Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department

PREVENT • PROMOTE • PROTECT

District Illness Report

October 12, 2026

Report Summary

This report contains information on the spread of diseases in southwest Nebraska.

Summary for the week of October 4 - October 10:

- School illness surveillance has started for the 2026-2027 school year. From now until May we will monitor illness and absence rates in schools around the health district. If any schools are not already participating and would like to, they can contact us to get started.

Public Health Disease Monitoring

Disease monitoring, or disease surveillance, is a public health strategy which focuses on gathering information about the status of health/illness in the community. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) uses this information to determine actions to help hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and other community members to prevent, prepare, or respond to disease outbreaks.

The ultimate goal of disease monitoring is to keep individuals and families healthy. When disease spreads quickly, it can cause stress on our healthcare system and increases risk for those such as the elderly and children who can suffer severe complications from these illnesses.

The mission of Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is to empower individuals, foster collaborative partnerships, and advance the well-being of our communities through public health best practices. We serve a nine-county district including: Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties.

There are several different methods that public health may use to monitor the spread of disease. This report presents data from emergency room visits and reported student absences.

Additional data on respiratory illnesses is available in the Respiratory Illness Dashboard on Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services website.

DATA SUMMARY: Emergency Room Visits

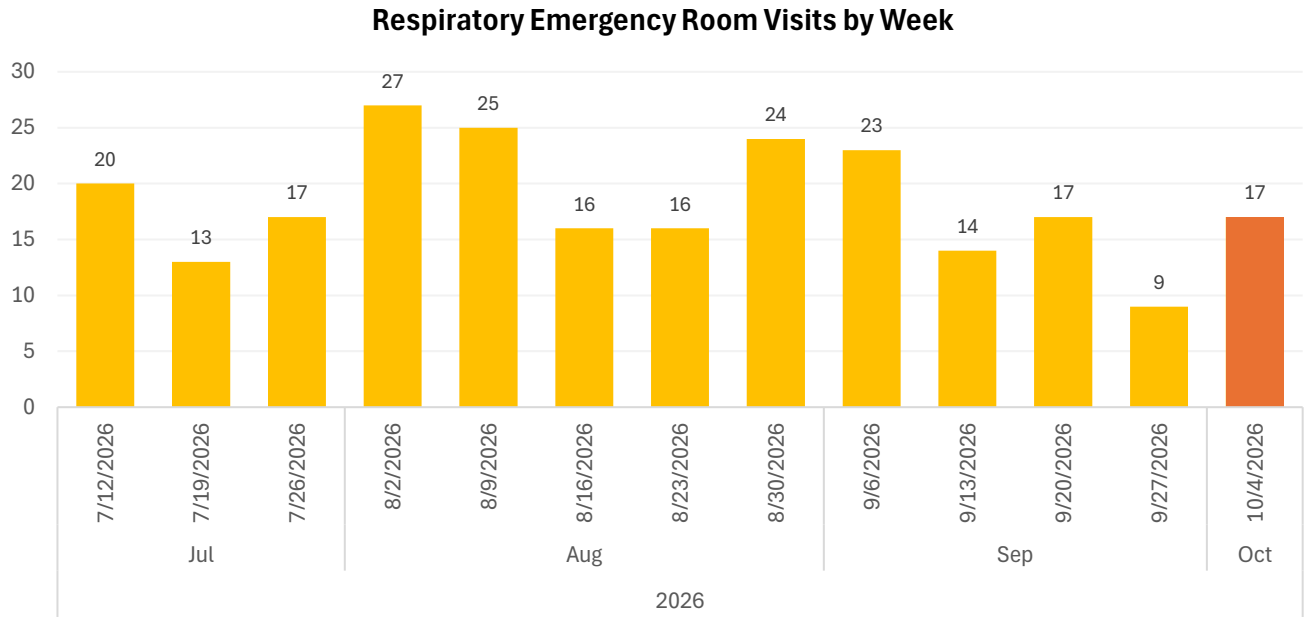
Emergency room data is a type of syndromic ('symptom-based') surveillance, meaning it is based on the symptoms of illness that are presented by those who visit an emergency room. Since symptoms are early signs of disease, it allows us to quickly identify unusual health patterns and respond quickly.

Emergency room visits typically represent the most severe cases in the district, so when the total number of ER visits increases, it suggests that disease is spreading widely throughout the community.

The following data represent emergency room visits within the SWNPHD district. All data are sourced from the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-Based Epidemics (ESSENCE), run by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and accessed through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NE DHSS).

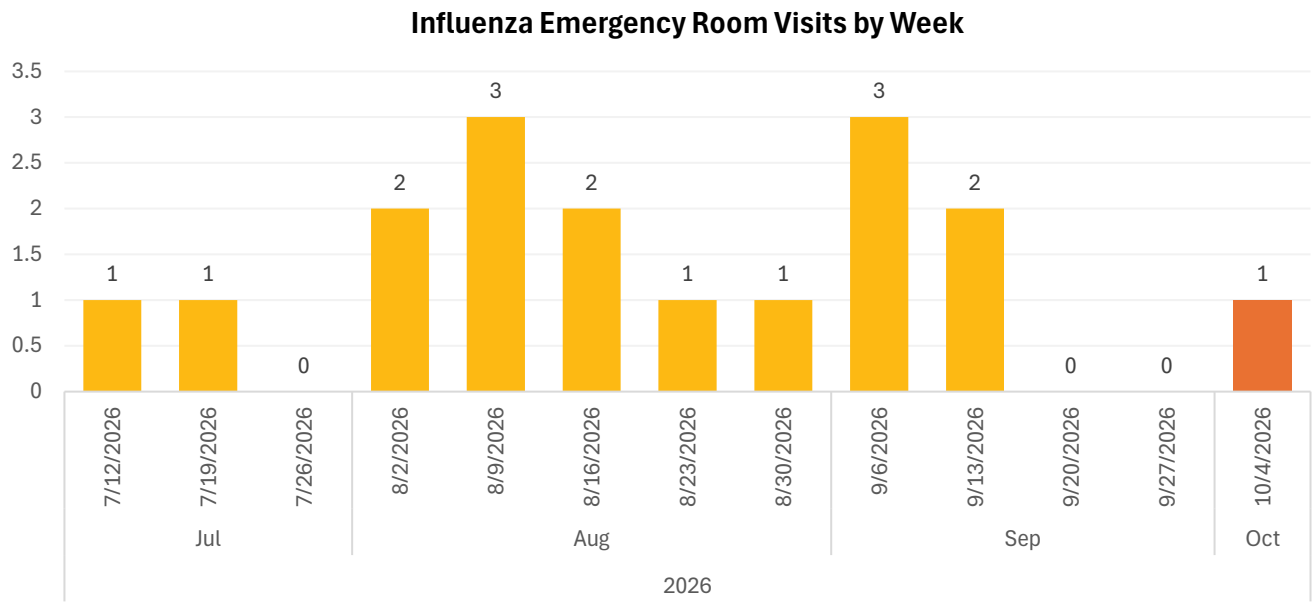
Respiratory Emergency Room Visits (2026-2027)

Respiratory visits include anyone diagnosed with a respiratory disease or who had respiratory symptoms including: cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, shortness of breath, or congestion.



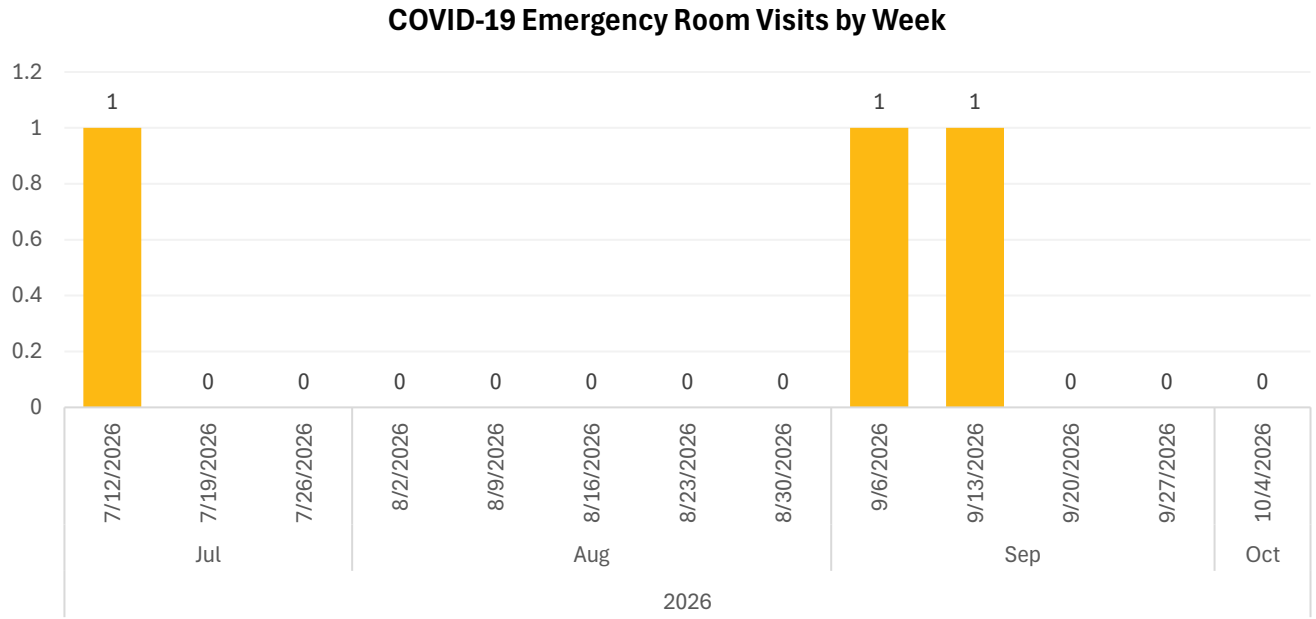
Influenza Like Illness (ILI) Emergency Room Visits (2026-2027)

Influenza Like Illness (ILI) visits include anyone diagnosed with influenza or who had symptoms of a fever combined with either a cough or sore throat.



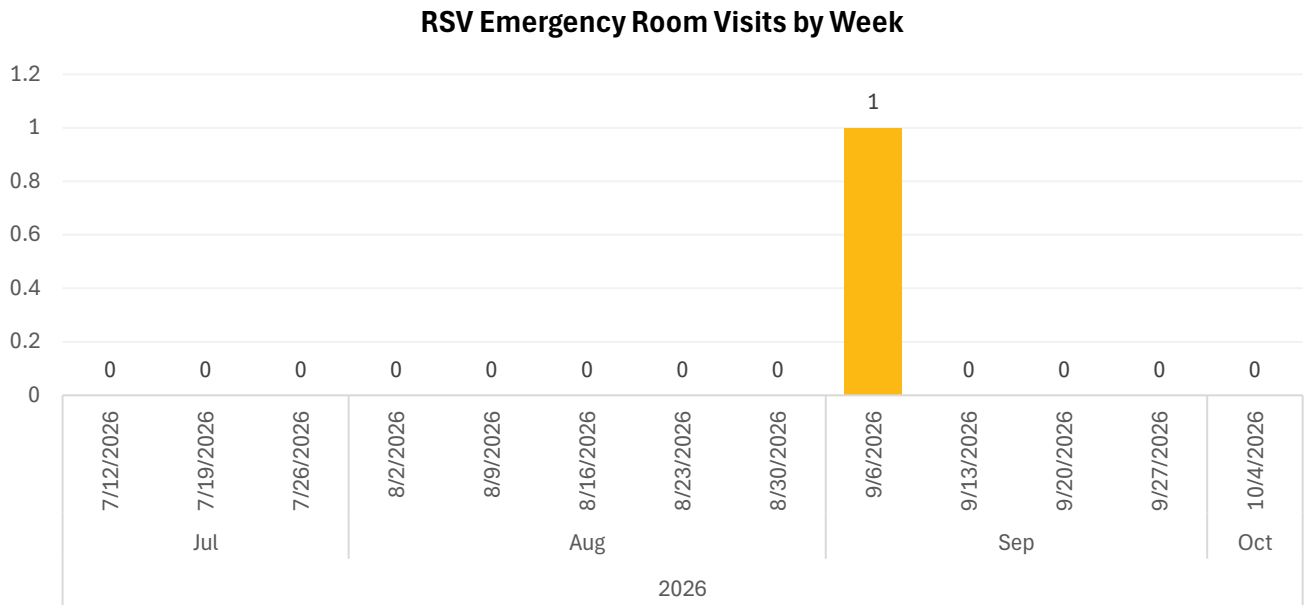
COVID-19 Emergency Room Visits (2026-2027)

COVID-19 visits include anyone who was diagnosed with COVID-19 or pneumonia due to coronavirus.



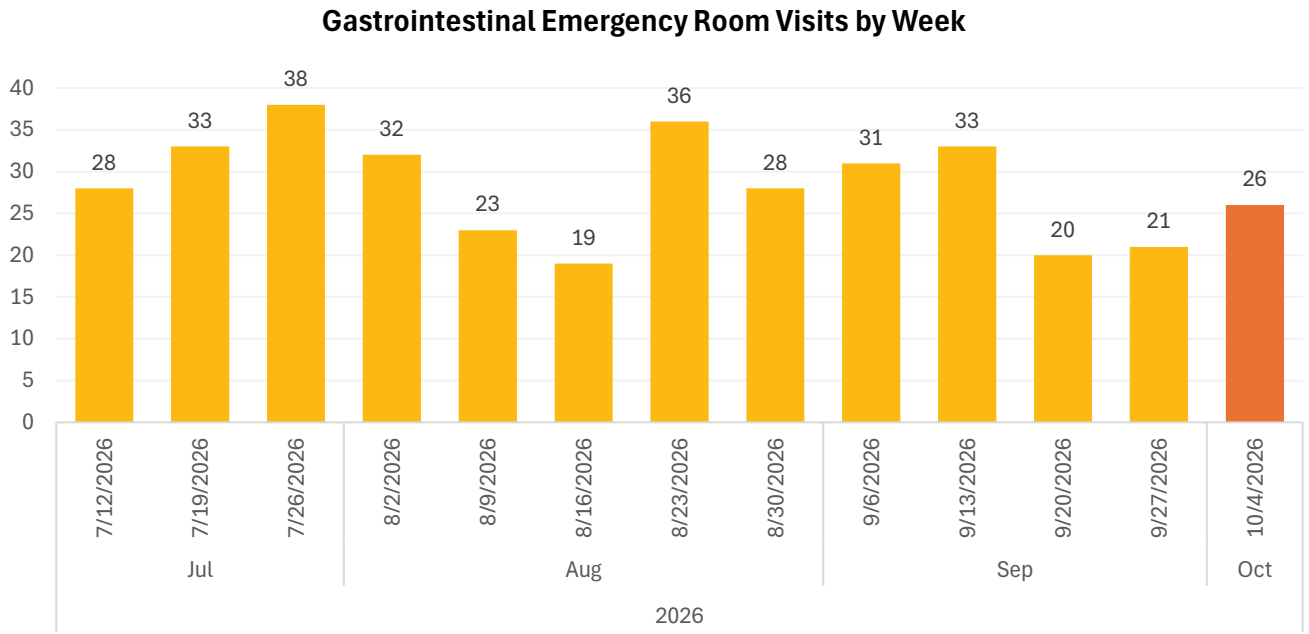
RSV Emergency Room Visits (2026-2027)

RSV visits include anyone who was diagnosed with RSV or additional conditions caused by RSV.



Gastrointestinal (Stomach) Emergency Room Visits (2026-2027)

Gastrointestinal (GI) visits include anyone with GI symptoms including: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, loss of appetite, or bloating.



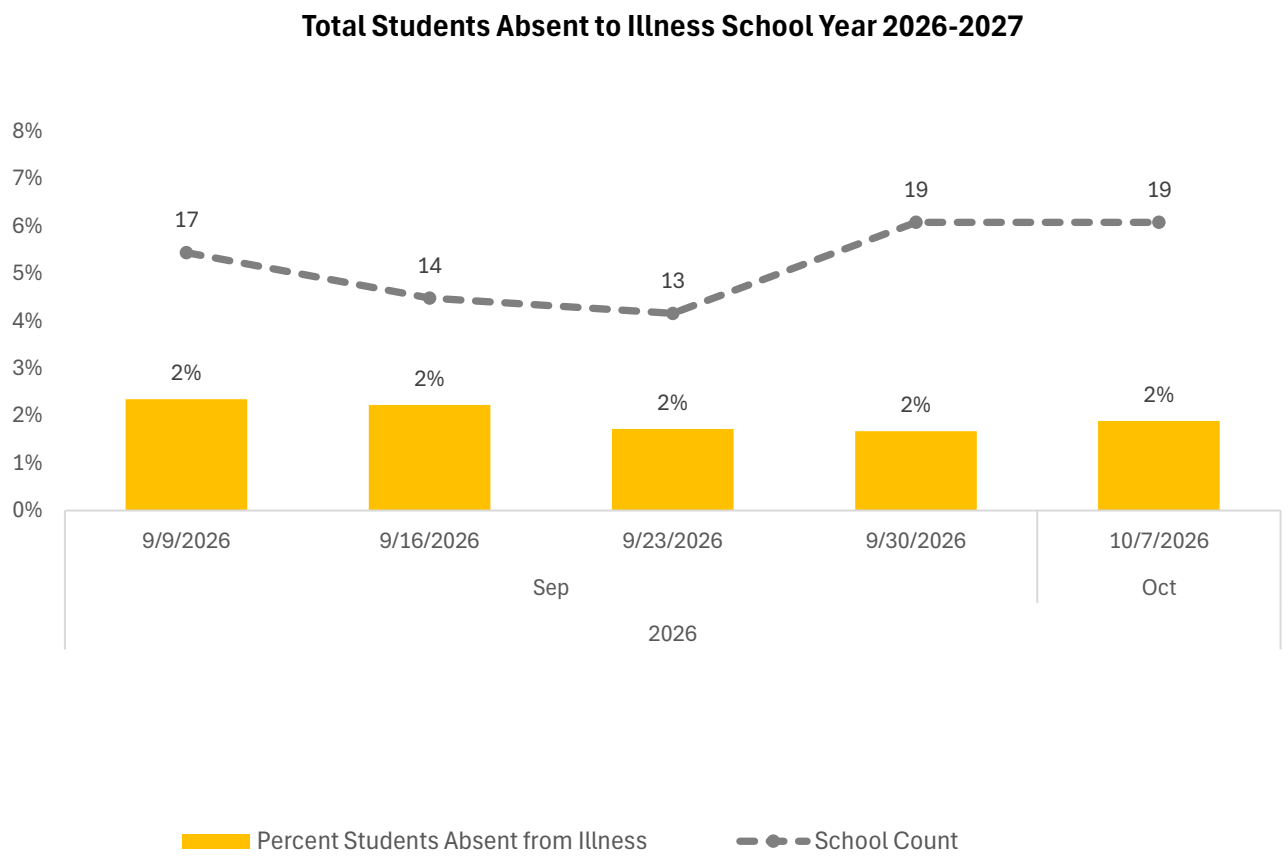
School Absenteeism Surveillance

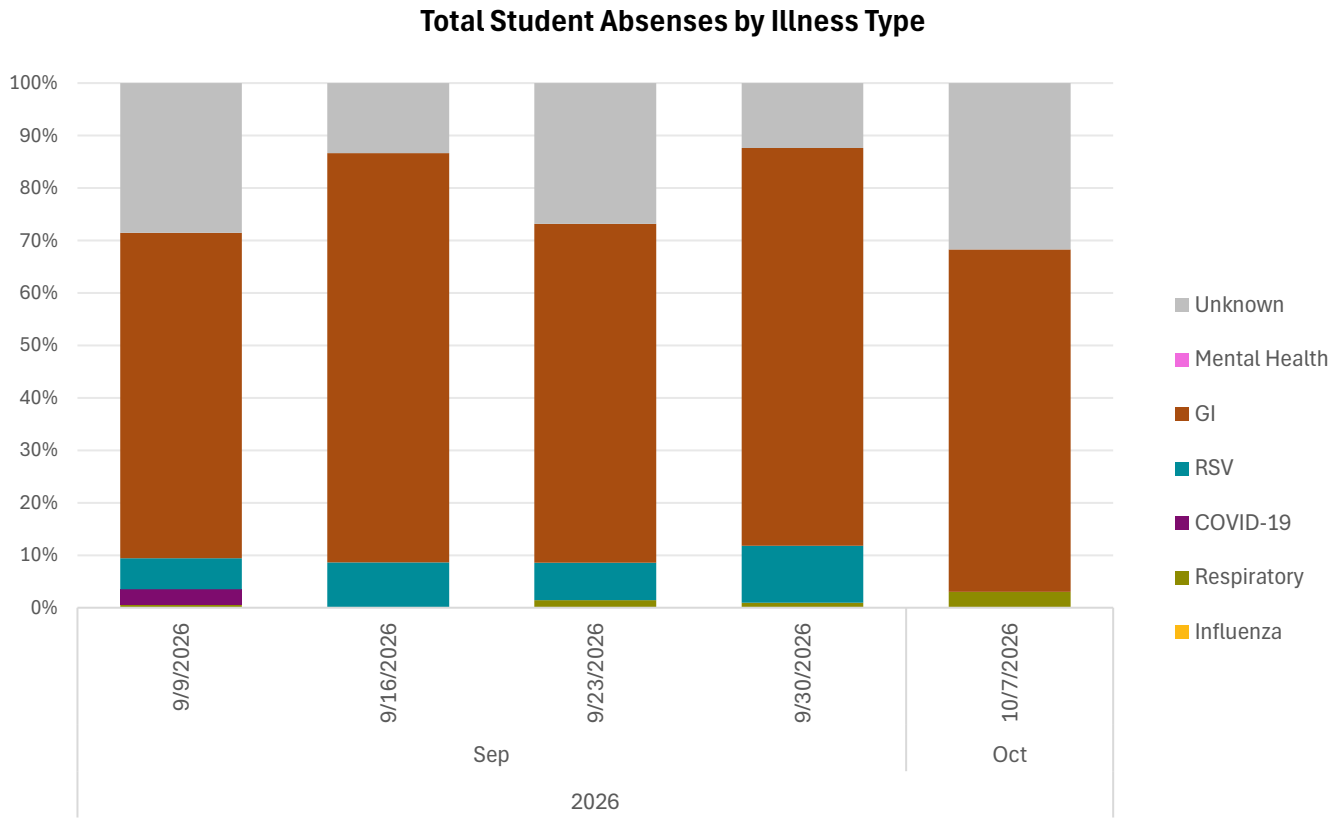
School Absenteeism is a type of surveillance that monitors how many students and staff are absent from school due to illness. Influenza and other respiratory diseases often affect school-age children first. These children represent much of the early spread of disease within the community. Absence rates above 10% indicate high transmission of illness and show that illness is spreading in both the schools and community.

The data presented here is the average for the SWNPHD district amongst schools who report absences. The number of schools reporting may vary from week to week.

The following data represent the average rates of student absences from schools within the SWNPHD district. All data are reported voluntarily by schools through the School Absenteeism Surveillance project run by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NE DHHS). When reporting, schools may choose from a given list of illness categories that describe the reason for absence.

School Student Absenses due to Illness (2026-2027)





SWNPHD reports are based on currently available data and are subject to ongoing revision and updates.