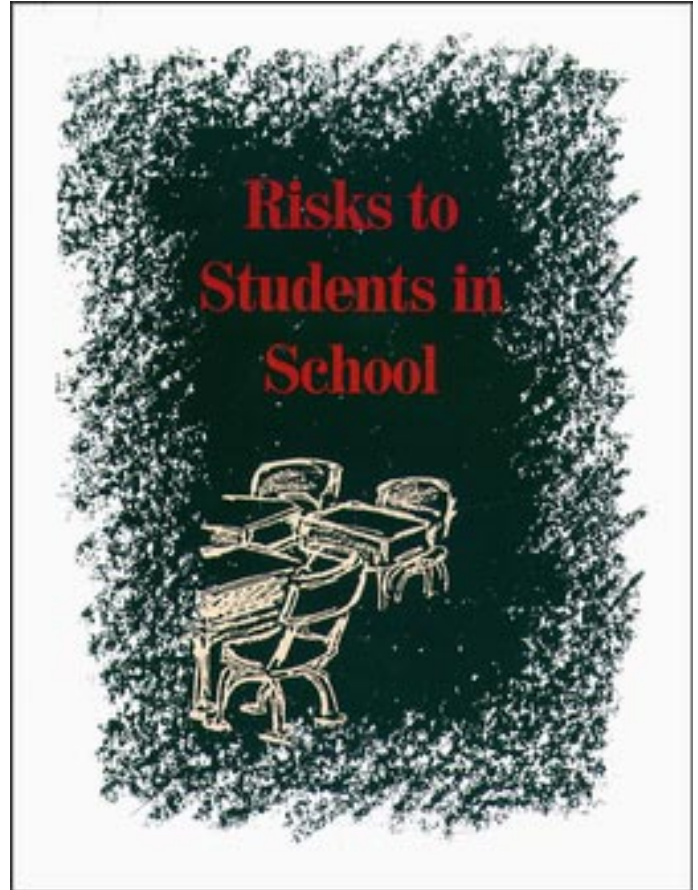


Risks to Students in School

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Foreword

School-aged children encounter a wide variety of hazards every day. While the leading causes of mortality for this age group are hazards that typically occur outside of the school environment, many hazards resulting in injury or illness exist in schools. These hazards confront children on their way to school, in the classroom, in the use of potentially hazardous materials in science, art, and industrial arts courses, on playgrounds, in gymnasiums, on athletic fields, and on their way home.

Because of congressional interest in the health and safety of school children, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the House Committee on Education and Labor requested the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) to assess the available data on hazards to children in schools in the United States. A letter of support was received from the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources. As directed, this study focuses on unintentional and intentional injuries (particularly violence) and illnesses from infectious diseases and environmental hazards (school materials, indoor air contaminants, and electromagnetic force).

In addition to estimating the likelihood of injuries and illnesses in schools, OTA considered the quality, relevance, and predictive value of the available data about health and safety risks by examining how the data were collected and interpreted. For many of the hazards in the school environment, the underpinning scientific research is incomplete and thus of limited use. This report does not, however, compare or rank risks. Decisionmakers, from Congress to individual school boards, are likely to want much more information than just numbers of deaths, illnesses, and injuries when setting priorities for improving school safety. Public fear of particular risks and the feasibility and cost of reducing the risk are among other very important considerations. As such, this background paper represents the first step in the process of setting priorities in risk reduction.

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