

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First Flu Associated Death Reported

Coldwater, MI. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is reporting the first flu associated death this year, as the number of flu cases caused by Influenza A – H1N1 strain increase. “The adult who died today was an older Hillsdale County resident with underlying health conditions,” states Rebecca Burns, the tri-county health department’s health officer.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is now reporting ‘widespread’ flu activity throughout the state. ‘Widespread’ means that outbreaks of influenza or increases in influenza like illnesses (ILI) are being reported and that recent laboratory-confirmations of influenza are also being reported in at least half the regions of the state. Influenza A (H1N1) virus is the most common strain circulating this flu season. This is the strain that was also associated with the 2009 pandemic outbreak.

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. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this year’s flu vaccine is one of the most effective in years and a good match for the viruses circulating this season. Rebecca Burns adds “So far, people who got the vaccine were 59 percent less likely to get sick with influenza than people who didn’t.”

Antiviral drugs are a second line of defense against influenza and can be used to treat flu illness. They also can prevent serious flu complications, like pneumonia. For people with a high risk medical condition, treatment with an antiviral drug can mean the difference between having milder illness instead of very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay. Antiviral drugs are obtained by prescription only from a healthcare provider.

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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