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## **Michigan prepares for Enterovirus threat; children with asthma at greatest risk**

Enterovirus D68, a respiratory illness that primarily affects infants, children and teenagers, has spread quickly across several Midwestern states in the past week. While various forms of enterovirus are extremely common, the current D68 strain is occurring at an unusual time and with unusual severity, according to Joshua Meyerson, M.D., Medical Director for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan.

“McLaren Northern Michigan has reported an upswing in pediatric patients whose symptoms are consistent with the virus,” Dr. Meyerson said. “Pediatricians in our region are also reporting increased numbers of children with respiratory illnesses; though most cases have been mild, some have required hospitalization. This increase is consistent with higher-than-normal rates across Michigan and nationwide.” Dr. Meyerson noted that none of the respiratory illnesses appearing in Northern Michigan have been confirmed as enterovirus, and the time frame for receiving test results is not yet known.

Enterovirus is spread from person to person, often through sneezing, coughing, or touching infected surfaces. Symptoms may range from mild to severe respiratory distress, and commonly include wheezing, shortness of breath, hypoxia and fever. Generally, symptoms can be treated and a full recovery is expected, though underlying respiratory conditions – such as asthma – can make the virus a more dangerous threat. Dr. Meyerson advises anyone with these symptoms, especially younger children and those with pre-existing respiratory ailments, to be treated by a physician.

While there is no vaccine to protect people from enterovirus, Dr. Meyerson recommends taking simple precautions to help prevent the spread of enterovirus and similar illnesses. “Remind kids to wash hands frequently with warm soap and water, especially before eating,” he advised. “Clean surfaces frequently with approved cleaning solutions, and minimize person-to-person contact. If your child exhibits respiratory symptoms, see a physician, and keep him or her out of school, day care, sports and other activities to minimize the spread of illness.” Dr. Meyerson added that children and adults who receive annual flu vaccines are more likely to stay healthy.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is working with area hospitals, as well as the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC), to monitor the spread of Enterovirus D68.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties. Visit [www.nwhealth.org](http://www.nwhealth.org) or call (800) 432-4121 for more information.