

## **News Release**

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### **For Immediate Release**

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### **Back-to-School Reminder: Schedule Your Child's Blood Lead Screening**

As families prepare for the upcoming school year with supply shopping, school physicals, and immunizations, Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) wants to remind parents and caregivers of another important health check: blood lead level screening for young children.

Children between the ages of 1 and 5 years old are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead exposure, which can cause lasting damage to their brain and nervous system, affecting learning, behavior, and development. Lead poisoning often occurs with no obvious symptoms, making screening the only way to know if a child has been exposed. Around 5% of the 2,600 eligible children in southwest Nebraska are tested for lead each year, according to Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

“Back-to-school is the perfect time to make sure your child is healthy and ready to learn,” said Diana Garcia, Program Manager at SWNPHD. “Blood lead screening is a simple, free test that can make a big difference in your child’s future.”

SWNPHD offers free capillary blood lead level screenings by appointment for children ages 1 to 5 at both the McCook and Ogallala offices. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to call and schedule an appointment today. This service is also available to daycare and school settings by appointment.

When is screening recommended?

- At 12 months and 24 months of age
- For any child up to age 6 who has never been tested
- Especially important if your child lives in or frequently visits older homes, or is enrolled in Medicaid or WIC

Why is it important?

- Even low levels of lead can affect a child’s IQ, attention span, and academic achievement
- Lead exposure is preventable—and early detection can help prevent further harm
- Screening is quick and easy

“There are a lot of older homes in our area, which is why we are working to increase lead testing,” explained Garcia. “Let’s make sure all children in southwest Nebraska have a healthy start to the school year!”

For more information about lead or to schedule an appointment, call SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow SWNPHD on Facebook, You Tube and Instagram or view the website at [www.swhealth.ne.gov](http://www.swhealth.ne.gov) which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. ###