



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, February 23rd, 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. Our numbers at the hospital today, a census of 219 as we continue to run a higher-than-normal overall census. The COVID census has continued to decline. We're at 23 today. We've been hanging around the 20s even in the high teens for several days now. Only 8 of those patients on ventilators, a total of 23 patients on ventilators anywhere in the hospital. 134 patients in the Emergency Department (ED) yesterday as those volumes continue to be down from historical rates.

Testing demand has gone way down. Last week we had fewer than 500 tests. Of course, last week's weather was a big factor in all that. This week it appears to be going up just a little bit as does the percentage positive just a touch. We'll watch that closely and see if any trends develop. We are down to only one testing site at the West Campus today, but the demand has been so low that we still have plenty of capacity. So, if you believe that you need a test, if you have symptoms, you've been exposed, if you have any other reason why you want a test please call 68NURSE. They'll schedule you and ask you to come to the West Campus for a nasopharyngeal swab and a test. We're doing that every day.

The biggest story continues to be our vaccination program. As you all know, we are now live on two sites. The Golf Course Road Church of Christ is giving first doses this week and next week. We have had a little bit of a decline in demand. I suspect a lot of it due to last week's weather events and the difficulty people had in communicating and getting out, but I would encourage you if have not had a vaccine yet, you want one, you are in any of the categories that are eligible, you're over 65, if you have any kind of chronic disease, if you have a body mass index of 30 or greater which is not particularly high but technically meets that criteria, and we have expanded a little bit beyond healthcare workers to all kinds of essential public health/service workers. That includes people who work for the city and the county, the police force, the fire department, teachers, and school district personnel. So, if you have any question about whether you might qualify for a vaccine, please go to our website www.midlandhealth.org/vaccine. Look at the criteria, sign up if you possibly can, and we'll get you in and get you vaccinated.

Last week, we had a good deal of delivery challenge. We didn't get any vaccine delivered during the winter storm event, but as of yesterday we are fully caught up. We got last week's allocation of first and second doses and this week's allocation of first and second doses. So, we have plenty of vaccine. We'll be talking today about distributing some of that vaccine to the counties around us who are not on a regular allocation schedule which is a part of our responsibility as a vaccination hub. So, we think we'll be able to get a substantial supply not only of the second doses that we owe the counties around us, but also a new round of first doses perhaps as soon as today. The team, staff from Midland Health, staff from Fire and EMS, along with volunteers are going back on the road tomorrow to Garden City. This is their second visit there where they'll be delivering about 200 second doses to the people who got first doses there 3 weeks ago. Next week, the tour will return to Ft. Davis and Marfa to do the same thing in



those two communities to catch up those second doses. And, as I said, we'll also be giving some doses to communities who can handle their own administration in the counties in our region.

Later today, we'll be talking about what our plans are for the weeks ahead. One of the challenges we'll be facing is that our friends from Team Rubicon, the volunteer group that's been such a great asset to us in directing traffic and helping with logistics and providing meals to the teams every day, Team Rubicon's commitment originally was for 6 weeks. We're in week 5 now. So, they'll be here through next week and then beyond that we've asked them if they are able and willing to stay, but we don't know if they can. And assuming that we'll need to ramp up the volunteer effort, I would encourage you all to consider volunteering at the vaccination sites. Non-clinical people is what we are talking about. We've handled the clinical side pretty well with students and staff from the hospital and retired nurse volunteers and all kinds of folks who've been willing to help out, but we'll need a few non-clinical people to help with logistics. Tasa, if you would put up on the screen the vaccine volunteer email address. voxvolunteers@midlandhealth.org I would encourage you if you have a little bit of time, you don't have to do it every day, but anytime that you might be available in the coming weeks we'll be more than happy to get because we need more volunteers to help keep the lines moving. By all accounts, the process has been very efficient, very well run at each of the vaccination sites. We are getting lots of good feedback, but we're very dependent on our volunteers to help make that happen. So, we hope that many more in our community will step up and volunteer as those needs grow in the weeks ahead. I think that's all I have. I'll be happy to take questions.

Moderator: Alright, Russell, I don't have any from the media yet. Tasa, do you have any Facebook questions?

Tasa Richardson, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: No Facebook questions at this time.

Moderator: Alright, Sammi has raised her hand. Sammi, go ahead.

Sammi Steele, NewsWest9: Good morning, everybody. I have a question about this Phase 1C. So, the state hasn't officially announced who is in Phase 1C, but it's my understanding that Midland and Odessa have opened up the vaccine to quite a few more people. Can you dive into, you know it was transportation and logistics, energy, communication, media, law—Can you dive into that criteria that people can now meet to get the vaccine?

Mr. Meyers: Well, we have not officially gone to Phase 1C. As you know, the state acknowledged this week earlier that they are beginning to talk about Phase 1C. And what they included were people over 50 and it's the 50 – 64 population who've actually had the greatest mortality from the COVID-19 virus. So, that's a sensible one. They are also talking about a wide variety of categories of essential workers, but there's been no official pronouncement from the state's vaccine allocation panel just yet on moving to 1C. What we've done, I can't speak to what's happening in Odessa, but what we've done here in Midland is recognize that the 1A and 1B categories have begin to wane just a little bit, the demand from those groups as we get closer to vaccinating all of those who are willing in those groups. And so, we've been slowing inching our way outward from the state's official definitions to populations that are close to meeting the criteria or actually do meet the criteria but need some further emphasis like people with all kinds of chronic diseases. One of the questions we get most often is: if my disease isn't on the list of 9 or 10 that the state published, am I still qualified? Yes, you are. The state's list actually says that it's not intended to be an exhaustive list of chronic conditions and you should talk to your provider about



your chronic condition. We've encouraged people with all kinds of chronic conditions to sign up and come in because we have the supply. We have a good bit of experience with assisting teachers and firefighters and police officers throughout the process. We've considered them to be essential workers and each of them really to have a healthcare component to their work. We've added people who are caring for a relative or a family member in the home even if you don't have a license or official training, if you're in the caregiving business, if you are in a caregiving role every day then you qualify as a caregiver and we want you to come on out. We've pushed the definition of the essential workforce a little bit and encouraged people who work in transportation and in the courts and in other places that are essential to the community to go ahead and sign up because we have the supply right now. But I'm hopeful that perhaps as soon as next week we'll hear from the state about the expansion to group 1C and specifically who the state intends to include in that so we can expand our definition even further.

Sammi: Great. And I mean I know you can't speak for the state, but why do you think it is taking so long to announce that Phase 1C?

Mr. Meyers: Well, I think the—Recognize that the state of Texas is a massive organism, and it includes sparsely populated rural areas like mostly all of West Texas, but it includes huge densely populated cities, several of them. And in those cities, I think they are still struggling to get the 1A and 1B populations covered. There's still ample demand in those populations and so the state folks are trying to balance and have one rule that applies across all different types of communities and it's hard to do that. We all have our different needs and different demographic characteristics. So, I think they are doing their best to strike the balance, but they are probably more influenced by the situation in the big cities than they are those of us out here in West Texas.

Sammi: Yeah, that makes sense. Awesome. Thank you.

Moderator: The next question comes from Mitch. He asks, "Did MMH get approval from the state when the decision was made to expand the groups of people it will distribute the vaccine to?"

Mr. Meyers: We haven't asked the state for approval to change the rules and I would argue that we haven't changed the rules. We've stretched them a little bit. For the most part, the work we've done with giving vaccines to people who are beyond 1A and 1B has happened on days when we've had no-shows, when we've had more vaccine ready to go and potentially being wasted and so we've found populations who were willing and able and if not perfectly matching the state's rules they were close. And that's essentially what we're continuing expanding upon. So, I don't feel like we're overtly breaking the rules. We do look forward to the state expanding the definitions so we can do even more in the days ahead.

Moderator: And now Tasa has a few Facebook questions for you.

Tasa: Will Stanton be giving vaccines on Wednesday? We are scheduled for our second.

Mr. Meyers: Yeah, I have talked to the people at Martin County Hospital District last week. I know they had some difficulty with the weather last week, but I would encourage you to call them directly. I don't have the exact information about their plans. So, I wouldn't be a reliable source. Please do call Martin County Hospital District directly to find out about Martin County.



Tasa: Is there any possibility to expand the criteria to receive the monoclonal antibody treatment for those testing positive?

Mr. Meyers: Yeah, the monoclonal antibody treatment has been a real boon. It's worked very well. Very few people have been hospitalized after receiving it. But this is a different animal. The FDA has a very, very specific and tight criteria for this Emergency Use Authorization for the antibody infusion and we do not feel that we are empowered to stretch those rules beyond what the FDA has published. We are hopeful that one day soon hopefully they will expand those criteria, but they haven't yet. So, if you're over 55, you have a chronic disease, and you're recently positive with no severe symptoms, no hospitalization yet, no dependence on oxygen. Lots of people do quality and almost 500 have received the infusion so far, but we don't feel that we have the authority to expand those criteria beyond what the FDA has stated.

Tasa: Erin, that's all the Facebook questions we have.

Moderator: Russell, we don't have any further media questions. Thank you.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you.