

July 2023-June 2024



**Southwest Nebraska  
Public Health Department**

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**



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# COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In 2024 SWNPHD has continued efforts to become accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). Gaining national accreditation status is a collective effort of the entire department to demonstrate our commitment to meeting a high level of public health standards and our dedication to performance improvement. We hope that our journey to accreditation will continue to strengthen our collaboration with local partners and enhance the quality of services we offer to the community.

In alignment with accreditation requirements, SWNPHD has made available our most recent Community Health Assessment (CHA) report which summarizes the health status for Southwest Nebraska and reviews strengths and challenges to healthy living that are experienced within our local community. To access the CHA or for more information visit: <https://www.swhealth.ne.gov/aboutus/chip>

The CHA report helps to guide the work of SWNPHD and was used to determine the current Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) priorities. CHIP priorities represent specific public health topics common within the community and serve as focused areas of improvement for the health department's work. The three current CHIP priorities are:

- -Physical activity
- -Heart Disease
- -Cancer

Throughout 2024, SWNPHD has explored ways to promote physical activity and increase prevention of heart disease and cancer. As a part of these efforts, the health department acknowledges the Healthy People 2030 framework, which is a set of 10-year goals intended to improve the health of Americans by 2030. There are many Healthy People 2030 goals that relate to our CHIP priorities, including increasing physical activity rates in children and adults, improving cardiovascular health, and reducing the number of deaths from cancer. For more information about the Healthy People 2030 framework visit: <https://health.gov/healthypeople>.

The health department looks forward to continuing to enhance our programs to support our CHIP priorities and public health best practices.

### Mission Statement

The mission of Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department is to empower individuals, foster collaborative partnerships, and advance the well-being of our communities through public health best practices.

### Our Vision

A future where all people thrive and grow within safe and vibrant communities.

### Our Values

Flexible  
Equity  
Integrity  
Empowering

# Air Quality

In an effort to reduce the number of days people are exposed to unhealthy air (Healthy People 2030 EH-01), SWNPHD partnered with Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the National Weather Service to install 4 Purple Air monitors throughout the district. The monitors were placed in McCook, Imperial, Benkelman, and Ogallala. Education was provided to the public about the importance of monitoring air quality through news releases, social media and our website. We also issued health advisories for high-risk individuals when the local air quality was code orange.

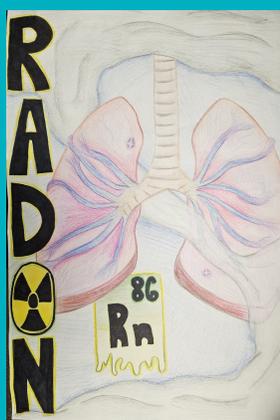
It is our plan to expand air quality monitoring in our district by placing at least 1 air monitor in each of the 9 counties we serve. You can view the current air quality by visiting our website or [www.purpleair.com/map](http://www.purpleair.com/map).



## RADON

HP2030: People's homes can have a major impact on their health and well-being. Healthy People 2030 focuses on reducing health and safety risks in homes. Some homes have problems like lead paint or secondhand smoke, which can cause serious health issues.

Radon gas is the second leading cause of lung cancer, and about half of all homes in Nebraska have radon above the EPA standard of 4.0 PCL. SWNPHD's radon program builds awareness of the hazards of radon and provides education on how to lower radon levels in buildings and homes. We share information through many different formats to reach a wide audience, and work with partners like realtors, building inspectors, and extension offices.



Pictured are the 2023 poster contest winners from Chase County Schools

Pictured are two of our 2023 poster contest entries

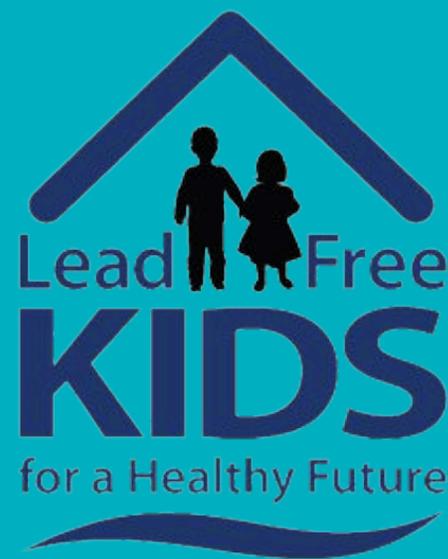


## Radon Poster Contest

Three local schools participated in the Radon Poster Contest, with 173 entries received in November 2023. Their posters shared the hazards of radon and encouraged testing in creative and often humorous ways, and many students reported getting their homes tested for radon after participating in the contest. Winners were selected in 3 age groups and received certificates and cash prizes.

# Childhood Lead Exposure

Lead poisoning in children can be prevented. Lead poisoning is any test result of 3.5 µg/dL or higher. There is no safe lead level for children. Our goal at SWNPHD is to help educate providers and the public on lead exposure and lead testing (Healthy People EH-04). Knowing if your house was built before 1978 and how to look for lead based paint in and around the home could help lower your child's risk of lead exposure. According to recent data from the 2023 DHHS Lead testing plan, 25-44 % (depending on county or residence) of all homes in Southwest Nebraska were built before 1978. Other ways that children can be exposed to lead are from imported foods/spices or medicines, old toys, cookware made of brass, pewter or ceramics, parents with hobbies or jobs such as ammunition reloading, construction, welding and plumbing or water from plumbing that contains old lead pipes can also result in an exposure. All children aged 1 – 6 years should have their lead level checked at least once to help find out if they have been exposed to lead. Ask your health care provider about checking your child for lead. According to the 2023 census data, Southwest Nebraska Public Health has 2,485 children aged 6 and under. Of this total only 134 children from the entire health district were tested which is 5.39% of all children eligible for testing.



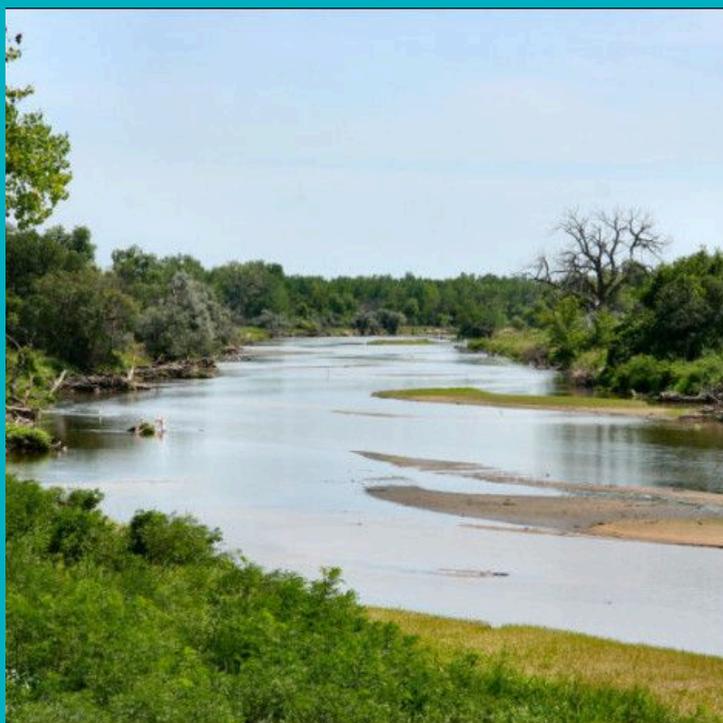
Year	Population <6 years	Number of children tested	Percent of children tested
2019	2703	93	3.44
2020	2704	85	3.14
2021	2663	117	4.39
2022	2607	130	4.99
2023	2485	134	5.39

## Vectors

### *Insect-borne diseases*

SWNPHD participates in Nebraska's West Nile Virus Program. Nebraska West Nile Virus Program traps and test mosquitos from Memorial Day until the end of September or the first hard freeze. Mosquitoes are trapped every other week and sent to the state laboratory for testing. SWNPHD has had no positive mosquito pools in the 2023-2024 season.

Tick surveys were also done this year to test for tick-borne diseases in the area. Three locations in the district were chosen to do tick flagging. Sites were Medicine Creek in Furnas County, Enders Reservoir in Chase County and Rock Creek in Dundy County. Site were flagged once in May and then again in June.



# Public Health Emergency Preparedness

The Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) program at SWNPHD monitors several sources of emergency health information, such as the statewide infectious disease briefings, Healthcare Interstate Situational Awareness calls, and the Nebraska Plains Healthcare Coalition. We attend community meetings and briefings for training, risk communication, and crisis response drills.

We participated in the development of the next 5 budget periods for the PHEP workplan to ensure that all aspects of the Notice of Funding Opportunity were addressed. This was done to include health equities in all aspects of the plans to be implemented, including advocating for services in rural areas of the state.



Healthy People 2030's goal "Increase the proportion of adults who have an emergency plan for disasters (PREP-Do4)" is addressed on a continuing basis with educational materials distributed through our website, news releases, and social media.



## Ongoing Effects of Covid-19

COVID continues to be a concern in the US and throughout the world. With the ever-changing virus strains, it feels like a new wave of COVID moves through the district about every three to four months. Although at this time there seems to be no definitive pattern on when a new wave will come though. As we learn more about the after effects of COVID, more and more people are experiencing long COVID symptoms. Long COVID is when people continue to have symptoms 4-6 months or longer after having been sick. Some of the symptoms that people continue to report are shortness of breath with everyday activities, feelings of being chronically tired, and others. These symptoms can affect individuals who experienced asymptomatic, mild or severe infections.

A study in the journal "Nature Medicine" estimates that about 400 million people worldwide have been afflicted with long COVID. That figure amounts to roughly 6% of adults, and 1% of children globally. Recent research has also shown that COVID-19 vaccination is linked to a significant reduction in the risk of long COVID. While there is no cure for long COVID yet, treatments can help manage symptoms, improve quality of life, and support recovery. Research is ongoing to find more ways to help people recover fully.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear how important it is to take care of our health care workers, including those working in Long Term Care Facilities. SWNPHD sent trained staff to 3 LTCF's in the district that wished to participate in N-95 fit testing and training. Several staff members were fit tested in addition to being trained in how to fit test the rest of their staff. The goal of the program is to ensure that 90% of LTCF workers are correctly fit tested for their N-95 masks to help prevent the spread of infection through the facilities.

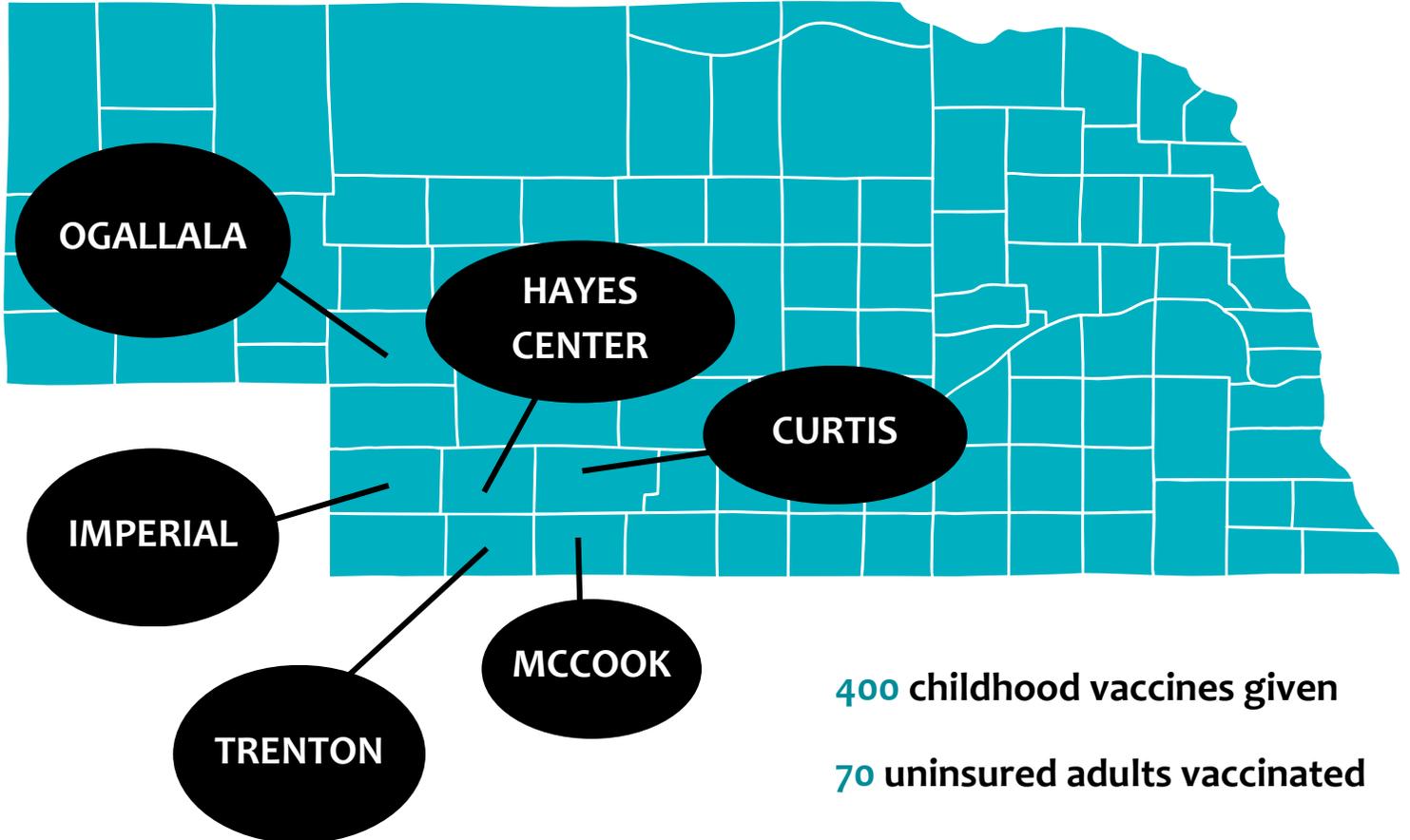
# VACCINES FOR CHILDREN AND CLINICS



Each year people get exposed to and get sick with diseases that a vaccine can help protect against. Healthy People 2030 addresses vaccine coverage rates with several goals, including maintaining vaccine coverage for both MMR and DTAP in children.

Routine childhood vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective. One of the ways that SWNPHD works to reduce the number of vaccine preventable diseases in the health district is to hold outlying (clinics not held at the office) VFC clinics where children can get shots before starting the new school year or get caught up on missed doses. We also hold flu clinics at local business during work hours so employees do not need to leave the job site to get their shots. This past year we held 22 VFC clinics in Hayes, Hitchcock, and Frontier counties. Ten business or senior centers throughout the district also hosted flu shot clinics for their employees or residents. Vaccine clinics are held at both the McCook and Ogallala offices as well as in Trenton, Hayes Center, Curtis.

## Rural Shot Clinic Locations



400 childhood vaccines given  
70 uninsured adults vaccinated  
1,026 immunizations given

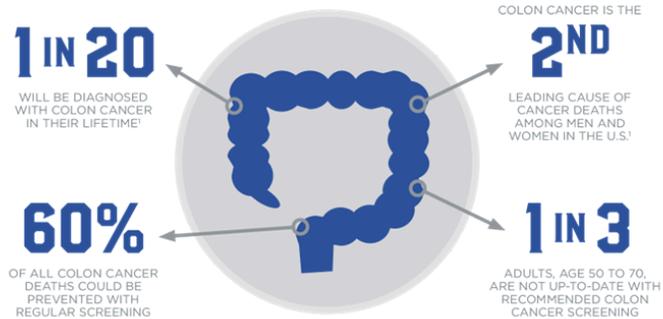
# COLON CANCER SCREENING

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States. Colon cancer rates are significantly higher in Nebraska than the national average, with a 42.9% case rate versus the United States' 38% rate. Nebraska ranks 41st for screening rates, but we can do better.

Healthy People 2030 have two main goals: Reduce the colorectal cancer death rate and Increase the Proportion of adults who get screened for colorectal cancer.

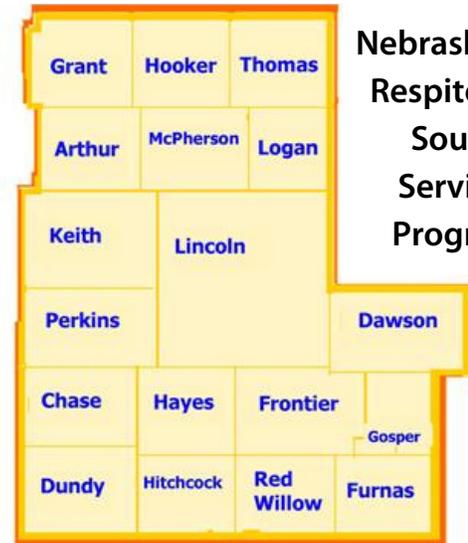
SWNPHD distributed 29 free colon cancer (FIT) screening kits to residents 45-74 in our district. To ensure everyone had easy access to the kits, we created a QR code people could scan to request a kit be mailed to their home. We also had them available at both of our office locations in McCook and Ogallala.

## What you need to know about COLON CANCER



# Mpox (Monkeypox)

Mpox is an infectious disease that can cause a painful rash, fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain and low energy. While most people fully recover, it can be fatal. With the number of cases growing worldwide, SWNPHD took steps to help educate the public about this virus with an aggressive social media campaign targeted towards the most high-risk groups. 8 Mpox vaccines were given to people in the health district as well.



Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network Southwest Service Area Program Map

# Respite

Taking care of yourself is one of the best ways to help your loved ones. Respite care provides short-term, temporary relief to those who are caring for family members with special needs or chronic illnesses. We try to provide a positive experience for the person receiving care.

SWNPHD hosts the Southwest Service Area of Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network. We currently have 11 families enrolled for services and 16 registered providers to step in and provide the much-needed respite care.

Throughout the year, we organize at least 2 events that respite families can bring their family member needing care to and use that time to take care of themselves. One of these events was held in Ogallala. All those that attended were guided through painting a predetermined picture on canvas while enjoying good company and snacks. (Pictured to the right is a family enjoying the Ogallala painting event together.)





# Dental

Polish your Pearls is a grant-based dental program implemented by SWNPHD that helps supplement regular dental visits to provide optimal protection against cavities for children. This program is available to local daycares and schools to provide oral health screening, dental education, application of fluoride varnish and sealants. Polish Your Pearls has provided dental services in 8 of the 9 countries in the district. With the lack of Medicaid dental providers in the district, it has been very challenging for many children to be seen or even treated by a dentist.

Long Term Care residents also have a hard time being seen or treated by a dentist. Polish Your Pearls with the help of the grant has purchased portable equipment to be able to go into Long Term Care Facilities to help residents. In LTC we can do dental screenings, dental cleaning, dental education, fluoride varnish, and denture cleanings.

Grant Pool patrons showing off their sun-safe signs after a Pool Cool lesson



## Pool Cool Sun Safety

The Pool Cool program works with local swimming pools to provide education about sun safety during their swim lessons. Twelve pools in the district agreed to teach the Pool Cool lessons. Each pool that participates in the program was given a gallon of sunscreen, educational posters and all the materials needed to teach the eight safety lessons. Pools were asked to provide pictures of the swimming lessons being taught. After completion of the program pools were awarded \$250.00.

## KIDS FITNESS



Nebraska Kids Fitness & Nutrition Day is a one-day event for 4th grade students in the district. This day is filled with 6 nutrition stations and 13 fitness stations. Across the district this day is held in 2 locations. The location in McCook is at the McCook Community College Peter and Delores Event Center with 268 students attending. The second location was held in Grant at Perkins County School with 191 students attending. This fun day would not have been possible without the many sponsors and the help of 100 volunteers between the two locations. Nutrition Stations teach information about portion sizes, how to read labels and how to have good eating habits. Fitness stations teach students the benefit of exercise for healthy living.

## Walk to Health

Walk to Health is a free walking program that encourages people to better their health by increasing their physical activity. This year we did 4 different challenges. This year's 12-week team walking challenge had over 270 participants. Prizes were given to the team with the highest daily average and the individual with the most steps. Thanks to support by Community Hospital of McCook, participants can track their steps and get encouragement through an app on their phone.

*1ST PLACE  
INDIVIDUAL STEPS  
3,112,749 STEPS*



*1st place Team  
"The Trampling Turtles"  
Average total steps 1,679,344*

# Tobacco

Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey (2021) showed that students in SWNPDH's 9 counties were more likely to try tobacco or e-cigarettes at a younger age compared to the students across the state. 20% of 8th graders stated that they have vaped in their lifetime. Working towards the Healthy People 2030 goal TU-05 (Reduce current tobacco use in adolescents), we attended an ESU-15 meeting with principal's and counselors to talk about these alarming rates of tobacco/vaping use. While at the meeting, we introduce an evidence-based alternative to suspension program that has been proven effective in reducing adolescent smoking and vaping. We continue to work with schools on possible policy changes and well as education starting at a younger age.

# NDOT

Nebraska Department of Transportation Office of Highway Safety awarded SWNPDH a mini grant to reduce occupant protection related injuries and fatalities in Nebraska.

Billboard designed and placed in McCook.



This grant was awarded to support youth and young adults seat belt education and awareness. SWNPDH has been sharing the facts by placing table tents on restaurant tables, Social Media ads, billboards, and banners at area fairs and demolition derbies.

## Healthy Cooking Class

SWNPDH partnered with Nebraska Extension office to offer monthly healthy cooking classes. The classes were held at the Keith County Senior Center. Participants were taught how to make healthy recipes using a variety of kitchen appliances such as pressure cookers, waffle makers and air fryers. The classes were advertised in the local paper, through flyers and on social media. We had between 10 to 20 people at each class. Free blood pressure checks were offered to all participants before and after the class.



UNL Extension educator teaching healthy cooking using an air fryer.

# HEALTH FOR ALL

The Healthy People 2030 goals aim to address health disparities and promote health equity for all people. The Minority Health Initiative (MHI) improves the health of populations of racial and ethnic minority groups. In collaboration with local hospitals and medical clinics, MHI reduces barriers to getting preventive health screenings and health education.

Preventive screening clinics were held in Chase, Hayes, and Red Willow counties that offered free blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol checks, education and health coaching, and COVID-19 and flu vaccines. Each person was connected to a local medical facility and other community resources.

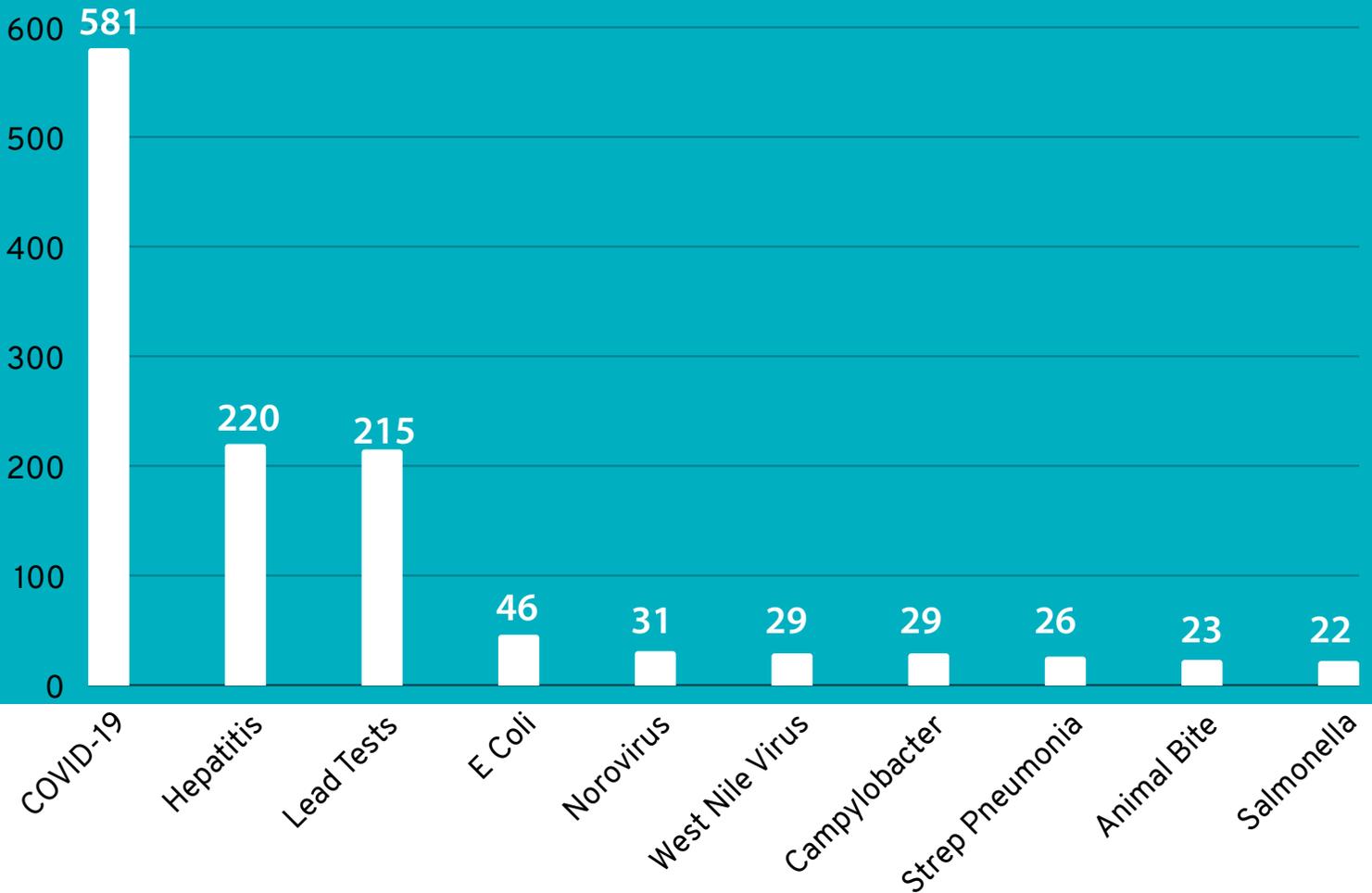
Several local ag businesses hosted screening clinics at their locations to give their employees access to health services and education to prevent and manage chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

The 3 Nebraska Medicaid companies also provided funding to increase the number of Community Health Workers and to screen for social determinants of health. Community Health Workers can assist community members to find resources, access healthcare like cancer screenings, and learn about chronic diseases.



Community Hospital McCook staff educating ag workers on chronic disease risk factors.

## Top 10 Disease Reports 2023-2024



## DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

**166 investigations were completed from over 1,400 cases of reportable conditions - infectious diseases, animal bites, and environmental toxins.**

Contagious and infectious disease surveillance is a major public health activity. Our team works hard to get the most up to date information out to the public about cases of diseases that are happening in the health district.

While COVID-19 continues to have the highest number of reports, other disease investigations included things such as hepatitis, food-borne illness, and West Nile Virus.

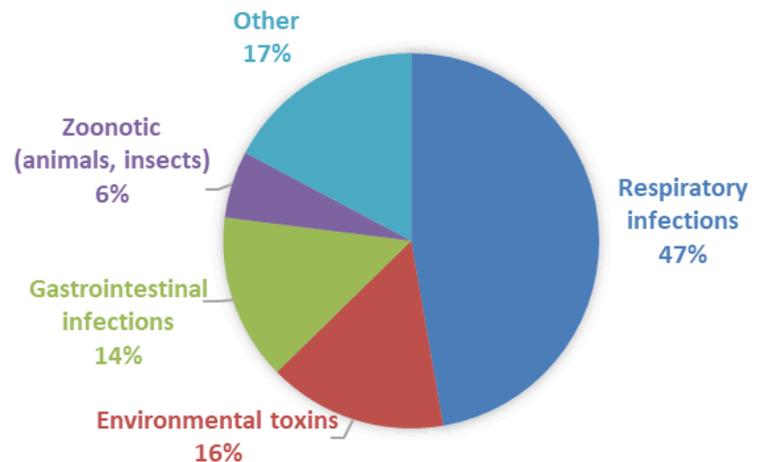
The timeline of disease investigations shows that in our area the respiratory infections like flu, RSV and COVID spike in the winter months.

Gastrointestinal infections (aka stomach bugs) usually spike in the springtime.

Reportable diseases can be split into 5 categories:

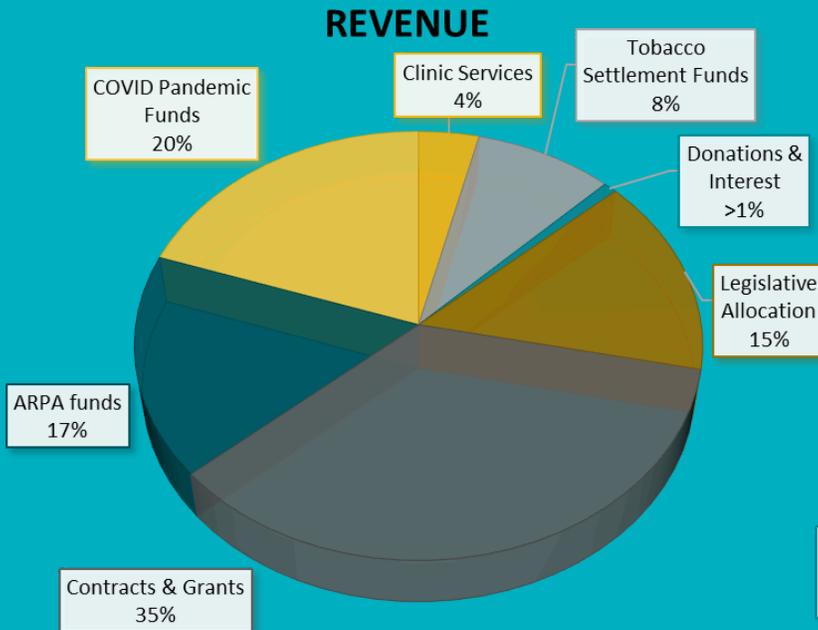
1. Gastrointestinal - stomach bugs, usually vomiting/diarrhea
2. Respiratory - affect the lungs, usually fever and cough
3. Environmental - exposure to toxins like heavy metals/lead
4. Zoonotic - spread by animals or insects, usually from a bite
5. Other - diseases that do not fit into the other categories

### Reportable Disease Cases in Southwest Nebraska



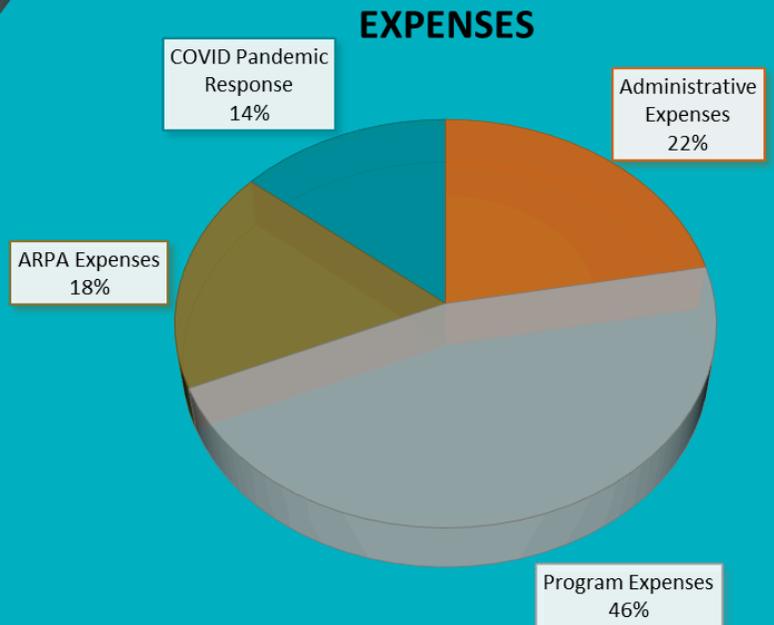
# FINANCIAL REPORT

JULY 2023 TO JUNE 2024



**TOTAL REVENUE:**  
**2,346,992**

**TOTAL EXPENSES:**  
**1,870,604**



## ARPA FUNDING

The American Rescue Plan Act, otherwise known as ARPA, became law on March 11, 2021. This funding was passed from the federal government to the states. Nebraska passed LB1014 in 2022 to allocate the ARPA funding. \$10M was allocated to the 18 district local health departments to be split evenly between them. This one-time funding of \$555,000 was designed to meet infrastructure needs and any other costs, including testing, personal protective equipment, and other preventive measures to combat the COVID-19 virus.

SWNPHD spent \$219,251 in fiscal year 2022-2023. Expenditures included: workforce development for staff, work to pursue accreditation, accessible door installation, purchase of 2 leased vehicles, SMART board and meeting room microphones, tables and chairs, security cameras, data reporting software, and plumbing upgrades.

In 2023-2024 SWNPHD spent \$330,784. Expenditures included: heating and air conditioning, new flooring, repair flood damage, pave the street, add LED signage and replacement of 5 laptops. A contractor was hired to complete the Community Health Assessment, Community Health Improvement Plan and SWNPHD Strategic Plan. Workforce development for the staff included the purchase of Human Resources (HR) software and data reporting software. An attorney was hired to correct political subdivision language in SWNPHD's origination papers.

# Contact Us

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Scan this QR code and let us know what you think!

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Public Health Department**

PREVENT • PROMOTE • PROTECT

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