

Garth Brooks to play drive-in concert event for 300 theaters

MUSIC CITY BEAT, 2A

THE TENNESSEAN

FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2020 | TENNESSEAN.COM



NETWORK

Next phase of reopening postponed

Nashville sees uptick in COVID-19 cases, mainly in SE

Brett Kelman Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Nashville officials announced plans Thursday to delay the next reopening phase while focusing efforts to combat coronavirus in the southeast portion of the city, where about half of new cases are clustered.

Dr. Alex Jahangir, the head of Nashville's coronavirus task force, said the delay was prompted by a slight increase in new virus cases seen over the past two weeks, but it was not evidence the city is regressing.

Jahangir said "nearly 50%" of all new cases detected in the past month were found in southeast Nashville. The city would focus on offering more testing, contact tracing and education efforts in that area, Jahangir said, but was not planning to have a separate reopening timeline for that portion of the city.

Heat maps released by the city show the largest cluster of active infections in neighborhoods along Nolensville Pike and reaching into Antioch.

See REOPENING, Page 12A



Dr. Alex Jahangir Head of Nashville's coronavirus task force

"This pandemic is not a southeast Nashville problem. The data we see is based on where a person who is tested lives – not where they work, not where they shop, not where they may go."

Inside

- State will resume distribution of free masks. **12A**
- As cases increase in Williamson County, Franklin's mayor is concerned about complacency. **13A**



Counties prep for influx of absentee ballot applications

Mariah Timms Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Tennessee counties are working to get a record number of absentee ballots ready before the August election even as state officials say to hold off sending them.

A legal battle continues this week between the state and plaintiffs represented by the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee over whether fear of contracting the coronavirus is a valid reason to vote by mail.

The state is now required to expand the policy to include those who fear COVID-19 exposure after a ruling last week by Davidson County Chancellor Ellen Hobbs Lyle. That ruling is being appealed by the state.

"Shame on you," Lyle told attorneys representing the state Thursday.

In a ruling from the bench, she ordered the state to comply with the court's ruling and instructed the state to fix its absentee voting request form by 5 p.m. Friday.

The debate comes as the state reports more Tennesseans have the virus than ever before in the pandemic so far, and officials continue to discourage large gatherings.

In Nashville, where large numbers of absentee ballot applications were received even before a court order on the program last week, new staff has been hired and a plan to print more ballots than usual is already underway.

Meanwhile, the state's Election Commissioner Mark Goins sent a letter to local officials telling them to create a specific application option for the virus exemption and "hold off" sending ballots requested under it, court documents show. And the Secretary of State's Office declined to answer media questions

See ABSENTEE, Page 6A



Lyle



Goins

Meharry partners with black churches to expand COVID-19 testing, reduce barriers



Soheb Khan, a preventive medicine resident, administers a COVID-19 test at Mount Gilead Missionary Baptist Church during a testing event Saturday. The church teamed up with Meharry Medical College to provide free COVID-19 testing to the public. ALAN POIZNER/FOR THE TENNESSEAN

'Need is there'

Holly Meyer Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

It took about an hour to transform Mount Gilead Missionary Baptist Church's parking lot into a drive-thru COVID-19 testing site. • By the time it opened at 9 a.m. Saturday, vehicles were already in line. • The sun bore down on the blue tented stations where gloved, masked and gowned Meharry Medical College students and staff collected pertinent information from people in the vehicles and then swabbed their nasal cavities. See TESTING, Page 13A

EMPIRE TODAY®

CARPET & FLOORING

Making Beautiful New Floors Easy

\$350 OFF*

LIMITED TIME OFFER!

CARPET • HARDWOOD • LAMINATE • VINYL • TILE

Schedule a FREE In-Home Estimate! Must call **888-365-6790** or visit **EmpireToday.com/Get350** to redeem offer.

*Discount applied to contract total of \$3,500 or more before applicable taxes. Must be presented upon appointment booking. Cannot be applied to deposit. Appointment must be scheduled by calling the number above or scheduled online at EmpireToday.com/Get350 to redeem offer. May not be applied to Sales or combined with coupons. Not valid on prior purchases. Residential only. Limit one offer per household. Expires 06/30/20. Subject to change. Sales (except CA) and installation are provided by independent contractors. Licensure at EmpireToday.com. CSLB 1047108 © 2020 Empire Today, LLC

USA TODAY

COVID-19: Our attention may be elsewhere, but "pandemic is still here." **14A**

Maple Street meets Eighth Ave.

Restaurant specializing in biscuit sandwiches in its newest location in Berry Hill. **9A**

Weather

High 87° | Low 63°
Lots of sun.
Forecast, **8B**

Volume 116 | No. 164
Home delivery pricing inside
Subscribe 800-342-8237
©2020 **\$2.50** Metro
State pricing varies



Coronavirus cases spike in Williamson County

Kerri Bartlett Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Williamson County has experienced an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases this week and the rate of increase, compared to previous weeks.

According to the latest report from the Tennessee Department of Health, 654 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Williamson County.

The rate of increase is approximately 11% over the span of this week, which is the highest increase in almost 60 days, according to data compiled by health departments and Johns Hopkins University.

The city of Franklin tracks the rate of cases and transmission each week on its website.

"Our percentage increase recently causes me some concern," Franklin Mayor Ken Moore said. "Even though it is a brief snapshot in time, we need to continue to be cautious."

Over the past 59 days, cases in Williamson County have increased from 312 on April 11 to 654 cases on June 10, or an increase of approximately 342 cases.

For some of that time, cases in the county increased by single digits each day.

However, this week new cases increased by 18 in just 24 hours, jumping from 630 cases on June 8 to 648 cases on June 9.

Mayor encourages residents to continue health protocols

Moore emphasized that residents should continue practicing proper health protocols.

"I am concerned that we are becoming complacent and not following the best practices of wearing face coverings in public places, physically distancing, and washing our hands often."

"This is a highly contagious virus and the older population is a greater risk. We will continue to follow Tennessee Pledge guidelines as we continue to reopen. Please be respectful and do the right things."

On Wednesday, Gov. Bill Lee said the "uptick" in coronavirus infections and hospitalizations in some counties across the state is an expected result of the state reopening much of its economy.

However, he also urged citizens to remain diligent in taking the necessary precautions to prevent the virus from continuing to spread.

Moore issued a stay at home order on March 25, while Gov. Bill Lee issued a statewide stay-at-home order on March 30, which lasted until late April.

Williamson County, along with 89 counties in Tennessee, began the first phase of reopening on April 27 when restaurants reopened and on April 28 when retail establishments reopened at

COVID-19 in Williamson County

Rate of increase over past two weeks:

- **May 22-28:** Cases increased from 500 to 533, or a rate of 6.6%

- **May-29-June 4:** Cases increased from 542 to 589, or a rate of 8.7%

Compiled by city of Franklin, Tennessee, Health Department and Johns Hopkins University

As of Wednesday

- **Number of cases:** 654

- **Negative tests:** 11,256

- **Recovered:** 389

- **Deaths:** 11

a lower capacity.

Establishments remain open with some restrictions such as capacity and social distancing measures. Some establishments require masks and some do not.

The city of Franklin launched a "Tennessee Pledge Partner" campaign, highlighting businesses on its social media outlets who are following the Tennessee Pledge, or the state's reopening guidelines.

The state guidelines for businesses

include deep cleaning, facilitating social distancing, checking employees temperatures and requiring workers to wear masks.

Coronavirus in Tennessee, US

There are at least 27,869, or 294 confirmed new cases of coronavirus in the state as of Wednesday afternoon.

At least 1,990 people have been hospitalized, and 18,516 have recovered so far.

Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a fast-spreading virus that originated in Wuhan, China, but has since become a worldwide pandemic. According to the World Health Organization, the global death toll is at least 408,025 with 7,145,539 confirmed cases.

As of Wednesday, the CDC said there have been at least 1,973,797 cases reported in the United States, with 112,133 deaths.

Metro Public Health Department officials announced Wednesday there were 6,571 confirmed cases of coronavirus in Nashville/Davidson County, an increase of 159 in the past 24 hours.

The confirmed cases range in age from 1 month to 100 years.

Kerri Bartlett covers issues affecting children, families, education and government in Williamson County. She can be contacted at kbartlett@gannett.com, 615-308-8324 or @kebl1414 on Twitter.

Testing

Continued from Page 1A

In total, 142 people were tested for the novel coronavirus in the Nashville church's parking lot.

Meharry operates three assessment centers in the city that are open five days a week. But the one-day, pop-up event hosted by Mount Gilead is part of the college's efforts to expand testing options amid the COVID-19 outbreak, said Cherae Farmer-Dixon, dean of Meharry's school of dentistry.

"Not everybody is going to come to the Meharry site or the other sites Meharry is managing. So how can we meet them where they are?" Farmer-Dixon said.

The historically black medical college, which has ties to the United Methodist Church, is partnering with black churches to reduce barriers to testing, Farmer-Dixon said.

Six Nashville churches, including Mount Gilead, agreed to serve as pop-up COVID-19 assessment locations on Saturdays in June and July. Meharry strategically partnered with churches that are not located near existing testing centers to reach more people, Farmer-Dixon said.

Tests are free and open to anyone, but organizers also hope to serve those who are at greater risk of infection and death.

COVID-19 disproportionately impacts communities of color

The coronavirus has disproportionately harmed communities of color nationwide and in Tennessee. Black Tennesseans make up 17% of the state's population but account for 22% of COVID-19 virus cases and 34% of deaths, according to the latest statistics from the Tennessee Department of Health.

Testing and education are key, Farmer-Dixon said.

"There are certain diseases that disproportionately negatively impact the African American community, certain populations. This pandemic is no different," Farmer-Dixon said. "This disease can spread so quickly and so quietly."

Mount Gilead hosted coronavirus testing in its neighborhood on Saturday not only to increase access, but because of health disparities and testing fears in the African American community, said the Rev. Breonus Mitchell Sr., who leads the Nashville congregation.

The church has a responsibility to help people improve their health, Mitchell said.

"Health was an issue in the Scriptures," Mitchell said. "Without people who are emotionally healthy and physically healthy, the church has no one to do its work, the missional work of the church."

Farmer-Dixon said "there is a trust factor" in two respected black institutions, the local church and the medical school, teaming to lead a testing effort that will reach members of the black community.

Government officials and other health institutions can sometimes cause fear in minority communities. The Tuskegee syphilis study is not far



Deacon Jon Walden, chairman of deacons at Mount Gilead Missionary Baptist Church, leads a prayer Saturday before a COVID-19 testing event for which the church teamed up with Meharry Medical College to provide free COVID-19 testing to the public. PHOTOS BY ALAN POIZNER/FOR THE TENNESSEAN



Sheream Reed, a student at Meharry's school of dentistry checks people in and directs them to the next step for their COVID-19 test at Mt. Gilead Missionary Baptist Church.

from people's minds, Farmer-Dixon said. The decadeslong federally funded experiment involved withholding treatment from hundreds of unsuspecting black men, according to a USA TODAY report. The study ended after it was exposed in 1972.

Serving community by providing comfortable, walkable options

When he recently called on Congress for funding help, Meharry President Dr. James Hildreth spoke about the trust needed to combat the coronavirus in minority neighborhoods. His pitch was that historically black medical schools could use federal dollars to expand testing and other services in these commu-

If you go

What: Free COVID-19 testing

When: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

- June 13: Fairfield Missionary Baptist Church in Goodlettsville

- June 20: Watson Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Nashville

- June 27: First Baptist Church South Inglewood in Nashville

- July 11: Kayne Avenue Missionary Baptist Church in Nashville

- July 18: St. Luke Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Nashville

nities that would welcome them.

The mistrust is the fruit of history, said the Rev. John Faison Sr., senior pastor of Watson Grove Missionary Baptist Church. The local church partnering with Meharry can make the experience more comfortable, he said.

"We also understand that our congregation and our communities are going to be hardest hit by this," Faison said. "So it's a perfect match. The trust is there, but the need is there."

His church will transform its parking lot into a testing site June 20. Church leaders are trying to spread the word, not only to the congregation, but in their neighborhood as well. Watson Grove will be a walkable option for those who do not have reliable transportation, Fai-

"Health was an issue in the Scriptures. Without people who are emotionally healthy and physically healthy, the church has no one to do its work, the missional work of the church."

The Rev. Breonus Mitchell Sr.
Pastor, Mount Gilead Missionary Baptist Church

son said.

"We've really tried to saturate our community," Faison said.

On Saturday, Deacon Jon Walden, chairman of the deacons at Mount Gilead, showed up early to help set up the testing site. Walden wanted to volunteer in part because a couple of his family members have been impacted by the coronavirus. Faith was also a factor.

"He tells us to go out and show love and concern for those that are less fortunate. In some of these cases, they may not be less fortunate material-wise, but health-wise they may be," Walden said.

Before the event got underway, volunteers and staff from the church and Meharry gathered together for a few moments. Walden led them in prayer, and Farmer-Dixon explained the logistics of how the day would unfold.

Then they disbanded, spreading out across the testing site ready to serve their community.

Reach Holly Meyer at hmeyer@tennessean.com or 615-259-8241 and on Twitter @HollyAMeyer.