Amid the rising number of new COVID-19 cases, both in Texas and nationally, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference this afternoon, updating the public on the state’s response to the outbreak, while simultaneously seeking to reassure citizens that he and health officials maintain a close watch on the numbers, as well as where those cases are occurring. In addition, Governor Abbott strongly emphasized the prudence of using mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but steered clear of mandating such a statewide requirement.

Governor Abbott asked that Texans to step up and help slow the spread of the virus, saying that Texans must find ways to return to daily routines while also learning to coexist with COVID-19, until a vaccine can be found. The Governor insisted that the state early on was successful in slowing the spread of COVID-19 and due to those precautions taken, “hospitals continue to have abundant capacity to treat patients with COVID-19”.

At several point in his remarks, Abbott reminded the pubic that the state has established safety protocols to minimize the spread and provided guidance for all Texans and Texas businesses. If followed, they can help reduce the spread of COVID-19. These guidelines can be found at open.texas.gov [open.texas.gov].

Per Governor Abbott:

- Individual precautions that everyone should follow:
  - Stay home if you can;
  - Wash your hands frequently;
  - Stay six feet away from others; and
  - If you can’t stay six feet away from others, wear a face covering.

- The State is surging testing resources in areas that may be hotspots in conjunction with the CDC and the National Guard.
- The State is working with hospitals to ensure that they have the ability to treat anyone with COVID-19.
- Wearing masks help keep Texas businesses open. Not taking action to slow the spread – like wearing masks – will cause COVID to spread faster, which will lead to the closure of businesses.

The main goal of these steps is to reduce positive cases and hospitalizations.

He also pointed out that local authorities and agencies are taking necessary enforcement actions throughout the state to address violations of the aforementioned state guidelines. Abbott specifically mentioned TABC, which has begun enforcing the guidelines of occupancy along with other health and safety protocols at all licensed liquor establishments through Operation Safe Open.

Governor Abbott stated that “closing Texas down again will always be the last resort”. He did note that the positivity rate is up from 4.5% in April to almost 9% today. “To state the obvious, COVID-19 is spreading at an unacceptable rate and it must be corralled”, Abbott said. There is a clear doubling of numbers, and if we see another doubling of numbers in the next month, Abbott said there will need to be tougher actions taken to curb and reduce case numbers.

Dr. Hellerstedt offered remarks, urging please people, at critical time to follow the social distancing protocols, to get control of COVID-19. He said it’s about hygiene, and that face coverings is always a great idea to protect yourself and others. Hellerstedt said that “We are at a point, where we need to recover the sense of community we had early on”.

The state is also completing surge testing in areas that may be hotspots while working with the CDC and National Guard. State officials emphasized that they continue to work with hospitals daily to check-in and monitor their status and also with local officials on a weekly basis.

After citing the spike in numbers after Memorial Day, the Governor was asked about 4th of July events. Abbott said that many counties are limiting the outdoor gatherings for the celebrations, limiting or canceling parades and other traditional events held on the day. He encouraged local officials to continue to set their own standards of large gatherings for their communities as they see fit. Abbott when on
to comment that the more local communities do to reduce the size of gatherings, the more likely they will be able to reduce the spread in their area.

To round out the press conference, Governor Abbott strongly encouraged residents to wear a face covering or face mask. It is proven that following health and safety protocols and wearing masks can significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19, Abbott said. Although, when asked if he would establish a state-wide mandate for masks, he said he would not, and that decision was driven by different COVID-19 situations from county to county. “Covid-19 hasn’t suddenly gone away, but neither has our ability to slow the spread...we don’t have to choose between jobs and health, we can have both”.

As always, please call with any questions.

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