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From NASA visit, Punjab kids get deadly virus

WSN Bureau
JALANDHAR/WASHINGTON

A bunch of students from a Jalandhar school who went visiting the United States' National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) earlier this month have landed back with swine flu. At least eight have tested positive for the deadly virus, four more from the group are suspected, and all the rest have been advised quarantining.

Total number of suspects was about to touch 100 in Punjab as this WSN edition was going to the press.

The swine flu cases spread a scare in Punjab even as a nine-year-old boy who arrived at Hyderabad airport from New Jersey tested positive for H1N1 influenza on Tuesday. With this, the total number of swine flu affected people so far has risen to 31 in India.

At least 29 out of 31 who tested positive for swine flu came from the affected countries in the west.

The 12-day educational trip of the Punjab students went awry when the group of 31 belonging to Jalandhar's Amar Dass Public School returned.

Initially, only seven of them were tested positive for swine flu. Samples of nine students had been sent to the National Institute of Communicable diseases (NICD) in Delhi.

Now, a full alert has been sounded in Punjab. The government has asked the people not to panic but with the state of the medical care and the repeated failure of the administration to deal even with the seasonal bouts of gastroenteritis or malaria, panic could be the only logical reaction of the people.

Punjab's civil health structure is in doldrums and neither the incumbent Akali Dal government nor its predecessor Amarinder Singh regime had paid much attention to health issues. Ritual statements about the CM directing the health authorities to take all preventive steps and claims that the



With health care infrastructure in doldrums and govt failing to control even seasonal bouts of gastroenteritis or malaria, panic is the only logical reaction

health department "was fully equipped to deal with the situation" complete the story.

Most of the 93 suspects are from among the people who came into contact with the children returning from NASA. One of the students was detained at Delhi airport while others had reached their home in Jalandhar. They are being treated at Jalandhar Civil Hospital. Two suspected cases have also been detected in Amritsar.

Meanwhile, another group of students

from another school which returned from US and reached here on Tuesday was examined by the doctors in the school itself. Six students, one principal and one teacher were examined and even the driver and guard of the school who accompanied them in the bus after landing in Delhi were also examined and they were found unaffected by flu. However, their families have been told to quarantine them as a precautionary measure and to keep a close watch if they develop any symptoms.

Most hospitals lack even sufficient numbers of the sample bottles and capsules of Tami-flu, the drug to treat the influenza, were in short supply.

Though the government claimed that it has provided 2500 surgical masks for the patients besides adequate number of such masks for the use of 30 doctors and 18 paramedics in two hospitals where the kids are being treated, it remains a fact that most hospitals do not have access to such masks and at times even an oxygen cylinder is found to be a luxury. The school group had flown to the US on an educational trip on June 2 and returned after 12 days.



Sikhs Organize Nationwide Blood Drive

FREMONT: With the Sikh Youth of America in the forefront and many well known Sikh forums and organisations participating enthusiastically, the First National Sikh Blood Drive, is all set to create history of sorts as Facebook groups pop up on the internet, gurdwaras participate in the cause and word spreads about the community work in keeping with the intrinsic spirit of sewa and sacrifice enshrined in Sikhism.

The drive is dedicated to the memory of the fifth Sikh master, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, whose life as the world's foremost example of sacrifice has inspired generations of Sikhs for centuries now and who is seen as a great spiritual leader by people of all religions.

Starting on June 21, Sikh Youth of America will organize the "First National Sikh Blood Drive" to help overcome the blood shortage faced by the nation. In order to achieve this goal they have joined hands with various blood collection agencies including American Red Cross and Blood Centers of America.

Sikh Youth of America is a nonprofit organization that has been working with young Sikhs to help them develop leadership skills for the past 25 years.

The blood drives will be held at several locations in various states including California, Texas, New Jersey, New York, Michigan, Massachusetts and Indiana. "This is a great example of the Sikh spirit of serving others in time of need", said Jasjeet Singh, a prominent member of the Fremont Sikh community. "We have always thought of ourselves as an integral part of America and have eagerly stepped forward whenever the nation has needed us to do so," he emphasized.

Incidentally, the Fremont Gurdwara will be a prominent center of activity. Its website already features a poster exhorting the Sikhs to donate blood for community's cause. **Continued on page 2**

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