

Winter stomach bug crawling through schools

BY CATHERINE BAUM STAFF WRITER

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EASTHAMPTON - A day from school is fun. Except when you're sick.

On Jan. 2, the first day of the new school term, eight high school students were dismissed due to a stomach virus, according to the school district R.N.

"It's this time of year," said Jeanne Moran, a nurse at the high school.

Moran said the 24- to 48-hour intestinal virus started before winter break. She saw that it wasn't over after a couple of students vomited in school last week. Moran partially blames the weather for the reported illnesses.

"It's hard on the body in winters when it warms up and gets cold again," Moran said.

With more than a 30-degree difference in one week, many people have experienced the side effects of a weakened immune system. The Jan. 3 high temperature was 16 degrees. Monday's was 47 degrees, according to the National Weather Service.

To prevent spreading the virus, Moran said students should avoid sharing bottled water and drinks, as infection can "get right into the mucus membranes." Also, use tissues to cover the mouth when sneezing or, if they're not available, use an arm rather than a hand, she said.

Administrators encourage students to use these tips for cleanliness, which were given to them in November and December when preventative measures were taken against STAPH infections. Moran noted the infections did not spread to Easthampton schools, but they were reported in a few Connecticut and Massachusetts schools, prompting Easthampton janitors and physical education teachers to wash sporting equipment and locker rooms.

Students took part in hand-washing demonstrations during health class last month, when teachers and nurses used a special liquid to show that bacteria can remain on fingers and under fingernails after hands are washed.

"It teaches the kids that scrubbing and friction for a good minute under water is very important," Moran said.

Easthampton School Committee members sworn in

The School Committee will have new faces and name plates at tonight's meeting, held at 7 p.m. at White Brook Middle School.

"It's an exciting time for all of us," said Nancy Follansbee, curriculum director for Easthampton schools.

Lori Ingraham, LaDonna Crow and Eric Yates were sworn into office last week, and Peter Gunn, who received the most votes of newcomers at the fall election, filled the vacant spot in November that Karen Stackhow left when she resigned last spring. Gunn attended the previous two meetings as a member of the committee. They join incumbents Tom Brown and Brian Fink.

New members were sworn in individually during a short ceremony at the municipal building. The ceremony was followed by a luncheon, where new members celebrated with their families. Follansbee said Yates and Gunn were with their wives and children.

"I think we're excited to have parents of students in our schools on the committee," Follansbee said. "Their children are young ... and they bring energy, enthusiasm and new ideas to the committee, which will be energizing for all of us."

Visiting Author Series

On Jan. 16, Patricia MacLachlan, author of Newbury Medal Winner "Sarah, Plain and Tall" and "Once I Ate a Pie," will discuss her writing and read from her books to students at 6:30 p.m. in the Pepin School auditorium. Books will be available for purchase.

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