

College student, 20, found dead in dorm room after testing positive for COVID-19

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Bethany Nesbitt, a 20-year old psychology major at Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, has become one of the latest young victims of the coronavirus in the US. She was found dead on the morning of Friday, October 30 in her dorm room, after having been sent home from the hospital following a positive COVID-19 test.

Bethany, who was in her junior year at Grace College, was the youngest of 9 children from a family in Michigan. She was training to be a Child Life Specialist, a type of health care professional who helps children and families navigate the process of illness, injury, disability, trauma, or hospitalization.

A statement from the family, published by her brother on Twitter, noted that she had been quarantined in her dorm room for 10 days at the time of her death. Initially experiencing symptoms in the week of October 20, she took a test for the virus on October 22nd, at which time she began quarantining. The statement notes that the results of that initial test were never delivered due to an unknown clerical error.

Bethany, who was asthmatic, worked with her mother and campus health officials to monitor her oxygen saturation levels.

On October 26, Bethany experienced a drop in her oxygen saturation and was taken to the emergency room for evaluation. An ER doctor determined that she likely had COVID-19 but felt that it was not a severe case as she seemed to be recovering. She then returned to her dorm room and continued her quarantine.

On October 28, Bethany notified her family that her oxygen levels were normalizing and that she had been fever free for 24 hours. On October 29, she was tested again. The statement from her family notes that her improving condition had encouraged her. She watched Netflix that night before retiring to bed.

Bethany passed away that night. The results of the second test, positive for COVID, were delivered only after her death.

The immediate cause of Bethany's death was a pulmonary embolism, which is a common cause of death among COVID-19 patients. A pulmonary embolism, according to the Mayo Clinic, is "a blockage in one of the pulmonary arteries in your lungs."

A recent article in Science News cites a new study which suggests that such embolisms in COVID patients may be a product of the body's immune system attacking the patient's body rather than the virus itself.

The statement from Bethany's family notes that she had elected to return to Grace College this semester and had been granted a single-person dorm room by the college. Grace College, which is a small, evangelical Christian college, notes on their website that while students are "required to wear a mask at all times in their residence hall," they have adopted a "floor is family" philosophy. As a result, students residing on the same floor are not required to wear a face mask around each other. Despite this, the statement from Bethany's family notes that she "was careful. She wore her mask. She socially distanced."

The statement concludes with a plea for everyone to "follow health officials' protocols and precautions." It continues, "We had already canceled our family holiday plans before Bethany got sick. The risks of gathering in large groups aren't worth it this year. There will be an empty seat at our table the next time our family comes together – and every time after that. This loss is forever. We plead with you to take this virus seriously. And we pray for your health and safety in this holiday season." Bethany's family have started a GoFundMe in order to collect money for a memorial scholarship in her honor.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children’s Hospital Association reported Monday that more than 61,000 children in the US were diagnosed with COVID-19 last week—more than in any other week of the pandemic.

According to the report, a total of 853,635 children have been diagnosed with the virus this year, representing 11.1 percent of all US cases. The percentage of pediatric cases has risen steadily since mid-April, when children accounted for just 2 percent of COVID-19 cases in the country.

In the last few months alone, COVID has claimed the lives of 13-year-old Peyton Baumgarth of Missouri, 19-year-old Chad Dorrill from North Carolina, 20-year-old Jamain Stevens Jr. of Pennsylvania, Michael Lang, a freshman at the University of Dayton in Ohio, and Jezreel Lowie B. Juan of Hawaii—to name only a few.

New reports emerging almost weekly indicate that there are still many unknowns when it comes to the impact of the virus on children. One recent *JAMA Cardiology* study suggested that the effects of COVID-19 on the heart can possibly last a lifetime, even in younger and healthier individuals.

The homicidal back-to-school campaign initiated by the Trump administration has been supported by members of both the Republican and Democratic parties, including Trump’s presidential opponent Joe Biden. This is not an exclusively American policy—many of the major capitalist powers, including Britain, Germany, and France—are pursuing the same course. The argument is made that because children and young people are not impacted by the virus as heavily as older people, little to no precautions are necessary and children can be sent safely back to schools.

A recent article on the WSWS quotes Dr. Andrew Pavia of Primary Children’s Hospital stating that the problem with this view is that it is “like saying there is no reason to wear a seat belt because most of the time you’re driving your car, you don’t have a crash... Children have much lower rates of serious complications, but that doesn’t help the child that does.”



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