



May 10, 2021

For immediate release

For more information, contact: Kim Engel, Director, 308-760-2415, [kengel@pphd.org](mailto:kengel@pphd.org)

### **Area physician and business leader affirm their strong stance on getting the COVID vaccine**

Dr. Bruce Forney, area physician, and Hod Kosman, CEO/President of Platte Valley Bank Companies joined the Monday briefing to share the importance of getting the COVID vaccine.

Dr. Forney has been a practicing physician in the Alliance and Gordon areas for nearly 45 years in August. His family ranch is in rural Sheridan county. He is concerned about the low COVID vaccination rate in the Panhandle.

“A recent local newspaper article shared a story of a young individual that’s been in the hospital for months showing how devastating the virus can be to even relatively young people,” Forney said. “While people believe this to be a disease of primarily older people, it’s not exclusive to them.”

He also shared the misconception that some believe about natural immunity to COVID but it is not necessarily better. Even if they have minor symptoms, the potential for long-term brain fog, difficulty thinking, and fatigue can be present for months afterward decreasing quality of life.

“Please think hard and get your COVID vaccine, the long-term symptoms are not fun to have,” Forney concluded.

The second guest leader, Hod Kosman, shared the unique strategies they’ve used with staff to increase COVID vaccination rates. Platte Valley Companies employs over three hundred people in the Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming areas.

“This virus was like nothing we ever experienced. In a normal setting, an employee may become ill and they were the only one affected by it while others kept operations flowing. With COVID, one person becoming ill impacts others. We had to close branches because we didn’t have enough people to man operations, that’s not a situation you want to be in,” said Kosman.

They took their promotion of COVID vaccines to employees seriously and it’s resulted in 100% of people over the age of 50 getting vaccinated with an estimated 50-55% of their overall employee population being vaccinated. They’ve offered two paid days off for anyone that gets their full vaccine series and later decided if they didn’t need the two days off, maybe they needed two extra days of pay. Once an employee got vaccinated, they could turn it into two

days of pay. If employees are willing to share their story on why they got vaccinated, they are highlighted in internal communications to encourage others.

“I encourage businesses to step up and do the right things to get their associates to be vaccinated. It’s really important. We need this to go away and go away now,” Hosman affirmed. “Personally, my family wanted to get together with kids and grandkids. We were not going to do that until we were vaccinated. This gave us the freedom and opportunity to go on a family vacation, the things that are important to get back to. I missed those kids so much. This is another good reason for people to get that shot so families can go where they want, when they want, and feel safe about it.”

Dr. James Lawler, Associate Professor at 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 will be joining the Monday, May 17 briefing to discuss the background behind misinformation circulating on the COVID vaccine. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/5c5ns63d>.

Panhandle residents 18 and older can self-schedule with two easy steps:

- Register on the [vaccinate.ne.gov](https://vaccinate.ne.gov) website.
- 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> or [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)
  - **Cheyenne/Deuel:** <https://tinyurl.com/5b5uac8p>, [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com), or [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)
  - **Dawes/Sioux:** <https://tinyurl.com/x5d5nnbn>, [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com), or [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)
  - **Garden:** sign up at [vaccinate.ne.gov](https://vaccinate.ne.gov) – a provider will call you
  - **Kimball:** <https://tinyurl.com/d2u8txrs>
  - **Morrill:** <https://tinyurl.com/sb8mvumm>
  - **Sheridan:** <https://tinyurl.com/cvrmkv38>
  - **Scottsbluff/Banner:** <https://tinyurl.com/w6b84fkf>, [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com), or [safeway.com](https://www.safeway.com)

The two steps are encouraged to ease the vaccine process. There is no charge for the vaccine. Pfizer will be coming soon to the Panhandle. Teens ages 16 & 17 can register at [vaccinate.ne.gov](https://vaccinate.ne.gov).

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>.

Three COVID deaths were confirmed, a Dawes County male in his 90s, Scotts Bluff County male in his 40s, and Sheridan County female 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 19 more cases of COVID in the Panhandle since last reporting on Monday, May 3. The investigations are underway, all close contacts will be quarantined.

**All Ages: 19**

County	Cases
Banner	0
Box Butte	1
Cheyenne	3
Dawes	3
Deuel	1
Garden	0
Grant	0
Kimball	1
Morrill	1
Scotts Bluff	4
Sheridan	5
Sioux	0

**Exposure Type**

Community	26%
Close Contact	47%
Travel	0%
Under Investigation	26%

**March 2, 2020-May 10, 2021**

- **Total Tests Conducted: 38,422**
- **Positive: 9,039**
- **Last 14 days (active) cases: 30**
- **Last week's cases: 19**
- **Last week's positivity rate: 7.7%**
- **Deaths: 194**
- **Active Hospitalizations: 1**
- **Total Cumulative Hospitalizations: 546**
- **Doubling time (November 15, 2020 – May 10, 2021): 176 days**

Current COVID testing access can be found at [www.pphd.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.pphd.org).