing 100 pounds; this means that the backpack should weigh no more than 15 pounds). But, it is estimated that about 55 percent of students are carrying backpacks heavier than the recommended guideline.

This year, AOTA with the help of Jacobs, has compiled a backpack tip sheet for students, parents, educators and administrators. Some tips include:

- Distribute weight evenly by using both straps. Wearing a pack slung over one shoulder can cause a child to lean to one side, curving the spine and causing pain or discomfort.
- Adjust the shoulder straps so that the pack fits snugly to the child's back. A pack that hangs loosely from the back can pull the child backwards and strain muscles.
- Load heaviest items closest to the child's back (the back of the pack) and arrange books and materials so they won't slide around in the backpack, creating a risk for falls.

“Having been involved with Backpack Day since its inception, I am proud to say we have been gaining support through these past nine years, but more education is necessary,” said Jacobs.

For more information about National School Backpack Awareness Day, visit www.aota.org/backpack.

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association** (AOTA) represents the professional interests and concerns of more than 140,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA’s major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to www.aota.org.