

NEWS RELEASE

April 14, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lori Rowley RN, Public Health Nurse, 308-345-4223

The Importance of Vaccination

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is working on increasing vaccination rates in the health district to protect those most at risk from vaccine-preventable diseases, including babies, small children, and people with weakened immune systems such as seniors and people undergoing cancer treatment.

“There has been confusion and misunderstandings about vaccines,” explains Lori Rowley, Public Health Nurse at SWNPHD. “But vaccinations are an important part of family and public health. Vaccines prevent the spread of contagious, dangerous, and deadly diseases. These include measles, polio, mumps, chicken pox, whooping cough, diphtheria, and more.”

Who needs to get vaccines to protect their health?

Everyone needs vaccines. They are recommended for infants, children, teenagers, and adults. There are widely accepted immunization schedules available. They list what vaccines are needed, and at what age they should be given. Most vaccines are given during childhood, so protection starts as early as possible. Most children receive 12 different vaccines by their 6th birthday. Some of these come in a series of shots, with 2 or more doses spaced apart. Some vaccines are combined so they can be given together with fewer shots.

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) believes that immunization is essential to preventing the spread of contagious diseases. Vaccines are especially important for at-risk populations such as young children and older adults. The AAFP offers vaccination recommendations, immunization schedules, and information on disease-specific vaccines at familydoctor.org.

What would happen if we stopped vaccinating children and adults?

If we stopped vaccinating, the diseases would start coming back. Aside from smallpox, all other diseases are still active in some parts of the world. If vaccination rates drop below herd immunity levels, the diseases will come back into areas where they once were eliminated. There would be epidemics, with many children getting sick and missing school and other activities. And there would be more preventable deaths.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a concerning drop in routine immunizations for children and adults. Routine vaccination coverage has not yet recovered among young children living in rural areas, especially kindergartners and Medicaid-eligible teenagers.

Now there are initiatives aimed at getting all children and teens back on schedule with their routine immunizations, to protect everyone from vaccine-preventable disease and disability.

Why is a high vaccination rate important?

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends children keep up to date on their childhood vaccinations and well-child visits. This helps children stay healthy when they are at school, daycare, and beyond.
- Even small declines in vaccination coverage can result in an increase in the number of cases and outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases like measles that can cause serious illness, hospitalization, and death.
- Routine childhood vaccinations are successful in preventing serious illness and death. Serious diseases once common at young ages in the United States, such as diphtheria, mumps, and rubella, are now practically unheard of. High vaccination rates will help keep it this way.

What can we do to get routine vaccinations back on track?

“Together we can protect children, families, and communities through routine vaccination,” continues Rowley. “Now is a great time to encourage families to check to see if everyone is up to date on their recommended vaccines and talk to a healthcare provider they trust.”

SWNPHD is working with many partners to take action to promote routine vaccination and catch up with recommended vaccines, including schools and school health partners, healthcare providers, and vaccine champions.

For more information on routine vaccines, contact the public health nurse at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website www.swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook and Instagram.

###