

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Parents are Urged to Have Their Children Vaccinated Against Chickenpox

(Coldwater, MI) Seven cases of chickenpox have been reported to the health department's St. Joseph County office this past week. In January, the Michigan Disease Surveillance System confirmed seven cases in Hillsdale County. Most of these cases involved school-age children. According to Michigan law, all students are required to be immunized with two doses of Varicella (Var) vaccine or have had a history of chickenpox disease. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, provides the following information for parents of school aged children:

Students Not Immunized for Varicella (VAR)

Children who have not been vaccinated and have not had the disease should be vaccinated immediately with the first dose of Varicella (VAR). Once the first dose has been administered, the child can receive a second dose at the following recommended minimum interval

- For children 12 months to 12 years – 2nd dose should be administered at 3 months;
- For children 13 years and older – 2nd dose should be administered in 28 days

If an outbreak of chickenpox occurs in your child's school, and your child is not immunized or does not have verification of having had the disease, your child will be excluded from school until he/she receives the first dose of varicella vaccine. If you choose to not immunize your child at all (and you cannot verify that he/she has had

the disease) and an outbreak of chickenpox occurs, your child will be excluded from school for up to 21 days after the last reported case of chickenpox.

Student Not Fully Immunized for Varicella (VAR)

Children who are not fully immunized, meaning they have only had one dose of the Varicella vaccine or do not have verification of having had the disease, should be vaccinated immediately. If an outbreak of chickenpox occurs in your child's school, your child will be excluded from school until the second dose is administered.

Currently, the health department is evaluating the immunization status of all children in the affected St. Joseph County Schools. While most children are in compliance with the Michigan's Communicable Disease Rules, those that are not may be subject to exclusion as specified above.

Chickenpox is a highly contagious illness that may start with a slight fever, followed by a blister-like, itchy skin rash which appears on the body and head. The illness usually lasts only a few days. The disease is usually mild, but has the potential to cause severe complications in certain high-risk individuals including children with a compromised immunity, pregnant women, and premature infants of less than 28 weeks gestation.

If your child is not immunized for chickenpox and has been exposed, the health department recommends that you watch your child for the signs and symptoms of the disease. If you suspect your child is ill with chickenpox, please inform the school. Your child should remain out of school until all of the chickenpox lesions have crusted over (usually about five days).

The best way to prevent your child from catching chickenpox is through vaccination. Your private doctor or the local health department should be able to provide your child with the vaccine. The health department provides vaccine free of charge for children who are on Medicaid, who are uninsured or who lack immunization health insurance

coverage through its Vaccine for Children Program. Call your local county health department office to schedule an appointment.

To learn more about Chicken pox or other vaccine preventable diseases, please visit our website at www.bhsj.org and click on Frequently Asked Questions.

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