

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Monday, May 11, 2020

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Ray Manchester – Director of Volusia County Beach Safety

Dr. Stephen Bickel, Medical Director of the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County of Volusia

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

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Good afternoon, I am Kevin Captain, interim Director of Community Information for Volusia County government. Today, with the briefing, you will hear from:

- Director of Volusia County's Beach Safety, Ray Manchester
- Dr. Stephen Bickel, medical director for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County
- Dr. Joe Smith, Chief Medical Officer for AdventHealth DeLand

Over the weekend, Governor DeSantis issued executive order 20 dash 120 regarding the reopening of barbershops and cosmetology salons that adopt appropriate distancing and other precautionary measures. To view that order you can go to Volusia.org/coronavirus under Emergency Declarations. Additional guidelines issued by the Department of Business and Professional Regulation and a list of frequently asked questions on the home page of www.Volusia.org/coronavirus are also available.

Family Health Source continues to offer antibody testing at the Hester Building at the Volusia County Fair Grounds for adults 18 years and older. Testing is available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., or until the capacity for the day is reached. Appointments are not required. We've been told it's quiet out there today, so if you're hoping to get antibody testing, today's a great day to go.

And I'd like to remind everyone that there will be a special meeting of the Volusia County Council tomorrow at 10 a.m. Agenda topics include the county's small business grants program. Relaunch Volusia, which is the county's plan to reopen county services and facilities, as well as a COVID-19 update. The meeting can be viewed live at www.Volusia.org Live Meeting.

And with that, I'll bring up Volusia County Beach Safety Director Ray Manchester.

Ray Manchester – Director of Volusia County Beach Safety

Good afternoon, Ray Manchester, Beach Services Director. This past weekend, 14 vehicle ramps were opened to facilitate a limited amount of parking on the beach. Social distancing guidelines remained in effect, and vehicles were required to park in front of markers at 25 foot intervals. We flew the red flag this weekend and rescued 7 individuals from the water.

For the most part, beachgoers complied with the regulations and few warnings were issued. And as a reminder, if you purchased a day pass this past weekend and want to upgrade to an annual pass, you can bring your receipt to a toll booth within the next 30 days and you'll be credited the \$20 towards the annual pass. And if you're a current annual pass holder, and purchased your pass prior to March 20, you will be credited a 57 day extension on your pass.

And now, I'd like to introduce medical director for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County Dr. Stephen Bickel.

Dr. Stephen Bickel, Medical Director of the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County of Volusia

So, I have been asked to talk about a couple of things, one of them being antibody testing. And, let me talk about the uses of antibody testing. People have asked a lot of questions about when they might use it.

Basically, there are a few indications; one of them being healthcare workers because they have significant exposure and they could have had a case of COVID and been asymptomatic and may not have been tested. So, the antibody tests are to help tell if you have had this infection or not in the last few months. We don't know how long the antibodies stay positive; they do gradually come down. But, probably several months, six months, or even longer. So, any healthcare worker, the point of it is to see if they may be immune.

One of the problem's with the test is that it isn't 100% specific so it does produce some false positives and depending on how likely the person is to have had COVID in the first place false positives can actually be a significant proportion of the test results. So, they have to be really interpreted with some consideration by a provider on what the likelihood is that they really mean that the person is immune.

But, that is one situation. Most healthcare workers are sophisticated enough or have contacts with people who are, who can help them interpret these tests. They are being done in the hospitals so there is pretty good follow up for that.

The second group of people are people who have had an upper respiratory infection or any of the other unusual symptoms that might have gone with the COVID infection, since January, or more likely that it was February when it entered the U.S. Those people, many of them couldn't get tested initially, and so it would be worthwhile for them, especially if they are considering going out into the community more actively. Like, with work applications and things like that. Get tested for the antibodies to see if that infection or episode they had in the past few months was COVID. You could diagnose it in retrospect because the antibodies would show up. The antibodies are not useful for diagnosing acute infection because they don't rise to the detectable levels for at least seven to fourteen days after the onset of the infection. The virus tests are used for that purpose.

And, the last use for antibody tests are for surveillance, but that is a pretty tricky area. To make good inferences about the population, prevalence of COVID; how many cases have been in the community in the last four months. You have to do a good sample of the population, or otherwise the results get distorted. So, there have been a few studies that have come out about that. Most of those have been criticized, some harshly, because of the sampling and the false positive rates. And, that is something done usually by epidemiology by people who are used to interpreting those. I am not sure if those are going to be as promising as people think.

But, basically the things to know about the antibody testing is: it is not useful to use to diagnose acute infection, it is useful to diagnose infection in the past, but it needs to be carefully interpreted because of these issues of false positive rates. I have been hearing about some of the newer tests are very accurate so that may make that issue less important.

And, the other thing that I was asked to talk about is that the criteria for testing has been relaxed significantly. There has been a big drive now to test people who haven't had access to healthcare or testing over the last few months because they don't have health insurance or because of lack of access to providers in their area. So, the health department is making an active push to make these tests available, even if they are asymptomatic. If they just want to know, or they are curious about it and they are in an area where they haven't really had access to healthcare. That is kind of a responsibility that the

public health department has undertaken. Those are the main things that I have been asked to talk about.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you so much, Dr. Bickell. We will now move on to our next guest, Dr. Joe Smith, he is the Chief Medical Officer for AdventHealth DeLand, and will be joining us today virtually.

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

Hi Kevin, thanks for having us on. Just to recap, we have had just about 1.3 million patients in the United States test positive for COVID-19, with about 80,000 of those patients having lost their lives. In Florida the numbers are more like 41,000 positives and about 1,700 deaths. And, about 17 Volusians have lost their lives in the COVID-19 epidemic. I am very, very pleased to report that so far on the healthcare front we are not seeing any signs of a surge or of a spike in the number of cases at the front line, and I think that this is a real testimony to the effectiveness of all of the measures that have been put into place.

AdventHealth is still prepared to respond to a surge should something like that become necessary. We have not scrapped those plans that remain very, very firm should we see an increase in the number of cases. As we all sort of re-enter something that much more resembles normal life I think that it is important for the community that you know that you are very, very safe. AdventHealth has started with elective surgery. That has been up and running and we are now at full speed there, and that is wonderful. A lot of people have delayed care for several weeks or even months, so it is very nice to see the people come back.

I would like to reiterate that our physicians' offices are open and it's time for you to take care of you. Everybody has really done the right thing about staying home, but now I think that now it is extremely important for the community to know that it is very safe for you to seek healthcare, anywhere within AdventHealth for sure. We have capacity and our staff are in PPE and we have had an overwhelming response with testing of staff with patients. It has really been incredible.

There are some things that I think that we can all do as a community that I think would be wonderful. AdventHealth is hosting, or rather co-hosting, a blood drive tomorrow, May 12th, from 11:00 a.m. to

4:00 p.m., at the Sanborne Center. Just as we have all stayed home and didn't do our shopping, blood donors also stayed home. And, so it would be really wonderful if people came out to volunteer. You have to be sixteen years of age or older and bring a valid I.D., but tomorrow, May the 12th, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Sanborn Center it would be a very wonderful thing if you could come out and help support the blood drive.

Alright, I have also gotten a lot of questions about masks. And, I want to reiterate some of the things that I have said before about masks and hopefully clear up some confusion. And, if you have any questions, certainly type them in, Kevin will get right with you. When you come into AdventHealth you will see that all of the staff are wearing at least a mask like this, and this is a surgical mask. This is also known as the double ear loop mask and you can see why. It has these two ear loops that go like this. The purpose of masks like this is to really help you to protect people around you.

And, why does that become important? We do know that a very large portion of people who are infected with this virus have no symptoms themselves. In other words, you are sick and you are contagious but you don't know it. So, we wear a mask like this, or one of these homemade masks like this, which I really like, too. These masks help you prevent yourself from sort of dispersing respiratory droplets out into the community. Where these masks can be problematic and this is where you get the question of, "Do I wear a mask, or do I not wear a mask?" I think, yes, but . . . is the answer. Yes, but no.

The masks like these homemade masks, which are really wonderful, or these double ear loop masks, are not going to prevent you from inhaling viral particles. Now, that becomes a little less important than you might initially think, because we all know, and we've discussed before, this virus transmits through droplet contamination. Meaning, you touch something that someone has coughed on or maybe touched with a contaminated hand and then you go and touch your eye, nose or your mouth, then these masks can help you there.

That other caveat, besides that other false sense of security that you might get from one of these and breathing in viruses is that you really make sure that your mask is reasonably comfortable. And, why do I say that? I was shopping the day before yesterday, and I saw someone with a mask that really didn't fit, and he must have touched that mask 10 or 15 times just in a few minutes. If you are wearing a mask that causes you to touch your face even more, then I think that the mask can actually cause more harm than good. So, what I would say is that if you want to be an extra good citizen, and there is nothing

certainly mandatory, but you can help protect the community by wearing a mask when you are in public, but make sure that it's a mask that fits well, and know the purpose of it.

If you want to wear a mask that is going to help prevent you from inhaling viral particles, then these are the masks that we need in the healthcare world; that is really the N95 type mask. They are not particularly comfortable, they are a little difficult to breathe through, they are quite thick, but these N95 masks are the ones that help prevent you from inhaling viral particles. But, again remember that is more for the healthcare world where we are working very, very closely with somebody's airway and we are at an increased risk of inhaling. So, for the average community member, I do think it's quite reasonable to wear even a bandana or a homemade mask just to be an extra good citizen.

I think that it's also quite reasonable, I got a question earlier today from a colleague of mine who is a surgeon here in DeLand, Dr. Thomas Corbyons, asking about people serving food, and if I think that that was a reasonable step. I do think that if you are handling food, serving food, if you are a cashier, if you are working very, very closely with people, and not saying that it is mandatory, but I think that it would be very, very reasonable for somebody to do an extra good job and help us be successful in rolling out the relaxed quarantine standards and wear a mask.

Another question that I got was around gloves. And, the difference between a dirty glove and a dirty hand in terms of touching your eyes, nose or mouth is that the glove is at least as bad, if not worse than a dirty hand. Just wearing gloves out in the community, if you are not very careful with what you do with that gloved hand, you are probably doing more harm than good. So, gloves have a very particular application and that is to keep you from transferring from one surface to the next. So, if I go to pick up a test tube or a blood specimen and I want to take it from this countertop to this countertop, and I take off that glove and wash my hands, that is the purpose of the glove. But, just wearing gloves all day long certainly is not something that I have seen recommended anywhere and I couldn't support this.

So, masks, know the difference. If you are wearing this type of mask (surgical) or this type of mask (homemade) is for your neighbor more than it is for yourself. If we all do that, then we increase the chance that we will have a very successful rollout. The N95 masks are best worn by healthcare workers who are in close contact with patients who we know have this virus. Hospitals are very, very safe, our doctor's offices are very, very safe. It is time for you to take care of you and for us to all start healing as a community and getting to a much more normal life. All be it, we are going to take those lessons with us about better hand hygiene and perhaps staying home when you are sick.

So, Kevin, I don't know if you have any additional issues or questions that came up, but I would be certainly happy to answer them.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Dr. Smith. We will now move to questions to see what we have available. Are there any questions here in the house? How about on Facebook?

We did have a few questions on Facebook.

Question 1: Valerie asked if you have a fragile immune system or pre-existing condition, what mask is best to use?

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

Answer 1: That is a good question Valerie. I think that you could still be very, very safe using the homemade masks or the surgical ear loop mask, or even a bandana. Again, you are going to catch this by touching a surface and touching your face. If you are one of those special people who knows that you have either a chronic condition and or a weakened immune system because of a problem that you have or a medication that take or what have you, what you can do is to be very, very disciplined there, which is not very different than life for someone who lives with an immune compromised state on a daily basis. Just because you have an immune compromised system does not mean that you have to wear something like an N95 mask.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Dr. Smith, any other questions?

Question 2: Last week Governor DeSantis had ramped up testing at long-term care facilities. I was wondering if the Department of Health could answer how that effort has been going so far, and are all facilities being tested right now?

Sure, we'll turn that question over to Holly Smith, the Communications Manager for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County.

Holly Smith – Communications Manager, Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

Answer 2: Good afternoon, thank you Casmira Harrison for the question. So the question is that the governor talked about extra or ramped up testing in long-term care facilities, because that is a vulnerable population for COVID-19 for poor outcomes. Here in Volusia County we reached out to all 140 of our facilities, long-term care facilities, that's nursing homes, that's assisted living facilities and adult family care group homes. We have had 59 of those facilities take us up on our offer to come and test the staff. So, it was an offer to all of those facilities to do the staff testing; all the staff. We are concerned about asymptomatic carriers bringing it into the facility and that is when it starts to spread. So, again 59 have accepted. Those 59 names were put forward to a regional testing team that is being run by the state. And, then the state coordinates the scheduling of those visits. I know on Friday, we had just started last week and seven facilities had been done. If they go into a facility where we know that there is a known positive case, then we know that they will test all residents. It is important to note that we had seven of our local facilities already do their testing on their own. They did all of their staff and all of their residents without looking to the health department for help. They were way out ahead of it in testing. So, 59 have accepted, another 59 we are waiting on them to call us and tell us if they want it. A lot of them are owned by corporate companies and they have to check with corporate to see if they want us to come in and do the testing.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you, Holly. Are there any other questions?

Question 3: Sandy on Facebook asked about the status of youth sports and camping.

Question 4: Jessie asked about phase two. So, could you talk a little bit about re-opening?

Answer 3: So, the first question about camping and sports; kind of a two-part question. The camping, because it is often times associated with a park, first we recommend that if people are interested in that visit Volusia.org/coronavirus. County parks are open, city parks you may want to go to your city sites to see if a park is open.

As far as camping goes within those parks, camping is going to be one of those items that will be reviewed in the Relaunch Volusia that will start to occur tomorrow at the County Council meeting. Also, because camping is synonymous with camp fires there is also the fire risk. There is still a burn ban for

Volusia County, so that is also a decision point with deciding whether we can open up the actual camping sites.

As opposed to the other part of the question with sporting events. There's a wide range of sporting events. We can have a small event to a large event with an arena full of people. Those are events that would need to be reviewed situationally and in tandem with our public health officials, county government officials and other private enterprises if they are involved in the event.

Answer 4: And, also about phase two, again as we look at the building of the phases, or the maturation of the phases that is going to be done in concert with the Volusia County Council, at the Council meetings with the Council Members being able to discuss and explore the options and to give directions to when it is appropriate, and when it is safe to move into the next phase. So, that is not a clear answer, but we will just have to continue to look at the public health data and collaboratively make decisions with our public health officials.

Any other questions? There are no other questions, so we will close today's briefing. Tomorrow we will meet for a Volusia County Council meeting and we will revisit on Wednesday thereafter or as directed. Take care, and stay safe.