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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Triple threat this respiratory season, take steps to protect your health now.

South Central Idaho – Cooling temperatures this fall and winter bring a triple threat to the region as flu, RSV, and COVID-19 cases are expected to increase. This may be especially risky for older adults, infants, and people with pre-existing medical conditions. South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) encourages residents to act now to protect their health and the health of their community.

“These diseases are a little tricky because the first symptoms are often a stuffy or runny nose, the same symptoms that we see for the less severe common cold or seasonal allergies,” says Logan Hudson, SCPHD Division Administrator. “Many people don’t take their illness seriously until other symptoms start and by then the virus has had a chance to spread.”

Flu

Influenza (flu) is a common respiratory virus that is highly contagious. The virus mainly infects the nose and throat but in high-risk individuals it may infect the lungs and cause serious illness. Vaccination is particularly important for older adults, children under the age of two, people with chronic health conditions like diabetes, cancer, or heart conditions, and pregnant women. Vaccines are recommended for people six months and older every fall to help protect against the most common variants. SCPHD, most pharmacies, and most doctor offices in the region carry this vaccine.

RSV

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common virus that typically causes mild cold symptoms in children and adults. **Infants and older adults can have serious complications from the virus and may require hospitalization.** A vaccine is now available for infants, young children, adults 60 years and

older, and pregnant women. SCPHD offers the RSV vaccine for adults. Please talk to your pediatrician about the vaccine for children.

COVID-19

COVID-19 cases mostly declined in the spring and early summer. Cases numbers began rising across the nation in late summer as a new variant continues to spread through communities. The latest COVID-19 vaccine addresses this strain and should offer more protection against serious illness and death than previous doses. SCPHD offers this vaccine as well as many local pharmacies and some doctors. This vaccine is not free, but is covered by many insurances. SCPHD expects to have vaccine available at no cost for uninsured adults in the next few weeks.

Prevention

Many respiratory viruses can be contagious even before symptoms start so practicing good hygiene at all times can help prevent disease spread. Including:

- Staying home when sick.
- Getting a vaccination/booster for seasonal viruses including flu, RSV, and COVID-19.
- Washing hands often, especially after sneezing, coughing, using a bathroom, blowing your nose, and before touching your face or eating.
- Covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or coughing into your sleeve.
- Wearing a mask when you have to be around people and you are showing any symptoms that may be contagious.
- Boosting your immune system health with regular physical activity, a healthy diet, fresh air every day, and a healthy amount of sleep each night.

“Every fall we have an opportunity to get ahead of disease and keep our communities healthy,” says Hudson. “Now is that chance. We can make a big dent in the spread of disease with choices we make today.”