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Swine flu strikes FGCU

Student sickened; many in the dark

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Florida Gulf Coast University confirmed Thursday that a student has contracted swine flu, but offered few details beyond that.

FGCU did not release the student's gender, age, major, year in school or place of residence, although it did confirm he or she lived on campus in a residence hall. The student has been treated, and as a precautionary measure, Provost Ronald Toll said the person's roommates also have been treated.

Audrea Anderson, associate vice president for community relations and marketing, said federal privacy laws relating to medical records prevent the university from disclosing any detailed information.

On a 760-acre campus of 11,000 students, freshman Noelle Beauchamp said she'd like to know at least some information.

"I don't want to get swine flu," said Beauchamp, 18, a pediatric occupational therapy major from Bradenton. "I haven't heard anything about it."

As of Thursday evening, the Florida Department of Health reported 2,915 confirmed cases of swine flu, including 44 in Lee County. One of those cases, a 51-year-old man from Lee, died this week, joining 21 others from Florida and 263 nationally who succumbed to the H1N1 influenza strain. The World Health Organization has declared it a global pandemic.

The median age for Lee residents infected with the virus is 8 years old. Children are more susceptible because their immune systems are still developing, and they spend a good deal of time in close proximity to one another — much like college students living in communal residence halls and attending classes. That's why Beauchamp wants to know more about FGCU's case.

Florida Gulf Coast isn't the only college dealing with swine flu. The University of Central Florida, which has about 50,000 students, has confirmed 11 cases, and Florida State University issued a health advisory last week after multiple students attending a summer music camp were tested for influenza.

The CDC recommends that people:

- Wash hands frequently.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick.
- Stay home if you have flu-like symptoms, which include a fever, cough or sore throat.

The news of FGCU's first swine flu case makes Beauchamp's mother, Stefanie, a little uncomfortable. So she rattled off a few time-honored hygiene practices to her daughter: wash your hands with soap and water, and watch whoever is around you.

Then mom threw in another piece of advice most mothers give their teenage daughters anyway.

"Don't kiss any guys and don't drink from anyone's glass," Stefanie Beauchamp said.
