

TRICARE's Back-to-School Safety Check

by Sharon Foster

All military kids should have a healthy, injury-free school year. TRICARE would like to highlight some common safety tips that may help parents as they prepare their kids for the new school year.

Backpacks and Back Pains

Everyone hates to see a 40-pound child, waiting for the school bus, bent over from the weight of a 60-pound backpack strapped to his back. Heavy backpacks place significant strain on children's spines. This can lead to severe back, neck and shoulder pain, as well as posture problems, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS). When choosing a backpack, parents should look for some of these features:

- Wide, padded, two shoulder straps
- Padded back
- Waist strap
- Lightweight, rolling backpack

It is recommended that a child's backpack weigh no more than 10 to 15 percent of his or her body weight. Kids should always use both straps and make sure the straps are tight so that the pack fits closely to the body.

For more information on backpack safety, go to the AAOS's website at <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00043> or the Nemours Foundation at <http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/backpack.html>.

Getting to School Safely

Whether a child walks or takes the bus, there are things parents can do to make sure they get there safely. The American Academy of Pediatrics has these tips:

For walkers:

- Make sure the child has a safe route with adult crossing guards at intersections
- Be realistic about whether a child is ready to walk to school alone
- In neighborhoods with higher levels of traffic, consider a "walking school bus" where an adult accompanies a group of children on the walk to school

For bus riders:

- If the bus has seat belts, make sure children use them at all times

- Kids should wait for the bus to stop before approaching it
- Check to see that there is no traffic coming before crossing the street



Photo by Jennifer G. Williams

Playground Injuries

The playground is a favorite of many young children but sometimes they can get hurt, often due to falls. The most common playground injuries are bruises, cuts, sprains and fractures. Because all playgrounds can present challenges and because children can be expected to use equipment in unintended and unanticipated ways, adult supervision is always recommended.

Parents and teachers should also:

- Make sure there is an appropriate surface under and around playground equipment
- Check for spaces where children can get their head or extremities caught
- Make sure platforms and ramps have guardrails
- Remove any trip hazards
- Make sure children do not attach jump ropes, clotheslines, dog leashes, etc. to playground equipment

For more information on playground safety, go to the Department of Health and Human Services' website at www.hhs.gov.

Sports Safety

With today's emphasis on physical activity, many parents are turning to organized sports for their kids. The options available to kids are limitless — soccer, football, basketball, cheerleading, lacrosse, gymnastics and track/field. Playing sports can be

fun, but they can also be dangerous if a child is not careful. Parents can help prevent injuries by:

- Getting their child a physical to make sure he or she is healthy before starting a sport
- Making sure their child wears protective gear such as helmets and protective pads
- Making sure their child warms up and stretches before sports
- Making sure their child wears the right shoes, gear and equipment
- Making sure their child drinks plenty of water

For more information on sports safety, go to the National Library of Medicine's website (www.nlm.nih.gov).

Head Lice

Lice are not dangerous and they don't spread disease but they are annoying. Schools and childcare settings are prime opportunities for head lice. The most common way to get head lice are by head-to-head contact with a person who already has head lice. Steps kids and their parents can take to prevent and control the spread of head lice include:

- No head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play
- Not sharing clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons or barrettes
- Keeping long hair up in pony tails or braids
- Not sharing combs, brushes or towels

Both over-the-counter products and prescription treatments are available to treat head lice. Parents can check their doctor, pharmacist or local health department for more information about products that treat head lice. For more information on head lice, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/index.html.

TRICARE hopes parents find these tips helpful in making the transition back to school and protecting their children from the most frequent kinds of school-related injuries. ●