St. Joseph County Department of Health

"To promote health and wellness with compassion and integrity through partnerships, education, protection, and advocacy for all who reside in and visit St. Joseph County"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   **CONTACT: Jenny Parcell**
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Department of Health reminds residents to stay safe ahead of Respiratory Illness season

With summer over and fall upon us, the St. Joseph County Department of Health (SJCDoH) wants to remind residents that good health is always in season. As the weather begins to change and get colder, more time will be spent indoors and in closer proximity to others, increasing the chance of contacting airborne illnesses like influenza, RSV, Covid-19, and other respiratory infections. The county health department provides flu and COVID-19 immunizations to county residents, as well as over 30 other immunizations to help you and your loved ones avoid severe illnesses all year round. You can schedule your immunizations by calling (574)235-9750, and select option 4, or by logging on to: https://www.in.gov/localhealth/stjosephcounty/immunizations/. The DoH also provides at-home Covid testing kits, available on the 8ᵗʰ floor of the County-City Building, 227 W Jefferson Blvd., South Bend, IN 46601, and at our Mishawaka location, 219 Lincolnway W, Mishawaka, IN 46544.

In addition to home Covid tests available at the SJCDoH, the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the U.S. Postal Service has reopened COVIDtests.gov as of September 27,2024, so households across the country may order four free COVID-19 testing kits. These tests are intended for use during the 2024 holiday season to detect current circulating COVID-19 variants. Clear instructions are included on each test kit to verify extended expiration dates found at https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-covid-19-and-medical-devices/home-otc-covid-19-diagnostic-tests.

Other things you can do to protect yourself from respiratory illnesses, include washing your hands with warm water and soap (for 20 seconds) or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. One of the most important and effective ways to stop the spread of germs is to cover your cough and sneeze. An uncovered cough or sneeze can send infected droplets up to six feet away and remain airborne for several hours. Viruses can live on surfaces for up to 48 hours. Proper hygiene etiquette practices can help prevent the spread of illnesses, including influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), whooping cough, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

Putting your hand in front of your mouth to cover your cough is not advised. When you do this, the germs will then spread onto everything you touch, including surfaces like remote controls and doorknobs, but also things like food you serve and hands you shake. The CDC recommends coughing into a tissue and throwing the tissue in the garbage. Then, wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizer just in case any germs were transmitted from the tissue onto your skin. If you don't have a tissue handy, the next best option is coughing into the crook of your elbow. This is simple, but it may take time to make a habit. This practice dramatically drops the odds of spreading germs.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coughing & sneezing: hygiene etiquette & practice. Reviewed July 26, 2016

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