

News Release

November 29, 2023

For Immediate Release

Contact: Lori Rowley, RN, 308-345-4223

Respiratory Syncytial Virus 101

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) encourages those 60 years of age and older to get the newly approved RSV shot. RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) is a potentially dangerous, highly contagious virus that can cause respiratory disease. Anyone can get RSV, but it can be more serious for adults over 60, including those with certain medical conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, or heart disease.

“As we age, we are at greater risk of experiencing more severe RSV because our body has a harder time fighting the infection,” explains Lori Rowley RN, Public Health Nurse at SWNPHD. “It’s important to protect yourself against potentially serious respiratory diseases like RSV.”

Symptoms of RSV can range from mild to severe. It can start with mild symptoms that appear to be an ordinary cold, like congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or fever. But RSV may escalate to more severe symptoms, such as:

- A cough that produces thick phlegm or mucus.
- A high-pitched whistling sound made while breathing.
- Labored or difficult breathing or shortness of breath.

These symptoms are a sign that the infection is causing fluid to build up in the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. Seek medical care right away if your symptoms quickly become worse or you are having trouble breathing.

Washing your hands often, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, and disinfecting surfaces can help stop the spread of RSV, but there is more you can do. There is now a vaccine available that protects against RSV. In May 2023, the FDA approved the first RSV vaccine for adults over 60. In the following month, CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended that adults in that age group consult with their health care providers about getting vaccinated.

The RSV vaccine is available at some local clinics and pharmacies. If you have questions about this or other vaccines, talk to your healthcare provider or contact the public health nurses at SWNPHD. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow SWNPHD on Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov. For more information call (308) 345-4223; one number three locations, McCook, Imperial, and Ogallala.

###