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May 1, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Department Alert For Local Mumps Cases

JOLIET – The Will County Health Department distributed informational letters to 400 area physicians Monday, in the wake of an ongoing mumps outbreak initially identified in Iowa.

Mumps is an acute viral illness which typically produces sore throat, body aches, fever and swollen glands in the jaw. Most people recover from the illness in a week, but serious complications are possible. The most common complications include deafness, meningitis, miscarriage and sterility.

Through April 28, the Illinois Department of Public Health had reported 194 mumps cases statewide, and the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had identified more than 1,800 infections including 1,284 cases reported from 71 of Iowa's 99 counties. The current incidence of disease represents serious concerns for public health officials who typically see fewer than 300 national infections annually.

More than 30 Illinois cases have been reported since April 26. A total of five cases have been identified in Will County, and the Health Department letter asks physicians to be on the alert for patients reporting swollen glands and other related symptoms.

There were 10 confirmed mumps cases in Illinois during 2005, including two in Will County. Between 2001 and December, 2005, the state reported just 67 total mumps cases.

Like influenza, mumps is transmitted from person to person through direct contact with respiratory droplets spread through coughing and sneezing. Direct contact with surfaces contaminated by the virus may also spread the disease.

People who are exposed to mumps may not show symptoms for 12 to 25 days, but are still capable of transmitting the infection to others. Most people begin to have symptoms from 16 to 18 days after exposure.

Mumps typically infected 200,000 Americans annually prior to the introduction of an effective vaccine during the late 1960s. The incidence of disease plummeted by 99 percent once mumps immunizations became routine.

The vaccine is thought to be 95 percent effective against disease transmission. Health professionals are at a loss to explain why the current outbreak has grown so large.

Health departments in Kansas, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Minnesota, Ohio, Missouri and South Dakota are also reporting significant mumps activity. The origins of the outbreak are uncertain, but scientists believe college students from Great Britain could have triggered the current problem. An ongoing British mumps epidemic sickened 57,000 people during 2005. British health authorities believe the epidemic is on the wane, but cases are still being reported.

Frequent hand washing with soap and hot water will help you to avoid potential mumps transmission. The Health Department also urges area residents to avoid sharing food, drinks and cigarettes. Consult a physician if mumps symptoms surface.