

Students sickened

Eight hospitalized after ingesting laced candy

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COURTLAND

On Tuesday afternoon, eight high school students from Southampton High School were sickened by eating candy laced with an as-yet unknown substance. They were taken to Southampton Memorial Hospital. As of 4:50 p.m., seven had been treated and released; the eighth could possibly be transferred to another facility as a precaution, officials told *The Tidewater News*.

Even as early as 3 p.m., all were reported as “good and vital signs stable and within normal limits,” according to hospital spokesman, Brandon Seier.

Officials had also told the paper earlier that the cause of the illnesses was in candy that was laced with a foreign substance and distributed by a fellow student. That pupil had been identified and questioned. Dr. Gwendolyn Shannon, superintendent of county public schools, confirmed that one student initially became sick after eating the candy. Later, the seven others who had also ingested the substance became ill. She also later told the newspaper that she had then so far visited seven at SMH, and that as of mid-afternoon, they were responsive.

“The school was placed on lockdown for a short time to ensure the safety of all students and to minimize movement,” Shannon announced in a press release. “As a precaution, if your child comes home acting out of character, please seek medical attention and/or call 911 immediately.”

In addition to Southampton deputies, first responders were called from Courtland, Capron, Franklin, Hunterdale, Boykins and Ivor units.

At 6:20 p.m., Sheriff Jack Stutts called the paper to say that a Suffolk man, 18-year-old Jaden Phillips, has been identified by multiple sources as the person who got the candy into the students' hands.

Phillips will be charged with possession with intent to distribute and distributing to a person under 18, both felonies, and contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a misdemeanor. The substance that was in the Gummi Bears is still unidentified.

After the paper had been sent to the printer, Stutts reported that Phillips had been arrested on Elmore Circle of that city. He was put into custody and transported back to Southampton County Jail, but had not yet been before the magistrate.

“We believe there might be additional charges,” the sheriff said.

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Before the facts were known and confirmed, though, rumors were plentiful inside and outside the school. Going to her car after her last day of classes for the year, senior Caroline Fowler told *The Tidewater News*, “I was having lunch around 12:40 p.m., and we were told to go back to our classes. I thought the lockdown was because of an active shooter. The lights were out and we were behind our desks.”

That restriction seemed to her to last around 30 minutes before getting an all clear message. She acknowledged that afterward she had later heard talk that some other students had “OD'd on Gummi Bears,” and further, that 23 students were affected and three were on life support.

One other student who would not give her name, said, “Somebody brought something to the school and now somebody's hurt.”

Veronica Wells, a parent, said she had come to the school to pick up a son and daughter. She had been told by the latter that it was THC in the gummy candy. THC is tetrahydrocannabinol, which is the prominent ingredient of cannabis/marijuana.

Michael Yeary, a freshman, said the talk was that whatever made the students sick was in either brownies or Gummi Bears.

Zaquis Turner, a senior, and Kendra Angel, a freshman, said they were in third block classes at the time

of the incident. Their mother, Ashaki Rawlings, said she heard there were seizures and heart attacks caused by whatever the students had eaten.

Michala Canida, a junior, said she was in a class at the time of the lockdown. Not until after her lunch did she hear the talk that “weed was in the gummies.” She added that her brother, Michael, told her not to eat any such candy. Michala also said she heard 23 students had been taken ill and two had died.

Michael had heard that somebody was selling or giving away the candy.

Check back with *The Tidewater News* for updated information as it becomes available.