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THE BOSTON GLOBE

Metro B3

Hospital staffs face calls to get flu shots

By Kay Lazar

Roughly 71 percent of employees at acute care hospitals in Massachusetts received flu vaccinations last season, according to a report released yesterday by state public health regulators.

The percentages have increased since the 2009-2010 season, but not nearly to the levels regulators had hoped for. That spurred a debate about mandating vaccines for hospital workers at a meeting of the Public Health Council, an appointed panel of doctors, consumer advocates, and professors.

Dr. Madeline Biondolillo, director of the Bureau of Healthcare Safety and Quality, presented a proposal calling on all acute care hospitals to aim for an employee vaccination rate this flu season of greater than 90 percent and no lower than 75 percent.

The measure would be voluntary. But some council members said the state may have to take stronger action to boost vaccination rates. The goal is to keep hospital employees from spreading the flu to patients and to ensure that a large number of caregivers do not fall ill amid a flu outbreak.

Current state rules require hospital workers to be vaccinated or to sign a form declining the shot. The rules allow for medical and religious exemptions.

Dr. Robert A. Driscoll, an infectious disease specialist at Labey Clinic, said his hospital boosted its rate last season from about 70 percent on Dec. 6 to 90 percent eight weeks later. Its policy required every employee who declined a shot to wear a surgical mask during the entire flu season whenever he or she was within 6 feet of another person, whether or not the job involved direct patient contact.

The mask is admittedly inferior to the vaccine, and it's a pain in the neck, Driscoll said. But he said, the policy spared most outbreaks to be vaccinated, albeit after one-on-one counseling from disease specialists.

"We did not have a legal challenge, and we did not lose any employees over this," Driscoll said.

Dr. Alan Woodward, past president of the Massachusetts Medical Society and a council member, proposed that the board adopt a resolution to support hospitals and other health agency programs that boost rates "through all appropriate means up to and including mandatory immunization."

But council member Harold Cox, an associate dean at Boston University's School of Public Health, said the council should not "be wimpy" and should consider stronger action.

"I understand the importance of being measured and incremental," he said. "But if we think it's important, we ought to say it."

The council, which lost a quorum during the meeting before the issue could be voted on, rescheduled the matter until October.

Last year, the Massachusetts Hospital Association issued a statement from its chief executive, Lynn Nicholas, strongly supporting mandatory flu shots for all hospital employees. Nicholas said it was "unacceptable and a huge disservice to patients" that about 20 percent of employees at acute care hospitals statewide refused to be vaccinated last year.



FALSE ALARM — State and Boston police responded yesterday to reports of a masked gunman on Massachusetts Avenue in the Fenway area.



A woman whom neighbors identified as Menz's girlfriend found the three victims covered in blood around 2:30 p.m. Residents of the quiet side street say that police have told them the man had been stabbed and that the killings were drug-related.



Menz, who was active in martial arts, received a bachelor's degree in professional writing from Champlain College in 2008.

Police ID 3 victims in Waltham killings

Search continues for assailants

By Peter Schworm

Authorities yesterday identified the victims of a triple-shooting in Waltham earlier this week, but provided no details on the search for their assailants.

The men were killed by Menz, 25, of Waltham, Erik Weissman, 21, of Cambridge, and Raphael Teken, 27, of Cambridge, according to the Middlesex district attorney's office, which is investigating the deaths.

The men were killed at Menz's apartment Monday afternoon. The other two men did not die there. Authorities say the slayings were targeted, and they are seeking one or more suspects. They are awaiting autopsy results.

A woman whom neighbors identified as Menz's girlfriend found the three victims covered in blood around 2:30 p.m. Residents of the quiet side street say that police have told them the man had been stabbed and that the killings were drug-related.

Larry Aronson, who taught Weissman at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, recalled him as a bright, well-liked student with an "edge."

"He had such potential and was such a good soul," he said. "He was just a good friend to a lot of people. He was friends with all kinds of kids, regardless of background. And that was what was important to him, that network of friends."

In 2008, Weissman was charged with marijuana possession and intent to distribute, according to a report. Police pulled Weissman over for failing to yield and smelled marijuana smoke in his vehicle. When asked about it, Weissman said, "I know you would smell it," and handed the officer a brown paper bag filled with bags of marijuana,

police said. He also told police he had been previously arrested on charges of marijuana possession and said he was carrying marijuana to share with his friends.

Weissman's family declined comment as their Cambridge home Tuesday evening.

Bill Labov, who went to high school with Weissman, said he had a great appreciation for the area and was an avid sports fan, especially basketball. He was "extremely generous," she said, and had a "contagious smile and easygoing."

"I know he loved his family," she said. "When he spoke of his younger sister, his face would light up."

Labov said they had stayed in touch since high school, and she was devastated by his death.

"I don't know why this horrific crime happened, but it ended three young lives too soon," she said.

After Menz's girlfriend discovered the bodies, she ran from the house screaming.

Neighbors described Menz and his two roommates as quiet, nice people who were a welcome change of pace from previous residents who often had loud parties late into the evening.

Menz, who was active in martial arts, received a bachelor's degree in professional writing from Champlain College in 2008.

In 2010, Menz and another man were arrested on charges that they assaulted several people at a store, according to a Cambridge police log.

Teken lived in Waltham, and two neighbors who asked to remain anonymous said they believed he was a drug dealer, saying he rarely left the house and had a steady stream of visitors.

Globe correspondents Derek J. Anderson and Katherine E. Lonsberger contributed to this report. Peter Schworm can be reached at schworm@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @GlobePetey.

Suit alleges bus monitor abused Peabody children

By Justin A. Rice

A lawsuit filed in Essex Superior Court in Salem this week asserts that four children were sexually abused by a bus monitor for this summer and contends that a transportation company hired by the Peabody School Department failed to protect them.

The children, ages 9 and 10, were abused "on numerous occasions" in July while riding a van run by American Caring Services, said the lawsuit filed by Jeffrey Newman, an attorney for Jeffrey Newman.

American Caring Services Inc. of Boston is named as the defendant in the lawsuit, which was filed Tuesday and seeks \$150,000 in damages.

"As a result of the bus company's negligence, the monitor, who was supposed to keep the children safe, in fact abused and molested them, the lawsuit says. In some cases, the suit alleges, the monitor pitched the children, leaving black-and-blue marks."

The bus monitor is not identified in the lawsuit.

The Peabody School Department interim superintendent, Herbert Levine, said yesterday that he immediately suspended the 30-day contract with American Caring Services and retained the services of another company after receiving the complaint July 27.

"We did our due diligence by doing [criminal record] checks on the driver and monitor, and we have them on file," said Levine, who added that the contract was signed before he took over as superintendent July 18.

"The company is licensed. We hired them to a 30-day contract to pick up and deliver six special education students to a summer program."

Yesterday afternoon, the Essex district attorney's office said it investigated and did not file charges.

"This matter was investigated by Peabody police and the Essex district attorney's office," said Steve O'Connell, a spokesman for the district attorney's office. "It was determined that was insufficient evidence to file criminal charges."

American Caring Services could not be reached for comment.

According to its website, the company provides elder care, including transportation and personal in-home-care services.

"When you hire a provider from American Caring Services you will be getting an experienced, background-checked, reference-checked caregiver," the website says.

While the company's website does not indicate it has experience with students, Levine said that American recently merged with another company that is more experienced at transporting children.

Newman said the abuse occurred for about a month before the children told their parents.

"They were afraid of this guy; he would cause them pain," said Newman, a Marblehead lawyer who has handled childhood abuse cases for 25 years, including ones involving clergy in the Catholic Church. "So they were afraid, but they did reveal it."

Newman said one of the parents sued alcohol on the monitor's breath during July.

"We're going to investigate this heavily, and if I find any information related to criminal activity, I will turn it over to the district attorney's office," said Newman.

"This case is particularly disturbing because the monitor assigned to protect the kids preyed on them," he said. "It's even more egregious in some ways. We'll follow the evidence and see where it leads."

Newman said he will also investigate how much the city researched American Caring Services before hiring the company.

"It's not saying the City of Peabody is in any way culpable," Newman said. "I just don't know. The most important thing is we obtain solid factual information to find out how this happened in order to figure out how to prevent it."

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Herb Chambers advertisement featuring Vespa scooters (FLY 50, FLY 150, LX 50) and Ultra Motor electric bikes (2011 Fast4ward Edge, 2011 A2B Velocity24, 2011 A2B Metro Plus) with financing options and contact information for Vespa Boston and Ultra Motor Electric Bikes of Boston.