

City Council Special Called Meeting Transcript (Joint Meeting with Travis County Commissioners Court) – 12/14/2021

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[9:03:41 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: Good morning.

>> Good morning, how are you?

>> Okay, that's good to hear.

>> Mayor Adler: I think that it's -- it's just an abundance of caution.

>> Well, that's good. Never too much to be safe.

>> Mayor Adler: Right.

>> Who do we have on the dais today if you're not --

>> I'm here, Leslie.

>> Are you waving at us?

[9:05:33 AM]

>> Judge Brown: Good morning, this is Travis county judge Andy brown and calling to order the meeting of the Travis county court. It is 9:05 A.M., and we're here at 700 lavaca street with commissioners gómez and Howard. And, mayor, I'll pass it over to you to start things off on your end.

>> Mayor Adler: Sounds good. We have the mayor pro tem who is chairing this meeting. She's live in the chambers, so I'll turn it over to her.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you, mayor, and thank you, judge brown. Thank you. I'm calling to order the city's portion of the joint meeting here on Tuesday, the 14th of December, 2021. The time is 9:06 A.M.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. So I'll call to order the joint meeting of the Travis county commissioners court and the city council. And I'll call up item 1 to receive briefings on covid-19-related matters. First we want to see if we have

[9:06:34 AM]

any callers in the public portion of this.

>> Good morning, judge. We do have one caller.

>> Judge Brown: Okay, let's go to the caller, please.

>> All right. We will hear from Zenobia Joseph. Ms. Joseph, please, go ahead. You have three minutes.

>> Thank you, judge, commissioners, council. I'm Zenobia Joseph. I wanted to make comments related to African-American outreach. I specifically wanted to ask Austin public health to remove the ad ma plays on kzai and it's a skit that plays that is supposed to be trying to get parents to get their children vaccinated. But it actually is pretty culturally insensitive. And Bob sounds like an older white male and Jenny sounds like a middle-aged white lady. And it's very patronizing. Not only that, but it juxtaposes with the Austin city council social welfare Thursday meeting announcement. And so I would just ask Austin

[9:07:35 AM]

public health to be a little bit more sensitive to recognize the target audience and to use perhaps the Marianne Nickerson and William Anderson voices to give the information to the listening audience. That information doesn't play on Kut, I listen to both radio stations. I would also ask you in the context of health equity and trying to reach the African-American population to do a more holistic approach, and to recognize that you have opportunities at the mobile food pantries. Specifically, tomorrow L.B.J. High school, 4:30 to 6:00, and Thursday Nelson field, 9:00 to 11:00, and on Friday and in del valle on Saturday, 9:00 to 11:00. And I recognize that Travis county say that it's difficult to reach people when

they're going through the lines. I would ask you to recognize that if people are waiting for food, if you use the \$50 gift card from HEB or Wal-Mart and

[9:08:37 AM]

you have it on the side they'll probably stop but if you're sitting there with a tent they probably won't stop to just get shots in arms. So I would ask you to use a hybrid approach. I know that Travis county is going through [indiscernible] The non-profits who have people stopping by for shots, but I disagree with that methodology. If they're just going to sit in a lobby of a church. It needs to be something a little bit more incentivized to get the money. I lastly ask you to provide information about utility assistance. Rental assistance is gone and social determinants of health

[indiscernible] And holistically. So the county's application, and for utilities, I'm not sure about that on the Austin side. But if you could collaboratively give more information for the health equity talk that is going on right now on kzai and Austin public health, and interim director Sturup was on last

[9:09:38 AM]

Monday and Shannon Jones on the radio -- there are opportunities where you can more hostistically meet the target audience that you're trying to reach. So I'm asking to you keep these things in mind and to do more than just shots in arms -- I know that is important, but you have to understand --

>> It is three minutes.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you, Ms. Joseph.

>> The question is not what is in it for you. Thank you. And I am available to answer any questions.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Any other callers today, Shelby?

>> Not at this time.

>> Judge Brown: Okay. All right, I'll go ahead and turn it over to Dr. Walkes and aph.

>> Good morning, everyone. Next slide, please. Next slide -- there, thank you. Today is the anniversary of our first deploying vaccines this

[9:10:39 AM]

time last year. And I put this graph up to show the milestones that have been made along the way by the members of this body and the decisions that have been made by our elected officials and the efforts

that have been taken by this community, by business leaders, in schools, the leadership in schools. All of the hard work of public health workers and the work of our essential workers to keep our economy going. And all of the work of the health care providers in our community. It is represented interestingly enough in this graph, and you ask how. In the first two stages that are shown here, we had masking available, social distancing,

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and the portion of December last year after the work and discoveries that were made right here at UT on the gene, that key that is what unlocks the entry, the door that allows this virus to enter our cells and cause infection, that gene and that identification and isolation of that happened here. And from that through the work of scientists here and all over the world, we were able to have a vaccine to put this virus into the category of a vaccine preventable illness. So taking a moment to think about that and remember all of the things that you have done collectively here and all of the people that are in our community have done, you see that we have been able to keep our system

[9:12:45 AM]

continuing to operate, our hospital system, with being able to go back to work. We now have children back and in-person instruction in schools. And all of those things were made possible by working together. Yesterday I was in a meeting with someone that I knew when I was in bastrop who was at the first meeting that we convened when this pandemic came to our knowledge, and I was asked what's the good news. Well, that's the good news, that we have been able to work together to keep our hospitals going and to help to save lives. And we found out -- if you go to the next slide, please -- that from the work of our modelers that we needed to do a little bit more masking and we needed to keep doing those mitigation

[9:13:45 AM]

efforts to avoid a surge as shown in the left-hand graph in the november/december time frame. And we made a decision to start looking at community transmission. The number of cases over a seven-day period per 100,000 -- because we knew that people -- this is an illness that you get exposure to covid-19 and then you develop symptoms or sometimes there's an asymptomatic case of this, but we -- we then see this viral loads or the amount of virus in our bodies increase and we test positive, and self-isolate, and some people recover and some people develop severe disease. And then they require hospitalization so that the hospital numbers are something that we see rise later in time.

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And because we knew that that was the case, we've started to monitor that and continue our measures of masking and social distancing and the guidance to the public to do those things into a period of time when we were at a -- just trending around the threshold of stage two and three. And we've been able to avoid the surge that we see on this graph. However, in the last week our case numbers have risen by 10%. And then we're seeing that nationally with a 12% increase in cases since Thanksgiving, which we anticipated being the case, given that in-person, indoor gatherings that we typically have during this holiday season. So if you would go to the next slide, please, again, just

[9:15:50 AM]

outlining those definitions on the next slide of what community-based transmission has been defined as, using one of the two of these parameters based on the CDC recommendations, whichever of the two is higher is how we decide to -- whether we're in a state of substantial high, moderate, or low community transmission. And in the last several weeks since the Thanksgiving break, before Thanksgiving, we had 44 cases per 100,000 as our community transmission rate, which was a moderate level of transmission. And as of the last several days we now are in the 70 range. So that's like higher as anticipated and we are seeing an increase in the number of cases.

[9:16:50 AM]

But, again, we're -- and we're also seeing an increase in our seven-day moving average of hospitalizations. We're up to 17. But, again, with mitigation efforts in the past we've been able to keep those things under control. And that's through this collaboration. The good thing about this community - the collaborative nature and spirit of the community has helped us to make our way through. So in the next slide, on the 6th of December, thank you, Ruth -- the CDC made an update to its self-testing guidelines and recommended that all people regardless of immunization status or symptom status -- so whether or not you had symptoms of illness, and whether or not you were -- you had received your vaccine, they're recommending that if you're

[9:17:50 AM]

planning to travel to visit with people that don't live inside your household that you test yourself to make sure that you don't have covid-19 so that you can help protect your loved ones and yourself, and stay home, and self-isolate and get better. So on this slide you see before you the considerations for self-testing. Self-tests are available in our local pharmacies, and we are distributing self-tests at our food

distribution sites in our neighborhood centers. So we have testing available now to help inform everyone on whether or not it's safe for them to travel. And so this is guidance that has

[9:18:53 AM]

been given, and we have been mentioning it in our communications with the public and strongly recommend that this be added to the things that we're doing as a community to go through and have a safe -- as safe as possible holiday season. If you look at our next slide, because our seven-day moving average is in the 17 -- it's listed at 17 now, we are in stage three. So the recommendations are for indoor masking in public spaces where you don't know the vaccine status or illness status of someone that you may be in contact with. And that would also suggest that if you have the opportunity to have a gathering outdoors, or meet with people -- friends and family in an outdoor setting -- that would give you better ventilation and provide a safer

[9:19:55 AM]

space for gathering if the weather permits. As always, travel, according to our federal regulations, requires that we wear masks. And this again would be an opportunity for you to protect yourself and other areas where you may be congregating and waiting for whatever mode of transportation that you have. If you're standing around people whose vaccine status that you don't know, wearing a mask would be helpful. Recent studies have shown that masking is beneficial, particularly if both parties are wearing masks, and if there are prolonged time frames of exposure, masking for both individuals helps reduce risk of transmission by upwards of 90%. So it is important that we continue to use this relatively benign way of protection.

[9:20:56 AM]

Next slide, please. The stats for our area show that in the period of November 29th through the 12th of December, we've had 189 admissions. The majority of those have been from Travis county. 57% of those, in fact. Almost all have been unvaccinated. We have record of two-thirds of in-patients' vaccine status, and those two-thirds have been unvaccinated. So it's important for us to continue to spread that message for vaccination in our community. And boosters for those who are eligible. Next slide, please. We're seeing a week-over-week increase in the number of hospitalizations over the past four weeks.

[9:21:56 AM]

The highest number of admissions has occurred in this past week. And we're still seeing that increase more so in the 20 to 69-year-old age range. More so in the 60 to 69-year-old age range in this past week. Next slide, please. We're seeing a disproportionate impact in our communities of color continuing. And as the caller pointed out, our efforts in those communities need to be continued, re-doubled, re-assessed, and that's an ongoing process that we undertake here at aph because we realize that the need is great. Next slide, please. Year-to-date we've had 5,979

[9:22:57 AM]

cases in our school system. During the last week, we've had 167 cases total, 133 of those were in students. Generally this is happening in settings where masking is not being done consistently. So it's happening in classroom settings and after-school events. It has decreased since the beginning of the year, but I've noticed that for the entire year last year that we had 3,933 cases total for that entire school year. And this year since August 16th to present we've had 5,900. So we see here that masking, distancing and the time that we've had with virtual learning

[9:23:59 AM]

in our previous year has had an impact in reducing case numbers last year. We know the importance of in-person learning, and it is important that we continue to give our kids the ability to be in class in school when possible. And so we can achieve that by continuing to have masking in place. There have been studies to show that this does not impact emotional growth and development and it does allow children to interact with each other and play and receive instruction in person. We now have vaccine available for our 5 to 11-year-old age group. And we have been extremely successful in our county and in getting children out to get vaccinated. And director Sturup will give

[9:24:59 AM]

you the stats on that. But this is so important, and we have an opportunity in the next couple of weeks to not only get our children vaccinated when they're off and out of school, but also give them the opportunity to spend time with friends and family. And it's going to be important that we protect one another with the things that we know that we can do so that they don't encounter anybody who has covid-19 during the holidays. A study came out recently in mmwr that showed that classrooms that use masking have a much lower rate of secondary cases and so less contact -- the impact of covid-19. So those sitting around a child

[9:26:00 AM]

who may be infected with covid-19, if they are wearing a mask, they have 1.7% chance of becoming infected with covid-19 if all are wearing masks in the classroom. And that goes up to 11.7% if masks are not being used. Next slide, please. When we started off, we made a conscious decision as a society to protect the most vulnerable in our community and recognized that our elderly population, due to advanced age and immune systems, decreased immune system capabilities that happens as we get older, and the fact that as we age we also have more likely medical illness in play. So those things put us at risk

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for developing illness and severe disease and death from covid-19. So in an effort to protect our older citizens, we, and residents and just community members, we -- we set about vaccinating everyone that was over the age of 65. And we've done so. And this graph shows that it's been helpful in protecting them against disease from covid-19 illness and death. And in the last 14 days we've had three cases in our nursing home facilities. Two of those were unvaxxed, and in unvaccinated staff members. And one was a resident who was vaccinated with j&j in July. None of these cases required hospitalization, and none resulted in fatality. Next slide, please. As I said that today marks the

[9:28:01 AM]

anniversary of our being able to vaccinate our community. And in the past year we've had 634 people die from covid-19. Overall, since the beginning of the pandemic, we've had 1,207 deaths from covid-19. This is a holiday time, and the loss of a loved one for many causes is significant and hard. And those of us who have experienced that loss are undoubtedly feeling the pain of that loss during this time. I would ask that our community remember to call a friend, to reach out to those that you may know that have been impacted by this. I don't think that anybody in our community has been untouched by this disease.

[9:29:06 AM]

Vaccines have worked to protect people from succumbing to covid-19. Of the 8.2% of the individuals who have died who have been vaccinated from covid-19, those individuals have had chronic medical illnesses that have impacted their -- their disease process and caused their demise. Next slide, please. We've seen over 10,000 breakthrough cases from covid-19 in our -- during this pandemic. 90% of them have been symptomatic. 104 have required hospitalization. And that in face of having

[9:30:07 AM]

deployed almost 1.9 million doses of vaccine. So, again, we know that this is a vaccine preventable illness. The breakthrough cases have been associated with -- and seen in individuals who we now know that have had some laxing or waning immunity and comorbidities that have impacted the vaccine efficacy. We now have boosters available. And I'm pleased to say that we have seen a 40% increase in booster uptake since the beginning of this month. So our community is rising to the occasion to get those booster shots that we know are needed to increase our protection from covid-19. We know that our immunity is

[9:31:13 AM]

being challenged by the new variants, with the delta variant we saw a decrease in the effectiveness of the vaccine anywhere from 50% to 70%. And reduction in preventing severe disease. We've seen some earlier reports from what our colleagues have been reporting regarding omicron that there may be as much as a 41% reduction in the effectiveness of our vaccines to this new variant omicron. We are also being told that boosters will help improve that protection. And so we have been careful to message this to -- as often and as loud as we can, and our community has been hearing us and they're going out and getting their vaccinations and

[9:32:14 AM]

their boosters. When I met with you last time, I showed you this slide. And this shows what the state of affairs was regarding omicron in the world on the 29th of November. And if you go to the next slide, as of yesterday, this is what omicron has done. It has made its rounds and it's around the world, and yesterday we had a report of -- reports of omicron, the .1.1.539, which is the variant of covid-19 that has been designated the name omicron. In Travis county we now have a preliminary -- three preliminary reports of this. We know from the progression that we now see on this slide from the previous slide that

[9:33:17 AM]

this particular virus variant is on the move and we have operated as a community knowing that at some point that once it hit our shores that it eventually would make it to Travis county. But we've not let our foot off the gas. We are continuing to March forward. We are wearing our masks. We are social distancing. We are preparing for the holiday season with the resolve that we have as a community that we will and can protect ourselves from this. So get vaccinated. Get your booster shots. Mask up. Wash

up. And test before traveling or gathering with friends and loved ones. Next slide. Thank you. I'll pass it on to Adrienne

[9:34:19 AM]

Sturup.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you.

>> Good morning, everyone. A pleasure to be with you once again. That last slide can be pretty alarming, but like Dr. Walkes said, you know, we've prepared for this. We know what to do. And the city of Austin and Travis county have worked tirelessly to make sure that our community has resources in place to be able to take advantage of those tried and true measures that we know work. As Dr. Walkes pointed out, last year we on this day that we first started giving out covid-19 vaccines. Very different scenario. So supplies were limited, it was only for a specific population. And people had to wait to get access. We are now at a point where as a

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country we have more vaccine than we know what to do with. And so in Austin and Travis county, there is ample opportunity for everyone who wants a vaccine to get one. And so, again, I encourage you -- do the things that we know work. Get vaccinated, get boosted, wear your mask, test and stay home if you're sick. For the month of December, the department issued 7,390 doses -- not even for the month, that's just through the 13th. And that's reflective of that uptake in boosters that we saw. And so I appreciate the community. You heard the messaging loud and clear and you came through. And we ask that you continue to come out and to get those booster shots. As far as testing, we're seeing a decrease in the number of tests that folks are asking for, but we are hoping in preparation for your holiday plans that you

[9:36:20 AM]

will consider getting a test before you leave and getting one when you come back home. And if you are hearing my voice and you think that's a good idea, we have what you need. We are providing testing at the George morales dove springs rec and at the expo, and we continue to offer mobile or in-home testing. Those appointments can be made by calling 512-972-5560. Or if it's easier for you can call 311. We continue to partner with our senior living facilities and homeless shelters and other facilities to offer testing in those spaces as well. So remember that if you are sick, please get tested. If you were exposed to someone who tested positive, please get tested. And if you are not sure, please get tested. If you

don't want to come out to get the nose poke, you can go to your local pharmacy or HEB and get an at-home kit.

[9:37:23 AM]

There are simple options. And the directions are easy to follow. As Dr. Walkes mentioned in partnership with the office of homeland security and emergency management, both Austin public health and Travis county neighborhood centers are providing test kits along with their food pantry opportunities. When we look at our vaccines for Travis county over time, as we know that Travis county is 71% fully vaccinated for those 5 and older. And fully vaccinated rate for 12 and up population is 85% first dose, and 75% fully vaccinated. You remember when we expanded that category to include our kiddos, we added 114 to the number of folks who were eligible for vaccine. I'm proud to say that we continue to do well as a county.

[9:38:24 AM]

28% of our pediatric kiddos are -- have received their first dose. And 15.6% are fully vaccinated. When you look at the distribution of vaccine by age as of the 13th, you can see here that we are continuing to see great strides in that 5 to 12 category. But over the last week or two, the largest uptick has been with our booster doses. You can see that we've administered in that 16 to 49 age range, 98,000 booster shots. So we're happy about that. The demand for boosters has been driving vaccine over the past couple of weeks. Some of our sites have been reporting wait times, but nothing too unwieldy. So, you know, please continue to come out. If you are a person who likes to

[9:39:26 AM]

structure your day, make an appointment online and then that process will go faster for you. But, if not, we still have those walk-up options that are available. When we dig down a little bit deeper to look at the demographics of our pediatric vaccine distribution, um, it's -- we're pretty much on par with the population make-up of that age group for Austin and Travis county. The gaps in the black and latinx population are not as significant, but are still there, so we're -- it actually looks like we're doing a little bit better in terms of meeting that gap. We're hoping that parents will take advantage of the kids being off on break and visit us at any of our sites to continue to protect our kids and community.

[9:40:26 AM]

When we look at the number of Travis county residents who have not yet completed their first course or received their second dose of vaccine, that number is now at 116,000. That's an increase by 6,000. Again, that's a result of adding the kiddos to this group. This is the slide that I wish that there was different information. To the point that the -- Ms. Joseph raised and that Dr. Walkes mentioned in her comments, the impact of this virus on the hispanic and black communities in Austin and Travis county has been -- they have shared an undue burden of this disease. And, unfortunately, we're still seeing that tapering off of

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vaccinations with hispanic at 45%, and black and African-American at 33%. A lot of the efforts of the department as well as Travis county are intentional and community focused in order to help to drive these numbers. But as Dr. Walkes said, we are going to continue to show these slides until the gap disappears. So when we take a look at geography for our first dose population, we have four zip codes falling under 70%. And that is 21, 41, 52, and 53 for first dose vaccination. And, again, this change is due to adding the 5 to 11 population to the group. And then when we look at the second dose fully vaccinated population, that yellow represents the 50% or lower, and those areas, again, where we are having intentional focus are

[9:42:30 AM]

78617, 42, 41, 21, 53. And so our vaccine operations -- we continue to be at southeast and little walnut creek library through the end of the month. So we are offering j&j and modern and pfizer at those locations. We are at the pflugerville library. We're also at the Delco activity center and because we know that, you know, it's the two shots, two arms deal this month, we are also offering flu at Delco for six months and up. And we're also offering flu at Sims elementary for children six months and older. We'll continue our mobile operations, places that we've been are the thinkery, and east Austin early college, and we will continue to respond to requests in the community to

[9:43:30 AM]

support events with covid-19 vaccinations. And so I was so pleased when I did my check of the media outlets this morning and, you know, the messaging is consistent. Get vaccinated. Get your booster. No matter how overwhelming that graph with all of those red lines might have looked about how rapidly omicron is spreading, we know that vaccines still are our best chance at being protected. Prep for the test. If you are planning to go see your family, test before you go. And test when you come back. Make sure that you aren't taking any virus with you. And that's a tried and true thing. I know that we're all

tired of it, of masking. Masking is still our best non-pharmaceutical effort to protect ourselves and others from covid-19. I think about masks the same way that I think about burpees.

[9:44:32 AM]

I hate them, but the benefits to my overall body conditioning cannot be beat, so when she says Burpee in the exercise workout, I do it. I hate it. But I know that there's a benefit. So I know that we have mask fatigue, but I encourage the community, we cannot be tired of a virus who obviously is not tired of us. So, please, continue to wear your masks. To Ms. Joseph's comments, we are attempting to have a full breadth approach to our outreach. I appreciate her feedback and we'll certainly get with the team to see how we can improve our presence in community radio. As far as our outreach activities, we were in the zip codes that we know are not where we need to be in terms of numbers. I apologize for the typo on the screen. That's 47, 44, 45, and then 17, we were out with our community

[9:45:34 AM]

health workers and our health equity unit, passing out information about testing and where the community can access vaccine services. And as always I like to -- oops I skipped -- I like to share pictures. This is our vaccine clinic at the thinkery. And so kids got to draw and wander and color and get protected all at the same time. And then, again, you know, really taking advantage of that multifaceted strategy, we were at in south Austin and we support many of the food distribution events and at dove springs, along with the food pantry. So those boxes there that you see are all of the shelf stable goods that families can receive and we continue to give out ppe. And we continue to give out hand sanitizer. We want to make it as easy as

[9:46:35 AM]

possible for people to do what's needed to protect themselves. And, lastly, before I end the presentation, it has been a year since we've been in this. I always give credit to Austin public health and Travis county, but there are -- the city of August employees continue to stand up for this community. It has been an across departmental collaboration to continue to support our community, to make sure that we have the best outcomes with respect to covid. So I appreciate all of the departments that continue to help us staff these events. I appreciate the leadership and continued support of city manager cronk and Stephanie hayden-howard as well as these two bodies in terms of the policy decisions and resources that you have allocated so that we can continue to do this good work. With that, I will end my

[9:47:36 AM]

presentation. Thank you.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Chuck, I'll turn it over to you.

>> Good morning, judge brown, mayor Adler, commissioners and councilmembers, chuck Brotherton, county executive from emergency services to provide y'all a quick update on the activities of our county mobile vaccine collaborative. Here with constable George morales of precinct 4, and Todd Hamilton with the central allied health institute. And at this time I'll turn it over to constable morales.

>> Good morning, commissioners, councilmembers, judge and mayor. This past week, with our partners, the mobile vaccine collaborative has done 2,811 shots for this past week. Total vaccines for the month is going to be 5,986. With 1,647 of those being pediatrics under 5.

[9:48:38 AM]

We have had cancel two outdoor clinics with inclement weather. To be safe we had to go ahead and cancel that one before we actually got started. We had a total of 2,740 fliers go out, and 850 phone calls made to target the areas of 77858, 53, 77824, 7741, 77821, del valle and 77844. We will continue working with the aid targeting title 1 schools. This week we have locations, Mendes middle school and Keeling middle school and provide boosters at idea schools this week. We will continue our static locations at J.D. Grocery store and del valle. This week we have 46 events

[9:49:41 AM]

scheduled to include palm elementary, the Mexican consulate, aid performing arts center and lulac manor. I turn it back to you, chuck.

>> Thank you, constable. Mr. Hamilton.

>> Thank you, chuck. Good morning, everyone. As constable morales has said, working with the coalitions, central Texas allied health institute have been responsible for 922 different vaccines for this month. 62% of those vaccines have come from adults which yields 775. 38% have come from children, 347. We continue to work within the eastern crescent of the city, whether it's at our static location for 1400, or out in the community in idea schools or any

[9:50:44 AM]

of the title I schools for Austin ISD. And we wrapped up both rounds of those for those particular ISDs and we'll continue to move throughout. Wherever constable morales and the coalition volunteer us for, that's where we'll be at, to continue this fight. I yield back.

>> Thank you, judge and mayor, to quickly share the county's website. To point people -- our viewers on how to find vaccination information with the locations that we are hosting this week as well as Austin public health, as well as our partners in Williamson county. On the county website, public-facing website, a quick link right there at the top left of the page. It will take anyone to our calendar for vaccine events, day-by-day through the week. And then selecting any one of these links provides all of the

[9:51:45 AM]

site information, details on the shots that are available, whether appointments are needed or not. But for most of these we are continuing to be barrier free, no appointments needed for the county locations. And as you heard from director Sturup, Austin public health is also hosting lots of barrier free no appointment required walk-up vaccine clinics. That will do it for us, judge. And we'll turn it back to you for questions.

>> Judge Brown: Thanks, everybody. I will turn it over to commissioner gómez first for any questions or comments.

>> Gómez: No, judge, I don't really have any questions. I think we are getting the word out and we seem to be going to the area where children are. And I think that we're getting our message out. Sounds like it. So, thanks very much. It looks like a lot of hard work has been done and so I'm very appreciative of that.

[9:52:47 AM]

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Commissioner Shea.

>> Shea: Yeah, I just wanted to ask constable morales, because I continue to be so impressed with how much effective outreach that you are doing. Would you repeat the numbers of people that you have reached? I want to make sure that I got them right.

>> We did 2,740 fliers, and made a total of 850 phone calls.

>> Shea: But the people that you have accessed, I remember --

>> Oh, vaccinated -- we vaccinated 2,811 for this past week. For the last two weeks combined for December, 5,986. 1,647 of those being pediatrics.

>> Shea: That is phenomenal. And can you just say really briefly about the calls that you're doing? Because I think that y'all have been really been creative about capitalizing on some of the outreach that

was done around the census and trying to engage the communities that are hard to reach and might be reluctant to

[9:53:47 AM]

participate. Can you just say a little bit about how you were doing that. And I was really impressed when I went out and toured with you guys and saw all of the creative approaches that you were taking.

>> Sure, first we owe you a debt on that one because we had access to phone numbers, and so we had a stronger and a larger reach now into these communities. Basically we call people and ask them if they would like the vaccine. We do ask them some questions about concerns about the vaccine. We do want them to do a follow-up with our 854 shot call center with Travis county health and human resources, but a lot of those people that we call are, again, the eight highly affected zip codes and those are our targeted areas. We could make up to four calls and assuming that, you know, we do a do not call, do not call us back, we do document that. But a majority of the time I would say that is more like 10%. 90% of them do have questions and 90% do want to know where our locations are at. So, you know, we'll continue to

[9:54:49 AM]

call into those areas. The areas that we block walk in, we do flyering of shop locations and some covid information. A lot of that is some of the information that is offered through Austin public health and we're very appreciative of that. So we'll continue to do what we have to do to get the messaging out.

>> Shea: Well, it's phenomenal and I think you're doing really outstanding work so I want to shout that out. A thanks to all of our staff who are continuing to try and keep people safe and I hope that people are getting the message that they've got to take the precaution that's available. Because you don't have the capacity in the healthcare system. And you hear all of these horrible stories around the country with communities with people sick with other conditions can't even get into the hospital because they're so full of covid patients. So thank you, all of you, for all of your work.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Commissioner Travillion.

>> Travillion: I just want to echo my thanks for the work that you all have been doing, particularly in title I

[9:55:49 AM]

communities and communities where outreach is difficult, or our normal outreach methods do not render the results that we're looking for. And my question really is we are about to go through a period, probably starting this Friday through mid-january, where schools are not going to be open. Do we have a specific strategy or should we develop a specific strategy to address the needs of kids and families who are out during this time period, and would like to get their vaccinations. Meaning, are we looking at community centers or places where youth -- youth recreation -- are we targeting churches. Are we looking at places where people congregate like malls? What are we -- what are we planning to do in the period

[9:56:52 AM]

where title I kids are not going to be physically at the school location. And is there anything that we can do, or anymore resources that we can provide to make sure that we -- that we don't lose ground during the period in which schools are closed?

>> I'll start. I neglected to mention this in my presentation. Dr. Walkes has worked with the jis to create a psa that is specifically targeting African Americans. And we've reached out to several of the pastors of the larger churches on the east side to ask if they will run the psa not only during their church announcements, but to also attach it to their social media feeds so that we can get that word out there. I know that the team is working

[9:57:53 AM]

on a variety of place-based events in communities, not necessarily in schools, but we can definitely work with the jis on specific messaging. We will continue to have our clinics at Delco and pflugerville. Even though the school is closed we are not, and we continue to serve. But, definitely can take a look at a more concerted approach in youth-serving areas or facilities.

>> Commissioner, we'll continue to push at our static locations. We do have some county holidays coming up, but during that time we're going to continue to push information out to static locations and try to work with Austin public health for additional shot locations that are in the area.

>> Travillion: I just want to

[9:58:55 AM]

make sure also that as we ask people to work during their holidays that we make sure that they're compensated for emergency pay for the time in which they are serving the community.

>> Judge Brown: Commissioner Howard?

>> Howard: Thank you. I was wondering from Adrienne or Dr. Walkes if our success in -- with vaccination in communities of color is sort of on par with what we're seeing in other communities, or are we ahead or behind?

>> I don't have a specific comparative analysis, maybe Dr. Walkes does. But, yes. In Walkes peer cities, there is this lag, this gap Walkes

[9:59:56 AM]

cities outside of Texas where they have seen significant increases the implementation of measures that are vaccine passports, or other type of measures -- I guess I'll say mandates. New York was one of the places that we were asked to talk to specifically, and the commissioner there was very clear that until they started putting some of those measures in place, they were seeing that significant lag. There was an inbetween step that he did mention that seemed to have some traction, and that was being in entertainment spaces. You know, attaching vaccine opportunities to concerts, or to restaurant week. He said they did a big push during their restaurant week in August. And so as we are embarking upon

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our festival season, that can be something that we would work with event organizers. We do have precedence for is that here. We did see with acl and the support from c3 that a lot of folks were incentivized to go out and get their vaccine to be able to participate in the event.

>> Judge Brown: Thanks. I just want to say thanks again, especially on the pediatric stuff. It looks like if my math is right we're at 28% of our eligible pediatric population that's been vaccinated. So that's up since last week. And we're still -- I think the state's at 15%, so if that math is right we're 13% above the statewide rate. And I want to commend everybody who's worked on that, especially constable morales, aph, our community partners, aid, Dr. Elsalde who has been amazing in

[10:02:02 AM]

making available the vaccine for kids, Dr. Telly with del valle aid has been amazing, making the vaccine available for kids, UT school of nursing, ascension-seaton and others. And I think the fact that the numbers more closely follow the population numbers and the demographics of kids shows that when we go where people are -- which we've been able to do better in this population because we know kids are in public schools. Kids are in title I schools. And I want to recognize that that seems to be the thing that works really well. We have work to do in the general population of making the vaccines available

where people are, but constable morales and his team, and aph and your team have done great work in going into the community and making more available. Constable morales' idea of having it in grocery stores and chief Bailey's idea of putting it in jds, that first -- I don't know if you remember what

[10:03:02 AM]

month -- that led to this effort of making it more easily accessible when people are doing something else that they're already going to be doing and they see the vaccine there. That's where we have success, and hopefully we can keep folks in that way. And I will pass it on, mayor, to you, unless constable morales, or Adrienne, y'all have any other thoughts on that? This praise that I'm giving to your work, y'all are doing great stuff.

>> I will say thank you and the staff say you are spot-on with your figuring.

>> Judge Brown: Good. Right on. 28% locally, 15% statewide. Mayor pro tem, I'll pass it over to you.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you, judge brown. We're going to start with district 10 for questions and then work our way down to district 1. Councilmember alter?

>> Alter: Good morning. As we mark this one-year anniversary, I want to join in thanking or staff, both the city and county, for all of the work

[10:04:03 AM]

and all of the professionals across our community who have been helping to get folks vote. I wanted to ask a question about our own workforce. I'm not sure if this is a question for the city manager, for Austin public health. It's been several months since we've heard statistics about how covid is impacting operations and how it is impacting our personnel. We had questions about whether we would be able to do mentoring, vaccination, and that was not a path we went down. But at one point we had certain departments that were experiencing very high absence rates that were then impacting service, etc. Could someone speak a little bit to what we're seeing now, particularly within public safety, but more broadly about how covid absences and where we are at? Covid absences are affecting

[10:05:03 AM]

city's functions, and what we know about vaccination rates among our personnel.

>> I'll start out, councilmember. Thanks for the question. You know, we unfortunately have not seen -- fortunately have not seen significant impacts to operations over these last several months. We continue to monitor and ensure that every employee is able and if they want to get their vaccine, that we make

that available to them. And so we have seen an increase in rates of taking the vaccine from across our employee base. We clearly don't have the actual numbers at this point in time, but I will follow up with hr and see if there is any additional information that we can provide to the council. Before I close, I'll see if acm hayden-howard wants to add anything.

>> Mayor Adler: Muted.

[10:06:06 AM]

>> Harper-madison: Thinker you're muted, acm Howard.

>> I'll follow up with the council after I talk to hr.

>> Alter: It would be helpful, because at one point it was really -- you know, over the summer -- creating some big challenges in terms of staffing, particularly for our public safety departments. And so it would be helpful to get an update and have an eye on that if we do experience a surge so that we're aware of what's going on and any steps that can be taken to address that, and I'd be curious what's working to get folks -- to get those vaccines within -- among our personnel.

>> One example I'll just mention, aph has been incredible

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in meeting departments where they're at, too, so, hosting town halls, making themselves available for smaller gatherings of employees so everyone can ask questions, get answers. And so they did a big push in that regard earlier in the fall and that was very helpful.

>> Harper-madison: Are you done, Alison?

>> Alter: Yes, thank you.

>> Harper-madison: You're welcome. Councilmember tovo?

>> Tovo: Thank you. And thank you all for your continued work on so many fronts. I really appreciate all of our public health professionals who have just been nonstop trying to keep our community safe and get vaccines out, and testing. So I had a couple -- one I'm going to make as a comment, since we're only supposed to ask one question. As I started hearing about Houston's wastewater testing over the last week, that got me thinking about Austin's. I and others had asked questions

[10:08:07 AM]

about that Earl on. There was a pilot program at UT to do that. I understand it halted because of lack of funding and personnel. And so this is really something for the future. I'd be interested -- once we're well past this I'd be interested in better understanding what the value of that was for cities like Houston that were able to continue it, and whether that's something that we should think about really sourcing up in the future through our partnerships with other entities. Was that able to yield information that we couldn't through other means, especially -- as I understand it -- one real benefit is that it gives a heads-up about the virus sometimes before the testing shows up because it's also measuring asymptomatic individuals who are asymptomatic. So, just for future -- again, once we're past this particular crisis -- it would be interesting to compare cities like Austin to Houston and the value that some of those cities got from that testing.

[10:09:10 AM]

And two, I just want to appreciate the messages about testing. I was out of town over Thanksgiving. After hearing several messages from our public health department about -- of doing that testing as a precaution before you were around family or in gatherings, I did get tested this weekend. So I'm happy, as somebody who's now vaccinated and boosted, I was having fever, coughs and sniffles. I want to amplify the message that you gave. I'm really happy to know that I could go to those gatherings knowing that I do not have covid and I'm not in the position of infecting others. So thanks for continuing to get those messages out and to talk about the ways and the various permutations of that and why you might want to do that whether you have just traveled or are about to be in the midst of other gatherings. I did want to suggest, add to what

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commissioner Travillion said about capturing families and especially families with children at places where they might be when school is out, and I wanted to suggest that -- just ask if you had any plans to do that with testing. I know our public health and our partner organizations are really stretched right now doing all of this work, but I wonder if any of the private sector folks who are doing testing might be interested in setting up at the airport, or at malls to do that kind of testing for people who are out and about and might want to get the surety that they, too, are covid-free. So I guess this is for director Sturup. Are there any plans to do that? When I was in New York City -- on lots of blocks there were mini testing facilities. Sorry. So they would be easy to access. When I was making my appointment, it was a little more challenging. A lot of the places were a day

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or two out. The good news is a lot of folks in our community are getting tested. The downside is we want everybody who has any questions about what their status is to be able to get that testing pretty quickly. So I'm wondering about having -- vaccinations but also testing in some of those areas that we know are going to be highly populated through the holiday season.

>> My initial reaction -- and I will always go back to staff to get their expertise -- is that we would not want to encourage folks who are sick to be in places with high foot traffic. We typically try to keep the testing operations in spaces where there isn't a lot of interaction with a larger population, in a space that allows for a big enough

[10:12:16 AM]

footprint and throughput so that we can keep not only folks seeking tests, but those who are administering the tests and doing all of the data collection work safe. But we do have the mobile testing options available if folks call 311. They can schedule those tests. And we are making a big push to distribute those kits that hesm has acquired, and perhaps that could be the compromise strategy, that we make sure that those kits are more widely available to parents and families in places that they might frequent rather than, you know, setting up an event that would cause exposure. And I know what you're talking about. When I was in New York in October, there were little pop-up tents on every corner in downtown Fulton street in Brooklyn where you can get a quick swab. But for consideration, we'll take that back to staff. I do want to note that staff

[10:13:18 AM]

said that they are exploring a wastewater project with the CDC and Austin water for our location, so more on that as that develops.

>> Tovo: Thank you. Director Sturup, thank you for that. I completely understand your point that we don't want to encourage folks who are sick to go in those places, and so I think what I was envisioning was more like drive-up solutions in the park, in the parking lot of those busy spaces. But I appreciate your thinking about the distribution of the kits in some of those places.

And thanks for the other info.>> Harper-madison: Councilmember Ellis.

>> Ellis: Thank you, mayor pro tem. I'm wondering if there's any more updated information about either the vaccines for those under five years of age or for boosters for those who are in the 5-11 age group, at what point that's appropriate for them to plan on getting a

[10:14:21 AM]

booster.

>> I'm glad you asked that question. There was a comment made on a call this week that they're anticipating sometime after the 1st of the year to see an application being made for consideration of the under five age group vaccination. So, more to come on that. No definite dates, but that was encouraging to hear that.

>> Ellis: I look forward to that information coming out, and all the work that everyone's doing on this.

>> Yeah. Thank you.

>> Harper-madison: Councilmember pool.

>> Pool: There we go. I don't have any questions, just my appreciation extended once more to the team, the

[10:15:24 AM]

cross-discipline team. Thank you all.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you. Councilmember Kelly?

>> Kelly: I don't have any questions, either. Thank you.

>> Harper-madison: You're welcome. Councilmember kitchen? Oh, actually, I don't know that she's with us today. And it looks like councilmember Casar might not be with us, either. Councilmember Fuentes? I'm sorry, councilmember Renteria?

>> Renteria: Yes. I don't have any questions. I just want to encourage people to go out and get their vaccination. You know, we're in the flu season. There is a cold bug out there, the cold is regular going around and causing some very severe symptoms. So I encourage you to wear your mask, even if you're vaccinated and you're boosted. Wear your mask out there, because there is a lot of other nasty bugs out there that just can't wait to get you.

[10:16:26 AM]

Thank you.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you. And it looks like councilmember Fuentes is not with us, either, in which case I'll go to me in district 1. I also don't have any questions -- enduring appreciation for everybody's effort around us really just trying to get ahold of this virus and the variants that go along with it. I also, like Adrienne Sturup, I hate burrpees and I'm getting to the point where I hate these masks. I'm developing a little rash, you know. And my glasses are always foggy. But I always have so many friends who are fully vaccinated and boosted and still contracted covid-19. And so I'm operating like the

mayor out of an abundance of caution and I encourage everybody else to do so. I really appreciate the fact that we are still in stage three and hope we don't go to four or five. And look forward to everybody being well. And moving into this holiday season thoughtfully.

[10:17:26 AM]

I think the one question I would have, if I had one -- in fact, it's not a question so much as a statement. I'm concerned about all the holiday travel and what that will bring. So I again would encourage everybody to be as safe as possible and think about everybody around them. Judge, I believe that's it for us.

>> Mayor Adler: Can you hang on a second?

>> Harper-Madison: I'm sorry, Mayor Adler.

>> Mayor Adler: That's okay. First, I just want to remind everybody that we have a special called in order to extend the enforcement and standing of Dr. Walkes' orders. The county is passing one today. We need everybody who is on the screen right now to participate or we're not going to be able to do that. So we need everybody to vote. It won't take long, but please make sure that you join the next meeting. And I appreciate the county taking that action as well. You know, we're coming to the end of the year and I want to say thank you, also, to aph, to

[10:18:30 AM]

Dr. Walkes, to Dr. Escott, everybody that's worked on this. The bottom line deal is that the number of people that died in Texas because of this virus is almost 80,000 people. I think it's like 75,000 right now. And that's just a staggering number. The mortality rate in Austin, less than half of the state's mortality rate. If the state had been able to achieve what we've achieved locally, almost 40,000 Texans would still be alive. And I recognize that every different area of the state is different, and we just can't expect the numbers to be stable. But nonetheless, our staff, aph, and the county workers, city staff, really have done a phenomenal job relative to our

[10:19:31 AM]

state and even relative to the rest of the country. We're among the communities that have best responded, and the results show that. And I want to end this year with thanking everybody for that. And it is significant. And it was the most pressing issue in this city and in this country and in the world over the last year, probably the last two years. So I just wanted to say thank you for that.

>> Judge Brown: Thank you. Mayor pro tem, did you -- so I guess we're going to adjourn or recess until what, 10:35, commissioner? Is that good?

>> Travillion: I think we can make everything work.

>> Judge Brown: Sounds good. So we'll stand in recess until 10:35. And I'll pass it over to you, mayor pro tem, to do the same.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you, judge brown. Colleagues, after we adjourn

[10:20:32 AM]

we're going to take a brief five-minute break before heading into our special called meeting. So if there's no objection, the city's portion of the joint meeting is adjourned at 10:20 A.M.