

*Swine flu numbers in
U.S. growing by day*

By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

In a conference call with state health officials Tuesday, Myra Stoney said they were asked "if we are ready."

The director of the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SNPHD), which serves Chase County and seven other area counties, said, in her mind, that translated to "It can happen."

The "happening" is swine flu, whose occurrences across the United States are growing by the day.

On Saturday, the Nebraska Department of Health reported that 11 cases had been confirmed in three states and possibly a fourth.

By Monday, the number had grown to 40 and, by Tuesday morning, the cases had jumped to 64.

On Wednesday morning, there were 91 cases confirmed in 10 states, including the death of a 22-month-old in Texas.

Two of those cases are in Kansas, and the majority (51) are in New York City. The others include 14 in California, 16 in Texas, two in Massachusetts, two in Michigan, and one each in Ohio, Arizona, Indiana and Nevada.

In her conference call with the state, Stoney said the public health departments were asked to now do daily checks with schools on numbers of students out with flu-like illnesses.

Likewise, staff is checking with hospitals in the eight counties each day on numbers of admissions.

Normally, the school and hospital checks are done weekly, Stoney said.

Despite the fact Kansas has two confirmed cases, Stoney believes Nebraskans shouldn't be alarmed.

"To me, I think it gets back to the basics of social distance. If you have a fever, don't go to school; don't go to work," she said.

Stoney said Chase County is in good shape to contend with any type of flu outbreak because, in 2006, it had several people involved in formation of one of six pandemic committees that organized in the eight counties served by the SNPHD.

At that time, the committees formed because of an avian flu scare.

"So, we have a plan in place for any type of pandemic," Stoney said.

Stoney said the committee that includes Chase County is "already working in the community" in preparing for a possible swine flu outbreak.

Most of the committee's work now is education and prevention messages, Stoney said.

Lori Mendenhall, an employee at Chase County Community Hospital, is head of the pandemic committee that covers Chase County, and is working with Heidi Wheeler and Julie Neighbors, who are SNPHD employees officed in Imperial.

They've already visited community centers and schools with messages on flu prevention.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in

pigs.

People do not normally get swine flu, according to the CDC. However, swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.

Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu.

In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with swine flu infection in people. Like seasonal flu, swine flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Swine flu viruses are not transmitted by food and a person cannot get swine flu from eating pork products.

Antiviral drugs can reduce the consequences of contracting the flu if taken early.

Stoney said it is very important that all persons take responsibility for their health and the health of others.

What you can do to stay healthy

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue away after using it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze, Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.
- People experiencing cough, fever and fatigue, possibly along with diarrhea and vomiting, should contact their physician.
- As always, people with respiratory illness, especially fever, should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading infections to others.