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## 72,000 In-Bound Calls to Health Department's Public Information Line

County Urges Understanding

*KNOXVILLE, Tenn.*—On Friday, Jan. 21 the Health Department's Public Information Line received more than 70,000 inbound calls. A majority of those calls came in between 10:30 and 11:30 a.m., which was 30 minutes before and after KCHD opened registration for 1,000 additional first dose COVID-19 vaccination appointments for the clinic taking place at The Expo Center on Saturday.

"To put it into perspective, the Amazon customer service center in Washington has more than 500 workers—adding hundreds more for seasonal call volume—and receives 'thousands' of calls a day," said Chief Technology Officer Zack Webb. "We received nearly 50k in one hour and are simply not equipped or staffed to handle that volume of calls."

The Knoxville Chamber reached out to two of the county's largest call centers, which reported receiving an average of 12,000 and 25,000 calls a day, respectively.

The KCHD Hotline was created to answer questions from the public about COVID-19. As vaccines become available, the handful of employees staffing that line have also begun helping schedule vaccination appointments and call volume goes up exponentially when those are open.

There was one instance where someone called 15 minutes before the registration opened in an attempt to keep KCHD staff on the line to reserve an appointment at 11 a.m. and more than 4,000 individuals were on the health department's COVID-19 Information webpage just before 11 a.m. waiting for the registration link to go live—that's four people trying to register for each open appointment without taking into consideration anyone calling the Public Information Line.

"We are pleased that people in the community are so eager to get the vaccine," said Senior Director and Public Health Officer Dr. Martha Buchanan. "But we continue to ask for patience as we work through the best way to notify people of available vaccines. Our employees are doing valuable work answering constituent calls and providing important information regarding

COVID-19. We want you to call them, but we also ask you to remember how many of them there are answering those calls."

"Even if we did have enough staff to answer this volume of calls, we can't make appointments to administer vaccines we don't have," said Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs. "The fact remains, there were only 1,000 appointments to be given. We will get more vaccine, but we are at the mercy of delivery from the State who is at the mercy of delivery from the federal government."

Despite these setbacks, Tennessee continues to be a nationwide leader in the number of vaccines distributed per capita. Knox County is playing a significant role in that success.

Knox County continues to look at ways to provide online registration for vaccine notification and expand phone access.

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