



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Tuesday, May 11th, 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 of data about the hospital. As you can hear outside, another ambulance probably coming in. We are extremely busy. 214 inpatients as of this morning. Yesterday, in the Emergency Department (ED) we saw almost 200 patients. We are holding a number of patients right now waiting for a bed to free up with discharge this morning. And on the COVID census, we have 15 who are in beds. Four in Critical Care and another eleven in Medical and I understand that we have at least 3 more holding in the ED awaiting a bed. So, we are using a number of 18 total COVID patients. And that's high. That's not historically high, but relative to where we've been recently, we've run pretty consistently in the 11 to 13 range for a couple weeks. Before that we were down in single digits regularly. So, back up to 18 indicates that clearly the disease is not gone. It's still present in the community, just not in as great of numbers as we saw before.

Testing, we've seen demand for testing go down and kind of level out at about 500 people a week. We've been 9.5% to as low as 6.5% positive. Last week was 8.5% positive. So, there's still disease out there. It's still showing up on testing. We're still getting people in the ED and some admitted to the hospital, just not in the kind of numbers we saw in the worst of the pandemic.

We are- At the 214 census, we are clearly close to capacity with people holding in the ED. We've taken the 6th floor Medical Unit out of service. We did that a few weeks ago. We are preparing it to become our day surgery operation. So, the added capacity that we put online back in the fall, we have mostly taken back offline which means at these unusually high census rates, the hospital is very full and we're a little challenged to find beds for everybody.

Moving on to vaccines, the effort continues. We're working hard to get vaccines out to people and it's become much more difficult. We're working with local businesses, with the schools, and you'll hear a little bit more from them in a bit. We've delivered one way or another over 110,000 doses of vaccine to date. In Midland County, we've had 51,682 people receive at least 1 dose of the vaccine which is just short of 40% of the population. That's lagging the state's numbers which I think are now north of 50% statewide. And then those that are fully vaccinated, 42,590 in Midland County. That's about 32.5%. So, those numbers are much lower than what we had hoped for. We would have liked to have seen double that in terms of the distribution of the vaccine. So, it's been a pretty disappointing response by people in our community who for whatever reason are choosing not to be vaccinated while the disease remains present and may be increasing here locally. So, we would continue to urge you if you have any question at all about getting vaccinated, please do so. There are many locations where you can do it, various pharmacies around town, the Midland Health Department has an ample supply of vaccine, that they will be happy to provide to anyone. They asked me to emphasize that that really does mean anyone. It doesn't matter where you live, if you're from out of town, if you don't live in Texas, if you're from a foreign county, regardless of your immigration status. No one is concerned about that. You can call our Health Department, get an appointment, get a shot, no questions asked, we will take care of you. And



it's very important if you have any willingness at all to get the vaccination, please do get one in one of those locations.

Let's see. As I hope you know, yesterday the FDA approved the Pfizer vaccine to be administered to 12-15-year-old adolescents. And so, we are now actively working both with the pediatric practices locally and especially with the schools to make vaccine available and as I said when the schools make their report, they'll have a little bit more to say about the plans for upcoming events at Junior High schools and the Freshman schools.

Finally, on the vaccine front, we are making a very specific push to get into the African American community and to try to raise their numbers of vaccine acceptance. We have a couple of events scheduled with more to come. There's one on June 6th at the Alexander Temple Church, there's part of the Juneteenth Celebration at Washington Park on June 19th. In both cases, we'll have teams out to hopefully vaccinate large numbers of folks. And I think the text number where you can register for a shot at one of those events Tasa is putting up on the screen now. (Text SHOT to 877-670-0432) It's very easy to text. Get yourself signed up for one of those events or a future event. We hope to have a number of additional churches and other community locations served within the next month or 6 weeks or so mostly on the weekends to try to make it as easy for people and as accessible as we possibly can.

I believe that's about all that I had to offer, and I'll take questions if you have them.

Moderator: Just for those listening I'm going to say you text SHOT to 877-670-0432 and then let me give them just a second to see if any media members raise their hand. Mitch asks, "Is there any concern with the uptick in hospitalizations that the disease may be making somewhat of a return since so many people are not getting vaccinated? Do you believe MMH will have to expand its Coronavirus wards?"

Mr. Meyers: We have moved away from dedicated COVID wards at this point. Clearly, if the numbers go back up and stay there, we'll reconsider that decision. We've always been prepared to do that but are hopeful of not having to. Mitch, I think that there remains that concern with the presence of variants. We've spotted multiple different variants in the positive tests in our market as have communities all over the state of Texas. So, the virus is changing and mutating. It is going to continue to spread at least to some extent as long as there are people who don't have any protection. So, between those who have been infected recently and those who've had the vaccine, we've got a healthy proportion of the population who has some level of antibody protection, but there's still a large number who do not. And so, yeah, the [disease] is going to continue to spread. The best hope that all of us have for a return to a consistently normal life for the elimination of some if not all of the social distancing needs that we're all experiencing still is to get vaccinated. We need to double those numbers of people vaccinated. We are not on pace to do that. We have plenty of vaccine supply. There's nobody 12 years and above who's not eligible to get the vaccine and there's really no reason not to proceed to get it in your own best interest, and your family's, and the community's to stop this virus where it is. We're not overly concerned with the numbers, but they are consistently and slowly going up. And the spread of vaccine will stop that if we can do it and do it aggressively.

Moderator: His follow up question to that is, "Do you think the authorization of the Pfizer vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds will re-energize the community when it comes to the vaccine?"



Mr. Meyers: Gosh, I don't know. I hope so. The response, what we heard from the schools and I think Imo Jean will probably share more detail later. It's been very encouraging in just the few hours since the vaccine was approved by the FDA. The schools have published information about vaccine clinics in the Junior Highs and the Freshman schools and the response has been very encouraging. So, we are hopeful that's not only students, but parents will be interested as well if they haven't already had their vaccine. So, time will tell. But it certainly is encouraging.

Moderator: And Tasa, your Facebook question.

Tasa, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: What are the current visitation policies?

Mr. Meyers: In general terms, every patient can have a visitor. I think we're still excepting in endoscopy. Is that right? (Asking someone off camera, response not heard) Endoscopy is the only outpatient function that doesn't allow for visitors. COVID patients they are a little bit more restrictive, but we also do allow for COVID patients to have a visitor with certain restrictions. In pediatrics and in Labor and Deliver, we'll allow 2. So, they are what they've been for several weeks. Now, as we get to the end of May, once school's out we're going to get our clinical guidance team back together, consider whether there's any further liberalization of visiting policies possible, whether we want to make any changes with regard to our internal social distancing and mask wearing policies as I'm sure other entities around the community are also considering those things. But it's much easier for us to make decisions to liberalize those policies if the numbers are going down. If they're going up, it's going to give everybody pause.

Tasa: Thank you. And just note that if you'd like to view the visitor policy in full you can go to www.midlandhealth.org/COVID-19 and you can view the whole policy. Erin, that's all the questions we have.

Moderator: Ok. Thank you, Tasa. Thanks, Russell.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you.

Moderator: With that we will 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, Erin. I'm Dr. Wilson from the Health Department. I'm going to talk about the numbers. To begin with, we have overall case count of 17,541 at this time. Thirty-one new cases in the last 3 days in Midland County. There's 762 persons isolating currently and 16,305 that have fully recovered. 13 are currently under investigation. There's 206 that we're unable to locate or are refusing to communicate with us. And 255 lives lost in Midland County since the beginning of the pandemic.

I want to remind everyone that the Health Department is very interested in getting vaccine out just as Midland Health is. We have at the Health Department both the Moderna and the Pfizer. Two very safe vaccines to be utilized and we would appreciate anybody who would like that to call and make an appointment. It is appointment only. No walk ins to get the vaccine, but we would be happy to get a vaccine to anyone and everyone. And as was mentioned earlier, also no questions asked, you know foreign nationals, anybody is welcome to come in and get a shot. We will not turn anyone away and we will not ask any further questions around those topics.



Another point is in the last month of April, there was 1 flu virus positive test detected in Midland County. So, if you look back over the whole flu season, there has been 1 flu case in Midland County. A really good reminder of how much social distancing and masking has prevented aerosolized virus spread. And also indicates how much more contagious COVID virus is compared to the flu because even in the face of the social distancing and masking, there's been quite a few cases of COVID and there continue to be to this day.

Another reminder is that if you are unfortunate enough to come down with the virus, particularly if you are in a high-risk group, we do have therapies that can decrease the risk of getting sick or sicker from it. The monoclonal antibody particularly is still being administered. So, if you have early onset symptoms of a respiratory tract illness or feel like you're getting sick like that, getting tested for COVID and if you're tested and determined to have COVID within the first 10 days of illness you're eligible to get the monoclonal antibody therapy. That's an EUA approved medication and therapy. Our experience in Midland has been for those that have received the monoclonal antibody therapy, their risk of getting seriously ill from COVID is significantly reduced compared to those that don't. So, early detection allows you to get the monoclonal antibody therapy. We'd appreciate you thinking about that and getting tested if you are especially in high-risk categories of the infection.

That's what I have to offer from the Health Department.

Moderator: Let me give them just a second to see if they raise their hand or type something out. Dr. Wilson, thank you.

Dr. Wilson: Thank you very much.