

Two pupils, seller feared dead after eating birthday biscuits



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By **Correspondents**



At least two pupils and a trader have reportedly died after eating biscuits brought to school by mother of a fellow pupil in LEA Primary School 3 in Kubwa, Abuja.

There were controversies yesterday over the cause of death and the number of the actual victims.

A source said a woman went to the school on Tuesday with biscuitss which she distributed to the pupils as well

as a trader selling dates to mark her daughter's birthday.

At press time, various officials and witnesses were quoting different figures.

Our correspondent, who visited the school yesterday, saw more than 30 teachers and executives of the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) wing in a heated meeting, deliberating on how to handle the situation.

The headmaster, who was identified only as Mr. Stephen, refused to divulge any information to journalists.

However, there was a sober mood in the environment, as residents and traders near the school expressed shock over the tragic event.

One of the residents, who gave his name as Joshua Nwadike, told our correspondent that angry parents and relatives of the deceased and hospitalised pupils

had stormed the school, crippling activities for over four hours and demanding justice for the death of the pupils.

He said: “I came out this morning and there were a lot of people protesting. A kid and her mum went to the school yesterday claiming to be celebrating birthday and shared biscuitss to pupils in the school and according to the report this morning, about seven are already dead.

“There were lots of police vans and it was very rowdy. Based on what I gathered from the protesters, the deaths stretched to this morning (yesterday) and others are still hospitalised.”

Mallam Kabiru, an orange seller, was saddened by the demise of his friend selling dates commonly known as dabino, on the school premises.

“The woman gave him the biscuitss yesterday too when she came to celebrate her daughter’s birthday which he ate. Now he is also dead.”

According to him, apart from the dates' seller, 15 pupils have died so far.

But the Federal Capital Territory Police Public Relations Officer, (FCT PPRO), DSP Anjuguri Manzah, said only two of the pupils had been confirmed dead, while others were recuperating in the hospital.

Manzah said the case had been transferred to the Command Criminal Investigations and Intelligence Department (CCIID), to determine the actual cause of deaths.

Meanwhile, the FCT NUT Chairman, Comrade Stephen Knabayi, said the union could not comment on the matter as it was presently under investigation.

He said: "As you heard, that is how we also heard the story and that is why we are here. Importantly, this is an issue under investigation and as it is now, nobody can tell you this is what happened."

This came barely two weeks after three pupils of a private school in Abuja were burnt to death when their

school bus caught fire.

While the actual cause of the death was still unknown, there were conflicting accounts regarding the death. Some accounts have it that the children died after consuming biscuits shared in the school by a birthday celebrant yet to be named, others alleged that the death could be attributed to food poisoning.

The Chief Medical Director of Kubwa General Hospital, Dr. Lasisi Akinola, said two of the victims rushed to the hospital were responding positively to treatment.

Akiola, however, refuted the biscuitss consumption speculation, but didn't disclose the result of his diagnoses.

He said: "The condition of the two children rushed to the hospital is stable, and it may not be related to food poisoning."

Also speaking on the incident, Bwari Area Council Chairman, Musa Dikko, who supported the speculation that the children died after eating biscuitss in the

school, also said that he was in the school for first hand assessment of the situation.

While disclosing that the school had to be shut to control spill off of whatever the cause of the death might be, Dikko said that the suspended activities in the school would resume on Monday.

He said: “Naima Yahaya, 14, primary five and Yahaya Garba, 14, primary four are alleged to have lost their lives due to their consumption of biscuitss that was shared on Tuesday by an unidentified birthday celebrant. Aisha Isa and Hasia Haruna have been taken to hospital for treatment. The authorities are yet to receive report on the exact cause of deaths and ailments.”

Meanwhile, the FCT Administration, through the Education Secretariat, also said that three pupils died in the school.

The Secretary of the Education Secretariat, Isa Maina, while commiserating with the parents of the deceased, said the matter was still under investigation to unravel the truth behind the death.

He said: “We regret to confirm that three pupils indeed lost their lives and two others hospitalised from that school in circumstances that are still under investigation from relevant authorities including the police and the Health and Human Services Secretariat of the FCT.”

“The school has since been closed down for the rest of the week to enable investigating authorities to carry out a thorough assignment. However, it is essential in the interest of concerned parents and the public to state the following. The school is a non-boarding primary school with no provision for any form of government school feeding programme.

“It was reported that some pupils consumed biscuitss purchased outside the school premises and consumed after school hours which might have adversely affected their health. Until investigations are complete, the cause/causes of the children’s deaths remain speculative. So far, there has been no evidence of deliberate foul play, but investigations are ongoing. Parents are advised to remain calm and be assured of the safety of their children in all FCT schools.”