



Healthy People in Heathy Communities
Improving Health in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

May 3, 2018

For Immediate Release

For more information contact: Michele Bever, PhD, MPH, Executive Director
 South Heartland District Health Department
 402-462-6211 / 1-877-238-7595

Health Official: Know your health department

South Heartland District Health Department's executive director Michele Bever is challenging residents in the four county health district to "know what your public health department does for you."

"It is not unusual for us to meet people who haven't heard of South Heartland District Health Department or who don't really know what we do," Bever said. "And, while public health workers do a great job carrying out statutory authorities and the ten essential services of public health, we often work behind the scenes, and we haven't put a lot of effort or resources into telling everyone about what we do!"

The South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) formed a little more than 16 years ago as an inter-local agreement between Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties. SHDHD was the first new regional health district formed under LB 692, which used Master Tobacco Settlement Funds awarded to Nebraska to create a public health infrastructure that covered the entire state. SHDHD is governed by a 15 member board, which includes a county supervisor or commissioner from each county, two community-minded citizens from each county, plus a physician, a dentist, and a veterinarian.

SHDHD's vision is "healthy people in healthy communities," said Bever. "So, everything we do supports progress toward that vision. We Prepare, Prevent, Promote, and Protect and we work with others in our communities to assure we have conditions in which people can be healthy."

Dr. Bever wants people to be aware of what the health department has available to them. South Heartland works to prevent chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke through the diabetes prevention program called Smart Moves and by helping people prevent or manage their high blood pressure and partners with hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, and the YMCA.

The department promotes healthy lifestyles with community walkability initiatives and wellness programs in schools and worksites. SHDHD also partners with worksites, grocery stores and hospitals to ensure and point out healthy food choices in vending machines, on store shelves, and in cafeterias.

"The health department is also involved in cancer prevention initiatives," said Bever. "These include encouraging safe behaviors, environmental testing, vaccination, and promoting regular screening. SHDHD is raising awareness about skin, breast, colorectal, prostate, cervical, and lung cancers."

The health department also monitors, provides education and reduces exposures to environmental risks to health, such as radon gas in homes or nitrates in our drinking water.

SHDHD's emergency preparedness and planning helps to protect the public during a disaster or disease outbreak. "We are monitoring reports of infectious diseases, foodborne illnesses and other reportable conditions to assure a prompt response to contain outbreaks and to help prevent further spread of illness," she said. The Vaccines for Children program (a federal program administered by SHDHD for eligible families) protects babies, young children, and adolescents from 16 diseases.

Woven throughout SHDHD programs is the priority to assist residents with access to health care. "The health department employs two community health workers to help reduce barriers to health services and to connect people to resources," Bever said.

"I want to make sure to acknowledge that we don't do all this alone," Bever said. "We are proud of our many partnerships that help make all of this happen. In fact, one of the 10 essential services of public health is to collaborate with partners to identify and solve health problems."

"We take this responsibility very seriously and we are continuing to develop our role as community convener and chief health strategist for the four-county district," Bever said. "So that, working with our many partners, we can ensure an environment where people can be healthy and we can realize our vision of healthy people in healthy communities."

##