

Fort Belvoir Facebook Virtual Town Hall Q&A Recap

May 28, 2020

This is not a verbatim transcript. Questions and answers may be edited for clarity.

Participants:

- MG Omar Jones, Commanding General, JFHQ-NCR/MDW
- COL Michael Greenberg, Fort Belvoir Garrison Commander
- CAPT Cynthia Judy, Director, Fort Belvoir Community Hospital
- Mr. Kevin Rennick, Director, Human Resources

Question: Why were we notified by email that someone who was in our home tested positive? There were no calls or no contact from the health department or the hospital on post. How many contract tracers do you have? This is concerning since we are a higher risk family.

CAPT Cynthia Judy: I don't have that letter but I've asked for housing to provide that letter to me. So, what I will tell you is if you're ever contacted by someone, whether it is by email or some other means, you are welcome to present to the hospital to have the team, talk with you about that level of exposure. I don't know who the employee was because I don't have that letter, but a lot of people are getting tested outside of Fort Belvoir Community Hospital. I'm not even sure if that worker was a beneficiary at Fort Belvoir Community Hospital and so a lot of that tracing won't come from the installation. I recognize that you weren't contacted by the public health department; but if you were to bring that letter in or come to the COVID clinic the team within assess your level of exposure, talk to you about how much time you spent alongside that person while they were in your home, and make a determination with you regarding testing.

Question: Is it harmful for people with certain health conditions to wear a mask?

CAPT Cynthia Judy: The CDC recommends that people who are actually physically having trouble breathing not wear a mask. So there are things that they can do, whether it's social distancing, limiting their activities outside the home during this time period and other things that they can do to mitigate some of that. But for all others, it's safe for them to wear a mask, even people who have COPD and other health conditions, unless they're having trouble breathing, it's safe for them to wear masks.

Question: Can we have a graduation procession in housing?

COL Michael Greenberg: We have worked with the assistant superintendent of schools in Fairfax County. We want to make sure that we are not causing teachers and children to come out in an environment when they don't really need to. So at this point we are not going to do a parade, we're not going to do any type of graduation ceremony.

Question: Can you explain the circumstances that would lead you to change to Health Protection Condition?

MG Omar Jones: It is important to note that just in the past week to 10 days, Secretary Esper delegated to the services and the services, at least for the Army, in turn delegated to senior commanders to make those decisions on health protection condition levels. What does it mean to you and why does it matter, because our health protection levels will really drive all of the things that COL Greenberg just talked about in terms of installation services, and which ones can reopen and which ones can expand services. What I would offer to you and I think COL Greenberg really said it well, that we will be in form of local authorities are doing even more very closely tied to the six counties and National Capital Region as well as the District of Columbia and watching what they're doing as well as, Virginia, and then four installations of Maryland, plus state of Maryland as well. Our leaders have a different set of priorities, we share that all in the same level of priority and as our people to protect our people from the virus. And it's the same thing that our governors or county executives or city managers or our mayors, etc. Firstly, local leaders also have a responsibility to provide economic conditions and the conditions for visitors to drive economic growth. We have a priority to address mission assurance that when the nation calls, we have to be ready. In terms of two different sets of priorities, I will look at as I make decisions about health protection levels there are really three factors. One is what our civilian local jurisdictions are doing. The second one is I have to look is Northern Command and Department of Army guidance. In many cases that come back to those priorities, protect our people but make sure we're ready. Make sure we maintain mission assurance. Third piece is we look at is the environment as CAPT Judy talked about already. We look very hard across the National Capital Region. We'll get through a number of new cases, we're good case rate to number of positive cases versus number of testing. We look at the transmission of cases: one infected person and how many people are they infecting; on average across the counties do the military hospitals or civilian hospitals have the personal protective equipment; do they have the capacity to take care of folks who are sick, and then do we add it to the testing efforts out there. Then I look to commanders like Mike Greenberg, and ask for their recommendations. So when I pull all that together, is when I will make decisions to transition from HPCON Charlie to Bravo at some point down the road and potentially hopefully to alpha as well.

Second question. As the Senior Commander from your perspective what does the new normal look like?

MG Omar Jones: For me, it what does the new normal look like for the folks who live on our installations--Belvoir; Myer-Henderson Hall; AP Hill; Meade; and Caroline County. And I will tell you that the new normal is going to be COVID-19 is going to be part of our environment until it's no longer a threat to this to our communities and to our people. So I do think that some of the things are going to be part of the new normal. Social distancing is going to be part of the new normal. Frequent hand washing; face coverings; social distancing are a part of the new normal. Many of our services are going to be reduced capacity so that we can set conditions for folks to have social distancing; and maintaining separation, and lots of cleaning. I think for a while that'll be part of our environment for the foreseeable future.

Question: What will the new normal look like for federal employees, particularly when it comes to telework?

MG Omar Jones: I speak about the entire federal workforce. Clearly OPM, the Department of Defense, the military services, or combatant commanders will have a significant say in all that, but I at least can talk to the Military District of Washington headquarters. Fort McNair is also the Joint Task Force headquarters for this region, and what I will tell you is that what I have seen the team do with the past 78 days. While working remotely and teleworking, it's been phenomenal. People are still contributing significantly, people are still working hard, and they are making an impact that we have seen across the region, every single day. At some point, we will have to return to headquarters, and we will come together again. I'm really looking forward to that. But we telework more than we did in the past. We have more distance between desks or distance between workspaces. We will use video teleconferences more than in person meetings. I think all that's true. And we're working our way very deliberately through that. This pandemic effects each and every one of us, each one of our families very uniquely, and we as leaders have to be thoughtful about that as folks come back. So there are a lot of conversations between our teammates and leaders and directors across the board. So we need to do this right and we take care of our people. We will also continue our mission.

Question: When will there be additional gate openings?

COL Michael Greenberg: This is a condition-based decision. We are close to opening up J.J. Kingman gate. That will be the next gate to open but we don't have an exact date. We're looking at traffic patterns and traffic counts, which have increased significantly over the last few weeks. Traffic surge is really most of the day. So although we have a lot more vehicles coming on the installation. We don't see tremendous backups at the gates. Right now the longest backups are about 10 minutes. We also look at health of the security guards. They're staying healthy. Those are the three conditions we're looking at before we open the gate.

Question: Fairfax County leaders are saying they are having a difficult time getting data from Fort Belvoir.

COL Michael Greenberg: I would tell you we share information with the county. The hospital shares information with the county. We also get information from the state and county departments of health. I will tell you, I have touch points with Supervisors Storck, Harrity and Lusk, which is the three local supervisors in this area. We talk weekly. We also talk regularly with Secretary Hopkins, Virginia Department of Veterans and Defense Affairs. Those discussions address a wide range of issues to include COVID-19.

Question: With the anticipation of Fairfax County entering Phase I of reopening this weekend, will we be able to return to monitoring birds on Belvoir? We have at least 8 teams of volunteers (residents on Belvoir, active duty/retirees who live off Belvoir, and supportive county residents) who have been eagerly awaiting the ability to check on the nest boxes as part of our annual, scientific mission to monitor and maintain cavity-nesting bird populations on the installation. Given this activity requires no

human-to-human interaction, is entirely outside, and is done only on a weekly basis, we hope that the decision will be made to allow us to return to our seasonal responsibilities.

COL Michael Greenberg: I couldn't give you a date but I will tell you here and probably in the next week or so, we will look at reopening that program to folks to begin to monitor in our birds.

Question: Can you address the unmarked electrical boxes across the installation?

COL Michael Greenberg: The Villages of Belvoir have done a complete screen training they believe of all areas on the installation, they have found one of those that were identified but some others as well. What I would ask you is, if it's not true, or, you know there was an oversight, reach out to our Department of Public Works or housing office. Let us know where those boxes are, and then we will reengage with the Villages of Belvoir.

Question: Can you communicate the plans to open outdoor activities such as basketball courts and playgrounds?

COL Michael Greenberg: The playgrounds will not open for probably for the next couple of weeks until we establish some standards and make sure that we can meet the standards.

Question: Can the chapels be used for private prayers?

COL Michael Greenberg: If you have a question or you have a special request, please reach out to the religious support office, and they'll be able to help you out.

Question: How long will the screening at the PX and commissary as well as the courtesy patrol last?

COL Michael Greenberg: The decision to make changes to the courtesy patrols and screenings will be condition-based, like all the other decisions to reopen services on the installation. We are not doing temperature screening anymore at the PX we're only doing the commissary. The COVID-19 patrols really did help set the norms for the installation and they are doing a good job. We are just trying to inform people to remind them to wear their face covered properly. As we go into those next phases, , HPCON Bravo and HPCON Alpha, the COVID-19 will change or be eliminated.

Question: What is the plan for outdoor pools?

COL Michael Greenberg: We have started our operations of getting ready. We doing that because we need to make sure we're working on the pumps, we have lifeguards, and we have employees if we do open pools. I talked to Fairfax County Executive [Bryan] Hill yesterday. They are not opening pools. We do have a training requirement out there as well. We will open things to make sure that we are trained and we can we support any required mission. For units that have mission requirements, we will assess the situation, and make sure that we can reduce the risk. I'm not telling you the pools will close for the entire summer, nor am I telling you that the pool will open this summer. I'm telling you the decision is conditions-based and we continue to assess the conditions.

Question: What is the COVID Clinic number?

CAPT Cynthia Judy: The clinic number is 571-231-0532. The COVID Clinic is located in the back of the emergency department and there's a drive up service there as well.

Question: Last week we were told that the education center would open when the threat level goes down, which level will be at HPCON B or HPCON A and when will this happen. Does the garrison commander make the decision about the levels?

COL Michael Greenberg: So right now that the health protection condition levels are at the sole discretion of the senior commander.

Mr. Kevin Rennick: We are looking at all our services across the installation. We want to ensure that whenever our doors open, we have taken every precaution to ensure the safety of not just our workers, but customers they serve. So we do understand the anxiety of trying to get back to normal, but right now we have to follow the conditions, we do have specific guidelines at the highest level, meet those measures, we will certainly open our doors and provide those services back to our community.