

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

**Friday, November 20, 2020**

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

**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

Good morning, I'm Kevin Captain, director of Volusia County Community Information. Thank you for joining us for today's briefing. Today, you will hear from: Holly Smith, Communications Manager and Government Liaison, Florida Department of Health in Volusia County and Dr. Joe Smith, the chief medical officer, AdventHealth. As our speakers will tell you in just a few minutes, we are seeing a rise in cases throughout the state, including Volusia County. And that means that we all need to continue to keep our guard up right now.

We know COVID fatigue is a real thing, but we also know we can't give in to it. As we approach the holiday season, it's more important than ever that we continue to follow those core safety measures, including hand washing, physical distancing and wearing a face covering when you can't physically distance. And, if you think you've been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms, free testing is available.

I'm happy to announce that the test site run by the Florida Division of Emergency Management in New Smyrna Beach has been approved to operate through January 31. That site, located at the City Gym, 1000 Live Oak St. in New Smyrna Beach, was scheduled to close, previously, at the end of the month. But, thanks to the state and the City of New Smyrna Beach, the site will now continue through the end of January.

That site offers both self-swab rapid antigen and PCR testing and operates from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. The site will close Nov. 26 and 27 for the Thanksgiving holiday, and then again Dec. 24 and 25 for the Christmas holiday, as well as Jan. 1 for New Year's Day. For more information on the site test, as well as

other testing locations throughout Volusia County, visit [Volusia.org/testing](https://www.volusia.org/testing). And with that, I'll introduce Holly Smith, with the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County.

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

Good afternoon, thank you Kevin. As of this morning, Volusia County has reported 14,681 cases of COVID-19, with 351 deaths having been attributed to COVID-19 here, again, that is in Volusia County. In October, the number of new cases reported each day for Volusia County began to increase to around 90 new cases each day. And, we have sustained that level and are now surpassing that. This week we have averaged more than 100 new cases reported each day. And again, this is for Volusia County.

Our 14-day positivity rate crossed that 5% threshold in mid-October. Today, that 14-day positivity rate is 7.2%. Clearly these metrics indicate that we are not heading in the direction that we want to be headed as a community.

The majority of new cases are being spread in households, that's among family and friends. And, as we enter the holiday season next week, please keep in mind that if you are planning to attend an event or gathering for Thanksgiving, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has offered guidance to help you prepare before you go. The CDC's first tip is that the safest way to celebrate Thanksgiving is at home with the people you live with. Nobody extra, just the people you live with.

If you plan to host or attend a celebration, outdoor gatherings are better than indoor gatherings. People who are at increased risk of severe illness or who live with someone who is at increased risk, those people should avoid in-person gatherings with people who do not live in their household.

If you decide that you do attend, or host a gathering, stay at least six feet apart from people who do not live in your household. You want to avoid the self-serve food or drink options, such as buffets, where the food is out and everyone is handling the same utensils, salad bars, and condiment or drink stations.

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer right before you eat food or after touching any common surfaces like hand railings, door handles, and toilets handles.

And most importantly, stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Stay home if you are waiting for COVID-19 test results. Stay home if you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. And, stay home if you feel sick.

Following this advice is not convenient for any of us, but it's how we decrease our chances of catching COVID-19 and how we can prevent others, that's including our friends and family, from contracting the virus. A little bit of inconvenience this year can help to protect those who matter to you. And that can make for wonderful holidays in the years to come.

Thank you, and now we will go to Dr. Joe Smith, Chief Medical Officer at AdventHealth.

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

Thank you so much Holly, I really appreciate that. I would like to validate and reiterate exactly as Holly said.; that is exactly what we are seeing in the clinical world. The number of cases that we are seeing overall does seem to be increasing, however, thus far we are seeing and are very fortunate and blessed to say that we are not seeing a significant increase in Volusia County in the number of critically ill patients. And, that is wonderful news.

I think that there is an inherent risk there that maybe we take that as a sign that we should sort of abandon the principles that have allowed us to continue to do so well with management of COVID-19 here in Florida. And, I just want to take this moment to say, please use this as evidence that the steps that we are taking are working. Use this to encourage yourself and remind yourself to wear the mask.

Thankfully it is getting a little bit cooler out and certainly that is something that is welcomed to all of us, and makes it a little bit easier to do. But, as Holly has said, be careful as you enter into the holidays about the temptation to disregard all of those things that have allowed us to be so successful so far. We have been very successful with the schools being open. We are doing very good with the businesses being open with the modified standard, and I just want to underscore again how important it is that we stick to this.

I am very, very pleased to announce that AdventHealth is still enrolling people in clinical trials for vaccines. We are partnered with several international entities to be able to do that. You can certainly call 1-800-VIRUSHQ and find out how you too can participate in a vaccine trial through AdventHealth and the partnerships that have been forged with manufacturers such as Johnson & Johnson. The details on when we will see those vaccines are still forthcoming and those would be available to those who are at most risk early on, and then to the general public. That all will be forthcoming if you have questions about that. Again, even after vaccines are rolled out, remember wash your hands; maintain social

distancing; stay home if you feel sick, and use either a manufactured or homemade face covering to help prevent the droplets leaving your mouth from landing on people and surfaces around you so we can continue to keep the spread of this thing controlled. Thank you.

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

Thank you Dr. Smith. And thank you, Holly. Before we close, I'd like to mention a few important deadlines that are quickly approaching. With federal authorization expiring soon, the deadlines to apply to the County's COVID-19 financial assistance are rapidly approaching. The County urges small businesses and individuals who believe they qualify for Volusia CARES grants to complete their application soon, as these programs are coming to an end in December. The deadline to apply for small business, home-based business, and nonprofit grants is Friday, Dec. 11. The deadline to apply for rent and mortgage assistance is Wednesday, Dec. 30. Applications will not be accepted after the deadline date. To learn more about all these grant opportunities, visit [Volusia.org/coronavirus](https://Volusia.org/coronavirus).

And as we close, a few comments on the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. Traditionally, this is a holiday where we get together with our extended family and friends. But, as with much of 2020, this year is different. The CDC recommends that gatherings be limited to your household. Additionally, when possible, it's recommended that celebrations take place outside. And thankfully, we're looking at some beautiful weather for turkey day! We know this is different, and it can be challenging, as many of us are missing our friends and loved ones. But, it's hopeful that, by following the recommendations this year, we'll be able to sit around the table with all of those we love next year. With that, are there any questions? Thank you, stay safe and help your neighbors.

**Question 1:** Claire Metz, WESH 2

How prepared is Volusia County to receive the vaccine in terms of storage and ultra-cold storage for the Pfizer vaccine?

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

**Answer 1:**

First off, the Florida Department of Health here in Volusia County began planning for vaccine distribution, my goodness, early summer I think, and possibly before that. And, a lot of people are seeing this, envisioning drive-thru massive huge sites and that's how everyone will get the vaccine. It's going to be a wide effort with hospitals and pharmacies and the Department of Health and our municipal cities as well, including first responders. So, as far as cold storage for the vaccine; we don't even know what vaccine we are going to get here in Volusia County. And, only one of them requires the ultra-cold storage. The other ones require cold storage or less than that. Here in Volusia County we do vaccinations all of the time so we have the refrigeration required for the regular vaccines. The hospital has the ultra-cold storage, and the hospitals are first up to get those vaccines.

The planning is based on a three-phase process based on availability of the vaccine. The first ones to come out will go to hospitals, we anticipate that will be the ultra-cold storage. And, the hospitals will be the ones to receive that vaccine directly and also distribute it from there. We also will have pharmacies that will be vaccinating long-term care facilities who sign up. And, from then on down the list we will have targeted groups, those high risk, at risk groups that will receive the vaccine. It is important to note that providers who are in the Florida Shot System, that is any provider who provides any vaccinations now; they can sign up now to be a COVID-19 provider. So, if there are any providers listening that have questions and would like to be a provider for the vaccine, when enough becomes available and we get into phase two, and that rolls out, please contact the Florida Department of Health and we'll tell you how you can sign up for that.

**Question 2: : Claire Metz, WESH 2**

Claire has asked if you have any information on how the vaccine will be distributed and who gets it first?

**Answer 2:**

Again, it is a three-phase process; hospitals and the pharmacies are to give it to long term care, and hospitals will get it first. And, then it will be distributed to those high risk groups that will be identified, and *that* could change depending on the vaccine that you get. Some groups may not be able to receive a vaccine, but until we know what vaccine we get, we can't answer those with any definitive answer at

this time, because there is so much still that is unknown at this time. But, the plans are in place, all we have to do is launch the one that fits the vaccine.

**Question 3: : Claire Metz, WESH 2**

Are COVID-19 case increases particularly alarming in Volusia? Our cases are up, but not deaths and serious complications from the illness.

**Answer 3:**

So, where we are now, today we are probably going to be reporting somewhere around 120 new cases. At the height in the summer we were doing 200 a day, possibly for a while there, so we are not quite at that surge that we saw in the summer, but we are nowhere near baseline, and we are increasing. Again, we were in the 90's, averaging 90 per week, and last week and the week before, and this week we are easily at 100, and our case counts have been increasing daily. These are the new case counts. We are concerned because we are entering into the wrong direction.

What was the second part of that question? Oh, consistently as we were entering into the pandemic we have seen somewhere between two and three percent of cases that have passed due to COVID-19. The death percentage being 2 – 3%. That still holds true. So, if we get a 100 new cases today, and 2 or 3% of those could die, you would anticipated seeing 2 – 3 deaths. As far as more serious illnesses, I can talk from a wide perspective from our hospital system here in Volusia County, they are doing well even though with increased cases coming into the facilities, with their treatments and things, they are able to keep their numbers down to where they are functioning fine, but I am going to pass that along to Dr. Smith who can provide more details at AdventHealth, and give you a better picture of the types of treatments and the outcomes that they are seeing in those COVID-19 patients.

Dr. Smith, do you want to take that?

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

Sure, thank you, Holly. We at AdventHealth have been very fortunate to be able to coordinate with Federal agencies to receive EUA medications. We administered a monoclonal antibody medication under EUA, which is a step from the Federal government before FDA approval, that allows us to bring the most up to date compounds to the front line. We have administered one of those compounds, just

yesterday here in DeLand, to an outpatient. So, to reiterate, things are moving at an unprecedented pace in terms of science catching up with the applied medical science at the front lines. Usually the trip from the laboratory to the bedside is several years to process. And, to see what we've seen so far is truly amazing. I do believe that the technology that we've been able to bring to bear has been absolutely instrumental in our ability to continue to manage those patients so successfully, and to manage the vast majority of them on an outpatient basis. With that, regardless of the question about when a vaccine will be available here in Volusia County, please understand that there are so many moving pieces to this. AdventHealth is coordinating with so many agencies, state agencies, manufacturers. We have been selected as one of the five entities in the state of Florida to distribute the vaccine. As Holly said, the thinking at this time is that the first individuals to receive that vaccine will be the highest risk, frontline healthcare workers. We are still working through the details of that, but again, as she stated, we do have pretty robust plans. We do have the ability to store and handle the vaccines, regardless of the manufacturer of the vaccine. There are some that require ultra-cold storage and some that require just cold storage; we are set up for all of that. As the product makes its way to us we are absolutely outfitted to distribute that in the manner that we just described.

My most optimistic expectation or prediction is that within two to three weeks AdventHealth will begin to bring in to bear these vaccines to those that receive the designation as the most high risk, or the most in need. That will initially be on a voluntary basis and we look forward to being able to participate in that from a community service standpoint and also from a historical standpoint of such amazing cooperation between different entities and individuals just like yourself who are working so hard to get us all back to a life that we want to live free of this virus. I'm very, very excited, very much looking forward to it and I think that there will be a lot more information available to you in a very short time, with details that will help you plan, and to make sure that you are able to get this vaccine when it is available to you. Thank you.

**Kate Stark** – Volusia County Media Specialist

Thank you Dr. Smith. And, one more question, since we have you, from Claire Metz.

**Question 4:** : Claire Metz, WESH 2

Do you have a message for residents as we approach the holiday season?

**Answer 4:**

Yes, first of all take a moment to be grateful. Be grateful for each other. Be grateful for the meal on the table. Please take a moment to think about all those people who are out working on the frontlines that may not be home with their families; we would appreciate that. But, take a moment to check on each other. Make sure that everyone is feeling loved and safe. And, while you remain a little bit socially distanced and washing your hands and wearing your masks, take a moment to express your love for each other that we are all here together to celebrate this. Let's hope that this is the last Thanksgiving that we need to talk about wearing masks, for a very long time. Thank you.

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

Thank you Dr. Smith and thank you Holly. With that we will close this morning's briefing. Take care, stay safe, and help your neighbors. And, with COVID-19, don't let your guard down.