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| **Press Release****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | Tim Jones | tim.jones@heartoftexashealthcare.org325-597-2901 |

**Taking Steps to Limit COVID-19 Spread Protects the Community**

*Heart of Texas Healthcare System offers the latest information about COVID-19.*

BRADY, Texas (August 17, 2020) – The rate of new COVID-19 infections remains high across Texas. Governor Greg Abbott recently extended a Disaster Declaration across all Texas counties as the virus continues to pose a serious threat. Taking steps to limit its spread is an important way to protect yourself and others in the community.

“Simple steps such as limiting group gatherings and wearing a mask can make a huge difference – and could save a life,” said Lonnie L. Vickers, MD, Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians at Brady Medical Clinic, a service of Heart of Texas Healthcare System. “The disease has been shown to be much more dangerous than the flu and much more contagious than many other illnesses. Doing your part is key to protecting our community.”

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, nearly 500,000 Texans have tested positive for the disease, which is responsible for more than 8,300 deaths across the state.

As health officials have learned more about the disease, it has become clear that it is spread primarily through the air, often by tiny droplets that are released through the mouth or nose when talking, coughing, sneezing or even breathing.

“Masks have been shown to be effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19, which is why wearing one is so important,” Dr. Vickers said. “Remember that wearing is caring.”

Another key component of preventing the spread of the disease is social distancing. Many of those who are infected with COVID-19 can be infectious for several days before experiencing symptoms, and some do not experience noticeable symptoms at all while still remaining highly contagious.

Those most at risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 are those with weak or compromised immune symptoms and the elderly. Limiting time spent in public to necessary errands and washing hands frequently are important ways to reduce the risk of exposure.

Symptoms of COVID-19 can include fever, cough, shortness of breath. Those who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 are also asked to seek medical advice.

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If you suspect you have been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing any symptoms, Dr. Vickers said that you should not go directly to the hospital or clinic but rather call your healthcare provider or the clinic first to determine what to do next. Testing is currently available in the community for those who meet certain medical criteria, as evaluated by the hospital’s medical team.

Dr. Vickers added that protecting your health, not just from COVID-19, is especially important this year. Although there is not yet a vaccine for COVID-19, the annual flu shot will soon be available. Getting vaccinated is always a good idea, but this year getting vaccinated early is an important way to protect yourself from that potentially dangerous disease.

Additionally, local providers are accepting appointments for annual wellness exams. These regular check-ups help ensure that you are in optimal health and provide you with tools to take charge of your wellbeing.

Yearly wellness exams, covered by Medicare and most insurance plans, include a variety of routine screenings that allow your provider to track and assess your health. In addition, they allow your provider to recommend additional screenings that might be needed due to your personal risk or phase of life.

“It’s never a good idea to delay important healthcare services,” Dr. Vickers added. “Now is an important time to take charge of your health.”

Brady Medical Clinic is a convenient choice that helps patients cut down on travel for common healthcare needs. Appointments can be scheduled for a number of services, including immunizations, comprehensive adolescent and adult health, Medicare screenings, women's health care, obstetrics, and annual wellness exams.

To learn more about local healthcare services or to schedule an appointment, please call Heart of Texas Healthcare System at 325-597-2901 or visit www.heartoftexashealthcare.org.

**About Heart of Texas Healthcare System**Heart of Texas Healthcare System provides healthcare for residents of McCulloch County and the surrounding area. Founded in 2011, the system offers a wealth of medical services, including 24-hour emergency care, advanced radiology services, a clinical laboratory, dialysis services, physical therapy, surgical services, patient education, sleep studies, and more. The system also owns and operates Brady Medical Clinic, which provides family medicine, preventive care, and acute care for minor emergencies. For additional information, please visit www.heartoftexashealthcare.org.

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