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Who: Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

What: February is Heart Health Month

The Branch – Hillsdale – St. Joseph Community Health Agency is raising community awareness in celebrating Heart Health Awareness Month for the month of February, 2004

In 2002, more than 26,000 Michigianians died from heart disease. In Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties more than 400 people died during that same year. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the tri-county area, in Michigan and in the U.S. Many of us believe that heart disease is merely a fact of life in our fast paced, fast food culture. However, many of the risk factors attributed to heart disease can be reduced or completely eliminated. You just need to know the facts.

Fact # 1 - Smoking kills - Tobacco use is the number 1 preventable cause of serious illness such as **heart disease**, stroke, emphysema and lung cancer.

Fact # 2 Exercise is for life – Physical activity builds endurance, helps control high blood pressure, reduce cholesterol, aid in weight control and reduce your risk of developing diabetes. The Centers for Disease control recommends we exercise (30 minutes/day, 3-4 times a week). 1 in 2 Americans do not exercise at this level.

Fact # 3 – High blood pressure and high cholesterol, double trouble. Both are easily detected and often easily controlled, but you need to know your numbers. Your blood pressure should be about 120/80 and your cholesterol should not exceed 200. Both should be checked every 5 years for persons over 20 and more frequently for those over 40. See your healthcare provider and learn your numbers and what they mean to you.

Fact # 4 - Obesity, a growing problem? Among Americans, more than 1 in 2 persons over age 20 are overweight or obese. Foods high in fat contribute to atherosclerosis, a major cause of heart attack and stroke. Too much salt leads to high blood pressure. A healthy low-fat diet with moderate exercise can be the ticket to a long fruitful life (a little fruit wouldn't hurt either).

What can you do? Now that you know the facts, here is a list of thing you can and cannot control to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Can Control

Tobacco – quit smoking
Physical activity – get moving!
Eat healthy (Low fat/low salt)

Can't Control

Age – (darn it)
Heredity (Grandma's high cholesterol can be yours)
Sex – Men are at higher risk, however, more women have strokes each year than men

Please visit us on the web at www.bhsj.org for more information about this and other Community Health Agency Services, health statistics and current events in Public Health.