



Welcome to the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's Winter Provider Newsletter. It certainly feels like winter has arrived with full force! While I'm not one to wish time away, I find myself eagerly anticipating the return of sunshine and warmer days.

Our agency reports six cases of Varicella (Chickenpox) among local youth, requiring PCR or DFA testing for accurate diagnosis. **Chickenpox is a notifiable disease in Michigan, and all cases must be reported to your local health department. If you have any questions, you can contact your local office or email epihelp@bhsj.org.**

This newsletter also includes **updated immunization recommendations from MDHHS and the Michigan State Medical Society**. Along with free CME and patient handouts.

Additionally, we will highlight public health observance dates, such as **January being Radon Awareness Month**. Please inform your patients about the risks associated with radon and encourage them to test their homes. Our agency provides free home testing kits at all of our office locations.

January 23rd marks **Maternal Health Awareness Day**, emphasizing the importance of the WIC program and recognizing Urgent Maternal Warning signs.

February 14th-21st is recognized as **National Condom Week**, addressing the rise in STIs and HIV cases within our jurisdiction. Our agency provides free condoms and educational resources to the community. Also included are highlights of MDHHS We Treat Hep C- Newsletter for Clinicians.

Wishing you a joyful holiday season with loved ones! Engaging patients in these discussions promotes a healthier community. We value your commitment to patient education at the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency.

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Varicella (Chickenpox)

Six cases of chickenpox in youth have been confirmed within our jurisdiction. Laboratory confirmation of a chickenpox diagnosis is now strongly encouraged and increasingly important as healthcare providers have less clinical experience with the disease due to the overall decline in disease incidence in recent decades. The test method of choice for rapid diagnosis and confirmation of chickenpox is the varicella-specific nucleic acid detected by polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Please see the table below for testing information.

Disease	Preferred Test Method*	Specimen(s)	Timing for Specimen Collection	Testing Logistics & Considerations
Varicella (Chickenpox)	PCR	Vesicular fluid by swabbing base of vesicle; scabs, or lesion crusts.	As long as vesicles are present	Use synthetic swabs (e.g., polyester) and place in a sterile, empty tube (do not place transport medium in the tube); Crusts or scabs can be collected with a tweezer; placed into a sterile dry container
Varicella (Chickenpox)	DFA	Scraping or swab from the base of open vesicles	As long as vesicles are present	DFA tests are an alternate method of confirmation; these are not as sensitive as PCR

*For other testing options for varicella, see: <https://ndc.services.cdc.gov/case-definitions/varicella-2024/>

In Michigan, a health care provider can document chickenpox immunity in the Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR) through either:

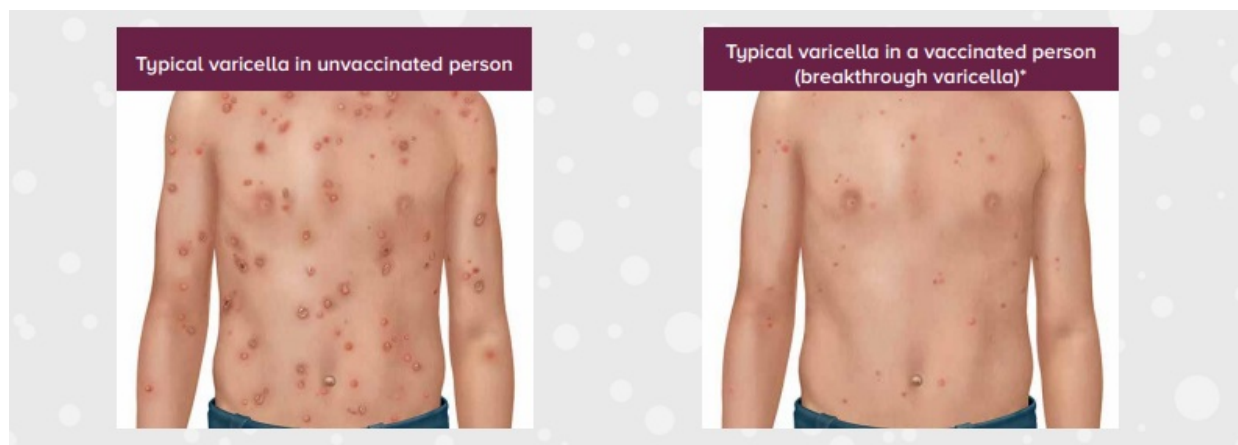
- 1) Laboratory confirmation, OR
- 2) An epidemiologic link to a lab-confirmed case.

Without this documentation, individuals should not be considered to have a valid history of the disease, as other illnesses may resemble mild chickenpox.

Chickenpox is a notifiable disease in Michigan, and cases must be reported to the local health department. For questions, contact your local office or email epihelp@bhsj.org.

Resources for providers:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/site.html#hcp>
- CDC [Varicella Diagnosis Fact Sheet](#)
- CDC [Breakthrough Varicella Fact Sheet](#)
- MDHHS Vaccine Preventable Disease Investigation Guidelines – Varicella
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Varicella_388985_7.pdf
- Prevention of Varicella: Recommendations of the ACIP
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5604.pdf>



Our agency is following MDHHS immunization recommendations. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has adopted the immunization schedules published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) as the standards of care for immunization practices in Michigan. [Click here](#) to view the MDHHS press release updated November 2025 for additional information.

Provider Resources:

- [MDHHS updated COVID-19 vaccine guidance for 2025-2026 for providers](#)
- [Free CME: Maximizing Trust & Reducing Resistance-Trusted Messenger Program](#)
- [Social media toolkit for vaccines: Michigan Health Communications Initiative](#)

Patient Handouts:

- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ](#)
- [2025-2026 Respiratory Virus Guidance](#)
- [2025-2026 Respiratory Vaccine Recommendations](#)

Latest updates on the Hepatitis B vaccine from Michigan State Medical Society (MSMS)



**The Michigan Association of
Preventive Medicine and Public
Health Physicians**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 11, 2025

Contact: Norm Hess
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Physicians Remind Michiganders Why Hepatitis B Vaccination at Birth Remains Important

Lansing, MI – The Michigan Association of Preventive Medicine and Public Health Physicians (MAPPP) and the Michigan State Medical Society (MSMS) strongly disagree with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' vote to delay the hepatitis B vaccine birth dose. MAPPP and MSMS support the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' (MDHHS) [recommendation](#) to follow the immunization schedules from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#).

Hepatitis B attacks the liver, and about 90% of infants infected at birth develop chronic hepatitis B infection, with 1 in 4 of these children dying prematurely from liver disease. Delaying the birth dose of hepatitis B increases risk of infants developing lifelong infection, liver cancer and death. [In 1999, a baby in Michigan died of liver failure due to Hepatitis B infection](#) three months after birth due to communication and reporting failures, combined with the hospital's temporary suspension of its birth-dose—leaving the newborn unprotected at birth. [Although the mother had tested positive for hepatitis B during pregnancy](#), the baby did not receive hepatitis B vaccination until two months of age – too late to prevent infection from exposure during birth.

"As a physician who cares for babies and mothers in the hospital and clinic, I recommend the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine. The birth dose acts as a safeguard to protect babies from preventable infection and death," said Dr. William Nettleton of MAPPP.

The hepatitis B virus is highly contagious and can be spread at home by people who may not know they are infected. Even small amounts of blood or certain body fluids can spread the virus, such as through sharing toothbrushes, razors or contact sports. During 1990-2019, new hepatitis B cases in US children and teens [decreased 99%](#) due to universal hepatitis B vaccination initiated in 1991. [No safety benefits have been identified for a delayed first dose](#) versus vaccination at birth.

For all these reasons, MAPPP and MSMS encourage continued universal hepatitis B vaccination at birth.

The Michigan Association of Preventive Medicine and Public Health Physicians (MAPPP) is the professional society for local public health medical directors and preventive medicine physicians across Michigan.

The Michigan State Medical Society (MSMS) is a professional society representing physicians and medical students in Michigan.

Patient Handout: For Parents and Other Caregivers: Understanding Hepatitis B and the Hepatitis B Vaccine

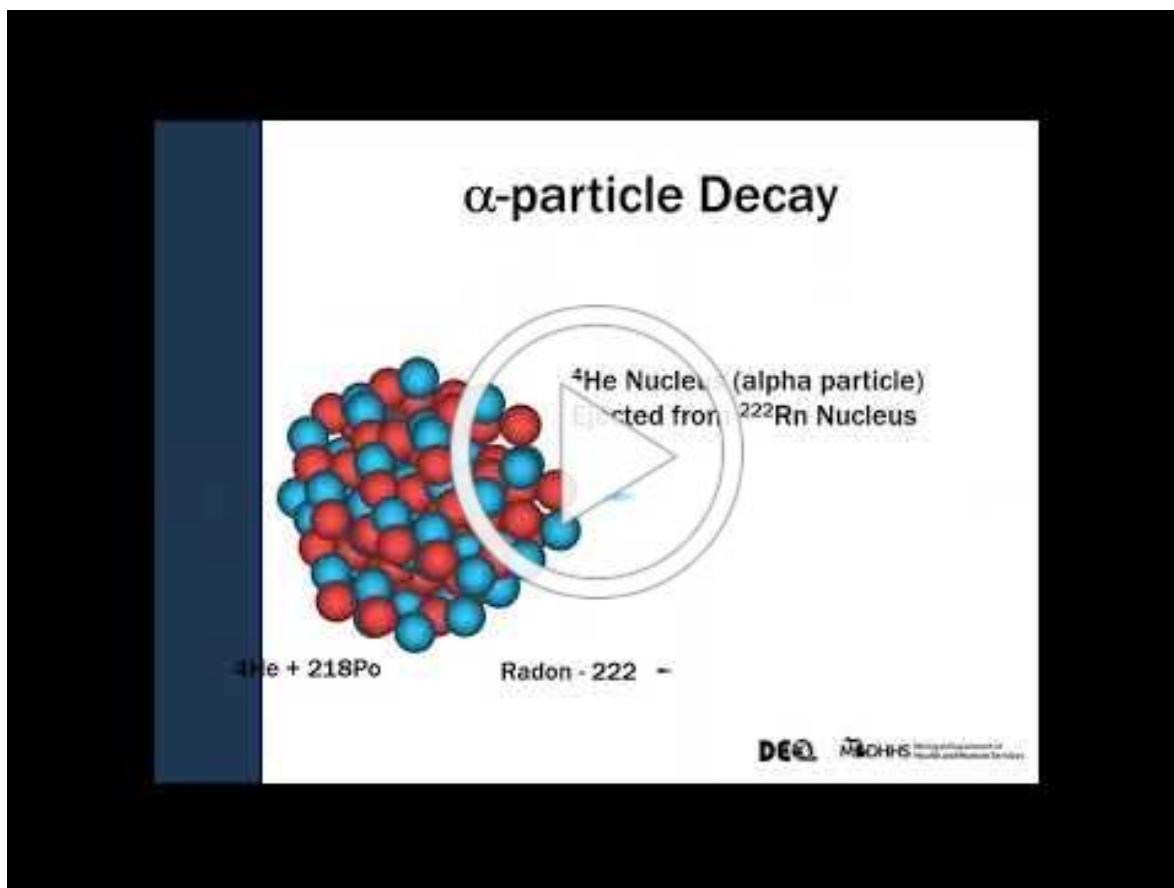
January: Radon Awareness Month

January marks Radon Awareness Month, a crucial opportunity to educate patients about the risks of Radon exposure and encourage proactive health measures. Our agency is committed to increasing awareness of Radon, a colorless, odorless gas that poses significant health risks, including lung cancer.

Radon is estimated to cause approximately 21,000 lung cancer deaths annually in the United States, making it the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

In the tri-county area, Radon levels can vary widely, emphasizing the need for residents to test their homes for this hazardous gas. Patients can obtain a free home testing kit by visiting any of our office locations. By fostering a collective commitment to Radon education and awareness, we can work together to reduce health risks and create safer living environments for all Michigan residents.

Watch the video below for additional educational information on radon for healthcare providers.



January 23rd: Maternal Health Awareness Day

Maternal Health Awareness Day (January 23rd) reminds us of the importance of ensuring every mother has access to the care and resources she needs. In public health, we are committed to health equity and culturally competent care to empower families in prioritizing maternal health.

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program provides free nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, and connections to community resources. Based on 2025-2026 income guidelines, a family of four may qualify if the family earns up to \$28.59/hour. Grandparents or guardians raising young children may also be eligible. Full eligibility details can be found at www.bhsj.org/wic.

Please encourage mothers and caregivers to apply for this program to support better maternal health outcomes. Participation in the WIC program is linked to improved birth outcomes, reduced infant mortality, and enhanced cognitive development in children. Additionally, WIC participation helps families purchase healthier foods, leading to improved diets for both pregnant women and children.

[Click here](#) to access a PDF of our WIC flyer to share with patients.

In addition to the WIC program, our agency is committed to enhancing education about Urgent Maternal Warning Signs. Healthcare providers are essential for recognizing these signs early and preventing potentially life-threatening conditions.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has created digital flyers to raise public awareness. Here are a couple of flyers that can be shared with patients:

- [Recognize Postpartum Warning Signs](#)
- [Urgent Maternal Warning Signs](#)

For additional materials, [click here](#) for a resource kit that contains best practices, resources, and planning materials for healthcare professionals.

Citation: Maternal and Child Outcomes Associated With the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) | Effective Health Care (EHC) Program

February 14th-21st: National Condom Week

February 14th to 21st is National Condom Week, aimed at promoting safe sexual practices and the use of condoms to prevent STIs, HIV/AIDS, and unintended pregnancies. We provide free condoms and information about testing and treatment services in all public restrooms at our offices. If you're interested in partnering with us to provide condoms or educational materials at your office, contact our Health Education team at 517-933-3019.



MDHHS We Treat Hep C: Newsletter for Clinicians Fall 2025

The latest edition of the We Treat Hep C - Newsletter for Clinicians (Fall 2025) is here! Highlights include:

- New factsheet: The Impact of the MDHHS We Treat Hep C Initiative in Michigan: Michigan : **We-Treat-Hep-C-Impact-final.pdf**.
- New MDHHS study showing harm reduction efforts make significant impacts on cases of hepatitis C, overdose deaths, and hospitalizations: **Measurable-Impacts-of-Harm-Reduction.pdf**.

[Click here](#) to read the full newsletter

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