Panhandle
Public Health District

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Respiratory Illness Cases are on the Rise in the Panhandle

Panhandle Public Health District is seeing a rise in respiratory illnesses such as Influenza A, Covid, RSV, and other respiratory illnesses. Respiratory illnesses spread easily through coughing, sneezing, close contact, and touching contaminated surfaces.

While respiratory illnesses can make anyone sick, certain people are at greater risk for serious complications:

- Young children
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic lung disease (like asthma and COPD), diabetes (type 1 and 2), heart disease, neurologic conditions, and certain other long-term health conditions
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

Steps the Public Can Take to Protect Themselves and Others

- **Stay up to date on vaccinations**. Influenza, Covid, and RSV vaccinations are effective tools to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death. It is not too late to get your vaccines for this respiratory season.
- **Wash your hands often.** Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer often.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Use a tissue or your elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- **Stay home when you are sick.** Avoid work, school, and public gatherings if you have symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, or body aches.
- **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces,** such as doorknobs, phones, and countertops.
- **Practice healthy habits.** Getting rest, drinking fluids, and staying physically active are important for health and wellness.

"Simple prevention steps make a big difference," said Jessica Davies, Panhandle Public Health District Director. "By staying home when sick, keeping up to date on vaccinations, and practicing good hygiene, we can help protect our families, coworkers, and our communities.

Davies added, "If you are ill, it is important to remain at home until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, and your symptoms have been improving for 24 hours."

When to Seek Medical Care

Seek medical care if your symptoms are continuing to worsen or if you are experiencing difficulty breathing, persistent high fever, chest pain, confusion, or symptoms that do not improve.

If you test positive for Influenza or Covid, you may be eligible to receive antiviral treatment such as Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) for the flu or Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir) for Covid. Contact your healthcare provider early, as treatment is most effective when started soon after symptoms begin.

Resources and Additional Information
To look up your vaccination record in the Nebraska State Immunization Information System visit https://nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov/prd_ir/public/clientSearch.do?language=en.

If you need to get up to date on your vaccinations, walk-in to PPHD's immunization clinic Tuesday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:00 or call your vaccine provider. You can also call PPHD at 308-633-2866 for more information. No insurance? Ask about the Vaccine for Children's (VFC) and Vaccine for Adult's (VFA) program.

A weekly update of influenza and other respiratory diseases in Nebraska can be accessed at https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Seasonal-Respiratory-Diseases.aspx.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website www.pphd.ne.gov.