

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

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **H3N2v: New Influenza Virus Hits Michigan**

**Coldwater.** County fairs bring to mind images of midways, elephant ears and lots of exhibits. And although there is no reason to avoid fair activities, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to encourage you to take some precautions especially in the animal exhibit areas. *The reason?* There is a new flu strain that is circulating called H3N2v. H3N2v is a non-human influenza virus that normally circulates in pigs but can and has infected people.

Viruses that normally circulate in pigs are “swine influenza viruses.” When these viruses infect humans, they are termed “variant” viruses. This particular virus is different from the H1N1 (swine flu) responsible for the pandemic of 2009. It was first detected in pigs in 2010 and not detected in people until 2011. Nationwide, there were 12 human infections with this virus, termed H3N2v, in 2011; most were associated with exposure to pigs. In 2012, H3N2v outbreaks in humans associated with exposure to pigs began in July. Michigan saw its first case in August 2012. As of August 24, 2012, Michigan has reported five cases of this particular flu virus. Nationwide to date, there have been 277 cases, of these 236 were reported from Ohio and Indiana. Primarily, the H3N2v infections have occurred in children who were exposed to infected pigs; many have occurred at agricultural fairs.

Influenza viruses can spread from pigs to people and from people to pigs. Transmitting the virus from infected pigs to humans is thought to happen in the same way that seasonal influenza viruses spread between people; mainly through infected droplets created when an infected pig coughs or sneezes. If these droplets land in your nose or mouth, or you inhale them, you can be infected. There also is some evidence that you might get infected by touching something that has virus on it and then touching your own mouth or nose. A third

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possible way to get infected is to inhale dust containing influenza virus. Scientists aren't really sure which of these ways of spread is the most common. Most of the cases known to date have come through exposure to pigs at fair events or exhibitions. Of all these cases, three instances of likely person-to-person spread of H3N2v have recently identified by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Director from the local health department states "Symptoms of H3N2v are the same as seasonal influenza and include: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue. And while this flu is can be spread from pigs to humans and to humans to pigs, a person cannot get it by eating pork (pig meat)."

If you are at an agricultural fair, the health department recommends that you follow these precautionary steps to protect yourself and your children:

- Don't take food or drink into pig areas; don't eat, drink or put anything in your mouth in pig areas.
- Don't take toys, pacifiers, cups, baby bottles, strollers, or similar items into pig areas.
- Avoid close contact with pigs that look or act ill.
- Take protective measures if you must come in contact with pigs that are known or suspected to be sick. This includes minimizing contact with pigs and wearing personal protective equipment like protective clothing and gloves and masks that cover your mouth and nose when contact is required.
- Wash your hands often with soap and running water before and after exposure to pigs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- To further reduce the risk of infection, minimize contact with pigs and swine barns.
- Watch your pig (if you have one) for illness. Call a veterinarian if you suspect illness.
- Avoid contact with pigs if you have flu-like symptoms. Wait 7 days after your illness started or until you have been without fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, whichever is longer. If you must have contact with pigs while you are sick, take the protective actions listed above.

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In particular, if you are at high risk of serious flu complications (i.e., children younger than 5 years; people 65 years and older; pregnant women; and people with certain long-term health conditions such as asthma, COPD, diabetes, heart disease, weakened immune systems, cancer or AIDS and/or neurological/neurodevelopmental conditions) may want to avoid pigs and swine barns at the fair this year.

Jo Ann added “Unfortunately, a vaccine is not available for mass immunization and this particular strain is not included in the seasonal flu shot. So the best prevention is precaution.” The health department has posted a new FAQ sheet on its website to help you in understanding the new flu signs and symptoms. To access, log into our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) and click on the “Frequently Asked Questions Sheets” button and scroll to H3N2v.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency will provide updates concerning this flu and other flu outbreaks as they occur. In addition, the health department will be out in the community this fall giving the seasonal flu shot at a location near you. Call one of our county offices to schedule an appointment to get your shot:

Branch County Office – 517-279-9561

Hillsdale County Office – 517-437-7395

St. Joseph County Office – 269-273-2161

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