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RARE FUNGUS KILLED BABIES IN CLEVELAND

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From staff and wire reports

Researchers are almost certain a rare fungus caused the deaths of two infants and made 12 others ill.

Researchers said Monday they believe the fungus caused the rare bleeding lung illness in babies in Cleveland, East Cleveland and Garfield Heights since 1993.

The fungus, *Stachybotrys atra*, is a black, slimy mold that grows only under very wet conditions and only on cellulose materials such as wood and paper.

"The disease is so rare that we may never be 100 percent sure of the cause, but this is likely to be as close as we ever get," said Timothy Horgan, Cuyahoga County health commissioner.

Researchers from Rainbow Babies and Childrens Hospital worked with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta to pinpoint the cause of the sickness, known as pulmonary hemosiderosis. The symptoms are bleeding in the lungs that causes the babies to cough up blood.

During the same period the 14 cases were reported in Cleveland - January 1993 to January 1995 - only 31 other cases appeared nationwide.

Dr. Dorr Dearborn of Rainbow hospital said the fungus was found in all but one of the houses where the infected babies lived.

Secondary tobacco smoke in homes where the fungus existed seemed to increase the likelihood of illness, Dearborn said. The researchers also found that breast-feeding might offer some protection to babies exposed to the fungus, he said.

OHIO

Fugitive nabbed

An Edon man was arrested Monday after police said he was wanted in West Virginia on felony sexual assault charges. Charles Myers, age unknown, was

arrested by officers from the Williams County Sheriff's Department after police ran a computer check on him when he hit a deer with his car. Officers said police in West Virginia had been looking for Myers for years. He is being held at Community Corrections of Northwest Ohio.

Health fair set

The Van Wert County Health fair will be from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at Vantage Vocational School. Featuring a pancake breakfast and plenty of information about health, the fair also offers a number of screenings, including a blood chemistry profile for \$25 and free hearing and body fat tests. For more information, call the American Red Cross at 238-9977.

Law protested

Conscientious objectors are angry about a new state law they say will give military recruiters too much information about high school students. Beginning Thursday, school boards must release the name and address of any student in grades 10 through 12 to recruiters upon request - unless the student or a parent tells the boards not to release the information. Michael Hawk of the Dayton office of the American Friends Service Committee, a Philadelphia-based organization that works to build public resistance to militarism, said the law gives recruiters too much access.

River study set

An interstate commission plans to study two specific substances polluting the Ohio River and its tributaries, with a fraction of the money it requested for the project, an agency official said Tuesday. The study by the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission is part of a long-term program to reduce dioxin, an industrial contaminant believed to cause cancer, and atrazine, a herbicide used in growing corn and soybeans. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said in May that it had found fish in the Ohio River and in the Kanawha River in West Virginia had high concentrations of dioxin. It asked the commission to study the source but provided only \$50,000 for the study.

Dismissal disputed

A woman who discovered that confidential information had been improperly stored in a state health department office says she was dismissed a week later. Audra Hood was dismissed one week after reporting that she had found sensitive information about HIV patients in an unlocked desk at the department's AIDS prevention unit, according to news reports. Department spokesman Randy Hertzler said Hood was a contract employee whose work was essentially complete. The State Highway Patrol, acting at the Health Department's request, is investigating two instances in which confidential information allegedly was mishandled.

Shell causes furor

A 6-year-old Toledo boy told his school bus driver that he wanted to show her a bullet he was toting for show-and-tell. But what Tim Nicolls pulled out of his pocket Monday was no bullet. It was a 20 mm cannon shell. Luckily, the shell was a dud, or it could have blown the bus up, police said. At first, police believed the shell was live. The Toledo police bomb squad removed the shell, which was taken to a police munitions storage area. A bomb expert said Tuesday it was empty, Noble said. The boy's parents bought the shell Sunday for \$10 from a vendor at the Toledo Air Show.

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