

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 Vaccine Information for Southwest Nebraska

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is working with state public health officials on plans for the recently approved COVID-19 vaccines. These vaccines will provide an important layer of protection against the spread of COVID-19 and will be a valuable tool for the communities in southwest Nebraska.

The vaccines currently approved for use were developed to provide immunity against the virus that causes COVID-19. They do not contain a live virus. Instead, the vaccine introduces a protein associated with the virus to your body's immune system. Your body then creates antibodies to combat the virus. These vaccines were carefully researched and tested, and they have been made available sooner than normal due to the removal of barriers including red tape and/or delayed government timelines. Researchers have been transparent in sharing data, holding live hearings, and pausing trials when it became important to slow down. Both vaccines were shown to be at least 94% effective in preventing COVID-19 infections, which has led to strong confidence in these COVID-19 vaccines.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will be distributing the vaccines in phases, following federal guidelines for each phase. The first phase will prioritize those in the highest risk categories, including frontline healthcare workers and long-term care facilities. Frontline workers are most likely to come into contact with positive cases, and long-term care residents are most at risk for severe illness from COVID-19. **A timeline for the public to receive the vaccine has not been determined at this time.** Further information will become available with each phase when enough vaccine is available. **For now, efforts are focused on vaccinating medical providers across the state so that they can continue to care for those in need.**

The COVID-19 Community Risk Dial for the week of December 21st remains at orange, meaning residents of southwest Nebraska have a high risk of contracting COVID-19. Testing is available but may require travel. Healthcare systems in the health district and across the state are burdened but adequate for the number of people hospitalized for COVID-19. Orange level recommendations include wearing a mask in public, washing hands and surfaces often, limiting travel, and working from home when possible. High-risk and vulnerable individuals should avoid public places.

SWNPHD had 177 new cases of COVID-19 reported December 15th to December 21st. A breakout by county includes: Chase – 11; Dundy – 7; Frontier – 3; Furnas – 17; Hayes – 0; Hitchcock – 26; Keith – 34; Perkins – 16; Red Willow – 63. This brings the totals for the health district to 2715 cases with 2492 cases recovered. While the number of cases has decreased, hospitals are still seeing more high numbers of severely ill COVID-19 patients.

COVID-19 information can be found at dhhs.ne.gov and at swhealth.ne.gov. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th St (1 block north of Arby's) in McCook.

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