

# GSU Holds Pandemic Drill

*Exercise preparation for possible flu outbreak on campus*

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Georgia Southern University nursing students act as public health workers to hand out preventative medicine to “patients” Tuesday afternoon at the Williams Center during a pandemic flu drill. The drill is designed to prepare the campus in the event of a pandemic flu.

Hundreds of Georgia Southern University students lined up outside the Williams Center Tuesday, hoping for an easy grade for participating in a health drill testing an emergency plan set up in the event a widespread outbreak of influenza.

The drill was an exercise in planning and organization, based upon a fictitious “what-if” scenario that had GSU students infected with avian influenza during a trip to Indonesia, said Loretta Brandon, GSU spokesperson.

The drill was part of a statewide preparation effort.

“The State Division of Public Health has mandated the coordination of pandemic influenza exercises all across Georgia,” said Stuart Tedders, associate professor of epidemiology at the university. “The Southeast Health District will carry out this drill on the Georgia Southern campus, giving us an opportunity to practice and prepare us to face this potentially deadly situation.”

Chancellor Erroll B. Davis of the USG Board of Regents asked each of the 35 universities and colleges in the state to develop a pandemic flu emergency plan, Brandon said. The drill helped expand and enhance GSU’s current emergency plan.

Students lined up outside the Williams Center, going through an outside triage unit before being allowed inside. In the event a real pandemic occurred, any student already ill with the flu would not have been allowed inside the building, but would have been sent to the local health center, said Roger Naylor, public information officer with the Southeast Health District, which oversees the Bulloch County Health Department.

Students who were not deemed “ill” were sent inside to receive preventative medication that would stave off or reduce flu symptoms, he said.

If the drill had indeed been an effort to prevent an outbreak, students would have received Tamiflu, he said. But since the drill was a practice run, the “medicine” bottles were filled with M&M candies.

In a real-life situation, should a flu outbreak occur, “we would have no vaccine,” Naylor said. “It would take six months to get it,” since vaccines are made to prevent flu strains from the previous year. Influenza viruses mutate rapidly and every year, some strains develop that are resistant to existing vaccines, he said.

Seasonal flu viruses are the ones that have been around and are seen every year, but the pandemic, or “world-wide spread” viruses such as the form of avian flu that affect humans is what health officials are concerned about, he said.

The new strain of avian flu that affect humans is causing concern that “it will become a seasonal flu,” he said.

The last time a flu pandemic occurred was in 1968, but the most notable one in history was in 1918, when “20 to 100 million people died,” he said.

As students filed inside, other students with the GSU nursing program took information, guided the “patients” to dispensing tables, and offered them amber bottles of candy representing the Tamiflu.

The purpose of the drill, Naylor said, was to make sure everything was in place to handle the issue should a true flu outbreak occur.

The Tamiflu would help students who had been exposed to the flu virus within the last 72 hours, he said. If the patient had been exposed to the virus before the previous 72 hours, the medication would have a lesser effect, he said.

The drill was realistic, with every action taking place just as it would have if the flu outbreak had been real. GSU Police guarded a room where the medicine was kept and blocked entry by any unauthorized personnel. A special needs table was set up for “patients” who were pregnant, taking medications or had other medical issues.

The scenario unfolded with the virus being spread by the students who had visited Indonesia. One spread the virus to a roommate. Another worked in the library. Others ate in a dining hall, and therefore a wide group of students had been exposed, but were showing no symptoms.

If that had been reality, the emergency plan would have not only notified students they could become sick, but provided medication to reduce symptoms, Brandon said.

University officials and employees of the Department of public health met Aug. 31 to organize the drill and to “complete an exercise that clarified the role of each department in response to a pandemic flu outbreak on campus,” she said. They discussed “incident command, decision-making, internal and external communication, public safety and student services during a crisis.”

The result of that meeting was executed Tuesday during the drill, she said.

Students participating in the drill received credit for their respective classes, she said.