Stomach Flu Closes College Campus

By Julianna LeMieux — April 30, 2018

For any student, the news that classes are canceled is like hitting the jackpot. An unexpected day off with no worries, no exams, and nothing to do.

Unless, of course, the reason for the cancellation is that a significant portion of the campus has fallen ill with norovirus - sometimes referred to as the "stomach flu." That is a different type of day off altogether and one that happened at Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) last week.

It is not uncommon for a college to be affected by a norovirus outbreak. Settings such as a campus are where norovirus can do the most damage - where many people live in close quarters. Norovirus has been known to send cruise ships to the docks when an outbreak emerges onboard.

Norovirus is relatively common, causing 19-21 million cases each year that result in about 56,000–71,000 hospitalizations and 570-800 deaths, mostly among young children and the elderly.

That said, shutting down an entire college campus is quite remarkable.

The good news is that norovirus is usually quick. Symptoms (diarrhea, vomiting and stomach pain) start quickly, within 12-28 hours after exposure. Although the brevity does not take away from how awful it can be, within 24-36 hours after it starts, it is usually over. This is good news for a college campus which can expect one or two awful weeks followed by a relatively quick tapering off.

Due to the excessive vomiting and diarrhea, dehydration is a common occurrence and should be taken seriously. Symptoms of dehydration are a decrease in urination, dry mouth and throat and feeling dizzy upon standing up.
So, when the number of cases at reached into the hundreds (213 cases of norovirus at WCSU have been reported so far) the college president, Dr. John B. Clark, issued this statement.

Dear members of our university community,

Since the safety and security of our students, faculty and staff are of our utmost concern, Western Connecticut State University will be closed Monday, April 23, in response to the illness that has affected approximately 100 students. Although we are aware of a limited number of affected students, based on our discussions with the Connecticut Department of Health, the Danbury Department of Health, Danbury Hospital and the WCSU Director of Health Services, we have decided this is the best and most conservative course of action to protect our university community from infection and spread of the disease.

Let's hope that the ongoing recovery support for students who were (or are) infected and the closing of the campus to halt new infections will serve their purpose. With only one month left in the semester and the snow days (hopefully) behind us, it would be nice to have an uneventful remainder of the semester.

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