

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

December 6, 2013

Steve Todd, MSA, RS
Health Officer/Administrator
517-279-9561 ext. 148

Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.
517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HO HO HO – ACHOO!

Coldwater, MI. It's a merry time of year, but allergies triggered by exposure to mold, mildew and dust mites, can turn even the jolliest of Santa's helper into a 'Bah Hum Bugger!' The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind you to consider the following allergy prevention tips to keep you and/or your guests from suffering an allergy flair-up.

- 1. Prior to hanging the greens or putting up your 'real' Christmas tree, hose them down outside.** Many people like to hang holiday swags or use pine boughs as part of their decorations. The fresh scent of pine adds a nice sensory experience to the festivities. However, boughs and real Christmas trees can contain mold spores. By rinsing them down, prior to bringing them into the house, you can reduce the number of spores on the greens and you and your guests may breathe a little easier. Even better, consider using artificial greens and/or a tree, as well.
- 2. Clean decorations prior to displaying them.** Because Christmas decorations are typically stored in places that are susceptible to dampness (i.e., attics, garages, basements, etc.) these too can become a source for molds, mildew and dust mites. Be sure to clean these as well prior to using them and wear a mask to reduce your own exposure to allergens. After all, you don't want to be sniffing or sneezing as you put up that favorite Christmas ornament. Once the season is over, clean them again and then wrap them in plastic and store them in an air tight container so that they will be ready to use next year.

- 3. Ask your guests if they have any food allergies.** Many people have special sensitivities to food items such as eggs, shellfish or peanuts. Be sure to let your guest know if food served contains any of these. If you are the attendee, don't be afraid to ask the cook what is in the recipe; and be sure to always carry with you an emergency dose of antihistamine, your rescue inhaler or an epi-pen, if it has been prescribed.

- 4. For those with sulfite sensitivities? Avoid dried fruits and wines.** Sulfites are preservative often used to prevent bacteria from growing in wine or to keep raw foods looking fresh. The most common allergic reaction is an asthma attack. About one out of 100 people have sulfites sensitivity. However, for asthmatics, the number jumps to one in 10. And it's not uncommon for this sensitivity to develop on later in life (i.e., in an individual's 40s or 50s).

- 5. Try natural scents instead of artificial ones.** During the holidays, you may be tempted to burn scented candles, use scented room sprays and/or mists. However, for many people with allergies, the enjoyment is turned into displeasure. They simply can't smell anything through their stuffed up nose. Instead of using artificial sources for scents, consider intermixing cinnamon sticks and cloves with your decorations? Or enjoy the fresh aroma of baked bread or Christmas cookies? You can still use candles, but burn ones that are made out of bees wax or soy, that contain little scent, but will still provide a warm and cozy atmosphere.

- 6. Replace a crackling log in the fireplace with a candelabra.** Burning wood through a fireplace or a wood stove releases particulates which can be irritants to people with asthma. Changing up to a candelabra in the fireplace may be one possible solution. A second would be to install a gas or electric fireplace, provided they are properly maintained and the room and fireplace are well ventilated.

- 7. Keep your festivities stress free.** The body's reaction to stress can release chemicals that can trigger an asthma attack or make you more susceptible to flare-ups. While the holiday season is typically busy, make your events more joyful by planning some down time, fitting in a massage or setting reasonable goals. After all, life is to be enjoyed, so savor the moment. The memories you make with loved ones now will surely outlive most purchases you have made.

According to Steve Todd, Health Officer, "These are just some tips you can follow to keep your holidays allergy free. More healthful tips are available on our website under our Frequently Asked Questions section." Go to www.bhsj.org. From the administration and staff of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, we would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

###