

Mesa site offering 24-hour COVID-19 testing

BY ZACH ALVIRA
Tribune Staff Writer

A Mesa OBGYN is offering free COVID-19 testing on the campus of Mesa Community College 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

Embry Women's Health has set up tents in the MCC parking lot at Dobson Road and Southern Avenue – as well as across from Tempe Marketplace – to offer tests for those who are asymptomatic.

The clinic, which only requires patients to make an appointment online, aims to help solve the problem of insufficient testing as Arizona continues to see a surge in cases.

"We are really excited to be doing what we are doing," said Raymond Embry, co-owner of Embry Women's Health. "We are just trying to get the word out and try to get more test sites up. We all believe testing is in wide demand and we hear of people who aren't able to get tested. We hope we are making a decision that can benefit the community."

The clinic was founded six years ago by Embry's mother, JoEllen, who was a nurse practitioner and wanted to start her own practice to care for her patients in a top-notch manner.

After about three years, Raymond quit his job in technology to help run the healthcare facility.

Together, the two have helped build the practice into what it is today.

But as the COVID-19 pandemic arrived began gripping Arizona, Embry sought options to provide testing for the practice's patients. Eventually, they began testing non-patients.

As word spread that Embry Women's Health was offering testing for those not experiencing symptoms, the volume of those seeking one increased.

"Labs usually provide the testing materials for free, but there was a shortage, so I began trying to source everything we needed and we weren't familiar with that side of things, so I really had to do some research," Raymond said.

"We put things together on our own and found FDA approved suppliers to put together the components we needed. We spent thousands of dollars to buy these supplies."

Raymond said the practice was doing



Workers for Embry Women's Health, a Mesa OBGYN Clinic, operate a COVID-19 testing site 24/7 at Mesa Community College. (Pablo Robles/Tribune Staff Photographer)

about 100 tests per week leading up to the testing blitzes offered across Maricopa County. Embry Women's Health took part in the blitzes and quickly became one of the top testing sites.

"The test blitzes ended and everyone thought June was going to be quiet," Embry said. "We started offering a small number of tests just from 6-10 p.m. but we noticed a trend where the number of positive results we got back were increasing."

"At one point, we had more positives in a single day than we did in all four weeks of the test blitzes."

Embry Women's Health launched the first 24-hour, seven-day-a-week testing site across from Tempe Marketplace. As that site began filling up quickly on a daily basis, they reached out to Mesa Community College and an agreement was made to set up another site in the parking lot.

The MCC site started small in comparison to what it is now, as only about 500 tests per day were initially performed. As word spread on social media, however, Embry said more patients started to come.

The overall process to get tested is easy. Patients are asked to register online through Embry's website for a desired time slot. Unlike most testing sites, the time selected can be for multiple people within the same car.

Upon arrival, a member of the staff comes to get the ID of the person who

wants to be tested. They are registered and swabbed while remaining in their car. On days where the line isn't too backed up, the process can take as little as 15 minutes.

"We ask patients to select one time slot. Then they can add as many

people to that slot as they want. We just ask they input all the information," Embry said. "It really makes things that much quicker."

As the virus spreads rampant in communities across Arizona, results can often be delayed due to backlogs at labs. When Em-



Raymond Embry, who helps operate Embry Women's Health, which was founded by his mom, looks over his COVID-19 testing site at MCC. (Pablo Robles/Tribune Staff Photographer)

bry first started the testing sites, the turnaround time was in as little as two days.

Now, however, there are instances where patients can wait as many as seven days.

But the clinic is always seeking ways to fast-track results. Staff members spend the entire day going from test site to test site to pick up samples and deliver them to as many as three different labs.

Embry is also seeking the services of other labs as well for when other testing sites open in the near future. The practice hopes to open six more in Chandler, Phoenix and hard-hit West Phoenix communities.

"If I could physically walk the tests through the lab and get the results for them, I would," Embry said. "We are looking for additional labs to take the capacity off of other labs, but others are looking for the same thing."

New challenges arise every day for Raymond Embry and his staff, but they've so far been able to navigate them and provide tests for communities in dire need.

Overall, that alone makes all the hard work they've put into quickly setting up the sites worth it, he said.

"In the beginning, we really weren't sure we could do this," Raymond said. "But now that we've been able to, it feels really good."

To schedule an appointment to be tested at one of Embry Women's Health's sites, visit embrywomenshealth.com/covid-19-testing.

Cars can enter the college's Lot C parking area at 1833 W. Southern Ave. Individuals arriving for appointments should enter at Enrollment Way off Southern Avenue.

"Our commitment to serving our students and our community remains constant during these times of change," said Brad Kendrick, MCC interim executive vice president of administrative services. "We are pleased to be able to serve as a COVID-19 testing site for our community and look forward to inviting our neighbors back to our campuses when it is safe to do so."

MCC campus facilities remain closed, while services continue to be offered to students remotely.

Patients with insurance will need to provide their member ID, group number and a physical copy of their insurance card. Insurance will cover all costs related to COVID-19 with no out of pocket cost to the patient.

Uninsured people are covered by a federal program but must provide a state ID, driver's license or Social Security number. ■