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For Immediate Release

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November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has joined the Nebraska Cancer Coalition's **Breathe Easy Get Screened** Lung Cancer Campaign to heighten awareness of lifesaving lung cancer screenings during November, Lung Cancer Awareness Month.

Lung cancer is the leading cancer killer in Nebraska and the state ranks 27th in screening rates. In 2023, the American Cancer Society estimated 1,340 new cases in Nebraska and 630 lung cancer related deaths. In 2022, only 6% of Nebraskans at high risk for lung cancer were screened.

"Lung cancer screening is critical, as symptoms often only become common in later stages of the disease when it's much more difficult to Breathe Easy and battle the disease. It's important for Nebraskans with a history of smoking to talk to their health care provider about screening as soon as possible, especially those who have postponed appointments because of the pandemic," said Nebraska Cancer Coalition's President Dr. Alan Thorson.

Cigarette smoking is the number one risk factor for lung cancer. In the United States, smoking is linked to about 80% to 90% of lung cancer deaths. People who smoke are 15 to 30 times more likely to get and/or die from lung cancer. Secondhand smoke is the third most common cause of lung cancer in the US. Quitting smoking at any age can lower your risk of lung cancer.

Radon exposure is the second leading cause of lung cancer. It is estimated that 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year are radon related. Nebraskans can lower their risk of radon exposure by having their homes tested for radon gas and taking recommended steps to mitigate exposure when necessary. Free radon test kits are available from SWNPHD.

There is a lung cancer screening option available to Nebraskans called a low-dose CT scan. This lung cancer screening is recommended for people ages 50-80 years with a 20+ pack-year smoking history who currently smoke or have quit within the past 15 years. A pack-year is smoking an average of one pack of cigarettes per day for one year. Screening for lung cancer with a yearly low-dose CT scan for those at high risk can reduce the lung cancer death rate by up to 20%.

If you are over 50 and have a history of smoking, talk to your healthcare provider about the options for lung cancer screening. "Speaking with your primary care provider about cancer screening is something we encourage all Nebraskans to do. Take ownership of your health and don't be afraid to advocate for yourself," stated Dr. Mike Romano, MD. "Physicians and healthcare providers appreciate patients who do so."

Visit the Nebraska Cancer Coalition website at necancer.org/lung-cancer to learn more or call SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. Follow SWNPHD on Facebook, Instagram,

YouTube and TikTok or view the website at swhealth.ne.gov which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health.

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