

WSU COVID-19 Pullman Community Town Hall – August 19

PHIL WEILER: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the city of Pullman's second COVID-19 town hall meeting. My name is Phil Weiler. I'm vice president for marketing and communications at Washington State University. And I'll be serving as our moderator today.

I want to thank you all for joining us. We have a important panel of city and community and county leaders with us today who have all been working together very closely for the past five or more months trying to be prepared and addressing the pandemic that is COVID-19. Let me take a second to introduce everybody. We can go ahead and get started.

We're joined first of all by Pullman Mayor Glen Johnson. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Also, we have Troy Henderson, director of Whitman County Public Health, Scott Adams, chief executive officer of Pullman Regional Hospital, Bob Maxwell, superintendent of Pullman School District, Gary Jenkins, chief of the Pullman Police Department, Mike Heston, chief of the Pullman Fire Department, and finally Kirk Schultz, president of Washington State University. Mayor, I'd like to turn it over to you to make some opening remarks, and then can go ahead and get started.

GLEN JOHNSON: Well, thank you very much for joining us today. And what you see here today are a number of people who are all working together, but they just represent just some of the many people that are all working during this pandemic. And I do have to say that we have some tremendous cooperation going on in the Pullman and the Whitman county area, all working on this to make sure that our residents are safe.

From a city standpoint, we want to make sure that our city workers are all safe so they can serve the residents that we have. But a number of nonprofit agencies have stepped up. I was just thinking of the churches that are doing food distribution right now. Everybody is working together to get us through this COVID-19.

We just hope that it ends a lot quicker than some of the predictions that we're seeing right now. But from a city standpoint, most people think of the 911, when you call for police and fire-- we have our fire chief and our police chief here today-- but there are other people that are very much involved with helping us get through this. And we think of all the different departments.

For example, maintenance and operation deal with our water service and with wastewater treatment. Those are also important, but you don't see those very often. Our city council meets on a regular basis. And we're all trying to do the best things that we can for our community.

We have our finance and our administrators all working to do the best that we can to make sure everybody is safe. And I must say that it's been fantastic working with Kirk Schultz as president of WSU. We have good communications.

Once in a while, we text each other, give us some updates. He calls when we've got some major decisions. And I just want to make sure it's very clear to everyone that WSU has made some very tough decisions here recently, some that have been dictated by the Pac-12 and the NCAA, but they've been tough decisions. But every one of those decisions, the university does think about the community.

I want to emphasize that they have really thought about the economy. They tried to have, obviously, an in-person graduation to try and help the local merchants. It couldn't be done. And we've seen football go from seven home games to five home games, a full stadium down to 8,000 to 10,000 people and then just the most recent announcement last Tuesday. So I just want everyone to know that we all are working together on this. And we will get through all this. So, Phil.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Mary-- Mayor, excuse me. Kirk, I'd like to turn it over to see if you have any remarks before we get started.

KIRK SCHULTZ: Great, Phil, and thank you, and welcome to the over 300 people and growing that are watching us today on this YouTube. I want to just emphasize several key things that WSU is thinking about moving forward. The first is health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and community has been paramount for us. And that means that we've had to make some very challenging and difficult decisions moving to an online instruction, as Mayor Johnson mentioned, the decision to not do an in-person graduation.

And then I think the most recent thing that I still believe was a right decision for us to make was not having-- postponing fall sports, including football. And when we did that-- especially for a college town like Pullman, we know how devastating that can be to our local economy. And so many of our merchants, that's how you make your money. You're counting on that big football Saturday with thousands of people coming in, spending their money, having a great time, enjoying the fantastic hospitality that we're proud of in Pullman.

So we didn't make these decisions without acknowledging and understanding the negative impacts it's going to have economically on our community. But at the end of the day, we felt we had to be just really careful to make sure that we don't overwhelm our health care system, that we are being responsible as people come back, that we're holding gatherings that make the most sense for us, but that we're being careful. Because I want to look ahead six months, eight months, a year, and be in a really strong position for our community, university, and everybody working together.

I will say, as well, almost all the people on this call are involved and engaged and working together around COVID-19 related issues, whether it's students in their community, restaurants, businesses, whatever types of things that we're trying to do. We appreciate the relationships we have with our public health officials, with Scott and the team at Pullman Regional Hospital. And we're just going to keep working together.

And then finally, I want to just emphasize uncertainty has become a hallmark. I wish I could look at my crystal ball and see where we would be two months from now, three months from now. And I know that frustrates citizens. That frustrates business owners. It frustrates local residents.

How come the university doesn't know more? How come they're not talking about this more? We're using the best data we have at the time we have it and making the best decisions that we have.

And I think sometimes a difference between sort of a visionary and a goat can be this slimmest of margins. And we're trying to make sure that we look back in two years and say, the university, the community, all of us working together made the best decisions they could for the overall health of our community. And that's where we continue to focus.

So I appreciate the opportunity to be here, answer questions, here from my colleagues, but please know we're being careful. We want to keep health as the number one thing for our community. And we're here to partner.

Wear your mask, socially distance, wash your hands. That's our mantra. And we're going to continue to repeat that as often as possible. And we're going to continue to try and demonstrate that as a leadership team when we're out and about the Pullman community.

So go Cougs. Go Hounds. And we're Pullman Proud as always.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, President Schultz. Just a little bit of housekeeping before we move on, we've had a number of people who've submitted questions in advance via email. Thank you to all of you who've done that. We have actually probably more questions than we're going to be able to tackle today.

We will do our best. There's a lot of important information that we want to be able to share with everyone and make sure that we all have a good understanding of where we are as a community in this particular outbreak. And also, note that we do have the live chat function operational in YouTube. I will do my best to try and monitor that. And if there are questions that I can pull out of there, I will address those to the right folks as well. But let's go ahead and move on.

I'd like to turn the first question to Bob Maxwell, our superintendent. There was a decision that was made for Pullman school district. And I would like you, Bob, if you could tell us what that was and what went into that decision-making process.

BOB MAXWELL: Absolutely. Thank you, Phil, and thank you for this opportunity to be with such a distinguished group and talking with our community. So the decision to go distance learning was not an easy one. Obviously, we would all probably prefer to have school in person.

However, given the unprecedented time of this pandemic, we have to keep in mind the safety of our students and staff in mind, first and foremost, in our community.

And so we've been working with the health department all summer long, actually meeting, taking a look at the guidance and protocols and the development of our reopening plan. We were tasked by the office of superintendent of public instruction to develop a plan both for in-person, what we call hybrid with some distance learning, or full-on distance learning. And we have a plan that contains both.

Unlike the spring, we've had an opportunity to have at least six weeks to plan this time for distance learning, rather than two days. So we will see a much different distance learning experience for our students and our families. That'll be a combination of synchronous live teaching, as well as asynchronous recording. There will be definitely better communication and more succinct communication and set times for interventions as well. We will have daily attendance. And our teachers have been spending a lot of time in training and preparing.

So we can provide a more robust learning experience for our students and our families. So it's definitely been a journey. Nothing in my educational career ever prepared me to plan to do online learning, when for 100 plus years, it's always been in person. So we're going to go and we're going to start school August 26. We're ready, and we will be obviously adapting as needed as we go along on this journey.

PHIL WEILER: So, Bob, I want to echo one of the things that you said. This is something that resonates with me at Washington State University. You made the comment that back in March you had to turn on a dime and move from face-to-face to distance learning. And that one of the advantages now is that we've got more time to prepare.

So I know that's something that we're at Washington State University pleased that we've got a little bit more time to prepare for that change. And I know that your teachers are going to be able to do an even better job this fall now if they've had time to figure out what that means to have to go to that distance learning. So thank you.

I like next to turn to Troy. I know that, obviously, COVID-19 is a public health emergency. This is what the public health department exists to deal with. And so, Troy, could you just give us an update, a status update on what is this-- where are we with COVID-19 in Whitman county?

TROY HENDERSON: Sure. For the last 10 days, we've seen a noticeable decrease in viral activity, which is a great sign. We hope to see that continue into the future. Testing for COVID-19 has functioned well for about the last four months. We're very, very fortunate in Whitman county that our turnaround times are very frequently been about 24 hours.

We have seen a bit of an uptick in the Pullman-Moscow area. And as I'm sure everyone's aware, Latah county as well is seeing an uptick as folks migrate back into those communities, but we're well-positioned to address any increase. The state of Washington as a whole has seen a steady

decrease in caseload over the last several weeks. So there's some positive signs both locally and statewide.

And as Mayor Johnson mentioned, there's a lot of elected leaders, business leaders, the health care community, leadership at WSU who are all working together to respond as effectively as possible. I will point out that the number one determinant for any community to be successful controlling COVID-19 is individuals making those wise choices that President Schulz mentioned. If you wear masks, social distance, wash your hands, and put in a few common sense practices, we can keep driving these numbers down.

PHIL WEILER: Good advice. Thank you. Troy, if you don't mind, I'm going to follow-up on something you said, because this references one of the questions that we received in advance.

You mentioned Latah county and, obviously, Pullman and Moscow are so close to one another. There's so much movement between the two communities and the two counties. We had a person wonder is there any kind of coordination that's being done with Latah county. Are we in contact with our colleagues over there?

TROY HENDERSON: We are. We get test results for folks who live in Latah county. They get test results for folks who live in Whitman county. And so we share that data almost in real-time as we get it to help inform each other about positive test results.

And then also when there's close contacts-- obviously, folks in the Pullman or Moscow community often have close contacts in other communities. And depending on whether it's a work situation or how big a group, we generally ask the other county if they want to take the lead for a bulk of folks in their county and vice versa coming back to us. So there's a fairly large amount of cooperation specifically around case investigation and contact tracing.

PHIL WEILER: That's good to hear. Thank you. Next I'd like to ask, Scott, can you give us an update on how things are going at Pullman Regional Hospital? I think we are all really proud of the quality of health care we have in our community. And we know that we're going to have to rely on you all if we do see outbreaks. And so we're just curious where we stand right now.

SCOTT ADAMS: Thank you, Phil. We're grateful to be included in this important conversation with the community, happy to be able to share an update of our activities, as well as answer questions as we have time. I'm impressed as we began dealing with the pandemic back in early March, that amidst the anxiety and uncertainty that President Schultz referred to, the community demonstrated its commitment to an understanding of its interdependence. And from those early days, the concerns about economic impacts, and the students, and families, and how they will manage their education for their children, the health care system all was brought together. And those conversations have continued since that time.

While we're in unprecedented times and people are returning to the community, additional students, the nature of the pandemic continues to bring uncertainty to us, but we're gratified

by the fact that through the commitment of our staff and physicians, we feel pretty prepared to continue to be here to provide adequate care. We were just reminded that we remain a five star hospital per patient experience. And that means you can continue to expect that type of care and responsiveness as you have needs at the hospital.

Gratefully, what we've learned is that, even though as Troy mentioned, the continues to increase in Whitman county, very few people actually require hospitalization. And that's a good thing. Most people are recovering at home. And the hospitalization rate in the county is really only about 1 and 1/2%. So if we continue to do the things that Troy and President Schultz have mentioned around masking, and handwashing, and social distancing, and other just good sense practices, we'll continue to see low results in our testing positivity and hospitalization activity.

If you need to be hospitalized, everybody should feel comfortable that we've got adequate protective personal equipment. We've got trained staff who continue to reviews of procedures and activities around caring for isolation patients and how to assure that other staff and other patients are safe. We do have a great interconnection with the Regional Coordinating Council for health care services that helps us make sure that we know what the capacity is in the region.

While we've got the capability to care for sick patients here, that may not be the best option given a particular situation. And so we'll be coordinating with that. Some patients may find that transferring them to another facility, even to Spokane, might be the best option given the circumstances at the time. We've been able to develop a treatment protocol here in the hospital should we have the need to care for significant numbers of COVID-19 patients.

Troy mentioned the value of testing. We continue to have a focus on that in our efforts. The main testing area at the hospital right now is behind the hospital in the parking lot, just behind the emergency department. And if you have a need to be cared for at the hospital, then that's where you'll get your test. And that's currently, if you're having planned surgery, or an endoscopic procedure, cardiopulmonary rehab services, or other types of same-day care provided in the hospital, then you'll go to that testing area to be tested prior to having those services.

If you're in the emergency department and you have COVID-19-like symptoms, you're going to be tested. If you're a maternity patient, you're going to be tested. If you're an inpatient and there's suspicion that you may be positive for COVID-19, then you'll be tested.

And gratefully, when we're doing our in-house test, and those are things for patients that are already here in the hospital, we get a turnaround time in a few hours. When you're preparing to come to the hospital for an outpatient procedure, those tests, as Terry mentioned, are within 24 to 36 hour timeframe. And that's really a good marker by comparison to other places across the country, even in the state of Washington.

We mentioned the testing positivity. We report that every week on our website for the hospital testing that we do. I think the county will begin reporting that county-wide in the near future, but we right now have it on the hospital website. And the positivity rate in the county or in the hospital for the tests we do is 2.2%. And that compares to the state positivity rate of about 5.7%.

So it continues to emphasize that good practices, continued commitment to masking, and social distancing, and handwashing will help us keep this at a manageable level. Before we move on, we want to remind everybody that we believe it is safe to be in the hospital to receive care here and in your doctor's offices. All these locations are doing many things to make it a safe environment.

We have universal masking. We screen patients and visitors when they come into these locations. We limit the number of people who are in hospitals that in the clinics who are not there needing care. So that's why we don't conduct in-person meetings anymore. All of our meetings are by Zoom and practicing appropriate physical distancing.

We shut down our volunteer program. The Red Sage Cafe is currently closed to the public. We no longer hold education classes here, again, to minimize the number of people who are in the hospital or in the physician offices who don't need care.

As a final point, we just want to remind everybody that this is not the time to delay your care. We are seeing an increase in the severity of illness in the hospital. And it's not necessarily COVID-related. It's for reasons that people have felt unsure or unsafe about having follow-up care for their chronic illness or their continuing health concerns. So we encourage folks to continue forward with your preventive services.

Get your immunizations. Get your shots. Flu season is coming up. This is a time if you've questioned the value of a flu vaccination, this is the year to do it and to make a commitment to keeping our community safe. And if all other options fail, we want to remind folks that telehealth services are available in all doctor's offices and clinics throughout the community. Thank you, Phil.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Scott. I actually think that last item was really important. I'll just emphasize it, if I can. I know folks do need medical care outside of COVID-19. They should not hesitate to seek the care that they need, because we want to make sure that people are keeping themselves safe and healthy.

There are still illnesses that are in our community that have nothing to do with COVID-19. And those need to be addressed. So glad you brought that up. Thank you.

Next I'd like to turn to Chief Jenkins. We had a couple of questions that were submitted in advanced asking about what's happening with regard to enforcement, for lack of a better term, enforcement of the statewide proclamations around what we should be doing with regard to

COVID-19. And I know, chief, that you actually issued a news release just this morning that addressed that issue. So do you want to spend a few minutes talking about what that news release said, and what your department is doing with regard to enforcement and education?

GARY JENKINS: Sure. Thank you, Phil. Well, we have seen an increase in the past few weeks in parties and gatherings. Prior to that, we took a strictly warning and education approach when we came across violations or we responded to calls where violations were reported. But with the uptick in parties that we've been seeing without masks, without social distancing, exceeding the proclamation limitation of 10 people, we felt we needed to transition from education warning only to include an enforcement element.

Phil, as you mentioned, I did release a news release today that's available on our website that lays out the potential violations that someone could be facing for these violations. They're either misdemeanors or civil infractions. Right now our focus really is on the party issue.

That's where we believe there's going to be the greatest amount of potential exposure and impact, a violation of someone that hosts the party. That includes any type of proclamation violation, such as no mask, no social distancing, and excess of 10 people. It is a civil infraction with a \$250 fine. And then the fine goes up to \$350 for second and subsequent violations.

So our whole goal is compliance. As Troy Henderson was saying, we've had really good experience with the individuals and the community complying with the proclamation requirements. And that's kept our numbers down.

But what we're afraid of is if we start to see an increase in these particularly parties, that that's going to turn those numbers around. And so we just want everyone to be compliant. And we will take enforcement action if necessary.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, chief. I think that's the message members of the community have been hoping to hear. I think there is some justifiable anxiety. We've seen what's happened at other college campuses across the country where students didn't follow those social distancing and masking proclamations and got together for parties, and we saw outbreaks as a result. So thank you.

I'd like to turn now to Chief Heston, if I could. I know chief that in the fire service interagency cooperation is really sort of the lifeblood of the work that you all do. And I have to imagine the same holds true for COVID-19. Can you talk a little bit about the work that's being done around working with you or your other agencies in the region to address this, and then also what do your crews do when they get a call-- when they get a medical call? How do they prepare for themselves when they're going into a person's home on a medical call?

MIKE HESTON: You bet, Phil. And thank you for the opportunity here as well. So working with the other agencies, we've been having daily and weekly meetings. Some of those will drop off to monthly, just seeing what the best practices are out there, updating our policies, looking at

statistics, and see where the hotspots are, what kinds of personal protection equipment we need and how to secure that, and making sure we have enough for the future, and then providing any help to our neighbors if they need that as well.

As far as our response to the COVID, we have been protecting ourself, even more with different levels of personal protection, masks, goggles, gowns, boots, and those kinds of things, especially to the known and suspected addresses with these patients. Dispatch is asking these key questions at the beginning to see if they can screen some of these patients to kind of give us a heads up as we're going. We especially focus on the long-term health care facilities to make sure we're protected when we go in there, because we don't want to be spreading that. And then we also kind of limit our crews how many people we send in to different scenes if we can make personal contact with folks on the outside without just rushing in like we normally do. So those are some different things that you'll see for us as well.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you very much. Bob, I'd like to turn to you, if I could. We talked a little bit about the fact that your teachers are ramping up for distance learning. And I'm wondering if there's any support we're able to give to students who might have-- you might not have the technology they need at home to be able to connect online and to take those courses.

BOB MAXWELL: Absolutely. Thanks, Phil. So we're doing a number of things. Some of those continued from what we've learned in the spring.

This year we'll be issuing chromebooks for each student, so they have the technology available to work at home, or if we're in a hybrid situation, both here at school, and be able to take that home. So each student will be receiving who needs one, a chromebook. In addition, we are continuing to ramp up our efforts to increase connectivity of families that do not have internet access.

So we are working with those individual families. In some cases, we're able to provide mobile hotspot. We're also working with the state to obtain some funding for students who have families that qualify for free and reduced lunch to receive funds to pay for their internet bill each month. And so we're still waiting for specific information on that. But once that comes, we'll make that known to our families who qualify for that particular program.

So again, if we have families out there that are lacking internet connectivity, please contact your building. And they will get in contact with the district office. And we will take a look at what we can do to help make sure that students are connected and able to access distance learning.

PHIL WEILER: Well, that's great news. Thank you very much. I'm glad to hear that we're able to provide support to those families who may not have either computers or the connectivity necessary to make sure their students remain successful. I'd like to turn now to President Schultz, if I could.

I know, Kirk, that you've made a decision a number of weeks ago now to change our delivery method. And I think a lot of people are aware of it, but perhaps not everyone. Could you talk a little bit about what the original plan was for the fall semester and how things have changed in recent weeks?

KIRK SCHULTZ: Sure, Phil. Thank you for the question. We were one of the first universities to come out in the late spring and talk about that we really wanted to have an in-person experience for our students this fall.

We had a tremendous number of our employees working with folks in the community trying to get ready to bring students back to campus in residence halls and apartments and those different types of things, have classrooms with appropriate social distancing, masking, all those different types of things, and really have that in-person experience. And what happened was a few weeks ago, a couple of the vice presidents we're talking about, things just aren't feeling exactly the way we would like to. And when I started going around and asking our colleagues, how many of you think that if we bring everybody back we'll still have everybody back at Thanksgiving? And to a person they said, it's just not going to happen.

And after seeing the disruption that occurred in the spring, where we had people on campus, they went away for spring break and we said, don't come back and how that pivot, I'm proud of the way everybody did. It still is very disruptive for students families and things like that. We just decided it's better to make the decision now and not have people come back than it would be to be back for two or three weeks and do what the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and a couple of other institutions are doing who had students back, in one case for a week, and have already had to make that decision that they're going to go to online instruction and send people home.

So it was a careful process. We worked really hard to bring everybody back in a safe manner. And when we just didn't think we could do it, we wanted to also give our faculty and our staff time to prepare and not do it at the last minute, where people were scrambling around.

So I know a lot of people are disappointed. A lot of our families are disappointed. A lot of Cougs-- future Cougs are disappointed, because they wanted that experience.

And I know some people are worried about, well, if you do this, does that mean now that the future people aren't going to value that residential experience? And actually, we're finding the opposite. People value that ability to move somewhere, be an independent young adult, and do classes, but do all the other things that are associated with an educational experience at a public land grant research university.

So I think instead of demeaning the importance of that in-person instruction, what we're going to wind up doing is seeing a real hunger to return to that as soon as possible. I think much like Bob's probably seeing, whether K through 12 system, is people want that interaction, and they

value it. And this is seen as you know, hey, this is OK, but it's not quite what we really have in mind the long-run.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Mayor Johnson, I've got a question for you. I know that this is a difficult time obviously for everybody across the country, around the world. People are losing jobs. They're having hours cut.

There's a real concern about the social safety net, I guess. Can you talk a little bit about what we're seeing in the Pullman region with regard to issues around food insecurity or homelessness? Are there services in place to help people if they are experiencing challenges caused by COVID?

GLEN JOHNSON: Well, there are a number of different agencies in the community. Community Action Center is one of them. I've had the privilege of serving on their board. I talked to Jeff Guyett. And matter of fact, we just had a board meeting just most recently. And Troy Henderson was on that board here for a while.

But he is right now not seeing a number of homeless cases. However, he is seeing a number of families at risk of eviction that the moratorium has saved. And so Community Action Center does have rental assistance. And they have stepped up in a number of categories like that.

Also, the Community Action Center has a new apartment complex called the Riverview Complex. It's actually behind the hospital. And that comes on board on September 1. And there will be rooms there for families that are basically homeless.

We do have on Davis Way another transition housing, but that has a time limit to it. The Riverview Apartments actually does not have a time limit to it. And people can go in there, especially if they're homeless.

But when you talk take a look at all the different agencies, Pullman Child Welfare, some of the agencies in Colfax, they're all stepping up right now. And we have had from the University, Jamie Callison came up with an idea, worked with the University on Pullman Serves it Forward, where a number of people donated. We had cash cards that could go to the different restaurants to keep the restaurants going, but also helped a number of people in the community.

And I know our church tomorrow, Trinity Lutheran, is working with Second Harvest. And they have enough food it 250 families that'll be delivered between 11 and 1 o'clock tomorrow at Trinity Lutheran up on Lybecker. So there is another opportunity, where Second Harvest is working with churches.

There's all kinds of people working together. But the quarantine, when I talk to Jeff Guyett, the executive director of the Community Action Center, he said, the food closet at first when the COVID hit, and we had people stay home and stay safe, oh, probably, about 60 different

families came through for food. Now, he's seen it's roughly around 30 to 35 families. And he says normally, before COVID, that was about 25.

So people are stepping up. We have a number of different agencies that are all helping together. And that's the beauty of this community, that when we see people hurting, we all step up, and we work together.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. I agree. I'm heartened to see that members of the community are doing what they can to make sure that we all get through this together.

Troy, I'm going to, I guess, maybe address this question to you, or it may also be a question for Scott. But this was something that had come up in the chat session. And there's some confusion about what it takes to get a COVID-19 test. Do you require a doctor's order, and what's the process if people have concerns that they might be ill?

TROY HENDERSON: That's a good question. Part of why there's confusion is because the requirements have changed over time. This is a novel new disease.

Our resources at the beginning were tremendously limited in regards to testing. And so those first couple months it was really difficult to get a test. Our testing capacity was way below where it needed to be. We're in a much better place today.

And Scott can fill in some of the things. But my understanding is it does take a doctor's order. But if you have symptoms you can generally get that at the testing location. If you're a close contact, as determined by the health department, the health department can get the doctor to order for the close contacts to be tested.

So if you have a reason to be tested, other than just the worried-well, it shouldn't be too difficult to get a test. And then the availability is good throughout the county. And that's best measured by the positivity rate that Scott mentioned earlier.

We have generally been around 2% positive for the last four months in Whitman county. And that metric has some problems in that negative test aren't all required to be reported, but we did get the numbers from the three largest testing facilities. And a 2% positivity rate tells you more than anything is that you have a good amount of testing in your community.

The positive caseload per 100,000 is a better metric for the viral activity in the community, but the positive case rate is a strong indicator of whether or not a community has an ample amount of testing. And we have in Whitman county for at least the last 3 and 1/2 or 4 months.

SCOTT ADAMS: Phil, I think I'll go ahead and add to Troy and confirm that testing at the hospital, the Palouse medical offices, through student health, and WC athletics, still all require some provider. Now, under state law, providers also include dentists. If you're going to be

having dental procedures and you've got concerns or your dentist, dentist can also write orders. But right now orders are still required to receive any testing.

As Troy mentioned, there are plenty of options for how people can obtain that order. The health department's able to do it as well as other provider entities. I would just add that one of the things people can do from a self-evaluation standpoint is if they're only showing minor symptoms, then running out to get a test may not be the first thing that they need to consider. Doing some self-quarantine and seeing if things progressed might be an equally acceptable option that could produce a result that doesn't require a test. So again, using some good self-evaluation options in addition to pursuing testing can help us maintain our availability of the resources for the community.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, both. And, Scott, I know that if a Washington State University student who happens to be here in Pullman does feel ill and they go to our Cougar Health Services and the need is for a test to be done, that is done, I believe at Pullman Regional Hospitals. Is that correct?

SCOTT ADAMS: That's correct. And we're grateful and happy to do that. We see that as a significant part of our service and responsibility to the community. Anybody that has an order that comes to the hospital, they'll go through the process. And we'll draw the sample and submit the test.

PHIL WEILER: Well, great. Thank you. And I have to say-- I mean, for me, that's another good example of the community and the university trying to work together hand-in-hand. We do have the ability to provide health care through Cougar Health Services, but we do rely on Pullman Regional Hospital to extend that care when it gets beyond what we can do ourselves. So thank you for doing that.

Next question. I'm going to address both to Chief Heston and Chief Jenkins. And we alluded to this a little bit that when Troy was mentioning that the situation has changed around testing. I know another concern that we all had at the beginning of this COVID outbreak was the availability of personal protective gear. And we did receive questions from the community, who were worried that perhaps our fire service and law enforcement personnel didn't have access to the equipment that they need. And so can the two of you perhaps just give us an update on, do you have the equipment you need, and are you able to respond and properly protect your staff?

MIKE HESTON: Yeah. Thanks, Phil. I'll go first. We do have enough protective equipment. And for a while or depending on how many calls we were going on, we started putting some other contingencies in place, like using some of our breathing apparatus, masks with filters, and, just in case, we started to get low. And then we started working with our emergency management at the county, equipment county level, which has access to state resources. And we started getting in resources from the state through the county to us.

So right now we're stocked up very well for the future. And we just need places to store the stuff, but we have quite a bit. And we have backup plans just in case we run low again. So we feel we're in good shape with that.

GARY JENKINS: And just a quick add-on to that for police, we're in the same position. We had a number of N95 masks to start with that we had in stock from previous times, where we had smoke from fires in the region that we had available for our staff and the public. And then working through Whitman County Emergency Management, they were able to get more supplies from the state. We also had members of the community volunteer to make masks for not just police and fire staff but also for all city staff. And so we have a lot of mass available for our city staff so that those staff members that are coming to work can be safe as well.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Thank you both. President Schultz, I have a question for you. This was something that came in again via our online portal.

Folks were asking what the enrollment numbers are going to look like for fall 2020. Now obviously we have six campuses across the state. And I know that we don't release formal numbers until the 10th day of classes, but do you have a sense across the system what our enrollment numbers look like at this point?

KIRK SCHULTZ: Phil, thanks. Great question. And we're not going to know a lot for another really two weeks, until we sort of see what happens.

And part of that is in the past we could have predicted today with a about a 99% exact what those numbers would look like, but our predictive models aren't very good. We expect that we may be down a couple percentage points, single digit percentage points over where we thought we would be. But if you go back three, four months, there were a lot of places that were predicting, we were going to be down-- not us, but public higher ed-- 20%, 30%, 40%.

We're going to be pretty close to where enrollment targets were for the Pullman campus. And a lot of other campuses are doing late recruitments as well. So I expect our numbers are going to be solid. They're probably not going to be the largest we've ever had. But, on the other hand, we're not seeing that drastic downturns that some of the pundits were really predicting, kind of in the middle of the COVID stuff, shall we say, in April or May.

PHIL WEILER: Yeah. I would agree. It wasn't that many months ago that I think the pundits were all saying, it's going to be 20% down across the board. Fortunately, for us, I think that's not the case.

If I could, I want to piggyback on another question that we've received a lot of questions about how many students are going to be in our residence halls. I know that our vice president with student affairs shared some information just earlier today about what the capacity rate is and how many folks we have in there. Do you have that information handy?

KIRK SCHULTZ: Yes, Phil, I do. It's amazing. Yeah, so our residence halls are going to be at about 15% capacity. That's 1-5 capacity.

So if people are concerned that somehow we're cramming lots of people in the residence halls and we don't have room to do that safely-- and I give a lot of credit the vice president Mary Jo Gonzalez and her staff, who set a very clear set of criteria about what it would take to be able to move into a residence hall room. And just as a reminder to our community out there, we have students from outside the United States. They don't have other options sometimes where to live.

We have students with housing insecurities, where a residence hall for them is a much better environment for them to be in than maybe other options that they might have or might not have. So we're very careful about that. Students had to show real need or real reason why they had to be in the residence halls. And we really stuck to that.

Now that being said, just like in our local community, that means that we take some pretty big financial hits over dollars that aren't in there, because we've got buildings. We've got bonds. We're paying on those, all those different types of things.

So we've been careful. We want to make sure that those students are safe in their classwork and things like that. But at the same time, that's the number, where it is. And if people hear something that's much different than that, I checked right before this to make sure that I had the most accurate number from Dr. Gonzalez.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. I was hopeful that you had that number handy. If you didn't, I did as well, but I didn't want to catch you off guard. I'd like now maybe to turn back to Troy if I could.

Troy, I know that I certainly have heard a lot in the media about referencing things like isolation and quarantine. And honestly, I guess I'm not clear the difference. Can you talk a little bit about what is the difference between those two terms? What happens if you end up having a-- you are tested and you're determined to be positive? What does that look like for the patient?

TROY HENDERSON: Sure. Isolation and quarantine are effectively the same, in that you stay away from other folks so that if you're sick or you may become sick you don't infect others. The technical difference is isolation is where someone who is symptomatic, thus folks who are COVID-19 positive. And quarantine are for folks who do not have symptoms, but may develop symptoms. And so we want to keep them away from other folks as well.

And there is a little bit of difference in the timeline. Quarantine is for 14 days. Isolation is for 10 days or until symptoms clear. And we generally ask for folks who can isolate or quarantine at home to do so.

And there are ways you can do that, even if you're in a residence with a roommate or with your family if your residence is large enough, and especially if you have a separate bathroom where

you can kind of keep apart. But for those folks who don't live in a situation where they can quarantine or isolate at home, and especially if they live with another vulnerable person, we do have some quarantine isolation rooms available for folks in some local motels. And the health department can help coordinate that.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. That's good information. Next question I have, I think is for Scott, if I could. This was something that I saw earlier in our chat feature or chat function.

Folks are wondering just what kind of capacity do we have. Let's say we do have people who need hospitalization. You mentioned that there's been very few hospitalizations, if any to-date. But if we did, what kind of capacity do we have in our community?

SCOTT ADAMS: Well, that's a great question and understandable area of interest, even some concern in some regards. As we, in the early stage of the pandemic, tried to understand that and what it would take and what our capacity required, like so many things, we started at one end of the spectrum, thinking how we're going to take care of anybody that shows up, to realizing that we had to use our own resources and capacities in a way that would be safest for our patients, and use the regional capacity as an additional tool to help us make sure we're providing the best care. So it's really hard to put a specific number on it.

We've got a section of the hospital that's designated the COVID patient section. And it's got a six bed capacity. So it could be as high as six patients, perhaps, if they were all more moderate in their disease and not necessarily all on ventilators. If we had all the sick patients with COVID or other illnesses were on ventilators, that number would be lower, because that's a much more intense level of care.

And so when we find ourselves in circumstances that we have concerns about pushing our capacity to provide safe care, that's when we draw on the regional resources, whether it's just another hospital close by or a larger facility in Spokane, or central Washington, or even down in the tricities. So all of that is in play to help make sure that people have confidence that you can come here. We'll understand what your needs are. And we'll get you to the right place of care. Hopefully, that's here in Pullman, but if the circumstances are such that that's not the best thing for you and your needs, then we'll find the right place for that to happen and make sure you get there safely.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Bob, I have a question for you. I know that there are meals that are served to students in the school buildings. And if we don't have students in those buildings, is there a way that we can provide meals for those students who need them and really rely on the school to help with that nutrition?

BOB MAXWELL: Yes, we do. So we already have plans in motion to provide this very similar service we did in the spring. So we will be serving breakfast and lunch at each of our school sites, as well as establishing distribution sites across our district boundaries.

We will be taking meals, breakfast and lunch, to-go out to community where students who qualify for lunches and breakfasts can pick those up. We are also exploring the ability for students that may wish to purchase a meal to pre-order. And they can either pick those up at the school or at a distribution site that we will advertise as soon as school gets started. So we will be serving breakfast and lunch. And we are looking at the pre-ordering option for students that may wish to purchase a breakfast or lunch as well.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. If you don't mind, I want to piggyback on another question that came in through the chat function that had to do with K12. And this was a parent who was wondering, is there a process that we're going to follow to determine when it's safe to go back to a face-to-face learning environment? So for example, is there a way, at some point in the spring, we might determine whether we can go from distance learning to face-to-face?

BOB MAXWELL: That's a great question. And we are actually working on a communication and a process called return to school stages. That will be in alignment with the Department of Health decision-making tree matrix. As soon as we have that in more of a final draft, I'll be actually talking with Troy and the County Health Department to review that.

So we are planning on what conditions it would take in order for us to move back to a hybrid model or full in-person instruction and trying to link that with some specific metrics as well. So obviously, our goal is to get back to in-person as soon as we can. That said, we want to make sure that it's safe for our students and for our staff. And we don't want to have to keep moving back and forth between in-person and distance learning. So we want to make sure that we give enough time to make sure that the number of cases is stabilized at a low enough number and remains there for a particular amount of time so it's safe for us to bring back students and staff for in-person services.

PHIL WEILER: Terrific. Thank you. President Schultz, I have a question for you. We had some folks who are wondering, has there been any connection or coordination between Washington State University and University of Idaho?

Obviously, the two schools are about eight or nine miles apart. And as I mentioned earlier, we do see a lot of traffic back and forth between the two communities. Can you talk a little bit about any kind of interaction between the two schools?

KIRK SCHULTZ: Certainly. I've been in communication with President Greene. And when we elected to move from an in-person format to a more remote format, he was one of the people I called just to let him know the decision we were making and why, but we've had a meeting, that was myself, Mayor Johnson, as well as our colleagues at the University of Idaho to talk about, regardless of whether somebody is in-person or not, we're still going to have students and people in our community, and what could we do to jointly work together to talk about wearing masks, social distancing, those kind of things.

And we see the border there. We understand there may be some political differences between the two states, but the fact of the matter is people go back and forth. They eat at restaurants. They do retail shopping in different communities. And there's a lot of that movement.

And so we want to coordinate where we can. And I think Troy mentioned that there's a lot of cooperation on the public health sector and other places as well. So we are communicating back and forth. Each of us is doing a little different pathway right now, but the bottom line is we're all committed to keeping our community as safe as possible and having that standard messaging that our towns doing, the universities are doing, and our region at large is doing.

GLEN JOHNSON: And our cities, Phil, are talking back and forth too. I've had a chance to thank Mayor Bill Lambert a number of times for stepping up, because that's not what Idaho is doing, but he required masks. And he also we had the social distancing.

And it was it was brave on his part. And I do appreciate what he's done. And we've had a number of conversations the same way.

PHIL WEILER: I would agree. I think that the Mayor of Moscow has been a great partner from what I've seen. So, Troy, I have a question for you with regard to the various phases that the governor has spelled out for communities in the state of Washington. Whitman county I believe is in a modified phase 3, if I'm keeping track of our box scores here. We received a question about what does it take to go from where we are and 3 to a phase 4, and what does a phase 4 mean?

TROY HENDERSON: Yes, that's a good question. We are in phase 3. And then everyone who was in phase 3 had phase 3 modified across the board by the governor, primarily in that he lowered collections of folks from 50 to 10. The governor has also tabled what phase 4 would be until the state gives in a better place.

So local health jurisdictions have not received guidance yet from the state. And the governor safe start plan is his directive. And so we're awaiting that. I will tell you phase 4, which is the final planned phase for the COVID outbreak, is not all clear.

It's going to be as back to normal as we can still be realizing that COVID is still here. So there's a lot not known about phase 4, but I anticipate phase 4, there is still going to be a request that folks social distance when they can. Don't get together in large groups if they can avoid it, and spread out when they can and then wear masks as much as often.

I think wearing mask may become kind of a more normal part of our society, which it is in obviously some of the Asian countries. And it not only helps protect us from COVID-19, but it has the potential to really reduce the influenza, seasonal influenza burden we see each year as well. And so the new normal moving forward, I think, it's just not going to be like it was a year ago.

PHIL WEILER: Well, unfortunately, I agree with you. I think the new normal will be different. We're almost at the top of the hour. I guess what I'd like-- Mayor Johnson, if you've got any closing remarks for us before we run out of time.

GLEN JOHNSON: I just want everybody to know that the city has stepped up and so many different categories to make sure that you have a safe environment here. And I do want to say something for Pullman Transit, because Pullman Transit has been affected obviously by the school district when they're not going to be in person. We have the troopers that have moved and the same thing with university students going to-- and staff going to the campus.

However, I just want you to know that in the past a 40-foot bus would hold maybe 60 to 70 passengers. They have it now socially distanced. They clean the bus and only allow 10 people on that Pullman Transit. Dial-a-Ride, they cleaned the Dial-A-Ride all the time. And that is safest too.

So I want everybody to know that Pullman Transit has stepped up, not only in cleaning and social distancing, but also in the messaging. If you'll see some of our transit buses, it tells you to wash your hands, stay six feet apart. We got that message out there too.

So I just want the public to know that we're all working together. And again, we certainly appreciate this town hall today. And thank you very much for allowing us to be part of that.

PHIL WEILER: Well, thank you, mayor. I I'd like to thank all of our panelists. I appreciate you spending time and think it's important for us to be able to hear from you, all the experts on where we stand with regard to this pandemic.

I also want to say a special thank you to the staff from Washington State University's academic outreach and innovation unit. They're the technical wizards behind the scenes who make this work for us, whenever we do it. I greatly appreciate the work that they do.

We've used them a number of times for Washington State University town halls as well. And they always do a fantastic job. So thanks to the group.

But most importantly, I want to thank all of you for joining us. I really do appreciate that you've taken time out of your day to make sure that you're informed. We will defeat this virus by working together.

We need to remember to wash our hands. We need to remember to wear our masks. We need to keep ourselves physically distanced. And we need to get our flu shots, as flu season comes.

But I think if we all keep ourselves knowledgeable about this issue and take those very simple steps, we're going to be able to tamp this virus down and get us back to normal much more quickly. With that, thank you very much. Take care, and enjoy your afternoon.