



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, February 16th, 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 and a little bit about what's going on at the hospital to begin with. We have 210 total patients in the hospital. We are down to 22 COVID positive patients. 10 of those in Critical Care and 12 in the COVID Medical Unit.

As you'll hear from everyone today the weather is wreaking havoc on our work. One of the things that we are experiencing is a number of patients who have come to the hospital and wouldn't otherwise need to be here except that they need oxygen and the lack of power in their homes has made it difficult for their oxygen generators to work so, we've boarded a few patients overnight and expect to continue to have to do that while the power remains unreliable. But otherwise, we are in pretty good shape as the census has been in a small, but steady decline especially among the COVID population over the last few days. And we are in a reasonable place to take care of people. We of course have staffing challenges as people have difficulty getting to work as power's off in their homes. So, that makes things a little bit more difficult, but the census is at a reasonable point right now. 145 visits to the ER yesterday and we have 17 patients using ventilators.

On testing, we did not test yesterday. We have the West Campus testing site open today. Testing demand is way down. The percentage positive last week and so far with just a few patients tested through the ER this week, we've been under 10% both weeks in terms of positives. So, it appears that the COVID population is declining here in this community.

Moving on to vaccines, there's a lot to talk about there. Yesterday was to have been the startup of the Golf Course Road Church of Christ vaccination site. Of course, we lost that day. But we are going to be live there today. Beginning at 1:00pm this afternoon, we are going to run 1:00pm to 4:00pm and do an initial soft start at that site. Only people with appointments for first doses should be going to the Golf Course Road Church site. We've moved our first dose vaccination process to Golf Course Road and turned the Horseshoe into an exclusively second dose site. The Horseshoe is open this morning starting at 10:00am, running its regular hours and doing exclusively second doses for people who got their first doses there are the Horseshoe 3 weeks ago.

We are having significant challenges with communication. Our phone lines at the hospital have been unreliable including the 221-4VAX phone number which we ask people to call for vaccination information, to change an appointment, etc. and so if you have an appointment for a second dose at the Horseshoe and you cannot make your appointment, if it's today and travel's not safe for you or for whatever the reason might be, you do not need to call us to reschedule, just come on sometime this week when you can. Just for this week, we are asking people who have a scheduled second dose at the Horseshoe to either keep the appointment you have or if you cannot, come some other time this week during our working hours of 10:00am to 5:00pm. First doses as I said are starting up at Golf Course Road by appointment only this week.



One of the things we're seeing is that the demand for vaccine has begun to slump just a little bit. Some of that I'm sure has to do with the weather, but we're encouraging people to get on the waiting list, sign up for a vaccination, and you will get an appointment pretty soon if you do so. We want to be fairly broad in our definition of those people who are eligible for vaccination. Of course, anyone over 65 is the starting point. We are struggling to get enough good information about all of the vaccine that has been delivered in the community, but we think we're not much more than about a third of the over 65 population that's been touched so far by vaccination. So, if you're over 65 this is the time to get on the list and come get your vaccination. Don't wait. The only reason to wait is if you've had COVID within the last 2 weeks and have recovered then, otherwise come on and get your vaccination.

We are asking anybody who's a caregiver of any kind to sign up and come on. That's every type of caregiver in the community including people who are at home, who are working with a family member who's sick, and are a full time or even a part time caregiver in the home for those people. You don't have to be a professional, you don't have to work for a caregiving organization, if you are a caregiver of any kind you are eligible to get a vaccine and we encourage you to sign up.

Chronic disease - The state's list includes about 10 different chronic disease states, but it specifically says that that's not an exclusive list and you should talk to your provider if you have some other chronic disease that's not on the list and can be considered for vaccine. We are encouraging anybody with any chronic disease to sign up for the waiting list and come on out and get your vaccine, whatever it is, whether it's on that list or not, we want you to sign up and come on.

One of the things on the list is obesity. The threshold for obesity is pretty low and probably lower than most of us realize. If you have a Body Mass Index or a BMI of 30 or more you are qualified and that's taking into account people my size and I'm not small by any stretch of the imagination, but my BMI's pretty close to 30. So, if you look like me or are bigger than me then you are eligible and you should come on, sign up, and get on the waiting list for a vaccine.

Public service workers - We have stretched our definition to include all types of public service workers, city and county workers. We had an inquiry from the courts yesterday. Courthouse workers, bailiffs, jail personnel, and police officers, of course we've done already and they're still welcome if we've missed anyone. School personnel, you are public service workers, and we want you to come on, sign up. We've gotten many of our school personnel vaccinated already, but we will do more if you'll go ahead and sign up and get on the list. And if you're in those categories, please be sure that you're prepared to bring your badge, some proof of who you work for and what you do, but we want to expand the definition of who's eligible now and encourage anyone who's remotely close to one of those categories to sign up and we'll get you vaccinated.

I think that's all that I have to tell you today, but I'll be happy to take questions.

Moderator: We don't have any in the chat, so we'll give them just a second to see if they want to raise their hand. Tasa, do you have Facebook questions?

Tasa Richardson, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: I do have one question.

Moderator: Ok.



Tasa: What resources are available for homebound patients that are without power and require electricity for equipment?

Mr. Meyers: Well, there's a variety of resources and I think if the County is on, they have been doing the coordination of the warming sites at the shelters, so I might suggest that we hold that question for later. But if you are dependent on oxygen, if you have a health-related concern that is exacerbated, is made worse by the lack of power in your home, you can always come to our Emergency Department (ED) for care. We have brought in some patients who really are not sick but are dependent on oxygen and we've housed them in the hospital pending the resolution of power issues at their homes. Now, obviously our capability of doing that is limited. We don't want to fill the hospital with people who don't need to be in the hospital, so if you have other shelter opportunities where power is available, we would encourage you to take advantage of those. But as your last resort, if your health is dependent on power and you can't manage it otherwise, come to our ED and we'll take care of you and help you to find the resources you need to keep your health intact.

Tasa: That's all the Facebook questions, Erin.

Moderator: Ok. The next question comes from Caitlin Randle with the MRT. She asks, "How many patients have you seen for extreme cold?"

Mr. Meyers: If we're talking about hypothermia patients, we haven't seen any that we're aware of. The only patients we've seen are those for whom there's a power concern at their home and they've had to come in because they're dependent on some power operated equipment.

Moderator: The next question comes from Mitch with Marfa Public Radio. He asks, "How long does MMH plan on running its 2 mass vaccination clinics?"

Mr. Meyers: That's a really good question that I can't answer. As you probably know, the state allocates vaccine a week at a time. We get a general indication. We get a pattern that we can observe of the state's allocation program, but we don't get anything but next week's allocation. So, as long as the state continues to send us what is about 1,000 vials a week, just under 1,000 vials a week for first doses, then we'll keep giving them. And not only giving them here locally, but also distributing to our partners around the region. Because we're now into a cycle where we are giving both first doses and second doses every day, we have determined that it makes sense to keep those segregated. So, first doses happen at the Golf Course Road site this week and for the next two, while second doses are happening at the Horseshoe. Once we've done 3 weeks of that, then we'll flip, and we'll go back to first doses at the Horseshoe and second doses at the Golf Course Road site with the philosophy being you go back to the place you got your first dose. So, we minimize the confusion for our patients. We'll keep doing that as long as there is vaccine available to us and people to vaccinate. But those are big ifs. We don't know how to predict that other than what the state tells us week to week.

Moderator: The next question comes from Sammi with NewsWest9. She asks, "How is the weather impacting getting the vaccine," and "Why did you guys decide to move forward with the vaccine clinic today despite the weather?"

Mr. Meyers: Well, we've got power at both sites. We've been out on the road some today. There's ice, there's snow, but you can move around the community and we think it's vital that while we have this



resource, this vaccine we get it in people's arms as soon as we can. The weather set us back yesterday. We lost a full day's worth of work, but we're not going to lose anymore days than we have to because the disease is still out there and the best weapon we have against it is the vaccine. We're going to do everything we can to avoid delaying. Of course, we're subject to power loss. You know, if we lose power at the Horseshoe and/or at Golf Course we'll have to shut down until the power comes back on. We are very dependent on that. But we're going to keep trudging on just like what we do everyday at the hospital. We don't close the doors here because the weather's bad and the same thing is true of the public health outreach we are doing with the vaccination program.

Moderator: Another question from Mitch. He asks, "Could you go into more detail on the decline in vaccination demand? Has it been a severe drop off? If demand is going down locally will more doses be sent to rural communities?"

Mr. Meyers: Well, I think it's a short-lived phenomenon, but I think because the state has defined the 1A and 1B populations pretty narrowly, as we seek out people who are both in those eligible populations and willing to be vaccinated; that continues to be, you know, part of our challenge; those numbers are going to slowly trend down. We've got people scheduled every day this week and into next week. So, it certainly isn't anywhere near zero. But we've seen a lessening of demand and so we want to encourage people to sign up and also stretch the limits of those definitions as much as we can so we can get as many people as possible to come in. Now, as of today, giving more vaccine doses to the rural communities is essentially on hold. Because we were supposed to get our vaccine for this week, it normally comes on Monday. Monday was a holiday. Of course, we've had the awful weather that's affected us and so we now know that at best case our vaccine for this week will come tomorrow. We only have enough in hand to do the first doses that we have scheduled through tomorrow. So, if the vaccine doesn't show up on time, we may even be forced to consider suspending the Golf Course Road site until it arrives. Once the vaccine is in hand, we have a tentative plan for distribution of some of the vaccine to the communities around us, but we don't want to commit that to them or internally until we know that the vaccine is in hand. Timing is in question, but I'm hopeful that by the end of this week we'll be able to give a fairly significant amount of vaccine doses to multiple of our partners in the region.

Moderator: We'll give them just a second to see if there's any follow up questions.

Russell, thank you.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you.

Moderator: And now we will turn it over to Dr. Wilson as the local Health Authority for the Midland Health Department.

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. There's over 16,000 current cases of COVID in the community. There's 1,320 isolating and 12,000 recovered. Under investigation over 2,200. And there's about 400 that we're unable to locate. 230 persons have died from COVID. The numbers that I'm providing to you today are from Thursday of last week. Along with everyone else, we've been having weather related communication issues and capturing of data so we're a little bit backed up on that information.



Speaking to that specifically, the Health Department has been compromised a bit with the weather with power outages as well as communication issues. I just received a text from the administrative leader over there that there now without phone service. So, their ability to communicate is compromised to some degree. They do have storage of all the resources, everything is moving ok, but it's cold and their communications are down.

One other note I think that's a positive note is that our flu in the community remains very, very low. Here at our hospital, there is still not 1 reported positive flu through our ED.

I believe that's the information I have to share with you today and I'll entertain any questions.

Moderator: Thanks, Dr. Wilson. We'll give them just a second.

Alright, thank you.

Dr. Wilson: Ok. I do have one other point. I think Sammi asked a question that was not completely answered about the availability of vaccine to our community. The latest word that we've heard I believe is that Wednesday would be the next time that we would be receiving vaccine. Of course, that's still going to be dependent on how the weather and power grids continue to be up and down. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you.