

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

January 22, 2014

**Contact: Steve Todd, Health Officer
517-279-9561, ext. 148
Kim Brown, Prevention Services Dir.
517-279-9561, ext. 143**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Flu Updates

(Coldwater, MI). The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is reporting a slight increase in influenza activity for the tri-county area. Steve Todd, Health Officer, announced that the total number of laboratory confirmed cases of influenza for the three-county health jurisdiction jumped from 4 to 8 cases today. Steve Todd states “January is typically the month when we start to see flu activity increase. While counties around us have been reporting many more cases, we have, until today, seen very little laboratory confirmed cases of influenza.”

Much of communicable disease reporting is aggregated on a regional basis. For example, Hillsdale County is part of a nine county region which also includes Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston and Shiawassee Counties. As of January 22, 2014 this region had reported 224 confirmed cases of influenza since the beginning of the FY 13/14 flu season. Until today, only one of those cases came from Hillsdale County. According to Steve Todd “Today, four additional confirmed cases of influenza were reported to the health department for Hillsdale County, bringing their total up number of confirmed cases to five.”

Branch and St. Joseph Counties are part of a different region which also includes Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo and Van Buren Counties. This region had reported 59 laboratory confirmed cases of influenza between October 1, 2013 and January 21, 2014, of which 3 came from Branch County. Steve Todd added “St. Joseph County has not reported any laboratory confirmed cases of influenza so far this flu season.”

In addition to confirmed cases of influenza, the health department also receives reports of influenza like illnesses from local physician offices, daycares and schools.

Kim Brown, Prevention Services Director, explains “Physicians are required to report flu like illnesses through the Michigan Disease Surveillance System (MDSS). In addition, the health department has implemented an electronic reporting system for schools and day care providers that seeks to capture information as to why a child is absent due to illness.” Using this electronic Communicable Disease Surveillance System helps to fill in the gaps quickly as to when an outbreak has occurred and provides insight as to where it might have started. Kim goes on to say “It’s very important that people state the specific symptoms they are seeing when they report their child’s absence. It helps us monitor disease events and to determine what additional steps are needed to contain an outbreak.”

Based upon information provided from MDSS, the health department has reported 921 cases of flu like illness across the three counties since September 1, which is slightly less than what has been reported in previous years for the same time period. That’s the good news. Now for the bad news, the most prevalent virus being confirmed is the H1N1 virus, also known as the swine flu.

H1N1 is a very serious illness and appears to pose a greater threat to children, young and middle-age adults. Steve Todd emphasizes the need for vaccination “Within both of our regions, we are seeing high rates of hospitalization associated with this virus and in some cases, deaths have occurred. These numbers are disturbing given that all seasonal influenza vaccines provide protection from H1N1. We continue to warn the public that vaccination is their best weapon. We recommend that everyone over 6 months get vaccinated. It’s not too late to get yours!”

The health department will be holding immunization clinics in each of its offices:

- **Branch County Office in Coldwater** – Mondays – call 517-279-9561 to schedule an appointment.
- **Hillsdale County Office in Hillsdale** – Wednesdays – call 517-437-7395 to schedule an appointment.
- **St. Joseph County Office in Three Rivers** – Tuesdays – call 269-273-2161 to schedule an appointment.

If you cannot attend one of the health department clinics, plan to visit your health care provider or a local pharmacy. Kim Brown cautions “Call ahead. We are monitoring

local vaccine supply. While there still appears to be plenty of flu vaccine available, not all providers are well supplied. If you are having trouble locating a provider, please feel free to contact us. We will continue to monitor local flu vaccine supplies.”

To learn more about seasonal flu, H1N1 or our immunization clinic, check out our website at www.bhsj.org.

Branch County

570 N. Marshall Rd.
Coldwater, MI 49036
(517) 279-9561

Hillsdale County

20 Care Drive
Hillsdale, MI 49242
(517) 437-7395

Three Rivers

1110 Hill St.
Three Rivers, MI 49093
(269) 273-2161

###