

# Scope of virus now being understood by scientists

By Daniel Q. Haney  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Something called the metapneumovirus, discovered just two years ago, is turning out to be an exceedingly common cause of human misery, responsible for garden-variety colds in grown-ups and more severe coughing, wheezing and congestion in children.

Researchers are beginning to piece together the scope of this ubiquitous but overlooked bug, which now appears to afflict just about everybody, probably over and over.

Even though the virus seems to be rarely serious, its vast presence intrigues microbiologists, and it is one of the most talked-about topics at this week's meeting in Chicago of the American Society for Microbiology.

Experts say the metapneumovirus is almost certainly not a new bug but something that has been around for eons.

Like many other respiratory bugs, this one is most likely to cause severe illness in infants encountering it for the first time. Although repeat infections are thought to be common, they result in much less intense illness, often just an ordinary cold or perhaps no symptoms at all. However, the bug may cause more serious problems in the elderly and people with other medical conditions.

Although new microbes, such as the ones that cause AIDS and SARS, are occasionally recognized, it is unusual to discover a virus as omnipresent as this.

"Thousands of hospitalizations occur every year due to this virus in infants," said Dr.

James Crowe Jr. of Vanderbilt University.

His research suggests that the metapneumovirus is second only to respiratory syncytial virus as a cause of severe lower respiratory infections in the young, occurring about two-thirds as often. Both viruses are members of the paramyxovirus family.

*"When we put this in perspective, it appears to be the second most common cause of respiratory illnesses in children."*

— Dr. James Crowe Jr.  
Vanderbilt University

Crowe's team looked at nasal specimens taken from 2,000 children after they were treated for lower respiratory infections since 1976.

The newly discovered virus turned out to cause about 12 percent of these severe illnesses. They also caused 15 percent of common colds in children, including one-third of the colds complicated by middle-ear infections.

"When we put this in perspective, it appears to be the second most common cause of respiratory illnesses in children," he said.

The virus went undiscovered because it does not grow well in cell cultures, a standard tool for sorting out the viruses that cause human disease. It was identified in 2001 by researchers from Erasmus

Medical Center in Rotterdam. They calculated that every child catches the virus by age 5.

As with many respiratory viruses, such as the rhinoviruses and coronaviruses that cause many colds, the body does not remember the metapneumovirus clearly and so contracts it over and over, even though repeat bouts seem milder.

Now that scientists know what to look for, they can search out the virus' genetic footprint in nasal secretions. This way, they are trying to assess how often — and how severely — makes people sick through life.

"At least in adults, we are figuring out whether it is a big deal. It is a little too early to say," said Dr. Ann Falsey of the University of Rochester.

Nevertheless, she said, it is probably a source of recurrent colds, although they may be less common than ones caused by the rhinoviruses, long considered the classic cold bug.

Without testing, victims cannot tell what sort of virus is causing their sniffles. However, Falsey said, it appears that hoarseness occurs more often a symptom of metapneumovirus colds.

In other studies discussed at the conference:

— Researchers from McGill University looked at elderly patients hospitalized with pneumonia or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The metapneumovirus was found in 2 percent, which was the same as influenza A.

— A team from Hadassah University in Jerusalem looked for signs of metapneumovirus infection in children. They found that one-third had been infected by their first birthday and half had it by age 2.



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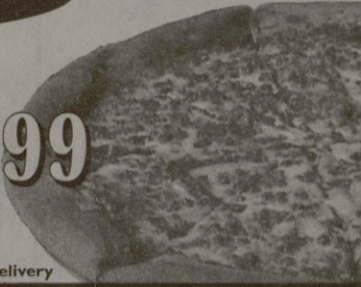
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account reports • questionable procedures

"The controls insufficient," Kibler said. The MSC has forced to study the financing side.

Catherine Smith, auditor of the System, said the evidence that pointed to person's involvement.

"Poor records to prove anything reasonable doubt," was a system's controls. It would not see i A&M department.

Auditor Robin Smith and fellow auditor found no crime had occurred.

Wood's said phone calls to District Attorney University Police James Lindholm recaps of the audit.

"We could not a crime had occurred. It's not a criminal weren't good records."

However, Wood's inability to address the legality surrounding mismanagement.

"That would be the DA's office of Smock said phone calls were placed were pretty sure management agencies in the case.

"We wanted to occur with what we she said.

Turner's official statement Wednesday reviewed the audit at this point agreed insufficient records track the loss. Absent a police includes witness are unable to determine activity is involved.

Other students have also had financial issues.

When the final one student short earlier this year discovered the student organizing signatures money, Kibler said.

"At that point criminal act, and UPD," he said.

Between April of this year, some of about \$1,300 in the office of Cadets, located in UPD Maj. Joseph

"The room who took it, w Anyone could have said.

At this point, more that can be determine where \$61,000 of missing funds went, Kibler

"You can never prove something right," he said.

Smith agreed cases, there's not done once the pay

"In a lot of crimes, people cut," she said.

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