

## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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### **Handwashing: A Simple Step That Makes a Big Difference**

The Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is encouraging residents to take a moment to revisit an everyday habit that plays a vital role in staying healthy: **handwashing**. As cold and flu season continues, proper hand hygiene remains one of the most effective ways to prevent illness and protect the wellbeing of families and communities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), many common diseases spread simply because individuals do not wash their hands often enough or correctly. Taking a few extra seconds to wash with soap and water can significantly reduce the spread of germs.

**“Handwashing is such a small action with a huge impact,”** said Paula Wimer, Program Manager at Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department. “Whether you’re at home, work, or school, washing your hands regularly helps stop the spread of germs and keeps everyone healthier.” Last year Paula visited 4 schools to give handwashing demonstrations. This year she partnered with Nebraska Extension educator Baleigh Lashley and visited 8 schools. The demonstrations had good reviews and school officials stated they have seen an increase in handwashing since their visit.

#### **When to Wash Your Hands**

SWNPHD recommends washing hands any time they are visibly dirty and during key moments, including:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before and after eating
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After using the restroom
- After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
- After handling animals, pet food, or animal waste
- After taking out the garbage

#### **How to Wash Hands Effectively**

To ensure hands are truly clean, follow these CDC-recommended steps:

1. Wet hands with clean, warm water and apply soap.
2. Lather all surfaces of the hands—including backs, between fingers, and under fingernails.

3. Scrub for at least 20 seconds. Humming the “Happy Birthday” song twice is an easy way to track time.
4. Rinse thoroughly under running water.
5. Dry hands with a clean towel, using it to turn off the faucet if needed.

If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be used. However, sanitizers are not as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy.

### **A Simple Habit for a Healthier Community**

Keeping hands clean is one of the easiest ways to prevent illness and reduce the spread of infections in homes, workplaces, and schools. SWNPHD encourages everyone to practice proper handwashing daily to help protect the health of their loved ones and their community.

For more information or to schedule a handwashing demonstration, contact Paula 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 us on Facebook, Instagram, 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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