



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

For more information contact:

Ben Roberts
Director, Public Relations & Communications
O: 229-312-5180
C: 229-343-7499
benroberts@phoebhealth.com

Not Much Will Change with the End of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

Albany, Ga. – The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) officially expires on Thursday, May 11, but most people in southwest Georgia should not notice any difference. The Department of Health and Human Services declared the PHE on January 31, 2020 to give the government additional resources and powers to initiate and sustain a coordinated and robust response to the coronavirus pandemic. With COVID transmission remaining low for an extended period, President Biden signed a resolution last month declaring that the PHE would end on May 11.

“In practice, nothing will change for our patients when the public health emergency expires,” said Dianna Grant, MD, Phoebe Putney Health System Chief Medical Officer. “We will continue to provide COVID vaccines and prescribe the same COVID treatments when they are appropriate to patients who test positive. And, while our COVID inpatient numbers have been very low for months, we remain able to provide the same level of care to patients who do require hospitalization.”

Phoebe currently has a significant inventory of COVID vaccine doses. While some patients may have to pay for an office visit to get a vaccine at a Phoebe clinic – as they have been doing – there will be no charge for the vaccine as long as that inventory lasts.

People with Medicare will continue to have access to COVID vaccines without cost-sharing. Medicaid and the Children’s Health Program will continue to provide vaccines with no cost-sharing at least through September 2024, and most private health insurance will continue to cover COVID vaccines with no cost-sharing.

“We encourage people to stay up to date on their COVID vaccines, and we will continue to administer vaccinations in our clinics and through our mobile wellness clinics which have upcoming events in coordination with the Boys & Girls Clubs and several churches,” Dr. Grant said.

COVID testing and vaccines will also continue to be available at no charge at all county health departments throughout the Southwest Public Health District.

Through much of the worst of the pandemic, Phoebe did take advantage of some waivers authorized through the PHE by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Those waivers provided flexibility needed to rapidly ensure and expand access to care, but Phoebe has not utilized any of those waivers in quite some time. The end of the PHE will also change the ability of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to collect and share certain data, but that has no practical impact on people in our region.

“It was a long and trying journey to get to here, but we are grateful that we are at a point where the public health emergency is no longer needed. We still want people to exercise the healthy practices they became used to over the last few years. That means wash your hands often, stay home if you’re sick and visit your primary care physician or an urgent care clinic if you experience COVID symptoms,” Dr. Grant said.

The primary operational change the expiration of the PHE brings for Phoebe is the sunseting of the health system’s incident command center. “In early March 2020, we stood up our incident command center so we could quickly and efficiently respond to the needs of our community and to the everchanging requirements and pandemic guidance. Our emergency preparedness team and leaders throughout our system have done an incredible job ever since,” said Scott Steiner, Phoebe Putney Health System President & CEO. “I’m so proud that our health system is operated by local leaders who are committed to doing what is right for our communities.”

The incident command center essentially operated 24 hours a day in the early days of the pandemic. Command center meetings were scaled back to daily, then weekly and – most recently – bi-weekly. The last official meeting was held this week.

Steiner also thanked the people of southwest Georgia for doing their part to minimize the spread and impacts of the virus and for supporting Phoebe throughout the pandemic. “The Phoebe Family greatly appreciates all the support we felt from our communities as we responded to this once-in-a-lifetime health emergency. Now, we are excited to be able to focus on other priorities as we seek to improve the overall health and well-being of the people of southwest Georgia,” Steiner said.

###