Federal Government Slaps $600K Fine on Wanaque Center After 11 Children Die

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The federal government imposed a $600,331 fine on the New Jersey nursing center where a viral outbreak left 11 children dead and 36 sick last year. Investigators reported Wanaque nursing home’s poor infection controls, lack of administrative oversight, and slow response from medical staff “directly contributed” to the rapid spread of the virus and its related death toll.

The 114-page federal inspection report, published in December, claimed the staff at Wanaque failed to correct issues that could have controlled the outbreak, allowing residents and one staff member to contract the virus and placing others in “immediate jeopardy.”

The report alleges the center had a faulty infection-control plan, did not respond appropriately when the outbreak emerged, and failed to properly monitor the infection rate.

Multiple children at Wanaque retained high fevers for days before staff sent them to the emergency room, two of which died within hours of arriving at the hospital. At least two other children, who had been symptom-free, contracted the virus and died after staff failed to separate them from their sick roommates.

Wanaque’s pediatric medical director appeared to be absent during the crisis and claimed he did not fully understand the responsibilities of his position. The director also failed to attend quality assurance and performance meetings and had not filed monthly reports for the last four years.

The Wanaque facility is strongly disputing the findings in the federal investigation report, arguing the staff followed proper protocols and the outbreak was “unavoidable.”

New Jersey ceased all admission to the nursing home following the outbreak, but is now allowing the facility to admit new patients. A restriction does still remain in place barring Wanaque from admitting pediatric ventilator patients until federal and state officials approve the facility’s written infection-control plan.

In addition to the $600,331 federal fine, the New Jersey Department of Health is imposing a $21,000 penalty on the nursing home for each infection-control-related failure.

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