Southwest Nebraska
Public Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Stay Safe with COVID-19 Cases High During Holidays

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has been seeing increased positive case numbers and deaths due to COVID-19 for the past two months, similar to the fall and winter of 2020. There were 734 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported in SWNPHD in the month of November 2021. This was the highest monthly cases for all of 2021, and the 3rd highest month since the beginning of the pandemic. The 1st and 2nd highest monthly cases overall were November and December of 2020, respectively.

Health Director Myra Stoney expressed concern over the situation, stating, "Many hospitals across the state are reporting few or zero beds available. This is a time to do whatever possible to avoid needing to be hospitalized, for any reason. We encourage everyone to make informed decisions for your own health and the health of those around you. During the holidays this means celebrating safely with loved ones and having many more years to celebrate in the future."

Leading up to your holidays, preparing and weighing the risk of places you plan to attend will help ensure everyone stays safe and healthy. Here are some things to consider as you plan:

Avoid Large Public Gatherings
Consider the risk of any activity you plan to attend. Large indoor gatherings, busy shopping malls, crowded airports or poorly ventilated spaces that last longer than 15 minutes pose more risk of spreading COVID-19. Staying outdoors, interacting with less people and social distancing will reduce the risk that you are unknowingly bringing sickness with you to your holiday celebration.

Wear a Mask When You are in Public
Masks trap respiratory droplets that are released when the wearer talks, coughs or sneezes. They also act as a barrier to protect the wearer from inhaling droplets released by others. Even if you are vaccinated, wearing a mask indoors in public and outdoors in crowded areas or when you are in close contact with unvaccinated people will help prevent you from becoming infected.

Get Tested Immediately Before and After Traveling
Get tested with a viral test 1-3 days before your trip to ensure you don't have COVID-19, even if you don't have any symptoms. Once you return home or if you are experiencing any flu-like symptoms after traveling, no matter where you have gone, self-isolate until symptoms go away and get tested for COVID-19 right away.

If You are Sick or Have Symptoms - Cancel
Be honest and don't force yourself to push through if you don't feel well. A fever, cough or other symptoms, might mean you have COVID-19 or you might have flu or some other illness. While most

people have mild illness and it may not seem too bad, there is a chance that it might be much more serious for certain family members. Canceling is better than infecting those you love with COVID-19 or influenza.

Get Vaccinated
Many generations tend to gather to celebrate holidays and the best way to protect those not yet eligible for vaccination, such as young children, and those who are at risk of getting severely sick, is to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza. Currently vaccination is the best protection from being hospitalized with COVID-19.

Consider Your Travel Plans
If you or family members are not vaccinated, reconsider travel at all. Most forms of travel can make it easier for infection to spread. Busy airports with layovers, bus stations, buses, train stations, trains, public transport, gas stations, and restaurants where you take your mask off to eat, are all places where physical distancing may be challenging, and ventilation may be poor. If the destination includes gathering with family or friends at someone's house, infection can spread there as well.

SWNPHD had 101 new cases of COVID-19 reported from December 7 to December 13, 2021, with an average of 157 cases per week in the last 30 days. A breakdown by age includes: 0 to 19 – 9; 20 to 29 – 13; 30 to 39 – 9; 40 to 49 – 10; 50 to 59 – 18; 60 to 69 – 17; 70 to 79 – 15; 80 and over – 10. The total number of COVID cases is 6,104. Four additional deaths due to COVID-19 were also reported, 3 confirmed and 1 probable, bringing the total number of deaths to 82.

SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th St (1 block north of Arby's) in McCook and can be reached by calling 308-345-4223. The website www.swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties.

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