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For immediate release

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COVID Vaccine Science & Facts

Dr. Kevin Reichmuth, Pulmonologist at Nebraska Pulmonology Specialties of Lincoln and Nebraska Army National Guard Colonel, joined the Panhandle briefing to outline the vaccine science and dispel circulating myths.

Reichmuth shared messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines are a new type of vaccine to protect against infectious diseases. To trigger an immune response, many vaccines put a weakened or inactivated germ into our bodies. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein-or even a piece of a protein-that triggers an immune response inside our bodies. That immune response, which produces antibodies, is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies.

The combination of several factors made it possible to increase the speed of vaccine development.

“The federal government’s commitment to a vaccine was spot-on, they overcame bureaucratic barriers towards important collaboration to efficiently move through each phase, allowing them to be ready,” said Dr. Reichmuth.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory committee meetings are on a specific schedule and they don’t normally adjust that schedule, but because we are in a pandemic, these emergency meetings moved quicker.

As cases were increasing so rapidly, separation and efficacy of the vaccine could be seen allowing the FDA to see safety data. It was easy to see the analysis in the interim and separation and efficacy in the vaccine allowing them to see what the FDA had set as the bar for achieving safety.

“The mRNA vaccines does not alter our DNA and it does not cause infertility. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and Society of Maternal Fetal Medicine would not have endorsed this vaccine in reproductive age women if that was a concern, the COVID infection itself could cause infertility. Preventing the infection has multiple benefits,” said Dr. Reichmuth.

He added, “The concern about Bell’s Palsy is actively being monitored, we are about two million vaccinations and there have been no spikes. In the Pfizer trial, there were four cases of Bell’s Palsy in the vaccination group and none in the placebo group. In the Moderna trial, it was three in the vaccination group and one in the placebo group. The bottom-line is that is not outside of the normal realm of Bell’s Palsy we would see in the population of about 15-20 cases per 100,000 people. In the Pfizer trial, that’s four cases out of 22,000 patients in the vaccination group and that’s not outside of what we would see normally.”

Reichmuth affirmed to-date, they have not seen cases of Guillain Barre Syndrome correlated with the vaccine and it continues to be actively monitored.

A full recording of Dr. Reichmuth’s presentation can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycj7mf3a> or on PPHD’s website at: <http://pphd.org/COVID-19.html>. Please share with others to stay informed on important COVID vaccine updates.

To date, 830 people in the eligible populations have received the COVID vaccine in the Panhandle. This number will continue to increase with each weekly distribution to the eligible populations at the corresponding times.

Ten additional COVID-related deaths in the Panhandle are being reported. This brings the total deaths in the Panhandle to 114. The deaths are being announced as follows:

- Grant County female in her 70s
- Morrill County
 - Female in her 70s
 - Male in his 70s
- Scotts Bluff County
 - One female in her 90s
 - Five males: one in his 70s, two in their 80s, two in their 90s
- Sheridan County male in his 70s

“We share our sincerest sympathy with the friends and loved ones in the loss of our fellow Panhandle residents. We send you peace and comfort especially during this holiday season,” said Kim Engel, Panhandle Public Health District Director.

Unified Command confirms 232 more cases of COVID in the Panhandle since last reporting on Monday, December 21. Recoveries are available on the Panhandle dashboard at www.pphd.org. The investigations are underway, all close contacts will be quarantined.

All Ages: 232	
County	Cases
Banner	4
Box Butte	17
Cheyenne	42
Dawes	11

Deuel	0
Garden	2
Grant	0
Kimball	11
Morrill	8
Scotts Bluff	121
Sheridan	14
Sioux	0
Under investigation	2

Exposure Type	
Community	34%
Close Contact	37%
Travel	0%
Under Investigation	29%

March 2-December 28, 2020

- Total Tests Conducted: 29,950
- Positive: 7,527
- Last 14 days (active) cases: 464
- Last week's cases: 228
- Last week's positivity rate: 34.5%
- Deaths: 114
- Active Hospitalizations: 14
- Total Cumulative Hospitalizations: 465
- Doubling time (November 9-December 27): 48 days

Avoid the Three Cs:

- Avoid Crowded Places – Avoid gathering in groups where you cannot maintain 6-foot of distance from others
- Avoid Close Contact – Wear a mask over your nose and mouth or maintain 6-foot distance when you are spending more than 15 total minutes with people you don't live with
- Avoid Confined Spaces – Avoid enclosed spaces with poor ventilation

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

The Panhandle COVID dashboard is updated weekdays at 4:30 pm MT 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.