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Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

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6998	16.09.2022	21.09.2022	Warangal Telangana	www.thehindu.com/English https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/sorry-state-of-affairs-in-ashram-schools-in-telangana/article65894250.ece
Title:	33 girl students of an Ashram school at Wardhannapet in Warangal district fell ill after having hostel food, Telangana			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU- Warangal, SSU- Telangana			

Sorry state of affairs in Ashram schools

33 girl students of an Ashram school at Wardhannapet in Warangal district fell ill after having hostel food that allegedly had a dead lizard

Panic-stricken parents of around 33 students of the State-run Ashram girls' high school at Wardhannapet in Warangal district experienced anxious moments, when their daughters were hospitalised for treatment for suspected food poisoning on the intervening night of September 5 and 6 this year.

The students were taken ill after consuming food that allegedly had a dead lizard in it at their hostel the previous night.

All of them were discharged after remaining under medical supervision for about one day, some in the local State-run hospital and others at MGM hospital in Warangal, much to the relief of their parents.

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Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,
Ministry Of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India

22-Sham Nath Marg, Delhi – 110 054

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The incident, which coincided with Teachers' Day, came as a stark reminder of the sorry state of affairs in the Ashram school housing nearly 192 girl students from tribal communities and other underprivileged sections.

Protests

It sparked protests by the aggrieved parents as well as various student unions, who raised serious concern over the quality of food being served to students. In what is alleged as a deliberate attempt to 'hush up' the incident by the contingency worker in the hostel kitchen, drew outrage from parents.

This also prompted some parents to take home their daughters from the hostel, citing poor quality food and unhygienic conditions in the hostel mess.

The district authorities suspended the hostel welfare officer/warden and cook besides terminating the services of a contingency worker following an outpour of anger over the 'food poisoning' incident.

Dead lizard in rice

Saritha, a Class X student of the Ashram school, had reportedly spotted the dead lizard in the rice, while having dinner at the hostel. "Soon after finding the lizard, I had alerted the worker in the kitchen," said a visibly shaken Saritha.

"But to my utter shock, he threw away the dead lizard saying it's dried red chilli in pickle. A little later, I started vomiting and experienced stomach ache," she said, adding that several other students showed symptoms of food poisoning afterwards.

Another girl student, who was also hospitalised on the same day, said: "We often find worms in the rice and the food served at the hostel mess is of sub-standard quality."

"What is more disturbing is the callous apathy of the worker in the hostel, who tried to cover up the food poisoning incident by downplaying it and attributing the sickness of students to self-induced vomiting out of fear," rued an angry mother of a student from a tribal hamlet in Raiparthy mandal.

"I cannot put my daughter at risk by leaving her in the hostel amid pathetic conditions," she said, vowing to admit her daughter in a better institution by toiling hard against all odds.

Hostel welfare officer Jyothi said: "I have always personally supervised preparation of food on a daily basis. I had gone to Warangal to attend an official meeting on

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September 5 when the incident took place,” adding that all the ailing students were swiftly shifted to hospital the same night and subsequently discharged the next day.

Around 70% of the total 192 students are attending classes in the Ashram school at present and efforts are on to ensure cent percent attendance, said Ramdas, Principal, Ashram high school, Wardhannapet. Proposals have already been sent for construction of additional rooms in the hostel building on the school premises.

Need of the hour

The urgent need of the hour is to streamline the functioning of government residential educational institutions, including welfare hostels, to improve sanitation and provide quality food with a nutritious menu to students, said Kula Vivaksha Vyatireka Porata Sangham vice-president N. Manohar.

In social welfare hostels, a meagre mess allowance of ₹33.66 is being paid to each student per day, he said, quoting the findings of a survey titled “Sankeshma Hostels Bata” conducted recently.

It is imperative to increase budgetary allocations to State-run welfare hostels in proportion to the soaring prices of essential commodities, he stressed.

The Wardhannapet incident is not an isolated one. A similar incident was reported from the Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies (RGUKT) at Basar in Nirmal district, where more than 100 students were taken ill after consuming meal at the university hostel in mid-July this year, pointed out Srikanth, an ABVP activist of the erstwhile composite Warangal district.

The two incidents exposed ‘glaring deficiencies’ in supervision of hostel messes attached to the State-run residential educational institutions, which need to be plugged immediately, he said.

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