

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Omicron Variant Identified in Southwest Nebraska

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has received confirmation that the Omicron variant is spreading in southwest Nebraska. Three cases from the end of December were confirmed as Omicron after genetic sequencing at the Nebraska Public Health Lab (NPHL).

“Omicron spreads very quickly. The incubation period appears to be 3 to 4 days instead of the 5 to 14 days we saw with the original COVID-19,” states Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager for SWNPHD. “Symptoms with omicron are usually more mild than other strains, although some people are still getting very sick and needing medical care. It is very important right now to stay home if you are sick.”

Influenza, or flu, is also circulating at high rates along with COVID-19. Hospitals in the nine-county health district are seeing very high caseloads, with very few beds available. “This is different from earlier waves of the pandemic when the main problem was finding transfer beds at hospitals in larger metro areas. Now it is the beds at our small hospitals that are filling up too,” continues Propp.

“It is understandable that people in our communities want to go out and live life as normal. Unfortunately, the conditions in our area right now are far from normal. Our healthcare workers need our support, and this huge weight on our hospitals affects all of us. We all need to decide for ourselves what we are willing to do to protect southwest Nebraska’s healthcare systems.”

SWNPHD strongly recommends residents take precautions against the spread of viruses by avoiding crowds, wearing a mask indoors when in public, frequent handwashing, disinfecting surfaces often, staying home when sick, and vaccination for eligible ages.

Regarding the COVID-19 vaccines, Propp states, “Data shows that we do know the vaccines are effective against the omicron variant. The point of the COVID vaccines is to keep people out of the hospital. When people in Nebraska are vaccinated, they are ten times less likely to need hospital care if they do get a COVID-19 infection.” Vaccinations are still available throughout the health district. A list of vaccination locations is available at swhealth.ne.gov.

SWNPHD had 151 new cases of COVID-19 reported from January 4 to January 10, 2022. The average number of cases per week in the last 30 days was 94. The total number of COVID-19 cases is 6,479. Five additional deaths from COVID-19 were also reported, including one probable and 4 confirmed, bringing the total deaths to 87.

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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