

## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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### **Cover Your Coughs and Sneezes**

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) reminds everyone to cover their coughs, particularly during this season when numerous viruses are making people ill. Viruses such as RSV and COVID-19 have been spreading at high levels throughout November and December, and influenza (the flu) is now also circulating. Covering your coughs and sneezes and washing your hands often with proper hand hygiene can help prevent the spread of these serious respiratory illnesses.

“I have been teaching handwashing to preschool and elementary age kids for about 3 years.” says Paula Wimer, Program Manager at SWNPHD. “I enjoy seeing the expression on the kids faces about how gross germs look.”

#### **Germs can be easily transmitted in several ways:**

- Coughing, sneezing, or talking can release tiny droplets into the air that might carry germs, which can be inhaled by people nearby.
- If you touch your face with unwashed hands after touching contaminated surfaces or objects—like doorknobs or light switches—you can introduce germs into your body, as your hands can collect germs from those surfaces.
- Touching common surfaces—like handrails, elevator buttons, or shared devices—can increase the risk of spreading germs, since these areas often collect bacteria and viruses.

#### **How you can prevent the spread of germs:**

1. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.
2. Throw used tissue away in the trash and do not reuse it.
3. If you do not have a tissue near you, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shirt, not your hands.

Remember to immediately wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Washing your hands is one of the most effective ways to protect yourself and your loved ones from getting sick.

#### **Guidelines for Proper Handwashing:**

1. Begin by washing your hands with warm water to help loosen any dirt and germs.
2. Apply soap and vigorously scrub all surfaces of your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds. Timing is the number one factor to ensure effective cleaning.
3. Rinse your hands thoroughly under running water to remove soap and germs.
4. Completely dry your hands using a clean paper towel. After drying, use the paper towel to turn off the faucet and dispose of it in the trash.

5. If you are unable to wash your hands with soap and water, an alternative is to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Ensure that it contains at least 60% alcohol for optimal effectiveness in killing germs.

Following these steps can significantly reduce the presence of germs on your hands and promote better hygiene.

For more information or to schedule a handwashing demonstration, please contact Paula at 308-345-4223. You can also find free handwashing posters on our website at [swhealth.ne.gov](http://swhealth.ne.gov) and handwashing stickers are available at both the McCook and Ogallala offices. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves the following counties: Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow. Our offices are located at 404 West 10th (one block north of Arby's) in McCook and at 418 North Spruce in Ogallala. You can also find information on our social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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