

For Immediate Release

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Date: April 1, 2009

From: The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Regarding: Gastro-intestinal illness at local prison

Lakeland Correctional Facility experiences a large number of gastro-intestinal illnesses

What, When, Where?

The Lakeland Correctional Facility in Coldwater has been experiencing a larger than normal occurrence of cases of intestinal illness in the past week. As of 4/1/09 there are more than 89 persons at the facility who have come down with similar symptoms of a common viral infection. Gastro-intestinal (GI) infections of this type are commonly referred to as 'the stomach flu'. Lakeland Correctional began experiencing more than the normal number of cases of this type last week and contacted the Health Department to request information and assistance in minimizing the spread of illness among staff and inmates.

What is being done?

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency has been working closely with Lakeland to educate correction staff about limiting the spread of the illness. The Health Department has provided cleaning guidelines to the facility in an attempt to stop the spread of new cases, and provided information to staff so that they can minimize the potential of spreading it to their families outside of the facility. **Samples have been sent to the Michigan Department of Community Health Laboratory to confirm (or rule out) the diagnosis of Norovirus as the cause of the illness.**

Current status

As of 4/1/09, 89 persons within the facility have had symptoms of this illness, including 10 staff that are sick. Five inmates who had previous illnesses who began showing symptoms of this disease were transferred to the Community Health Center of Branch County as a precaution. Some persons who contract a GI illness often become dehydrated due to vomiting and diarrhea and require more specialized medical attention.

Additional Information

Keep in mind that while GI illnesses are often referred to as the 'stomach flu' they are NOT the flu. The flu is a contagious respiratory illness that can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Flu symptoms can include, fever, extreme tiredness, muscle aches and dry cough. Symptoms of influenza can last up to a week. 36,000 people die from the flu annually in the U.S.

GI illness on the other hand usually has symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramping and a general feeling of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. In most people the illness is self-limiting with symptoms lasting for

about 1 or 2 days. Most people get better within 1 or 2 days, and they have no long-term health effects related to their illness. Be aware, however, that 2 to 3 days after your symptoms have ended, you may still be contagious and can still pass the virus to others. Make sure to continue to use good personal hygiene (hand-washing!) precautions even after you feel 'better'.

Preventing the spread of GI illnesses:

You can decrease your chance of contracting a GI illness by following these preventive steps:

- ✓ Frequently wash your hands, especially after using the toilet or changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- ✓ Carefully wash fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a **bleach-based** household cleaner.
- ✓ Soiled or contaminated clothing or linens should be washed in an automatic washing machine after an episode of illness.
- ✓ Persons who are infected with GI illness should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 2 to 3 days after they recover from their illness. Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be disposed of properly.

Additional Information

To learn more about GI illness visit us on the web at: www.bhsj.org

Or visit the Centers for Disease Control Web site at:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-ga.htm

For information about hand hygiene and the prevention of disease, visit our website at:

www.bhsj.org/Publications/faqs/HandwashingAndGermsFAQ.pdf