

NEWS RELEASE

Panhandle

Public Health District

April 6, 2020

For immediate release.

For more information, contact: **Kim Engel**, kengel@pphd.org or **308-760-2415**

In normal times, the work of Nebraska's 19 local public health departments often flies under the radar for most of us. Their success is marked by what does not happen...injuries avoided, chronic diseases prevented, infectious disease that are contained and fizzle and never make the news. Over the past several weeks, all Nebraskans have come to understand what members of local boards of health have long known... local health departments play key roles in every aspect of our everyday lives. The emergence of and response to coronavirus has meant huge disruptions for all of us. While many of us have been forced to scale back our work, our local health departments have scaled up to meet the challenges of coronavirus and lead community responses. While many of us have (correctly) followed the urging of our local, state and national leaders and stayed home, the teams at our local health departments are working seven-days-a-week on the front line.

All local health departments across the state are contacting and monitoring hundreds of people who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 or has other risk factors. At the same time, local health departments are working to help all sectors of our local communities understand how to protect themselves and others from infection. Several local health departments are working to contain coronavirus infections in facilities that house some of the people most vulnerable to COVID-19, including the elderly and disabled in long term care facilities as well as incarcerated youth and adults.

Local health departments are working arm-and-arm with our healthcare community—hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities, EMS, laboratories and other health care providers. They are coordinating to make best use of scarce resources like tests, masks, gowns, and respirators. They are also monitoring the health of healthcare teams as they treat the growing number of community members with COVID-19.

Our local health departments are communicating daily with local, state and federal partners to stay up on the quickly changing COVID-19 guidance from the CDC and from Nebraska DHHS. They synthesize and relay key information to local partners such as schools, businesses and faith-based organizations. They also field thousands of phone calls from people like us... community members with questions and concerns. Local health departments are sharing the information we need so that all of us can work together to flatten the coronavirus curve and protect our healthcare system's capacity to serve our communities.

National Public Health Week is observed the first full week of every April. Nebraska's 2020 events marking the week have largely been postponed or cancelled. But this year, more than any year in living memory, National Public Health Week has meaning for every Nebraskan. As community members, as members of local boards of health, and as Nebraskans, we are grateful to the dedicated teams at our local health departments. We urge you to show your gratitude for their work by heeding their advice to all of us during this public health emergency.

- Stay home as much as possible.
- Keep at least 6 feet distance from any people we do not live with.
- Avoid gathering in any groups other than with people we live with. If a group is necessary, limit it to 10 people and remember the 6 feet rule.
- Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds each time
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough and throw the tissue away
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, and mouth with unwashed hands.

To find the contact information for your local health department, visit <https://nalhd.org/about-us/nebraska-local-health-departments/> .

Panhandle Public Health District Board of Health