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For Immediate Release

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Respiratory Illnesses – Very High in Southwest Nebraska

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has seen a large increase in reports of Influenza A and COVID-19 cases over the past few weeks. Respiratory illnesses like these affect your lungs and airways and share common symptoms like fever and cough. As cold weather continues and people spend less time outdoors, respiratory illnesses spread more easily.

“Wastewater is tested weekly at certain sites across the state, so we have the ability to monitor what viruses are affecting the residents of our area,” explains Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager for SWNPHD. Wastewater testing from the past two weeks has shown high levels of both Influenza A and COVID.

Wastewater is normally tested for RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), Influenza A and B, and COVID-19. Starting at the end of January, the wastewater will also be tested for the measles virus. “Being able to test for these viruses can help us predict illness in the area as well as giving us another tool to help monitor for possible outbreaks,” states Propp.

Since October 1st the district has seen over 100 hospitalizations from Influenza. The majority are from December to now. SWNPHD has received lab confirmation of 59 COVID cases in that time as well, with 30 cases reported in January so far. Many schools in the health district are reporting high absentee rates due to illness.

Prevention

- Influenza and COVID vaccines are still available in the health district. Vaccination against both flu and COVID can help reduce the severity of symptoms and the amount of time you may be sick. This helps reduce lost time at work and school.
- Frequent handwashing is the number one way to help reduce the spread of illness. Washing your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water will help keep germs from being transferred from your hands to your eyes, nose or mouth. If no soap and water are available, use a 70% or higher alcohol-based hand sanitizer and be sure to rub it into the skin until it is dry.
- Cover your cough. Using the inside of your elbow or a tissue to cover up will help reduce the number of viruses that get into the air. Be sure to wash your hands if you use a tissue.
- Stay home if you are sick. If you are running a fever, you need to stay home for 24 hours after no longer needing fever controlling medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. You can still be contagious for up to 24 hours after your fever goes away.

If you or someone else has been sick and has any of the following issues, seek immediate medical attention. Trouble breathing, chest pain or pressure that is not going away, confusion, trouble waking up or staying awake, bluish lips or face, or an uncontrolled fever after taking fever reducing medication.

For more information contact Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager at 308-345-4223. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health.

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