April 17, 2019

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

With the current measles outbreak in Southeast Michigan reaching 41 cases (as of April 10, 2019), the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department wants to remind families of the importance of knowing whether you are susceptible to measles and to take steps to protect yourself.

Measles is a highly contagious virus that is passed to others by coughing and sneezing, or by contact with a contaminated surface or object. The measles virus can live in air and on object for 2 hours, infecting 90% of non-immune people even after the ill person has left the room. People typically develop symptoms of measles 7-10 days after exposure, but it can take up to 21 days. The first sign of measles is usually a high fever, along with a runny nose, red eyes, cough and sore throat; 3-5 days after these symptoms, a rash will appear that begins on the face and moves down the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. Infected individuals are contagious from 4 days before the rash until 4 days after. Severe illness and complications from measles are more likely to develop in infants and children younger than 5 years, pregnant women and people with weakened immune symptoms. *If you think you may have measles, please do not visit your health care provider or emergency room without calling ahead first! It is important that precautions are taken to prevent others from becoming exposed!*

There is no treatment for measles, but there is a way to prevent it. The combination measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine has been available since 1971 and is a safe and effective way to protect yourself. Children between the ages of 1-4 should have one dose of MMR vaccine, and everyone over the age of 4 should have two doses. Adults born before 1957 are assumed to be immune to measles because most of them had the disease as children.

The Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department is committed to following Centers for Disease Control recommendations to protect the public health against measles. Therefore, a single case of measles in our area may prompt the health department to exclude potentially exposed unvaccinated or non-immune individuals from school or work. Therefore, we recommend that all residents review their vaccination records to determine if you have received 2 doses of MMR vaccine. MMR vaccine can be obtained at your health care provider office or at the health department. The Health Department will bill health insurance for MMR vaccine, or can provide it at low or no cost for individuals who do not have health insurance.

If you have questions about measles disease or how to determine if you need an MMR vaccine, or if you would like to schedule a vaccination appointment, please call the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department at 231-256-0200.