

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 10, 2020

Garland County positivity rate cut in half from previous week

HOT SPRINGS – There were 48 new COVID-19 cases reported in Garland County from June 28 – July 5, but because of a record number of tests performed, the positivity rate decreased from the previous week's 5.8% to 2.7%.

Also, thanks to the number of recoveries in Garland County last week, the number of active cases at the time of the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Task Force virtual meeting on July 6 was 75, only six more than the previous week's total of 69. Garland County Health Officer Dr. Gene Shelby said the total number the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) is monitoring – both active cases and possible contacts – was at 98.

The 1,945 test results processed in the past week more than doubles any previous week's total. Contributing to the test tally may have been testing done in long-term care facilities, he said. This testing may have also pin-pointed more cases in the 65-and-older age group, from which there were 17 among the county's active cases.

CHI St. Vincent (CHI) and National Park Medical Center (NPMC) both reported their numbers are still up, consistent with the previous week, but ample hospital beds and ventilators are still available. They are seeing cases from long-term care facilities and the Ouachita River Unit prison near Malvern, as well as patients from surrounding counties and from the southwest region of the state. NPMC reported seeing sicker COVID-19 patients compared to those from earlier in the pandemic, primarily in patients who are elderly and with co-morbidities. CHI representatives concurred, and added that those with co-morbidities are definitely getting sick, and sick for a long time.

Shelby said he appreciated the information and ideas given during an ADH conference call on June 30 with Dr. Nate Smith and Dr. Jose Romero. One item that was discussed was the start of school. Each school district is developing their own plan for this fall in conjunction with ADH and the Arkansas Department of Education. Shelby added that Romero, pediatric infectious disease specialist who will be taking over as interim ADH director when Smith departs for his new role at the CDC in September, is a strong proponent of youth returning to school if at all possible. Romero said on the call that there are negative long-term effects if kids are out of school for extended periods of time.

City Manager Bill Burrough discussed the governor's recent executive order that provides local governments across the state the choice to enact a draft ordinance, written in conjunction with the Arkansas Municipal League, requiring the use of face masks as directed by ADH. The City of Hot Springs Board of Directors voted to enact this ordinance, effective immediately, replacing the resolution they had on their agenda that would have encouraged the use of face masks. The City will be mailing the ordinance to every business in Hot Springs so it can be posted at their establishments. There is no penalty or citation as a part of the ordinance; rather than focus on the criminalization of refusing to wear a mask, the ordinance promotes the use of education and encouragement to ensure the use of

face masks. This ordinance also allows for the use of law enforcement to support local businesses that encounter individuals who refuse to wear a mask.

There has been an increase in call volumes to the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Call Center (501-760-4307). Many callers, including people from out of town, ask about where they can get tested for the virus and what facilities offer free testing. Testing at the Garland County Health Unit, 1425 Malvern Avenue, is one of the local locations that offers free testing. The complete list of area testing sites is available at <https://bit.ly/HSGC-testing-sites>.

For those who wish to report an establishment not following the guidelines set forth by the governor and ADH, either the Garland County Health Unit can be contacted weekdays at 501-624-3394, or ADH can be called at 501-661-2171. Once a complaint is filed, an investigator at the local health unit is assigned to follow up.

The United Way of the Ouachitas application for individuals and families who have suffered loss of employment 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. 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.