

# Public Health Views... and News

*A Newsletter for regional Health Professionals*

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### **SARS**

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS, is a respiratory illness of unknown cause that has recently been reported in Asia, North America and Europe. The illness generally begins with a fever greater than 100.4 F and is sometimes associated with other symptoms including chills, headache, malaise and body aches. The incubation period is typically 2 to 7 days. The spread of the disease is unclear but it appears to be related to close contact with respiratory secretions and bodily fluids of known cases of SARS.

As of March 25, the cause of SARS has not yet been definitively identified. CDC scientists were able to isolate a virus from the tissues of two patients who had SARS. Examination by electron microscopy revealed that the virus had the distinctive shape and appearance of coronaviruses. These laboratory results do not provide conclusive evidence that the new corona virus is the cause of SARS. Additional specimens are being tested to learn more about this virus and its link with SARS.

**What is being done:** The CDC has activated its Emergency Operations Center and is distributing health alert notices to travelers who may have been exposed to cases of SARS. The CDC is also assisting state and local health departments in investigating possible cases of SARS in the U.S. The CDC will be providing safe specimen handling guidelines to labs analyzing specimens in an attempt to identify the cause of SARS and has deployed dozens of health specialists worldwide in support of this global investigation. Clinicians who wish to learn more about diagnosis, exposure management and infection control of this disease should visit the following web sites:

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars)

[www.who.int/csr/sars/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/)

[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)

As of 4/9/03 there are 2,781 suspected cases under investigation worldwide with 111 deaths. There are 97 cases under investigation in Canada. There have been two suspected cases in Michigan.



## CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS



The percentage of children who have received all the recommended immunizations is always a concern to public health. We continue to explore ways to ensure our children are fully protected by eliminating barriers to immunization.

Barriers often include:

- \* Inadequate records.
- \* Lack of access to records.
- \* Family relocations.
- \* Inefficient notification
- \*New requirements

The Michigan Childhood Immunization Registry (MCIR) has become the effective tool to overcome many of the old and new barriers. MCIR is an electronic statewide childhood immunization registry that is accessible by private and public providers. It is now going "on-line."

The MCIR system has many features to create efficiency in the immunization process. Some benefits of this program include immediate access to:

- Immunization history.
- Immunization schedules.

-Fewer phone calls between providers to obtain and assess a child's immunization history,

-Fewer missed opportunities to provide immunizations.

-Quick access to a child's official immunization record for day care and school requirements.

-A resource for sending reminder and recall notices to parents or guardians for due or overdue immunizations.

-Vaccine management should recalls or shortages of vaccine occur.



We are also encouraging schools to arrange for "read only" access to the MCIR system to facilitate the efficient recall of mandatory vaccination information for school children. A strong partnership between health providers, schools and our Agency will help achieve the maximum protection of our children and community for all vaccine preventable diseases.

To learn more or find out how to sign up for MCIR "on-line" call

517-279-9561, ext. 124 or

MCIR Help Desk  
8:00a.m. 5:00 p.m.  
1-888-217-3901.

## Immunization Schedules

### Coldwater Office:

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday 8-4  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday 10-6

### Hillsdale Office:

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday 8-4  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday 10-6

### Three Rivers Office:

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday 8-4  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Monday 10-6

### Sturgis Office:

1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday 8-4  
3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday 10-6

## Other Prevention News:

**FAMILY PLANNING:** The budget for Family Planning has received almost \$30,000 in cuts over the past 12 months. The challenge has been to cut costs as much as possible but yet provide access to those who depend on these services. Unfortunately, this will also mean increases in charges for some services, though we have tried to stay within manageable parameters.

**BCCCP:** Budget cuts included Mammogram screening for women ages 40-49 in the Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. However, funding was able to be maintained for diagnostic tests for suspicious findings.

**WIC:** The Michigan WIC Conference took place March 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> in East Lansing. The Community Health Agency received an award for sustaining caseload rates. Jill Waligora, a casual clerk-technician for the

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Agency was honored for her quilt contribution last year to the National WIC Conference representing the State of Michigan.

WIC has a required education component. The Nutrition Education Malls, now open in all of our clinics should make the process more fun.

### **BIOTERRORISM PREPAREDNESS**

Since August 2003, Kathy Koshelnyk, our Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, has been active with both Region I (Hillsdale) and Region V (Branch and St. Joseph) in planning for critical incidents. Activities have included participation in regional workgroups such as the Smallpox Response Teams as well as providing updates on the smallpox vaccination plan to local health providers and first responders. She has also assisted the Community Health Agency with strengthening their internal health protection procedures.

The State of Michigan is actively developing two web-based communication systems: the Michigan Disease Surveillance System (MDSS) and the Health Alert Network (HAN). The MDSS is a 24 hour/7 days a week real time computer program for reporting critical diseases and other incidents. The HAN is designed to allow rapid contact of providers and emergency personnel to inform them of critical incidents or developments.

Excellent web sites for finding more information include: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov),

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org),  
[www.ready.com](http://www.ready.com)



### **News from Health Promotion**

The Health Promotion division of the Agency also suffered budget cuts. Medicaid Outreach as well as Community Health Assessment were eliminated in the MDCH 2002/3 budget. However, the Community Health Agency's commitment to Health Assessment and Community Outreach is strong. There will be a slight reduction in some educational programming outside the agency, but Health Promotion will continue to be a vital and necessary



part of the Health Agency. The Community Health Agency will continue to provide assessment data to the community through the Multi-purpose collaborative bodies in each county as well as through our web site [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org). Visit our website for information on services, locations, health reports, Environmental service forms (downloadable) and links to important resources, including

the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization.

Community health information is also available for more than 2,500 providers of related services within the tri-county area listed on our web page. Additionally, there are links to health publications, statistics, press releases and other items which could prove useful in the care of your patients.

### **Hearing and Vision Program**

Vision Screening Technicians from the Community Health Agency screened about 18,000 children in the tri-county area last year. Approximately 10% were referred for follow up care with an eye care professional because they failed the screening. The Public Health Code mandates that the health department provide screening to children in the schools. The Community Health Agency also offers free screening to other children as time allows. Some parents feel a referral causes undue financial burden to them, especially if the doctor feels no treatment is necessary or prescribes eye glasses. Our hope is that parents would come to realize the importance of eye care on the same level as ear or dental care. Prevention costs a lot less! Vision disorders are the fourth most common disability in the US and the leading cause of handicapping conditions in children. About 75,000 3-year-olds develop amblyopia each year – a leading cause of blindness if uncorrected early. Statistics show that about 1/2 of these children are not diagnosed until after age 5. Statistics also

show that 1/2 of all children complete high school before they have an eye exam, though 20% of children aged 9-15 need glasses.

Finally, parents who feel they are wasting their money on an eye exam should know that when their child's eyes are examined, the doctor is getting quite an eyeful, since this is the only place where our vascular system is fully exposed for inspection. Other serious health conditions could be detected early as well. Early detection provides the opportunity for more effective and less expensive treatment.

### Senior News



The Area Agency on Aging will be holding public hearings for the 2004 -2006 multi year area plan and annual implementation plan. The document outlines funding, services, advocacy and program development activities for the next three years as it relates to older adults in Branch and St. Joseph Counties. The dates, times and places are listed below:

#### **Branch County:**

Thursday April 24 4:00 pm  
Community Health Agency,  
Coldwater – 570 N. Marshall

#### **St. Joseph County:**

Friday April 25 11:00 am

Community Health Agency,  
Three Rivers, 1110 Hill St.

All of our Public Health partners and community members are welcome.

For Health Information on the items included in this publication or other health issues of interest, please contact the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency at the following numbers:

#### **In Hillsdale County**

517-437-7395  
Or 888-544-7395

#### **In Branch County**

517-279-9561

#### **St. Joseph County**

Sturgis – 269-659-4013  
Or 800-258-1093

Three Rivers – 269-273-2161  
Or 800-258-1092

Or on the world wide web at:

**[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)**

#### **Environmental Health**

One of the most important roles that the local health department plays in protecting the health of the public is surveillance. Investigation of food borne illness complaints is the major tool that we use to determine if an illness is part of an outbreak associated with our food supply. It is important that suspected food borne illness is reported to our agency so that it can be determined if there is an outbreak in the community. The following serves to illustrate the importance of this flow of information.

Norwalk-like viruses have received a lot of attention in recent months. Our department's ability to conduct surveillance for diseases like norovirus relies on receiving reports of confirmed and suspected cases.

Norovirus and other Norwalk-like viruses cause gastroenteritis. Symptoms including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain usually develop within 24-48 hours after consuming contaminated food or water. Symptoms are relatively mild and last for 24-60 hours. But the viruses may be shed for 2 weeks after symptoms disappear. People can become infected with the virus in several ways. Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus; touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus; having direct contact, sharing food or eating utensils with a person who is infected. Food or drink can very easily become contaminated with norovirus because the virus is so small and because it probably takes fewer than 100 norovirus particles to make a person sick.

Containing norovirus and other food transmitted viruses therefore become not only the problem of the food service worker, the physician treating them, but the Health Agency as well. It is therefore critical that we are all communicating on these and other types of health issues to promote and protect the public Health.

**Branch – Hillsdale – St. Joseph  
Community Health Agency**

*Your Community Partner in  
Public Health*