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For Immediate Release

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High Levels of Respiratory Illness Circulating

High levels of respiratory illness have been noted to be circulating in the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD). These illnesses include colds, influenza, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), and COVID-19. These can all have similar symptoms so it can be very challenging to know what you or your loved ones may be suffering from. For those at risk of getting very sick, it's important to get tested so the right treatment can be prescribed.

COLDS: Mild illness with symptoms usually starting 1 to 3 days after exposure. Symptoms include cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, watery eyes, and sneezing. Colds may last up to 10 days. Adults can usually expect 2-3 colds per season while younger children may have more. There is no vaccine or treatment that can combat a cold.

INFLUENZA: Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually starting 2 to 4 days after exposure. Symptoms come on suddenly and include fever (not everyone will experience a fever), chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue (tiredness). Some people have vomiting; this is more common in children. Symptoms may last 5 to 7 days with a shorter time for people who got a flu shot. Influenza is treatable with antiviral medication if identified within 48 hours after symptoms start. Flu shots are available every year and help decrease the severity of symptoms as well as how long it lasts.

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus): Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually starting 5 days after exposure. Symptoms of RSV in children are fever, runny nose, loss of appetite, coughing, sneezing, and wheezing. Symptoms in adults are low grade fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing and headache. Symptoms may last 2-8 days. Severe illness is more common in young children; however, a high number of adults are also experiencing severe illness from RSV this year. Those most at risk include those over 65 years of age, people with heart or lung disease, and adults with weakened immune systems. There is no vaccine or treatment for RSV.

COVID 19: Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually starting 2 to 14 days after exposure. Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. COVID-19 vaccines are available for first time doses as well as updated booster doses. Getting COVID-19 vaccine helps decrease the severity of the symptoms as well as how long symptoms will last. If you get COVID-19 and are at risk of getting very sick, treatments are available that can reduce your chances of hospitalization and death.

As with any illness, seek immediate medical attention if you or someone else is having trouble breathing, chest pain or pressure that is not going away, confusion, trouble waking up or staying awake, bluish lips or face, or an uncontrolled fever after taking fever reducing medication.

“We want to remind everyone to stay home when you are sick with a fever,” states Melissa Propp RN, Clinic Manager at SWNPHD. “This may mean having to miss the annual family or work gathering, but the people you could have made sick will be happy you chose not to share your germs. While you can't avoid every germ this season, do your part in stopping the spread by covering your coughs and sneezes for a happier and healthier holiday.”

To help stop the spread of germs this winter:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put your used tissue in the trash.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands for 20 seconds.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth as these are places where viruses and bacteria can enter your body.
- Try to avoid others that are sick.

For more information contact Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager at 308-345-4223. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook and Instagram or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Call 308-345-4223; one number three locations, McCook, Imperial, and Ogallala.

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