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For Immediate Release  
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### **Respiratory Illnesses – What’s the Difference?**

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) saw a spike of COVID cases during late summer and fall this year, and now influenza is just beginning to appear. As cold weather approaches, we spend more time indoors with friends and family. With close contact and cold dry air, we are more likely to encounter viruses that cause respiratory illnesses. Knowing the difference can help us figure out what is making us sick and what treatments may help.

Colds, flu, RSV, and COVID-19 can all have similar symptoms so it can be very challenging to know when it is serious or when to get medical care. For those more at risk of getting very sick, it is important to get tested so the right treatment can be given.

**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. Younger children are more likely to have colds, often 3 or more times per season. There is no vaccine or treatment that can combat a cold, though rest and over-the-counter medicines can help with symptoms.

**INFLUENZA (flu):** 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 stomach issues, though this is more common in children. Symptoms may last 5 to 7 days with a shorter time for people who got a flu shot. Flu shots are available every year and help decrease the severity of symptoms as well as how long it lasts. Influenza is treatable with antiviral medication if identified within 48 hours after symptoms start, so check with your medical provider.

**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 from RSV is more common in young children and older adults, with labored breathing, thick mucus, or whistling sounds while breathing. Seek medical care for any of these symptoms. Multiple RSV vaccines are now available for young children and seniors aged 60 and older, to prevent severe illness.

**COVID-19:** Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually start 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. If you get COVID-19 and are at risk of getting very sick, treatments are available that can reduce your chances of needing to be hospitalized, so check with your medical provider or local pharmacy. COVID-19 vaccines are available that help decrease the severity of the symptoms as well as how long symptoms will last.

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.

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, Instagram, and YouTube 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.

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