

Flu bug hits area schools

Although Farmington's St. Fabian's School is the only school to have closed because of student illness thus far, the flu bug has taken its toll in absenteeism in Farmington schools.

St. Fabian's closed Tuesday and Wednesday of this week because about 97 students were reported absent by noon Monday, approximately one third of the student enrollment.

"We're hoping to prevent it from spreading," said Helen Ryan, school secretary, explaining that St. Fabian officials had discussed the closing with the Archdiocese of Detroit.

"Last week, we had between 50-60 students out, so absenteeism was definitely going up," she said, commenting on the first time St. Fabian had closed because of illness.

Farmington Public Schools' absenteeism is running slightly higher than the average, according to Supt. Lewis Schuman, with the highest absenteeism being recorded in the junior highs.

"We're running about 9-10 per cent absenteeism in the elementary schools," Schuman said. "It's the usual run of respiratory illnesses."

February usually has the highest absentee rate, according to Oakland County Health official Joyce Paape, in charge of the Farmington and Clarendonville school districts.

SHE ISN'T ALARMED yet because the absenteeism isn't significantly high and because there are no reports of severe illness.

"We're getting reports of a number of respiratory illness but not all of them are diagnosed," she said. "It's usually a high fever and illness for four or five days, strep throat and scarlet fever just about like it is every year."

"What I keep my pulse on is how serious the illnesses are," she said, and she's worried more about March and a measles outbreak.

"Farmington happens to be pretty well protected, with about 97-98 per cent immunized. March is the month for measles, the severe kind, and it runs in cycles."

"Measles is a very damaging illness and unnecessary because we have a very effective vaccine."

It's up to the school officials to close a school because of illness, but Oakland County Health officials make recommendations, she says, using a 30 per cent absenteeism rate and severity of illnesses as guidelines.

Both Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary and Junior High Schools have about normal absenteeism for February, said school officials.

The elementary school had 50 out of 565 students out, but 20 students were out with chicken pox. "It's a little higher than usual, but not much," said a spokesman.

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