

March 2, 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Following the heightened concerns over the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019), Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to reassure you that no confirmed cases have been identified in any of our 3 counties. The real concern in our community at this time is influenza. The number of young children presenting to emergency departments and hospitalized from the illness continues to rise along with cases of influenza-like illnesses reported through schools and childcare centers.

Influenza, also called “the flu”, is a respiratory viral illness that can cause fever, cough, chills, headache, muscle aches, runny nose and sore throat. With true influenza a fever is almost always present and the cough is often severe. Influenza symptoms usually last 2 to 7 days. Influenza is not the same as the “stomach flu,” which is a gastrointestinal illness causing severe nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea that usually lasts 1 to 2 days. The influenza virus spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes, causing droplets containing the virus to spread in the air. Uninfected people can become infected by being in close contact with these droplets (within 6 feet) and breathing them in or by touching surfaces the droplets fell onto.

There are many things that can be done to keep our schools, homes, and communities “flu-free.”

1. It’s not too late to get vaccinated. Influenza vaccine is widely available through the local health department, area physicians and pharmacies.
2. As a general rule, even outside of influenza, children and adults should stay home when ill. We recommend that people sick with any influenza-like illness remain at home until they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
3. Teach your family how to lower their risk of getting and spreading the influenza virus by:
 - Washing their hands often with soap and running warm water for at least 20 seconds
 - If a hand washing station is not available, use hand sanitizer properly. Gels, rubs, and hand wipes work well against influenza if they contain at least 60% alcohol.
 - Coughing or sneezing into their upper shirt sleeve or elbow—not onto their hands!
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth. That’s how germs enter the body.
4. Seek medical care immediately if your child experiences any of the following symptoms:
 - Illness lasting longer than a week
 - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - Bluish skin color
 - Not drinking enough fluids or not urinating
 - Not waking up or not interacting with others as they normally do
 - Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
 - Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse coughing
 - Fever with a rash

If you have any questions please contact your local health department at 517-279-9561, select option #1 for clinic services.

Sincerely,

Kali Nichols, MPH, Director of Personal Health & Disease Prevention
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