

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Good Hygiene Practices for Healthy Fair Attendance

Coldwater, MI. It's fair time and that means lots of fun. There are funnel cakes, cotton candy and lemonade made fresh in a cup. There are also barns full of animals, with lots of people walking through them. Paul Andriacchi, Environmental Health Director from the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, encourages fair attendees to practice good hygiene while visiting the fair. "The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has reported at least two cases of variant influenza A/H3N2 (H3N2v), both of whom were swine exhibitors at a county fair. In addition, we have received word that a pig that was shown last week at another county fair, has tested positive for the same Influenza A virus. While practicing good hygiene anywhere is always important, practicing it at the fair this year is even more so."

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency reminds fair attendees to follow these simple good hygiene practices while visiting the fair:

Tip #1: Don't take food or drink into animal barn areas. Don't eat, drink or put anything in your mouth in the animal barn areas;

Tip #2: Don't take toys, pacifiers, cups, baby bottles, strollers, or similar items into animal barn areas.

Tip #3: Wash your hands often with soap and running water before and after petting or touching barn animals. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Parents should supervise young children.

(Tips #4 to #8 are specific to pigs)

Tip #4: Avoid close contact with pigs that look or act ill.

Tip #5: Take protective measures if you must come in contact with pigs that are known or suspected to be sick. This includes minimizing contact with pigs and wearing personal protective equipment like protective clothing, gloves and masks that cover your mouth and nose when contact is required.

Tip #6: To further reduce the risk of infection, minimize contact with pigs in the pig barn and arenas.

Tip #7: Watch your pig (if you have one) for signs of illness and call a veterinarian if you suspect it might be sick.

Tip #8: Avoid contact with pigs if you have flu-like symptoms. Wait 7 days after your illness started or until you have been without fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, whichever is longer. If you must have contact with pigs while you are sick, take the protective actions listed above.

Pigs can carry influenza viruses which can spread from pigs to pigs, pigs to people and from people to pigs. Influenza viruses spread mainly through infected droplets created when an infected pig coughs or sneezes. If these droplets are inhaled or ingested by a person, that person can become infected. Symptoms of H3N2v infection are similar to those of seasonal flu viruses and can include fever and respiratory symptoms, such as cough and runny nose, and possibly other symptoms, such as body aches, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Andriacchi continues “If you are at high risk of serious flu complications and are going to a fair where pigs will be present, avoid pigs and swine barns at the fair. This includes children younger than 5 years, people 65 years and older, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, weakened immune systems, and neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions. This virus can sometimes cause severe disease, including pneumonia, even in healthy people.” He adds “Young children may be more susceptible because they have little to no immunity against this strain of flu.”

In addition, the health department is asking health care providers who have patients that are experiencing symptoms of a fever >100 degrees Fahrenheit, plus a cough and/or a sore throat and have either been exposed to swine or have attended a county or state fair to contact the local health department.

Practicing good hygiene, which includes washing your hands often, showering daily, and wearing clean clothes, can help reduce your exposure to many communicable diseases, including the H3N2v Influenza Virus. To learn more about this strain of flu or other flu strains, visit our Frequently Asked Questions section at www.bhsj.org.

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