



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 positive test result percentages dropping in Garland County

HOT SPRINGS – Garland County continues to lead the state in per capita COVID-19 testing, but there is yet work to be done in planning how to safely re-initiate elective and non-urgent surgeries and procedures in line with Arkansas Department of Health guidelines, according to representatives with CHI St. Vincent and National Park Medical Center.

At the virtual meeting of the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Task Force on April 27, Garland County Health Officer Dr. Gene Shelby again praised the local medical community for continuing to provide tests to the public. For the week from April 19 – 26, Garland County had 297 tests reported. Of those, only four were positive, for a positive rate of 1.3%. Shelby noted the recent positive rate is much lower than the county’s overall positive rate of 6.1%, which comes from a total of 1,814 tests administered with 111 positive results.

To continue to mitigate the spread of the virus locally, Shelby noted the importance of following the recommendation from national and statewide authorities of wearing face masks in public, particularly in stores and in other situations where maintaining social distancing is a challenge.

For those who do not have a face mask, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers step-by-step guidelines on making cloth masks from a bandana or T-shirt at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>. The CDC also published a short video demonstrating how to easily make a mask at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPx1yqvJgf4>.

Governor Asa Hutchinson announced on April 22 that elective surgeries and medical procedures at the state’s hospitals and clinics can resume on April 27, with a few stipulations that include the patient must test negative for COVID-19 within 48 hours of the procedure. Area hospital representatives said that their leadership teams are taking appropriate steps to safely resume some elective surgeries and procedures that were previously rescheduled out of an abundance of caution amid the novel

coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The planning processes are underway in both area hospitals, and they are taking every precaution to ensure the safety of patients, coworkers and physicians. Some elective procedures will be scheduled very shortly.

The COVID-19 Call Center reported receiving multiple calls relating to pre-procedure testing needs, and callers were directed to available testing sites. Hospital representatives said that COVID-19 test scheduling for procedures would most likely be organized by the clinic or hospital scheduling the procedure, rather than it being left up to the patient. The Call Center is available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week, at 501-760-4307.

The United Way of the Ouachitas (UWO) has launched an online application for individuals and families to request assistance if they have suffered loss of employment or income as a result of COVID-19. The application is available at <https://www.unitedwayouachitas.org/covid-19-application>, and applicants can choose for assistance in several categories, including food, rent, utility bills, medical/prescription costs and costs for gas or public transportation.

Money for assistance is made possible through several grants for which the UWO was recently awarded, donations to the COVID-19 Relief Fund and \$16,000 from United Way Worldwide. A \$25,000 grant from the Blue & You Foundation will provide food boxes in partnership with the Project HOPE Food Bank. Sarah Fowler, UWO executive director, said they plan to use \$5,000 a month for five months of food relief. Another grant of \$10,000 from the Arvest Foundation will also assist with food, as well as medical and shelter needs. The COVID-19 Relief Fund has also received \$2,600 from Truist Bank, \$2,000 from Weyerhaeuser and nearly \$1,000 from individual gifts. To donate, visit www.bit.ly/UWO-COVID, call 501-623-2505 or send a check by mail at 233 Hobson Avenue, Hot Springs, AR 71913.

Agencies reported that levels of personal protective equipment (PPE) are currently suitable, with one exception being swabs for COVID-19 testing. City Manager Bill Burrough and Garland County Judge Darryl Mahoney said they are continuing support role efforts, which includes a daily pursuit of additional PPE along with Bo Robertson, Garland County emergency management director.

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>.