

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

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Three new Adams County cases, SHDHD and ACEM continue to encourage masks

Hastings, Neb – Three new lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported to the South Heartland District today for Adams County. This brings the total number of cases in the 4-county health district to 109, including 103 in Adams County, four (4) in Clay County, two (2) in Webster County, and zero (0) in Nuckolls County.

Three new cases in Adams County include:

- 1 female in her 20s
- 1 female in her 60s
- 1 male in his 20s

SHDHD continues to conduct contact investigations for positive individuals who live in South Heartland counties. As a reminder, persons who test negative on a given day are not protected from COVID-19 exposure the following days, so continued practice of social distancing and prevention is necessary.

Since COVID-19 does not always have symptoms and because we have community spread, it is especially important to practice prevention and social distancing everywhere we need to go. This is another important reason SHDHD recommends people wear masks at work or in public places where it is difficult to socially distance from others. This includes but is not limited to workplaces, grocery stores, pharmacies, and doctor's offices.

“People want to know: what type of mask should I wear and when?” said Michele Bever, SHDHD executive director. “There is some confusion about what mask is most suitable for various situations, especially when we constantly hear about state and national shortages in personal protective equipment.”

Ron Pughes, Adams County emergency manager, suggests healthcare workers and other medical first responders follow guidance from their workplace regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that these workers wear a surgical mask or N-95 respirator in addition to a face shield or goggles when caring for patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. Cloth face masks are not considered PPE, but can be used as a last resort if resources are not available. If used, they should be worn with a face shield,” Pughes said.

Bever said that a portion of the pandemic emergency funds set aside by the Legislature in March is being used by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service to acquire PPE for health and responder personnel across the state.

“The supplies are currently requested by each organization (hospital, clinic, long-term care center, emergency medical services, law enforcement, etc.) based on their needs, then delivered to local health departments for distribution,” she said. “This includes various types of masks, gowns, goggles, gloves, face shields and other supplies.”

“Unfortunately, the supply availability is not currently keeping up with the local requests,” Bever said, “so some organizations are working hard to control use and extend the life of these limited supplies.”

Pughes said that in order to reserve critical medical supplies such as surgical masks and N-95 respirators for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, it is recommended that community members, long term care residents and others in communal living use cloth face coverings.

“These cloth face masks can be made from household items or common materials at a low cost or obtained from South Heartland area organizations that are producing or collecting homemade cloth masks for community use,” Pughes said. “We are fortunate to have so many local individuals contributing to this effort.”

“Just remember that a cloth face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others,” he said.

Pughes said that cloth face masks should fit snugly but comfortably, be secured to the head with ties or elastic, include multiple layers of fabric, remain breathable, and have the ability to be laundered without damage. These face coverings can be made from a variety of materials, including cotton, silk, and linen, or can be improvised with scarves, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels. Instructions for both sewn and non-sewn masks can be found on the CDC website, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

Pughes said that cloth face masks should not be placed on children under the age of two, anyone who has trouble breathing, or individuals who are unconscious or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance.

Cloth face masks should be cleaned regularly, depended on how frequently they are used. A weekly wash will be sufficient for most individuals, or a wash after every two uses. Masks can be washed in a laundry machine or laundered by hand.

Bever said that face coverings should not replace other preventative measures including frequent handwashing, avoiding touching one’s face with unwashed hands, avoiding contact with individuals who are sick, and social distancing. These measures remain crucial in the effort to slow the spread of COVID-19.

South Heartland District case counts by county are updated daily on SHDHD’s COVID webpage: <https://southheartlandhealth.org/public-health-data/corona-virus.html>. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides daily updates to Nebraska's coronavirus COVID-19 cases on their Data Dashboard at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus>.

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