

Transcript: Interview between Elizabeth Ralston and Becky Reitzes

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>>ELIZABETH: Hello. Welcome. Becky, thank you so much for joining me. My name is Elizabeth Ralston. And I am a consultant working in the areas of public health and accessibility. And I am a white woman with silver hair, sitting on a brown couch with a beige wall behind me and a green plant in the corner.

I am wearing a blue shirt with geometric shapes on it. I'm here today with Becky from the Public Health department. And we will have a conversation about COVID and how it has affected our lives as we know it.

So, welcome, Becky.

>>BECKY: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. My name is Becky Reitzes. I work for Public Health - Seattle & King County. And I have been with Public Health - Seattle & King County since 2001 as a trainer and educator.

I have red hair which is pretty unnaturally dyed red hair. I'm a white woman with red lipstick and nose rings and I'm wearing black glasses and a black T-shirt. Behind me -- I am in my home, so behind me I have a red wall and a chandelier above my head.

>>ELIZABETH: Thank you, Becky. Tell me what are the most important things about COVID that people need to know right now.

>>BECKY: Yeah, you know, I think there's been so much confusion and so much time and just so many changes over the months, and that is really natural and normal, especially given the fact that we are in a pandemic, which we haven't had in our lifetimes, and that this is a new virus, so we have been learning a lot of new things.

And so I do want to be really clear that although we have been learning a lot of things, what we do now know is a lot of information. We know how people get COVID-19. We know how people prevent getting COVID-19.

We know how people can stay safe and healthy during this pandemic.

I want to acknowledge first and say many people are struggling so hard right now. Things are so difficult. People are showing up with loneliness, depression, missing being around their family and friends. For some folks it can be really, really suffering. I want to make sure folks are getting support as they need it and that that is okay and totally something that we all need right now.

So that's just one thing I want to acknowledge, is that it's been going on for so long, that a lot of folks are going to need some support.

Some things to remember is that we do know masks work for preventing COVID, for preventing us getting it and preventing us giving it to our friends and family and even the folks we are near in public.

So wearing a mask is super important, and wearing it so it is covering fully your nose and your mouth. It also needs to be fitting well. It doesn't need to be super tight, but it needs to fit well and not be falling off, because we also don't want to be touching our face. So one thing to keep in mind is not touching our face. And so if we are always constantly moving our mask, then that's going to be us touching our face as well.

Another thing keeping in mind is we want to wash our hands very often. It's a really simple way to prevent getting colds and flus, viruses, including COVID-19. We want to wash our hands with soap and water for 20 seconds repeatedly throughout the day and use hand sanitizer in between when we can't wash our hands.

Then I mentioned not touching our face. Even when we are washing our hands all day, we still want to make sure not to touch our face, because we don't want to be touching our eyes, our nose, or our mouth.

We want to be still practicing this physical distance between folks, so staying 6 feet away from folks out in public even when we are wearing face coverings or masks.

We want to stay home when we are sick. So I know that's really hard for folks because they, especially right now, are missing being out in the world, but if someone is feeling sick, they want to stay home.

They also really want to get tested if they are feeling sick.

>>ELIZABETH: Thank you. That's great, Becky. Really good information. So as you know, I have a hearing loss. And mask-wearing has been a bit of a challenge, I must say, for someone who lip-reads like me and for other people who sign as well.

I want to make the point that masks are great, but if you have a clear mask, that's even better. Can you speak a little bit about clear masks versus a face shield? I have heard different things about how much protection a face shield can give you. So can you speak a little bit about that.

>>BECKY: For a face shield, it's still recommended that someone would wear a mask or face-covering over their mouth and nose.

So when people wear face coverings over their mouth and nose, it is preventing droplets from coming out of their body onto someone else, and the mask will block that from getting to someone else. So we are really taking care of others when we wear our face coverings and masks.

Then the face shields are really important for folks who want some added protection of getting COVID from other folks. So the face shields are really great because they will prevent COVID-19 from getting into our eyes if we are in close contact with people, but they are not going to protect the other people. And it is also not going to protect our mouth and nose as well as wearing a face-covering or mask.

Does that make sense, Elizabeth?

>>ELIZABETH: That does. I have noticed that there are some people who wear face shields and I know that it doesn't give complete protection, but I guess if you do social distancing and keep your distance, then I think it works okay.

So that leads me to another thought. What is the best time -- when is the best time to get tested? There has been back and forth about this. So what do you know about that?

>>BECKY: Yeah, I would be happy to share about that. I do want to go back to the previous point, though, about the face shields real quick and just say that, you know, again, our recommendation would be not to wear a face shield on its own.

The recommendation would be to make sure to wear a mask or face-covering over our mouth and nose and then also be wearing the face shield as well. And that way you are protecting yourself and other folks as well.

Then in terms of getting tested, in the beginning of this pandemic, there were a lot of messages about not going to get tested and if you think you have COVID-19 or you have been exposed, to stay away from other people for 14 days and see if you have symptoms.

But that is because we didn't have access to testing in the way that we do now.

Now, especially here in King County, we have access to testing and a lot of the testing sites are ADA accessible, have ASL interpretation, and then also we can offer interpretation with deaf-blind interpreters as well.

So, we are really recommending that folks get tested at any sign of COVID. So if they are having coughing, sore throat, a fever, especially a fever over 100 degrees, body aches, chills, diarrhea, vomiting, sudden loss of taste or smell. If someone's having any of those types of symptoms, they want to get tested, even if the symptoms are mild, even if someone is like: "Oh, it's probably just a cold."

We want to make sure someone gets tested and gets tested right away. The big thing as well is, it may take them some time to get tested and then it may take a little bit of time for them to get the results.

So in the meantime, they do want to quarantine or stay away from other people, to make sure that if they have COVID-19, they are not passing it to somebody else.

The other thing I would say is if they are living with other people and in either a house or home, or wherever it is they are living, and they think they might have COVID-19, they do want to still practice that distancing and wear the face-covering or mask inside where they are staying.

The final thing I will say is if they have been exposed to COVID-19, so they did do an outdoor hang with somebody, they were socially distanced but they were around them for a little while, and now they find out that person has COVID, even if that person has no symptoms, they still want to get tested.

>>ELIZABETH: Yes, because you may have COVID and be asymptomatic. That that's why it's really important to make sure you quarantine and get tested. So thank you for that.

>>BECKY: I forgot to mention that, that yeah, a lot of folks who have COVID-19 unfortunately have no symptoms and that's -- you know, the hard part is then people don't know that they -- the nice thing

about symptoms is it tells somebody to go get tested. And without symptoms, people don't always know they need to get tested.

>>ELIZABETH: Can you talk a little bit about the test itself, what is involved in the test. And are there different kinds of tests that you can take?

>>BECKY: Yeah, there are different tests folks can take.

What we recommend is that they would want to call their health care provider or they can go to our website at www.kingcounty.gov/covid/testing and look for the closest testing site.

So depending on their health care provider or where they go, it depends on what kind of test they will get. And then again, to think about sometimes some of the testing sites will be a drive-up site or walk-up or wheel-up site, and then some of them might just be actually in their regular doctor's office.

So it does depend on where they go and which type of test will be administered or they will get. And just know those types of tests, whatever it is their doctor offers, is going to be effective for finding out if they have COVID. I don't know if I answered your question, though.

Did I answer your question, Elizabeth?

>>ELIZABETH: You did. I also would like a little bit more specificity about how the test is administered. What happens when you get a test?

>>BECKY: The most common tests that are administered right now are -- there's two most common ones that are done to find out if someone actually has COVID-19 currently.

And those tests are -- one is a longer Q-tip-looking item. One is a shorter Q-tip item.

The longer one is actually done by the provider themselves. The provider inserts that Q-tip pretty far up to see if they have COVID. And then the other test is actually the provider will give you the shorter Q-tip, and that Q-tip actually you administer yourself.

And which people are often really nervous about that and they think they are going to mess it up, but it's really easy, and that one only goes a little ways up to your nose, like to the bridge of your nose.

And they explain exactly what to do when the provider gives them to you.

So if someone is also wondering which test they will get, they can ask when they call to make the appointment, or they go online to make an appointment, they might want to do some research and see what type of test they do.

>>ELIZABETH: Thank you. I know at the end of this interview we are going to have a list of resources as to where you can go and get tested.

>>BECKY: Yes.

>>ELIZABETH: So those resources will be available to the viewer, the listener.

So, another quick thing about the face shield and the masks, because people with disabilities, it may be more difficult for people with disabilities, if you are wearing a mask and a face shield over.

I would recommend using apps on your phone, or a pen and paper, or a small white board, to communicate with your provider so the provider does not have to remove their mask.

Just an FYI aside.

So now we have a vaccine. So can you talk about what that means for a pandemic and what that means for us.

>>BECKY: Yeah. That's awesome. Thank you so much for asking. Also, I really appreciate the tips you just offered. They were super helpful.

We do have a couple of vaccines available. And I think one thing people need to keep in mind with the vaccine is it will take a little while for everybody to get vaccinated, so in the meantime, people still need to remember that we still need to practice social distancing or physical distancing.

We still need to be able to wear our masks. We still need to limit our time with family who do not currently live with us and limit our activities outside.

So the vaccine is a huge breakthrough and going to be a huge help in ending this pandemic, but it's not going to end the pandemic all by itself. We still have to take care of each other and be really aware of all of the time we're like around, and making sure that, again, wear masks, wash our hands, not touch our face, and keep doing all the things we are doing, in order to end this pandemic.

>>ELIZABETH: Thank you, Becky. This is all wonderful and helpful information. And you have been working so hard to communicate all of this out to the public. And I really appreciated hearing your tips and insights about that.

We will have a couple series of interviews with other people talking more in depth about the vaccine, so stay tuned for that. And thank you very much, Becky, for your time.

>>BECKY: Thank you so much, Elizabeth. You also have been super helpful. And this was amazing. I really appreciate it. Thank you.