

News Release

For Immediate Release

May 13, 2025

Contact: Lori Rowley RN, Public Health Nurse, 308-345-4223

Hepatitis Awareness Month

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month—dedicated to raising awareness about viral hepatitis and promoting prevention, testing, and treatment. Hepatitis B is a vaccine-preventable disease that can lead to serious liver complications if left untreated. This month Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) encourages residents to make sure they are up to date on their hepatitis B vaccinations.

Hepatitis B is a liver disease that can cause mild illness that lasts a few weeks, or it can lead to a serious, lifelong illness. Chronic liver disease first appeared in the top 10 causes of death in SWNPHD's health district starting in 2020 and has been in the top 10 every year since then, according to Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Acute hepatitis B is a short-term illness that can lead to fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, jaundice (yellow skin or eyes), and pain in the muscles, joints, and stomach.

Chronic hepatitis B is a long-term illness that happens when the hepatitis B virus stays in a person's body. Most people who go on to develop chronic hepatitis B do not have symptoms, but it is still very serious and can lead to liver damage (cirrhosis), liver cancer, and death.

Chronically infected people can spread hepatitis B virus to others, even if they do not feel or look sick themselves. Hepatitis B is spread when blood or other body fluid infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected. People can become infected through:

- Birth (if a pregnant woman has hepatitis B, her baby can become infected)
- Sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- Contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person
- Sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Exposure to blood from needlesticks or other sharp instruments

Hepatitis B vaccine can prevent both types of hepatitis B, acute and chronic. Hepatitis B vaccine is usually given as a 2 or 3 dose series depending on the brand. Most people who are vaccinated with hepatitis B vaccine are immune for life.

- Infants get their first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth. The birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is an important part of preventing long-term illness in infants and the spread of hepatitis B in the United States.
- Infants are usually given their next doses during their well child checkups at 2 and 6 months of age.
- Anyone 59 years of age or younger who has not yet gotten the vaccine can be vaccinated.
- Adults 60 years or older can talk to their medical provider about being vaccinated for hepatitis B.

If you have questions about hepatitis B or the vaccine, contact your healthcare provider or the public health nurses at SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov.

###