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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tips to Staying Healthy This Winter

Kingsford, Michigan – November 22, 2005. Many different viruses and bacteria circulate at the same times of the year. These include viruses capable of causing influenza, the common cold, and viral forms of meningitis. Bacterial meningitis is also a concern in our community. Vaccination is not the only way to help prevent the spread of viral and bacteria caused diseases. Here are steps you and your family can take to stay healthy this winter.

Studies have shown the simplest and most effective way to prevent disease transmission is to wash your hands often-- with soap and warm water. Rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces. Wash for at least 20 seconds. (Tip: have your children sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice while washing.) It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs. Use regular soap. Antibacterial soap is not necessary. These soaps may contribute to the growing problem of antibiotic resistance. In areas where many people congregate and use common restroom facilities, such as schools and large retail stores, post handwashing signs in all restrooms. School staff are encouraged to teach the importance of handwashing among students and to monitor this activity.

When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in the gel kills germs that cause colds and the flu. However, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers do not remove dirt.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when people touch something that is contaminated with germs and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. Germs can live for a long time (some can live for 2 hours or more) on surfaces like doorknobs, desks and tables.

Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs cause illnesses like the flu (influenza). The flu, and many other respiratory illnesses, usually spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes and the droplets from the cough or sneeze move through the air and are deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. So, always cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, wash your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

If you feel ill, stay home from work and keep sick kids home from school or daycare. And keep in mind; most people with flu or other respiratory illnesses will recover just fine.

For more information, please call the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department at 774-1868 or 265-9913 or visit the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm.

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