

## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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### **Widespread Outbreaks of Influenza Across Nebraska**

Laboratory confirmed cases of influenza have seen a rapid increase as reported by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS). Outbreaks are in schools, long-term care facilities, hospitals, clinics, and work places. “Make your health a priority and get your flu shot now,” recommends Southwest Nebraska Public Health Nurse, Melissa Propp, RN.

Residents may see facilities handling this outbreak with various protocols, such as: masking patients and staff, deep cleaning, restricting visitors, reducing activities, separate entrances and waiting areas for well patients vs ill patients.

We want to remind our residents that influenza is highly contagious and is caused by the influenza virus. The virus is spread from person to person primarily through droplets, which are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People are contagious one day before symptoms start and up to 7 days after symptoms begin. SWNPHD highly recommends regular handwashing and covering your cough as prevention methods.

“When people get the flu they may have a sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, dry cough or muscle aches,” states Propp. “If you are experiencing flu symptoms, please stay home for at least 24 hours after you are free of fever, without taking fever reducing medication.” Illness may last several days to a week or more before recovery. Before you go to your family healthcare provider, call to let them know your symptoms to ensure you are not infecting others in the waiting room. The flu may be especially serious for the elderly and people with diabetes, heart, lung or kidney diseases.

“Do not confuse influenza with GI virus, better known as “stomach flu”. Influenza is in your lungs. GI virus attacks your stomach and/or digestive tract,” explains Propp. “The flu shot can protect you from getting influenza or lessening the effects but it does not protect you from “stomach flu”.

#### Tips for Flu Prevention:

1. Stay home when you are sick, especially if you have a fever. You should be fever free for a minimum of 24 hours (without fever reducing medication) before you return to work or school.
2. GET VACCINATED EACH YEAR.
3. Avoid close contact with people who are sick or with others if you are sick.
4. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough into your inner elbow.
5. Wash your hands frequently using soap.
6. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
7. Practice other good health habits such as getting plenty of sleep and exercise, managing your stress, drinking plenty of water and eating nutritious foods.

SWNPHD and the CDC continue to recommend influenza vaccination for everyone six months and older. It takes approximately two weeks to receive immunity from influenza after getting the vaccine.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins and Red Willow counties.

For more information call Melissa Propp, RN at 308-345-4223 or email [nurse@swhealth.ne.gov](mailto:nurse@swhealth.ne.gov) . SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, McCook – one block north of Arby's. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook.com/swnphd and Twitter@swpublichealth.

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