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Flu outbreak spans country, killing at least 10 children

By Angela Brown
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT WORTH, Texas — Tissues are disappearing so rapidly from teacher Irma Natoli's desk that she's resorted to handing out paper towels to sniffing seventh- and eighth-graders struggling with flu symptoms.

"We've gone through boxes of them," said Natoli, who teaches at Morningside International Academy, a Fort Worth school for sixth- through eighth-graders. "They are constantly going to the bathroom for toilet paper and to wash their hands."

As a nasty flu outbreak spreads across the country, schools are reporting more empty seats as parents keep children at home to recuperate or to protect them.

The flu is being blamed for the deaths of at least five children in Colorado, three in Texas and one each in Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Children are particularly susceptible because their bodies have not previously been exposed to the virus that infects the nose, throat and lungs, according to the

federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Children's Medical Center Dallas has seen more than 500 children with the flu since October. On Thursday more than two dozen were in the intensive care unit, Dr. Jane Siegel said.

"Most of those children require IV fluids ... and most have significant enough lung disease so they're on a ventilator," she said.

In a typical year 36,000 Americans die from the influenza virus, but flu researchers expect a higher death toll this year.

The flu season usually stretches from October to May, peaking in December and January, but this year cases were reported in some Western states as early as September.

Texas was the first state this season where the flu was considered widespread, the CDC's most severe ranking. Nine other states — Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Arkansas, Tennessee and Pennsylvania — have since been classified as having widespread flu outbreaks.

More than 6,300 flu cases

have been reported in Colorado, more than in the previous two years combined. North Dakota has tallied 292 flu cases so far, compared to just two this time last year.

Many states, including Texas, do not calculate the number of flu cases because they are not required to report such cases to the CDC.

Most of the outbreak this fall has been a strain called A-Fujian-H3N2, which was not selected for this year's flu vaccine, according to the CDC. Health experts say the strain is closely related to the strain the vaccine targets, A-Panama-H3N2.

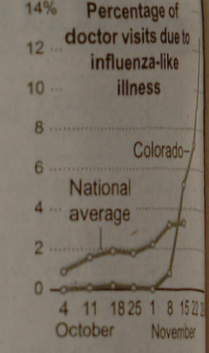
The high number of cases has prompted more people to seek flu shots this year. More than a dozen stood in line Thursday outside Fort Worth's Bagsby-Williams Public Health Center.

"I just got over the flu, and I don't want to go through anything like that again," day care worker Cynthia Bolen said. "It gets to your bones. You don't want to eat and you just ache. It's a thing that will paralyze you."

The outbreak in Texas started last month in Houston and spread quickly, according to the

Flu hits Colorado

Colorado has seen a spike in flu-like illness well above its national average.



NOTE: National figures not available for Nov. 22 and 29; national average includes data for Colorado.

SOURCES: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

state Health Department's weekly number of cases at Children's Hospital in Houston peaked at 129 in mid-October. In previous years, the hospital averaged 10 or fewer cases during the season.

Hospitals are taking precautions. Wyoming's County Memorial Hospital restricted anybody under 18 from visiting patients. And the Plains Regional Medical Center in North Platte, Neb., is asking one with even mild flu symptoms — runny nose, sore throat — to put on a mask before visiting someone.

Senate

Continued from page 1

Rights and Labor Standards Investigation Bill on its second reading. The bill provides that the student body president form a committee to research the labor conditions in factories where A&M-licensed clothing is manufactured and communicate those findings with the administration and organizations at other universities.

Freshman senator Will Hailey, a freshman political science major, said the legislation was a positive step for the Senate to take.

"The Aggie Spirit dictates that we use what we've been given to help those less fortunate than ourselves," he said.

A report on sidewalk, lighting and water drainage compiled by the Student Services committee that included problem areas on campus, will be submitted to the

Physical Plant

Robin Cappell, a senior accounting major and chair of the Student Services Fee Advisory Board, presented the recommendations for the distribution of the student services fee for the coming year to the Senate on first reading, and the Senate will debate whether to accept the board's recommendation at the next meeting on Jan. 28.

A bill designed to let students vote on the proposed 65 cent increase per credit hour, which would raise the student services fee cap 12 cents past the \$150 limit currently in place, passed on first reading. Once the \$150 limit has been passed, the University is allowed to raise the fee 10 percent each year, and the new limit would then be \$250.

A bill to dissolve two graduate senate seats failed, as did a resolution thanking the Graduate Student Council for its Diversity statement.

Both measures were introduced by graduate senators Jackie Price and Cassia Rutherford.

A diversity resolution endorsed by GSC last month included a statement of support for the Rainbow Graduate Student Association, a group that represents lesbian, bisexual and transgendered graduate students.

Price said she was disappointed by the Senate's lack of approval for the resolution, and that her graduate school constituents requested she introduce the resolution as a show of support for the GSC efforts.

The voting disclosure bill, supported by Mark McCaig, a junior marketing major and the senator he recently attempted recall, junior political science major Teems, would prevent secret balloting being used to vote in the Senate. It passed first reading.

Tuition

Continued from page 1

stances, there has been broad support.

Rusty Ince, a senior psychology and government major and a member of the committee at UT, said the administration was receptive to proposals put forth by the committee.

"We looked at all factors and how much we needed and what was fair," Ince said. "Every question we asked, every consideration we had was taken into account. Our input is a crucial piece of this process. We are not rubber stamping what the university puts out for us."

Ince said the committee focused on student input. The

committee held forums, put materials on the Web, held a Web forum and talked to their respective constituencies to get input and suggestions. Ince said a majority of the students at the public forums were understanding about the tuition increases.

"I would recommend this for every institution," Ince said.

Ince said that with the tuition increases to take effect in Spring 2003, the committee helped to fund 60 percent of the university's deficit.

"As the move forward with new freedom in regards to tuition, this is another mechanism to ensure that changes in the system are reasonable and applicable for Texas A&M," Josefy said. "Fortunately, we have an administration that is responsive to student's needs."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Study: Low to moderate drinking may cause people to lose brain tissue

DALLAS (AP) — Low to moderate drinking may cause a loss of brain tissue in middle-age people, a study found.

The researchers also found that such alcohol consumption does not lower the risk of a stroke — contradicting findings from previous studies.

Using magnetic resonance imaging, or MRIs, researchers measured the patients' ventricular and sulcal areas — of the brain containing only cerebrospinal fluid. Increased ventricular and sulcal size indicates a reduction in brain tissue, or atrophy.

The findings showed that both voids grew larger more people drank.

Research associate Dr. Jingzhong Ding said researchers cannot make a definitive cause-and-effect link between drinking and brain atrophy because the study were done only once during the study and because they found only a small reduction in tissue.

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