



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, April 27<sup>th</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. Hospital data today as the mayor said, things are looking relatively positive. We have a census today of 181 in total. A pretty high activity level for this time of year. Only 10 patients as of midnight were COVID patients, COVID positive inpatients. Two of those in Critical Care and 8 in the Medical Unit. We have another 6 patients who are, what we call, convalescing patients, patients who have been in the hospital a long time. We're managing the symptoms that resulted from their COVID infection, but we no longer consider them positive and keep them in isolation.

The Emergency Room (ER) traffic has picked up considerably. 195 patients yesterday. Headed back toward more normal activity levels for this time of year.

On the testing side, our testing volumes have been down at or below 600 patients a week for a while now, but in the most recently completed week we were 9.8% positive which is a bit of a tick up from the 5-6% we'd been running for a while now. So, we still do see disease in the community. We still have some patients in the hospital, but clearly the number of vaccines we've gotten out, the number of people who've been infected and developed some level of protection against the virus is making a difference in the virus's spread.

Speaking specifically about vaccine, the picture is changing for us this week. We have been operating at the Horseshoe with the assistance of the county's Emergency Management Team, Midland Fire and EMS, Midland Health Department. That operation has been a great success but is coming to a close. We are open every day this week from noon to 4:00pm accepting walk-ins, accepting people who have appointments. But come Friday afternoon at 4:00, we'll be closing the Horseshoe operation for good. That will be the end of that mass vaccination effort. As of today, we have either delivered ourselves or distributed to regional partners over 107,000 doses of the vaccine, primarily the Pfizer vaccine, a few J&J doses sprinkled in there. As we look forward, we got a few things going on to continue the vaccination effort. Number 1, we've built up quite an inventory of vaccine and we're working with the state to get that distributed a little further. We've been working with folks in El Paso and here recently and we'll send them another 7,000 doses later this week. But we have an ample supply to get through what we need to do here in Midland, especially as the demand for vaccine continues to decline in our community. Going forward, we have a couple of different ways we are going to deliver vaccine. From the hospital's perspective, our primary plan will be to get to businesses, to schools. We're going to our 2 Midland area high schools this week to vaccinate 16 and older students. We'll be talking to churches and perhaps doing weekend events there and in other community center environments. But moving away from the mass vaccination everyday effort to targeted populations that we can visit for an afternoon, vaccinate 50, 100, 200 people at a time and then move on to another convenient site. So, we appreciate this school district, the businesses locally who are cooperating with us and getting vaccine closer to their employees. We think while that's going to be a slower process, it's going to take longer to get more people vaccinated, we will continue the drumbeat of getting vaccination out, getting it in the



arms of people who are willing to take it, continuing to attempt to educate people who have doubts, who have questions about the vaccine. Those who are on the fence, we're going to continue to try to make it convenient and make full information accessible to them so they can make a good decision.

As we close our general availability site at the Horseshoe, it's really important to note that the state has been distributing vaccine to many, many different providers all over the community and all over the state really. And if you want to get a vaccine, if it's not convenient or appropriate for you to go to one of the many sites that we'll be supporting you can go to the state's website that has a vaccine tracker and find a place to get your vaccine. We will link to that from our own website in the vaccine information area. So, it's very easy to find a vaccine now. Supplies are abundant at local pharmacies, HEB and United grocery stores that have pharmacies in them have supplies, there are many places you can get a vaccine even after the Horseshoe operation closes.

The last thing to tell you is our vaccine success rate so far. The state's data are available on the state's vaccine tracking website as well and while they have a day or two lag, they're pretty close. The state reports this morning that in Midland County, 39,000 people have been fully vaccinated to date. That's right at 30% of the eligible population, people 16 and over who live in Midland County. We've gotten about 30% of them fully vaccinated. When you look at people who've received at least 1 dose, that's just short of 49,000 people or about 38% of the eligible population. So, progress has been good. It was very fast and furious in the beginning; the demand has gone way down here in the last few weeks as we've been accepting appointments for vaccine every day at the Horseshoe. We've gotten into the double digits 30, 50, 70 patients a day who have registered and those numbers are way off from the thousand plus a day we saw at the beginning. So, we still want to encourage people to get a vaccination if they haven't done so. If they have questions, there are lots of answers available on our website and the CDC website. We'll be publishing much more information in the days ahead to try to convince people to take that last step and go ahead and get vaccinated for the good of their community. But our efforts are not shutting down. They are just changing. We're looking forward to continuing to serve the community and get vaccinations in arms as broadly as we can.

That's all I have. I'll be happy to take questions.

Moderator: Alright, Stewart would like to ask a question, so Stewart whenever you are ready.

Stewart Doreen, MRT: Good morning.

Mr. Meyers: Hi, Stewart.

Stewart Doreen, MRT: I just wanted to ask with the Horseshoe closing, can you talk about the idea of in retrospect having to do a mass vaccination site. The idea of being thrust into that position, having a facility like the Horseshoe available to you, the teamwork that went into it with the other United Command Team members and just basically the overall experience because by most accounts it went off flawlessly and I just kind of wanted to hear your thoughts about having to do it and what you thought about the whole experience.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you, Stewart. It was a great experience. Certainly, if we had it to choose, we would have never chosen to do it we would have not had to deal with this disease, but since we did, I think it was a great illustration of the power of teamwork. I think this Unified Command Team's willingness to



come together, to put our unique perspectives aside for the good of the whole community, to put our resources to work where we had strengths, to make sure that we served people in their time of need. I think it was really a pretty phenomenal success. A lot of creativity on the part of our team, especially Val Sparks and her team in the Employee Health Department, our Fire and EMS guys, Justin Bunch and the team in County Emergency Management, Whitney Craig and her team at the Health Department all coming together to find ways to do things none of us knew how to do or had ever done before. We are really blessed to have the backstage facility at the Horseshoe which was unscheduled and completely available to us through this entire period so we could set up this complicated process with computers and with vaccine storage and with workspace and lock it up every night and come back to a ready facility every morning. That was a great gift that we couldn't have gotten in many places and we really appreciate the county making that available. But it was more than just us. You know, a great group of volunteers. I've lost count, but we're in the neighborhood of 50 plus volunteers who've worked with us at different times throughout the effort. The Abell-Hangar Foundation funded Team Rubicon to come here and provide just incredible service to us in managing logistics and helping us to figure out how traffic flow should work, using people who had done a lot of this kind of thing before when none of us had. I'm just really proud of our community and it's not surprising to me. You know, I've been here long enough to see people step up in a crisis many different times. It's part of our DNA as a community and we came through in this situation better than ever. So, it was a great experience. Really proud of our people and a lot for us to be proud of.

Moderator: Ok, that's all he has. The next question comes from Mitch. He asks, "On average, how many COVID-19 vaccines is MMH administering per day?"

Mr. Meyers: You know, Mitch, I don't have the specific numbers, but I can tell you it's been well under 1,000 now for a couple of weeks. It's in the six to eight hundred range and it varies day to day, but that's in the ballpark. And most days, the vast majority of those are second doses. If we get 200 first doses delivered in a day that's a pretty good day now when we were regularly doing over 1,000 at the beginning.

Moderator: His follow-up question to that is, "Since demand is declining for COVID-19 vaccines in Midland, how many doses is the state currently sending MMH on a weekly basis?"

Mr. Meyers: Zero. Now, there are other people in the community getting weekly doses in small quantities. But we stopped ordering a couple of weeks ago because we had accumulated a surplus and we have been not only in a condition of abundance for our own operations, but we've been able to distribute to other places who are not getting their allocations as rapidly as we got ours. So, we still have an abundant supply, but we've been able to send after this week it will be about 14,000 doses to El Paso where they have a huge need. We still have more in our freezer than we can use for the foreseeable future. So, we are not ordering from the state right now. The state has assured us that if our supplies get low, we can return to regular ordering and they will fulfill those, but we really don't need any more right now. We have more than we've been able to administer.

Moderator: And Tasa has a Facebook question for you.

Tasa, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: Yes, thank you, Erin. This question is actually for everyone on the Unified Command Team, so I'll let everyone else address as they speak. But you've been asked if you have been vaccinated.



Mr. Meyers: Oh, yeah. I was vaccinated at the first opportunity I had as my wife and both my kids and my future son-in-law all have been. We are enthusiastic believers and endorsers of the vaccine. Among us, there were a couple of minor post vaccine reactions. I had some chills the next day. It was no big deal. My son was a little bit sick the next day, no big deal, immediate recovery and you know tremendously better than the really horrific experience that so many people have had actually had getting the disease, being hospitalized, being ventilated, sometimes dying largely due to lack of oxygen in their body. It's a terrible disease with bad consequences and the vaccine's a very small price to pay to make sure you're not one of those. So, I'm a true believer and will continue to be.

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

Moderator: Ok, that's all the questions we have for you. Thank you, Russell.

Mr. Meyers: Ok.

Moderator: With that we'll turn it over to Dr. Wilson, our local health authority for the Midland Health Department.

Dr. Larry Wilson (Vice President, Medical Affairs Midland Health): Thank you. I am Dr. Wilson with the Health Department's count. I'll give you the numbers first that we have today. We have 17,331 cases in Midland County. 710 are currently isolating. There's been 16,138 recovered individuals. 26 are currently under investigation. There's 205 that they are unable to locate or aren't willing to communicate information and there's been 252 deaths from COVID-19 in Midland County since the beginning of the pandemic. One of those, the 252<sup>nd</sup> was reported on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April; a patient that was here in the hospital at Midland Memorial Hospital. And it's just a reminder, things are improving as you've heard already. We have fewer patients in the hospital on a day-to-day basis by far with COVID. Fewer of those that are in the hospital are ending up in Critical Care which is a very good sign that there is an overall sort of reduction in the severity of the infection which is a natural history of significant viruses like this over time. That's all-good news, but it's still very real. People are still being admitted, having oxygen hunger, and unfortunately still occasionally dying.

Other information from the Health Department, the Health department currently has both Moderna and Pfizer vaccine available and they are maintaining a registry of patients that would be interested in coming in and being vaccinated. We're encouraging anyone 16 and older to sign up and get vaccinated either through the Health Department or at any of the number of sites around the city that are available currently. I want to remind everyone as well that the natural immunity that comes from the COVID infection when compared to the vaccine is not as robust. There is a longer lasting high titer of antibodies from the vaccine than there is from natural immunity and there's also a broader number of antibodies that are developed that seem to provide a better control of the different variants or a better treatment for the different variants. So, whether you've had the infection or not, we strongly encourage everyone 16 and older to be vaccinated for all the reasons that you've heard already. Now, that's the information that I have from the Health Department today and I'll entertain any questions.

Moderator: Mitch with Marfa Public Radio has one for you. He asks, "Dr. Wilson, with dwindling demand for the vaccine, are you worried that it will be difficult for the Midland area to get beyond 50% fully vaccinated?"

Dr. Wilson: Well, we are pretty close to 50% fully vaccinated. And yes, I think I have some concern about the dwindling numbers of people that are interested in being vaccinated. I think there's some worrisome misconceptions that the vaccine is dangerous. You know, there's been some bad publicity around one of the vaccines recently that has gotten people's attention. So, I just want to really emphasize that the number of persons that have complications from the vaccine compared to the number of people that have significant consequences from getting the infection, there's no comparison. The vaccine is far safer and provides far better immunity across the population than taking the risk of being infected and the complications that can arise from that. It's a much better option for everyone. For those young enough that they are not that worried about it and they think well, you know, even if I got it the likelihood of me being very sick is small, but as long as we're allowing the transmissibility of the virus in the community, so even if you're asymptomatic and you're carrying the virus it's replicating which increases the risk that a new mutation will develop and create a new mutant variant that can potentially be more serious. So, for everyone's welfare, including your own, it's in everybody's best interest to reach herd immunity and to suppress the reproduction of the virus in our community. So, I'd like us to get there. I don't know if that message is getting out widely enough at this point. I think the really positive news that we are seeing with the reduction in the number of people getting sick and our opening up of the community, etc. is sort of providing people an optimism that may be a little bit premature still. So, if we could just keep the pedal to the metal if you will and keep people going in and getting vaccinated, I think that's a really fundamental thing to getting us to the place of herd immunity. So, thanks for the question, Mitch.

Moderator: The next question comes from your Facebook page. Have you been vaccinated? Can you hear that? Have you been vaccinated? That was the next question from your Facebook.

Dr. Wilson: Oh, I'm sorry. I was waiting for the question to be asked. Absolutely. I've been vaccinated. My wife's been vaccinated, and both my children have been vaccinated. We are true believers, obviously.

Moderator: And then Stewart has a question for you. Stewart-

Stewart Doreen, MRT: Good morning. I was curious, as you're looking at numbers moving forward which ones are the—is there one in particular that you're looking at that would bring concern to you if you saw a reverse in the data, would it be confirmed cases, people in the hospital, anything else?

Dr. Wilson: Yeah, I think at this point because there's, I think, a reduction in people that are interested in being tested in general that as a surveillance tool I don't know if that's really the most reliable means at this point. The thing I'm paying most attention to is watching the hospital admissions, and then those that end up in the hospital how many of those become really sick and require ventilator or Critical Care management and those numbers have been staying pretty low, pretty, you know, down in the high single digits and low double digits you know 10 to 12 range for several weeks now. So, that's very favorable. But it serves as a reminder also that it's not gone. You know we still have patients, a couple a few patients a week that are in the hospital and once hospitalized they are in the hospital for a while requiring oxygen therapy and some of those are ending up in Critical Care. It's not gone away. It's still a pretty significant infection and problem that we have in the community, just much better than we were experiencing 6 months ago or 8 months ago.



Moderator: Dr. Wilson, I think that's everything for you. Thank you.

Dr. Wilson: Thank you, very much.