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For immediate release

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COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Questions & Answers for Southwest Nebraska

The COVID-19 virus, formally known as 2019 novel coronavirus, was first identified in China in December of 2019. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) as of February 20, 2020 there have been 75,748 confirmed cases globally. The United States has 26 confirmed cases. Two of the 26 US cases are from close contact with someone who has the COVID-19 virus and 11 of them are from the passengers who were brought from the Diamond Princess cruise ship. Of the 13 passengers brought to Omaha from the cruise ship, 10 of them are in the National Quarantine Unit and 3 are in the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit.

“We have received questions regarding the COVID-19 virus,” states Kathie Skeen, Emergency Planning Coordinator for Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD).

“Understanding that our residents are concerned, we would like to share the responses to some of the most common concerns.”

Frequent COVID-19 questions include:

How does the virus spread?

- Coronaviruses generally spread much like the flu does. It is spread by respiratory droplets generated when a sick person coughs or sneezes, which is why it is so important to cover your nose and mouth with either a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.

How do I protect myself?

- Protecting yourself from this virus is the same as protection from the common cold or the flu, which includes:
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that has 60% or more alcohol in it
 - Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough
 - Stay home if you're sick
 - Don't be in close contact with someone who is sick. Close contact is defined as within 6 feet of someone for 10 minutes or more.

- If you have been to China or in close contact with someone who has been in China and you develop symptoms of a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, contact your local health department or healthcare provider and inform them of your symptoms and recent travel history.

Can I get the virus from clothing or other items imported from China?

- No. Because coronaviruses don't easily survive on surfaces the risk is almost nonexistent. Those items are being shipped over a period of days or weeks at various temperatures, which is longer than the virus can survive on a surface.

What is the treatment for this virus?

- A vaccine isn't available yet. Most people have recovered by drinking lots of fluids, resting and taking pain and fever medication. If symptoms worsen, medical care might be needed.

Even though current risk is extremely low, Skeen encourages residents to stay informed. She recommends the websites for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov and University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) www.unmc.edu for the most up-to-date information.

For more information, contact SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. 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 or at 501 Broadway in Imperial (5th St. entrance). Information can also be found on the website www.swhealth.ne.gov and on Facebook and Twitter.

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