

Germ Warfare

Sometimes being a detective is more about acting than snooping. No clues to follow. No villains to outsmart. No old man to shake his fist when unmasked and say, "I'd have gotten away with it, if it weren't for you meddling kids."

Sometimes villains aren't even aware of their crimes like a bumbling toddler ambling over an ant hill unfazed by the death and destruction below their feet.

At William B. Travis we have the opposite problem. The ants are killing us, and we are helping them like blind mice crawling toward a hungry snake farm. But our ants are not ants, they are germs, viruses, and all those little microbes that cause you to shiver while your head is burning up, cough until your chest caves in, and for extra fun maybe puke your guts out, and we are passing them around faster than a salacious tweet.

Billions of germs are turning the school into a war zone. The bombs are snot. We have mucous machine gun spray sneezes that can decimate an entire room with one horrific blast. Ignorant double agents are mindlessly booby-trapping every door handle and railing with biological weapons of mass destruction. The worst part is we could stop it or at least minimize the impact, but like moronic sheep we are inviting the wolf to a lamb buffet.

Is your school the same way?

Kids blasting out sneezes into the hallway like a random sprinkler blast. Students rub phlegm on fingers, thumbs, and palm then spread it to every surface in the school like mucousy fairy dust.

Why do I care?

Who am I?

Hannibal Greatneck III, Sixth grade student at William B. Travis, Detective, Lover of root beer and Cheetos, and Noticer of details that sail past most twelve to fifteen year olds like a seagull feather in a hurricane. My wake-up call-H1N1. Better, and less correctly known as Swine Flu. I have friends at school who think you have to be licked on the face by a pig to get swine flu. Others stopped eating pork chops because they thought they might get sick. I told you these kids are not thinkers. They are the "WHO's" and there is no "Horton" looking out for them. Rheni Rummell started bringing bacon sandwiches for lunch because he scared to eat ham. I thought about telling him where bacon comes from, but figured if you're going to be "WAY" wrong about something you might as well be wrong on the side of tasty.

I am watching with interest, awe, and sadness as my class and school let myth, superstition, and more often bored teen ignorance spread illness and perhaps death, like a high school after-prom party at the Friday-the-13th lake.

Hold it a second, I am hearing a voice in my head. It's Miranda Selber, William B. Travis's entry to the Adolescent Popular Girls Association of America and Guinness World record holder for the most "likes" in a sentence.

"Hello, Handy. Be, like, gross much? Pig flu, like sucks, and all, but, like, we aren't all gonna like die."

Second voice coming in. It's Randy "Kahuna" Bingham, our resided surfer dude, which is tough when you live 1500 miles from any decent waves.

"Whoa, dude! You are bumming me out, and I totally have no idea what you are talking about. Luau--gnarly, Pig flu--bummer."

Fair point Kahuna voice in my head. Let's back up for a little history and fact lesson on the Swine Flu, which is really called **H1N1** virus.

"Dude, history lesson. Bogus."

"Yeah, I agree with you, Randy voice. Like Snoozeville! I am tuning way out."

There will be no quiz, so I will leave out most of the history and stick with important stuff.

The "flu" is short for "influenza", like "duh" is short for "nice move bonehead", and it's a virus. **Important because there is no cure for any virus.** You get the flu, and you suffer aches, pains, fever, chills, and phlegm as thick as pudding. You feel as run down as a Chihuahua on a go-cart track. And every flu is a different virus. **H1N1** is a brand new virus.

Every year hundreds of thousands of people get what is called seasonal flu and about 36,000 people die. The majority of these deaths are babies and the elderly, but **H1N1** is different in another way too: Young healthy people are dying. They go from thinking about the school dance to a doctor saying, "There's no chance."

"Dude, this is getting heavy."

"Yeah, that's like actually scary and stuff."

A little worried is good, but don't be scared. We detectives put worry into action and figure out how to solve and not be paralyzed by problems.

First thing to do: **Stop spreading the rumors and crazy talk.**

Meaning we stamp out the lies and made up stuff about this flu like my dad's size 13 boots to my volcano project gone wrong.

1. YOU CAN'T GET THE FLU FROM EATING ANY PART OF A PIG, EVEN IF YOU FALL INTO A VAT OF BACON FAT.

2. THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN EAT OR DRINK TO KEEP YOU FROM GETTING THE FLU.

(Leave the herbal potions to the hippie guy who never smells right.)

3. THE FLU VACCINE CANNOT GIVE YOU THE FLU OR ANY OTHER ILLNESS OR DISEASE.

(except the giggles when you see some big football player squeal like little girl when he sees the needle.)

"Hello, Handy," Miranda is back, *"Little girls are, like, way tougher than boys and don't squeal. Stop being a sexist."*

You are right I am sorry.

There is just one way to get the **H1N1** flu. Come into contact with the **H1N1** flu, and it can be anywhere someone who has the **H1N1** flu has been. These little suckers can live for a long time on about any surface. When Snotty McGirk slides his twitchy little fingers across his virus-packed nose, millions of flu germs cling onto his snot. Now whatever he touches is the main transfer point of disease network control. Along comes Polly McFidget, and she sharpens her pencil in the same pencil sharpener as Snotty. Tens of thousands of virus invaders have made their departure and next time Polly rubs her eye, her nose, or shoves a finger in her mouth to lick off excess peanut butter- Hello, Flu! You win a 25% possibility of adding vomiting and diarrhea to your prize!

"Ick," pops in Miranda's voice in my head, *"like TMI."*

Sorry, sounds gross. Think how it feels! Like somebody put a ferret in your intestines and your butt in stealing every drop of water in your body to flush him out.

"Dude, too vivid." Kahuna throws out from my head. *"What can we do? How do we stop it? You just said it's everywhere, we can't see it. There is nothing we can do!"*

You are as wrong as a bonfire at the ice capades. A few little changes in your regular routine can almost guarantee you steer clear of **H1N1** (not the swine flu), other flues, colds, meningitis, and ink stains on your face.

1. WASH YOUR HANDS OR USE HAND SANITIZER. A LOT!

Really, that's it. Every time you go to the bathroom, touch a door knob, railing, or public surface, use someone's pencil, pick up a turtle, grab the X box controller from your friends sweaty hands, wash or sanitize your hands before eating or touching your face. Do so and your chances of contracting **H1N1** drop lower than the limbo bar at a slug party. And for the record, don't share: forks, straws, drinks, spoons, gum, meatballs, etc.

"Dude, whose gonna eat the same meatball?"

Sorry, got carried away, but you get the idea. Germs everywhere, Duh!

2. AVOID SICK PEOPLE!

Seems easy but for some reason many students who feel like garbage still show up in their classroom like a moth to a 100 watt bulb. Stay home if you are sick. **H1N1** is an airborne virus.

"OMG," mentally texts Miranda, *"it can like hatch out of the air?"*

No airborne means that if it's flying around the air and hit's you in the face then you can catch it.

"How does it get flying around?" says Kahuna, *"Did it catch some monster air?"*

More like a monster sneeze. When someone has the virus and does not cover their mouth when they sneeze they send more germs than you could count in a lifetime into the air at up to 200 miles per hour.

"Wicked!"

Yeah, Randy, try ducking that tsunami. Everyone needs to eject their mucous into a Kleenex or into the inside of their sleeve near your elbow.

Miranda chimes in, *"Like gross."*

Better to have all the germs in the air? Or on your hands? People think you can cover your mouth with your hand and stop the sneeze, but it just slips through your fingers and fills our hand with diseased loogies.

3. GET VACCINATED/A FLU SHOT

The **H1N1** vaccine and virus is so new that everyone will need to have two shots.

"Nah, hey, why don't they just put both shots into one mondo shot?"

You know, Randy, for a voice in my head you'd really think you could find the answers to this stuff in my brain yourself. It's all there you know.

"No, dude, that stuff is way up front. I am purely subconscious. Never the twain shall meet, right?"

If you say so, the second shot comes about three weeks later, and is called a **"booster"**. Being a new virus we have no immunity at all in our bodies to **H1N1**. Most flues are altered versions of an old flu so one shot will do, but this vaccine needs a kick in the pants **3** weeks later for the motivation to finish the job. Picture a middle school student with a long book report due. He starts out working pretty strong, but then a week in, he's lost interest and is getting tired. He's slacking off getting the work done, even though it's almost finished. He knows he will get no credit for part of the job, but he just isn't motivated. In walks Dad, *"Hey champ, get that done tonight or no Play Station, Ipod,*

television, friends, bed, or dinner for a week." Kaboom he's working like gangbusters, as my grandpa says, and it's finished.

A better analogy is this: Think of hitting the Nitro on a street racing video game. The second shot is the Nitro.

"Rock on, Nitro. Dude, I am there!"

"Hello, earth to Space Station Randy. Miranda calling. We are still talking about a shot here, not a video game, and Handy I hear like these shots are like the actual virus. So, I get the things to stop the thing, and it gives me the thing?"

That's a lot of things. The thing you are talking about in the shot is a dead thing. It is the virus, but a very nearly almost completely dead thing. The virus in the shot teaches your body to search and destroy any live virus it might come across in the future. It's your own built in blood-hound-ninjas. They get the scent from killing the dead virus in the shot, and then sniff around until they smell more of the same virus. Then they turn into silent killers of the night destroying all new live **H1N1** germs.

In rare cases people who have gotten the vaccine feel a little fluish for a day, but it goes away quick, or they get tenderness or redness at the shot site. That is all minor compared with 14 days of sickness that makes fighting a polar bear with a slice of bread look fun. Lastly, if anyone has allergies they must tell their doctor first.

Time to Wrap Up

I need to check the web and see if voices in your head is something I should be worried about.

"Dude, you're fine."

You're right Randy, I am, but I want to finish this up and get planning my project for school tomorrow. I started this by saying sometimes being a detective is more about acting than sleuthing. I am sending a wake-up call to the student body of William B. Travis using a tiny spray bottle, water, Borax, glue, yellow food coloring and some make up help from Kayla. It's going to be gross. It's going to be great! I promised the school that Ralphie and I would help clean up afterward, and the students will hopefully get the message about their role in stopping **H1N1**.

RECAP ALERT!

The Duh's and Do's of **H1N1**

Duh, 1. Cannot get from eating pork product.

- Duh, 2. There is no cure, only prevention.
- Do, 3. Wash your hands. A lot.
- Do, 4. Don't touch your face and put fingers in eyes, mouth, or nose.
- Do, 5. Avoid sick people. Stay home if ill.
- Duh, 6. Don't sneeze in the air or your hands.
- Do, 7. Sneeze into your sleeve at the elbow pit, or a Kleenex.
- Do, 8. Get the vaccine!! And booster!!
See two exclamation points. That means its serious.

Brad Tassell is the author of the award winning novel for teens and preteens on bullying, **Don't Feed the Bully**. It is read in hundreds of schools. DFB helps students move the bully target, learn empathy, and build a live long love of reading. For more: www.dontfeedthebully.com