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For Immediate Release

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Officials: Stay Safe during Flood Clean Up

Local health officials are letting the public know about resources available to help people stay safe as they clean up and recover from flooding.

“In our district of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, all four counties have issued emergency declarations,” according to South Heartland District Health (SHDHD) health director Michele Bever. “And there may be more concerns arising in our counties as our residents survey the damage in their local areas and identify emerging issues.”

“The effects of the recent weather and flooding extend beyond the immediate destruction of roads, bridges, dams, and buildings,” said Jim Morgan, SHDHD’s public health risk coordinator, who described “the heart wrenching scenes of the loss of homes and animals, especially those that are the source of income for farmers and ranchers, and have an indirect effect on people statewide, regardless of where you live.”

According to the health department, two key concerns with flooding are safe drinking water and appropriate clean up to decrease chances of mold.

Safe drinking water and water for personal use such as for food preparation, bathing/showering, laundry, and dishes should be a top priority following flooding events. According to the health department, flooding may contaminate private wells, so if residents use water from a private well, the water should be tested to assure it is safe for consumption. Water sample kits are available at the health department (call 1-877-238-7595).

After the water levels fall back to normal, there are other consequences to address, including mold. “Mold can occur wherever water is or has been, from flooding, rain entering your house from the outside, or leaking pipes,” said Mr. Morgan. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stresses the importance of recognizing mold. You may recognize it by sight (floors, walls and ceiling discolored) or smell (bad odor, musty, earthy smell),” he said.

Morgan said the first step is to remove wet contents (including carpeting, furniture, and bedding) and dry out the affected areas. “Controlling moisture in your home is the most critical factor for preventing mold growth, which can begin within 24-48 hours,” he said.

Next, clean and disinfect all affected areas to remove the source of the mold and prevent mold from developing or returning. Be sure to use personal protective equipment such as gloves and

mask when cleaning moldy areas, as molds can become airborne and cause respiratory symptoms and other health problems.

The health department's website, www.southheartlandhealth.org, has general information about mold, exposure, and adverse health effects as well as information on detecting, mold cleanup, removal, and remediation.

Additional information about flood and flood recovery, including reporting damage, travel safety, recognizing needs for emotional first aid and coping tips, and other updates and resources, are available from Nebraska 511, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and South Heartland District Health Department (get help by contacting SHDHD toll free at 1-877-238-7595).

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