



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, March 9th, 2021

Transcribed from a previously recorded live event.

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

Russell Meyers, CEO Midland Health: (Audio starts mid sentence) Giving a little context, I think you all know if you listened to our press event last week that we did not intend to have a gathering of the Unified Command Team today, but in light of the governor's recent decision to lift the statewide mask mandate and to fully re-open Texas as the numbers get better, we thought it was worthwhile to spend just a few minutes with you putting that into context and offering some advice on how we should behave at least for the foreseeable future.

So, if I might start off just to give you a sense of where we are, the numbers are declining. The hospital census today is as low as it's been in a long time with only 15 COVID patients. That's roughly six percent of the hospital's capacity. And you may remember that one of our magic numbers along the way has been 15% of capacity to consider us in a difficult position and to illustrate the need for community restrictions on movement and social distancing requirements and that sort of thing. So, things are getting better. The numbers of people who need a test are going down. The percentage positive of the tests that we're doing in our testing site has been consistently under 10% for a while now and vaccine administration is going very well. By the end of the day today, we will have given about 58,000 doses of vaccine in our employee health department for our own employees, in our mass vaccination sites to mostly Midland residents, but really all comers who register on our site and meet the state's criteria, and also in the communities around us to whom we've distributed from our vaccine supply that's been allocated to us as a hub. So, we've delivered a lot of vaccine. A lot of people in our community are now vaccinated. 27,000/28,000 Midlanders have gotten at least 1 dose as well as people from all over the region.

So, there's a lot of good news, but I think it's very important to reinforce a couple of things. Number 1, the Governor lifted the mask mandate, allowed businesses to reopen, but he didn't say, in fact he emphasized throughout his talk, that people should continue to wear masks, continue to social distance. The state's not going to require us to do that anymore, but that doesn't make it any less important or any less valuable as public health advice. So, we are here today to ask our community to continue to stay the course for the foreseeable future. I'd like to think it's only a few weeks to two or three months, but I don't know that yet. We'll have a better sense of that as we get to the other side of spring break, as we deliver more vaccinations, as we get more guidance from the CDC, as they slowly open up and loosen their guidelines. You may have seen here recently that for fully vaccinated people the CDC has issued some new recommendations allowing for a little bit more social gathering and just slightly moving away from the stringent social distancing requirements that we've lived with for the past year. But those are not mandates, those are not blessings to go out and party and enjoy a normal life with



everyone in your community. We're just simply not there yet. One important thing that I think we've recognized this flu season has been that the wearing of masks has virtually eliminated transmission of the flu. We've had virtually no flu show up in the hospital and by this time of the year that's an extraordinary event so, it illustrates two things. Number 1, that masks work against the flu, and number 2, the corollary to that is that it illustrates how contagious the COVID vaccine is. If it's preventing us from transmitting the flu, mask wearing is preventing us from transmitting the flu, and yet it's failing to fully protect us from transmitting COVID, that's a very, very contagious virus that we all should continue to respect.

I'll remind you that the vaccine continues to be available. You can check out our website at www.midlandhealth.org/vaccine. You can call 221-4VAX and get yourself on the waiting list to get a vaccine if you're eligible. We're delivering both first and second doses now at the Horseshoe every weekday. And I read today that the state is getting closer to announcing its decisions on the 1C group, expanding availability of vaccine. I'm hopeful we may hear about that as soon as later this week or next week and we'll be able to communicate that to the larger community.

So, with that I will be happy to take questions if anybody has one.

Moderator: Tasa, do you have any Facebook questions while we wait for media?

Tasa: We don't have any Facebook questions at this time.

Moderator: Ok. Media members, remember you can raise your hand if you don't want to type it out. Alright, Russell, that might be a first.

Mr. Meyers: I think it is. Thank you very much.

Moderator: With that we will turn it over to Dr. Wilson with the— Oh, we just got one for you, but Dr. Wilson, you might be able to answer it as well. So, Dr. Wilson who's speaking as the local health authority for the Midland Health Department.

Dr. Larry Wilson, Midland Health Department: Thank you, Erin. The case count have continued to decrease for us as well with the Health Department which we're very pleased with. For the last 3 days, there have been fewer than 20 new cases documented in Midland each day which is very impressive and very much improved from what we've seen historically. There was though in the last week another death reported to bring our total death count in Midland County to 241 which is a sober reminder to all of us that COVID is still real, it's still here present with us and our mitigation, our mask wearing, our care with one another can help decrease the transmission to the vulnerable people that are going to be at risk of dying of this disease. We still have a ways to go before we get to the point where we're past that.



As Russell mentioned and I'll reiterate too, the biggest thing we can be doing right now is getting shots on arms and getting people vaccinated. I think Midland Health with the Health Department and others are going to be trying to get across to the population that's been reluctant to get shots that's there's very little to no risk in getting vaccinated and far more benefit to be gained by being vaccinated and protecting yourself and others from the risk and getting to the point of herd immunity going forward. That's really the game plan. That's the goal for all of us.

As was also been reported already, the governor's lifting the mandate for masking and the sort of legal consequences of not mask wearing is not the same thing as saying that we are through this and we can go back to normal business to be able to practice normal lifestyle and to be going shopping and to restaurants, etc. If we maintain the care with social distancing and mask wearing we are going to be safe and we hope we can continue to do that. So, with that I'll answer any questions.

Moderator: This question came in right as Russell was walking out, but they ask, how many have received their second dose?

Dr. Wilson: Russell might know that. I don't know exactly how many have received their second dose. We're north of 20,000 that have received doses. And how many of those have received their second dose I don't think we have that number right now. We can get that for you though.

Moderator: We'll give them just a second, Dr. Wilson. Alright, Dr. Wilson, thank you.

Dr. Wilson: Ok, thanks very much.