

For Immediate Release

Thursday, December 19, 2002

Local Health Department Continues Ongoing Preparations for Small Pox Vaccinations

Duke E. Anderson, Interim Health Officer for the Branch-Hillsdale St. Joseph Community Health Agency characterized the recent announcement of the Small Pox Immunization plan by President Bush as, “A public report on the planning and preparation taking place on the state and local level since September 11”. “The local health department has been very involved in preparation for any type of public health emergency and continues to work with local emergency and medical personnel to assure the health and safety of the communities we serve”. “Ongoing county level and regional meetings have been taking place for several months and I am confident the local communities are as prepared as possible for the very unlikely event of a local BioTerrorism emergency”.

To help educate the community on the issue the agency has put together a summary of frequently asked questions which is available on the agency’s web site

A Smallpox Primer

What should I know about smallpox?

Smallpox is an acute, contagious, and sometimes fatal disease caused by the variola virus. It is marked by a fever and a distinctive progressive skin rash.

If I am concerned about smallpox, can I get vaccinated?

At the moment, the smallpox vaccine is not available for the general public.

How safe is the Vaccine?

The smallpox vaccine is the best protection you can get if you are exposed to the smallpox virus. Careful screening of people who receive the vaccine should greatly reduce the number of people with serious reactions. You cannot get smallpox from the vaccine.

What are the symptoms of smallpox?

Smallpox generally begins with high fever, head and body aches, and sometimes vomiting. A rash that generally begins on the face, arms and legs will follow. The rash spreads and progresses to raised bumps that crust, scab and fall off after about 3 weeks.

Is smallpox fatal?

The majority of patients with smallpox recover, but death may occur in up to 30% of cases.

How is smallpox spread?

Smallpox normally spreads from direct contact with infected persons or direct contact with infected bodily fluids or handling contaminated objects such as bedding or clothing.

Is there any treatment for smallpox?

Smallpox can be prevented through the use of the smallpox vaccine. There is no proven treatment for smallpox. Antibiotics may be given to prevent secondary infections.

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

People who are allergic to the vaccine or its components, pregnant women, persons under the age of 18, persons with skin conditions such as eczema or dermatitis, persons being treated for cancer or who have received an organ transplant, persons living with HIV, or who are taking medications such as steroids)

Who can I call, where can I go, if I still have questions?

You can contact the Branch/Hillsdale/St. Joseph Community Health Agency at the following locations and phone numbers.

Hillsdale	20 Care Dr., Hillsdale	517-437-7395
Coldwater	570 N. Marshall Rd, Coldwater	517-279-9561
Sturgis	600 S. Lakeview, Sturgis	269-659-4013
Three Rivers	1110 Hill St. Three Rivers	269-273-2161

Or visit us on the web at www.bhsj.org for more information