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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To: All Media

From: Joel Strasz, Public Health Officer, Bay County Health Department (BCHD)

Date: December 6, 2023

Re: **BCHD Hosts Flu and COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic, Shares Guidance on Protecting Against Respiratory Viruses this Season**

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN – BCHD will be hosting a Flu and COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Day on Tuesday, December 12 between 8:30 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 to 4:00 PM. To schedule an appointment, please use the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/4yn4wzfb> or call 989-895-4009 and select option 2.

This is the time of year when many people get sick from respiratory viral illnesses, including influenza (flu), COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Fortunately, effective tools are now available to help prevent serious illnesses from all these viruses.

“Now is the perfect time to schedule a vaccination at our office, your primary care provider, or your preferred pharmacy,” says BCHD’s Medical Director, Dr. Thomas Bender. “Even though no vaccine offers 100% protection and vaccinated persons can still get infected, getting vaccinated is proven to be effective at reducing a person’s duration of illness, severity, and infectiousness to others. The negative impact of these viruses on our community – whether measured by healthcare costs, missed school days, or workplace productivity – will decrease as more residents choose to get vaccinated.”

Seasonal Flu Vaccines

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends](#) that everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every season. People with an [egg allergy](#) may now get any flu vaccine.

Each year seasonal flu vaccines are designed to protect against the four main groups of influenza viruses that research indicates are most likely to spread and cause illness among people during the upcoming season. Flu activity typically increases during or after the winter holidays, and so it is important to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 Vaccines

The CDC [recommends](#) everyone aged 6 months and older receive an updated COVID-19 vaccine, with additional doses administered to those who are immunocompromised or never previously vaccinated. If you recently had COVID, you may consider [delaying](#) your vaccination by three months.

Even though the public health emergency ended in May, COVID-19 remains a public health concern. The updated COVID-19 vaccines provide enhanced protection against current viral variants, reducing the risk of experiencing severe illness and long COVID. Rates of hospitalization and death from COVID-19 have been lower in communities with higher COVID-19 vaccination rates.

RSV Vaccines and Monoclonal Antibody Immunization

RSV is a common seasonal respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms for most people but can produce severe illness in infants and older adults.

- RSV vaccines are available to protect adults aged 60 years and older from severe RSV. Please consult with your primary care provider to see if an RSV vaccination is right for you.
- CDC [recommends](#) two ways to protect infants from getting very sick with RSV. One is a maternal RSV vaccine (Abrysvo) given during pregnancy (32-36 weeks) immediately before or during the RSV season (September through January). The other is an RSV monoclonal antibody immunization that provides antibodies to protect infants and young children from severe RSV. If the mother receives the maternal RSV vaccine, this will typically eliminate the need for the infant to receive the RSV monoclonal antibody immunization. Consult with your doctor about RSV protection for your infant.

Prevention

The following steps can help prevent the spread of all these common respiratory illnesses:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs
- Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough
- Stay home if you or your child is feeling ill
- Wearing a KN95 mask or N95 respirator when around others

Where to Get Vaccinated

Flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines are available at BCHD and many area healthcare providers or pharmacies. Visit <http://www.vaccines.gov> to search for convenient options.

Most people with insurance plans will cover flu shots and COVID-19 vaccines without any additional cost, but you might need to receive these vaccines from an approved, in-network healthcare facility or pharmacy. Medicare Part D will cover the cost of the RSV vaccine for eligible adults aged 65 years and older. Adults aged 60-64 and pregnant mothers with private health insurance should check with their insurance provider to confirm RSV vaccine coverage.

CDC's [Bridge Access Program](#) provides free COVID-19 vaccines to individuals lacking health insurance or whose health insurance does not cover the cost of COVID-19 vaccines. Visit <http://www.vaccines.gov/>, enter your zip code, select the desired vaccine, and click search. Search results can be filtered to only show participating pharmacies by checking the box for Bridge Access Program Participant.

BCHD has adequate supply of the flu vaccine, Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, and the Abrysvo RSV vaccine. However, the health department has a very small supply of the RSV monoclonal antibody, some of which is available at no cost to infants who are qualified for the Vaccines for Children ([VFC](#)) Program and some of which is available to infants with private insurance. Since the cost of the COVID-19 vaccine has changed, BCHD is now billing health insurance providers, including Medicaid, Medicare, and most private insurance. BCHD does not deny services to people who are unable to pay.

Transportation Assistance

If you cannot easily leave your home, [Disability Rights Michigan](#) can help. Call 1-800-288-5923 and explain that you would like to receive a vaccine in your home. Both the Flu and COVID-19 vaccine can be delivered and given at the same time. Services are free and confidential.

If you are homebound, the [Michigan Community VNA](#) can help. Call 1-800-852-1232 or email Murphys10@michigan.gov and explain that you would like to receive a vaccine in your home.

The Bay County Health Department protects and promotes a healthy community and safe environment by providing quality services through all stages of life. Local public health information and updates are available at (baycounty-mi.gov/health) and on our social media channels (@BayCountyHD).

If you have questions, please contact the BCHD at 989-895-4009, Monday through Friday, 8AM-5PM.

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