



September 28, 2020

For immediate release

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Keeping kids in school is the goal

Panhandle total: 869, Active: 80, Recovered: 779, Deaths: 9

School has now been in session for up to six weeks in many Panhandle communities. Several area schools, administration, and boards have worked hard to implement increased precautions during the COVID pandemic to keep children and staff safe. These include things like:

- Spacing students out in the classroom and at lunch to allow for effective distancing.
- Mask wearing in accordance with the Panhandle risk dial.
- Staggered passing times to decrease the number of people in the hallways and staggered recesses.
- Increased handwashing and sanitizing points throughout the school.
- Staying home when a student or staff member is experiencing even minor signs of illness.

“These are all key to slowing the disease spread,” said Kim Engel, Panhandle Public Health District Director. She added, “When these increased precautions are being implemented, it significantly reduces the amount of students that are required to quarantine due to close contact resulting in kids staying in school.”

In some situations, the health district has seen one confirmed COVID positive student or staff member and upwards of 38 others that are then required to quarantine, as required by the Governor’s Directed Health Measure, when contact tracing has been conducted. Factors that are considered in the disease investigation:

- Close contact is considered less than six feet for a total of 15 minutes or more.
- **Were masks worn by the positive individual and the close contacts?**
 - In a classroom where everyone is masked, including the initial positive case, the initial positive case will isolate at home, and the remainder of the school-aged individuals will self-monitor for symptoms.
 - In a classroom where the initial positive case is not masked, the initial positive case will be isolated at home, and any school-aged individual who had close contact will quarantine at home.
 - In a classroom where the initial positive case is masked but others are not, the initial positive case will isolate at home, those school-aged individuals without

masks and had close contact with initial positive case who are exposed will quarantine at home, and the remainder of the classroom will self-monitor for symptoms.

- In a classroom where no school-aged individual were masked, the initial positive case will be isolated at home, and any school-aged individual who had close contact with initial positive case will quarantine at home.
- Seating charts for the classroom, lunch room, and transportation
 - marking where each student sat and if they wore a mask
 - distance between desk
 - attendance for the date(s) in question
- If a school-aged individual has close contact during an outdoor extracurricular event or in an indoor space where all individuals are spaced six feet apart, the school-aged individual(s) may self-monitor in lieu of quarantine.

Gordon-Rushville Public Schools Administration and School Board has implemented every recommended increased precaution and it has proven to uphold their goal of continuity. Because they have worked so hard on prevention, they have had no quarantines when a school student or staff tested positive.

“When I walk through the halls and see children in classrooms and in their seats learning, I know this is why we have all worked so hard on these reopening plans. Continuity is the ultimate goal while keeping kids, families, and our community safe,” said Lori Liggett, Gordon-Rushville Public Schools Superintendent.

Sidney and Gering strengthened their policies to include mandatory mask wearing to avoid another situation of a large number of quarantined students missing school. We urge all schools to implement precautions to keep school age students, staff and the community safe. Our goal is to keep kids in school. Local public health departments are obligated to quarantine close contacts according the Governor’s Directed Health Measure. This can be found here: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/PPHD-DHM-September21.pdf>.

We also urge that students and parents show kindness and grace to those confirmed positive with COVID and who are in quarantine. We are in a pandemic, to blame an individual for the consequences of quarantine, or missing events, is a form of bullying and only adds to the despair of the situation.

Unified Command confirms 24 more cases of COVID in the Panhandle since last reporting on Thursday, September 24. The investigations are underway, all close contacts will be quarantined and actively monitored for symptoms by public health officials.

Children 19 and under: 5		
County	Cases	Exposure Type
Box Butte	2	Community Spread
Morrill	1	Close Contact
Scotts Bluff	1	Close Contact

Scotts Bluff	1	Unknown
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Adults: 19		
County	Cases	Exposure Type
Box Butte	1	Close Contact
Box Butte	3	Community Spread
Cheyenne	2	Community Spread
Cheyenne	1	Close Contact
Dawes	1	Close Contact
Dawes	1	Unknown
Deuel	1	Close Contact
Garden	2	Community Spread
Scotts Bluff	2	Close Contact
Scotts Bluff	3	Community Spread
Sheridan	1	Community Spread
Unknown	1	Unknown

Unified Command confirms 26 more recoveries in the Panhandle:

Recovered: 26	
County	Total
Box Butte	7
Cheyenne	2
Dawes	4
Deuel	1
Garden	1
Morrill	1
Scotts Bluff	9
Sheridan	1

Testing information and access for the Panhandle area:

- You can sign up for the following free testing at [Testnebraska.com](https://www.testnebraska.com) or 402-207-9377:
 - Box Butte General Hospital in **Alliance**: Monday-Friday, 9-10am
 - Ambulance Bay on the east side of the emergency department, watch for the green arrows
 - **Chadron** Community Hospital: Mondays & Fridays, 7-9am
 - Collections are at 821 Morehead Street (Old Hospital ER Entrance next to Wilson Park)
 - **Other testing opportunities for symptomatic patients may be available through the hospital as ordered by your Primary Care Practitioner, call the hospital at 747-2466 with questions.**
 - **Gordon** Memorial Hospital: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2-4pm

- Regional West Health Services in **Scottsbluff**: Mondays & Fridays, Noon-4pm; Wednesdays, 2-6pm
- **Sidney** Regional Medical Center: Tuesdays & Thursday, 7-9am
- Community Action Health Center in **Gering**: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays, 7-8am
 - Testing is free, sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/yydxr5mc>
- Morrill County Community Hospital in **Bridgeport**: Daily
 - Call 308-262-1616 for testing, same day results
- Contact your local hospital or clinic for information on testing access.

March 2-September 28, 2020

- **Total Tests Conducted: 14,052**
- **Positive: 869**
- **Cumulative Positivity Rate: 6.1%**
- **Recovered: 779**
- **Active Cases: 80**
- **Deaths: 9**
- **Active Hospitalizations: 3**
- **Total Cumulative Hospitalizations: 83**

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.

For the most up to date information from the CDC, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

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.