

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Steve Todd, Health Officer

517-279-9561, ext. 148

Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Dir.

517-279-9561, ext. 143

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Take 3 to Prevent Flu!

Coldwater. Kids are back in school and some are starting to experience the first cases of 'the crud' that comes from being in closed quarters, shuffling papers and sharing pencils. To limit your exposure to the "virus of the day" circulating in your community, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency recommends taking the following three steps:

- **#1: Take time to get a flu shot.** The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months of age or older get a flu shot as soon as the vaccine becomes available. Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Director at the Health Department states "The flu shot is the first and most important step you can do to protect yourself against flu viruses. This year's shot protects against three flu strains – influenza A, influenza B and H1N1 viruses. The influenza A and B antigens in this year's vaccine are different from the past two flu seasons and were selected based upon prediction models concerning which viruses will most likely cause illness during the upcoming flu season." The health department strongly encourages the following high risk people for serious flu complication get vaccinated:
 - Anyone 65 years or older;
 - People with chronic conditions, such as asthma or other lung diseases, diabetes and/or heart diseases and their caregivers;
 - Young children 6 months of age or older;
 - Pregnant women;
 - Caregivers of infants under 6 months of age; and
 - Health care workers.

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- **#2: Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.** The following simple steps can do much to reduce your exposure to viruses:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Be sure to throw the tissue in the trash after you have used it.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as much as possible.
 - Avoid close contact with sick people, if possible.
 - If you are sick with flu-like illness, limit your contact with others and stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone so as to avoid spreading the illness to others.
- **#3: Take flu antiviral drugs if prescribed by your physician.** Antivirals are different than antibiotics and should be taken early during the onset of the illness. While antiviral drugs don't cure the illness, they can help shorten its duration and help prevent flu complications, like pneumonia. Ms. Wilczynski adds "Most healthy people will not need antiviral medications to combat the flu. However, for those people who are at risk for flu complications, catching the flu is serious and can lead to hospitalization and even death." Flu-like symptoms include:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Sore Throat
 - Runny/Stuffiness
 - Body Aches
 - Headache
 - Chills
 - Fatigue
 - For some, it may also include vomiting and diarrhea.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency will provide updates concerning 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:

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Branch – call 517-279-9561 to schedule an appointment for:

- Tuesday, October 9th 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dearth Center – Branch County Fairgrounds

Hillsdale – call 517-437-7395 to schedule an appointment for:

- Friday, October 19th 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Hillsdale County Senior Center – Perennial Park, 320 W. Bacon, Hillsdale

St. Joseph – call 269-273-2161 to schedule an appointment for:

- Monday, October 8th, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Three Rivers Community Center – 103 Douglas Street, Three Rivers
- Monday, October 15th, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Sturgis Senior Center – 304 N. Jefferson, Sturgis
- Monday, October 22nd, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Messiah Lutheran Church – 185 W. 5th Street, Constantine

The health department accepts most insurances. In addition, it offers free shots for children who have Medicaid or who are without vaccine coverage through the Vaccine for Children Program. For all others the cost is \$30.00, which is due at the time of the appointment.

According to Steve Todd, Health Officer, “Getting the flu vaccination is so important. We hope that people who can’t make these events will contact their local providers or pharmacies to get their flu shot as soon as possible. We would like to see everyone immunized this season.” Community members interested in obtaining a list of area flu providers can contact their local health department county office to find out who is providing shots locally. For more information about upcoming flu clinics, the dangers of flu and the benefits of the flu vaccine, visit the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency website at: www.bhsj.org.

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