

Our Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities
Proudly serving, Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

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COVID-19 Local Planning and Preparedness: How Residents Can Help

Hastings – The South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) is working closely with state and local healthcare partners to monitor coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and anticipate its impact on our healthcare system and our communities.

SHDHD, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and local healthcare partners in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties are working together to monitor the unfolding outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The virus originated in China and has spread to multiple other countries including the United States. So far, there have been no cases identified in Nebraska residents and the risk remains low across the country.

“Our priority is to protect our South Heartland residents,” said SHDHD health director Michele Bever. “This means ensuring residents and community leaders have access to the most current information and that they know what they can do to help keep themselves, their families, their employees and communities at low risk. South Heartland and our local health care and preparedness partners are taking to the next level our respective plans for reducing and containing disease outbreaks and we are asking for the community’s help.”

Nebraska DHHS and local health departments have processes in place to monitor and assure care, if necessary, to Nebraska residents who recently returned from China. Dr. Tom Safranek, the State Epidemiologist for DHHS, said on Wednesday: “Based on the spread of COVID-19 and an increase in cases in other countries, DHHS is now including Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Italy, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, along with China. **We’re asking people with travel to these countries in the last 14 days to either self-report to the Nebraska public health online system at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx> or contact their local health department for guidance and next steps.**”

Patients with COVID-19 infection have reportedly had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. It is important to remember that people who may become ill upon returning from overseas travel are more likely to have other respiratory illnesses typically seen this time of year like flu, which might also require treatment.

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Bever said SHDHD is working with Mary Lanning Healthcare, Brodstone Memorial and Webster County Community Hospital so that the health systems will be ready to assist people who may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

According to health officials, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. People can help protect themselves and others from respiratory viruses, including the common cold, influenza and coronaviruses by practicing these simple, everyday preventive actions:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick and staying home if you are sick.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throwing the tissue in the trash.
- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently-touched objects and surfaces.

Emergency managers in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties are encouraging residents to review their family preparedness plans and be ready for emergencies, including disease outbreaks. Worksites, schools and faith communities should also review plans. For assistance, tools, templates and recommendations, contact your county emergency manager or South Heartland District Health Department.

Bever encourages residents to stay informed. She recommends three websites for the most up-to-date and accurate information and guidance:

www.southheartlandhealth.org - SHDHD's website for local information and updates, as well as links to the state and national websites.

<http://dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus> - for Nebraska-focused information.

<http://www.cdc.gov/covid19> - the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website is updated frequently and includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), fact sheets in English and other languages, updated information on number and location of current cases, recommendations for travelers and travel restrictions, guidelines for health professionals and labs, archived video recordings of national briefings.

Residents also may call the health department toll free: 1-877-238-7595 with concerns or questions.

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