

# PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS & VIEWS

A Regional Health Professional Newsletter



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## FROM THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR'S DESK

As the Medical Director of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, I frequently think about how to protect our community and how to encourage healthy habits. One of the most successful public health interventions is vaccination. Vaccination has eliminated some diseases and controlled others. One example is smallpox that has been eradicated worldwide.

Vaccine hesitancy is a state of uncertainty and hesitancy regarding vaccines. There are many reasons why families might be vaccine hesitant. Health care providers need to offer support, take time to answer questions, present facts and address parents' and patients' fears. Physicians and health care providers are the most trusted people when it comes to health care advice. Vaccine acceptance can increase with the support and encouragement of a trusted doctor, advanced practice provider or nurse.

In addition to COVID-19, the agency manages outbreaks of diseases like chicken pox, pertussis, and influenza within the jurisdiction, and is monitoring outbreaks of measles and polio in other jurisdictions.

Please start talking to families about vaccination early. Let them know that your family is vaccinated. Take the time to answer their questions and to dispel any myths and misinformation. If the Health Department can assist with any information regarding vaccines, please don't hesitate to call.

Larson, H. J., Gakidou, E., & Murray, C. J. (2022). The vaccine hesitant moment. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 387(1), 58- 65. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmra2106441> Shen, S. C., & Dubey, V. (2019). Addressing vaccine hesitancy: Clinical guidance for primary care physicians working with parents. *Canadian family physician Medecin de famille canadien*, 65(3), 175-181.

## PNEUMONIA CASES RELATED TO BLASTOMYCOSIS OUTBREAK IN THE UPPER PENNINSULA

An outbreak of atypical pneumonia infections related to blastomycosis in workers at a papermill in Escanaba is prompting a reminder to providers to consider this fungal source when diagnosing patients in endemic areas, particularly those who have occupations or participate in activities that expose them to soil and decomposing organic matter, like leaves and wood.

Endemic areas for this fungus in the United States include; the midwestern, south-central, and southeastern states, particularly areas surrounding the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, the Great Lakes, the Saint Lawrence River, and the western United States.

Blastomycosis is asymptomatic in approximately 50% of cases. Symptomatic persons usually present 3 weeks to 3 months after exposure. The clinical presentation of acute pulmonary blastomycosis is often non-specific; symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Night sweats
- Myalgia
- Arthralgia
- Anorexia
- Chest pain
- Fatigue

Acute pulmonary blastomycosis can progress to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Approximately 25% to 40% of symptomatic cases will develop extrapulmonary infection, which typically manifests as cutaneous, osteoarticular, genitourinary, or central nervous system disease.

The fungus lives in the environment, particularly in soil and decaying organic matter such as wood or leaves.

Blastomycosis does not spread from person to person or between animals and people. In rare cases, blastomycosis can be spread through needle stick and sexually transmitted. People at higher risk of contracting the disease include those who:

- Spend time near moist soil (by lakes and rivers)
- Participate in activities such as forestry work, hunting, and camping in wooded areas
- Are exposed to disturbed soil

Amphotericin B is recommended for moderate to severe disease, central nervous system disease, immunosuppressed patients, or pregnant patients. Itraconazole is recommended for mild to moderate disease and step-down therapy. Therapeutic drug monitoring should be considered for certain antifungals like itraconazole when treating blastomycosis.

- For more detailed treatment guidelines, please refer to the Infectious Diseases Society of America's Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Blastomycosis.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Blastomycosis. <https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/blastomycosis/health-professionals.html> Published January 17, 2023. Accessed March 27, 2023.

## **WHAT COULD THE END OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY MEAN FOR YOUR PATIENTS?**

The end of the public health emergency means the end of certain pandemic related benefits.

Families on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program have already seen a reduction in benefit dollars. This may contribute to food insecurity in some homes. Families with children up to age 5 and women who are pregnant or nursing may qualify for WIC benefits. Families can be referred to Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, Your Local Health Department office, for more information and enrollment.

Patients who receive Medicaid services will begin receiving Notices of Re-determination in June. During the pandemic, those who were currently receiving benefits and those who were added to the program were not required to provide annual household information to continue benefits. Starting in June, this process will re-start. For some, it may mean the end of benefits and transition to a Healthcare Marketplace policy. Your Local Health Department's Community Health Worker and Area Agency on Aging Regions 2 and 3C have trained resource specialists who can assist your patients in navigation of the Healthcare Marketplace and provide information on the policies available to them.

There are no anticipated changes in the Emergency Use Authorizations for treatment or vaccine recommendations.

## **STI AWARENESS WEEK**

### **April 9-15**

The Agency has been monitoring the increase in sexually transmitted disease, mainly Chlamydia and Gonorrhea, within the jurisdiction. It is important to screen and discuss prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases with your patients. Your Local Health Department offers condoms and lubricant free of charge at all of our locations. There is no income requirement for this program.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides a tool for STI risk assessment suitable for primary care settings (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/products/provider-pocket-guides.htm>). Information about behavioral counseling and other STI prevention strategies can be found at (<https://www.cdc.gov/std/prevention>). The CDC also maintains a compendium of evidence-based behavioral counseling interventions that have been shown to reduce STI acquisition or increase safer sexual behaviors. (<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/research/interventionresearch/compendium/rr/complete.html>).

Contact Your Local Health Department if you have questions, or have a patient who needs testing, counseling, or treatment.

## **MAY IS HEPATITIS AWARENESS MONTH – FREE CME/CNE**

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month. The CDC recently published updated recommendations for hepatitis B screening and testing. In this publication, “screening” refers to testing people not known to be at increased risk for exposure to HBV. “Testing” refers to conducting serologic tests of people with symptoms or who are identified to be at increased risk for exposure to HBV. These updates expand on the recommendations published in 2008.

Here is the Summary of 2023 HBV screening and testing recommendations:

- Screen all adults aged 18 years and older at least once in their lifetime using a triple panel test
- Screen pregnant people for hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) during each pregnancy regardless of vaccination status and history of testing
- Expand periodic risk-based testing to include people incarcerated, people with a history of sexually transmitted infections or multiple sex partners, and people with hepatitis C virus infection
- Test anyone who requests HBV testing regardless of disclosure of risk

For the complete guidelines and recommendations see the following article: Screening and Testing for Hepatitis B Virus Infection: CDC Recommendations — United States, 2023, MMWR Recomm Rep 2023;72(No. RR-1):1–25.

Acute Hepatitis C Cases have doubled since 2013 (124% increase), and during 2020 increased 15% from 2019. The CDC recommends one-time hepatitis C testing of all adults (18 years and older) and all pregnant women during every pregnancy. The CDC continues to recommend people with risk factors, including people who inject drugs, be tested regularly.

The following link will provide you Free CME/CNE regarding core competencies for screening, diagnosis, management, and treatment of Hepatitis C from the University of Washington, in partnership with the CDC:

<https://www.hepatitisc.uw.edu/alternate>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viral Hepatitis Surveillance Report – United States, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics/2020surveillance/index.htm>. Published September 2022. Accessed March 27, 2023.

## **PROMOTING ORAL HEALTH**

Each June, the American Dental Association (ADA) sheds light on the importance of oral health care. Many dental conditions are highly prevalent in the U.S. population due to inadequate prevention or treatment. In fact, the CDC estimates that more than 1 in 4 adults have untreated tooth decay, almost half of all adults over 30 show signs of gum disease, and nearly 1 in 10 adults have severe gum disease.

Primary Care Providers have the opportunity to stress the importance of oral health, but realistically, cost is a barrier to receiving dental/oral care for many families.

My Community Dental Centers (MCDC) are available in all three counties with locations in Coldwater, Hillsdale, Sturgis, and Three Rivers. MCDC works with most insurances, Medicaid and Medicare, to provide services from hygiene to restorative. They also offer a sliding fee scale, service discounts, and payment plans.

If you have questions, or to schedule an appointment at a local MCDC clinic, call 877-313-6232.

## **COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's "Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)" and "Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)" is continuing.

Initial data research, has been presented to each of the counties' community coalitions. Feedback from the members of those organizations shaped the second phase of the project, focus groups and community input.

A focus group for "Maternal and Child Health." is being put together with the help of the Great Start Collaborative within each county.

A second focus group on Behavioral and Mental Health Care is being with the help of St. Joseph County Community Mental Health, Pines Behavioral Health in Branch County, and Lifeways Community Mental Health in Hillsdale County.

Additional online surveys and phone interviews will be conducted with residents, community leaders, and providers.

Your opinion matters to us. We hope that you will be able to actively participate in the project.

## **JOIN OUR VOLUNTEER CORP**

During the pandemic, the demand for testing and vaccination in 2020 and 2021 stretched our agency. We would not have been able to provide the community support needed without dedicated volunteers from our jurisdiction and surrounding area.

If you would be willing to support our response to a future public health emergency. Please register to volunteer at:

<https://www.mivolunteerregistry.org>

Registration places you under no obligation. Thank you for considering the opportunity!

## **THE BENEFIT OF A COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER**

Our Community Health Worker is certified to assist clients in navigating human services needs. The goal of the program is to support individuals and families to identify programs and services that will stabilize their family unit and allow them to prosper.

Our Community Health Worker has assisted families to overcome food insecurity, finding resources for medical care and equipment needs, educational attainment, connecting victims of abuse to services, finding financial resources for utilities and housing.

If you have a patient who could benefit from these services, contact Rachael at Your Local Health Department office, extension 232.