

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 46
August 15, 2021



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, chief marketing and public relations officer for Living Branches, and today is Friday, August 13. Welcome to you, and welcome to Ed Brubaker, our Living Branches president and CEO. Here we are again.

Ed Brubaker: Here we are again, and until you said that, I didn't connect Friday, the 13th.

AM: I didn't, either.

EB: This is our lucky day, Alex.

AM: Ha! What could happen today, Ed? Well, it's not our lucky day, because after a hiatus of several months, we are back talking about actual Covid cases on our campuses. So, right now at Living Branches, as of today — Friday, August 13 — we have one person testing positive at The Willows of Living Branches, who is a resident. We have one resident testing positive at the Dock Woods campus who is living at our Dock Manor housing. It's been a while.

EB: It has been a while, and I think that early next that a person at The Willows will come out of quarantine. It's an interesting situation, and I know there's been some questions about, "why do you allow people that aren't vaccinated?" I think to live in Living Branches, or to work here, too — all those kinds of questions — the interesting thing is the people in question were all vaccinated. So technically they were breakthrough cases, but the good news is that even though, without revealing specifics...even though there was some compromised health in certain situations, as in one case they went to the hospital, but that was their choice and they had reasons around it that had nothing to do with Covid. But the point is, the vaccine — we think — protected them from more serious illness. It also likely protected staff and residents around them because, in our first testings the next day, Friday last week at The Willows and Tuesday this week, and our next one is next week, the tests to date have all been negative for both staff and residents. So that would tend to me that it probably was someone coming in from the outside that may have brought it into the facility. Who that is, is nearly impossible to discern at this point, because while our facilities are not as open as they were pre-Covid, they are quite open to visitors, families, etc. So, number one: it's a cautionary tale against making assumptions that just because someone got it means they were not vaccinated. But, it is a positive story to again say the vaccine was never touted as saying, "you won't get Covid." It was saying that it would reduce that likelihood, but will also keep the symptoms down. I think the fact that all tests to date have been negative, and the fact that the persons in question did not get terrible symptoms, and did not have to be on a breathing apparatus in the hospital is all good news. So,

again, it affirms — like our t-shirts say — get the check; get the vaccine; make it happen. There is positive news coming out of this. The negative news is we needed to close Dock...I almost said Dock Meadows, didn't I? Ha, we needed to close The Willows of Living Branches for 14 days, and that's horrible that we had to do that. But, that's still where the regulations are, so we needed to do that.

AM: It was interesting for me in the case of the person who decided that once she tested positive, she was taking herself to the hospital just to make sure that everything was okay...it was interesting to me that they wouldn't keep her. Even the hospitals, I think, are maybe not at the point as they were in the spring and last year where it was like, "Oh my gosh, what are we going to do?" Even they're like, "No, you'll be fine. Go home."

EB: Yeah, because unless you really need hospital care, you shouldn't be in the hospital. Emergency rooms are not glorified minute-clinics, they need to be used for that. So yeah, absolutely they're going to review that and determine, "Does this situation require us or not?" In that case, they decided it was not.

AM: Well, a question that we have from a family member at this time, and this is more of a statement/question, but the statement is from a family member who has parents at The Willows. Her statement is, "My parents are vaccinated, and quarantine is not good for them. Why do we still have to do this?" More specifically, what are we doing to try to figure out how to try and be advocates for our residents so that they don't have to keep doing this?

EB: Yeah, and it's a great question and an important one, too, because as I think about the last year, the fact that we need to go into quarantine, or have needed to go into that, and have had to restrict visitors — now the nice thing is we have compassionate caregivers visitors, so there are things that have changed since then. But the question is on-point in that it is very difficult. Before we were so focused on care-taking of the physical health, that sometimes we...and when I say "we," it's a collective "we." We as regulators, state department of health, ourselves, etc., but a year ago, we were at a different point. That's not to say what's happening is not concerning; it certainly is, meaning the delta variant, etc. The point is very well-taken, and I hope, you know because the way it seems, we're going to have to figure out a way to live with Covid like we do the flu and with everything else. So the regulators, I think, need to come to terms with this, and hopefully sooner rather than later. Now having said that, we've had interactions, and I haven't had any recent ones, but Steve Malagari used to be on our local calls that we had, so he knew what was happening. But, we should all be contacting our legislators and saying, "Can't this change?" Now, if any of those first two tests would have revealed a larger spread or revealed other cases we didn't know about, that changes the whole equation, right? The fact that we had the first round of testing with nothing, I think...yeah, it feels to me that we need to be able to do something different. That's not to say that the person that has it shouldn't quarantine for their specific length of time, and I believe they should, but it's really the question of, "What about these other people that are impacted negatively?" And I agree 100% that we need to find a better way, and that's something that we will continue to advocate for. But I would encourage, you know, the viewers also to say, "How can we start changing this?" Some

of this is at the bureaucratic level, too, not at the legislative level, because a lot of the rights of the last year were not coming from legislation that was passed. It was the bureaucrats within the department of the health that were creating the information for us as to what we needed to do. So we need to continue to advocate, but for the voting public, the legislators are definitely the place to start. We can all do this together, and I think we need to for the health of our residents. "Health" being physical health, but also "health" being emotional health.

AM: Yeah. You made a comment a while ago to me that when you really think about it, January 2 was when we got our first round of vaccinations at Living Branches. We have had people test positive, both staff and residents, since that time, but we've not seen a case where it has spread within the campus. I think that, maybe as more communities are hopefully experiencing those same results, somebody will start looking at that data and feeling like they do have the ability to be a little bit less cautious — if you will — in what's required once someone tests positive.

EB: Yeah, that's true. I think the challenge is that it's always easier in anything, not just Covid... but in anything...it's so much easier to put the regulations on and to close things down for whatever it is. If it's in your personal family household about whatever you're dealing with, it's so much easier to invoke rules, but it's so much harder to bring them off again and remove those rules. And that's why systems happen like they do, you know. Rules are passed and then someone 10 years later says, "Why did we do this?" "Oh, that's a remnant of 20 years ago, such and such happened..." So that's just kind of the reality of life. It doesn't mean we shouldn't do anything about it, and I think we need to advocate for that because it's really important.

AM: Yeah well, and in all fairness to our state regulators, they're trying to make rules that cover the entire state. And we are in a situation where, for both staff and residents, we have very high levels of vaccinations. There are certainly communities out there that aren't, you know, at 95% resident vaccinated and 80% staff vaccinated.

EB: That's right. That's exactly right, and a good point to think about. Something for us to keep in mind, too, is let's keep getting vaccinated. If you're not vaccinated, get vaccinated! You know, if you're an employee, you'll get a shirt. Do the research; get comfortable; get vaccinated, it does make a difference.

AM: Well, and especially for residents, some of the persons that just tested positive did have significant other health issues going on, and they're recovering just fine. That's super encouraging.

EB: Absolutely. I think, again, vaccination takes away the host. That's why it's so disappointing to see some of those southern states that the vaccination rate is just not enough high enough. We're fortunate in these northern states, and particularly Montgomery County, to have our

levels where they're at, and I think that makes a difference. Having said that, our positivity rates are still going up, and it's concerning. But, I'd much rather live here, frankly, than Florida or Texas, or some of the other southern states right now because unfortunately, it's become some political issue instead of a medical issue. We need to refocus on this being a public health issue. It is not a blue-red issue; it's a public health issue.

AM: Well, and you're also now really seeing kids that are being impacted in ways that we didn't last year.

EB: Yeah, that's exactly right.

AM: I think that may change the narrative somewhat.

EB: I think it will, and it's really sad to see because I'm the type of person that likes to learn things, and I try to do as much as I can...the right thing. Not because, you know, it's a disaster happening and I waited too long, but you plan and you look ahead. There's so many people that you can read the stories of where they're on their death bed because of Covid and they say, "Can I get the vaccine?" It's like, "No, I'm sorry. It is too late." And so, you never want to say, "I told you so," in those kind of cases because this is life and death. But having said that, let's do the right thing. This is the best way to get to the other side, and I believe so strongly in that. I know some of the viewers will not agree with me on that, but that's okay. We're entitled to our opinion, but as the CEO of Living Branches, I am going to preach what I think is the right thing to do, because I think it only protects our residents — the ones who are we are serving — and it protects our employees, our families, and our loved ones. So, isn't that a good reason to do it?

AM: I would say so.

EB: It would seem so.

AM: Yeah. One of the things that happened this past week that is, perhaps not great news, is that we went back to a face mask mandate for everyone on all campuses, including our Residential Living residents. I don't think anyone was excited to see that, but it was a necessary step.

EB: Yeah it was, and that's unfortunate, too. But, it's interesting as someone told me the other day, it's a little annoying to them as they had gotten the vaccine and they feel like, "I did the right thing and now I am needing to do this to protect someone who didn't make the decision that I did." Now having said that, there's also different reasons. We can't assume that everyone who didn't get the vaccine is just stubborn; we can't assume that at all. But, I understand the

sentiment and I think we've seen more and more blow back from people who are vaccinated saying, "Okay, let's do it." But we also need to recognize that there's various reasons for people not doing it. I tend to focus on those things that aren't medical related, but there's some that are legitimate, and so we need to remember that. But it's really just for the overall protection, and it really is the protection of the unvaccinated. It's what's it about, and that's why we're wearing masks. I think we need to remember that — that's a big part of it.

AM: I had a fair number of residents who were saying, "Okay if we're taking this step, what's next? Are we closing the dining rooms, are we doing this, are we doing that..." and I think it's fair to say we're trying to be as measured and as opened as we possibly can.

EB: Yeah that's right. I think one of the things, as I referenced earlier...one of the things we learned is it's very emotionally hard. The other side that we need to remember is — that at least at this point — is that it appears the vaccines are still doing what they are supposed to be doing. There's always the debate of how long they will last, all those kinds of things, do you need boosters, etc., but that's a huge difference from this August to last August. So that's huge, but that's not to say that there's still not problems, and the risk is the greatest to those who are unvaccinated. Now having said that, we have employees who would love to have their families vaccinated, but can't because they're not of age. And so frankly, I'm glad our daughter is 28 and vaccinated as opposed to 10 and unvaccinated, because that does create stress and strain in someone's life. So I get that, and that's a challenge for some people, too.

AM: Yeah, and it is important, I think, to remember that — especially if you're a Residential Living resident, you'll be thinking, "Why do I have to do this?" — we can't let it spread to Health Care or Personal Care, and we also do not want to spread it to employees who could take it home to children who are not vaccinated.

EB: Yeah, exactly.

AM: Well, so we've spent a fair amount of time this week, and these past couple of weeks, working on projects that actually are not Covid-related. I thought maybe we could give a little plug to something that we have been spending quite a bit of time working on, and that is trying to hire new staff. You hear everywhere about a shortage of employees, and we are not immune from that.

EB: Yeah, I don't know that I've talked to anyone who owns a business or works in a business where they have to have employees who isn't struggling with this...it's everywhere...and we are as well. We're trying to do some things, we're looking to particularly do some things with CNA and RA rates within Personal Care and Health Care, and it is a real challenge. But here's the shout-out, you know, and I'll look in the camera to say: all of you in viewing/ listening land,

Living Branches is a wonderful place to work. The thing that we can offer, that other places may not be able to offer, is the ability to literally — and figuratively — touch the lives of other people...touch the lives of human beings. That is probably the thing that our staff has told us the most over the years as to why they've continued to work here. Certainly we all need the appropriate pay and benefits to, you know, pay our bills, but beyond that, once that's at the baseline, the fulfillment is being able to care for other human beings and be able to give up oneself. But not just that, we get so much in return: the love and care that goes in both directions is just amazing to watch, and that's frankly what we can offer that other employers may not have the ability to offer. There's a lot of very important work out there, don't get me wrong, but this unique opportunity is present at Living Branches. If you're looking to pick up part-time work, if you're looking to do something different, Living Branches is hiring for many different positions at this time. Look at our website, and come and join us. It's a great place, it really is, and there's a lot of great people here. If you have a serving heart, and want to serve others, this is a place for you.

AM: Absolutely! Any other final comments?

EB: I don't think so at this point, other than last week, I did celebrate a milestone. We won't go public with what that milestone was; it happened to be a birthday, but I was able to bring in and sponsor Downtown Scoop — Lucy and I sponsored bringing them on site — and it was just a lot of fun. We needed that change of pace, and we're doing other things, too, within the organization that are a change of pace. We had beautiful weather, and thanks to people that sent cards and well wishes, and just came out and had their happy faces there...it was a happy time to be together. It's been too long of a year without doing those kinds of things, and so it was just fun to be able to do that. Having said that, I know Kathleen Roberts was planning something in September that I see was now canceled as well, and so we're in that tug-and-pull place again that's unfortunate. We will eventually get there, but it is a struggle again right now, and I just want to acknowledge that.

AM: Well, thank you.

EB: And thank you.

AM: Thank you to our viewers! If you have questions, please feel free to send them to me at CoronavirusQuestions@LivingBranches.org. And we'll see you again in a couple of weeks. Thanks.