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For Immediate Release

Contact: Diana Garcia, Program Manager, 308-345-4223

Water Lead Testing for Schools & Licensed Childcare Centers

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) in partnership with Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy is offering free water lead testing to all public, parochial, and private schools, along with all childcare facilities that are licensed within the health district's nine counties of Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow.

Identifying sources of lead exposure is crucial for preventing childhood lead poisoning. There are no safe levels of lead in drinking water. Childhood exposure to lead is associated with hearing and speech impairments, learning disabilities, behavior disorders, slowed growth and development, and damage to the nervous system. Children ages 6 and younger are the most vulnerable to the effects of lead exposure.

Public water is tested routinely by the public utility, but many schools and licensed childcare facilities may have plumbing components (such as faucets) that contain lead. While all schools and licensed childcare facilities are eligible, the program focuses on those that are at highest risk for lead exposure. Testing is strongly recommended for facilities that:

- Serve children 6 years old and younger.
- Public preschools, elementary schools, and childcare facilities in underserved and low-income communities.
- Built before 1988.

Any positive test results are used to identify fixtures, faucets, or fountains that have lead in the water. Once the school knows which ones have lead, they can prevent exposure by placing a "Do Not Use" sign over the sink or fountain or by removing the faucet. The goal of the program is to prevent the use of faucets with high lead levels for drinking water or cooking.

Funding for lead testing comes from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act grants (WiiN). SWNPHD will mail the free test kits to schools and childcare facilities to take a water sample. Instructions will be provided with the test kit, along with a link to a video demonstration done by the EPA. The kits have prepaid postage so they can be sent into the laboratory at no cost.

"Testing water for lead is free through this program, and it's so easy to participate because anyone can collect the water sample – a janitor, a high school student, or school nurse," explains Diana

Garcia, Program Manager at SWNPHD. “It only takes about 15 minutes and can give parents and teachers peace of mind that they are protecting their young children from lead poisoning.”

Schools and licensed childcare centers that wish to sample their drinking water should contact SWNPHD at (308) 345-4223 or info@swhealth.ne.gov to request a test kit and instructions. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram or view the website at swhealth.ne.gov.

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