

Lung infection brought from spring break spreads to 37 campuses

by Susan FitzGerald
Knight-Ridder Newspapers
April 11, 2001

Federal health officials are investigating more than 200 cases of students who developed an acute respiratory illness that they suspect is histoplasmosis.

The students are from 37 colleges and universities in 18 states, but nearly all of them had one thing in common -- they vacationed in Acapulco during March and stayed at or visited the Calinda Beach Hotel there, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The first outbreak was picked up by an alert student health physician late last month at Villanova, where 29 students got sick about two weeks after returning home. Similar cases have been identified from Massachusetts to Missouri. Locally, some students at Rutgers University, Muhlenberg College in Allentown and Pennsylvania State University, fell ill.

Histoplasmosis is a fungal disease that primarily affects the lungs and can be deadly in people with other health problems. The fungal spores involved thrive in dirt rich in bird and bat droppings and can be breathed in when soil is disturbed.

"There was some construction going on around the hotel," said Dr. Rana Hajjeh, a CDC epidemiologist in Atlanta, who is heading the investigation. But she said it would be premature to conclude the hotel site was the source of the infection because "the hotel is not the only link that is common."

She said there was also construction near certain bars and nightclubs the students tended to frequent.

Hajjeh said CDC officials are in consultation with the Mexico Ministry of Health, which is conducting its own investigation. The Calinda Beach Hotel has not been shut down, she said.

While it suspects histoplasmosis, the CDC so far has tentatively confirmed only one of the more than 200 cases under investigation, Hajjeh said. That was from a lung biopsy done on a student at Washington University in St. Louis.

Dr. Richard Pacropis, an internal medicine specialist who directs student health at Villanova, set off a national alert among college campuses after he figured out what was likely bringing so many students into his infirmary.

On March 28, a student came in with a high fever, muscle aches, chest pain, dry coughing and weakness, and she was soon followed by others with

similar symptoms.

"We had 29 students over a four- to five-day period," said Pacropis. Six of them ended up at Bryn Mawr Hospital, where Pacropis is on staff. In taking medical histories on the students, he learned that all of them had spent the March 3-11 spring break in Acapulco.

They didn't appear to have the more predictable illnesses, such as flu or mononucleosis. But chest X-rays revealed a fungal infection of the lungs. Because the infection has a 2- to 21/2-week incubation period, the students had felt fine when they first came back to campus.

Carissa Giardino, 21, a Villanova senior from Doylestown, Pa., said she was among a group of 29 Villanova women who spent about \$850 each for a package deal that included airfare and a week's stay at the Calinda Beach Hotel.

After getting back to classes, she began to experience a high fever, muscle aches, fatigue "and a lot of soreness in the chest; it hurt to breathe normally."

When she didn't get better after a week and heard of a friend who had a suspected case of histoplasmosis, she went to the emergency room at Bryn Mawr Hospital.

The sickness wiped her out. "I didn't do anything but go to classes

for two weeks," Giardino said.

Pacropis said the most seriously ill students were given a 28-day course of anti-fungal medicine. All 29 students are now recovered.

Pacropis reported the cases of suspected histoplasmosis to the Pennsylvania Health Department, which entered the investigation and in turn alerted the CDC.

From his students, he learned the names of other colleges with students staying at the same hotel and took it upon himself to alert their medical directors. He said he has received calls from around the country.

One Penn State student who stayed at the Calinda Beach Hotel is now being evaluated for histoplasmosis, according to a university spokesperson.

Sam Miranda, head of student health at Muhlenberg, said his center has identified seven possible cases among students who spent spring break in Acapulco. All are back to good health.

Hajjeh, of the CDC, said histoplasmosis is a disease that routinely pops up around the country, particularly in areas such as the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, where the soil is rich in the fungus.

"We've had a lot of outbreaks," she said. "But this is the first one of such multi-state magnitude."

Bush budget includes slight increase in spending for higher education

by Matthew McGuire
TMS Campus
April 10, 2001

While President George W. Bush's recent budget proposal has focused on slashing the federal budget over the next 10 years, education programs affecting colleges and universities saw increases in funding, or at the very least, went untouched.

The bulk of Bush's proposed increases in education spending will go to elementary and secondary education programs, while college students will benefit from increases in financial aid and programs to promote success among disadvantaged students.

Under the new budget, Bush proposes spending an extra \$1 billion on Pell Grants to provide disadvantaged students with financial assistance for college. The increase would boost the maximum award by \$100 to \$3,850, the highest amount ever awarded.

Federal student loans also get a \$37 billion increase through two programs -- the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) and the Federal Direct Student Loan (FDSL).

While the House approved the Bush plan unchanged, the Senate voted last week to reduce his \$1.6 trillion tax cut by more than one-quarter and add \$250 billion to Pell Grants and other education programs over a 10-year period.

The American Council on Education was dissatisfied with the Bush's recent budget proposal, but applauded the Senate's budget proposal with the additional funding.

"We are disappointed by this budget proposal, particularly the funding for need-based student aid," the American Council on Education said in a statement. "...As this process moves forward, we will work to see

that the final spending levels match the Senate's budget resolution as closely as possible."

Other post-secondary programs that typically service students with "demonstrated financial need" received no increase in funding.

The work study program, which provides grants to pay wages of students to pay college costs, and the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) program, which provides grant assistance of up to \$4,000 for students, will keep the same amount of funding in Bush's proposed budget.

The Perkins Loan, which provides loans to students with financial needs, also received no additional funding along with the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program, which provides federal funds for state grant programs and provides community service programs to help financially needy students pay for college.

Other financial aid programs, however, were given a boost.

The proposal calls for an increase in the amount of money the federal government will forgive teachers employed at high-poverty schools. Currently teachers may have up to \$5,000 of their federal loans forgiven after teaching for five years, however, under Bush's plan students who majored in math and science and teach those subjects in high-need schools could have up to \$17,500 forgiven.

Outreach and tutoring programs, such as TRIO, which helps disadvantaged individuals enter and complete post-secondary education programs, will get a \$50 million increase. Bush's plan also calls for a \$15 million increase in aid to colleges and universities that primarily serve black and Hispanic populations.

Racist flyer surfaces at UC Davis as appeal over student election lingers

by Billy O'Keefe
TMS Campus
April 10, 2001

Campus police offers at the University of California, Davis are warning student government leaders to take precautions after racist literature decrying the results of a recent student election turned up on campus.

The flyers, which claim to be the work of the Ku Klux Klan's Davis Knights, allege that officials should overturn the results of the election because the winners include students who are African American and gay.

"Only pure white heterosexuals can really be expected to follow the rules since they're the only ones capable of understanding them," states the flyer, which claims that the minorities cheated in order to win their respective races.

Campus police spokesperson Paul Pfothenauer said that they are looking for the source of the flyers but added that no crime has been committed. The most important factor right now, he said, is the safety of the students involved.

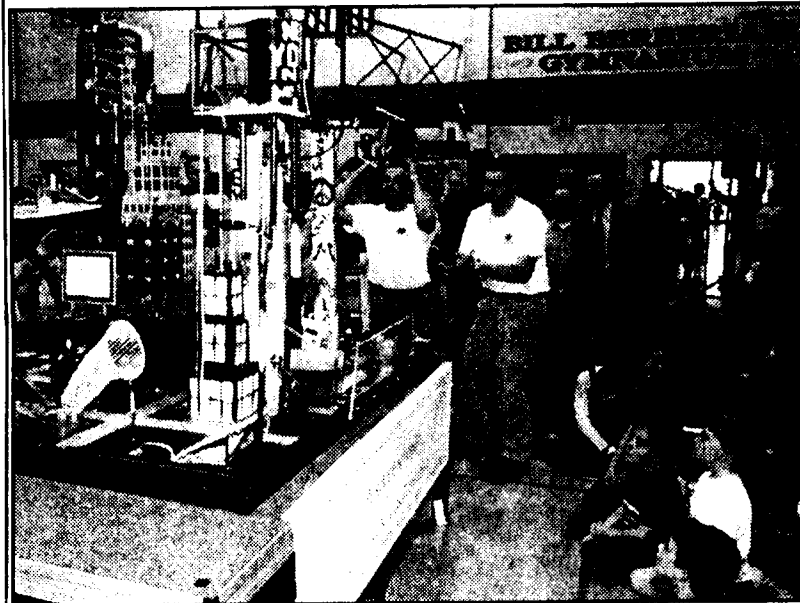
"We'll provide them with as much safety as we can," he said. "That's our biggest concern right now."

Pfothenauer said that flyers have been found near the library and a building that houses programs covering ethnic studies, and that one student has reported receiving a flyer near her apartment building.

The election, which took place Feb. 20, is currently on appeal. Students on at least 10 separate occasions have voiced complaints about the behavior of the Leadership Empowerment Activism Determination party on the day of the election. Students allege, among other things, that LEAD party supporters were campaigning near the polling place while students voted, a violation of election rules.

The party swept the election, winning the presidential race and all six vacant slots on the student senate.

Engineers at The Big Apple?



PURDUE NEWS SERVICE/DAVID UMBERGER

Purdue Society of Manufacturing Engineers team members Beau Wendholt and Mark Pund, both from Ferdinand, Ind., react to a successful run of their machine, "The Big Apple." The team's contraption claimed first place last week in the 2001 National Rube Goldberg Machine Contest at West Lafayette High School. Competitors in the 13th annual event had to build a machine to select, clean and peel an apple without human intervention.

NCAA looks at easing eligibility requirements

by Matthew McGuire
TMS Campus
April 9, 2001

Following close behind NCAA regulations that took place in Division II athletics earlier this year, the NCAA could loosen regulations that would allow athletes to compete in college sports after spending one year in the pros.

The NCAA management council is meeting April 9 and 10 to discuss a controversial slate of changes.

If approved, the changes would allow high school players to accept prize money, sign contracts, compete with professionals, earn money fol-

lowing graduation and enter the draft, while keeping their eligibility.

Students would only be able to participate in Division I athletics if they spent one year or less playing for a professional team, and they would lose one year of eligibility. Recent Division II legislation allows an athlete to participate in athletics after three years of professional play, with the athlete losing one year of eligibility for each year of pro participation.

If the NCAA management council approves the legislation, the NCAA board of directors must also approve it before the management council finalizes its vote in October.

Students grill GE chairman on money, employees and more

TMS Campus
April 10, 2001

Students at Fairfield University in Connecticut pulled no punches during a question-and-answer session with General Electric Chairman Jack Welch.

Students questioned everything from Welch's religious beliefs to his \$76 million dollar salary last year, as well as company policies on employee benefits and the environment.

Speaking before more than 500 students, Welch, 65, defended his company, saying that GE, which is based out of Fairfield, has created more than 300,000 jobs and produced more than 19,000 millionaires, mostly through stock options.

Welch made no excuses about his salary, \$56 million of which was generated through stock options. But when students questioned the disparity between Welch's salary and the poverty-level wages of workers in Mexico, the chairman, who will step down this year after serving for two decades, swiftly defended his company, claiming that "no one came to GE with a gun to their head."

When asked why all employees weren't entitled to stock options, Welch called such an idea "the dumbest idea in the world" and defended the system as one based on reward rather than a basic employee right.

Welch, who earned the nickname "Neutron Jack" after he initiated a series of layoffs upon taking the helm in 1981 as GE's chairman, defended his practices Monday, saying that firing people, while never easy, is a part of running an efficient business.

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