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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Parents are Urged to Have Their Children Vaccinated Against Chickenpox**

**(Hillsdale, MI)** At least ten cases of chickenpox have been reported in Hillsdale County. According to Michigan law, all students are required to be immunized with two doses of Varicella (Var) vaccine or have had a history of chickenpox disease. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Community Health, recommends the following steps occur:

**Students Not Immunized for Varicella (VAR)**

Children who have not been vaccinated and have not had the disease should be vaccinated immediately with the first dose of Varicella (VAR). Once the first dose has been administered, the child can receive a second dose at the following recommended minimum interval

- For children 12 months to 12 years – 2<sup>nd</sup> dose should be administered at 3 months
- For children 13 years and older – 2<sup>nd</sup> dose should be administered in 28 days

If an outbreak of chickenpox occurs in your child's school, and your child is not immunized or does not have verification of having had the disease, your child will be excluded from school until he/she receives the first dose of varicella vaccine. If you choose to not immunize your child at all (and you cannot verify that he/she has had the disease) and an outbreak of chickenpox occurs, your child will be excluded from school for up to 21 days after the last reported case of chickenpox.

**Student Not Fully Immunized for Varicella (VAR)**

Children who are not fully immunized, meaning they have only had one dose of the Varicella vaccine or do not have verification of having had the disease, should be vaccinated immediately. If an outbreak of chickenpox occurs in your child's school, your child will be excluded from school until the second dose is administered.

Currently, the health department has finished evaluating the immunization status of all children in the Pittsford Schools and those children who participated in the Pittsford sponsored Quiz Bowl held on February 5, 2011. Most children are now in compliance with the Michigan's Communicable Disease Rules.

Chickenpox is a highly contagious illness that may start with a slight fever, followed by a blister-like, itchy skin rash which appears on the body and head. The illness usually lasts only a few days. The disease is usually a mild, but has the potential to cause severe complications in certain high-risk individuals including children with a compromised immunity, pregnant women, and premature infants of less than 28 weeks gestation.

Because your child may have already been exposed to chickenpox, the health department recommends that you watch your child for the signs and symptoms of the disease. If you suspect your child is ill with chickenpox, please inform the school. Your child should remain out of school until all of the chickenpox lesions have crusted over (usually about five days).

The best way to prevent your child from catching chickenpox is through vaccination. Your private doctor or the local health department should be able to provide your child with the vaccine. The health department is offering special walk-in clinics next week from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Hillsdale Office, located at 20 Care Drive, Hillsdale, Michigan. Call 517-437-7395 for more information or go to our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) and click on Frequently Asked Questions.

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