

Autopsy reveals Detroit kindergartner Jimari Williams' death was from Hib infection: What parents and teachers need to know

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The cause of death for Jimari Williams, the kindergarten student who died on April 26 after an outbreak of illnesses at Marcus Garvey Academy in Detroit, was finally revealed this week through a Freedom of Information Act request (FOIA) filed by the *Detroit News*.

The *News* writes that “the Wayne County Medical Examiner’s Office determined the manner of [Jimari’s] death to be natural and lists Waterhouse-Friderichsen Syndrome due to *Haemophilus influenzae* beta [also known as Hib] as the cause of death.”

Information surrounding Jimari’s death and the outbreak at Marcus Garvey was initially covered up by both the Detroit Health Department, which as late as May 3 issued a statement on the outbreak at Marcus Garvey that failed to even mention the death of a child, or that the illnesses were linked to Hib; and by the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), which held a poorly promoted online meeting on May 5 where questions about Jimari were banned.

That state officials did not release the autopsy result sooner, and that it took a FOIA request by a journalist to reveal it to the public, are further indications that, after three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the US public health system has been largely destroyed. In fact, Hib is a “reportable condition” in every state, and all cases should be reported to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC).

What is *Haemophilus influenzae* beta, or Hib?

Haemophilus influenzae beta, known as Hib, is a respiratory bacteria that can be transmitted through the air in the same way as airborne viruses like SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19.

Common types of Hib disease are pneumonia, bacteremia (the spread of bacteria in the blood vessels), meningitis (bacteria in the membranes surrounding the spinal cord and brain), as well as cellulitis, ear infections, and abscesses around the sac containing the heart.

People who are immunocompromised, who have sickle cell disease, or have cancer and are undergoing treatment, are at increased risk of developing Hib disease. If Hib disease is suspected or diagnosed, immediate hospitalization is often required, and treatment with antibiotics.

After the development of Hib conjugate vaccines, which were first licensed in 1987, Hib disease became increasingly rare.

Before the vaccines, there were about 20,000 cases of *H. influenzae* disease reported annually in the US, two-thirds of them in children aged 18 and younger. Hib was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis and other invasive bacterial disease, with around one in 200 children five and younger developing invasive Hib disease.

But by 2018, just 38 cases of invasive *H. influenzae*

were reported annually in the United States. The rate of Hib disease has plummeted to around one case for every 2.5 million people in the population. Between 2009 and 2018, just 36 invasive Hib cases in those younger than five were reported to the CDC: Two of the 36 were too young to have received the Hib vaccines; 12 were never vaccinated; and 14 were under-vaccinated. Eight that had received age-appropriate vaccinations had no underlying causes.

However, since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, Hib vaccination rates in children have dropped considerably. Jimari Williams was almost 3 years old when the pandemic began. Children his age are more likely to have missed primary or secondary vaccine shots for Hib disease.

Additionally, the CDC estimates that over 96 percent of US children (more than 65 million) have had COVID-19 at least once. The disease is known to potentially damage all organ systems, including the immune system, making those who have had COVID-19 more likely to get seriously ill from other pathogens.

What is Waterhouse-Friderichsen syndrome?

Jimari Williams' autopsy cites Waterhouse-Friderichsen syndrome as his cause of death. The syndrome was first described by Rupert Waterhouse and Carl Friderichsen in the first decade of the 20th century among children who developed bacterial sepsis.

This is a rare, life-threatening complication of systemic infection that leads to bleeding into the adrenal glands and leads to adrenal insufficiency. The adrenal glands are critical in the production of hormones that regulate your metabolism, immune system, blood pressure, response to stress and other essential functions.

Such a rare complication during initial treatment is difficult to diagnose because the symptoms can masquerade as septic shock, which is a sharp fall in blood pressure that leads to organ failure. Jimari's deterioration in the last hours of his life must have been harrowing.

What can teachers and parents do?

Jimari's death and the official cover-up show that after three years of the COVID-19 pandemic—which has killed well over 1 million Americans, including over 2,000 children—the state has all but abandoned what was once known as “public health.” As we wrote on May 9:

The example of Jimari Williams shows how the population will be treated by the capitalist state and media from now on: Workers and children will get sick and die at school and work and nothing will be done. Causes of death will not even be identified. No one will be told what is happening. Reporting will be suppressed. And when another pandemic emerges, which scientists warn is increasingly likely as climate change deepens, there will be no attempt to stop it. Nothing at all will be done to save lives.

Pathogens like COVID-19 and Hib spread through the air, and because schools bring together children and teachers from throughout the community, the schools always function as major sources of community spread.

In order to take control of the situation in the schools, stop the spread of diseases and save lives, teachers and school workers must link up with parents and students by building Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees in every school. These committees should work with trusted scientists to monitor the spread of diseases in the schools, inform parents and the community about outbreaks, and shut down schools when they deem conditions to be unsafe.

To get help building a committee at your school, contact the Michigan Educator's Rank-and-File Safety Committee with the form below, or write to educators@wsws.org!



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