

Tens of thousands of children are facing a lifetime of back pain misery

- **Seven out of ten primary school children reported back or neck pain in a year**
- **Number of children receiving treatment for back/neck pain has doubled**
- **Poor posture, careless use of technology and heavy bags pose a serious health risk to young people**
- **Free e-learning course will help schools teach children safe practices**

MORE than two-thirds of primary school children have reported experiencing back or neck pain over the course of one year, according to a recent study. Sixty-four per cent of secondary school children had suffered problems over a similar period and almost 90 per cent of the children had not reported their pain to anyone.

These shocking results were revealed in a questionnaire-based study of 204 school children and underline a growing concern for the effects of computers, games consoles, smartphones and iPad-style tablets on young people's developing bodies. The children's activities could lead to debilitating health problems that have been described by one expert as a "healthcare time bomb".

Research shows that as many half of all 14-year-olds have experienced back pain. This has many consequences, including absence from school, low self-esteem, difficulty taking exercise and poor concentration. Arthritic changes have been seen in some 15-year-olds and adolescent back pain sufferers are four times more likely to experience back pain as an adult.

Eighty per cent of children in the UK regularly carry bags that are up to 20 per cent of their body weight, according to research from the charity BackCare. Studies show children

should not carry more than 10 per cent of their body weight and that anything over 15 per cent can be damaging.

The Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board in Wales reported that the number of children receiving treatment for back and neck pain recently doubled over a period of just six months. The percentage of paediatric referrals to physiotherapy for back/neck pain increased from 2.1 per cent in September 2011 to 4.5 per cent in March 2012.

Lorna Taylor BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy, MCSP, HPC said, “Current lifestyles and the increase in technology are having detrimental effects on our children’s musculoskeletal health and if not addressed in school and at home now, will have far reaching effects for our children, future working generation and society. This is a healthcare time bomb.

“It’s vital we instil good habits and provide resources so children can be comfortable, be able to concentrate, reach their full potential and work and play sport as they decide, and not be limited by preventable disability and a life in pain.”

Ms Taylor was speaking at a conference organised by Cardinus Risk Management where an e-learning programme was launched, designed to educate children about safe working. Healthy Working MOVE explains to young people how using electronic devices, carrying school bags and adopting different postures when working and relaxing can affect their bodies. The e-learning programme will be offered free-of-charge to every primary school, secondary school and college in the UK and teaches children how to use technology comfortably and safely.

It has been developed by Cardinus Risk Management in association with the Health and Safety Laboratory, an agency of the Health and Safety Executive. The e-learning is based on the award-winning course Healthy Working that helps to protect adult workers around the world.

The information, advice and guidance in Healthy Working MOVE has been redesigned and re-presented in ways that will have strong appeal for children and young people. There is a version for primary school children, a version for secondary school children and another for students in higher education.

Jon Abbott, managing director – ergonomics and safety at Cardinus, said, “For many years we have recognised the risk of ergonomics injuries to adults in the workplace and the DSE regulations are designed to reduce risk. Our younger generations are using technology more regularly at school and home and yet we are failing to recognise the risks. It cannot be right that we work so hard to protect the working population but fail to recognise the

impact technology has on children at a critical stage of their physiological development.

“I am delighted that Cardinus is in a position to help. Along with our partners at the Health and Safety Laboratory, we are in a great position to help protect children. Healthy Working MOVE is our first response to the problem and we have taken the decision to make it available free to education establishments across the country.”

Back pain among children is not new. There have been previous studies that showed similar issues. In 1994 a study of school children in Scandinavia revealed that 41.6 per cent suffered back pain while sitting in class; 30 per cent reported pain after sitting for less than one hour and 70 per cent suffering after sitting for longer than two hours. Twenty years on very little has been done to protect children and the statistics appear to be getting worse.

Healthy Working, the innovative online DSE assessment and e-learning solution, provides award-winning solutions that are fully endorsed by the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management. (IIRSM)

Healthy Working MOVE takes all the expertise that went into Healthy Working and presents it in a format that young people will enjoy and that is available completely free of charge to all schools and colleges. Healthy Working MOVE is supported by IIRSM, NEBOSH, IEHF and Jolly Back (Back Care and Ergonomics for Children). For more information, schools and colleges should telephone 020 7469 0200.

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