

## 10 Scenario of the outbreaks in the schools

### 10.1 Scenario in Bornem

Students can only buy soft drinks at the school restaurant during the noon-break, which starts at 12:05'. Soft drinks are sold directly from the crate. On June the 8<sup>th</sup> some students complained the Coca-Cola purchased at the school restaurant, smelled and tasted bad. Some students drank the soft drink, some bottles were returned back half full and some of the bottles were replaced. Because there were so many students who had complaints about their Coca-Cola, the school stopped the sale. All soft drinks sold on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June at noontime came from a delivery of 20 crates done on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June during the morning, as the stock in school was nearly empty.

At 13:10' the classes restarted. Starting from 13:30' students from different classes with health complaints individually came to the secretariat, at 13:45' there were already more than 10 students with complaints. Most ill students had no contact with each other prior to going to the secretariat. Alerted by his secretariat, the director consulted the Medical School Inspection (MSI) to ask what to do. The MSI advised (by phone) to take all the students to hospital. Checking in every classroom, additional students with complaints were identified. With cars from the staff the students were brought to hospital where they had to wait in the corridor. In total 22 students were brought from school to hospital.

The link with the consumption was made very fast, because of the experience the school had with bad smelling Coca-Cola during the noon-break. According to the director all students with health complaints had drunk Coca-Cola. Nevertheless, there were also many students who had consumed Coca-Cola and didn't have health complaints (5 crates of Coca-Cola were sold during the noon-break). Contact was made with Coca-Cola Antwerp to ask if they were aware of complaints the students had expressed.

Meanwhile the director from Coca-Cola Antwerp had come to the school where two crates out of the remaining 15 were collected for examination.

In hospital a blood- and urine sample was taken from the students. Some of them received oxygen. At this moment some students were upset and frightened because of the blood control. All this happened before 14:50', the playtime of the other students.

At 15:50' the other students went home. The director made them feel at ease by saying that their friends were in the hospital, but that there were no major problems.

In the course of the evening another 11 students went from home to the hospital because of their health complaints. At that moment 33 students were hospitalised. At 19:00 18 students were dismissed, 15 (the worst cases) other remained hospitalised overnight.

The next day, Wednesday June 9<sup>th</sup>, all 33 students hospitalised received chest radiography. Also another 6 students who had some health complaints were taken to hospital. Overall 39 students had had contacts with a hospital service: 18 with the emergency unit (dismissed at 19 h.), 15 stayed overnight and 6 new cases had the chest radiography the next day. After the radiography, all students were dismissed from hospital and went to school. At school they briefly discussed about what had happened and then returned home.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> the majority of the students returned to school, but after half an hour some of them contacted the secretarial office again with health complaints (lack of concentration, tiredness). The director told them to return to their homes and to come back on Monday. On Monday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, all but 4 students returned to school (Those 4 students were not present at the day of the interview, nor was there any information on their health situation).

## **10.2 Scenario in Brugge**

Students can buy canned soft drinks in tins on the playground (vending machine) during recreation time (between 10 and 10:10') or in the school restaurant during lunchtime.

The first pupil reported health complaints soon after recreation time (at 10:30), a second pupil between 10:30' and 10:45'. Before noon, 7 students stated to have health complaints. From the moment two students reported sick the 'nurse' contacted the hospital emergency services to bring the students to a hospital. The ambulances would visit the school 3 or 4 times to take sick students to hospital.

Based on the large media attention for the events in Bornem, the link with the consumption of soft drinks was rapidly made. The students with health complaints were asked if they had consumed soft drinks bought at the vending machine; they said they had consumed Coca-Cola light (in tins 33 cl.). Immediately after the first complaints the director stopped the selling of soft drink on the playground. He also contacted the Coca-Cola Company.

The 7 students with health complaints came from 5 classes of a different level. According to the director it was impossible that these students had had contact prior to the events since they all came directly from their classes at the moment of the complaints. The only thing in common was the fact that they had bought soft drinks on the playground.

Four students were dismissed from hospital in the course of the day

All the students taken to hospital could leave the hospital at evening. According to the director they all suffered from indigestion.

The students with complaints did not show a common characteristic; they were all 'normal' students with normal study results. One pupil – according to the director – faked his complaints.

## **10.3 Scenario in Harelbeke**

At 1:30' p.m. on Friday 10<sup>th</sup>, two students with complaints came to see the director. They stated to suffer from head- and belly-pain. As usual, when students have health complaints, they spend some time in the school sickbay (a small room with two beds). Around 3 o'clock another 4 students reported health complaints and were also taken to the sickbay. Worried about the increasing number of students with complaints, the director contacted a doctor (not the school doctor as he was absent). After a brief examination of the 6 students, the doctor gave an "antalgic effervescent tablet" and "Motilium®". In the meantime another 3 students reported sick. The doctor contacted a hospital where alarm phase I was activated: 5 ambulances and the special medical urgency team were sent to the school. 13 students were taken to different hospitals in the neighbourhood. Later on, another 2 students were hospitalised (directly from home to a hospital).

The majority of the students reported to have health complaints came from only two classes. They showed no specific characteristics compared to the other students.

After 6 students reported being ill, the director searched for the cause. All six students were asked whether they had eaten hot meals in school. None of them had. Based on the events in Bornem, a link was made with the consumption of soft drinks. In Harelbeke, students are only allowed to buy soft drinks during the noon-break in the restaurant. There are no automatic drink dispensers in the school. Students are allowed to bring soft drinks from home. From the 13 students having health complaints, 3 took (canned) soft drinks from home. The other 10 had bought soft drinks (Coca and Fanta) at school during the noon-break.

Twelve out of 15 students temporarily hospitalised were dismissed on Friday-evening. The 3 others were dismissed the next day. According to the director this had nothing to do with the nature of the complaints of these three students but only with the policy of the hospital (St.Maarten Hospital). The next Monday, 3 students were again hospitalised. Two of them had gone to school on Monday morning, the other went directly from home to the hospital. On Thursday another three students were again hospitalised.

#### **10.4 Scenario in Kortrijk**

Around 2 p.m., during courses, two students with complaints came to see the director. They stated to suffer from headache, vomiting and abdominal complaints. Soon after, other students reported health complaints. Because it was obvious some students suffered from severe pain it was decided to contact the hospital and to bring the sick students to the hospital. Ten students were taken directly from the school to the hospital, two students went from home to the hospital (total number of initial cases: 12). Most of the students could leave the hospital soon. One pupil had to stay in the hospital and was still hospitalised moment of the investigation by the ISP.

The 12 cases came from different classes: 6 from one class (3<sup>rd</sup> year), 4 from two classes (4<sup>th</sup> year), one from one class (1<sup>st</sup> year) and one from one class (3<sup>rd</sup> year).

From 11 cases it is known that they consumed canned Coca-Cola and other soft drinks on the reference day. From these 11, seven students bought (one or more) canned Coca-Cola in school, 3 students bought their Coca-Cola in a shop outside, and one pupil brought the Coca-Cola from home. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> of June was a very hot day, it is plausible that the students consumed several cans of Coca-Cola during the day.

According to the director of the school, it was clear to him that one of the 12 students taken to hospital didn't suffer from any health complaint, and he knows another pupil as a more unstable person. This last pupil was dismissed soon after the hospital admission, but was again to be admitted to hospital a few hours later.

None of the students showed any specific study profile. All except one passed the examination without any problem. One pupil did not succeed, but the failure of particular student was not attributed to the incident of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

#### **10.5 Scenario in Lochristi**

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, before classes, the director telephoned to a hotline set up by Coca-Cola and asked about the safety of the drinks in the school's two vending machines. The Coca-Cola company told him that the company believed there was no real problem, but that he should remove all cans stamped on the bottom with codes that included the letters DU, DV and DW. The school staff followed this instruction. Soft drinks were sold during the break starting from 10.30'.

Around 11 o'clock a few students from two different classes stated they had head and stomach complaints. As usual in such a case, it was decided they could spend some time in the corridor in order to recover. Around 11:15' the director contacted a doctor as the complaints didn't go away and other students had also come to the school office having the same complaints. It was decided to call for an ambulance to bring 4 students to the hospital. By the time the ambulance arrived, 6 students were considered to be really sick and should be brought to hospital. As usual when calling an ambulance, the police was alarmed automatically. Shortly after the arrival of the ambulance the

police officer arrived. He decided that all students who stated to have complaints should be taken to hospital. In total, 37 students were taken to two hospitals. The majority of these 37 came from two classes, while the others came from different classes. The director, who didn't agree with the police officer, estimates that 20 students pretended to have complaints.

The majority of the students were soon dismissed of the hospital. Eight students had to spend one night in hospital, one pupil had to stay 2 nights.

The link with the consumption of soft drinks was made very fast (considering the contact the school had had with the Coca-Cola hot line). The students with health complaints were asked if they had drunk soft drinks from the vending machine at school (they all said yes). At 11:30' the Coca-Cola hotline was contacted again by school, stating students had become ill. The Coca-Cola official now told him that Fanta (or BONAQUA) cans, as well as any cans labelled DX and DP had to be removed.