

**Transcript**  
**Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 32**  
**December 23, 2020**



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer for Living Branches. Today is Wednesday, December 23, 2020. Welcome to you and welcome to Ed Brubaker, our President and CEO. Nice to see you.

Edward Brubaker: Nice to see you, Alex. We're doing this a little early this week since Friday is Christmas

AM: I see you have your official Christmas tie. I have my Christmas earrings. We're all set.

EB: We are all set. At least with what we're wearing. I don't know if we're all set for Christmas. What is Christmas anyway? We say, "Are you ready for Christmas?" And we interpret Christmas to be ready with our packages and that's maybe not the true meaning of Christmas.

AM: I would agree with that – especially this year. Let's start with a summary of where we are with Covid on our campuses. We will start at The Willows and say there is no Covid there right now. There is one staff person who tested positive I think 13 days ago and I believe they just did their last round of testing for that yesterday and we're waiting with fingers crossed to see our results from that. At Souderton Mennonite Homes we continue to have two persons in Residential Living, although one is just coming off the end of their quarantine, so really one person with symptoms. We have five persons in Personal Care and 13 persons in Health Care who have tested positive. For staff, we have six persons testing positive. At Dock Woods that number is three in Residential Living, eight in Health Care, and six staff persons. So still spreading - certainly not as rapidly as we saw in the spring, but this is the first time we've had actual spread in Personal Care at Souderton, so that is something new that we're dealing with right now.

EB: Yes that's right. And the challenge, too, in Personal Care – I was talking with Monique [Cole, executive director of Souderton Mennonite Homes] late last night about it and the challenge is co-horting and trying to control the spread. We had talked about opening the Covid unit, but Personal Care residents are not used to living in congregate spaces – not that Health Care is either, but you have two persons in a room. But that was the challenge, so I know we're coming up with some different approaches – but that's the challenge – to try and contain the spread.

AM: And of course we're testing residents, we're testing positive, no meals in the dining room, no activities – things like that to really try to keep residents in their rooms as much as possible so that we can hopefully minimize that spread. But they have at least 14 days of testing ahead of them – testing once a week to try to get our hands around that.

EB: And if you think about it, too, even within our facilities – even though it would seem to be lower than the spread within the wider population, and so you have to keep that in mind as well. It is, I would say, out of control right now across the US, particularly in places like California and otherwise. So frankly, while it is unfortunate, it is not a surprise that it is making its way back into retirement communities and nursing homes.

AM: I think the positivity rate in Montgomery county this week is still above 11% and Bucks county is significantly higher than that. So it is not surprising to see that. I guess the other big news that we've spent most of this week working on is vaccine information. So by the time our viewers are watching this they will have already received information about vaccines. One of the updates we should make from what we shared last week, was that just today, Jen Derstine at The Willows of Living Branches, received the first email from CVS about a vaccine clinic there. Last week we were unsure about whether or not we would be able to vaccinate residents at The Willows but now it looks like we will, although we don't yet know when.

EB: That's true. And the other thing to keep in mind, too, as I've said, is until CVS shows up on the day they're scheduled with the vials that we can count to say how many do you have? The reality is this is such a logistic challenge. Until they show up with their vials and we know how many vaccines can be given on that day, that's when I'll really have confidence to say we have X number. Or in the case of Grand View Hospital, they actually received their doses for their staff and that's how they're doing it within the hospital system. So until it's here we won't know. It's really a logistical challenge to pull all of this together and give them a break, too, to be working through it. We're at least excited that there is good possibilities because we really do feel that those give some good hope to people for moving to the other side of this.

AM: As a reminder for residents and staff and family members, for persons being vaccinated, we need a signed consent form. For resident POAs that are not on campus, that can be done verbally or electronically, but we need a consent form. We also need copies of insurance cards front and back. Everyone has a little bit of work to do with this. And then yes the logistics of getting it all together is quite interesting. I had a difficult conversation last night with the daughter of a resident in Residential Living who was wondering when her father would be able to get his vaccine. And we talked about this last week. I was on a webinar yesterday with CVS and they were confirming that Residential Living residents, Independent Living residents, are not being vaccinated in this first go-around.

EB: Yeah. And I think that's the reality. And there's going to be a process to go through it. So we'll work through it. But I am heartened and encouraged – she's saying when can my father get it? I want my father to get it. So that's certainly part of what we're continuing to work at. Look at our website. There's going to be more information coming to that. Get educated. Get comfortable. Because we want - I want everyone – I recognize that's probably not going to happen – but I would love everyone to get it. If we can't get everyone we want at least 70-80%. I'm planning to get it. I know some politicians are catching grief because they're lining up and people are saying, "you haven't done anything for the last eight months." I literally heard – was that the New Hampshire Governor saying, "They haven't done anything in Washington, why are they prioritizing themselves?" I don't know that I would completely agree with that, but I understand the perspective. Having said that, there is also the perspective being stated that we want people to be comfortable. And leaders are persons that people look to, to get people comfortable with doing it. So I am 100% behind the vaccine. I want to get it myself. The question will be, how many doses do we have? And is it appropriate to get it? And the reason I would get and the reason I will likely get it is so that we can show people on video or otherwise of me getting it. Just to really provide encouragement to people to get it, you know, if it's good enough for me, it's good enough for everyone else, or vice versa. We really want to encourage people to get the vaccine. It is not going to make life go back to normal right away, and we can talk about that a bit if you'd like, it's a process and it's going to take time, but it's an absolutely important step.

AM: I saw something in the news this week about a hospital system in California where it looked like the line workers were revolting because the administrators and persons who weren't even on campus had been vaccinated first. And so maybe just to clarify – I believe it's very important for you to get the vaccine in order to share that message, but our priority is getting our workers in Health Care, Personal Care, dining service, and environmental services – the people who are there on the ground.

EB: Absolutely. They are the people dealing with this day in and day out. I'm not on the campuses as much as I used to be. I do get there periodically, but nothing to the level of a direct care staff worker, etc. It's just really important for them and our residents to get this vaccine – just very, very important.

AM: So we are hoping that we will be able to vaccinate all of our staff persons, but the marketing team – I think we'll be at the end of the line instead of the front of the line, which is totally appropriate.

EB: Yeah and we're hoping that we get enough that we won't have to decide that, but again, time will tell.

AM: Part of the logistics with this, are just the logistics of how are we going to do it. But the other part is education. We are building the website as we speak right now, putting up video information, frequently asked questions, links to the CDC and other resources, etc. So if people have questions and want to get answers, please go to [livingbranches.org/coronavirus](https://livingbranches.org/coronavirus) and then locate vaccine resources on the left menu.

EB: I would encourage people to go to our website but also the CDC and other reputable sites to educate yourself – get comfortable. And get comfortable quickly.

AM: As you said, this is the first step to get back to normal. And we have to take it.

EB: That's right.

AM: Because I can't do 2020 again next year.

EB: No I can't either. And I would say that would be true for all of our staff and all of our residents. And so this is not this magic things that's going to transform the day after the vaccine – as I said before, you take it, 21 days later you get the next dose, and two weeks later you might have good immunity. So it's a period of time. Now who knows what your immunity might be during that time, but it certainly isn't maximized until that period of time. So if you extrapolate that out and kind of layer that over these next months, it will take time. And so when people say, "Do I need to wear a mask?" "Can I travel right away?" Well the answer to those things is yes you need to wear a mask and no you can't travel right away. These are things that will layer off in the future. But what we don't know is if you can transmit the disease – certainly not from the vaccine, because there is no live virus – but if you would actually have a touch of the disease could you be an asymptomatic spreader until you're immune? We don't know that. So the best plan is to wear a mask. And honestly – I gotta tell ya – it's not that hard. For me, the hardest things sometimes is I walk out of the office and say, "Oh I don't have my mask on!" To remember it! You know, you're walking into a store and you see everyone with their mask on and realize yours is in your car still. But honestly, folks, it's not that hard to do. So let's keep doing it. Let's be disciplined and keep doing it. We can't travel right away, but let's get this done so we can eventually get there. If we slough off the vaccine, we're going to be in a hard time for a long time coming to get through this. Let's do it a step at a time and it'll happen.

AM: Remembering to wear your mask, making sure you have it in your car to go to the grocery store – those are not difficult things. For our staff members who are in an active Covid outbreak – those masks are a totally different story. And again, we want to be to the place where we are not doing this anymore.

EB: That's exactly right. And I would invite any John Q. Public who is anti-mask or frustrated with mask-wearing, when we're talking surgical mask – let me bring you into our facility, let me put you in gloves, let me put you in an N-95 and a surgical mask over that, let me put you in a face shield, and then let you care for residents for eight hours a day. You know, we've got to start having empathy for each other and what we're going through – and work together to get to the other side of this. I very strongly believe in that. But it's very hopeful that the vaccine will start to get us in that direction.

AM: I'm not trying to wax philosophical here, but there is something appropriate about rolling out a vaccine that is bringing us hope at Christmas. It just makes sense.

EB: Absolutely. That's maybe what we can end with today, because again the core of this is to give a small update and remind people to check our website to get educated – things are coming out. That's how you'll learn about it within Living Branches. And we want to keep you informed. But absolutely, there's hope for the future. It's interesting – I've been thinking over the last few days – you know, you'll say "Are you ready for Christmas?" - and we joked about this earlier. Or, "Are you in the holiday spirit?" And it's interesting when you think about it – in this Christian tradition, which is where Christmas comes from – the early Christmas was not about carols and sitting around with music playing on B101 or going to holiday parties or going to King of Prussia mall – that was not the original Christmas spirit, folks. Frankly, us staying at home maybe is more like the original Christmas in the stable by themselves, scared and lonely, not even being able to get a room at the inn. Doing things that were not comfortable to them. We're in this – we might as well create the analogy and make the comparison and say: maybe, just maybe, we can experience a little bit more of the original Christmas this year and recognize the sacrifices that were being made then – the reality of being in the stable and not an inn – when we complain about not being able to do the things we normally do. So maybe the Christmas spirit we experience this year will be a bit closer to that original Christmas those many years ago that provided hope for the world, frankly. Just as now today we're experiencing hope with the vaccine and the treatment options that are available. We can be hopeful that 2021 will be a better year than 2020. And I'm really hopeful for that, but it will take some time. And it will take continued discipline. But I really do hope people will have a wonderful Christmas, a merry Christmas, a happy Christmas, a joyful Christmas, a meaningful Christmas – even though it's going to be very different this year for most of us than many others in the past. Maybe just maybe we can reflect and take us closer to the original Christmas those 2000 years ago

AM: And if you strip it all away, really the original message and meaning of Christmas is: there is a God who loves you. And I think that is so appropriate now, because I think that is what has gotten a lot of us through this year. Just remembering that fact.

EB: That's right. Really the idea of Christmas is as you say – is love. Love from God, but also love that humans can have for each other. And I would just reflect, I would hope that in 2021 we can work at that better than we have been for these past years. That we can truly find ways that

republicans can respect and love democrats, and vice versa – that democrats can love and respect republicans. We can join together with people who are different from us. That the black and brown communities can feel more and become more a part of our society than for many years it has not been that place for them. So I really do hope we can through these processes really do some soul searching too, as individuals and as a nation, to say, “let’s do better.” Let’s use this difficult time as a way to be better people, better individuals, but a better society – a more loving, more kind society. I saw a sign the other day in someone’s yard that said: Let’s Make America Kind Again. And honestly that would be my hope. Let’s be kind to each other. And let’s work together for a better tomorrow.

AM: Well, Merry Christmas.

EB: Thank you. Merry Christmas to you as well.

AM: Merry Christmas to our viewers. Please visit our website for updates and have a wonderful holiday.

You can feel free to email any questions to [coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org](mailto:coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org). Thank you!