



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:

Kelley Mapes 517-279-9561 ext. 103
Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency



2007 – Michigan’s Year of Public Health
Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency
Kicks-Off “Stepping Up to a Healthier You” Month

December 1, 2007 – Local health officials are encouraging Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph County residents to take care of their health this busy holiday season. The health department launched an awareness campaign today that will highlight several core health issues that are of particular concern during the holidays and winter months, including physical inactivity and unhealthy eating, the spread of germs, substance abuse, and coping with stress and depression.

“At this time of year, sickness and disease are the last things anyone should have to worry about, which is precisely why we should not let preventable health conditions get in the way,” said Kelley Mapes, Community Health Educator. Holidays can lead to stress, fatigue, financial constraints, consumption of foods not normally eaten, substance abuse, and other physical and mental health problems. According to the *2003 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey*, only 3% of adults in Michigan engage in the four essential healthy lifestyles that can reduce the risk for chronic disease: healthy weight, adequate fruit and vegetable intake, adequate physical activity and no smoking.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 19 million people in the United States – one in ten adults – experience depression each year, and nearly two-thirds do not get the help they need. Treatment can alleviate the symptoms in over 80 percent of the cases. Yet, because it often goes unrecognized, depression continues to cause unnecessary suffering.

Mapes also reminds people of all ages to protect themselves from germs – such as influenza and foodborne germs - this winter season. About 10% to 20% of Americans get influenza each year, about 36,000 Americans die from it each year, and many more are hospitalized. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that each year in the United States, 76 million cases of illness, 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths are caused by foodborne germs.

“There are simple steps that everyone can take to reduce their risk of getting sick or struggling with mental health issues,” said Mapes. “We also want to assure the communities that the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is here to help them and protect their health this season and all year long.”

Mapes offered these tips for stepping up to better health this holiday season:

Healthy Lifestyle

- Although they may be comforting, limit intake of higher-fat holiday favorites like eggnog and candied sweet potatoes. Choose smaller portions at potlucks and choose lower-fat foods, such as apples, cranberry dishes, and baked squash.

- Be physically active every day – Build a snowman, go sledding or cross-country skiing at a local park, or go for a walk with family and friends after eating large holiday meals.
- Routine check-ups are the best way to detect disease early and lower your chances of becoming seriously ill or dying from a disease that is controllable or preventable.
- Knowing your family health history can help you and your health care provider understand your current and future health risks, allowing you to make important lifestyle changes and identify which types of screening are most important for maintaining your health.
- Visit the *Michigan Steps Up* website at www.michiganstepsup.org for healthy living resources such as a free personal plan to help with setting goals for moving more, eating better, and being tobacco-free; healthy recipes; a list of wellness events in your community; and much more.

Protecting Yourself and Loved Ones from Germs

- The single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each year. Talk to your health care provider about other immunizations you may need.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and keep your distance from others when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then put your used tissue in a wastebasket.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for twenty seconds or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick
- When buying food, do not allow foods to thaw out, buy what you can use by the "use-by" date, and do not buy food in poor condition (such as "freezer burn," leakage, dented cans, bulging lids)
- Keep your refrigerator at 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the freezer at 0 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Store non-perishables in dry, high places away from pests and dampness.
- Cook foods thoroughly - especially meat – to kill harmful bacteria.

Coping with Stress During the Holidays

- Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable.
- Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.
- Spend time with supportive and caring people.

The mission of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is to provide for the benefits of public health, protection, prevention and promotion. For additional information contact Kelley Mapes, Community Health Educator at 517-279-9561 ext. 103 or visit

www.bhsj.org

###