

Get your own beer! Swine flu spreading on campus

September 23 2009, By DORIE TURNER , Associated Press Writer



An Ole Miss decorated dispenser of hand sanitizer rest next to football themed napkins and an almost empty tray of crackers and dip, at the tailgate setup of the Deaton family of Booneville, outside the Vaught-Hemingway Stadium in Oxford, Miss., Saturday Sept. 19, 2009, prior to the home opener NCAA college football game against Southeastern Louisiana. Lori Deaton, who works as a medical technician, said her concern about Swine Flu led her to bringing the hand sanitizer. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

(AP) -- It's lurking in that awesome party just off the quad, hiding in the shot glasses passed from person to person and in the make-out sessions in the hallway.

Swine flu is swirling through the nation's campuses, but despite all the warnings, flu kits and prominently displayed jugs of hand sanitizer, many students, like Georgia Tech freshman Elise Woodall, just aren't

that worried.

"I drink my orange juice," she said. "I figure I'll be OK."

College administrators around the country are faced with a nearly insurmountable challenge: trying to stem the spread of the highly contagious [swine flu](#) virus amid the almost round-the-clock microbe-swapping behaviors of college students - many of whom are not all that concerned about the impending bug.

Since the first day of classes, colleges have asked students to isolate themselves once they begin coughing and sneezing, but the mild nature of this strain of flu has some students ignoring that advice, health center officials said. And just a few people with flu at a Saturday football game - which can mean 100,000 people in a stadium at some colleges - can turn into dozens more cases sitting in the waiting room of the student health center on Monday.

"When you're in the stadium with 90,000 of your closest friends, it's not exactly great infection control, especially when I look around and see people sharing a Coke," said Alan Blinder, a sophomore at the University of Alabama. "I know people are aware of the advice, but I don't know if they are applying it."

From random hookups at fraternity parties to the passing of beer cans in dorm rooms, germs have always made the rounds on campuses with the speed of a viral video.

"There's not a better way of transmitting germs than packing hundreds of young people into poorly ventilated party rooms and sharing glasses, smoking materials, playing beer pong and kissing," said Dr. James Turner, president of the American College Health Association and executive director of student health at the University of Virginia.

Combine higher education's already germ-soaked environment with the largely unpredictable flu bug, and epidemiologists fear the pandemic could explode this fall and winter as the seasonal flu and swine flu both hit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention even went as far as to recommend sick students wear surgical masks when they kiss.

Turner's association estimates more than 13,000 college students have had flulike symptoms in the last month at 250 colleges spread across the country, though there is no way to tell how many of those are swine flu because health officials are no longer testing every sick student. That data is the most comprehensive look at how the swine flu is playing out at colleges, though the numbers don't account for all the country's 4,300 degree-granting institutions.

So far, two students have died from the flu - one at Troy University in Alabama on Sept. 4 and one at Cornell University on Sept. 11. Health experts say those numbers will grow as more students with other health problems contract the virus.

Even so, on most college campuses, student life in the era of swine flu bears pretty close resemblance to student life before the bug arose. Students still shuffle between classes, stopping to chat in hallways and the library, with the only really noticeable difference being the vats of sanitizing gel sitting in most common spaces.

Georgia Tech sophomore Christopher Bryan said he tries not to touch door knobs and hand rails where he knows germs are easily shared, but the Panama native said he's not really changed his behavior otherwise.

"There is always a concern about getting sick, but swine flu is everywhere, not just here," he said waiting for a shuttle on the Atlanta campus.

Colleges are offering isolation dorms for sick students, providing ample hand sanitizing gel and sending multiple e-mails about proper hand-washing techniques.

For Emory student Anand Saha, the chills, sore throat and fever started after he attended an Indian dance workshop on [campus](#) that packed 50 students into a tiny room. Saha has his own bedroom in his dorm, so he isolated himself there instead of going to the residence hall for sick [students](#).

Now, the Memphis, Tenn., native, who is a resident assistant in his dorm, said he uses hand sanitizer as much as possible and has hung up posters on how to avoid getting swine flu in his dorm.

"College life fosters close living, whether it's in residence halls or with sports teams that spend a lot of time with each other," said Saha, a neuroscience major. "It's a lot of interaction with a lot of different people on a daily basis. Classes are pretty big, and a lot of times you have people breathing down your neck or you're elbow to elbow with other people."

On the Net:

Emory University: <http://www.emory.edu>

American College Health Association: <http://www.acha.org>

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