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Health Department Promotes Protection against Harmful Bites and Bacteria in July

Kingsford and Iron River, Michigan, July 2, 2012 – As Michigan residents enjoy camping, swimming, and fresh homegrown food this summer, health officials are reminding everyone to reduce their risk of exposure to bacteria and viruses that can cause illness. The Dickinson-Iron District Health Department is kicking off a month long awareness campaign today to inform local residents about what they can do to prevent illness and what the health department is doing to protect the health of Dickinson and Iron County residents and visitors.

“Be aware of potential infection from various sources during the summer months, but do not let it keep you from enjoying the many activities that the Counties have to offer for fun and recreation,” said Daren Deyaert, Environmental Health Director. “You can protect yourself and your family by taking special precautions.”

Michigan residents should be aware of and protect themselves from illnesses such as Lyme disease, rabies and West Nile virus. Lyme disease is a bacterial infection resulting from the bite of an infected deer tick. Early symptoms may include a distinctive rash at the site of the tick bite, fever, headache, fatigue, eye symptoms and muscle/joint pain. “There are deer tick populations in the U.P. that can transmit Lyme, so avoidance is important. Your local health department and the Michigan Department of Community Health websites have lots of information on prevention strategies,” states Dr. Teresa Frankovich, Medical Director. “These include wearing light, long clothing that allows ticks to be spotted more easily, staying on trails and groomed paths in wooded and tall, grassy areas when possible, using appropriate repellants and checking skin for ticks when coming indoors from areas where ticks are likely to reside. It takes about 24-48 hours of attachment for a tick to transmit the bacterial infection, so checking daily can be very effective at preventing disease.”

Rabies and West Nile virus are both viral infections. Rabies is contracted through a bite or scratch from an infected animal. It can also be transmitted if saliva from an infected animal gets into an open wound or into a person’s eyes, nose, or mouth. In Michigan, rabies has been reported most often in bats. Once a person develops symptoms of rabies, it is almost universally fatal, so reducing your exposure is crucial. Make sure your cat or dog is kept up to date with its rabies vaccination and avoid contact with unfamiliar/stray and wild animals. If you believe you may have been exposed, contact your healthcare provider or the health department. Don’t wait to seek treatment as there is highly effective preventative treatment available.

West Nile virus is spread to humans primarily by the bite of an infected mosquito. A mosquito becomes infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Most people who are infected with West Nile virus either have no symptoms or experience mild illness such as fever, headache and body aches. Again, avoidance is important. Strategies to avoid exposure include wearing long, protective clothing, using appropriate repellants, getting rid of standing water in your yard when feasible and staying indoors when mosquitoes are very active. If you have symptoms of concern, contact your healthcare provider.

Not only should you be aware of potential illness from animal and tick bites during the summer months, but also illness from consuming contaminated food and beverages.

Here are some precautions you can take to protect yourself and your family from foodborne illness:

- 1) When carrying food to another location, keep it cold to minimize bacterial growth. Cold food should be held at or below 40°F. Pack food right from the refrigerator into the cooler immediately before leaving home.
- 2) When using a cooler, keep it out of the direct sun by placing it in the shade or shelter. Avoid opening the lid too often, which lets cold air out and warm air in.
- 3) Be sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters. To prevent foodborne illness, don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and poultry and their juices can contaminate safely cooked food.

The Dickinson-Iron District Health Department is committed to promoting wellness, preventing disease, providing health care, and protecting the environment. For information about infectious disease prevention and services, visit www.didhd.org or call your local health department.

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