

## **COVID-19 Vaccinations Press Conference**

**Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at 12:00 p.m.**

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

**Jeff Brower** - Chair, Volusia County Council

**Patricia Boswell** – Administrator, Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

**Mike Chitwood** – Sheriff, Volusia Sheriff's Office

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Good morning, I'm Kevin Captain, Community Information director for the County of Volusia. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. Today, you will hear from:

- Jeff Brower, Volusia County Council Chair
- Patricia Boswell, the Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County
- Sheriff Mike Chitwood, Volusia Sheriff's Office

Before I turn it over to the Chair, I'd like to remind everybody that the best place to find information from the County related to COVID-19 is [Volusia.org/coronavirus](https://www.volusia.org/coronavirus). The county's citizen information center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, to answer any non-clinical questions related to COVID-19 vaccination events. That phone number is 866-345-0345.

And now, without further ado, welcome the Volusia County Chair Jeff Brower.

**Jeff Brower** - Chair, Volusia County Council

Thank you for being here. My name is Jeff Brower and I am your Volusia County Chair, and, boy, what a way to get baptized into this position with COVID-19. It's been a long journey. It's been a long problem. But, the good news is that the Federal government has brought us vaccine in unprecedented times. Still, we are not getting it as rapidly as everybody here wants to. Let me assure you that Volusia County has

the same values and principles that you do. Especially when it comes to our senior citizens, we want them to get the vaccine as quickly as possible, as safely as possible, but we are limited to the amount of vaccine that we can get. The County is working with our partners, local and state levels. We have a plan in place. We are asking for the public's patience. You will be able to ask questions today specifically about the Daytona Beach event. As we go forward to insure maximum coordination, the County has been participating in weekly calls with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County, area hospitals and our Region Five partners.

In addition to that, the County and city managers take part in conference calls every other week in a continued effort to share information and work together. Yesterday, I sent a letter to every mayor in Volusia County; all sixteen municipalities, to assure them that we wanted to work with them. To ask them if they would please work with us as a program is being rolled out, so that we can participate in it. We have plans in place to get the vaccine out in a way that is easy for our senior citizens, both by on-line and telephone.

The County is closely coordinating with the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County and working collaboratively on future vaccine events in the County. You probably saw the one yesterday that was just released with Deltona. It took three minutes to have that become filled up. We had 1,900 vials of vaccine available. And, it doesn't last that long. We did hear comments suggesting that Eventbrite, that that system was not as easy to deal with. Many of the people that were dealing with it aren't even on the internet, but it worked well.

I have heard from some of my constituents that said, yes, it was sluggish for them; first time that they had ever been to an Eventbrite thing, but they were relieved that they got registered and they have appointments for Friday. And, that is what we want to hear. We need to have more vaccine to distribute.

While we may not have expected registrations to fill up quite so quickly, actually I think we all knew that it was not going to take any time at all. There are thousands of people that want it. The amount of fear in the public is unprecedented. We get 2,000 vials of vaccine and we have 250,000 people that want it. So, we will get it out as quickly as we get vaccine in. It is not nearly enough to meet the demand yet, but while we recognize there was frustration that 2,000 individuals will be able to receive a vaccine this week. It's a start.

Our goal is to distribute the vaccine as quickly as we can, as quickly as we get it, so while it may be small amounts at this point, we are making an impact. I want to assure you there will be many more vaccination clinics planned for Volusia County, the County has been planning this a long time. As each shipment of vaccine comes in, we have plans to get it out. And, that brings up a very important point. While we're working with our partners to proactively identify vaccination sites throughout the county, events will not be announced until the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County has vaccines in hand.

We want to ensure that we are able to follow through on our commitments to the community, as soon as we know we have vaccine available and not to give people a false hope with a false start. We've been assured that in time, the vaccine will be much more widely available for deployment, but in the meantime, we're asking for your patience as we continue to distribute the vaccine as efficiently as possible and just as quickly as we receive it. Some factors, most notably the timing of the vaccination shipments and the number of doses received, are out of our control. That is not an excuse, that is reality. That is what we find every day. We want to get vaccine out, but there is only so much to give. We have places lined up to distribute it, but we have to have the vaccine.

I can assure you that the County in conjunction with the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County; (turns cell phone ringer off) . . . that is a constituent calling me now to find out when the next vaccine slot will be. I am serious. A hundred emails a day and more phone calls than I can count. You have the County's attention. I have the County's attention. I have had absolutely all that I can ask, with attention from the County Manager, from Joe Pozzo, from everybody that I have dealt with in the County, but we have to have vaccine to get out.

The Florida Department of Health in Volusia County has a good plan and a sensible strategy in place. That's not to say that there weren't any bumps in the road. But we're doing, on a County level, we're doing everything that we can to make sure that doesn't happen in every distribution that we are involved with and where . . . and I think that that's going to be the case for now. We will be working with the cities; I believe they will come to us and let us know when they have an event. And, I believe that the Florida Department of Health will do the same. Our goal is to eventually vaccinate everybody that wants it in Volusia County. So, with that I am going to turn it over to Patricia Boswell.

**Patricia Boswell** – Administrator, Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

Good afternoon, Patricia Boswell, the Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. I reviewed the most recent statistics this morning and they paint a clear picture. COVID-19 is surging in Volusia County. In the past two weeks alone, we have reported more than 3,000 new cases of COVID-19. Our investigations tell us that a significant number of these cases are the result of household clusters. We also have had a few outbreaks at facilities. Over the next couple of weeks, these new infections will translate to more hospitalizations and unfortunately maybe deaths.

The surges began following the Thanksgiving holiday and now we are beginning to see the Christmas holiday infections on top of that. This new surge in Volusia is nearly double what we experienced in July. As of today, Volusia County's positivity rate is 10.3%; this demonstrates the high level of community spread. This is not a result of less tests being conducted. We actually have had more tests conducted over the holiday season. The percentage of those tests that have come back positive is called the positivity rate. This rate is on the rise and climbing. Today Volusia County had more reported more than 24,200 COVID-19 cases. Nearly 460 deaths have been attributed to COVID-19 in Volusia County.

This week, the Florida Department of Health began public distributions of our COVID-19 vaccine to seniors. This followed vaccination of the frontline workers who may be called upon to work these public distribution sites over the next several months. Our initial supply was extremely limited. However we have been told that we will continue to receive shipments and as they arrive, the County will announce how and where people can receive a vaccine. In the first two days of our distribution this week, the Department of Health staff vaccinated 2,000 seniors over two days. We anticipate continuing to vaccinate at this rate but everything is dependent upon receiving vaccine.

We continue to ask for our public's patience as we roll out this process. Things have not gone as smoothly as we would've liked. We have learned from this and we have improved our processes. And we've also discovered that we are efficient at administering the vaccine.

The COVID-19 vaccine is, as I said, in very limited supply; Volusia receives its allocation from the State. Again we are awaiting to hear when our next shipment will arrive and what that amount will be. We don't know how many doses it will be in that shipment. I assure you, once we receive it, we will make it available quickly.

The COVID vaccine is crucial to preventing the spread of the virus and one more layer of protection. The combination of getting vaccinated and following the CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and

others will offer the best protection from COVID-19. By washing up, backing up and masking up; that's what's going to help us to get things back to normal.

Thank you. And now, Sheriff Chitwood.

**Mike Chitwood** – Sheriff, Volusia Sheriff's Office

Good afternoon. I just want to echo the sentiments of our County Chair. He is exactly right when he says that there are 2,000 doses of the vaccine and there are 250,000 people lining up. So, I want everybody to just be patient. This is an event unlike anything that we have seen in the history of this country. So, it requires everybody to have a little bit of patience and little bit of common sense. Let's vaccinate those 65 and older, the healthcare workers and, I think, that our first responders start getting vaccinated this week. As the Sheriff, I am an elected official, I am not going to take the vaccine until the vaccine is plentiful enough that we can take care of all of those folks that are 65 and older. That is our priority.

And, I do want to echo what the Chairman said. Everybody is working hard in an area that has been unprecedented and people find it easy to criticize us, and it's easy to criticize the cities; this isn't right, that isn't right, do this, do that, but at the end of the day everybody is doing what they can do to with the limited supply of the vaccine. So, my plea is to be patient, follow directions. I am excited about what is going to happen tomorrow in Deltona. You know, three minutes, reservations were gone. Dewey O. Boster park is a great venue. We have plenty of deputies out there. For those of you who were fortunate enough to make that appointment, just be patient and make sure you are on time. Because, if you miss that appointment you are probably not going to get in. So, you know there is a window there. Get there. Follow the instructions and we are going to get through this. So, with that, Kevin; turn it back over to you.

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Thank you Sheriff. With that we will take any questions.

**Patricia Boswell** – Administrator, Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

**Question 1:** (Mike Springer, WFTV) Ms. Boswell, I know the event at Daytona Beach you have received a lot of criticism there. What do you say to the people who look at the event and say rather than having people in their 60's, 70's and 80's camped out on a dimly lit, two-lane road there overnight for ten hours at a time, in 40 degree temperatures, why not delay that vaccination process a few days so that they could do this by appointment only, so that they didn't have to wait out in those conditions?

**Answer 1:** In hindsight that is exactly what I would have done. I would have done it differently. I would have not had that experience for anyone who had gone out there. So, I do apologize for anyone who had been impacted by that in a negative way and I would have done it differently.

**Question 2:** (Mike Springer, WFTV) What changes can we expect going forward with the new vaccination process from the lessons we've learned from Daytona?

**Answer 2:** The lessons learned is that we are going to go with an appointment system at this point. And, we are going to work closely, very closely with our County partners and our city partners and to try and make it the best possible experience for those that are coming out to be vaccinated.

**Question 3:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) Out of curiosity, do you all feel that you are getting the proper dosage amount fair from the State?

**Answer 3:** Well, so I cannot speak to the fairness piece (Reporter: "Compared to other counties.") because I don't see what the allocations are for anyone other than myself. (Reporter: "And, where do things stand?") But, do I think that it is adequate, by no means, and I think that it was well demonstrated that there is a very, very, very high demand which is very exciting, and great for us in terms of getting back to that normal life that we are all trying to attain. But, we are certainly not getting adequate supplies at this point to meet even a fraction of the demand. (Reporter: "Compared to other counties in Florida.") I can't speak to others' allocations, because I don't have that information. I only know what I receive.

**Question 4:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) And, where do you all stand with realistic next shipments and how much do we expect?

**Answer 4:** It is very unpredictable. We have no idea because the first shipment didn't compare to the second shipment in any way. So, I cannot speak to what the next allocation will be. Sorry.

**Question 5:** (Mary Helen Moore, News-Journal) So, what goes into determining how many vaccines we get? Is it a population? Is it community spread; and who makes those decisions?

**Answer 5:** I believe the allocation is done from the Federal government to the State, and I can't speak to, but I did hear that population was going to be a factor in allocation, but I don't know what that weighted factor looks like. And, then at the State level, the allocation is made.

**Question 6:** (Mary Helen Moore, News-Journal) At this time are all of the vaccines that Volusia County gets are going to the seniors or . . .

**Answer 6:** No, there's vaccine being administered by our hospitals to healthcare workers, so both hospitals, AdventHealth and Halifax received an allocation, and we've received an allocation. Our allocation we have vaccinated the vaccinators on Saturday. We basically brought people in that would be working these vaccine distribution sites to get them vaccinated so that we would have that workforce available. And, then we took what was remaining, and divided up to do four sites at a 1,000 vaccines per site this week.

**Question 7:** (Mary Helen Moore, News-Journal) Does everybody who got the vaccine in Daytona and the people who made their appointments in Deltona have their second appointments set up?

**Answer 7:** So, what we've done is, if you've seen the card, on the back would be the information about your second dose, the date that you should receive it, and we've reserved the site for the two days that will be necessary to receive those second doses. So, they will go back in 28 or 29 days, depending on how the calendar works, and get that second dose at the same site that they received the first. It is, will be, what we call a "closed pod," so it wouldn't be that they would experience people coming in for their first dose. It would be just those that are there for their second.

**Question 8:** (Mary Helen Moore, News-Journal) And, are those appointments already arranged or will people have to do anything to arrange that?

**Answer 8:** There are no appointments made at this point. It was just a date and site that was provided.

**Question 9:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) Just two more questions. Are you only looking to get other Moderna vaccines since you got that initially?

**Answer 9:** To my knowledge Moderna is what we have received in two shipments and I believe that it may continue but I have no knowledge as to whether there is Pfizer that is going out?

**Question 10:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) So, you will take whatever, is what you are saying? But, obviously if someone gets the first Moderna vaccine; does the second one have to be Moderna as well?

**Answer 10:** Yes, we will. Yes, the vaccines need to be the same.

**Question 11:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) So, what other sites are you looking at for the vaccine sites?

**Answer 11:** Deltona is the only site that has been announced at this time.

**Question 12:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) Are you looking at anywhere else?

**Answer 12:** The County is having those discussions, but as was indicated by our Chair, we are not going to schedule anything until we have vaccine available, because we certainly don't want to disappoint anyone.

**Question 13:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) Is that more of a central location, or why not DeLand, Orange City or Port Orange. Why Deltona and Daytona Beach? Larger populations, or . . . ?

**Answer 13:** Daytona Beach had the most cases, and when you look at the over 65, certainly Deltona and Daytona Beach have probably very close to the same number of 65 and up.



**Mike Chitwood** – Sheriff, Volusia Sheriff's Office

**Question 14:** (Mike Springer, WFTV) I had a question for the Sheriff. I know that you said that you want to wait to get the vaccine, but how do your deputies feel about getting the vaccine? And, are you encouraging them to take it?

**Answer 14:** That is a great question. We start today at AdventHealth where Volusia Sheriff's Office can go. We have appointments set up for the next three days. We have roughly 470 sworn deputies, and a little over 100 signed up to get vaccinated. So, while we are not mandating, we are strongly encouraging it, and having had it myself, I would hope that more of them would get themselves vaccinated. So, that is a concern that more are not getting vaccinated.

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Any other questions? Okay, with that I . . .

**Jeff Brower** - Chair, Volusia County Council

**Question 15:** (Mary Helen Moore, News-Journal) Well, I just wondered how the communication has been with the County and the Health Department. We've, you know, seen some County Council Members who have said that they are unhappy with the communication, so I just wanted to see if you could address that, Chair?

**Answer 15:** Yes, I can address it. It could be better. The County has taken steps a long time ago to try and make that communication good. We can't force people to pick up the phone, but we need move ahead from here. And, I feel confident that what's happened in the last week, that we will be working closely with the cities, with the Florida Department of Health Volusia, and that the rollout will be a lot easier for our seniors to get signed up on. So, that's all I can do. That's all that the team at the County can do is to move forward from here and I don't think that we'll have to press it any harder to get that kind of cooperation from everybody. Everybody in the County saw what happened in Daytona Beach; it's not acceptable. And, as far as I can control it, the people that I talk with at Volusia County, we won't allow it to happen again. We need vaccine.

I'm going to add something to what the Sheriff said about the first responders. They are getting shots today, it's starting. I was on the phone last week with Mike Peniatowski. We couldn't have a better man with Advent healthcare to be managing that part of the rollout. The County is not involved with that, that is Advent hospital. I was also on the phone last week finding out about our senior citizens that are in long-term healthcare facilities, that can't get out to get a vaccine. They need someone to come to them. And, the Federal government has contracted with various drug stores, with CVS, with Publix, with Walgreens, and they are hiring thousands of people to get that done. I wish it was done now, but it's not. So, they will get out in the next week or two. Our shut-ins and long-term healthcare facilities who want the vaccine will get it as well.

This is a huge endeavor. It has never been attempted in the history of America. We've had lots of vaccines, but we've never tried to rollout a vaccine as it's being produced. It's not going to be easy. There will be other bumps in the road and my heart is with the people who elected me. Especially with our older citizens and our first responders who put their lives on the line every day for each of us. They need to get the vaccine. I am not willing, and I am glad to hear that the Sheriff is not willing to make them do it, and make it mandatory. I have not had the vaccine and nobody in my family has had the vaccine, no one in my family will have the vaccine, including me. I want to see everybody else get done, so that's my goal, and that's my job. Thank you.

**Question 16:** (Jerry Askin, WKMG) So, what you are saying is that moving forward there will be no more of "first come, first serve," only "appointment only" for these future vaccine sites?

**Answer 16:** As far as the County is concerned. And, yes, appointments on-line, but we've also taken steps; I've asked them, "What about seniors that have never been on-line" that don't have a twelve year old grandson or daughter to tell them how to do that. They've already thought about that, of course, and so we have a phone-in for that so people can pick up the phone. By far, I believe, the on-line was much more popular; three minutes it was gone. People want the vaccine.

**Question 17:** (Mary Helen Moore, News-Journal) Did you say that you are not going to get the vaccine, or are you not going to get it until the over 65 will get it first?

**Answer 17:** Well, that is my healthcare decision, and I don't feel that I need to share it with the public, but what I said was, that I'm not getting the vaccine; no one in my family is getting the vaccine, until everybody in Volusia County who wants it, has had it. Thank you.

**Kevin Captain** – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

I'd like to thank all our speakers today. Thank you Mr. Brower. I'd also like to reiterate that for more information as future events roll out, you can follow the Volusia County Emergency Management Facebook page. Also on Twitter, Volusia County Emergency Management. You can go on-line to [Volusia.org/coronavirus](https://www.volusia.org/coronavirus), and I am going to give you that number one more time for the Citizen's Information Center. That phone number is 866-345-0345.

With that we will close this afternoon's briefing. Take care, stay safe, and help your neighbors.