

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

March 20, 2015

Contact: Stephen Todd, Health Officer

517-279-9561, ext. 0148#

Rebecca Burns, Environmental Health Director

269-273-2161, ext. 0228#

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### Farm Animals and Disease Prevention

**Coldwater, MI.** Trips to farms and petting zoos can be fun for small children, while caring for and handling animals for exhibition purposes can be very rewarding for young adults. But contracting a disease from an animal is neither fun nor rewarding. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is currently investigating a possible outbreak of Cryptosporidiosis associated with the handling of farm animals.

Farm animals including cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and goats, can pass diseases to people. As you know, farm animals are not like house pets and do not have places to rest or eat that are away from where they pass manure. Different animals can carry different types of diseases. For example, cows and calves can carry bacterium like *E. coli* or parasites like cryptosporidium. Pigs can carry the bacterium *Yersinia enterocolitica*. Chickens can carry *Salmonella* bacteria. All of these diseases are enteric diseases which can cause diarrhea, abdominal pain and fever. Many of these germs/parasites are found in farm animal manure.

To avoid being infected, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency recommends you protect yourself and your family members by remembering a few simple tips when coming in contact with farm animals:

- **Wash hands** thoroughly with soap and water right after touching a farm animal or anything in the area where they live and roam, including: fences, buckets, and straw bedding. Adults should supervise hand washing for young children. While hand-sanitizers may provide a limited amount of protection against some

diseases, they are not effective against all diseases. Be sure to follow-up after using a hand sanitizer with soap and water as soon as possible.

- **Wear protective clothing**, such as gloves, coveralls and boots when caring for animals. If you don't have boots, consider wearing booties over your street shoes when visiting a farm. When going indoors, be sure to leave soiled items outside so as not to cause cross-contamination of household items.
- **Do not eat or drink after touching farm animals** until you have adequately washed your hands with soap and water.
- **Clean** any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for farm animals outside the house, such as cages or feed or water containers.
- **Never bring live farm animals (*even small, cute ones like chicks*) inside the house**, in bathrooms, or especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored, such as kitchens, or outdoor patios.

Some people are more likely than others to get diseases from farm animals. A person's age and health status may affect his or her immune system, increasing the chances of getting sick. People who are more likely to get diseases from farm animals include infants, children younger than 5 years old, organ transplant patients, people with HIV/AIDS, and people who are being treated for cancer. Special advice is available for people who are at greater risk than others of getting diseases from animals.

For more information about *Cryptosporidium* – the parasite that causes Cryptosporidiosis - please visit our web page at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) and click on the 'Quick Info About Health Topics' button. To learn more about how the health department is working to protect our community, go to: [www.bhsj.org](http://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  
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**Three Rivers**  
1110 Hill St.  
Three Rivers, MI 49093  
(269) 273-2161