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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Congregate Living, COVID-19, and Easter

Coldwater, MI – It's the weekend of Easter and we want to take the kids to the community Easter egg hunt, and enjoy time with our extended family. We especially want to visit with those family members who live in a congregate type of facility; i.e. long-term care, memory-care, foster care, etc. A lot of the things we have done every Easter can't be done this year, and that includes visiting in-person with our family members who live in a congregate care facility. But we can and should visit by phone or video chat, and here is why.

According to information posted on the MDHHS Coronavirus webpage; COVID-19 is a new disease and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe disease. However, based on currently available information and clinical expertise, **older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions** might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Based on what we know now, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility

And, people of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:

- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions
- People who are immunocompromised

- Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease

In Hillsdale county, the Hillsdale County Medical Care Facility (HMCF) has been dealing with an outbreak of COVID-19 that has affected some workers and patients. Because people live in close contact with one another and workers care for multiple patients, a virus like COVID-19 can spread rapidly within such a setting. A major complication is that people don't immediately develop symptoms of COVID-19, so a congregate facility can have the virus spreading without the medical care workers knowing until people are really sick.

In the case of HMCF, they established an isolation wing for patients that were COVID-19 positive which removed those who could spread the virus to others. Staff that had any symptoms or tested positive were isolated at home. Remaining staff that were not sick and could still work used personal protective equipment to protect themselves and the patients while doing patient care.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency works with all the long-term care facilities located within the tri-county area to ensure they have necessary infectious disease protocols in place to protect patients and staff. We also assist with ensuring these facilities have access to the personal protective equipment needed by their workers. This year, when you gather together with family to celebrate Easter, do so over the phone or use video chat. When we all work together, we can protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is committed to promoting wellness, preventing disease, providing health care, and protecting the environment. For additional information, contact your local health department office or visit www.bhsj.org and follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/BHSJCHA.

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