



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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 this is a little bit of data from the hospital. Today, we have a total census of 185 in the hospital. We haven't been below 200 consistently in a long time, so things are beginning to come down as we get into the warmer weather. 17 total COVID patients today. 8 of those in Critical Care. 9 in the Medical Unit. Only 5 of those COVID patients are on ventilators and there's a total of 18 patients on ventilators throughout the hospital. Emergency Department (ED) traffic was up considerably yesterday at 187 visits in the ED.

Our testing volume has really sort of bottomed out in the 600 or so per week range here for the last 4 weeks or so and the percentages that are coming back positive have been consistently below 6% now for the 4<sup>th</sup> week in a row. So, we are beginning to see less disease incidence in the community as more and more people either have had the virus or have been vaccinated and that's a really positive trend we hope to continue.

In terms of events that are happening now, the one material thing happening at the state level is the expiration of the Department of State Health Service's rules on hospital visitation. Those are expiring today and so the state is leaving hospitals to make our own decisions about visitation limits and masking requirements and those kinds of things. We have our Internal Steering Committee meeting tomorrow to talk about what if any changes we would want to make to our visitation policies. I would expect that if they choose to make any changes, they'll be minor. We will expect to continue to require masking, continue to require screening at the entry points to the hospital, limit those entry points, etc. But we'll have more to talk about the next time that we meet. If any changes happen of any significance, we'll get those out on social media and out to the press once we've determined what changes we would like to make.

The last thing I'd like to focus on is vaccines. We have had, I think, a very, very successful vaccine roll out so far. We've delivered either in our own facilities with personnel from the Unified Command Team or in regional partner facilities to whom we've allocated vaccine now over 70,000 doses of vaccine. By my count, about 64,000 of those have been delivered right here in Midland in various settings, mostly at the Horseshoe and our other mass vaccination efforts. But we are beginning to see a pretty significant decline in demand and so we hope to do some more things to make vaccine accessible to people in the coming days and more than anything else to remind people of its availability, of its safety profile, which is excellent, of the fact that the vaccines are working and are available for those people who have been hesitant, who have waited for whatever reason. There really is no longer any reason to wait to get your vaccine and we want to continue to deliver that message in every possible venue. Given that, I'd like to show you something, a tool that we've created with the help of a couple of local professionals to speak to our community about the safety profile of the vaccine and reinforce the importance of getting your vaccine as soon as you can. So, Tasa, I'll ask you to play that video and I'll come back to answer questions.



--Midland Health Video plays. Transcript of video follows--

Stephanie Moses, Ph.D., Assistant Professor Behavioral Medicine at TTUHSC: The COVID-19 vaccine was developed very, very quickly and that is alarming for a lot of people. I have to admit it was alarming for myself as well. But after listening to the experts talk about the process of developing the vaccine and the efforts put into it and the testing done from it, the clinical trials done, I think that we can rest assured that it is safe.

Lyden Odukwu, M.D., Family Medicine: I encourage family members and friends to get the vaccine because it will keep them healthy and their family and their neighbors, too or people they come around. And also, the sooner everybody gets vaccinated, the sooner things can go back to normal.

Dr. Moses: I did get the vaccine. I have to admit when it was first available to me, I paused. I questioned, I considered it. I really considered taking the vaccine because it was some of the first vaccine given out in our community and I know a lot of people were very cognizant of that and wanted to wait and see the effects. But when I started weighing the costs and the benefits I'm a mother of four and my kids can't afford for me to be sick and go down for that long and the uncertainty of what would happen if I did catch COVID as many people in the African American community have underlying health conditions. I have hypertension. I have asthma. And it was important to me to be able to safely predict that if I did get the vaccine the side effects would be minimal at best and definitely more predictable than if I actually caught the virus. I do believe the COVID vaccine is safe and effective. The technology advancements that we have today make me feel very, very comfortable and I believe in science. When our leading officials in the community and at the state and local level as well as the national level say it's safe and effective and they're willing to take it and they back it up by science then I trust it. I believe it.

Dr. Odukwu: What I would like to add is that everybody has a role to play in getting rid of this virus and not expect, you know, the doctor or the government to do everything. And if you get your vaccine you are actively playing a role in stopping this virus that has changed everybody's life in the last year. So, get vaccinated and you have done your job.

Dr. Moses: I do support the decision of the NMA. I am a member of the NMA. I have presented at several of their conferences nationwide and I trust and believe in that community. And a community that looks like us and also believes in science and has some brilliant leading experts in the community as well it makes me extremely confident in their support of the COVID-19 vaccine. I believe that when we have people that are in the front lines, in the trenches doing the work that we can identify with and that look like us and are part of our communities. And they are saying it's ok and we have to start to trust in the medicine, in the science that goes behind the practice of medicine.

--End of video--

Mr. Meyers: Two things I'd like to highlight from that quickly if I might. Number 1, you heard Dr. Moses refer to the NMA. That's the National Medical Association, the country's largest organization of African American physicians who have strongly endorsed the vaccines. And then to highlight Dr. Odukwu's last statement, "Get the vaccine and you've done your job." It's one thing you can do that can make a difference to the community. And you have complete control of whether you choose to get a vaccine or not. If you're 16 years of age or older in Midland, TX you can get a vaccine today. You can get one tomorrow. You are eligible and we can make it very easy for you to get vaccinated. You can go to our



website at [www.midlandhealth.org/vaccine](http://www.midlandhealth.org/vaccine) to sign up. You can call us at 221-4VAX. Either way, we'll get you an appointment probably within a day or so and we can make it very, very simple for you. So, please do get vaccinated if you haven't yet and I'll be happy to take questions.

Moderator: We have two from Stewart. The first one is, please address the fewest number of confirmed cases in a week since June. What should Midland County residents make of that?

Mr. Meyers: Well, I would say Dr. Wilson's going to be up here in a minute and you could ask him the same question if you'd like, but my first thoughts are that we've had thousands of people who've been infected and have antibodies to the disease from having a COVID infection. We have thousands of people who have had both doses of the vaccine both here in Midland and around the region. We are continuing to follow our mitigation practices. The things that we have available to us, the tools we are using are working and we really are at a critical moment here where those things are all coming together. We have just a little bit more time to do the masking and social distancing strategies to try to push this all the way to zero and I think we have ample evidence that those things work, and we need to stay the course.

Moderator: His next question is what did you think of the school district's decision to continue with the current mask policy?

Mr. Meyers: Well, I think the school district has been very thoughtful about considering its options and you'll get a chance to talk to Dr. Atkins in a minute if you'd like to ask her. But, I think it's consistent with what we've been saying that masking and social distancing strategies work. That it's too soon for us to lift those expectations. We are not lifting them here in the hospital among our workforce or our visitors and patients and so I think at least through the end of the school year there's ample evidence and prudence in staying the course and continuing what we know has been working. So, I have no criticism whatsoever for the school district's decision making. I think it's been thoughtful and considered the reality of where we are.

Moderator: Next question comes from Danny. He asks, "If someone from Mexico has family in Midland can they get the COVID vaccine here?"

Mr. Meyers: Yes. We have no restrictions on—The state's been very clear on this. We've asked them the question several times. There are no geographic restrictions to getting vaccinations at any site in Texas. So, if you can produce some form of ID and you're willing to tell us about yourself including where you live then we will put a shot in your arm even if you're from Mexico. And there are a handful. I think we may have had 10, 12, less than 20 people with Mexico addresses who have been vaccinated so far. There are 2 or 3 other countries represented. People who are in Midland for one reason or another and we didn't let their home country prevent us from giving them vaccine. Probably 5 or 6 other states have been represented among the people we've given vaccines to. So, we're not discriminating. If you're here and you're eligible, we'll give you the vaccine.

Moderator: Next question comes from Mitch. He asks, "Is MMH planning on expanding who it will administer the vaccine to like it did previously? If so, who is the hospital considering opening up shots to?"



Mr. Meyers: There's no body left to open to-- We are wide open now. If you're—You know, the only restriction we have at this point is age. The vaccine is not approved for anyone under 16 years of age and so we will not give the vaccine to anyone under 16. But if you're 16 years of age or older, we've removed the restrictions at this point. You can get on our waiting list, get registered, make an appointment, and get a shot.

Moderator: And Tasa, do you want to ask your Facebook question?

Tasa Richardson, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: Yes. Can a patient coming in for a colonoscopy next Monday have a companion with them?

Mr. Meyers: Oh, the Endoscopy has been the one area where we have continued to limit visitation because we have very limited waiting space. When you come in for a day surgery procedure, we put you in a room and your family can stay there in the room while you go off to the operating room and then come back. We don't have a like environment for endoscopy patients. So, the short answer is still no. I'm sure that's one of the areas we'll look closely at as we consider expansion of visitation policies. But we haven't changed them any yet. So, for now for Endoscopy we are not allowing that visitor to attend. (Comments off camera, not heard) If you have a special request call—Who should they call? (asking someone off camera) Call Endoscopy. If you have a special need for whatever reason you are concerned about do call Endoscopy and they'll see if they can make a special arrangement for you. But routinely, we are not allowing visitors in that particular area.

Tasa: Thank you. That's all the Facebook questions we have.

Moderator: The next question is, can you talk about how long someone needs to wait to get the vaccine after having COVID?

Mr. Meyers: I think Dr. Wilson's going to come up next and I'll let him answer that one.

Moderator: Ok.

Mr. Meyers: He'll be much more likely to give you the correct answer.

Moderator: Then that's all we have for you, Russell. Thank you.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you.

Moderator: And with that we will turn it over to Dr. Wilson, the local health authority for the Midland Health Department.

Dr. Larry Wilson (Vice President, Medical Affairs Midland Health): Thank you, Erin. Morning. I'm going to go through a few of the numbers from the health department this morning first. The overall case count is 16,852 of whom 14,876 have recovered. There's 924 persons in isolation. 572 that are currently being investigated. 247 deaths in Midland County since the beginning of the pandemic. As Russell had mentioned and Midland Health has mentioned, the case counts seem to be down currently. We've had in the last week single digit new cases every day except for two of those dates. It's been a very remarkable reduction in cases over the last month or so that we're very, very pleased to see. A little bit of a pop in the hospital census of COVID today, but overall, we've been 15 and under for a considerable amount of time now. It's been very, very good so we're very happy about that. We truly



believe it's related to the number of people that have had the infection previously and have some degree of immunity from that and the really remarkable vaccination effort that we've all made and everybody that's been vaccinated has contributed to. I want to emphasize that as Russell mentioned

there's been over 60,000 vaccines administered, shots on arms administered. Over 30,000 people in Midland County has been fully vaccinated. We've had not a single significant reaction that's been documented at all. You can look at the numbers across the country. You can look at the numbers specifically in Midland County and I don't think there's an argument for saying this is not a safe vaccine. And the opportunity for successfully opening up with complete relaxation only exists if we reach that point of herd immunity. So, we are cautiously optimistic about where we stand today, but I really encourage everybody to please go out and get vaccinated. It's safe. It's the right thing to do for the community. It's the right thing to do for your family members, etc. So, if you're eligible which is basically everybody over 16, sign up and get vaccinated. With that I'll take any questions.

Moderator: Stewart asks the same question to you. What did you think of the school districts decision to continue with the current mask policy?

Dr. Wilson: I spoke with at least one of their leading health persons within MISD last week about that. I fully endorse what her recommendations were and that's what they concluded. I think it's the right thing to do for the time being. As the mayor said, we've come to this point by virtue of doing the right thing. Let's hang in there for a few more weeks. I think it's not going to be much longer before we can start having a more relaxed policy among our public our Unified Command folks. We are very, very close, but we need to get more people vaccinated before I'm going to feel comfortable being unmasked in public forums. Within our population that we have in the hospital, we've had some conversations and we'll continue to have some conversations regarding those that have been vaccinated congregating and having meetings, etc. in a more relaxed fashion. And I think that would be our first steps moving that direction. If individuals chose to be vaccinated, I think you could take that more relaxed perspective going forward when we get to the point where we're ready to do that. I think what MISD is doing today is the right thing to do.

Moderator: And then can you talk about how long someone should wait to get the vaccine after they have COVID?

Dr. Wilson: At least two weeks after recovery.

Moderator: We'll give them just a bit to see if they have any others. Dr. Wilson, thank you.

Dr. Wilson: Thanks very much.