

Health risks to children associated with forced retention of body waste

A statement by health care professionals

The practice by school teachers and other caretakers of delaying or preventing children from eliminating body waste is commonplace. The so-called 'bathroom privilege' in schools is often seen as precisely that: a privilege, not a necessity or a right. Sometimes, denial of students' access to rest rooms is done for punitive reasons. More commonly, rigid scheduling or denial of toilet use is done for the sake of the caretakers' convenience. In the case of young children, for whom bladder and bowel control have not been fully mastered, denying a child the opportunity for prompt relief when the need arises can have serious, long-lasting physical and psychological consequences. For individuals of any age, forced retention of body waste not only carries serious health risks, but constitutes a violation of a fundamental human right.

RISKS TO HEALTH

urinary tract infection, urgency incontinence, overflow incontinence, poor drainage of urine from the kidneys, reflux of urine up towards the kidneys, deterioration of kidney function over time from backpressure, kidney infections, loss of bladder elasticity, over-stretching the bladder beyond its normal capacity, accumulation of urinary waste products in the blood (uremia), spasms of sphincter muscles, involuntary retention of urine (urochesis), inflammation of the bladder walls,	inability to empty the bladder fully, painful urination, desensitization of the brain to cues that signal the need to empty the bladder or bowels, constipation, bowel obstructions, irritable bowel syndrome, absorption of toxic fecal products, bowel incontinence, sexual fetishes involving retention/elimination of urine (urolagnia), sexual fetishes involving retention/elimination of feces.
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We, the undersigned, deem the practice of denying, delaying, discouraging, penalizing or interfering in any way with a child's normal bodily function of waste elimination, or failure to accommodate that need, to be forms of child abuse and neglect. We call upon educators, school administrators, education policymakers and others in positions of public influence to strongly discourage these practices, and to inform all caretakers of the involved risks.

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