

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

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**Contact: Steve Todd, Health Officer  
517-279-9561, ext. 148  
Jim Cook, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator  
517-279-9561, ext. 120**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Frigid Forecast Means a Cold Start to 2014**

**(Coldwater, MI).** Dangerously low temperatures are in the forecast for the area and the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants individuals and families to be safe when faced with the hazards of cold temperatures.

“Subfreezing temperatures can be dangerous and even life-threatening for people who don't take the proper precautions,” says Jim Cook, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for the tri-county agency. “It is important for everyone to monitor their local weather reports and take steps now to stay safe during times of extreme cold temperatures.” During cold weather, you should take the following precautions:

- Stay indoors as much as possible and limit your exposure to the cold;
- Dress in layers and keep dry;
- Check on family, friends, and neighbors who are at risk and may need additional assistance;
- Know the symptoms of cold-related health issues such as frostbite and hypothermia and seek medical attention if health conditions are severe.
- Bring your pets indoors or ensure they have a warm shelter area with unfrozen water.
- Make sure your vehicle has an emergency kit that includes an ice scraper, blanket and flashlight – and keep the fuel tank above half full.

Jim adds “With temperatures plummeting down below zero and wind chills in the double digits, frostbite and hypothermia are real dangers for those that have to be

outdoors.” Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by skin freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas and should be suspected when the skin turns white or grayish/yellowish; feels unusually firm or waxy; and is numb. It most often affects exposed areas, such as the nose, ears, cheeks, chin and fingers. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased in people with reduced blood circulation and among people who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures.

Hypothermia occurs when your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced and the body’s temperature begins to fall. Signs of hypothermia include: shivering, exhaustion, confusion, slurred speech, drowsiness and fumbling hands. Hypothermia can impact a person’s brain and leave them mentally and physically unable to respond to their environment. Victims of hypothermia are often elderly people with inadequate food, clothing or warm shelter; babies sleeping in cold bedrooms; people who are outdoors for long periods of time and people who are outside and are drinking alcohol or using illicit drugs.

Hazardous wintry conditions are in the forecast. Don’t be caught unprepared! To learn more about how to prepare for winter weather and extreme cold temperatures visit our agency’s website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) or by going to the FEMA website at [www.ready.gov/winter](http://www.ready.gov/winter).

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