

## **COVID-19 Update Press Conference**

**Thursday, October 15, 2020**

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

**Jim Judge** – Director of Volusia County's Division of Emergency Management

**Holly Smith** – Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

**Dr. Joe Smith** – Chief Medical Officer for AdventHealth, DeLand

**Craig Capri** – Police Chief, Daytona Beach Police Department

**Mike Chitwood** – Volusia County Sheriff

Good afternoon. I'm Kevin Captain, director of Community Information for Volusia County government. Thank you for joining us for today's briefing. With today being the first day of Biketoberfest, we stress to our visitors and to our residents who are venturing out, the importance of personal safety and responsibility. In support of today's message, we've got billboards up throughout the county reminding people to mask up when physical distancing is not possible.

We also have digital and social ads running supporting this same messaging. So, if you're riding a motorcycle, please wear a helmet. We know helmets save lives. And when you get to your destination and you take your helmet off, if you can't maintain a physical distance that is safe, then we encourage you to wear a mask. Masks save lives too. Just remember, your mask protects others, just as all those other individuals who choose to wear masks; they are helping to protect you.

We know that there will be a lot of people in town this weekend in concentrated pockets of activity. Please remember those three important practices to keep yourself and others safe- wash up, back up and mask up. Here to talk more about Biketoberfest and public safety, as well as COVID-19, we're joined by: Jim Judge, the Director, Volusia County Emergency Management; Holly Smith, the Communications Manager and Government Liaison, Florida Department of Health in Volusia County, and Doctor Joe Smith, the chief medical officer for AdventHealth DeLand, Volusia County Sheriff Mike Chitwood and

Daytona Beach Police Chief Craig Capri. And with that, I'll invite up Volusia County Emergency Management director, Jim Judge.

**Jim Judge** – Director of Volusia County's Division of Emergency Management

Thank you very much Kevin. And, when it is hurricane season and you have Emergency Management in front of you it just goes with a tropical update; right? So far this year it's been busy. We've had 25 named storms; nine of which have been hurricanes; three of which have been major: Laura, Teddy, and of course the most recent, Delta. So, busy season, but we continue to monitor the tropics. There are a couple of waves out there we are keeping an eye on, but also down in the southwestern gulf the National Hurricane Center is monitoring a potential system that could come up in about five to seven days. So, we're not out of the woods yet, but I will be glad when we are, to get through the rest of October. But, then it's 2020 and we still have to get through the month of November, which is traditionally very quiet. So, hopefully it won't be the case, but the system down in the southwestern gulf has about a 20% chance right now of becoming a typical system that we will need to monitor. Hopefully that it will stay very minimal, and if it does form, move to the northeast. It looks like Jamaica, the Caymans, Cuba and the Bahamas, could be in the path of that storm, so we are going to continue to watch that.

Now, on with our COVID testing. Of course we have the fairgrounds at the Hester building. We've had that all the way since August 13<sup>th</sup>. And, so far we've had over 7,000 individuals tested. It operates 7 days a week, from 8 am to 4 pm, it's free, no appointments are necessary and it's free. So it's important to go and be able to get that test.

Now, some good news. We've been working with the Florida State Division of Emergency Management and once we get through the month of October we intend to keep the testing going. It will be a walk-up site and we will relocate that to New Smyrna Beach, and there will be more details coming. We hope to continue that, not only through the month of November, but even December, if we need to.

So, with that, let me turn it over to Ms. Holly Smith with the Volusia County Health Department.

**Holly Smith** – Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

Good afternoon, I'd like to begin with the cumulative COVID-19 statistics for Volusia County and then I am going to move into a brief overview of the current data trends. As of this morning, Volusia County has reported 11,739 cases of COVID-19. 299 deaths have been attributed to COVID-19 here in Volusia County.

The number of new cases reported over the past several days for Volusia County has increased some, an average of an additional 13 cases a day. We had been in a slow, steady, slow decline, and this week we saw that increase just a little bit. To put that data point in perspective though, the health department looks at the 14-day positivity rate. And that rate has remained relatively stable recently. The positivity rate is the number of positive cases divided by the total number of tests conducted. According to the CDC, the positivity rate can tell you a couple of things. A high rate can mean there are a lot of infections out in the community. Or it could tell you that only those at highest risk of being infected are tested, and reporting processes, and delays also could skew results. That's one of the reasons the health department looks at the 14-day average positivity rate. Any data dumps or things that skew results on one day will be averaged out so that a clear trend shows.

Here's a line graph showing the weekly positivity rates for the past month or so. In Volusia County the 14-day positivity rate has remained below 5 percent since Sept. 24. Today the 14-day positivity rate is 4.8.

You just heard Mr. Judge just talk about the testing site out at the Fairgrounds. There is something of note coming out of that site and that is about the people who are testing at the Fairgrounds. Normally we see people going there to be tested if they are asymptomatic. Recently we have seen a significant increase in the number of those people having symptoms. In other words, people showing up to be tested showing up there because they are symptomatic. We have seen a significant increase in the number of those people having symptoms. A month or so back, people without symptoms were requesting testing. Now the majority of tests are people who have symptoms similar to COVID.

As expected, we are seeing a slow rise in people going to the emergency departments with COVID-like or flu-like symptoms. This first line graph shows the weekly number of emergency room visits with COVID-like illness. After that slow, steady decline, that's similar to what I showed you on the last graph, there's a slight uptick at the end of the line.

That rise is a little more prominent on this graph which shows the number of emergency room visits for flu-like illness. We are about two weeks from the official start of flu season. Here in Florida, flu season

can run from October into May. To date, we have not had any flu outbreaks reported in Volusia County. However, we are continuing to see more cases, individual cases of influenza or flu, here in Volusia County. If you have not gotten your flu vaccination this year, you'll want to get it soon. It can take at least 2 weeks for your body to develop antibodies against the flu. That's why the CDC recommends getting vaccinated early... before the season is in full swing.

If you'd like to get a flu vaccination but are not sure where to go, the Department of Health has a flu shot locator on its website. The address is [FluFreeFlorida.com](https://www.flufreeflorida.com). That's [FluFreeFlorida.com](https://www.flufreeflorida.com), and look on the right side of the screen for the flu shot locator.

And now I'd like to talk about, it's not just flu season that we're heading into. You are going to hear a little bit from public safety that there are large public events planned this weekend. And then we have Halloween, and then the holidays are right around the corner. And, even now... before the holidays, we're already seeing clusters of new cases in households. These are a handful of cases within the same household. In fact many of our news cases are coming from those household clusters. The CDC has information on how to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 during household celebrations or even large events that are planned in cities. You can find the information online at [cdc.gov/covid19](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19).

Thank you. And now, Dr. Joe Smith with AdventHealth DeLand.

**Dr. Joe Smith** – Chief Medical Officer for AdventHealth, DeLand

I would like to reiterate what my colleague just said about making sure you take advantage of flu vaccine programs that are available through AdventHealth, and through your primary care physician. Co-infection of influenza and COVID-19 is a very serious co-infection that you must do everything that you can, to make sure you avoid. So, in addition to the usual steps of hand hygiene, mask wearing, and social distancing, take full advantage of that flu vaccine, and that is the smartest thing that you can do.

Here at AdventHealth we are continuing to implement CDC guidelines around mask wearing, temperature checks, to make sure we keep our staff, visitors, and patients safe. We have been able to continue to provide elective services with really no significant interruptions since the lockdown began to be lifted some months ago. Here at the bedside, we do see a mild increase in the population of the patients we have here with COVID-19, however, those numbers remain significantly below the peak. Approximately about a third of the peak, and that is indicative that you are all doing your job. You are all

doing what it takes to re-enter our “more normal” lives with this COVID-19 specter out there. What I want to make sure that everyone understands, is that the fact that this is going well is not a permission slip for all of us to disregard the measures that made us safe so far. This is a time to remain vigilant as we attend sporting events, as we go back to work and school, as we enter into the holidays even. It is important to make sure you do all the things that you’ve learned how to do over the last couple of months to keep yourself safe, so that you can enjoy those activities to the fullest extent possible.

I am getting a lot of questions, personally and professionally, about what to do with testing. As we re-enter this more-normal social interaction, and people are beginning to travel more, I’ve been asked about testing. It is important that you know that you don’t have to go to the emergency room to get tested for COVID-19, and that is particularly important if you are not sick. You can call 1-877-VIRUSHQ, that is 1-877-VIRUSHQ, and we can help you make an appointment to get you tested for COVID-19. Or, any local Centra Care can help you to schedule an appointment to come in and be tested for COVID-19. So, know that you don’t have to come to the emergency room department just for a test.

We have been very successful with providing everyone with surgical, ear loop masks, and doing temperature checks. We do not have any shortage of PPE in the hospital. We are very well positioned to take care of patients and staff alike. Our cleaning has been robust from day one and we have learned to make that even more robust, and enhanced those measures to make sure that we are keeping the facilities clean and free of COVID-19 virus. We have expanded our ability to provide telehealth visits. That has been really successful in helping patients obtain access to specialists whose offices may be ramped down, or seeing a decreased number of patients. And, that has allowed patients to access those services without having to travel. Really exciting.

We at AdventHealth also want to make sure that we are supporting our local businesses. As you begin to expand and hopefully begin to return to something approaching normal business operations, I think that it would be nice for you to know that you can reach AdventHealth at [AdventHealthCFLsafebusiness.com](https://AdventHealthCFLsafebusiness.com), and that is going to give you some information about things that you can do to make your place of business safer for the public. And, that you can more comfortably provide the services that you provide so well.

Mental health awareness I think remains one of the more important aspects of this pandemic that perhaps has not gotten as much attention as it should. If you speak to law enforcement or social services professionals, you’ll hear that there have been a number of increases in the types of calls that they

respond to that indicate a level of stress in the community that is just unprecedented. It's okay to not be okay right now. Certainly you can reach out to your primary care physician. You can call us again at 1-800-877-VIRUSHQ and we can help you find a primary care physician, but I think that right now above all else, make sure that you are reaching out to each other and make sure that you are doing well, and that you are providing support. Most of our support network has been hampered, and again with all of the things that are going on in the world, it is okay to NOT be okay. Just make sure you tell somebody. Thank you.

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

Thank you Dr. Smith. The County certainly appreciates the participation and commitment from our area hospitals. With that we will move to Daytona Beach Police Chief, Craig Capri, and Volusia Sheriff, Mike Chitwood.

**Craig Capri** – Police Chief, Daytona Beach Police Department

Well, Biketoberfest is here. We are prepared. I anticipate, even though we are in the City of Daytona Beach, we are not having any permitted outside events. I anticipate large crowds, especially on the weekends. The weather is going to be beautiful from what I foresee, so we will get a lot of Central Florida day trippers. I think that we will be busier during the day than we will be at night. We have more than enough resources in place. I have received a couple phone calls here, in the last 30 minutes, about a rumor that we are shutting down Main Street, and shutting everything down. That is not true. Main Street will be shut down to regular vehicles, with the exception of motorcycles; motorcycles only. Due to some incidents with traffic related incidences, with accidents and stuff. It is a lot safer to have motorcycles only on Main Street due to the area there; due to how tight it is. It is strictly a safety reason on why we are doing that.

We ask that you wear your masks, and social distance when practical. Probably hard to do since the bars will be open and there will be people in tight places. Wash your hands and ride safely. Ride safely. I don't anticipate any major problems; it's business as usual, with the exception of the COVID-19 pandemic. I don't think that we are going to see the record number of crowds. We don't see that during Biketoberfest anyway. That is a smaller event compared to Bike Week, but I do anticipate people being

cooped up for the last six to eight months, and the weather being nice, people coming out to explore and see what is going on.

From a public safety standpoint and partnered with the Sheriff's Department and our other partners up and down the peninsula, I think that it's going to be a great, safe event with more than enough resources for the citizens and the businesses. So, that's all I have.

**Mike Chitwood** – Volusia County Sheriff

How many Biketoberfests is this for you? (Chief Capri: Thirty one.) This is going to be your last one? To echo exactly what the Chief said, we are going to have more than enough resources out there. We expect a busy weekend because the weather is going to be nice, but we'll hammer home the point that we say all the time. If you are coming into our community, respect our residents. Obey the law and you will not have any problems. And remember, you are here as a visitor. There are people who live here year round, and while we open up our community to you, we are asking you to respect us and follow the rules. Be respectful and have a great event, and be safe. That is the most important thing.

Claire has a question for us.

**Question 1:** (Claire) Does either one of you in law enforcement business, do you have any reservations about your own law enforcement officers mingling among, what could be a significantly large crowd, with COVID-19 on the rise?

**Answer 1:** Claire, that is a great question but sadly law enforcement doesn't have the capability to social distance. You know, even during this whole entire event, if you look around Volusia County, whether it is Daytona Beach Police Department, whether it's us or Port Orange, we still have to do our job. You know we encourage our deputies and police officers to wear their masks when possible to do the best that you can possibly do. But again, if some people take responsibility, personal responsibility, then our deputies and police officers don't have to get involved, and put themselves in that situation.

**Craig Capri** – Police Chief, Daytona Beach Police Department

Just to add to that. As law enforcement officers we are used to dealing with some nasty things sometimes, especially germs and touching people that are somewhat inebriated and vomited all over themselves and what not. We almost have muscle memory to have hand sanitizer, before hand sanitizer

was popular. And, to wear gloves, before wearing gloves was popular, and to wear masks. So we almost have muscle memory and it is almost instinctive to us to put this stuff on and always keep our distance, not only for officer safety, but from the standpoint that when you have to go hands-on with somebody, and you have to deal with them, that you are used to washing your hands and really clean, and clean. Like the Sheriff said, we don't have that luxury of social distancing, but our officers have been great about protecting themselves and doing everything they can, based on their job functions.

**Question 2:** (Claire): And for either of you, or for Holly perhaps, does this Biketoberfest have the potential to be a super spreader event? Have you heard about this being a super spreader event? I know we've heard about these super spreader events; is there a concern to the community that this could occur?

**Holly Smith** – Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

**Answer 2:** So, the virus is still here, Claire. It hasn't gone away; it is a communicable disease and it is spread person to person. So, as people become more social, congregate together more, they are out, they are not social distancing, they are not doing the mitigation measures, the only protection that we have against the virus; you can expect to see cases increase. To what extent, I cannot comment on that now, and we will see what comes up in the next couple of weeks in the data.

**Question 3:** What authority to your officers . . . (inaudible).

**Mike Chitwood** – Volusia County Sheriff

**Answer 3:** I could only imagine what Craig would say, but we are not the social distancing police, and we are not the mask police; that is not what we are out there to do. If you come here, you heard what Holly said, it's a highly – having had it I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemies, it is a highly communicable disease. So, if you are coming, and we want you to come, you need to be cognizant of that, and you know, if you are going to be in a jam-packed room, and you've heard it over and over again, wear a mask. You know, wash your hands, do all of the things that you are supposed to do to try and prevent the spread. Now I am going to let Craig speak.



**Craig Capri** – Police Chief, Daytona Beach Police Department

I'm with the Sheriff on this, that we are not the mask police or the social distancing police. The problem you have is, that you would hope that people have respect. If they don't have it for themselves, then hopefully they have it for their neighbor and other people catching it that are prone to that. So, Daytona Beach, for example, we are going to be in a lot of inside activities because we don't have any outside events, and so I hope that the bars are going to take the necessary precautions. I don't think that anybody wants to catch this, and I think that everybody is doing the best they can to try to control from getting this, but at the end of the day, it is the individual's responsibility to protect themselves and to protect others from catching this virus. Anymore questions? Is there coleslaw wrestling?

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

So, any other questions? With that I'd like to thank all of the speakers today. It is certainly a good safety message and an important one, especially with this week's events.

And, today, a quick note that today is Global Handwashing Day. We've talked a lot about handwashing over the last seven months, so today is a great reminder to wash your hands often with soap and water or with instant sanitizer, for at least 20 seconds. And, you've probably been told a couple of children's songs to sing to make you reach that 20 seconds? But, it's Biketoberfest, so how about when you are washing your hands this weekend you do it for at least as long as the chorus to "Born to Be Wild?"

With that, keep safety first this weekend. Take care.