



BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

BCHD Recommends Preventive Measures, Vaccines to Avoid Seasonal Respiratory Viruses, Offers Walk-in Flu Vaccine Clinics

Benton Harbor, Michigan, Oct. 18, 2023 – If you want to avoid getting seriously ill from respiratory viruses this fall, the Berrien County Health Department is recommending simple preventive measures and vaccinations against the big three: flu, COVID-19 and RSV.

“From now into spring is respiratory viral season, and each year we see an increase in the number of respiratory viruses and illnesses in our community,” Health Officer Guy Miller said. “Taking some simple precautions, such as staying home when you’re sick and washing your hands frequently, can help reduce the likelihood of catching or transmitting an illness.

“Getting vaccinated against the flu, COVID-19 and RSV give you, your loved ones and our entire community an added layer of protection. The Health Department encourages everyone to schedule their vaccinations now – either through us, your primary care physician, a local pharmacy or other health care provider.”

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness typically in the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses. It can result in mild to severe illness and sometimes death.

BCHD is offering walk-in flu vaccine clinics now through Nov. 29. Flu shots will be available at the Niles office at 1205 Front St. from 9 a.m. to noon every Monday. Flu shots will be available at the Benton Harbor office at 2149 E. Napier Ave. from 9 a.m. to noon every Wednesday. No appointments are necessary.

COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It most often causes respiratory symptoms that can feel like a cold, flu or pneumonia. It can also damage other organs in addition to the lungs.

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild cold-like symptoms, including runny nose, coughing, sneezing, wheezing and fever. These symptoms usually appear in stages. In very young infants, RSV symptoms may be irritability, decreased activity and difficulty breathing.

BCHD recommends following everyday preventive measures to stop the spread of germs, including:

- Avoid close contact with other people who are sick and stay home when you are sick.
- Follow the U.S. Centers for Disease Control guidance regarding isolation and masking if you test positive for COVID-19.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Practice other good health habits, including getting plenty of sleep, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, drinking plenty of fluids and eating nutritious foods.

In terms of vaccines, BCHD recommends:

- **Flu:** Everyone 6 months and older should get this season's flu vaccine, which will protect against severe disease and hospitalization even though you might still get influenza if exposed. It's especially important to get this vaccine if you have an underlying medical condition such as obesity, asthma, heart disease, diabetes, emphysema or a suppressed immune system.
- **COVID-19:** Everyone 5 years and older should get the updated FDA-approved COVID-19 booster, now the monovalent mRNA from Moderna or Pfizer. For infants and children 6 months to 5 years, for whom it is still being given under Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA, the vaccine decreases the risk of hospitalization and ICU stay, even for those who have no medical risk factors. It also reduces the risk of long COVID in children and adults. For older adults, the highest risk group, a COVID-19 vaccine reduces the risk of hospitalization and intensive care stay.
- **RSV:** For adults 60 and older, there are two RSV vaccines available for those with risk factors for severe disease. This same vaccine is FDA approved for pregnant women between 32 and 36 weeks of gestation in order to protect their babies born during RSV season up to six months after delivery. For infants up to 19 months, there are monoclonal antibodies available to prevent severe disease or

death. Talk with your health care provider to discuss whether an RSV vaccine or monoclonal antibodies would be advisable for you or a loved one.

“The CDC states these three vaccines can be safely given on the same visit,” Miller explained. “However, for extra-cautious older individuals, it may be wise to space out the influenza vaccine from the COVID-19 booster and the RSV vaccines by a month due to a slight risk of neurological complications seen during clinical trials.”

If you are unable to attend one of the walk-in flu clinics, BCHD is currently scheduling appointments for [flu shots](#). It is also scheduling appointments for RSV monoclonal antibodies for infants 19 months and younger. You can schedule your COVID-19 vaccine at [multiple locations](#) or through your primary care provider. For more information on seasonal respiratory viruses, visit the [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#).

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