

As many as 25 dead in Colorado school attack

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LITTLETON, Colorado (CNN) -- At least two heavily armed young men opened fire and tossed explosives Tuesday at an affluent suburban Denver high school, killing students and possibly faculty members, authorities said. Sheriff John Stone said as many as 25 people were killed, including two suspects found dead in the library.

CNN has accounted for at least 20 students being treated at hospitals for gunshot and shrapnel wounds; at least seven were listed in critical condition.

Stone, sheriff of Jefferson County, said he believed the two suspects died of self-inflicted wounds in an apparent "suicide mission."

Sheriff's department spokesman Steve Davis said school officials told him they had had no disciplinary problems with the two alleged suspects who were juniors or seniors at the school.

A department spokesman said the number of fatalities is still unconfirmed.

Davis said the amount of ammunition and explosives that the gunmen had indicated that the attack on the school was premeditated.

The shooters also determined where the most students would be congregating, such as in the cafeteria and the library.

Authorities are executing search warrants at the homes of both suspects, Davis said.

'Trench coat mafia'

The incident at Columbine High School apparently began around lunchtime, but the shooting spree spread to the school hallway and library and possibly to the school roof, where two students said one young man was tossing grenade-like explosives.

Two gun-toting teens were dressed in black trench coats and wearing masks, students said. Some said they were thought to be member of a small group of "outcasts" at the school known as the "trench coat mafia."

Stone said the two young men found dead in the school library were among three whose names police had as suspects. He said they were students at the school, but a department spokesman said they were former students.

Parents of students rushed to the scene as heavily armed SWAT teams surrounded the school. One group of three young men dressed in dark clothing, possibly friends of the gunmen, were detained for some time by police and later released.

Another young man later was seen being led away in handcuffs. The sheriff's department said he was not a suspect, but was being questioned because he was a known associate of the two suspected shooters.

A school district official said school Principal Frank DeAngelis "actually saw one of the gunmen and was able to push some students into a location to protect those students."

The school, located in an affluent suburb of 35,000 immediately southwest of Denver, completed a \$13.4 million remodeling and expansion program in 1994 -- including numerous athletic fields, sports facilities, computer and science labs and a state-of-the-art auditorium.

Clinton expresses sorrow

President Clinton said Tuesday night he and the first lady were profoundly saddened and shocked by the shooting.

Clinton said the tragedy could be a wake-up call for the nation.

"We do know that we must do more to reach out to our children and teach them to express their anger and to resolve their conflicts with words, not weapons," the president said.

"You know there are a lot of kids out there who have access to weapons -- and apparently more than guns, here -- and who build up these grievances in their own mind and who are not being reached," Clinton said.

Eyewitness accounts

Hours after the drama began, several groups of students who had been trapped inside were evacuated from the school by police SWAT teams, while the suspected shooters remained inside, along with other students hiding elsewhere in the school and a number of gunshot victims.

A student who called a television station on his cell phone said he had heard renewed shooting about two hours after the incident began at 11:15 a.m. MDT (1:15 p.m. EDT). He described two fellow students who were wearing black hats, black masks and black trench coats.

Another male student who said he was about 100 yards away from the shooters said there were three of them, including one fellow student he recognized and another boy dressed in white "throwing the bombs on top of the school -- some kind of grenade or something."

That account was supported by another student interviewed on local TV.

About four hours after the incident began, a young man who appeared to have blood on him propelled himself out of a second story window where officers below reached up to catch him.

A short while later several groups of students- several dozen in all -- fled the building and were taken away by officers. They did not appear to be injured.

At the rear of the school, students were being treated by medical personnel and then taken to local hospitals.

Four of the shooting victims were taken to Swedish Medical Center. According to a hospital spokeswoman, an 18-year-old woman is in stable condition with shrapnel wounds to her chest and arm; a 17-year-old girl remains in intensive care in critical condition; a 15-year-old boy is in stable, but guarded condition; and a 17-year-old boy who was shot in the back, chest and colon is in critical condition.

Three students were admitted to Denver Health Medical Center. One was said to be in critical condition; another was in fair condition.

Five were admitted to Littleton Adventist Hospital, four with gunshot wounds, but all were said to have non-life threatening injuries.

Three were admitted to St. Anthony's Hospital. There were two males and one female, all in critical condition.

Two others were admitted to Lutheran Medical Center in stable condition.

One was admitted to University Hospital.

'They just kept shooting'

Student Braden Pasusich said he saw two students in black trench coats with weapons. Other students said the weapons included shotguns, automatic weapons and pipe bombs.

"They were just shooting. They didn't care who they shot at. They just kept shooting. Then they threw a grenade," said a student named Janine who talked to a Denver television station.

A student named Emily, who said she was in the library when the shooting started, said the gunmen were shouting that they wanted revenge.

Cathy Clark was in the library and heard noises. "This girl came up screaming ... like, 'Someone's got a gun.' She said get under the table. So everyone got under the table," said Clark. "These two guys came up and they were shooting randomly -- there was bombing, I guess, downstairs and people were screaming."

Jonathan Ladd, another student, said he heard a loud noise like an explosion and then gunshots. He said the shots were coming from the back of the school toward the school office.

"There was one shot after another," said Ladd, who said he fled the school.

The school has an enrollment of 1,870, according to the school's Web site.