

# PATTERNS OF SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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**Abstract.** School absenteeism data can be used as surrogate data to identify potential disease outbreaks in schools and the community. We aimed to explore the patterns of school absenteeism, especially absence due to sickness with and without fever. Absenteeism data of anonymous students during academic year 2013 were extracted from an electronic school absenteeism monitoring system implemented in 6 primary schools in Bangkok. Absence status was classified into 4 groups: unexplained absences, absence for personal reasons, absence due to sickness with fever, and absence due to sickness without fever. The absence rate was calculated to describe the patterns of absenteeism by type of absence, sex, grade, school size and season. The overall absence rate was 47.40 per 1,000 school days. Unexplained absence rate was 29.34 per 1,000 school days. The absence for personal reasons rate was 12.84/1,000 school days. The absence due to sickness with fever rate was 3.87/1,000 school days. The absence due to sickness without fever rate was 1.35/1,000 school days. Patterns of school absences differed by school sizes and over time. Seventy-three percent of students with absence due to sickness reported they had fever. Absence due to sickness with fever occurred more commonly among younger students (Grades 1 and 2) and during the rainy season. Similar patterns of absence due to sickness and absence due to sickness with fever among the schools suggest data recording absence due to sickness may be used to estimate the incidence of acute febrile illness among students. This data regarding absence due to sickness may be useful for syndromic surveillance. Further studies of the correlation between absence due to sickness among students and disease occurrence in the community are needed.

**Keywords:** absenteeism, primary school, fever, absence due to sickness, syndromic surveillance

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