



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Garland County seemingly ready for Phase 2 of reopening

HOT SPRINGS – With only four positive test results in the past week and currently only six active cases in Garland County, the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Task Force is pleased that our area has remained on a steady path toward Phase 2 of the reopening.

At the task force’s virtual meeting on June 8, Garland County Health Officer Dr. Gene Shelby said that data from the week of May 31 – June 7 shows that the county had 311 COVID-19 tests with four positives, making the positivity rate 1.3%. “We are now two weeks since Memorial Day weekend, and we have not seen a spike in positive cases,” he said. “That is certainly a tribute to what everyone is doing as far as social distancing and following the governor’s directives.”

Shelby encouraged continued promotion of COVID-19 testing as a means to keep the virus from taking hold and spreading in our community. He particularly hopes all organizations that have contact with visitors to Hot Springs and Garland County to share with guests that COVID-19 testing is readily available, and for anyone with symptoms or concerns to go and get tested. Shelby did note that if individuals from out of town are tested in Garland County, those numbers would not appear in our county stats as they are based on the individual’s permanent address.

A list of active testing sites can be found at www.cityhs.net/covid-19, and a flyer can be downloaded at bit.ly/HSGC-testing-sites. One of the sites, the Garland County Health Unit at 1425 Malvern Avenue, shared that the testing process is safe (self-administered in the individual’s vehicle with guidance from a nurse) and is quick with only a couple of forms to complete. There is also no out-of-pocket expense at this and other local sites.

The Hot Springs/Garland County Call Center (501-760-4307) had an increase in calls on Thursday and Friday, many from out-of-town guests wanting to come visit. Almost all local businesses and restaurants are back open and are operating in accordance with the governor’s directives and guidance from the

Arkansas Department of Health. County and city officials noted that local hotels, businesses, restaurants and downtown Hot Springs were all busy this past weekend with many out-of-state license plates.

The local hospitals and LifeNet all reported that volumes are approaching pre-COVID-19 levels. National Park Medical Center (NPMC) and CHI St. Vincent (CHI) both shared they are working to inform the public about the safety measures being taken, and that it is safe and recommended for individuals to seek treatment for symptoms they may be having. “There still seems to be the misconception about hospitals being inundated with COVID-19, and that’s just not the case, at least not in Hot Springs,” said Mandy Golleher, director of Marketing & Communications at NPMC. “We want to get the word out because we know there are other individuals who are having symptoms as serious as chest pain, who need to seek care but are too worried about COVID. Our hospital and clinics are taking every precaution to protect our patients and our communities, and our facilities are safe.” Golleher said that there has not been a hospitalized COVID-19 patient there since early April. Vicky Sanders, market director of nursing at CHI, echoed Golleher’s comments and said CHI has hired additional personnel for their screening stations.

Bo Robertson, Garland County Emergency Management director, could not participate in this week’s meeting as he was unloading and sorting a shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE) for hospitals in the Southwest quadrant of the state. Several representatives in the meeting applauded the efforts taken by Robertson throughout the pandemic.

The United Way of the Ouachitas (UWO) is still experiencing high volumes of requests from community members for assistance. They continue to work with partner agencies and use available funds to help those in need. The application for individuals and families who have suffered loss of employment of income as a result of COVID-19 is online at <https://www.unitedwayouachitas.org/covid-19-application>. Applicants can choose for assistance in several categories, including food, rent, utility bills, medical/prescription costs and costs for gas or public transportation. They are also still providing free income tax preparation assistance by appointment.

To donate to the COVID-19 Relief Fund, visit www.bit.ly/UWO-COVID, call 501-623-2505 or send a check by mail at 233 Hobson Avenue, Hot Springs, AR 71913.