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For immediate release

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**Dr. James Lawler shares on Monday briefing discussing the disinformation pandemic:
“What is happening is not completely accidental, nor is it innocuous.”**

Dr. James Lawler joined the Monday, May 17 Panhandle briefing to discuss COVID and the origins of the disinformation pandemic.

Lawler’s background with a career in the Navy working around emerging infectious diseases and biodefense and later through security briefings at the White House in the National Security Council helped inform his presentation.

“What is happening is not completely accidental, nor is it innocuous,” Lawler explained.

Misinformation is a type of false information, which could be honest mistakes and misunderstandings, but disinformation is deliberately used to create and spread confusion and is the result of nefarious activity. Lawler assured listeners it’s quite real and quite robust.

The internet has become a powerful tool for misinformation and disinformation because it’s much easier to spread. There’s been research to show that both spread much more quickly than truth does.

Many internet and social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, sometimes have a whole bunch of outrageous and often controversial claims about COVID and vaccines. All are part of a large network of incorrect and debunked claims that have a profound effect on how people perceive the pandemic.

Trolls, bots, and cyborgs are part of the campaign to make messages seem like they are getting much more traction on social media than they truly are. People measure value in the number of likes a post may have but many of these likes are generated by bots.

“What we are seeing with COVID and vaccines is that it is part of an intentional campaign to sow discord, confusion, and distrust, not necessarily to sway people’s thinking one way or the other,” said Lawler. “These bots don’t just amplify anti-vax messages, they actually do this by amplifying messages on both sides.”

Lawler reminded listeners that some people take social media sites as gospel and it’s just not true.

Dr. Lawler is the Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center; Director of International Programs and Innovation at the Global Center for Health Security; and Director of Clinic and Biodefense Research. His recorded presentation is accessible at <https://tinyurl.com/dm29ks94>.

Pfizer is now available in the Panhandle and anyone 12 and older can get vaccinated! Self-schedule with two easy steps:

1. Register on the vaccinate.ne.gov website.
 2. For the corresponding counties, pick a location, day, and time that works for you. Dates and times will be added to the links as they are made available.
- **Box Butte/Grant:** <https://tinyurl.com/25mwaapu> | [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)
 - *Walk-ins welcome* Dave's Pharmacy Hemingford & Alliance, Monday-Friday
 - Moderna or Johnson & Johnson 8a-5:30p | Pfizer 2p-5:30p
 - Alliance Community Pharmacy, Monday-Friday
 - Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson 7:30a-6p
 - **Cheyenne/Deuel:** <https://tinyurl.com/5b5uac8p> | [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) | [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)
 - **Dawes/Sioux:** <https://tinyurl.com/x5d5nnbn> | [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) | [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)
 - *Walk-ins welcome* Western Community Health Resources, Monday-Friday, 12:30p-1:30p
 - Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson
 - **Garden:** sign up at vaccinate.ne.gov - provider will call you
 - *Walk-ins welcome* Regional West Garden County Clinic Front Desk, Monday-Friday, 8a-5p
 - Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson
 - **Kimball:** <https://tinyurl.com/d2u8txrs>
 - *Walk-ins welcome* Kimball Health Services, Monday-Friday, 8a-4:30p
 - Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson
 - **Morrill:** <https://tinyurl.com/sb8mvumm>
 - *Walk-ins welcome* Morrill County Hospital Clinic, Wednesdays, 8a-4p
 - Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson
 - **Sheridan:** <https://tinyurl.com/cvrmkv38>
 - **Scotts Bluff/Banner:** <https://tinyurl.com/w6b84fkf> | [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) | [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com) | [walgreens.com](https://www.walgreens.com)
 - *Walk-ins welcome* Click on <https://tinyurl.com/w6b84fkf> to see availability.

The two steps are encouraged to ease the vaccine process. There is no charge for the vaccine.

People who are fully COVID vaccinated will not be required to quarantine due to close contact. If you have lost your COVID vaccine card, go to <https://tinyurl.com/2zh7uhhu>.

Two COVID deaths were confirmed, both Box Butte County females, one in her 60s and one in her 70s.

“We share our sympathy in the loss of our fellow Panhandle residents,” said Kim Engel, Panhandle Public Health District Director.

Unified Command confirms 24 more cases of COVID in the Panhandle since last reporting on Monday, May 10. The investigations are underway, all close contacts will be quarantined.

All Ages: 24

County	Cases
Banner	0
Box Butte	2
Cheyenne	3
Dawes	2
Deuel	1
Garden	0
Grant	1
Kimball	2
Morrill	1
Scotts Bluff	3
Sheridan	9
Sioux	0

Exposure Type

Community	50%
Close Contact	46%
Travel	0%
Under Investigation	4%

March 2, 2020-May 17, 2021

- **Total Tests Conducted: 38,678**
- **Positive: 9,063**
- **Last 14 days (active) cases: 38**
- **Last week’s cases: 24**
- **Last week’s positivity rate: 9.6%**
- **Deaths: 196**
- **Active Hospitalizations: 2**
- **Total Cumulative Hospitalizations: 548**
- **Doubling time (November 15, 2020 – May 17, 2021): 183 days**

Current COVID testing access can be found at www.pphd.org.

The Panhandle COVID dashboard is now being updated on Mondays only prior to the 3:30pm MT briefing and available at www.pphd.org. For the most up to date information from the CDC, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Panhandle Public Health District, Region 21, 22, and 23 Emergency Management, and Scotts Bluff County Health Department are working as a unified command on this evolving situation. Essential updates will be regularly communicated to the public and community partners.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website www.pphd.org.