

Still no autopsy released in death of Jimari Williams in Detroit kindergarten

Georgia parent speaks out on H. influenzae infection in school child

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Join the meeting of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee this Saturday at 1 p.m. EDT titled, “After the death of Jimari Williams: Mobilize educators, parents, and students to defend public health and stop school layoffs!” Register here:

If you have information about a school outbreak, or are ready to get involved in our fight for safe schools and against budget cuts, contact the WSWs now! Fill out the form at the end of this article, or write to educators@wsws.org.

It is now nearly a month since the tragic death of Detroit kindergarten student Jimari Williams on April 26, yet the nature of the fatal disease has not yet been determined. On May 16, the WSWs was informed by the Wayne County Medical Examiner’s office that the autopsy will not be released until “sometime between August and November.” When our reporter asked why the delay, they were not given a real reply, but simply were told the lab was in Pennsylvania.

The six-year-old was a student at Marcus Garvey Academy, where there was “an unusually high rate of flu-like symptoms, including student fevers, and vomiting, namely at the early grade levels,” according to the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD). The Health Department has never said how many people overall were sickened.

In line with the Biden administration’s ending of the Pandemic Health Emergency May 11, there has been no official mention of COVID, nor school-wide testing protocol for the protection of students and staff. The most recent, entirely understated, weekly Michigan COVID report of May 2 showed 2,630 new cases of COVID-19 and 62 virus-related deaths. In other words, paying no attention to official pronouncements, COVID continues to spread, to wreak havoc on people’s immune systems, and to kill.

Jimari’s classmates were sent back into the school after a brief “deep cleaning” with no concrete information about the disease or any attempt to deal with airborne cleanliness such as HEPA filtration in every classroom or Far-UV technology or even masking. According to the Centers for Disease Control, an estimated 96 percent of schoolchildren have contracted COVID, putting them at increased risk for many other diseases and conditions.

The only medical information released to the public has been the diagnosis of four of Jimari’s classmates. The district reported that these children had Haemophilus influenzae, a name for any infection caused by bacteria called *H. influenzae*. There are six distinct types of *H. influenzae* (named a through f), as well as other *H. influenzae* that are classified as nontypeable. The one that people are most familiar with is *H. influenzae* type b or Hib for which a vaccine is available and required by most school districts. H. influenza, however, like COVID, is transmitted through the air.

For their part, Detroit’s Democratic Party establishment, including Mayor Mike Duggan and the Detroit Federation of Teachers, have remained silent on the death of Jimari Williams and the infectious disease outbreak at Marcus Garvey Academy.

The response of workers has been entirely the opposite, with an outpouring of concern among educators and parents. Learning about the death of Jimari, the parent of a child in Georgia who suffered with H. influenza contacted the WSWs. She asked to relay her experience as a warning to other parents. She asked for anonymity due to pending legal matters associated with her child’s traumatic disease.

“I fear parents are not being told about the dangers,” she said. This is very detrimental. My daughter had COVID twice. We know that COVID weakens parts of the immune system. My daughter had [H. influenza] Beta Lactamase

Positive and she was vaccinated for it, but got it anyway. Type B can cause sepsis, meningitis, pneumonia, or sepsis arthritis. It varies in severity from ear infections to more severe infections.

“Is there a correlation between COVID and H. influenza? There is. Plus there is the potential of COVID to decrease the effectiveness of the [Hib] vaccine.” She referenced a paper, “The potential role of COVID-19 in the induction of DNA damage,” by Pablo Panico, et al., which points to the role of DNA damage in many chronic diseases.

“How many times do you go to the doctor and the doctor says, ‘Oh, it’s just viral.’ Well, H. influenza can cause meningitis and death. Thank goodness I found a doctor who finally diagnosed my child.”

The Georgia parent explained the difficult struggle to be taken seriously and get a real diagnosis and cure. She said her daughter has an immune deficiency which can lead to repeat respiratory infections, making her health a real concern.

“In January, my daughter developed a fever and complained of leg pain. The next day her temperature shot up to 103 degrees; she woke up shaking. It looks like the flu. When we take her to the doctor, he thinks it’s tonsillitis. At first, her temperature went down, and everything tested negative. But then she got hot again and says her car seat is ‘on fire.’ I’m exhausted as a parent, it is so scary. My ex-mother-in-law fears that it’s sepsis. We started an antibiotic, and she gets a little better.

“Fast forward to February 9, I went to wake my daughter and noticed her heart racing, it was about 145 beats per minute. She was in extreme pain when trying to stand her up. (She often complained of legs being tired and hurting). Her oxygen dropped into the 70s, and heart rate to the 50s. She told me she was going to pass out. These episodes typically lasted about an hour.

“We took her to the hospital which is an hour away. Her white blood count was 21, extremely high, and this is considered a critical result. Her cortisol was 24.9 (in the afternoon lab work) which is high. They kept her overnight for monitoring and gave her another antibiotic to take for 10 days.

“We ended up back in the hospital at the beginning of March. After being there for four days they finally find a mild pulmonary obstruction, three nodules on her lungs. Three cultures were taken and were tested, all three were positive for Haemophilus Influenzae, Beta Lactamase Positive and Moraxella (B) catarrhalis. She had elevated neutrophils, indicating a bacterial infection. They put her on 840 milligrams of Augmentin twice a day for four weeks.

“Now she is doing so much better, no night sweats, and no more vomiting or extreme episodes of pain. It was sad to see her suffering and feeling helpless. I feel we would not have gotten a diagnosis or the right medicine if I had not advocated.”

The Georgia parent explained that when she hears about cases like Jimari’s, she worries about parents “who aren’t knowledgeable about the law or their rights. We had doctors who were dismissive, who claimed her condition was ‘psychosomatic.’ He wasn’t listening, which made me feel hopeless and scared.

“The system is broken. Just because we live in poverty or come from poverty or don’t have a medical degree doesn’t mean we can’t make the right decision for our children. I feel like we know our kids best and doctors really need to listen more to the parents. There is a lot of information coming out regarding COVID and H. influenzae-associated conditions.

“Parents should not be afraid to speak out. I came from poverty, from practically nothing, but I will not be scared to stand up for what I believe in and advocate for my children. I work in the school system, however, I’m not a teacher and my pay is not as much. We make it work for our family. I am fortunate for what we have. My husband built our home and our mortgage is nowhere near what the average families’ is today. I know families with mortgages of \$1,600 a month in a tiny house in sketchy areas who have to work three or four jobs to make ends meet. How are they doing it? Then there is the cost of groceries!

“If my experience helps someone else, I don’t want it to go unused. Life is not always easy and we must continue to fight for what is right and inspire other people and break the cycle.”



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