

# 500 pupils tested for bacteria

## Disease carriers sought on Kauai

By Beverly Creamer  
Advertiser Staff Writer

State health officials are worried that some Kauai children are carriers of a flesh-eating bacteria that has killed one person on Kauai and sickened three others.

The Health Department yesterday tested about 500 first-, second- and third-graders to see whether they may be carriers of this specific strain of the strep A bacteria.

"Studies on the Mainland have shown that kids may be a reservoir for this type of bacteria and not develop the symptoms," said Patrick Johnston, spokesman for the Health Department.

"The studies speculate that they are exposed and develop an immunity ... but could

potentially pass it on to someone else, namely an adult."

One adult died on Kauai earlier this fall from the bacteria, officially called *necrotizing fasciitis*. Another three cases of the bacterial infection have been confirmed, but those patients have recovered.

Testing took place yesterday at Wilcox Elementary, Kapaa Elementary and Waimea Canyon Elementary. Any children who are found to be carrying the bacteria will be treated with a course of antibiotics that kill it, Johnston said.

"We chose representative schools on the island to determine whether there was a reservoir of strep A bacteria among school-age children."

"If we discover there's a reservoir of strep A within the schools, we'll be able to advise physicians in the area to be on the lookout for people who come into their office with

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symptoms," said Johnston. These include signs of infection around an open sore or wound.

As a general precaution, the Health Department advises Kauai residents to wash any cuts and scrapes with soap and water, apply topical antiseptic to kill any bacteria, and keep the cut clean and protected.

It will take up to two weeks to complete analysis of yesterday's throat cultures at Wilcox Memorial Hospital, said Johnston. But he said he expects there will be indications sooner of whether or not children may carry the infection.

"There's been a seasonal increase in strep A skin infections on Kauai for the past few years, and we've found it again this year," said Johnston. "It shows up in September and October and doesn't peter off till November, but this year they are continuing to have cases into November."

"We don't know where the bacteria is coming from. It's a serious condition, and we want to take steps to avoid the more serious problems we're having."

—PATRICK JOHNSTON,  
SPOKESMAN, STATE  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Yesterday's testing drew numerous volunteers at all the schools to help in the effort to analyze and contain the infection. "There's been a lot of support," said Johnston.

"We don't know where the bacteria is coming from," he said. "It's a serious condition, and we want to take steps to avoid the more serious problems we're having."