

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Third Flu Associated Death Reported

Coldwater, MI. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is reporting its third flu associated death this year, as the number of flu cases caused by Influenza B strain increase. The adult who died last week was under the age of 65 “with underlying health conditions,” said Steve Todd, the tri-county health department’s health officer.

The Michigan Department of Community Health is now reporting ‘Local’ flu activity. ‘Local’ means that outbreaks of influenza or increases in Influenza-Like-Illnesses (ILI) cases and recent laboratory-confirmed influenza are being reported specific to a single area of the state. While Influenza A (H3N2) viruses are the most common strain circulating this flu season, an increase in influenza B viruses is currently being reported.

The first line of defense against flu is vaccination. The health department continues to encourage people who have not been vaccinated to get their flu shot. While the CDC reported that due to a viral shift, the Influenza A antigens were not as effective as in previous years, the Influenza B and H1N1 antigens appear to be on target for this year’s strains.

Antiviral drugs are a second line of defense against influenza and can be used to treat flu illness. The reduced protection against Influenza A makes the appropriate use of influenza antiviral (or “anti-flu”) medications more important than usual. Antiviral drugs work best when given early; however, some therapeutic benefit has been observed even when treatment is initiated later. “This flu season, physicians should be

aware that all hospitalized patients and all outpatients at high risk for serious complications should be treated as soon as possible with one of three available influenza antiviral medications if influenza is suspected, regardless of a patient's vaccination status and without waiting for confirmatory testing," adds Steve Todd. "Health care providers should advise patients at high risk to call promptly if they get symptoms of influenza."

The third line of defense is practicing good hygiene. The health department offers the following tips:

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

To learn more about how to protect yourself and your family from the flu, please contact your local county health department office or visit our website at www.bhsj.org.

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