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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Blastomycosis Outbreak Investigation Update

Public Health Delta & Menominee Counties continues to work with Billerud Paper Mill, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to investigate an outbreak of blastomycosis, a fungal infection, associated with the Escanaba Billerud Paper Mill.

To date, there have been a total of 109 cases of blastomycosis identified. Thirteen out of the 109 total cases have been hospitalized. All 109 of the cases are either employees, contractors or visitors of the Billerud Paper Mill in Escanaba. There has been one previously reported death associated with this outbreak.

Although the number of cases has increased by 5 over the past week, this does not necessarily indicate that Blastomyces exposures are ongoing. Due to the lengthy incubation time (time from exposure to the fungus to the time one starts to show symptoms) for blastomycosis, it is likely all cases had an exposure prior to the mill idling operations. This incubation period can range from 21 to 90 days.

“While we continue to see new cases testing positive for blastomycosis and being reported to Public Health Delta & Menominee Counties, we continue to see fewer new cases being reported each week and many of these cases have been showing signs and symptoms since March.” says Michael Snyder, Health Officer, PHDM.

Blastomycosis is a disease associated with a fungus that grows in moist soil and decomposing matter such as wood and leaves. People can get blastomycosis infection by breathing in fungal spores from the air. Blastomycosis does not spread from person to person or between animals and people.

Those who do get sick can develop symptoms such as cough (sometimes with blood), fever, chest pain, difficulty breathing, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, muscle aches, and joint pain. Any persons experiencing these symptoms should contact their healthcare provider and discuss whether testing for blastomycosis is recommended. Blastomycosis is treatable with antifungal medicines, but it is important to get diagnosed early. Most people with blastomycosis will need treatment with prescription antifungal medication. Depending on the severity of the infection and the person’s immune status, the course of treatment can range from six months to one year.

For more information, please visit the NIOSH website at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/newsroom/alerts/blastomycosisshhe.html>

Or the Billerud website at: <https://escanabamillinfo.com/>

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