



Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Local Health Departments Across the State Promote Protection Against Harmful Bites and Bacteria in July

Coldwater, Michigan, July 2, 2007 – As Michigan residents enjoy camping, swimming, and fresh homegrown food this summer, health officials are reminding everyone to reduce their risk of exposure to bacteria and viruses that can cause illness. Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency kicked-off a month-long awareness campaign today to inform local residents about what they can do to prevent illness and what the health department is doing to protect the health of Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph County residents and visitors.

“Be aware of potential infection from various sources during the summer months, but do not let it keep you from enjoying the many activities that the County has to offer for fun and recreation,” said Kelley Mapes, Community Health Educator, “You can protect yourself and your family by taking special precautions.”

Michigan residents should be aware of and protect themselves from illnesses such as Lyme disease, rabies and West Nile virus. Lyme disease is a bacterial infection resulting from the bite of an infected deer tick. If left untreated it can cause chills, fever, headaches, and muscle and joint pain. Although the risk of developing Lyme disease is minimal in Michigan, residents should be aware of their risk of infection and seek immediate diagnosis and treatment upon possible exposure.

Rabies and West Nile virus are both viral infections. Rabies is contracted through a bite or scratch from an infected animal. It can also be transmitted if saliva from an infected animal gets into an open wound or into a person’s eyes, nose, or mouth. In Michigan, rabies has been reported most often in bats. There is no treatment for rabies once a person or animal shows signs of the disease, so reducing your exposure is crucial.

West Nile virus is spread to humans primarily by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Most people who are infected with West Nile virus either have no symptoms or experience mild illness such as fever, headache and body aches. If you suspect that you have been exposed to the virus, seek medical care immediately.

Not only should you be aware of potential illness from animal and tick bites during the summer months, but also illness from consuming contaminated food and beverages.

Here are some precautions you should take to protect yourself and your family from foodborne illness:

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- 1) When carrying food to another location, keep it cold to minimize bacterial growth. Cold food should be held at or below 40°F. Pack food right from the refrigerator into the cooler immediately before leaving home.
- 2) When using a cooler, keep it out of the direct sun by placing it in the shade or shelter. Avoid opening the lid too often, which lets cold air out and warm air in.
- 3) Be sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters. To prevent foodborne illness, don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and poultry and their juices can contaminate safely cooked food.

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency serves the residents of Hillsdale, Branch and St. Joseph Counties. For more information about infectious disease prevention and services, visit www.bhsj.org or call 517-279-9561.

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