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## **Local Health Departments Across the State Promote Protection Against Harmful Bites and Bacteria in July**

Coldwater, Michigan, July 1, 2008 – As Michigan residents enjoy camping, swimming, and fresh homegrown food this summer, health officials are reminding everyone to reduce their risk of exposure to bacteria and viruses that can cause illness. Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency kicked-off a month-long awareness campaign today to inform local residents about what they can do to prevent illness and what the health department is doing to protect the health of Branch, Hillsdale, and St. Joseph County residents and visitors.

“Be aware of potential infection from various sources during the summer months, but do not let it keep you from enjoying the many activities that Branch, Hillsdale, and St. Joseph County has to offer for fun and recreation,” said Rebecca Burns, Director of Environmental Health “You can protect yourself and your family by taking special precautions.”

Michigan residents should be aware of and protect themselves from illnesses such as Lyme disease, rabies and West Nile virus.

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection resulting from the bite of an infected deer tick. If left untreated it can cause chills, fever, headaches, and muscle and joint pain. Although the risk of developing Lyme disease is minimal in Michigan, residents should be aware of their risk of infection and seek immediate diagnosis and treatment upon possible exposure.

Rabies and West Nile virus are both viral infections. Rabies is contracted through a bite or scratch from an infected animal. It can also be transmitted if saliva from an infected animal gets into an open wound or into a person’s eyes, nose, or mouth. In Michigan, rabies has been reported most often in bats. There is no treatment for rabies once a person or animal shows signs of the disease, so reducing your exposure is crucial.

West Nile virus is spread to humans primarily by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Most people who are infected with West Nile virus either have no symptoms or experience mild illness such as fever, headache and body aches. If you suspect that you have been exposed to the virus, seek medical care immediately.

For more information, including frequently asked questions sheets about Lyme Disease, West Nile Virus and Rabies, including a fact sheet on what type of bug sprays work and which ones don’t, visit our website at:

[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)

The Community Health Agency is a fully accredited health department and serves the residents of Branch, Hillsdale, and St. Joseph Counties.