

Washington County, Texas Joint Information Center (JIC) Video Update 7-28-2020

Video location: <https://youtu.be/Aiz3wcEC0k>

Wende Ragonis: “Hello Washington County this is Wende Ragonis, the CEO and president of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce and today we're here with doctor William Loesch of Baylor Scott & White and who also serves as our public health authority in Washington County and we're going to talk with him about the impact of COVID-19 on our community and our small businesses thank you Dr. Loesch for being with us today. If you could, explain the testing process for those people in Washington County who are maybe showing symptoms or who are wishing to get tested

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: “Testing since the beginning, testing has been the most difficult part of this whole process. You know when we started, we didn't have near enough tests. I remember back in early March we were starting to see what we thought were cases and turnaround time was terrible. We've gone up and down, it's still probably the most difficult part of this whole process. Currently testing is being overwhelmed by a lot of what I consider unnecessary testing. The process of getting a test actually is pretty straight forward I usually recommend folks talk to their primary care physician if that doesn't work Scott & White here locally does have several options for getting testing if you don't have a [Primary Care Physician] PCP in the system. I'll tell you though, a lot of this is gonna depend on whether you're symptomatic or not. A lot of folks want to get tests just for peace of mind and I wish that was useful but in reality it's not. If you're not having symptoms testing is really not a good idea. We want to be testing folks that actually have symptoms and that need the test. Several reasons why: one is were overwhelming the system right now. When this was at its peak back in April and May we were actually still doing fine didn't have a lot of demand for asymptomatic testing we were getting test results within ~~48 hours~~ 24 hours now it's at least 48 hours sometimes even longer. State tests initially would take a couple of days, 3 days to come back, they're taking up to 2 weeks right now to come back. And part of that is because we're just overwhelming the system. If you call your physician or one of the doctors here what they will do is they will direct you more than likely to an outpatient testing center we have one right next to the hospital. The testing process is still the same there are multiple different types of tests out there the one that we use predominantly here is the nasopharyngeal swabs they take a Q. tip about yea long [demonstrates about a foot in length] and they stick it [demonstrates placing the swab in a nostril] pretty much back to your brain. Which I had one done this morning for screening purposes not because I'm symptomatic or exposed, and it's not as bad as it sounds it's not fun it's not something people want to do but it does work. Everybody keeps asking about the immediate tests that you can get done the hospital does have a way to test people emergently where they can get a result within about 5 to 20 minutes. The problem with that test is we don't have a lot of reagents so we have to be very careful and judicious with who were testing so that kind of testing is reserved for folks are having to be admitted to the hospital right away. Because we need to know that data right away most folks that have this in the first few days of their disease course they may feel really bad but they're not very very sick and that's why we're trying to hold off on testing till you're at least symptomatic in fact some newer studies are hinting that testing somebody when they're asymptomatic or even within the first 3 to 5

days their illnesses really wasteful because we have a lot of false negative tests I'll tell you we had several false negative test when this all started it really threw us off we were sure we were looking for now that we know and then dad is getting a little bit more firmer on this I'd recommend not testing to you've had symptoms for about 3 days although the guidance of your physician is most important."

Wende Ragonis: "Okay well that's good to know so if you are seeking a test or you want to get a test work with your physician."

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: "Work with your physician, and the problem we've also seen some folks don't like taking no for an answer, and I'm one of them. I'm American, when I want something I want it now and I want it my way! The thing is, the doctor is not sitting there or the [Physician's Assistant] PA, nurse practitioner, are not doing this because they don't want to help you. The problem is, let's say you got exposed, so you're at work minding your own business, weren't wearing your mask for some reason got exposed to this virus. I've had a lot of folks say, "well I was exposed I want a test so I can go back to work" it doesn't really work that way. The problem is you've been exposed. I don't know, I like to say this phrase whether it is gonna get me in trouble not I don't know "you can beat the rap but you can't beat the ride" if you get exposed there's not very many ways around that quarantine for 10 to 14 days. So the thing is let's give a for instance, let's say you went somewhere to some other facility because you were told no here and you go get your test well if it comes back negative that doesn't necessarily mean you weren't exposed or you don't have the virus because like I said it can take 3 to 10 days for that virus develop enough level where we can detect it on a test and so a test can be a false negative or negative test is done too soon can be falsely reassuring I've seen folks go back to work like I had a negative test well but you still had the virus and you end up spreading it to other folks and so it's really important not to get tested too early. The big thing here is to follow the advice of your physician you know especially if you've got a relationship with somebody. We care about you our job is to take care of you so as we want to do."

Wende Ragonis: "So you talked a little about getting a test to go back to work or quarantine can you explain to us, for the work force, when is it appropriate to go back to work and how that process should work."

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: "and I sent out, I know I did an article for the paper and for the radio last week and wrote a letter about this 2 weeks ago and actually the CDC actually revised their guidelines last week actually more in line with what I was saying. We're seeing a ton of employers asking for 2 negative tests and I'm begging you please stop requiring 2 negative tests. It is a false sense of security it doesn't mean that folks are infected. If they have, you know, if they still have positive tests after they've been sick for 10 days. The current CDC guidelines give 2 ways of returning somebody to work and this is mostly geared to health care workers but it can be extrapolated to everybody else. You can do the test based method: the CDC actually in their most recent guidance said we don't recommend doing the test based guidelines. It's clearly in big words we don't recommend doing this. What they recommend is a symptoms based approach for almost all patients and that means that once you've had symptoms for at least 10 days or 10 days from beginning of your symptoms once you've had no fever for 24 hours is the new guidance, it used to be 72 hours, now they said 24 hours fever free without taking Tylenol or aspirin or ibuprofen - etcetera, you're free to return to work. And the reason is, this test can be positive in people for weeks if not months. My record is 9 weeks right now I had a patient that for 9 weeks kept having persistent positive tests but were no danger to anybody. It's very complicated but this test does

not look for whole virus it looks for virus a certain portion of the virus that we clone with PCR testing you may get just that part you need and some people shed virus particles for weeks at a time but not be infectious to anybody else. They've done studies correlating this with viral cultures, we don't do viral cultures that's something we just don't have the capability of doing, but the PCR test is extraordinarily sensitive once you build up a certain level. So trust the doctor. If your doctor clears you to return to work the liability... Everybody keeps saying "well its liability, liability" Well the liability is on me if I cleared you to return to work and you're still sick and you get somebody else sick you can come blame me. But the problem is all these negative tests or these tests that I consider really inappropriate, they're clogging up the system. It's still taking... That's why the tests are taking days and days and days in reality that first few days it's nice to know that somebody's positive because it helps a quarantine. Many folks will not quarantine until they hear they've got a positive test even though they should, sometimes. The better we can do with getting these test results back quicker the better off we'll all be."

Wende Ragonis: "You can return to work once your doctor clears you, so it sounds like everything is really centered on your relationship with your primary care physician and what they direct you to do is safe."

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: "And there is some inconsistencies, I get it. Every doctor does a little bit different on their own. Some doctors will be more aggressive in testing some are a little less aggressive. I'll tell you, all the providers I know in this county are doing the right thing. They're testing what their gut instinct is and I'll tell you I never override a clinician's judgment. Your PCP knows you better than any other doctor knows you and I might look at in hindsight say I wouldn't have done that or would have done that... That doctor knows you. Trust their judgment on this. I'll tell you with the very first case we had in this county there was a negative test and they were told not to retest that doctor said, "no I trust my judgment I want to retest." That's how we got our first positive. It's helpful to let the doctor have some judgment on this."

Wende Ragonis: "Washing county is blessed to have many residential facilities for both our seniors and for others as well so can you talk a lot about what's going on in some of our residential facilities."

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: "The month of May was rough for one of the nursing facilities here in town and I'll tell you it's night and day difference now. That facility got hit with nearly 100 cases and over 25 deaths if I'm not mistaken; very rough time. We were all very stressed not enough manpower the state of Texas came in and helped us out and we've been hoping to avoid this in other nursing facilities. I'll tell you right now two more facilities have been hit, relatively hard. It may not be quite as hard as the other facility but the damage is still there. Nursing homes are just... They're designed for this to go poorly. It's not... It's not a problem with the virus, it's not a problem with testing, it's a problem with the population that lives in the nursing home and the fact that everybody is on top of each other. Nursing facilities have patients that need round the clock care if you're in a nursing home you need a nurse or somebody at your side round-the-clock. And staff at all of these facilities, every single facility in town have been wearing masks, they've been sequestered, they've been as safe as they can. But you can't keep masks on residents 24/7 they can't [unintelligible] it's hard enough, I've been wearing this since 7:00 this morning, I took it off just for the interview. You can't live in these all the time especially not in your own residence. Masks are really important in this, in nursing facilities... The staff members are wearing masks at all times, they're doing as best they can. The residents on the other hand they can't wear masks around the clock many of them have respiratory problems that are severe they're on

oxygen but also on top of that a lot of them have dementia, Alzheimer's disease, etcetera and they just are not equipped to leave the mask on and so the staff members, the staff are usually, unfortunately the ones that bring it in, not known to them. I know there was... I can talk more about asymptomatic spread And the [World Health Organization] WHO article that came out several months ago and set us all back quite a bit. But once it gets into a facility, the residents will spread to each other even if they keep them separate. I'm still speculating whether this gets into the air handlers in the system, they can clean and sanitize as much they can, but you've got too many people in an enclosed space. Even as careful as you can be, this virus likes to spread. And they've gone on lockdown, they've kept visitors at bay, we don't have people coming in and out, and despite best efforts we still see this virus running through there which is why the more we can control community spread and the less we have out in the community the less likely it's going to get into the nursing facilities.”

Wende Ragonis: “Well that's a great point and so if we all do our part in the community to keep it at bay that puts the folks that are working in those residential facilities at you know at less risk of bringing it in there so that's a great point.”

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: “Well our nurses and our C. N. A.'s and our respiratory therapists and all the folks that work in nursing homes and hospitals. they're humans too. You know when you're a kid you always think of the teacher – that's that lady that lives in the closet at school while I'm there – in reality they don't teachers go home just like everybody else. Nurses and doctors and all of us, we're all human. We have to go home, someone has to go to the grocery store, someone has to go out and do things, you have to get out and live and unfortunately just because the fact you have to live you're going to be at risk of contracting the virus. Right now in the last month the case count in this county has drastically climbed up and that's community spread, it's out in the community. it's... The mask mandate I think has helped I think we're seeing a little leveling off, finally just in the last couple of days. The case counts in the hospital running down. College station is seeing it level off I'm not gonna say it's dropping down yet but at least it's not spiking anymore like it was I think the mask mandate did help that I know there's a lot of folks who disagree with whether masks are useful or not. I'll tell you, common sense, I know Facebook and social media has a lot of people saying that masks kill people... I think we'd have a lot of dead surgeons if that were the case. I mean like I said, I've worn masks for 8 to 12 hours a day for the last 3 months with no ill effects and I've actually had 4 exposures and I've not gotten a virus yet despite testing. [showing mask to camera] These things help, these things help.”

Wende Ragonis: “So speaking of the masks what's a great way or how what are the protocols for taking care of these masks.”

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: “I'm spoiled, I get the good surgical quality masks, their disposable they're good for one day of use, or when they get soiled or if you get real exposure, you can change them out. Most folks aren't going to be able to have that luxury, I mean you can get them on... you can get masks... I'm seeing them everywhere now, I mean Amazon's got them again you can get him at the store, my wife said she saw them in H. E. B. the other day. Most folks will be using cloth masks which maybe not quite as good as surgical masks but it's gonna help prevent transmission so it's not... it will protect you to some extent but it's mostly to keep you from spreading it around. If everybody wears one, we stop spreading this. Caring for the mask: I would say there's some judgment here, I don't wanna be quoted as saying that I'm the mask guru or that I know exactly which each specific type of mask needs to be cleaned I'd say I'd clean them more frequently than you think you need to. Most cloth mask

you can launder. Cloth mask a lot of folks are making them for the longest time, you can buy them online, either the cloth masks or the Gators are different kind of folks... everybody has their own preference on this. [unintelligible] I usually say get a couple different ones you know if you had 2 or 3 or 4 you can switch them out. A lot of different ways to sterilize them for cloth masks, I just, you know, launder them. Good laundry detergent. Make sure they're clean that way."

Wende Ragonis: "Thank you for your time today is there anything else that you think you would like to share that would be helpful to the community"

Dr. William Robert Loesch, MD: "I know there's still a lot of folks that think this is a hoax I can't stress enough how much this is not a hoax. I mean I've seen it, it's out there, it's real. The sky is not falling, things are finally I think leveling off, but this is the time to be careful. We opened up back in May because we had to. Schools are about to open up in August and they have to. The children need to get back to school. We've got to start opening up. Wearing mask is going to be the only way I think we're going to be able to do that. [holding up a mask] This gives you freedom. Everybody keeps talking about taking away freedoms, I know it's mandated now... Wear the mask. It gives you freedom. You can get out we can get our business is open we can get everything running again with just a little bit of inconvenience. One day this [holding up mask] will not be required, one day. I wish it were tomorrow, it's not. We just have to stick... We're all in this together, we're all on the same planet, we're all in the same community, we all have the same goal, we don't want to get this. We don't want to get sick. For most people the virus is more of an inconvenience, it feels like a bad flu to most people. it does kill indiscriminately and we can't predict who's going to get it is the problem we've seen deaths as young as 32 years old in this county as up to 100 years old then again I've had people over 100 survive so it's not a death sentence either just be careful. Stay active, stay happy, stay healthy."

Wende Ragonis: "Thank you doctor less for your time today we really appreciate it."

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