

Peterson AFB: 21st Space Wing Town Hall Transcript  
April 3, 2020

21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano  
21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn  
21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Hey good afternoon Team Pete and happy Friday! The end of another work week here, and from all of us on our end and all of our families and beyond Team Pete, welcome to all of our families spread across 14 time zones right now and 27 total locations, some of which are tuning in right now at this moment, I just want to take a little bit of time with a couple important members of our team and answer some of your questions again. And as we've now progressed into what is about the end of the first month of this heightened state of readiness conditions, virus and the infection responses continued, I think it's important for all of us to stay in communication and stay in sync. And as you know many of you received our emails, we have an app our Peterson Air Force Base app that we're pushing out information on, of course this is going out over Facebook, but there's Facebook information as well as immediate releases. And then by the way I've just been walking around and I want to thank all of you for some of the great ideas that you've given to all of us as we walk around and some of those as we'll talk about we actually put into practice and that's really great all of you are part of this effort so thank you.

As we continue to work closely with all of the health agencies, hospitals, clinics certainly at the military installations here and around the town, around the city of Colorado Springs and in all the locations where we were where we're at so that we could figure out how to best serve you with your needs, by the way beyond just coronavirus care there's a tremendous amount of care that still going on right now and this outside of that must continue this is essential I know for all of your families so within the next 30 minutes or so we're going to have a little bit of discussion. I've got to Colonel Vaughn on the line with me and you know he's been on the on the phone or on the screen the last couple weeks and I've asked Chief Simmons as well, command chief, to come in and share a few thoughts and answer questions as well. And then just so you know I'll remind you a little bit later as we get into next week I'm going to kind of split these sessions alright and we're going to have one session on Friday we're going to talk a little bit about maybe some more medical related or things that are closer to the medical topic dealing with coronavirus and then on Tuesdays Chief and I are going to host a Facebook live event where we're going to talk your career concerns and personnel concerns, family concerns... I know there are a lot of those as people, as PCS season progresses, promotion season people are buying and selling houses, or maybe they're in the middle of those things or they're facing the loss of income to spouses, and to make sure that we give you all the resources that help you understand what we're doing there so with that I'm going to kick it over to my trusty sidekick over there and our outstanding Medical Group Colonel Chris Vaughn.

**21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn:** Good afternoon Colonel Falzarano and Chief Simmons. I appreciate the opportunity to join on another town Hall and to everybody

across Team Pete hope you're all staying healthy and safe and sound and most importantly continue to stay optimistic because we're going to absolutely navigate through this. So as the boss said I'm Colonel Vaughn and the Medical Group commander based out of Peterson and just going to share some updates on the medical front and some of the operations that we're doing out of the MTF. I'm going to start off with some really good news on the testing front whereby planning ahead several weeks ago we were able to get a shipment of viral testing media and these are the critical supplies that we use to take samples from individuals that need to be tested for COVID-19 and we were able to get those supply orders in and the good news is we have enough supply media to last us for several weeks of testing.

In addition with our testing platform, we're getting turn-around times within two to three days on that and so really serves two impacts right there— one it gets the patient their result really soon so that they're not worried or concerned on what their status is and then also it gets people back into the fight and gets them back to a return to duty status based on that test results or if they need to be a patient and then we can equip them with the information that they need in order to take care of themselves and to recover and then to get back into the fight. So with that if you need to be tested or feel that you need to be tested for COVID-19 this is the phone number it's (719) 524-2273, option one, and then with that you give us a call and we'll do a prescreening and then if you meet the criteria for COVID-19 testing we'll get you scheduled and give you a specific time to show up at our testing location to take a sample. And so with that this just remains a dynamic scenario and we're all maneuvering through it but we're all going to get through it together and I really want to encourage everybody to download the Air Force Connect app and also to keep checking the wing Facebook page for continued updates.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Appreciate that. Thank you. Alrighty thanks Col. Vaughn and uh now it's a kick it over to Chief Simmons.

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons:** This is Chief Simmons glad to be with you here today on this uh this Friday just want to start off by saying that it's not lost on leadership this is taking a toll on all of us and it's taken so long and airmen families we understand that it's taking its toll on us and our families many people are longing for a return back to that normalcy, wanting to get back to their old lives. Some of us are stressed by being told to just stay in place and others are stressed because they're stretched too thin they're being asked to do things that they've never had to do they've been asked to do things in amount they've never had to carry. Most of our lives we'll get out of rhythm, maybe less connected, but for sure we are not on hold. We are not on hold. It only takes about 30 to 60 days to establish a routine, for that routine to become habits, habits that are hard to break. Eating, sleeping, exercise... the things that we were doing that kept us in a good battle rhythm and things we need to continue to do. Because we are sitting at home a little bit more doesn't mean that we should stay in bed a little bit later, doesn't mean that we should eat a little bit worse. It means that we have to be more disciplined and responsible. So I ask you to review your routine. Are you spending time or are you wasting time? Staying productive and constructive. Are you staying disciplined and are we being responsible? What is our new normal? What are we becoming because of this and through this? As we each embrace our

personal newfound space that we have, please also remember to have patience and appreciation because we're all in this together.

This is unique in that everybody is experiencing something different, all of this, all at the same time. This is not escaping anybody. I would personally like to extend gratitude and appreciation to each of you for your professionalism, and for your dedication, for your hard work, but also for your understanding. I'd like to extend a personal thank you to our support group who's been holding the line on this installation offering up innovative and ingenious ways to provide support and opportunities for airmen to experience life in new creative ways. But also like I show my appreciation for those who are actually out there on the frontline in harm's way each and every day in ways that they hadn't imagined when they when they come to work every day. And I would ask each of them do to two things check and connect. Check on them- shift supervisors, other supervisors, that's all of our jobs And then once you've checked make sure you stay connected. It shouldn't just be a one-time thing. It should be continuous. The only way we get through this better is to do it together even though we are separated.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Thank you that's a great message and words I think words that we can all use to help guide us through the next days or weeks or how long it is. Let me... with that I'm going to start getting into some questions here and let me jump right in here and this is a great question and one that I've heard several times so dealing with retirees and specifically *why are retirees being barred from the commissary or the BX at specific times?* After all it is true retirees earned the right to shop at those places on base and why is active duty being given a preference? So yeah we have a we have set aside an hour in the morning for not only availability for active duty but we have civilians who are mission essential. First responders set aside a little period of time in the morning for those personnel to create a separate period of shopping and most of the people that are shopping during that. Many of 'em are mission-essential personnel that are critical to supporting, whether it be the operations of NORTHCOM, Space Command, Space Force, SOCNORTH... uh and a whole host of other organizations on the base in addition to the critical missions of this one 21st Space Wing.

And so in in my judgment I think that's the right balance to provide a little bit of time where the mission-essential personnel can go into the shop in the commissary into two days a week only two days a week in the BX. I mean talk directly to all of our retirees though and uh and I'll tell you that I am not going to close the BX or the commissary to our retirees. If you drive up to our commissary or BX or military personnel flight um and you take a look at the parking lot you're going to see something outside of each of those places and several of the places on base you're going to see a Purple Heart parking spot. I wanted Warrior parking spot and Gold Star family member parking spot and all of us realize that many of the people who have earned the right to park in those parking spots. You are the people that came before us and the people whose shoulders we stand on and so well we've had to make a small accommodation to one hour of shopping in the morning. I tell you my intention is to go to make sure we continue you support all of our retirees all of our families independence who are just as critical to this mission today as any of the rest of us, so and thank you for your service I appreciate it. With that let me turn it over to Col. Vaughn.

**21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn:** OK thank you sir. So I've got a health related question here: *is a request to self-quarantine for 14 days due to community exposure such as commercial air travel approved by an immediate supervisor or higher?* That's a great question and there's no indication for quarantine for generalized community exposure such as air travel or walking through a store. Quarantine is for individuals who have been in close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual. And close contact is defined as being in contact with a COVID-19 positive person for six minutes or longer and within six feet or less. But if you have specific questions on close contact quarantine or whether you possibly been in close contact I'd encourage you to reach out to our public health department at the Medical Group or the County public health department for further clarification with that.

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons:** Hey I've got a question that came in that I really appreciate. The question is: *is there any way active duty can sign out free weights and other equipment from the base gym possibly using an Air Force temporary issue receipt?* I love this question because it's telling me that our airmen want to stay ready. They care about their fitness, they care about their wellness as do we. Now while we don't intend to check out our service equipment for free weights and larger gym equipment and things like that, we're not going to push that outside of our control. We have placed workout equipment on the outside of the Fitness Center for people to use. There's also a number of apparatus that allow you to do body weight resistance and exercises and we've kept on the running track outside as well as the improved in-field all open for use with that personal space consideration. The intent is also to make sure that we've got a they have the tracks or the trails all around the park and around the base open for use. And we encourage people to get out with that to enjoy the fresh air and get out and take a run, take a walk, take a jog, stop along the apparatuses and do some pushups and sit-ups and resistance. The other access is also open up the golf course so that we can get families out and enjoying themselves with free golf and putting. We've got so many things that are coming online in a couple of weeks, for next days and weeks to come to encourage our members to get out and stay fit. I appreciate that question and encourage everybody to get out. And if you forgot, the opposite of staying fit, but a drive-in movie theater is coming soon so if you prefer that, then maybe watching that theater. That's good too sir now that is that's why they're cheap.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** That's good advice uhm let me say I'm gonna take this question and take an opportunity to uh to make our one of our newest members famous and that is Airman White heading to the comm squadron. Chief and I the other day uh last week it was early this week when we went over to the dining facility and we caught him on his very first full day in the Air Force. He's from Arizona, excited to be here and excited to get started. We started talking with our airmen and uh in that conversation you could tell that that uh you know in a couple days uh without the gym and folks are cooped up and uh looking for things to do and so we're looking at this very seriously. There are some programs where folks have had, by appointment thanks to the gym, with the small numbers... so our medical team is analyzing that and I want to make sure we have a balanced sustainable approach. This I think we can be safe at the same time if we can be healthy and fit and mentally and spiritually healthy as well.

Quick question here uh that comes up and this is a really valid question for many of our parents right to ask: *if the base goes to Health Protection Condition Delta, or some other heightened state of readiness, will military spouses still be able to get on and off base? If they're mission essential, what about kids or whatnot?* Let me tell you that the gates of the base are still going to remain open for all of our central personnel. That includes people that are if you live on base if you're one of the mission essential people working on base at no time is there going to be any policy where even if we were to go to Health Protection Condition Delta is not like Force Protection Condition Delta where we lock the gates and keep people out. It's a totally different situation and so we're not going to strand children off base or spouses and you'll still be allowed to proceed and drive back and forth because after all people still need to go and get food and they still need to eat and they still need medical care right? There are a lot of things I know we have, we have parents that have autistic children that need treatment that right now is really difficult to get for unfortunately for many in those circumstances. And there are all sorts of different things you need access to and I want to make sure that you're able to access those services and not care as long as it's safe for you to do so. Thanks so let me turn over Colonel Vaughn again.

**21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn:** OK thank you sir um so here's a question that that we received this question is about data and *whether positive cases among active duty will be shared and how many positive cases do we have on Peterson Air Force Base and in what squadrons and also how many people have been tested?* I think this is an awesome question because someone out there is thinking about the numbers and looking for sources for factual information and I think that's really important right now because there's a lot of information or media out there that maybe isn't exactly correct but as far as data we are absolutely a data driven organization and we do track a lot of things. Recently out of the Department of Defense, guidelines have been provided to installations to not publicly announce new coronavirus cases among personnel and the reason for that is for operational and information security. So even though we are absolutely tracking data locally and it's of interest to us, it can also be potentially of interest to our adversaries as well. And so even if we may not announce something out of the Medical Group publicly, there are information resources that are correct that are authoritative that we can all utilize. One of them is the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and their website, every day they are refreshing the data in the trends across the state of Colorado and even here locally within our county. And that's a great resource to use; it's one that I use every single day. And then even closer to home in terms of tests that have been accomplished I can say that through our own group point of testing location we've got 197.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Really appreciated and thanks for the question Colonel. I got another question here and another encouraging question because it speaks to the spirit of our airmen the question says: *is there any chance of Air Force personnel being sent TDY to a heavily affected COVID-19 area?* And I don't take that question as being asked out of fear as much as being asked us of the opportunity to serve. Walking around the base I've heard of plenty of airmen saying: "how can I contribute, how can I get involved, how can I help?" Bottom line is that the global force management process that sends us around the

world to fight the fight is still ongoing however there is a stop movement in place for TDYs and not essential deployments. And so a lot of that has been curtailed, however what you're seeing out there in the news and how the Army is standing up their hospitals, and the Navy as Navy hospitals out on the East and West Coast helping those highly affected areas. The Air Force and this Space Force both also stand ready to provide whatever services and responses they will call the community to do. What I would ask of each and every airman that's assigned here in the Colorado Springs area, Peterson, Schriever, and Cheyenne Mountain is that we are considering cautious and responsible with the help that we do provide.

So we want make sure that when it's time to call upon those airmen that they're ready. We don't want you in harm's way unnecessarily, but we understand the need and the desire and the innate nature of those who want to serve. I believe the Air Force has a humanitarian side to it that allows us to provide capabilities around the world. The Air Force is already involved in transporting personnel back and forth from highly affected sites and we will continue to do whatever we can do and I know each and every airman out there is chomping at the bit to do their part. We appreciate you, thanks. I know this is occurring at all the bases where 21st air base personnel are represented and many of the Team Pete personnel on this installation work because I know this does this stuff also going on inside this city right here in between installations and the support is being provided. It's pretty incredible. So if you could talk Chris for just a couple seconds about some of the mental health support, up to the Air Force Academy and then how we're also posturing to help support for Carson down the road.

**21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn:** Yeah absolutely sir yeah so our neighbors up the road at the Academy they're going through a tough time as well. In addition to COVID-19, working through resiliency, and making sure that it's just absolutely on point. We have incredible partnerships here and across Colorado Springs and even all the way up to Denver with Buckley Air Force Base and in particular as a medical community, all of the military treatment facilities, we routinely share resources and expertise and personnel when there is a time of need to respond to a particular location in order to help them out and so we're sharing if called upon some of our mental health staff to augment the Air Force Academy in this moment, and because in our moment of need they would do the exact same thing for us. In addition with Fort Carson for the military medical standpoint Fort Carson is our local hospital and we're in close collaboration with Evans Army Community Hospital and starting this next week we'll have a handful of our physicians and also some of our nurse staff going over to Fort Carson for some additional training and collaboration and orientation should there be a need to increase their hospital bed platforms. So we're not detailing any staff permanently just yet but we're just continually trying to lean forward to planning to prepare should there be a need for that. Thank you, sir.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Yeah appreciate it Chris. I think those are important points to make and to let folks know what's going on behind the scenes. It is a tremendous amount of effort and uh in collaboration teamwork that's going on and not just between us between the local community as well. So a question on the BX and commissary again and on some of the precautions we put into place and uh and distancing there. Looks like people are concerned about *some folks aren't following the safe distances* and so let me tell

you that we take the Commissary and the BX are probably the areas with a large number of people go through a given day. I hear on this installation certainly right now and so we are continually evaluating our posture over the measures that are put into place. If you been there over the last week and you come back you'll see that now we've taped off 6 foot measurements on the floor so to help folks understand the distance if they're waiting in line with installed plexiglass directly in front of all the cashier's now. By the way that's across the entire base, any customer service waiting area. At the pharmacy to go there they've got some plexiglass where I can give people a little bit of extra protection. I was over at the Commissary today, by the way I'm over at the commissary probably twice um probably twice a day, but it's not even doing shopping. I just go over to see what's going on and uh and talk to people and take time to learn a lot from talking to people over there. And so today is not a plexiglass I think I'm going to go back and talk to the team "hey let's make the plexiglass a little bit bigger so we can provide a little bit more protection" and uh you know a little more people feel more confident uh over there and then uh with our medical team. We're all we are also looking at should we go in and have some sort of a number of people in the commissary. I went to was even a safer procedure right especially if we were to see current virus numbers increase in a measurable way so we're looking at all of that and taken your feedback uh into account and that's how we're a type of implemented the way the measures that we have already so please continue to voice your concerns and that's how we're able to take action taken action quickly. We hear from you. Alright we go back over to Col. Vaughn.

**21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn:** OK thanks boss uhm so here's a question: *according to a news release only those that are required for critical mission accomplishment as determined by unit commanders should be at work so why are there non mission essential personnel still working at the 21st Space Wing clinic?* Thank you for the question and once again the outpouring of support and concern for our medical staff has just been phenomenal but let me talk about this just a little bit. So the Medical Group itself is absolutely vital right now as we confront COVID-19 and this scenario requires us to have staff that are present in-house to take care of patients but also to manage what are kind of behind the scenes processes that allow us to deliver effective healthcare. And so managing overall risks for our staff knowing that we're going to have personnel in the clinic where potentially ill individuals are going to be arriving is always a daily concern and it's just something that we try to balance day to day and week to week. So some of the things that that we've done over the past several weeks is we continue to leverage a lot of virtual appointments or telephone appointments so that patients don't even have to come into the Medical Group. And we're also using a lot more telework on any given day. Right now we have at least 25% of our entire group at home performing telework and still accomplishing the mission remotely and then at the same time we have additional medical staff that are at home just on scheduled rest as we've altered some of our shifts so that our normal duty week has really changed and that's both allowing risk mitigation but also allowing our personnel to get their required rest so that they can continue to provide safe health care. We're going to continuously evaluate this, the things that we're doing this week may change next week as we both deliver health care and take care of our team and I appreciate the question.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Hey Colonel if I could follow up I just want to add little bit on that. There was another question that leans towards the medical career field but in the larger sense all the efficiencies. The question is: *will those still having to go to work in person received hazardous duty pay?* The short of it is that hazardous duty pay has not been, that entitlement, has not been authorized for performance of duties. Well we have the uncle in COVID-19 pandemic but the greater understanding is that our medical professionals don't get a six-foot buffer. They do their jobs every time it's in close contact. Col. Vaughn said every time that they have an engagement with a patient with a member it's a potential spread of infectious disease to them so we understand that they're being put in harm's way just to do the job. Here stateside we also understand that every AFSC that's doing their job the potential risk of coming in contact with this virus over surfaces and in the air just to come in and do that work. For leaving the dorm itself airmen are leaving their residence not to mention what's being brought in and out of their residence. This is a risk to everybody. This is a risk to everyone which is why we have to be so responsible with what we do and where we spend our time in making sure that we do things that are in the best interest of the collective. I'm so painfully proud of the installation members that are assigned to Peterson Air Force Base, Cheyenne Mountain, Schriever, each and every day by how you've responded to this pandemic. So I appreciate the time thank you appreciate it.

I'm going to jump down to the last question here and the question is: *how strongly is the stay-at-home order being enforced on base and what should we do if we observe residents not complying with the order? If one sees neighbors together is it reasonable to call Security Forces? Would I be another nosey neighbor or should I stick to passively aggressively staring at them from a safe distance?* I like the way that's worded. You know the physical distancing and social distancing are serious things and we continue to reiterate that and I continue to ask everyone whether you're, and it doesn't matter if you're in housing on base or if you're asking somewhere else or wherever you are at, do you continue to buy those guidelines and for the benefit of yourself for your neighbors for high risk individuals around we continue to do that. Up until this point I have, and I see no reason to stop now. I trust all of our people that live on base the people that work here and it is up to each and everyone of you, each and everyone of us, so I pulled those standards and to be a part of the solution. So I'm asking if you see something that looks unsafe for too many people together you know the best thing for you to do is back away from that situation and if it looks like it's becoming a problem I encourage you to call a member of your unit, commander, supervisor, whoever that is and ask them to please help engage.

At the same time the Tierra Vista leadership is ready to engage in that as well and provide appropriate guidance to anyone you see that's coming around the base. There are plenty of opportunities. I know it's difficult I have a lot of kids too and it's difficult to go and sometimes when the kids get out separating all apart those things happen um but there are a lot of opportunities and made our properties available to walk along the walking paths that are on base outside of the housing. Large open fields where people can go and family can be together and so take advantage of those opportunities where you can and take time for you to have some family time some bonding time together at a safe distance. Turn over to Colonel Vaughn again.

**21st Medical Group commander, Col. Chris Vaughn:** Alright thank you sir uh here's a question: *can retirees use the on base COVID-19 testing station? Can NAF civilians used the station too and what are the hours of use?* So any beneficiary that has an assigned primary care manager either at Peterson or Schriever can be set up for sample collection at our point of testing and this is whether someone is active duty. But this occurs first after being screened medically to make sure that there's actually criteria by which you need to have a sample taken and then after screening and if this criteria is met you'll be given a specific time to show up at the point of testing lane and you'll have the sample taken. So far we've been running the point of testing Monday through Friday from 1100 to 1400 hours but over the last week uh what the data has indicated is that this demand has actually been decreasing to the point so we're now going to reduce the days to Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1100 to 1400. And this is going to help us with both efficiency, reduced fatigue with our medical teams, and also conserve these critically important supplies that are used for this kind of testing. But even though will have the point of testing lanes set up Monday, Wednesday, Friday if there is an emergency and urgent need to take a sample from someone will still be able to accomplish that on a special case basis on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Thanks Chris appreciate it. Chief, do we have any more questions on your end?

**21st Space Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt Jacob Simmons:** Yes sir I've got one more question if you got time and it sort of falls in line with access to the base that you had asked a question about earlier but just a little different twist. *Where do individuals take any documentation to allow caregivers access to the base?* So things like the daycare with a child care facilities are more limited people are looking for other child care caregiver options how can they get them access. Well if the caregiver already has access to the base that doesn't change they're not being restricted from coming onto the installation. All of our gates are still operating within hours and our west gate is still open 24 hours so that caregiver already has access they could come on through with their current documentation. If it's a new caregiver that's trying to get on to the installation then our visitor's center is still open from 0700 to 1600 Monday through Friday, so seven o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon. Our visitor centers will still process people to be sponsored onto the installation if you need them to come on to the caregivers and then after hours they can go to the west gate and they can be processed there it just may slow down the traffic coming into the base. It may take a little bit longer but we can get them processed as well. Hopefully that answers your question.

**21st Space Wing commander, Col. Thomas Falzarano:** Thanks Chief and I just want to emphasize a point that we're looking at our gate hours so how many people coming through the gates now and in assessing that and I will put out some words shortly in slightly adjusting some of our gate hours. And I don't think it's going to be a huge impediment to folks arriving or leaving from the base but just do things a little bit smarter as we continue to evaluate our posture here. Let me just thank Chief- thank you- and thank Colonel Vaughn for spending a few minutes with the Team Pete family and those around the world and reminding everyone that we're going to be here every Friday. Chief and I will be here Tuesday and as we go through this,

once again, there are a lot of questions that people haven't thought of right now. There are going to be some unique situations that we're going to have to work our way through. Every family and every airman is unique and different, has special circumstances all the way from Aaron White who's got almost a full week on his first Air Force Base under his belt, to folks like Chief and I who have several weeks of experience. And but no matter who you are I just want to tell you that we are proud to serve alongside each and every one of you. We couldn't be prouder to serve alongside each and every one of you and no matter what we do I want to make sure that each and every one of us continues to be built to last.