

Headline: Conn. student disabled on school trip wins \$41.7M  
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Headline: Conn. woman left severely ill by insect bites on school trip to China wins \$41.7M jury verdict

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Bytitle: Associated Press  
Dateline: NEW HAVEN, Conn.

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — A jury on Wednesday awarded \$41.7 million to a woman who sued her prestigious boarding school after contracting a tick-borne illness on a school trip to China that left her unable to speak and brain damaged.

The federal jury in Bridgeport ruled in favor of Cara Munn, 20, in her lawsuit against The Hotchkiss School, a private school in Lakeville. The school said it would appeal.

Munn, of New York City, was a ninth-grader at Hotchkiss when she joined a school-supervised trip to China during the summer of 2007, according to her lawsuit. The then-15-year-old suffered insect bites that led to tick-borne encephalitis, her attorneys said.

The school failed to ensure that the students take any precautions against ticks and allowed them to walk through a densely wooded area known to be a risk area for tick-borne encephalitis and other tick- and insect-transmitted illnesses, her attorneys said.

"Hotchkiss failed to take basic safety precautions to protect the minor children in its care," Munn's attorney Antonio Ponvert III said. "I hope that this case will help alert all schools who sponsor overseas trips for minors that they need to check the CDC for disease risks in the areas where they will be travelling, and that they must advise children in their care to use repellent and wear proper clothing when necessary. Cara's injuries were easily preventable."

Attorneys for the school argued that tick-borne encephalitis is such a rare disease that it could not have foreseen a risk and could not be expected to warn Munn or require her to use protection against it.

Hotchkiss officials said they remain very saddened by Munn's illness and hope for improvements to her health.

"We care deeply about all our students," the school said in a statement. "We make every effort to protect them, whether they are here or participating in a school-sponsored activity off-campus. We put great care and thought into planning and administering off-campus programs, and we extend the same care to students on these trips as to students on campus."

Historically, Hotchkiss students have undertaken study, service projects and travel in the United States and throughout the world and derived great benefit from the opportunities, the school said.

The case lasted eight days, and the jury deliberated for about eight hours before returning their verdict.