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Contact Michele Bever, Executive Director, South Heartland District Health Department
402-462-6211 or Toll Free 1-877-238-7595

Local Health Department: Get the Facts on Coronavirus

Local health officials want South Central Nebraska residents to know that the risk of becoming ill with the new coronavirus is low and that up-to-date information is available to help people stay informed.

“We understand that some are worried about the coronavirus outbreak,” said South Heartland District Health Department Director Michele Bever. “However, the current risk for South Heartland residents is low.”

As of February 4, 2020, there were 11 confirmed cases in the United States, but none in Nebraska or surrounding states. The virus does not currently spread easily from human to human.

According to health officials, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus. There are simple everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. These include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Contact your healthcare provider’s office before seeking treatment if you suspect you may be ill with coronavirus.

The 2019 novel coronavirus (2019 nCoV) is a new virus that causes respiratory (breathing) illness. This virus was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak of respiratory illness that began in December in Wuhan, China.

Patients with 2019-nCoV have reportedly had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. There is currently no vaccine to protect against 2019-nCoV. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

Dr. Bever said the South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) “already has plans in place for this kind of situation and the health department is putting those plans into action.”

Bever said that “the situation is continually changing, with new developments daily, but the health department is working with state and national partners to monitor the situation, and is receiving and passing along the most current guidance.”

According to Bever, the health department is working closely with local preparedness partners in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, including hospitals, healthcare professionals and emergency managers. “We are sharing the most current guidelines and recommendations, and making



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606 N. Minnesota, Suite 2
Hastings, NE 68901
(402) 462-6211
FAX: (402) 462-6219
Toll Free: (877) 238-7595

WEB: www.southheartlandhealth.org

sure we have everything in place to respond should any local cases of coronavirus infection show up in our district,” she said.

Even though current risk is low, Bever encourages residents to stay informed. She recommends two websites for the most up-to-date and accurate information and guidance. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov) website is updated frequently and includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), fact sheets, updated information on number and location of current cases, recommendations for travelers and travel restrictions, guidelines for health professionals and labs, archived video recordings of national briefings, and much more,” Bever said.

The health department’s website is available for local information and updates, as well as links to the CDC website. Bever encourages residents of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties to visit SHDHD’s website: www.southheartlandhealth.org, or to call the health department toll free: 1-877-238-7595.