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## Students fall ill

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■ Officials say weed killer apparent cause of odor that sent 42 Madison Middle School students to area hospitals

About 90 students became ill at Madison Middle School Friday afternoon after inhaling fumes from a new weed killer being used on the school grounds, Madison Fire District Chief Walt Zilke said.

Zilke said 42 students were transported from the 849-student school to area hospitals for treatment of nausea, dizziness and in some cases, vomiting.

By 4 p.m., nine students treated at UHHS Memorial Hospital of Geneva had been released to their parents, according to Bonnie Zachowski, an assistant of the hospital's chief operations officer.

Zachowski said another student was taken from the Geneva Hospital to Ashtabula County Medical Center, where no information was available Friday night.

A nursing supervisor with Lake Hospital System confirmed late Friday that all children treated at LakeEast and LakeWest hospitals had been released.

Madison Schools Superintendent Stan W. Heffner said the problem began about 9:15 a.m. when a custodian began spraying weeds along the perimeter at 1941 Red Bird Road in Madison Township.

This was the first time the school had used the weed killer, so Heffner said no one was aware it would produce an irritating odor.

Within a half-hour, the smell from the solvent chemical, known as Formula 190, wafted up into some of the classrooms in the sixth- and seventh-grade wing of the building.



Jeff Forman/News-Herald

Madison Fire District firefighter/paramedic Chris Young talks Friday with Madison Middle School parent Dave Bossart. An insecticide used outside the school caused many students to get sick Friday.

"A bunch of students started complaining about being nauseous," Zilke said.

Zilke said the first call from the school came in to Madison Fire District around 11:30 a.m. and the situation was "pretty well stabilized" about 2:30 p.m.

"We saw how many children we were dealing with and called for mutual aid from 10 departments that provided an additional 12 ambulances," the fire chief said.

The scene at the school was one of confusion as anxious parents parked in the grass and walked inside to make sure their children were all right.

"I got a phone call at about 1:30 p.m. and I started to panic," said Joanne Yoe, after picking up her two children at Madison Middle School.

Yoe's 12-year-old son, Steven, a sixth-grader, said "everybody smelled something."

"The teacher told us that the janitor had sprayed something to kill the weeds," Steven said.

Steven said his teacher, Mary Jane Baldwin, appeared to have an allergic reaction and had to be replaced by a substitute.

"The sub took us out in the hallway," Steven said.

In addition to feeling sick, Steven said he saw some students with red faces.

Zilke said students with special concerns or respiratory problems such as asthma were given special attention and transported as a precaution.

"We isolated the area and opened the windows and felt comfortable that was all that was needed to air it out," Zilke said.

Zilke said the herbicide will not be used on the school grounds again.

"We are looking into it and the company is well aware of what is happening here," he said.

The chemical, made by State Chemical Manufacturing in Cleveland, is 98 percent solvent and 2 percent herbicide, according to the district.

The custodian was ordered to stop spraying the chemical after students began to complain of headache, nausea and dizziness, but not before the chemical was sprayed for a few hundred feet along the building.

"When we saw enough kids coming down (to the clinic), we knew it was more than a few kids having a bad day," Heffner said.

Heffner said several concerned parents showed up because they didn't know how hazardous the chemical was.

However, Heffner said, the material safety data sheet indicates there should be no permanent effects from the chemical inhalation.

A letter was sent home to parents to reassure them.

The product contains no chemicals known to cause any long-term effects or problems," Principal Holly Lepisto wrote in the letter to parents. "It will never be used again."

Once students got away from the odor, many began to feel better, Heffner said.

The sixth- and seventh-grade wing was evacuated and those classes continued outside for the rest of the day.

Heffner said it is common practice for the custodians to spray for weeds during the school day in the spring.

There has never been a problem with other herbicides used, Heffner said.