

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 36
February 5, 2021



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer for Living Branches. Today is Friday, February 5, 2021. Welcome to you and welcome to Ed Brubaker, our President/CEO. Nice to see you. You're wearing a very attractive shirt, there!

Edward Brubaker: Yes, thank you Alex. Good to see you as well. Yes, there are our Covid vaccine t-shirts for staff because we want to continue to encourage staff to get vaccinated and proudly wear their shirts to say they have been. So Fridays from here till whenever we decide not to do it anymore, we'll be wearing our "I got the Covid Vaccine" t-shirts. It's another way to show people that we've done it, as staff members, but also to encourage others who may be on the fence and may want to talk to someone who had the experience, and what was their experience.

AM: You get these after your second dose, so by next week we'll have a fair number of people who will be sporting them on Fridays. Let's talk about our case count. Happily I don't even have to have to written down because we have one person within all of Living Branches who is testing positive and that person is in Oakwood Court. But other than that, knock on wood, as of right now we don't have anyone else, which is very encouraging.

EB: The interesting thing about that situation is that we then had to go into protocol testing for our staff and residents, and to date we have not found any other positives, so it begs the question: How did it get in? Because we're not also aware that she had been out to any physician appointments or anything like that. In theory it may have been a false positive and we're not sure about that, but we're going to be doing some testing next week that would be earlier than we typically would just to check that theory because it was an antigen test. But it is kind of a headscratcher. But that can happen sometimes with this disease. There could have been an exposure you didn't know about or a latent exposure that took a while to work itself out of her system, or whatever. So we're still exploring that, but the headliner is: one person in all of Living Branches. And no staff persons that are positive. We have some that are out of work because of exposure, but no current positives. So that is really excellent news. Obviously the spring was a challenge. Summer and early fall tended to track downward. And then of course with the holidays – but now we have the vaccine as well and we do believe that is making a difference as well. So some positive news but we still have got a way to go.

AM: And maybe just to clarify with our resident that we have seen cases we believe that have been false positives. But in this case she does have symptoms, so it would seem to make that less likely to be a false positive. So I'll be very interested to see what the test reveals.

EB: That's true. But when I did quiz our infection control nurse and our medical director, they indicated that there could be other disease that mirrored some of the symptoms. So yeah, we're just not exactly sure what was going on in that situation. But wow, one within all of Living Branches – that's pretty amazing.

AM: Now that we've talked about the fact that our cases are dying down and we're working on vaccination, the question on everyone's mind is: When can I come and visit? And so there are various – that's actually a pretty complicated question. There are a lot of different aspects to that. Maybe we should start with the easy one. Let's start with Residential Living and talk about what we're doing for visitation there.

EB: With Residential Living, the threshold we're looking at is 5% positivity in Montgomery county. It is dropping, which is a positive sign. So I would hope it would continue to drop and sometime in the next few weeks we could change that again. I would also say we'll need to pay attention to other data points as well. So if that becomes problematic or it feels like it's safe to do some reopening, because we do look at Residential Living differently than we do in Personal Care and Health Care, partly because it's not regulated in the same way. So that is the magic number we're watching – the 5% positivity rate in the county. It is dropping, but we'll continue to monitor that in the next weeks.

AM: Then with Health Care, Personal Care, and Memory Care, we are in general looking to get our common space visiting program back up and running again. And that is something we're striving to get going next week. It's a whole lot easier to shut it down than it is to get it back up and running again.

EB: Yeah that's right. You have to remember there are expectations from the state, too, from a regulatory standpoint as far as monitored visits and those things. So we have to have staff available for that. So it does become a challenge to start that up again and that's really what the operations teams are working on now. But you have to think about it, too, the last time we did that, we didn't have – I don't know how many we have - 15 or more vaccination clinics? – so that's going on, too. So there's a lot of different things that need to be attended to. Testing is going on. We went to twice-weekly testing which wasn't happening the last time. Now fortunately next week we can go back to once-weekly testing of staff, but there's a lot going on. We did form a testing team so they could take on some of those responsibilities. But you can't just easily ramp up all of these staff people, because frankly the hiring marketing is still kind of challenged out there. So that is some of the challenge we're dealing with, but we absolutely want to move that as quickly as at all possible even with all of that going on because we recognize with vitally important it is.

AM: We are piloting something new at our smallest campus, The Willows of Living Branches, which is in Hatfield and Personal Care only. Because it is the smallest and only one level of

care, it is a great location to pilot things. So you were speaking of testing and we're using The Willows as an opportunity to pilot a guest program. So let's talk about that.

EB: Sure. I know you've been heavily involved with the creation of that with some operations folks as well. The idea is to allow for visits to take place in a more relaxed setting, meaning in your unit. But you obviously need to make sure your safety protocols and positivity rates in the county are at the appropriate place. So it's really kind of exciting to see because it will allow guests to see their loved one in their loved one's apartment. There are obviously things we need to put in place and we are putting in place – we have testing protocols, it's going to be everybody – I believe it is up to two – so there's details. It's not a total opening of the campus. But it is doing something different than we've done in the past – trying to be creative, but still putting things in place to make it safe, because while we feel we're making nice progress with vaccinations, and while we feel our numbers are going in the right direction – you just heard about that – the reality is that the wider community – it's still very much out there. We still have staff getting exposed by a spouse or a family member. So we haven't gotten anywhere close to herd immunity yet. So we still need to proceed with caution, but I think it's very exciting to be here because it is just so incredibly important. We're also trying to do more with our compassionate caregiver program, which is something else we started last fall but then had to stop because rate were going up – both in the county and within Living Branches. So we're revisiting that, too. I know specifically that in Oakwood Court they're doing some work at that and in other places. So it feels like there are some nice opportunities and hope on the near-term horizon, but also on the longer-term horizon, as well.

AM: I was joking with my husband a few days ago, "Thank goodness the Eagles are not in the Super Bowl, because no one needs to have Super Bowl party now." You know, we looked at Thanksgiving, we looked at Christmas, we had – even though we were advising not to, many people still went and saw family, there were gatherings. Well now we're weeks past that and the rate is starting to tick back down. But now we're at the Super Bowl and another reason for people to get together. So it's not the Eagles, it doesn't matter – maybe everyone needs to remember, do not have a party please.

EB: Well I suspect a lot of people will want to watch Tom Brady lose.

AM: That would be beautiful.

EB: We'll see what happens. But you're absolutely right. I don't know where the Super Bowl ranks in terms of holidays – it's definitely above Valentine's Day. It's probably closing in on Thanksgiving. I know we always – not this year obviously, but in the past, joined friends for a Super Bowl party. So yeah, hopefully that is not something people will be doing - even to watch Tom Brady lose, but the point is, that it's a good thing the Eagles aren't in it, because those

kinds of things do become spreading events. And we need to pay attention to that. So we're hoping we'll continue on the trajectory we're on.

AM: Our question this week is actually from future residents – about 30 future residents. I've been getting calls and emails about this for a while now. And they're calling to ask us: "Can I please get my vaccine at Living Branches? We see you're vaccinating your residents. How about us future residents?"

EB: I think I'll probably have to start with the quick answer so people get that and then I'll go into it. The quick answer unfortunately is no. We don't have the opportunity to do that. We were able to work with people on the future resident list who are moving in very shortly, so that's a different category. But the future resident list in general, no. Having said that, we do understand the Biden administration is looking to distribute the vaccine more through pharmacies, so a few weeks ago already I reached out to our pharmacy and I want to follow up with that. So if there are ways for us to do it, either for us to coordinate it – although that does become costly and a logistical challenge, too – or do we want to bring people on our campuses? But there may be other ways we could help coordinate this, too. But I would also encourage persons in that category to look for places that can do it – I know Lehigh Valley, St. Luke's, various other places have been signing people up. But certainly if there is a way that we could find a place to steer people to or create something, we're certainly open to that. But right now we don't have the ability to do that.

AM: And that's not us. It's CVS. That is our vaccination partner. Believe me, we've tried. But there's not anything we can do about that. But that does lead to a great question about new move-ins. So we reached out and talked to people who are scheduled to move in next month, maybe, and are just finishing up their turnover, and we were able to offer them the vaccine. But we are working hard to identify how we are going to be able to vaccinate people three months, six months, nine months from now if that's something we need to do.

EB: Exactly. And it would not be just new residents who move in, but also new employees who come to work for us, too. So yeah that supply chain hasn't been worked out yet. And I know with the J&J vaccine that is looking to get approval with one dose – it seems the efficacy isn't as good as Pfizer, and we're doing Pfizer, but that could be an opportunity, too. Because again it is better than nothing, and it helps us get to herd immunity, and it is a very good efficacy rate. But I know for myself personally, I'm appreciative of the fact that the organization and myself personally got the Pfizer vaccine. I've been thinking about that again recently that when you think about the world's population – I don't know – it may be 1% or 2% - maybe 5%? A very small percentage have gotten the vaccine and when I think about that reality – like why was I? I know the technical reason – I work for an organization like Living Branches. But the bigger question is: Why? How did I happen to live in the US? And? When you read stories about sub-Saharan Africa who may love to get the vaccine and may or may not never get it. So honestly, part of the reason why I got it in addition to living here, is with gratefulness, that the scientists

have been able to do that. So I really hope residents who may sitting on the fence or staff persons will take time to study it. I'm amazed by the science. Look at it. Study it. And then gratefully, gratefully put up your arm and say yes, I am grateful, I am thankful that I can, and I'm thankful for the scientists who worked on this so hard on our behalf.

AM: I'm actually getting really emotional as you're talking about that right now. In part because one of my dear favorite residents is at end of life. And we can't go visit her. She doesn't have Covid. She frankly is thrilled. If she were conscious she would be thrilled because she wants to go see her husband in heaven. But we have got to get things back to normal. And this is a gift that we can do that.

EB: And I see it as each of us honestly having a responsibility – a sacred responsibility to do it on behalf of those we serve, and each other, and our families, and our loved ones. I really do believe that. And I know not everyone sees it that way and I will respect that. But I will never stop preaching it as the CEO of Living Branches.

AM: When you look at the number of our people who have been vaccinated, the vast majority are really feeling this same way.

EB: That's right. And we're just under 73% of staff. And I think depending on the facility, it's anywhere from 90-100% for residents. And while it's not the same or 100% for either one, those are very good numbers. When I hear colleague CEOs talking about 25% of staff, 50% of staff, 60% of staff, I'm proud of the fact we're at 73%. Now, I want to get to 80% and beyond, but I'm pleased where we're at, but really hope we can continue to raise that number.

AM: I've been out practically dragging people to the vaccination clinics – I think they're starting to run the other way when they see me coming now. But as I'm out talking to our team members, so many of them just want things to be back to normal for our residents. That is the overwhelming theme, if you will right now. And we really are making progress. By next week, for Personal Care, Memory Care, and Health Care – all residents who want them will have received their second dose. So we're making good progress there. Souderton Residential Living is having their first clinic today, Dock Woods Residential Living and Dock Manor is having their second clinic next Friday. So by Valentine's Day, the majority of our staff and residents will be fully vaccinated.

EB: It will still take a good amount of time to get to normal. We still need to mask up. We still need to maintain distance. But we are absolutely making progress and that feels very good.

AM: We should also say, because I have received a lot of emails about that – we cannot reopen our campuses for Health Care, Personal Care, and Memory Care until we get clearance from regulatory agencies and that's not here yet.

EB: That's right. They're studying data. But they're proceeding with caution as well. Because they're also paying attention to not only the vaccination rates within Living Branches but also within the wider community. So it's going to take some time yet.

AM: Final thoughts?

EB: Final thoughts. Well here's a final thought. If you're an Eagles fan and you remember when Andy Reid was the coach of the Eagles. If Andy Reid was still the Eagles coach, would Patrick Mahomes be our quarterback? And would we be in the Super Bowl? I don't know. Perhaps yes, perhaps no. But it is an interesting question. Because we seem to go through personnel – some personnel with the Eagles more quickly than others – and some would say there's other personnel that should move on from the front office, too.

AM: As my final thought, I will say: please do not email or call me about this final thought, as I have to hear this at home all of the time. So I do know what the official Metricarti theories regarding that. But to spare our audience, I will not respond. It will be interesting to see what happens. Here's to a Tom Brady loss, how about that?

EB: Although you have to admit he has been an amazing quarterback – he's what 43? That's amazing.

AM: Thank you for watching. If you have questions, please send them to coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org or visit our website at livingbranches.org/coronavirus for more information.