

Peterson AFB: 21st Space Wing Town Hall Transcript
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21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano
21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Alright hey good morning Team Pete and all of our mission partners and all of our members stationed around the world right now in one of the 27 locations that we have Knights operating from. It's great to talk to all of you again here on Facebook live and we've got Colonel Vaughn with us this morning. Now we've kind of transitioned to having two of these events per week, so one on earlier in the week on Tuesdays with the Chief. We answer some of your questions related to some career and personnel matters and everyday airman family issues and we're working through a lot of those for you. We appreciate your questions on that. And then we've got the update here on Fridays we've moved to the morning, or afternoon for some of you depending on where you're at one of our 14 time zones, to answer some more questions related to coronavirus, COVID-19, and how that's impacting all of you.

A few changes that have happened this week: I know all of you are tracking that face masks are, we're in face masks now, so don't keep it on I'm safe in my office I promise no one's here. But thanks to Miss Ethel, a longtime family friend who actually works here on Peterson and made this one for me. I know we have many people pitching in to make face coverings, masks, and having some fun with it and volunteering and it's great to see that spirit of teamwork and the camaraderie. We in fact had a donation that I accepted--- some 500 masks for all of our front-facing, customer facing, airman in the Wing. From the folks at the pharmacy, to the defenders, to folks that are working over in places like the commissary and communicators throughout fixing mission essential equipment, civil engineer, so that stuff is going to, and it's already starting to, hit the streets. And it's so great that people are volunteering to do that it's amazing seeing people helping out.

We've had a few changes this week. I know many of our bases have had to limit control procedures. Most locations now you put your ID card up to the window and scan it there to limit contact, so just one further protective measure and I think that's going well as well and then the continued physical distances. Those guidelines have been in place for some time but we're continuing to emphasize those and I think things are going well. So I just want to commend everyone for their patience and following through on guidance that's been put out there. And I think as you'll hear Colonel Vaughn and I talk next 30 minutes you'll see just where that's making an impact and all of your listening to press conferences and following that I'm excited to see what Colonel Vaughn has. I know he's been digging into the numbers and looking at some of the stats and trends. We look at the stuff every single day at 9:00 AM you talk about it and what's going on and his team really I think has some positive signs, some encouraging signs that come directly from all the hard work that all of you have put in. You put in by yourself and you put in with your families to make it safer so we're going to talk a little bit about that this morning over the next 30 minutes or so. With that let me turn it over to the Colonel Vaughn in our medical team and hear from him.

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: Alright hey thank you sir and hey everybody. Good morning Team Pete, all of the mission partners, friends and families associated with 21st Space Wing. As the boss said, just past week new guidance came out regarding mask wearing or cloth face coverings. Over here on base and within the Medical Group we're seeing some awesome creativity with that and seeing some good designs that people are making at home and we're going to talk a little bit about what those masks are for and what they do and what they don't do.

In response to some of the questions that we received about that when we get to the Q&A portion, as the boss said the installation keeps making adjustments based on guidance that comes in or just things that seem to be smart business for the Medical Group. For us one of those things is just on Wednesday we kicked off a drive-up pharmacy pick-up service at the base exchange and that's where folks can pick up their prescriptions without even getting out of the car. So it just kind of removes just another little piece of possible personal interaction that we've now eliminated. And I'll tell you that was really a partnership between the medics and civil engineers and it just shows how much collaboration is taking place on base.

You wanna make a request up front as additional testing capability continues to roll out across our region and it may be possible that someone gets a COVID-19 test taken downtown at a location outside of one of our military testing spots. And if that's the case we would just ask that you notify the 21st Medical Group so that we can help track that, but then also it's a good idea to notify your supervisor too just so they can also help track that because I can guarantee that supervisors care about individual's health as well.

Lastly I'm going to foot stop this every week but please download the Air Force Connect app. That app is just a great way to get the current information on the status of base services. I so appreciate what everyone's doing--- keep it up and we're taking the right steps but we need everyone's help to continue the course. And so with that boss over to you to start the Q&A portion.

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Yeah thanks Chris. And once again on the Air Force Connect app we've got the button on there which has all the COVID-19 guidance, the latest updates and then we're also pushing messages out periodically. Just reminders on what to do--- have a mask if you go into the commissary, those sorts of things just to help people out. And those come up as messages, they show up on your phone, and it's another tool to help you stay connected. I know there's a lot of tools out there and everyone has their preference but our goal is to make sure that whatever you use for a tool is that we have a way to access you.

Alright so we're going to the best question first thanks a good way to start so this is by far the best question: *I drive a Jeep that doesn't have windows, or I have a motorcycle... I don't have doors so when I get to the gate what do I do?* So I'm not going to mandate windows on motorcycles I promise. So if you have a vehicle that doesn't have windows you can still come on base. Our defenders are going to have their masks right? They have coverings there, sanitizing everywhere, and you'll still be fine. Just show your ID. They scan it from safe distance and you really, as a medical professionals have educated me, a few feet in six minutes rule. So if you're within close contact a few feet away from someone for a couple seconds at the gate that's not where the risk is coming from so you'll still be allowed on base and you could still drive.

Obviously if you have a vehicle that has tinted windows and has tinted windows folks are putting the ID card up to the front window which was intended and they scanned it there and so people are figuring it out. And I know this, we're getting adjusted to this and it's just new norm so good news if you have a motorcycle or vehicle without windows still come on base. Alright Chris, over to you.

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: Alright thanks sir alright here's one of our questions that has to do with COVID-19 testing: *can shift workers volunteer for testing?* And you know here's a simple answer: whether it's a shift worker or any kind of personnel on the installation that we've got this lane testing for COVID-19 set up on Peterson over near the car wash and any beneficiary who is enrolled in the 21st Medical Group has that testing available. We're still applying criteria-based testing that is published by the CDC and so that's really our first step is to apply some criteria as to whether someone has symptoms or were they clearly in close contact with someone that also tested positive for COVID-19. So after that preliminary screening and assuming that an individual meets that first criteria, then what we'll do is we'll get you scheduled for a specific time to show up at our point of testing lane and will collect the sample. And then we ship it off to the lab. The phone number for that is (719) 524-2273, option one, and then that's how we'll get you triaged and screened. But to see if you if you actually need to get tested for that right now we're doing our point of testing line at the car wash Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and that's just based off lower numbers of folks who have been calling feeling that maybe they need to get tested. But with that if there is an urgent need that emerges on a Tuesday or Thursday we can still accomplish that at the Medical Group right out of the clinic so we're still able to do it ultimately five days a week. Thanks for the question.

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Hey Chris and I were talking this morning about the test numbers that have come back and we had almost all of our tests come back from earlier in the week. The turn-around time if you could give folks an idea and it's still pretty quick it's only a couple days...

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: Yes sir yeah absolutely so with the medical team that's located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base they really have a state of the art lab and technology and that's where we're shipping our samples to and the folks they're getting them turned around within 48 to 72 hours. So over the last couple of weeks our data and the pending results... we've only been waiting for maybe 20 results on any given day. And those fast turn-around times are huge because it really puts the individual's mind at ease when they get their result back. It puts their families' mind at ease and their co-workers and their supervisors and ultimately it gets people back into the fight and back to their daily routine much faster. So we've been very pleased with that partnership with Wright-Patterson and we're going to keep using it.

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Absolutely great right and if anyone has any concerns or questions that you know "hey I think I have symptoms of something" please call or use the resources of our medical workers right. They are ready, they're willing and able and they will answer your questions. That readiness to test, they're ready to look at you and

whatever it is, no matter even if you have something, whether it is the regular cold or flu they can help out with that too. Especially right now this heightened state of awareness take advantage of that resource, medical capabilities, professionals are second to none so we'll get to see it right now.

So let's take a look at another question here on the face masks. As you mentioned Chris, face masks and coverings and enforcing those standards obviously the standards are out there and so the question is: *where can security forces actually enforce the wearing of face coverings and masks in relation to housing and public areas?* And some people have said "hey I've seen some people walking around base within 6 feet of each other and they don't have a mask on and so yeah let me first start with my commander's common sense answer and that is that I do not intend to have a security forces or use defenders to patrol around base and arrest people for not having a face mask on. Or maybe you're within 5 feet of someone or there's a couple of people having a conversation somewhere. Those things are going to happen from time to time right? It will happen from time that some kids in housing will gather up and they'll be talking and playing and those things happen as well right? In most of our houses in base housing the fencing in the yards are all together and so there are going to be interactions in the office, in the workspace there going to places where folks come within 6 feet of each other, there are going to places in the commissary... I go over to the commissary every single day at least once a day to check out what's going on and I go over to the BX every day to check out what's going on and there are places where it is impossible to just to be further than six feet away from someone.

So I ask that everyone continues to use common sense and use their judgment if you do see hey yeah there's a group of people that are chronically ignoring the guidance if it's in housing I ask that you bring that up with the Tierra Vista office and mention that and that will get back to me. And you can mention that to your supervisor, or First Sergeant if you don't feel comfortable confronting that person, and then let us take care of it if it becomes a chronic problem. Let us go and we can go and take care of that. And my goal through all this is to just have all of us be adults about this and be responsible and not have to resort to "well I could bar people from the base or enforce drastic measures". Our goal is to make sure we get through this as a family and as a team right, and we can talk through it. So if you have a specific area of concern bring that up and I'm happy to address it. I'm happy to have our leaders and our First Sergeants address it with those individuals.

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: Yeah boss if I can chime in on that it relates to one of the questions that we received at the Med Group but with respect to the face coverings and cloth facial masks. Let me talk about what it's supposed to do and really what it's not meant to do. So the purpose of the of the cloth-based covering at first I want to assure everybody I'm alone in my office right now there's no one even close to me which is why i'm not wearing a mask right now. But the purpose of the covering is to catch the wearers droplets coming from their mouth and I add particularly when you're talking or somebody is sneezing it's really to catch the wearers droplets. It's not meant as really an inbound protective barrier that's really that's not what fabric masks are designed to do so we don't we don't want people to get confused with that. And it is absolutely, they're not meant to be a substitute for the continued protocols of good hand hygiene, covering your mouth or your nose if you're sneezing or

coughing and physical distancing. And then also just staying home if you're not feeling well. Those measures really remain the primary weapon to fight COVID-19. The fabric mask is just a supplemental measure with that

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Thanks Chris I think that something we all have to remember and something by the way we're all learning right as we go through I know like I've done it three times already here I put the face mask on and guess what I just did? I just touched my face and I touched the mask and now have a false sense of security and so now I gotta go over to hand sanitizer and make sure I use that and so it's something we're getting used to it's a new normal but you're absolutely right it would be a mistake to assume that the face mask covering is now solved the COVID problem because it hasn't. Are we back over to you Chris for a question?

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: I'll take a question here. The data question is: *how many positive cases are on Peterson?* So as we mentioned last week Department of Defense has given services some guidance on what we can and what we can't talk about in terms of actual cases on an installation as the Pentagon would rather talk about those specific numbers itself but let me talk about some overall trends and data that we do track and follow every day here within the state of Colorado and also El Paso County. So the various websites for the county and the state are updated every day and they've got a lot of data out there. So as of close of business yesterday for the state of Colorado over 31,000 COVID-19 tests have been run and so that's quite a bit and when you look at the overall positive rate across the state based on those tests. And obviously those tests don't capture everybody, but just serves as a representative sample, comes out to around 20% based on those tests across the entire state. But also keep in mind a lot of that testing is specifically targeted for individuals based on those criteria that I mentioned earlier so it's kind of a very careful net cast on a certain portion of the population based on symptoms and contacts with individuals that have contracted COVID-19. We are starting to see some positive news with this in terms of new case rates as well not necessarily increasing at the at an increasing rate everyday as well as with hospitalizations across the state and within the county.

We're also seeing positive trends with that as well of fewer people each day that have to be hospitalized and that I think that's really important and really a positive side because obviously if somebody has to be hospitalized it means that they can't recover from this illness at home but the data shows by far the vast majority of people that contract COVID-19 recover at home very similar as you would with the cold or the flu. That's good. Good things that what the data mining is showing.

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Just to let everyone know we look at those numbers every day we were looking at those numbers across several states obviously California, New Mexico, Colorado, North Dakota, Florida, Virginia, Massachusetts, and other places, other countries as well and there are some good trends out there and some of the numbers...I would ask him here on base but I think we're still what 4 to 5% Chris on the test positive rate? So which is in the curve on just told you we are at 20% statewide for those tests so there are some reasons as to why that is but I think that speaks highly of how everyone has

really leaned into these protective measures. Certainly in the 21st base, things in the Team Pete community, all of our geographically separated units, and everyone's taking this to heart and so I think just as you've heard in the national press conferences I would encourage everyone to continue to follow through with the guidelines and because some of the trends that we're hearing we're seeing the trend lines are dependent upon us continuing doing what we're doing and so keep it up. It's working. It is the simple message I have for everyone.

Alright so questions, back to related to the last question here but a question: *is anyone working with Tierra Vista to enforce the no-gatherings policy in base housing?* And so Tierra Vista obviously has posted the closures to places like dog parks and some of the common areas and to help enforce those physical distancing. I do talk to the leadership at Tierra Vista on a regular basis and communicate several times a week on the current status you know they're putting out messages to make sure we stay in sync because sometimes I know it can be confusing between what's Tierra Vista area or a park and what parks for our children in housing they all just look like parks right? And so I want to make sure it would be common and consistent across the board there and if there's confusion forward those questions up and we can help out as we have in the past, getting some clarifying guidance. So Tierra Vista is working to enforce those gatherings issues. If you do see a you know an issue where there seems to be a chronic problem where some folks look like they're not being secure once again I ask you that you forward that up to your Vista representative and then through your leadership. The message will get to me and you can send it into public affairs. We can talk about that during this forum by the way there are also some areas where you can have public gatherings safely right? We've done that. We did that with our two 5 year olds this week and we went to the drive-in movie theater over at the youth center which was a great success and we had all the cars spaced out and family distancing and physical distancing. So there's some areas where we can do a little bit of that fun stuff and gather right so there's a balance and we're gonna continue to look for some of those ways to maintain that balance and be healthy physically and mentally. Alright Chris let's turn it over you.

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: Alright boss thanks and in addition to the drive-in movie theater, other fun things going on. I tell you FSS is doing a great job with the pizza Wednesdays and then I heard also I think there might be some like wing night perhaps on Friday? So there's still stuff going on and ways to get connected and also pick up some really good food also so check out 21 FSS on what they're offering.

So one of our other questions here: *that security forces personnel were taking temperatures of those entering Cheyenne mountain are they no longer going to do this since the windows have to remain up?* So now I get it might be a little confusing on how that works at the people's windows are rolled up but the simple answer is in order to provide some additional monitoring up there at Cheyenne Mountain. We're still going to take the temperatures it just requires folks to roll down their windows and they'll have their temperature scanned and then they can roll their windows back up. So a little bit of a variance there but it's specific to Cheyenne Mountain. For the folks that work up there that's a very good question, but if you are here in a motorcycle or a vehicle with no windows you can get your temperature scanned still, same procedure.

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: If you got any other questions on your end about the drive-in movie theater and all that which it's good to see and we're continuing to go and see if we can add to some of those fun activities. We got Easter today. The Easter bunny is going to be driving around on the fire truck so she'll physically distance. I'm sure from the firefighters and then won't be getting off but driving around housing so for all your kids out there I encourage you to go out and go out your front yard, wave at the Easter Bunny, and kind of be fun for them. My kids will be out there you know.

I also have one of my son's going to graduate high school as is many of your kids they're out there and the Air Force Academy is going to have graduation here next week and so these are special events that are typically involved with tons of family coming in and we celebrating together. And so we're looking for support squadron civil engineers and a bunch of others are looking at how can we do something really exciting and cool on base. We have tons of space out here. I'm looking out here today at the flight line from where I'm sitting talking to all of you there is so much space and there's gotta be a way where all of our graduating high school seniors... we could come up with the world's coolest high school graduation ceremony and I put something on here on Team Pete for all those families. So we're looking at that stuff if you have "hey I got a great idea about that" send us that idea and we'll take a look at it and so we can help continue to build that sense of teamwork and family on Peterson. I think that's the last question I had up here. I don't know if Chris, do you have anymore questions over there?

21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn: I do I have one more. Okay alright let's go the question is: *how long will we be picking up medications at the new curbside location?* So again that's the group-side location over at the Peterson base Exchange and the bottom line is we're going to do that for as long as we have to maintain these protocols and you know until public health officials start giving the signals of the all clear and we can go back to the old way of doing business. We're in it for the long haul and we're ready for that. I went over there yesterday and again our civil engineers are just knocking out just awesome things. We've got a little smaller size shelter to give our teams that are working out there a little bit of coverage as to whether the sun is beating down on them or if it's raining or whatnot so total teamwork across multiple squadrons on base bringing that together. But we're going to offer that service using runners coming in and out delivering prescriptions as long as we have to.

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano: Yeah to Colonel Vaughn's point I've got all sorts of great comments already, emails on the drive-up pharmacy. I sent an email last night to Colonel Fritchey and he fired back and said "hey we've already built a fighting position over there at the parking lot, already gotta shelter up". It's just amazing teamwork I love to see it. And I drove by there this morning, they had got the whole thing going. People are driving up, they got their shelter. Once again the only problem we're going to have with these face masks is we're going to have tan lines. And pharmacy techs are going to get a little interesting and the second problem we're gonna have is getting the group again even back indoors at least during the summer months compared to you know the outside. Filling the prescriptions and then being inside all day long it's pretty cool to see them out there.

So a final question I've got here is: *why hasn't the base moved to mission essential personnel only yet?* The base is effectively at a mission essential only step right now. The

difference between Peterson and some other bases, and this is not to demean any other bases or belittle or say we're better, is that the mission we have here on Peterson is to support a couple of combatant commands and several other really really important mission partners. A couple of combatant commands that live right on the base. And then there's other combatant commands that are operating from the base and one of those, primarily NORAD-Northcom, is at the center of the fight right and so everything they do, every day is mission essential and everything that they need is mission essential and so we have to support all that. So our footprint is going to continue to be a little bit bigger than the typical base that's out there and then in addition to that and so that's why we have our support group in a Medical Group are working literally 24/7 because we can't fail. We cannot fail the critical mission that's occurring here in the fight that's centered right here.

The other thing is all of our units around the world are mission essential and all that data that's flowing into Cheyenne Mountain, Vandenberg in the missile warning missile defense, and space domain awareness, and electronic warfare missions that are going on... that stuff is critical everyday. So we need to continue to support that so our footprint is going to continue to be a little bit bigger. And I tell you the second part of it is I absolutely refuse to stop caring for and to stop accepting our retirees in. Those folks whose shoulders we stand on and so as long as I'm commander here we're going to continue to support them right. We're going to do creative things like have a drive-up pharmacy and other things to reduce the risk to the maximum extent possible and continue to provide and serve what I think is absolutely mission critical a part of our community right? The people whose shoulders we stand on that came before us.

So one final question before going to my closing comments is on the color of face masks. So I've got a black one on here, ordered some black ones. Earlier in the week I was wearing my SnoFest, a blue scarf wrapped around thing I've got on. So we're going to do our best for our customer forward facing part of the base to kind of have some neutral stuff and some stuff that works for them for their jobs but you know in the Medical Group we get all sorts of different kinds and those are based off of the their job and how they're doing whatever the specifics of their medical job are. If you're mission essential it's going to work and you don't interact with customers and you're in one of our operations centers and you're just keeping that mission going, wear inappropriate face mask and don't be afraid to have a little bit of fun. It's OK to have a little bit, we gotta find a way to have fun even during this time. The main group they're doing all sorts of creative things over there make the best of it and we're not going to arrest you for having a creative face mask. We are going to try and provide some standardization or something that looks professional to those folks you know that visitors center and customer service in those sorts of places as best we can do so if you have any questions about that once again you can ask your First Sergeant, First Sergeant talks with the Chief, and he gives me all the info and we see if there's a problem we can kind of address that may put out some more guidance.

As I've said before I prefer not to put out guidance on everything and I prefer to let our commanders, First Sergeants, Chiefs do it. We're paying it forward and that is to lead so with that I appreciate Colonel Vaughn all of your insight over there. The numbers and stats as if I could recap kind of we're at, my consensus is there's some positive signs on the horizon, but none of us should let that kind of give us a false sense of security. There's still work needs to be

done and everyone is still be patient we gotta continue to focus right? There's still a lot of people in our community, in our families, that are high risk. There's still people in our community and our families that are going through other medical conditions right? There's normal everyday life stuff that is going on besides the current virus and so I ask everyone to continue to focus on that right? The basics of leadership and caring for the folks around you reach out to people I've said it multiple times but if you haven't sent a text message or smiley emoji or something to somebody, just haven't sent something to it all along time, just to check up on him take the opportunity to do that from day to day and that may make the difference in changing that person's outlook today and into the future. So with that thank you for what you're doing every day. It is incredible, just an amazing privilege to serve alongside each and everyone of you and you know just as Chief and I say, and Colonel Vaughn and I are saying, especially with their medical team: all of us want to make sure that each and every one of you continue to be built to last. Thanks team.