

TESTED

CONTINUED FROM 1A

results were issued within 24 hours. She stressed the testing, which is basically a nasal swab, was not done at or by any county health department staff.

The health department also was notified there is no specific testing kit for coronavirus and testing could be done with items already found in hospitals or doctor's offices.

The samples do need to be kept refrigerated in transport and ice packs are included in the kits.

"The testing was done by a medical provider," Hittson said. "All samples are then sent to the Missouri State Public Health Lab. All samples are given a priority based on the subsequent investigation of the patients. Priority one goes first and others are tested when time allows."

Hittson added the testing of patients here should not alarm residents, since coronavirus symptoms so closely mimic that of influenza, which is very common this time of year.

"Right now, you would be hard-pressed to find any jurisdiction that hasn't tested at least a few people," Hittson said. "We encourage everyone to continue to use best practices to limit spread."

County

Brinker says no matter what happens with the virus in coming weeks, he feels the county has made the proper preparations and is working with the East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWGW) in a more regional response.

"I don't suspect this is something that is going to go away overnight," Brinker said. "Everybody's getting out in front of it to prevent the spread. We're prepared for this and I don't think this will in any way spread like the flu numbers in the county."

Current flu cases now number 2,100. The highest ever in county history was the 2017-18 flu season with 2,913.

Brinker added he has spoken to executives Sam Page from St. Louis County and Steve Ehlman from neighboring St. Charles County and neither reports any new cases in their jurisdictions.

Through its partnership with EWGW, Franklin County has ordered 200 N95 surgical masks, eight cases each of wipes and hand sanitizer, and 10 additional testing kits.

Brinker also announced the county's legal counsel has prepared a document for residents who may be quarantined.

If residents test positive and are ill, they will be hospitalized. If well enough to go home, they will be confined to their homes or a designated quarantine location by penalty of misdemeanor charge.

Hittson added during previous communicable disease outbreaks those affected have been willing participants in testing and have cooperated with the health department, so no issues are expected with potential quarantines.

In the early stages, health department officials will handle the caseload, but if necessary, the

county emergency operations center can be activated, which would bring in more staff members and could involve deputies from the sheriff's office to help.

Emergency operations centers have been activated in St. Louis city, and St. Louis, Jefferson and St. Charles counties.

If patients are ordered to stay home, services will be provided to make sure they have proper supplies for the duration of the quarantine.

Phone Calls

Hittson stressed the county does not want prospective patients to travel to medical providers to be tested for coronavirus. Instead, residents are asked to contact the health department at 636-583-7300 to receive guidance on where they can be tested in a more isolated environment to limit potential virus spread.

A "person under investigation" form will be filled out for anyone who is symptomatic and the results can be shared with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

"The hospitals have been great in helping us prepare for this," Hittson said. "We don't want people just showing up at the emergency room or doctor's office. Anyone who is symptomatic should call the health department and let us tell them the next step to take. If we choose not to quarantine a patient, it can be overridden by the state. They have final say."

Hittson says the health department is being inundated with phone calls daily regarding the coronavirus from schools, businesses and private citizens alike.

State and county officials are currently working to direct coronavirus inquiries to the existing poison control phone number and if call volume continues to increase, they plan to utilize the 211 system.

A dedicated phone line is already in place at the health department if the need arises.

Information

County officials were expected to take part in a conference call Tuesday afternoon with state health officials and Missouri Gov. Mike Parson, who is receiving updates from Vice President Mike Pence and the federal task forces dealing with the virus.

Brinker, Cook and Hittson will continue to hold daily meetings with any other applicable county staff and agencies while the coronavirus is threatening.

Hittson encourages all residents, schools, businesses, civic, church groups or anyone with questions to refer to the websites of the CDC (cdc.gov) and the DHSS (health.mo.gov).

Additional information on coronavirus and its effects on Franklin County can be found on the county health department's Facebook page as well (facebook.com/Franklin-County-Health-Department).

SCHOOL

CONTINUED FROM 1A

ters for Disease Control) recommendations and will continue to follow our health, sanitation and safety protocols.

"If we receive any word of a case in our area or our schools, or if we receive any guidance from county, state or federal health professionals, we will certainly share that with our staff, students and parents," VanLeer said.

Cleaning

Borgia High Principal Pam Tholen said the school is taking several steps to keep the campus as clean as possible.

"We are working with our cleaning company, FKI, to ramp up the cleaning of the high-touch areas like handrails and bathroom fixtures," she said. "Furthermore, teachers have been provided with sanitizing wipes, and additional hand sanitizer stations have been installed."

"Right now, it appears that those at highest risk for serious complications are older people and those with underlying medical conditions," said Tholen, noting the high school has a teacher and student battling cancer.

All school officials stressed that if a student is sick, they should stay home from school.

"We understand that many of our students prioritize school over their health and may be anxious about days absent from school," Tholen said. "Rest assured that we will work with you in situations of extended absences when it comes to students' health."

Tholen said the school is in contact with Saint Louis University regarding any attendance issues for 1818 dual credit courses.

"In these worrisome times, communication is key," she said. "Our school community's health and wellness are of the utmost importance to us."

MSHSAA Responds

VanLeer said MSHSAA (Missouri State High School Activities Association) released a statement March 9 saying in part, "We have contacted the Missouri Health Department and at this time, there are no restrictions or requirements to stop activities with large groups of people. We are developing contingency plans for the possible effects of school closures on the state playoffs, your spring sport practices

and/or contests, and are monitoring COVID-19 developments closely."

Local parochial schools, in conjunction with the Archdiocese of St. Louis, sent out letters and stressed they are taking every precaution to ensure that schools are cleaned thoroughly each night and students are monitored.

"We urge families to continue to maintain healthy habits as we do during any cold and flu season," said Our Lady of Lourdes Principal Ann Joyce.

School officials said if a student or other immediate family member is symptomatic of COVID-19, the health department should be contacted and officials will give them information regarding potential testing and the need to self-quarantine.

With spring break approaching for many schools, families who plan to travel are advised to check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) link for travel guidelines and the latest updates on areas with confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Officials from all of the schools also shared fact sheets about coronavirus and tips. These include:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick;
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- Using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available;
- Staying home when you are sick;
- Covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash; and
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.

People can seek out additional information on COVID-19 and the current outbreak on the CDC's website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

School officials said parents should check the website frequently for the most up-to-date information.

"While this entire situation is very unsettling, it's helpful to know we are all in this together," Tholen said. "I ask you to join me in praying for the St. Louis area schools which have been impacted by the recent diagnosis."

PROGRESS

CONTINUED FROM 1A

road, including minor

and major collectors and arterial roads.

Public Works Director John Nilges said the city was able to get the two grants, in part, because of its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan.

"We're kind of a big fish in a small pond because of that," he said. "It allows us to get more points to get as much money back from the Feds as possible."

Jefferson Street

Plans call for a 2-inch asphalt overlay on Jefferson Street from Highway 100 to Fifth Street. Sidewalk and curb and gutter replacement, including ADA upgrades, will take place from Fifth Street to Wainwright Street.

New sidewalks will be added from Wainwright to Highway 100. The sidewalks along that stretch of Jefferson

Street are not ADA compliant, Nilges said.

The project carries an estimated price tag of \$1.5 million, he said. The city's share is estimated at \$298,985.

Nilges said the sidewalk component was a big key in getting the grant funding.

"Any time you can add to your sidewalk network, it does make you more successful in getting those asphalt project grants," he said.

With the agreement in place, the city will move forward with hiring a consultant. According to the project schedule, the city will have a public hearing/meeting on the project in early 2021.

Plans will be developed in 2021 as well. Right-of-way acquisition will begin in late 2021 through early 2022.

The bidding process

should start in late 2022 with a contract awarded in early 2023. Work is set to begin in summer 2023.

Westlink Drive

The Westlink Drive project is much simpler. Plans calls for a 2-inch overlay of the street and a new right turn lane from Westlink onto Bluff Road.

"It's a skewed turn lane," Nilges said. "We're not necessarily adding a turn lane, but we're improving the turning geometrics on that. We'll be doing that in house."

The project carries an estimated price tag of \$547,750. The city's share would be \$109,550.

The project is expected to follow the same schedule as the Jefferson Street work.

"It's two good projects that cost 20 cents on the dollar," Nilges said.

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