



THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN TO WINE SINCE THE BOTTLE



College Seasons Begin and Swine Flu Threat Enters Locker Room

By KATIE THOMAS
Published: August 28, 2009

One by one, Tulane's football players returned from a morning practice last week complaining of similar symptoms: [sore throat](#), [fever](#), fatigue. By the end of the day, Dr. Greg Stewart, a director of Tulane's sports medicine program, said 18 players had contracted [the flu](#). And it [would only get worse](#).

By the end of Friday, eight days later, 31 football players and 6 members of the volleyball team were believed to have come down with [swine flu](#). Tulane canceled the football team's Fan Day last weekend and kept the volleyball team home from its season opener in Nebraska.

"We've never had anything like this," Stewart said.

As public health officials brace for the start of the academic year and an [expected resurgence of swine flu](#), college locker rooms are turning out to be an early proving ground. Just as the football season is getting under way, [Duke](#), Texas Christian and Alabama have reported cases of swine flu or of players experiencing flulike symptoms.

Health experts say college athletes are perfect candidates for the swine flu, the virus known as H1N1, which in June was declared a global pandemic by the [World Health Organization](#) and which has infected more than one million Americans.

The strain tends to spread most quickly among young adults, who have not built an [immunity to flu](#) strains. Because the athletes share dorm rooms, cafeterias and sometimes unsanitary locker rooms, "it's kind of an ideal situation for the flu," said Arteaia Gilliard, a spokeswoman for the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Although the virus spreads quickly among the young, Gilliard said, they typically contract mild cases and tend to get better without treatment.

Chuck Wynne, a spokesman for the [N.C.A.A.](#), said he was not aware of any games or tournaments — outside of Tulane — that had been canceled because of a flu outbreak. Classes have not yet begun at many universities, and athletic seasons are just beginning. The responsibility for deciding whether to cancel games rests mainly with conferences or individual colleges, Wynne said.

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At Tulane, Stewart said the flu cases had been relatively mild, with students being ill for no more than two days. Two of the students tested positive for Type A influenza, which includes the H1N1 virus. Because the cases occurred outside the typical flu season and spread quickly, Stewart said officials were assuming that the athletes contracted swine flu.

At Duke, the flu was diagnosed in about 15 players. A handful tested positive for the H1N1 virus, said Dr. Jeffrey Bytomski, the head medical team physician for Duke sports. Although Duke officials said they were not aware of any other athletes who contracted swine flu, about 70 middle school and high school students had the virus after attending camps at the university this summer, said Michael Schoenfeld, a university spokesman.

At Texas Christian, about five football players reported flulike symptoms, but a spokesman said he did not know whether they were tested for swine flu. A similar situation was reported at Alabama, where a spokesman said either four or five football players had flulike symptoms, although all but one had since returned to practice. Classes have begun at both colleges and each has reported cases of swine flu among the student body.

Charlie Thompson, the head athletic trainer at Princeton, said he had closely followed the news about swine flu among college athletes.

“Everybody’s on high alert,” he said. Thompson, who is also the chairman of the National Athletic Trainers’ Association’s college and university athletic trainers committee, said he had advised athletes not to share towels, to cover their mouths when they coughed, and to speak up if they felt ill. With some teams well into their preseason practices, athletes are likely to be physically and mentally stressed, making them more susceptible to illness, he said.

“Athletes and this population, they think they’re indestructible, so you have to teach them a little bit on how to keep themselves safe,” Thompson said. **INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**

If flu outbreaks continue, the virus could affect schedules and derail the seasons of unlucky teams, said Jay Christensen, the proprietor of [The Wiz of Odds blog](#), a college football Web site.

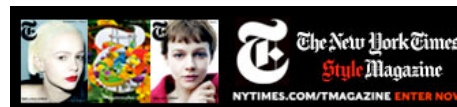
If teams lose an important game because a star player is ill, he said, it “could have somewhat of an economic impact on some of these athletic programs.”

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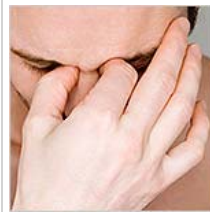
A version of this article appeared in print on August 29, 2009, on page D3 of the New York edition.

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