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For Immediate Release
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Respiratory Illness: What are the Symptoms?

Many respiratory illnesses go around in the fall and winter in southwest Nebraska. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has seen a rise in cases of respiratory illness during the first two weeks of December. Influenza (flu) and RSV are just beginning to appear, and rates remain low for now; however, COVID-19 is widespread throughout the health district. SWNPHD has received reports of three deaths from COVID-19 in the last 6 months.

“Now that the weather is getting colder, we often find ourselves staying indoors more and keeping windows and doors closed tight to the elements,” explained Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager at SWNPHD. “Cold dry air, close contact with others indoors, and holiday events all help contribute to more people getting sick this time of year.”

Colds, flu, RSV, and COVID-19 can all have similar symptoms so it can be very challenging to know when it is serious or when to get medical care. For those more at risk of getting very sick, it is important to get tested so the right treatment can be given.

COLDS: Mild illness with symptoms usually starting 1 to 3 days after exposure. Symptoms include cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, watery eyes, and sneezing. Colds may last up to 10 days. Younger children are more likely to have colds, often 3 or more times per season. There is no vaccine or treatment that can combat a cold, though rest and over-the-counter medicines can help with symptoms.

INFLUENZA (flu): Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually starting 2 to 4 days after exposure. Symptoms come on suddenly and include fever (not everyone will experience a fever), chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue (tiredness). Some people have stomach issues, though this is more common in children. Symptoms may last 5 to 7 days with a shorter time for people who got a flu shot. Flu shots are available every year and help decrease the severity of symptoms as well as how long it lasts. Influenza is treatable with antiviral medication if identified within 48 hours after symptoms start, so check with your medical provider.

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus): Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually starting 5 days after exposure. Symptoms of RSV in children are fever, runny nose, loss of appetite, coughing, sneezing, and wheezing. Symptoms in adults are low grade fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing and headache. Symptoms may last 2-8 days. Severe illness from RSV is more common in young children and older adults, with labored breathing, thick mucus, or whistling sounds while breathing. Seek medical care for any of these symptoms.

Multiple RSV vaccines are now available for young children and seniors aged 60 and older, to prevent severe illness.

COVID-19: Mild to severe illness with symptoms usually starting 2 to 14 days after exposure. Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. If you get COVID-19 and are at risk of getting very sick, treatments are available that can reduce your chances of needing to be hospitalized, so check with your medical provider or local pharmacy. COVID-19 vaccines are available that help decrease the severity of the symptoms as well as how long symptoms will last.

As with any illness, seek immediate medical attention if you or someone else is having trouble breathing, chest pain or pressure that is not going away, confusion, trouble waking up or staying awake, bluish lips or face, or an uncontrolled fever after taking fever reducing medication.

For more information contact Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager at 308-345-4223. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook, Instagram, You Tube, or view the website at swhealth.ne.gov which contains many resources and information to prevent disease, promote and protect health.

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Common Winter Viruses

Viruses	When do you get sick after being exposed?	What are the symptoms?	Is there treatment available?	Is there a vaccine?
COLDS (Rhinovirus, Enterovirus)	1 to 3 days later	cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, watery eyes, and sneezing	No.	No.
INFLUENZA (flu)	2 to 4 days later	fever (often, not always), chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue (tiredness). Children may have diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting.	Yes. Your doctor can prescribe antiviral medicine if it has been less than 2 days since your symptoms started.	Yes. Flu shots are recommended once a year and help reduce symptoms and infections.
RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)	5 days later	babies & children: fever, runny nose, loss of appetite, coughing, sneezing, and wheezing. Difficulty breathing in severe cases. adults: fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing and headache. Older adults sometimes have difficulty breathing.	No. For severe cases, they may be hospitalized to get oxygen or other supportive care.	Yes. RSV shots are recommended to protect infants, some young children, and older adults to help prevent breathing problems and severe symptoms.
COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2)	2 to 14 days later	fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.	Yes. Your doctor can prescribe antiviral medicine if it has been less than 5 to 7 days since your symptoms started.	Yes. COVID shots are recommended once a year to help reduce symptoms and infections.



Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department

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Viruses	When do you get sick after being exposed?	What are the symptoms?	Is there treatment available?	Is there a vaccine?
Colds (Rhinovirus, Enterovirus)	1 to 3 days later	cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, watery eyes, and sneezing	No	No
Influenza (flu)	2 to 4 days later	fever (often not always), chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue (tiredness). Children may have diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting.	Yes. Your doctor can prescribe antiviral medicine if it has been less than 2 days since your symptoms started.	Yes. Flu shots are recommended once a year and help reduce symptoms and infections.
RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)	5 days later	Babies & children: fever, runny nose, loss of appetite, coughing, sneezing, and wheezing. Difficulty breathing in severe cases. Adults: fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing and headache. Older adults sometimes have difficulty breathing.	No. For severe cases, they may be hospitalized to get oxygen or other supportive care.	Yes. RSV shots are recommended to protect infants, some young children, and older adults to help prevent breathing problems and severe symptoms.
COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2)	2 to 14 days later	fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.	Yes. Your doctor can prescribe antiviral medicine if it has been less than 5 to 7 days since your symptoms started.	Yes. COVID shots are recommended once a year to help reduce symptoms and infections.

