

## News Release

*For Immediate Release*

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### Severe Weather Safety

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) would like to encourage residents to take an active role in staying safe during severe weather. Spring in Nebraska is a good time to think about severe weather and the risks that it brings.

“While preparedness is very important, it goes hand in hand with knowledge as severe weather approaches your area,” explains Kay Schmidt, Emergency Response Coordinator for SWNPHD. “Having the knowledge to stay informed of impending weather is vital to any safety plan.”

One way to stay informed is to pay attention to weather alerts issued by agencies such as your county’s Office of Emergency Management, the National Weather Service, and local news channels. Knowing the difference between alerts is important as well. A watch means that weather conditions are favorable to produce a specific event, while a warning means it is time to take action because the weather event is happening.

The most common watches and warnings during spring and summer include the following:

- **High Wind Watch:** Sustained, strong winds are possible. Secure loose outdoor items and adjust plans as necessary so you're not caught outside.
- **High Wind Warning:** Sustained, strong winds with even stronger gusts are happening. Seek shelter. If you are driving, keep both hands on the wheel and slow down.
- **Dust Storm Warning:** A Dust Storm Warning is issued when visibility of 1/2 mile or less due to blowing dust or sand, and wind speeds of 30 miles an hour or more.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch:** A Severe Thunderstorm Watch is issued when severe thunderstorms are possible around the watch area. Winds 58 mph or higher and/or hail 1 inch or larger are possible in a severe thunderstorm. Secure items outdoors that may blow around in high winds. Stay informed and be ready to act quickly.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** A Severe Thunderstorm Warning is issued when a severe thunderstorm is happening or is coming up in the warning area. Severe thunderstorms have winds of 58 mph or higher and/or hail 1 inch or larger. Seek shelter inside a sturdy building, away from windows.

- **Tornado Watch:** Tornadoes are possible in and near the watch area. Review and discuss your emergency plans and check supplies and your safe room. Be ready to act quickly if a warning is issued or you suspect a tornado is approaching. Acting early helps to save lives! The watch area is typically large, covering numerous counties or even states.
- **Tornado Warning:** A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. There is imminent danger to life and property. Move to an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building. Avoid windows. If in a mobile home, a vehicle, or outdoors, move to the closest substantial shelter and protect yourself from flying debris. Tornado warnings typically cover a much smaller area (around the size of a city or small county).

“If you find yourself in a weather warning, please listen and follow the instructions given by the alerting agency,” states Schmidt. “This will lower your risk of accidents or injuries during severe weather.”

More information about the difference between the warning levels may be found on the National Weather Service’s website at [weather.gov](http://weather.gov), under the safety tab. If you would like more information on how to be safe during severe weather, please visit [Ready.gov](http://Ready.gov). 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. You can follow us on Facebook and Instagram, visit [www.swhealth.ne.gov](http://www.swhealth.ne.gov) which includes many useful resources, or stop by the office at 404 West 10th Street in McCook.

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