

No homework for Classes 1 & 2, kids' bags to get lighter

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New Delhi: Children's schoolbags are set to get lighter as several states and Union territories are acting on a recent communication from the Centre to formulate guidelines that set out the maximum weight in accordance to the class in which students are enrolled.

The HRD ministry, which had announced "rationalisation" of school syllabi by culling irrelevant or obsolete content, has said Class X schoolbags must not exceed 5kg, while for Classes I and II, they shouldn't be over 1.5kg. The norm for Classes III to V is between 2-3kg, for VI and VII 4kg, and 4.5kg for Classes VIII and IX.

The Centre's letter to states, UTs and education boards also says there will be no "homework" for Classes I and II, and no subject other than language and mathematics will be prescribed for these classes. For Classes III to V, schools will teach only environmental science, maths and languages as prescribed by NCERT. The letter asks states to "formulate guidelines to regulate the teaching of subjects and of schoolbags in accordance with government of India instructions".

Ensure students don't carry additional books, extra materials: Centre

► From P 1

Following the communication, some states issued circulars to education departments to comply with the directions with immediate effect. Some like Delhi said they have not yet received the MHRD's letter, which was issued last month.

The Centre's move is in keeping with the MHRD's initiatives to reduce schoolbag weight and also rationalise teaching calendars to ensure more time for non-academic activities like sports and other skills.

While setting class-wise weight limit on schoolbags, the Centre has asked states and UTs and education boards to ensure "students should not be asked to bring additional books, extra materials". While Lakshadweep administration has implemented the guidelines with immediate effect, some other states like Karnataka will issue their norms based on the MHRD's direction.

The ill-effects of heavy schoolbags may not be immediately evident but physicians say they can have an adverse impact on the nervous system besides being a physical burden for kids. Dr Ramneek Mahajan, director, orthopaedics and joint replacement, Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi, said heavy schoolbags can cause lasting damage like spinal deformities as children's skeletal frames are not fully formed.

"The excess weight puts undue stress on muscles, ligaments and discs and damages them. Children develop a forward head posture as they are swinging forward at the hip to compensate for the heavy weight. In the long term, they develop imbalances that can affect the nervous system," he said.
