

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FLU SEASON IS HERE – Don't delay. Get the flu shot right away.

If you're 65 or older, the flu prevention message for you this year is simple: **Get the flu shot as soon as you can.** Just one shot will help protect you for the entire 2011-12 flu season.

This year—and *every year*—health officials urge you to get the seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it's available in your community. While anyone over the age of six months should get a flu shot, older adults are at greater risk of serious flu-related complications. Seniors are more likely to develop pneumonia, be hospitalized and die from the flu when compared with young, healthy adults. This is because the body's ability to fight illness drops as you age. In fact, each year about 9 out of 10 seasonal flu-related deaths and more than 6 out of 10 seasonal flu-related hospital stays in the United States occur in people 65 years and older.

"This year's flu vaccine will protect against the H1N1 virus that was of such great concern in 2009 and two other influenza viruses," said Dr. James Phillips, Medical Director, Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency. "One of these is the H3N2 virus. This virus usually hits older adults harder. And having one flu vaccine will make it easier to get the protection you need against flu all season long." Flu vaccine supplies are expected to be plentiful, but you should get the flu shot as soon as it's available, as the timing of influenza circulation is unpredictable and sometimes starts in the early fall.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is taking appointments for its community flu clinics to be held in each county. Clinics are scheduled as follows:

Branch – call 517-279-9561:

Tuesday, October 11 th	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Dearth Center – Branch County Fairgrounds
Friday, October 28 th	8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.	Coldwater Office – 570 N. Marshall Rd.

Hillsdale – call 517-437-7395:

Saturday, October 15 th	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Hillsdale County Senior Center – Perennial Park, 320 W. Bacon, Hillsdale
Tuesday, November 1 st	10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Hillsdale Office – 20 Care Drive, Hillsdale

St. Joseph – call 269-273-2161:

Wednesday, October 5 th	10 a.m. to 1 p.m.	Messiah Lutheran Church – 185 W. 5 th Street, Constantine
Tuesday, October 11 th	9 a.m. to 1 p.m.	Three Rivers Community Center – 103 Douglas Street, Three Rivers
Wednesday, October 19 th	10 a.m. to 1 p.m.	Sturgis Senior Center – 304 N. Jefferson, Sturgis

The health department accepts: Medicaid, Medicare Part B, Blue Cross/Blue Shield Medicare Advantage (first three characters are **XYO**) and Railroad Carriers. Children who are without insurance vaccine coverage are eligible for free shots under the Vaccine for Children Program. For all others the cost is \$30.00, which is due at the clinic appointment. According to Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Director at the tri-county health department, “Due to a funding reduction, we will not be able to provide free vaccine as we had last year. As a result, we are depending on other local providers and pharmacies to immunize the general population, allowing us to focus mainly on seniors. Community members interested in obtaining a list of area flu providers can contact their local health department county office to find who is providing shots locally. Remember: Getting a flu shot every year is your best protection against the flu and its complications.”

Flu is a viral infection. It causes fever, chills, sore throat, muscle aches, cough, headache and a runny or stuffy nose. For most people, flu symptoms last only a few days, but for young children, people 65 years and older and people with certain chronic health conditions – they can get much sicker and suffer its complications.

Flu is preventable by getting the flu shot. It takes up to two weeks for protection to develop – but after that – the protection lasts up to a year. Because flu can occur at any time, it's important to get vaccinated soon. Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency encourages its residents to not delay – get your flu shot right away!

For more information about upcoming flu clinics, the dangers of flu and the benefits of the flu vaccine, visit the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency website at: www.bhsj.org.