

Autopsy ordered at Willowbrook

By NED HOUSEMAN

A blind, mentally retarded youth died at the Willowbrook Developmental Center early yesterday, several hours after he complained of stomach pains and was prescribed penicillin, authorities reported.

Aides found the boy, Jose Toro, 19, of Brooklyn, gasping for breath in bed in a ward at 5 a.m. He was pronounced dead 10 minutes later, despite the desperate effort of a nurse to save him with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Toro, who resided in Building 9 of the sprawling institution, is believed to be the first resident to die at Willowbrook this year.

According to a Willowbrook spokesman, Toro's illness was discovered Sunday afternoon by his mother, who was visiting him. She informed a supervisor, and the boy was examined in his mother's presence by a Willowbrook physician, Dr. William Fleischer.

Although Toro — who spoke some Spanish despite his handicap — told his mother his stomach hurt, Dr. Fleischer found no sign of abdominal trouble, the spokesman said. The youth had a temperature of 102 degrees and was prescribed penicillin.

Thirteen hours after Toro's illness was discovered, aides found him gasping for breath and notified a supervisor. There was no nurse in the building. Arthur Mizell, a nurse responsible for Buildings 7 and 9, was in Building 7 nearby.

Authorities said Mizell ran to the stricken boy, applied mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and then used a mechanical resuscitator in an attempt to save his life. But when Dr. Jeeredi Parasad arrived 10 minutes later, Toro was dead.

"There's no rash, no throat swelling, there's not a mark on his body," said Louis Siegal, supervisor for Buildings 7 and 9.

Siegel said that the absence of a rash seemed to rule out the possibility that Toro had an allergic reaction to the antibiotic. An autopsy was scheduled to be performed last night, and the results will be made known today, according to Dr. Ragasmy Natarajan, Willowbrook's deputy director of clinical affairs.

"There is no evidence of any violence, no evidence of any injury," Dr. Natarajan said.

Dr. Natarajan said there was nothing unusual in the fact that there was no entry for Toro in the ward's log book between 10 p.m. Sunday and the time of his death, seven hours later.

An entry in the log book marked 6 p.m. Sunday indicated that Toro had a temperature of 101 and was given a dose of penicillin. A 10 p.m. entry showed the boy's temperature had dropped to 100.4. There was no further entries.

Dr. Natarajan said all temperatures are taken rectally, and that it is thought best not to disturb residents' sleep unless they have a high fever.

"I don't think there was anything amiss at all," he said.

Toro, blind since infancy, occupied a first-floor ward with eight other blind, retarded adolescents. Building 9, which houses about 135 "profoundly and severely" retarded youths, has been the subject of news coverage in recent months.