

Backflow Incident from the Air Conditioning System (New York, USA, February 2010):

Students Drinking Bottled Water Following Fountain Contamination

Students at P.S. 20 in Queens were drinking bottled water today; one day after dozens became ill after drinking contaminated water from a fountain.

The Department of Education says 74 students complained of nausea after drinking the water at the Flushing elementary school; 71 of those students were taken to the hospital.

Crews spent the night flushing out and decontaminating the school's water system, which is now back on. But no one can drink the water until test results come back, which are expected as early as tomorrow.

While officials say the chemicals are not highly toxic in small doses, the mother of one of the children who got sick yesterday says she's still very concerned.

"It's the life of my daughter, and I know this is a poison thing that could kill anyone, little by little," said Karen Martinez, whose daughter remained under observation at Flushing Hospital. "I mean, they could say it's not dangerous, but still I feel insecure."

The DOE says the chemical turned the water pink and gave it a sweet taste.

"I was like, that is not normal water. I didn't drink it all," said student Danashia Allen. "It looked like Kool-Aid."

Although a van delivered dozens of five-gallon jugs this morning to help get the school through the day, some parents came extra prepared, supplying their children with their water and juice.

"My daughter's smart and I spoke to her already; she already knows what to do if there's a problem, to call me," said a P.S. 20 parent. "But she has everything that she needs and her teacher is a wonderful teacher. She has them on a very strict routine."

Officials believe the water was contaminated by a coolant from an air conditioning system being installed in a new wing of the school.

The city says the contamination was limited to the school's water supply.

The DOE says the contractor who was working on the air conditioning is one the department routinely uses. A spokesperson says this appears to have been an accident, but it's still being investigated.