

## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Severe Storms and Power Outages

*The 2011 Spring Season has been one of the most deadly, bringing with it dangerous storms, damaging winds, downed wires and power outages.* The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants you to be prepared in the event of a severe storm and offers the following strategies to keep you safe:

**Tornado:** In case of a tornado warning, if you are advised to take cover, you should move to an interior room within a basement. If there is no basement, go to an inside room, without windows, on the lowest floor. This could be a center hallway, bathroom, or closet. For added protection, get under something sturdy such as a heavy table or workbench. If possible, cover your body with a blanket, sleeping bag, or mattress, and protect your head with anything available--even your hands.

If you are in a mobile home or a moving vehicle and hear the warning to take cover, get out and move to a nearby building, preferably one with a basement. If there is no shelter nearby, move to the nearest ditch, ravine, or culvert – avoiding areas with trees and vehicles - and lie down. Shield your head with your hands. Do not get under your car or your mobile home, as they cannot withstand tornado winds and may roll over you.

**Downed Wires:** If a power line falls on a car, you should stay inside the vehicle. This is the safest place to stay. Warn people not to touch the car or the line. Call or ask someone to call the local utility company and emergency services. The only circumstance in which you should consider leaving a car that is in contact with a downed power line is if the vehicle catches on fire. Open the door. Do not step out of the car. You may receive a shock. Instead, jump free of the car so that your body clears the vehicle before touching the ground. Once you clear the car, shuffle at least 50 feet away, with both feet on the ground. As in all power line

related emergencies, call for help immediately by dialing 911 or call your electric utility company's Service Center/Dispatch Office.

If you come across someone who you believe has been electrocuted, take the following steps:

1. Look first. Don't touch. The person may still be in contact with the electrical source. Touching the person may pass the current through you.
2. Call or have someone else call 911 or emergency medical help.
3. Turn off the source of electricity if possible. If not, move the source away from you and the affected person using a non-conducting object made of cardboard, plastic or wood.
4. Once the person is free of the source of electricity, check the person's breathing and pulse. If either has stopped or seems dangerously slow or shallow, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately.
5. If the person is faint or pale or shows other signs of shock, lay the person down with the head slightly lower than the trunk of his or her body and the legs elevated.
6. Don't touch burns, break blisters, or remove burned clothing.

**Power Outage:** If your power is out for less than 2 hours, then the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to consume. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold for longer. If the power is out for longer than 2 hours, follow the guidelines below:

- For the Freezer section: A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- For the Refrigerated section: Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- Use a digital quick-response thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

When power goes out, water purification systems may not be functioning fully. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Your state or local health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating

water in your area. Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Remember:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite):
- If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
- If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon (~0.75 mL) of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon (~1.50 mL) of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

According to Steve Todd, Health Officer, “Many people have been saved from injury, illness and death by following a few simple safety rules like these. The best way to be safe is to be prepared. Remember, safety doesn’t happen by accident.” The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers additional tips on how to be healthy and safe at its website at: [bhsj.org](http://bhsj.org). Check under the heading ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ for a list of printable handouts to assist you in staying healthy and safe.

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