Study shows prevalence of back pain in children and adolescents, and increased rates associated with increasing age

LAS VEGAS (March 12, 2019)—A new study presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) highlights the frequency of back pain in children and adolescents and suggests there is a significant linear increase in back pain, specifically in the lower back as kids age from 10 to 18-years-old.

Up until this point, there has been no known large-scale epidemiologic study of back pain in a representative cohort of American children. Because of this, Peter D. Fabricant, MD, MPH, orthopaedic surgeon at the Hospital of Special Surgery in New York City, and his colleagues surveyed a representative cohort of children and adolescents across the United States and documented the findings in “The Epidemiology of Back Pain in Children and Adolescents: A Cross-Sectional Study of 3,669 American Youth.”

The subjects were equally split by age and sex, and proportionally representative of the population of state of residence, race/ethnicity, and health insurance status as determined by census data. After outlier subjects with an unusually high or low height, weight or BMI were excluded (in order to eliminate outlier responses), 3,669 participants were included in the final analysis.

Among the findings of the research:

- Back pain is common in children and adolescents, and the incidence of children who experienced pain in the past year increases linearly with age (about four percent for each year of age).
- Of the cohort, 33.7 percent (n=1,236) had some episode of back pain in the previous year and only 40.9 percent of this group sought treatment such as physical therapy (44 percent), massage therapy (33.9 percent) and chiropractic treatment (34.1 percent).
- While back pain is common in children and adolescents, it very rarely requires invasive treatment such as injections or surgery, as less than 5 percent (n=23) of the 40.9 percent who sought treatment needed surgical or procedural intervention.
- Females reported more back pain (38 percent) compared to males (29 percent) in the previous year and, among both groups, lumbar back pain was the most common at 68.9 percent.

“While adult back pain has been widely quantified and studied, there has been little research looking into similar effects on children and adolescents,” said Dr. Fabricant. “We know that it’s a real issue affecting kids and this study allowed us to collect a vast amount of data and provide a high-level analysis. Now we can use these results to further study specific activity-based, physiological, and psychosocial contributors to back pain in this population.”

# # #
About the AAOS
With more than 39,000 members, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons is the world’s largest medical association of musculoskeletal specialists. The AAOS is the trusted leader in advancing musculoskeletal health. It provides the highest quality, most comprehensive education to help orthopaedic surgeons and allied health professionals at every career level best treat patients in their daily practices. The AAOS is the source for information on bone and joint conditions, treatments and related musculoskeletal health care issues and it leads the health care discussion on advancing quality.

For more information, contact:
Kayee Ip 847-384-4035 312-543-3211 ip@aaos.org
Lauren P. Riley 847-384-4031 708-227-1773 pearson@aaos.org