

## Regional

# Disease poses threat to children

By William C. Crum  
Associated Press

PORTLAND (AP) — A pediatrician at Oregon Health Sciences University on Monday warned parents to be wary of the threat from meningococcal disease, an ailment that poses a particular threat to young children.

Dr. Gary Parks, a pediatric critical care specialist at OHSU, said the hospital had treated six cases of the disease this year, and one child died.

The ailment claimed the lives of six people, four of them young children, last year in the Yakima, Wash., area.

In each case at OHSU this year, Parks said, there was a delay in diagnosing the disease and beginning treatment.

He advised parents to avoid delay in seeking medical treatment for children who become lethargic and develop a fever.

"The faster we can get our hands on these children, the better we can do with them," Parks said at a news conference at the hospital.

He said a rash that develops in almost all cases makes the disease easy to identify.

The bacteria that causes meningococcal disease is spread through coughing and sneezing. The disease can lead to meningitis, an inflammation of the lining of the brain.

Parks said the state could be facing the beginning of an epidemic, but Fred Hoesly of the epidemiology section at the state Health Division said an epidemic is unlikely to develop.

Hoesly said 10 cases had been reported to the Health Division so far this year, down from 18 at the same time last year. Meningococcal disease is about as prevalent in Oregon as pertussis, or whooping cough, he said.

Hoesly said there were 59 cases of

meningococcal disease last year in Oregon, and one death.

"We cannot say that we have any problem here that's unusual in comparison to past statistics," Hoesly said.

Parks said the concern of doctors at OHSU was prompted by the number and severity of the cases they had treated this year.

Parks said some children may suffer only mild symptoms while others become extremely sick very quickly.

Parks said the child that died at OHSU was healthy only hours before his death.

"His case was probably eight hours from being well to being dead," he said.

The disease causes blood clotting abnormalities that restrict the flow of blood to the extremities and to the organs of the body.

A 20-month-old boy treated during the last two weeks at OHSU probably will lose the tips of his fingers and toes because of the loss of circulation.

The latest case at OHSU is that of Rachel Bakamus, a 13-month-old from Longview, Wash., who was sent to the hospital Sunday night.

The little girl's parents, Bill and Cathy Bakamus, said their daughter developed a fever and was up most of the night Saturday.

Cathy Bakamus noticed a slight rash Sunday morning and took Rachel to her pediatrician, who immediately sent the child to OHSU.

Rachel was in critical but stable condition Monday in the hospital's pediatric intensive care unit.

"She has every single organ system being monitored, head to toe," Parks said. The child may eventually need plastic surgery, he said.

Cathy Bakamus, a 28-year-old mother of two, said her youngest daughter's rash in its early stages looked like broken blood vessels.

# Flag burning issue still a hot topic up north

By Mark Jewell  
Associated Press

OLYMPIA (AP) — Less than a week after a federal judge in Seattle threw out the nation's new flag-desecration law, state lawmakers Monday debated whether to ask for a constitutional amendment to protect the national symbol.

"I do not think it is contrary to the American way to respect an American symbol for which thousands of Americans have given their lives," said Sen. Leo Thorsness, a Congressional Medal of Honor winner and former prisoner of war in Vietnam.

Thorsness, R-Seattle, sponsored the measure, which would ask the state's congressional delegation to support constitutional protections for the U.S. flag.

The Senate petition failed to come to a vote but was expected to be reconsidered Tuesday.

Last week, U.S. District Judge Barbara Rothstein ruled that the right of Americans to burn the flag must be protected as vigorously as their right to wave it. She threw out charges against four Seattle protesters who burned a flag and declared the Flag Protection Act of 1989, passed by Congress, to be unconstitutional.

President Bush has supported a constitutional amendment outlawing destruction of the flag, and some in Congress have renewed that call in the wake of Rothstein's ruling, which is likely to be appealed directly to the U.S. Supreme Court.

State lawmakers have no jurisdiction over federal constitutional questions and Thorsness' measure, SR8743, is merely a request.

Thorsness told of a fellow

American prisoner of war who endured torture at the hands of his North Vietnamese captors because he dared to construct a makeshift flag out of a handkerchief.

The flag is deserving of special protection because it reminds citizens of freedoms that are jeopardized daily through laws enacted by the Legislature, Congress and other bodies, Thorsness said.

But Sen. Arlie DeJarnatt, D-Longview, argued that flag-protection laws are contradictory because they restrict freedom of expression.

"We must, if we truly believe in freedom, respect free-speech rights," DeJarnatt said.

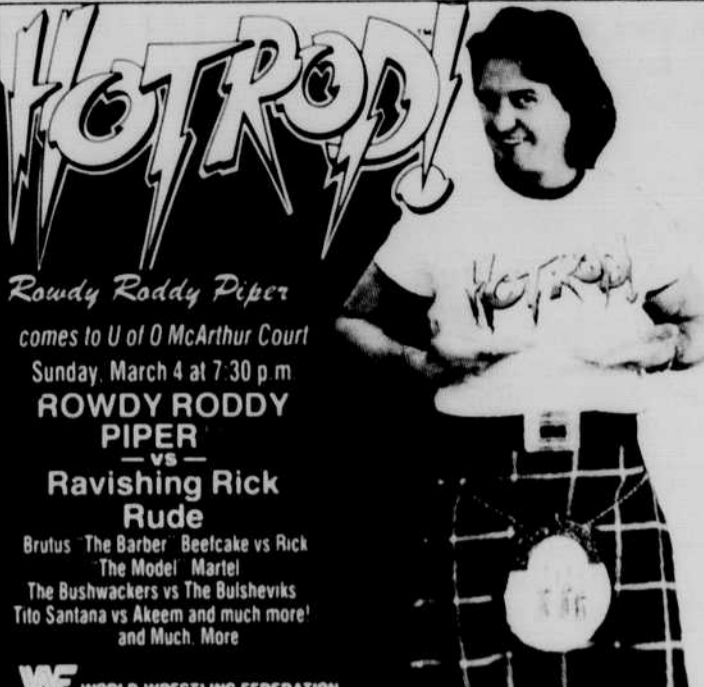
Such freedoms "include the right to be obnoxious and repulsive" by burning flags, he said. It is better to ignore such acts than to pay attention by imposing legal restrictions, he said.

DeJarnatt said the only countries that legally protect their flags are Cuba, South Africa and China, nations that he called "totalitarian."

"I don't want to join that group," he said.

Thorsness' petition gathered signatures of support from a majority of senators, but debate was cut off when a procedural question arose. Critics questioned whether the measure should be considered as merely a Senate request rather than referring it to the House as well. If the Senate passed the petition, the lower chamber would have only a few days to consider it before scheduled adjournment March 8.

Thorsness said the measure would be brought up for a Senate vote Tuesday, but he predicted it may not be considered by the House before adjournment.



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