



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, January 26th, 2021

Transcribed from a previously recorded live event.

Midland Health's portion selected out of the Unified Command Team Press Conference.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you, Erin. I am Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health. A few data points to begin with. Our hospital census today is 216 which is still high, but down some from where we've been recently. Primarily as COVID begins to moderate, we are down to 46 COVID positive patients in the hospital. 20 of those in Critical Care with ages ranging from 27 to 76. 26 people in the Medical COVID unit ages 34 – 93. We have 27 patients using ventilators today. Saw 144 patients in the Emergency Department (ED) yesterday.

Our employees are continuing to get well. We are down to 60 total people quarantined today. 32 of those are quarantined because they are positive for COVID and the rest because they have other symptoms that are concerning. We have another 55 who have been exposed and are self-monitoring but continuing to work.

We have been continuing very successfully to infuse the monoclonal antibody treatments in our special infusion center. Through yesterday, we've treated 346 patients to date and of those only 4 have been hospitalized. As we've said before, that is a population that we'd expect as much as 20% hospitalization as they are all high-risk patients and that's a pretty solid success rate so far for the monoclonal antibody infusions.

Testing, last thing before we get to vaccines. Testing was down considerably. Our volume of testing was down 14% last week. The positive percentages were down from 22 to just over 16% last week and the numbers are even lower so far this week. So, we have plenty of capacity for testing at both of our sites. You can call 68NURSE to schedule a test if you need one, but the numbers are going down both in total numbers and in percent positive.

Let's talk about the vaccine effort. To begin with I want to say thanks to the county team for sharing the Horseshoe with us and making things very easy for our folks to manage logistics out there, to Midland's Fire and EMS service, to the Health Department, to staff and volunteers from all over the place, and to the Team Rubicon folks from that non-profit who have brought volunteers to help us with getting traffic directed and helping patients as they are needed throughout the day. It's been a great team effort. The process at the site runs very, very smoothly. If you have an appointment and you're preregistered, you can be in and out of there in just minutes. If you have an appointment and you're not registered it just takes a few more minutes, 10 – 15 minutes at the most and then with a short waiting period to make sure there's no reaction to the vaccine you can be out of there within a half hour without any difficulty.

There are some interesting challenges with communication. We've had a lot of calls about, "Am I on the list?" "When is my scheduled date?" "I don't know. Nobody's communicated with me." We are still improving our communication channels. We have stood up a phone line that's 221-4VAX, but that phone line is pretty overwhelmed. Lots of calls. We are trying to get more and more operators on so we can handle more calls, but we are experiencing some fairly long wait times.



A few numbers that I think are interesting. We have scheduled so far into next week over 7,000 people to get vaccines at the mass vaccination site. That's great, but there are 8,000 more on the waiting list. So, we still have a lot of work to do. We would encourage you if you haven't heard from us to be patient. Our team is working through the waiting list, especially those who signed up very early. The information we receive from them is not as complete as the later sign ups so we're having to do a little bit of extra work to find those folks and get them on the schedule, but we are working at it hard every day and are hopeful of getting all of those people scheduled over the next couple weeks.

As we've talked about, we did a soft roll out on Friday with 251 vaccines delivered. That went very well, but we learned a few things about traffic flow and were able to improve those. Yesterday we gave 858 vaccines. We had hoped to give over 1,000. We had a large volume of no shows. We had a waiting list of people we were able to call in at the last minute, but we are particularly concerned about the no show volumes at the site. It's been, as I've said we've had some communication challenges, so we know there have been people who have tried to cancel and have not been able to go through to us. If you know that you have a vaccine appointment and you need to cancel it for some reason, you got your vaccine elsewhere or there's some reason it doesn't work for you, you can call us on the 221-4VAX line and perhaps easier and more efficient would be to email us. Email: vaccine@midlandhealth.org if all you want to do is cancel an appointment you know is scheduled. That's vaccine@midlandhealth.org and we'll take care of that cancellation for you as needed.

Let's see. Yesterday, we received another over 5,000 doses allocated from the state. We are hopeful of continuing to get an allocation of that size every week for the foreseeable future. Last week, you may remember ours didn't come in until Thursday. So, the fact that another round has come in on Monday gives us the flexibility to share some of that vaccine with other providers. The state is, as has been publicized, is concentrating on vaccination hubs. There are over 80 of those around the state now, larger providers who can handle several thousand doses a week and that means that many of the smaller providers are being left out in the state's allocation process right now. When you look at Trauma Service Area "J" which we are in, a 17-county area I believe it is, Ector County and Midland County are getting substantial vaccination doses allocated to us as hubs, but the counties around us are not. And so, we and our friends at Medical Center in Odessa have worked together to take some responsibility for the counties around us. Each has taken a list and we are having various levels of interaction with people in those surrounding counties and hoping to get vaccine out to them at least in small quantities as things go forward. This week, we are very hopeful of getting several of those local communities supplied at least with some of their needs given that we've gotten 2 vaccine allocations within just a few days of each other. We have some flexibility to keep our own mass vaccination site going at 1,000 a day and also share some with our neighbors in nearby counties. So, that's ongoing over the next couple of days. The state has a process for us to use to transfer components of our allocation to other approved sites and so we are working through that and trying to serve as many people in our region as we possibly can.

I think that's all I have unless there are questions.

Moderator: Tasa, I haven't received any from the media yet. Well, we'll let Sammi go and then we can do Facebook. Sammi, whenever you are ready.



Sammi Steele, NewsWest9: Good morning. Ok, a few things Russell, talking about those no-shows yesterday. What are you going to do with the vaccine that has been thawed without having it go to waste?

Mr. Meyers: Well, there's multiple levels of vaccine survival. Thawing, once the Pfizer vaccine has been thawed it lasts in a refrigerated state for 5 days. So, we are thawing only just enough to do the day's work each day and then if it doesn't all get given that day, we've got 4 more days to give it. So, we are good on avoiding waste on the initial side. Once it's thawed and then drawn up—You know every vial has to have six doses extracted from it, mixed with a saline solution and drawn up in a syringe. Once that's done you have—is it six hours? You have most of a day to give a drawn-up vaccine. So, we have a team on site that's actually taking the vials from the refrigerated state, putting the vaccine in with the mixture to create the solution that we need in a syringe, and they are doing that all day long only as it's needed all in real time. So, as we get through the day if we find that we've got no-shows, we have a list, I think today has 180 people on the list, who have stated their willingness to be called and to come at the last minute and if we have no shows we work our way through that list being careful throughout the day only to draw up as many syringes as we know we can use. So, waste is not a problem so far and we're trying to improve that no-show rate as the week goes on.

Sammi Steele: If, as this week continues there's 150 people who do not show up do you guys think you would look at the possibility of having a walk-in appointment versus having people preschedule one?

Mr. Meyers: Well, that's what that separate list of people is. It's people who have preregistered with us, but don't have an appointment yet.

Sammi Steele: Ok.

Mr. Meyers: We'll call them. We're summoning them. We're not just saying all comers, show up. We don't think that process works well for us. We do need people to share a certain amount of information that we can then report to the state and we can have for our own ongoing tracking purposes. So, I don't think the walk-in option is going to happen for us, but we're not closing any doors. The most important thing for us to do is to get every vaccine we have into somebody's arm and hopefully somebody who's in the 1A or 1B group.

Moderator: Is that everything, Sammi?

Sammi Steele: Yes, if Mitch wants to ask his question, I have one more after this, but I'll let Mitch go.

Moderator: Mitch asks, "What are the surrounding counties that Midland Memorial is looking at distributing doses of the vaccine to?"

Mr. Meyers: Well, I didn't bring my list. As I said we have 17 counties in the region and we and Ector each took a list that we would try to interact directly with. I know that we made a promise to Howard County yesterday. Howard is the most populous of those counties besides Midland and Ector. We have promised them some amount of doses and they are working on a vaccination site through the Scenic Mountain Hospital group. We are talking with I know Glasscock County, with Presidio and Jeff Davis, with Martin. There's- I'm leaving out a couple I'm confident, but they're for the most part the ones nearest us and surrounding Midland County and that will be going on over the next couple of days. So, we're having varying levels of conversation. Some of those counties have well established health



systems with whom we can speak and who are ready to accept vaccine and deliver it themselves. Others have much more limited capability and so we are trying to match our support for them with what their needs are.

Moderator: His next question is, “Will MMH reschedule appointments for individuals who have to cancel?”

Mr. Meyers: Yes, absolutely. As long as they haven’t gotten it somewhere else.

Moderator: Ok, Sammi, what’s your last question?

Sammi Steele: I’m wondering, how are you guys verifying peoples’ chronic conditions, you know, for them to meet Phase 1B criteria? It seems like it would be easy for someone to fill out that preregistration form, say they have a chronic condition when they don’t just to get the vaccine. Is it really just trusting the public?

Mr. Meyers: Yes, it’s an honor system. We are choosing to trust people because the practicality of getting a doctor’s note from every person who has a chronic disease is just not there. Our priority is to get the vaccine out and we are prepared to take the risk that some people might not be honest with us. We think that would be rare. I think we’ll see as time goes on, but the vast majority of the people we’ve cared for so far are over 65 and that’s easily proven. We do ask for identification, so we know what age you are and the chronic condition issue is an honor system at this point.

Sammi Steele: Yeah, that makes sense. And then another question. People have been asking me if the city is going to start reporting the amount of vaccines like they have positive COVID cases just to show growth. Is that something you guys would look into?

Mr. Meyers: The amount of vaccine given? Is that what you mean?

Sammi Steele: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Meyers: Yeah, I think we should do that actually. I’ve said the numbers already, but I’ll say them again. 251 on Friday, 858 more on Monday. Of course, that leaves out the thousands of vaccines we’ve already given to healthcare workers in prior weeks. So, I think we can put that together and begin reporting it on our site and elsewhere. You can go to the DSHS website right now and see how many vaccines have been given in Midland County and reported to the state. That’s updated every day.

Sammi Steele: Ok.

Mr. Meyers: I think there’s a little lag in their data. We’ll try to make sure our data is absolutely current. The state’s lags a little bit, but you can see that right now.

Sammi Steele: Ok, awesome. Thanks.

Mr. Meyers: Ok.

Moderator: Kate Porter with CBS7 asks, “Will the residents of surrounding counties come to the Horseshoe for the vaccine or will the vaccines be transported to those counties?”



Mr. Meyers: It's some of both. We certainly-- From the very beginning the state has asked us and we have not in any way restricted the residence. So, if you get on our waiting list and we schedule you for a vaccine we don't care where you live. If you're willing to come to the Horseshoe and you're scheduled, we'll give you a vaccine there. But beyond that, what we are talking about with Howard County earlier and will be talking about with others later this week is delivering a supply of vaccine to them on ice with the intention that they will deliver it in their community to people whom it's much more difficult to get to Midland. Some of these counties are a long way from us. You know, Presidio County is 3+ hours away from us for a lot of that population. We're hopeful of helping them as well. Those for the most part will be packaged and refrigerated. They'll come get it and take it and deliver into their home communities.

Moderator: Tasa, want to go ahead and ask your Facebook questions?

Tasa Richardson, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: Absolutely. Thank you. What are the hours of business for the antibody infusion clinic and are they open on weekends?

Mr. Meyers: I don't know. Sorry, let me get-- (Comments off camera not heard) We are giving infusions on Saturday. This is all by appointment. Hours of operation— (Comments off camera not heard) Yeah, we're running 3 scheduled groups of 7 patients each and they are running roughly 9:00am to 5:00pm. Daytime hours Monday through Saturday as scheduled though. (Comments off camera not heard) Yeah, it's a 3-hour process: an hour of prep, an hour of infusion, and an hour of recovery. So, it takes a while, but we'll schedule you for one of the options 3 shifts a day, 6 days a week.

Tasa: The next is more of a comment, but I think worth mentioning so that people are aware. Emails that are being sent to those that are registered for the waiting list are ending up in spam or junk folders. And is there any communication to alert people of that? So, I think this is a great time for us to touch on that.

Mr. Meyers: That's a very good point, Tasa. We have had a lot of people who have told us they didn't get the communication even though we have good email addresses and cell phone numbers for them. So, do please check your spam folder before you call us and say you didn't get notified of your appointment.

Tasa: Do we need to get the vaccine if we have already had COVID?

Mr. Meyers: Yes, there is no certainly around how long the antibodies will last after being positive for the disease. Of course, every person is a little different. But the general consensus has been that the vaccine is going to provide better and longer protection than simply getting the disease and recovering from it. So, we would encourage you to still get the vaccine. Early on we asked people to wait and let others go first who had not had the disease because you have some protection from recovering, but if you're willing to take the vaccine and you've been COVID positive, go ahead and get on the waiting list and we'll schedule you and get you in. We do advise that.

Tasa: Are pharmacy staff in group 1B?

Mr. Meyers: Pharmacy staff? They are in group 1A. Those are healthcare providers.

Tasa: And Erin, I think that's all the questions we have.



Moderator: Ok, Russell can you touch on where they get their first dose and if they go back to the same place to get their second?

Mr. Meyers: Yes, sure can Erin. Of course, we've delivered doses in a variety of different areas, but the first thing is anywhere you get your first dose should give you a card and should schedule your second dose and tell you where to come back and get it and it should be the same place you got your first dose. For the vast majority of people that's going to be the Horseshoe. We're delivering more there than anywhere else, but if you're an employee or someone else who got it in our Employee Health setting here at the hospital then we'll ask you to come back there in 3 weeks or so. If you got it from a pharmacy locally or some other provider, you should be looking back to that same provider for your second dose.

Moderator: Thank you, Russell. And now we'll turn it over to Dr. Wilson with the Midland Health Department as a local health authority.

Dr. Larry Wilson (Vice President, Medical Affairs Midland Health): Thank you, Erin. I'm going to start off with some numbers from the Health Department. The total case count is currently at 15,197. We have 1,528 individuals isolating with positive COVID. We are investigating an additional 3,357 cases and there's 9,694 that have recovered. There's 404 that we're not able to locate or are not being cooperative with our investigation and there's been 214 deaths in Midland County from COVID.

I want to focus a little bit on the contact tracing and bring that to everybody's attention and please ask everybody to be cooperative if you get a call on contact tracing. I'm happy to report that the contact tracers are now currently up to date. They are contacting persons from yesterday today which I don't think we've been at that point throughout the whole pandemic. So, we're very pleased with the robust efforts and the state's support and Unified Command's support and city's support in getting contact tracers to help us with that ongoing process. So, we are up to date and it's very important that if you are contacted that you give as much information as you can to the contact tracers. That's our means of being able to determine people that have been exposed and the need for them to be quarantined and avoid propagation of the disease in the community.

I'm happy to report also that the second doses of Moderna vaccine that the Health Department had given out, there's 200 doses that were given out 3-4 weeks ago now. Those doses are in. Those of you that had received an initial dose are aware of who you are and that you have a scheduled appointment for follow up. Please keep that appointment and you will get your vaccine for your second dose.

The Health Department is not intending to be getting any more first doses. The Health Department is working with the Unified Command and through the Horseshoe Arena and other means of distributing vaccine. The Health Department's website will link you to the Midland Health website to enable you to get onto the waiting list for the Horseshoe Arena. We are currently still focusing upon 1A and 1B individuals and ask for patience from the community as we move through that body of more vulnerable persons and then we can move onto the mass vaccination of the greater community.

I think those were the main points that I was going to make today, and I'll entertain any questions.

Moderator: Alright, Dr. Wilson. We'll give them just a second to see if they have anything. Stewart with the MRT does say thank you for getting November's numbers updated.



Dr. Wilson: You're welcome.

Moderator: Alright. That's it. Thank you, Dr. Wilson.

Dr. Wilson: Thank you.