

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Thursday, April 30, 2020

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Ed Kelley – Volusia County Council, County Chair

George Recktenwald – Volusia County Manager

Mike Chitwood - Volusia County Sheriff

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today. I'm Kevin Captain, interim director of community information for Volusia County Government. As many of you know, the Governor held a press conference last night addressing Florida's step-by-step plan for recovery.

At a county level, we've already begun working on a plan, that we're calling *Relaunch Volusia*. We've now been able to review the Governor's guidance and ensure that our plans for reopening are in accordance with what the state has issued. The Chair will speak to some of those measures shortly, and we'll continue providing updates as we roll out these processes. But before we get in to all that, I'd like to give a quick snapshot of the day's numbers. Dr. Matusiak, with our public protection division, assesses the data daily and keeps the county informed, in tandem with the Florida Department of Health, about the latest statistical data regarding COVID-19. A great resource for daily updates on data is the Florida Department of Health dashboard, located at Florida Health COVID 19 dot gov. And with that, I'll introduce County Chair, Ed Kelley.

Ed Kelley – Volusia County Council, County Chair

Good afternoon to all of you! And, I am happy to report, as Kevin mentioned, the plans that we had phased in to relaunch and reopen Volusia County, actually fit in well with the governor's plan, and right now a lot of the focus is going to be on our beaches. And, as we said, either yesterday or the day before, we will be opening the beaches in phases. Most of you realize that last week was probably the first phase where we allowed three ramps to be opened for those with a handicapped sticker who needed to use those, and we had over 800 vehicles access that way. We also opened up some of the parking spaces on county rights-of-way near the beach and also opened three beach vehicle ramps for use by

handicapped persons and others. The new rules did create some challenges for our Beach Safety team. That's why, as we roll out additional measures for reopening, we ask the public to follow the rules put in place. After all, they're there for your safety and protection.

And now, something that I've been waiting to say for at least three or four weeks, I'm happy to announce that beginning Saturday, May 2, we'll be lifting the physical activity requirement on the beach and allowing full activities. Pat yourselves on the back, I know that all of you have been waiting patiently. I know that you all want to get out there, but please don't everybody go this weekend; space this out a little bit.

That being said, strict social distancing guidelines that we are putting in effect in Volusia County are a little bit different, and possibly more restrictive than what the Governor has said. For example, we are going to ask that groups must be spaced six feet or more apart, and remain 10 feet from all other groups. That is six people maximum and ten feet apart. I know that I've mentioned that I have a friend who has ten children. You are welcome to take the children or leave some of them at home. Or, half of them you can take, and your wife can take half, so each of you can have six people each group. But, please understand that that is important for your safety and the safety of others, so that we can be allowed to keep the beaches open. The last thing that we ever want to do is to even think about doing what they have had to do in California, and what they are going to do tomorrow. We don't want that, so help us follow those and we will be able to extend something more than that.

We do realize that these factors had a lot of consideration going into them, but you go to the beach for an extended period of time. And, even when observing distancing, this can create a scenario where a cluster of people are gathered in a limited space. And, we know that these two factors—extended exposure time and groupings—increase the potential for COVID-19 spread. We know there are some core areas that get crowded. If you can access the beach in a less populated area, please do so. And when you get to the beach, spread out from other groups. We've got 47 miles of beautiful beach, which means there's plenty of space for everyone.

While driving on the beach remains restricted right now, we're working towards opening that back up too. We're working to install markers at 25 foot intervals, and the turtle markings are at 50 foot intervals. We are putting little blue markers in between these markers, so that we're maintaining safe spacing so that you can get in and out of your vehicle without affecting those people near you.

In the meantime, to facilitate beach access, beginning Saturday we're prepared to open additional county-maintained off-beach parking, provided we can do this while ensuring the safety of beachgoers. Potential areas includes what we refer to as our costal parks, as well as Michael Crotty Bicentennial Park, Wisteria Road parking lot and Dahlia Avenue Park. However, parking will be VERY limited at these parks, as ensuring social distancing is key. Lighthouse Point Park and Smyrna Dunes Park will also open Saturday at partial capacity. Again, parking will be limited to make sure social distancing guidelines can be maintained. Restrooms, splash pads, playgrounds and showers will remained closed at all of these facilities. When it comes to the beach, we as a county have a responsibility to ensure that we enact all the measures possible under our control to maintain safety. And for the county's purposes, the largest measure of control we have is parking. Because parking facilitates easy beach access. So in an effort to broaden ADA access, and provide an outlet for beach activity, we will take measures to open up a marginal amount of spots in certain areas. The number of available spots will be largely dependent on beachgoer volume in that direct area.

And just because we're making these moves to partially reopen, that doesn't mean everyone should head to the beach Saturday. I'd like to reiterate what the Governor said yesterday regarding the higher risk population. Those at high risk, including senior citizens and individuals with significant underlying medical conditions, are strongly encouraged to stay home and limit their risk of exposure. I want to take this opportunity, to again stress, how important personal responsibility is.

Social distancing is pivotal and must be maintained so that we can continue the rollout of our phased reopening. I wear a mask when I am within six feet or ten feet away from someone. If you are in a grocery store shopping, follow those directions on the aisles. I'm having to turn into the "Aisle Police" when I am in Publix, but I don't mind it. It is for our own protection. The faster that we can get rid of congestion and expose ourselves to each other, the faster we can bring control of COVID-19 under control. I want to stress, this is something very important that I've been saying for a long time. Personal responsibility is product number one.

And speaking of reopening, we're also working to open county facilities at a pace that is in alignment with the public health data and guidance from the state. County officials are putting the finishing touches on those plans and will begin those rollouts in the coming days and weeks.

To begin, on Monday, May 4, nine of our libraries will begin offering limited public access for computer use. Those libraries are:

- Daytona Beach Regional Library
- DeBary Public Library
- DeLand Regional Library
- Deltona Regional Library
- Dickerson Heritage Library
- Edgewater Public Library
- New Smyrna Beach Regional Library
- Ormond Beach Regional Library
- Port Orange Regional Library

An appointment is required and patrons will be permitted use for a one-hour time period. Free printing will be available. Libraries will continue curbside materials pickup. Again, as with all other divisions, this is a phased approach, with plans for further lessening of restrictions as the situation allows.

Regarding testing, Family Health Source will close their testing sites at Daytona Beach Racing and Card Club and Deltona Plaza. The site at 1205 S Woodland Boulevard in DeLand will remain open.

- Additionally, this Monday, May 4, Family Health Source will provide antibody testing at the Hester Building at the Volusia County Fairgrounds.
- Testing is available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- We continue to post testing information, and all other COVID-19 information, at [Volusia dot org forward slash coronavirus](http://Volusia.org/forward-slash-coronavirus).
- You can also call the Citizens Information Center between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at 866-345-0345.

We recognize that many people are eager to resume what I'll call "normal life". One thing that I've tried to equate this to, in a way is like after 9-11. We all returned to a normal that we are all still living today. We are going to be returning to a normal period in our life that is going to be different than the normal we had. But, we are looking forward to that and we want to return to a normal life as quickly and safely as possible.

I'm confident that the Relaunch Volusia plan gives us a roadmap of how to safely and responsibly reopen our community and position Volusia County to not only rebound and recover, but come back stronger and more resilient than ever. And now, I'll introduce Sheriff Mike Chitwood, who will bring us up to date on several of those issues.

Mike Chitwood - Volusia County Sheriff

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I just want to remind everyone that it was six weeks ago that we stood before our County and our State, looking into the abyss wondering what was out there, and what we were facing, and how do we overcome it. Here we are six weeks later and how the Chairman said, we are talking about relaunching Volusia.

But, the one thing that I cannot stress enough, that he mentioned earlier, is that we do not want to be like California when it comes to the beaches. We want to show California and the rest of the country, that has a beach, that Volusia County is going to do it the right way. So, make sure we practice social distancing. Make sure that we practice good hygiene, and good health on the beach. Make sure we don't overrun certain areas and that we spread out. Most of all let's think of our first responders out there, especially our Beach Patrol. Let's not have them work any harder than they have to work.

And lastly, as we reopen, I cannot stress enough, we want to run, but it's time to crawl. It's time to take baby steps to get back to where we are, because we still do not know what the future holds. The last thing that we want to see is that this virus come back with a vengeance and cause more death and destruction. So, I have seen firsthand how great Volusia County has handled this crisis. Everything from standing and supporting first responders and our medical personnel to supporting our vulnerable population and making sure they are being taken care of. And, I am asking you as we begin to crawl, to heed the advice of your elected officials and medical personnel. We are going to get there. Six weeks ago the abyss was dark; today there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Thank you all, may God bless each and every one of you, and may God continue to bless and guide this great nation.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you, Sheriff Chitwood. And thank you, Chair Kelley. At this point we will take it up for questions. We will ask you to raise your hand and our production coordinator will come by with a microphone.

Question: I wanted to ask about the beach restriction. You are asking "people" to stay ten feet apart or "groups" of people? Like if I bring my family, we would sit ten feet away from some other group, not the individual people in that group?

Answer: Yes, if you are a family unit, it is okay that you are together, and as Chairman Kelley said, if you have a bigger family, that's okay. The main purpose is to ensure that the groups stay ten feet away from other groups. Use good judgement. If you are within ten feet of other multiple groups, be mindful that that's also a point of congestion. We have a big beach and it's also a very wide beach, so there is a lot of opportunity for beachgoers to disperse and make sure that they keep themselves safe. It is going to come down to personal responsibility.

Question: Also, on testing; one quick question about that. Next week when it starts at Family Healthsource, do you know if people need to make appointments? I know that it's not a drive-thru but can they just show up and get in line; is that how it works?

Answer: Yes, all the information on the Family Healthsource is updated daily on Volusia.org, so we recommend that you go to Volusia dot org forward slash coronavirus where right on the front page is the testing information. It has the Family Healthsource phone number, email address, as well as the website address. In addition to that, the Advent Health Center as well.

Question: And, one last thing from me, basically next week when the beach opens, but also when restaurants, and some of the other things the Governor's Order includes; is that the job of Volusia County to police that? If a restaurant has more than the capacity, or the 25% that they are supposed to, do you want calls to the Sheriff's office informing them, police that sort of thing? Or, who does that?

We are going to have County Manager George Recktenwald answer that question, Mr. Harper.

George Recktenwald – Volusia County Manager

Answer: Yes, thank you; that is a good question. Right now, the way the Governor's Order is set up, of course businesses are set up under the purview of the Department of Professional Business Regulation, so that is one avenue. Also, it says in the order that the local law enforcement jurisdictions can also handle that. It is a second degree misdemeanor if they are not complying with the Governor's Order, and they could be cited and given a \$500 fine, or they could be taken and there could be some sort of jail time associated to do with that. So, the order does allow for the local law enforcement agencies to enforce that order.

Question: Okay, maybe the Sheriff can help me out with this one. Have you guys had any discussions with beach patrol about how you will enforce the social distancing? I know that we've heard that there is a penalty, a misdemeanor and all that, but have you guys had discussions on how you'll enforce that?

Mike Chitwood - Volusia County Sheriff

Answer: Actually, I will let George answer that, as Beach Patrol doesn't fall under my purview. Question: But, so you guys will not work together? Answer: Whatever resource that the Beach Patrol will need from us such as drones, deputies, citizens on patrol who have been helping out, parking issues; all they have to do is ask us, and they will have that resource.

George Recktenwald – Volusia County Manager

The Sheriff and I talk on a regular basis on that, and so to his point, the Beach Patrol is the main agency on that. We will look at the crowds and what people are doing, and if we need extra resources we will use that. So, we use drones right now because it is a big beach. We can take a look at what's happening and see if there's an issue, and whether resources need to be dispatched to an area where people are starting to gather and there are crowds, we will use that resource. And, we will work with the Sheriff if we need any more. I must say that this is an event where you do see agencies working together, cities, county, agencies within the county, we all share information and help each other out at all times.

Mike Chitwood - Volusia County Sheriff

Something else that we also want to stress is that it isn't always the beaches; sometimes it is the county islands and the intercostal waterway. Everything that the Chairman has been saying, and George has been saying, is that you just can't throw 500 boats on Disappearing Island and think that you are going to circumvent this. Last weekend we were out there in force and we were enforcing the social distancing between boats and beachgoers, or island goers. You know, take a minute to think about this; shouldn't our resources be doing other things than enforcing "this"? The Chairman said in the beginning that this is about the personal responsibility here and we can't stress that enough. For us to be successful there has to be personal responsibility here. Law enforcement shouldn't have to run around and tell you, "Hey, there's 40 people in a cluster; you need to break it up?"

Question 5: Can you guys characterize compliance since the beaches were closed to sunbathing/sitting, and how you think it's going to go? And, are you guys concerned about visitors, and not necessarily the residents here who know the rules?

George Recktenwald – Volusia County Manager

Answer 5: Very good questions. I can say that if you look at photographs that we have from years past, with what our beach normally looks like this time of year, I can tell you that people have complied. They have done other things, they have gone out into their neighborhoods and chosen to do other recreational activities. So, I believe there has been very good compliance over all. We started feeling that last weekend there were a little bit more people out there and people were starting to look for ways to circumvent the rules. I think that put some pressure on us. I believe that they gave out, or wrote, about 1,200 warnings in one day alone, on Sunday. We really don't want to see that, and as the Sheriff said, we don't want to waste resources. Those folks are out there to save your life out in the

ocean; that is the primary purpose that they have. So, if they are having to patrol for simple self-responsibility action, I think that we are using resources unnecessarily.

With regard to your other question about our concern about tourists, not necessarily people who live here who already know the rules; we are working with the various advertising authorities and the local hotel and motel association to make sure that people who come here and visit are getting that information in those hotels. We will continue to have message boards out, and we will continue to put out information, because we do want to educate people. And, I will say, as the Chair said, we are hoping that people still tend to stay home right now, or stay in their areas. You know, we really do need a phased approach to this and that is what we are trying to do. We're really not at a point where we need a lot of people coming great distances to come here and go to the beach. If they do, maybe it would be best if they did use a hotel and not to just come for the day.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Mr. Recktenwald, Sheriff Chitwood and Chairman Kelley. At this point in assessing our Facebook Live, there are no questions that have been submitted. So, to close this conference we ask that everyone please remember that this is a phased in approach, and we appreciate your patience as we navigate this situation. We'll continue to give you daily updates and we'll close this session and ask everyone to take care and stay safe.