



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Garland County testing more per capita than any county in the state

HOT SPRINGS – At the virtual meeting of the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Task Force on April 13, the rise in confirmed cases in Garland County was attributed to the county’s high rate of testing.

“Our area hospitals and clinics have really stepped up with regards to COVID-19 testing. Per capita, Garland County is doing more testing than any county in the state,” said Garland County Health Officer Dr. Gene Shelby.

Hot Springs City Manager Bill Burrough and Garland County Judge Darryl Mahoney both attributed the high testing capacity to the reported number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in our area. Garland County had 99 of the state’s 1,398 confirmed cases, according to the Arkansas Department of Health online status updates webpage as of 11 a.m. on April 13. The total number of tests recorded in the county was at 1,231, and there have been 27 recoveries and no deaths.

Burrough said that Hot Springs is being allocated an additional round of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, courtesy of the CARES Act, to be allocated to COVID-19-related relief. Hot Springs is being granted around \$274,000, and the plan is to work with the hospitals and clinics to purchase rapid-response coronavirus testing supplies.

These CDBG funds are a reminder for residents to complete the census. Although the pandemic has taken attention away from the 2020 Census, everyone in Hot Springs and Garland County is strongly encouraged to take a few minutes to complete the short survey, which can be done online (with the code received in the mail or with a street address), by phone or by using the paper form and returning it in the mail. A complete count ensures Hot Springs and Garland County receive the appropriate amount of federal funding based on our area’s true population. Not only do these federal funds go toward meal programs, community development and road improvement projects, and so much more, they also assist in other times of need, such as this ongoing crisis.

All reports on the task force call were optimistic in terms of the current supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hospital bed and ventilator availability.

Bo Robertson, Garland County Emergency Management Director, could not be in the meeting as he was documenting property damage in the county from the recent thunderstorms. His efforts were applauded by Mahoney for “working day and night to secure PPE” for our area. “Everyone in the county has done a great job flattening the curve,” added Mahoney.

Physician clinics can make requests for PPE by using the website of the Arkansas Medical Society, arkmed.org, as it is coordinating PPE distribution to outpatient clinics.

Ty Farris, of the Hot Springs Fire Department, urged all in the meeting to continue to set a good example by following the recommendations to stay at home when possible. “There is still a lot of traffic out there. Especially in the next couple of weeks as we head toward the peak, encourage people to stay at home more than they are,” he said, referencing a lot of people being out over the past weekend when the weather was nice.

The United Way of the Ouachitas (UWO) continues to seek funding opportunities to assist those impacted by COVID-19. Money has been awarded from various sources, although the funds have not been delivered yet.

Since Arkansas 2-1-1 was made available statewide, the number of calls has greatly increased with more than 1,700 in March and already more than 1,000 this month, according to Sarah Fowler, UWO executive director. She said that when residents dial 2-1-1, it is a great tool for them to have access to services in their communities.

The Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Call Center/Hotline is available at 501-760-4307, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, as a first line of triage in an effort not to overrun our hospitals. The hotline is also available for adjoining and nearby counties, for which Hot Springs serves as the regional healthcare provider. Another option for anyone exhibiting symptoms is to call their primary care physician. Calls to 9-1-1 should be solely limited to anyone requiring an emergency response.

Deliveries of food and/or required medications to the elderly, disabled and other high-risk individuals by medically-screened and vetted drivers is available by Sheep Dog Impact Assistance of Central Arkansas by calling 501-712-5514, extension 707.

Public health officials continue to stress the importance of washing hands often, keeping social distance, staying home when sick and disinfecting surfaces often. For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>.