

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Ed Kelley - Chair, Volusia County Council

Carmen Hall – Director, Volusia County Community Assistance Director

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

Dr. Margaret Crossman - Chief Medical Officer, Halifax Health

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Good afternoon. I'm Kevin Captain, interim Director of Community Information for Volusia County Government. Thank you for joining us today. We have a few speakers lined up and starting is going to be, Ed Kelley, our Volusia County Chair, to discuss some things that were talked about in yesterday's County Council meeting. In addition, we have Carmen Hall, who is the Director of Volusia County's Community Assistance division. On top of that we also have Patricia Boswell, the administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. And, to close today's conference we have Dr. Margaret Crossman, the Chief Medical Officer with Halifax Health. Without any further ado we will get started right away, Mr. Ed Kelley.

Ed Kelley - Chair, Volusia County Council

Thank you, Kevin, and good afternoon to all of you. It is a great day to be out in the rain and sunshine, liquefied, but, yes, Kevin, we did have a special meeting of the Volusia County Council yesterday. We had one that I was told would probably be 20 – 25 minutes long, and it actually lasted about two hours. And, it was two hours well spent, because here are a couple of things, highlights that we were able to do, which actually wasn't even on the agenda to be discussed.

The biggest, well not the biggest, but one of the newest, "the newest," is that we decided and voted unanimously yesterday to, from the CARES fund that we have of the \$96.5 million we have, we are going

to allocate \$15 million total, to all 16 cities of Volusia County. The formula for division hasn't exactly been decided, but we know that each of the cities; all of you out there, had special needs that you've had to do. You've had additional expenses that you've had, just as we have at the County level. And, so these are expenses that were qualified by the Federal government for the use of these funds.

We also created and allocated \$2.5 million for the non-profits. These are, I guess, what you call "brick and mortar non-profits," 501C3's, that have up to 25 full-time employees, will be given a one-time grant of \$3,000, and if you have 26 or more employees, you will be eligible for a one-time grant of \$5,000. So, we are working with the United Way of Volusia/Flagler counties to administer the grant program. And, we will continue to provide details as they become available.

Also, never forget what we did about two weeks ago, two and a half weeks ago, and small businesses one to twenty-five, we now have 2,100 applications that have been received. We have a couple of phases in the approval process. The county continues to process and submit approved applications for funding. We are also considering to expand the Small Business Grant Program to businesses who don't normally operate out of a "brick and mortar." There are many of you that have home businesses where you work, but your income is affected, your expenses still went on; those will be discussed at a future meeting.

In the meantime, those businesses should review the qualifications and you can find those right here at Volusia.org. Everything is there; it is simple, easy-peasy as you might say. And, I just lost a mic but I will set it back up here, and there you go. Accidents happen, but you are back there. So, it's easy, we want to make it easy.

And, we also have the rent and mortgage assistance. And, speaking of rent and mortgage assistance programs; they are active and have available funds. And, to make to make it easier to speak about that, I have asked Carmen Hall, Volusia County Community Assistance Director, to come up and explain some of the details on that and let you know much is available and what you need to do to qualify. With that, here is Carmen.

Carmen Hall – Director, Volusia County Community Assistance Director

Thank you; good afternoon, I am Carmen Hall, Community Assistance Director. In an effort to assist homeowners who have experienced a loss of income as a direct result of COVID-19, and to assist current

renters Volusia County Council has allocated \$5 million for emergency rent and mortgage assistance. The program is designed to assist eligible households with payment of their rent for one to three months. This includes past due payments, current payments, and if they remain eligible, future payments. The amount of assistance is capped at \$1,500 per month. In order for a household to be eligible, they must be located within Volusia County, have a recent mortgage statement, or an active rental agreement in the applicant's name, and it must be current as of March 13, 2020.

The applicant must document or certify a loss of income as a direct result of COVID-19. The household annual income must be at or below the area median income level of \$77,880; that's per year. To estimate a yearly household income, we'll take your gross monthly income and multiply that by twelve. If yearly household income exceeds this amount, or your household is larger than a family of four, we will review your household income and family size to determine if you might still be eligible.

These programs have recently been redesigned and the amount of documentation required has been reduced. A list of required paperwork and application is available on-line at www.volusia.org. Complete application packages may be submitted by secure upload on our website or may be mailed to our office. Assistance will be provided on a first ready, first served basis. If you would like additional information, you can email communityassistance@volusia.org.

And now, Patricia Boswell, Florida Department of Health of Volusia County, Administrator.

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

Good afternoon. As of today, Volusia County has a total of 683 cases and we've had 37 deaths. Twenty-four of those deaths were residents or staff of long-term care facilities. We've had 21%, or 139 hospitalizations; 12% or 81, of the Volusia cases have been associated with long-term care facilities. Twenty-three percent, or 154, Volusia cases have been associated with the State correctional facility.

As we continue to reopen it is to remember limited face to face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing, also called physical distancing, means keeping space between yourself and other people from outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing, stay at least six feet, which is about two arm lengths, from other people. Do not gather in groups. Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings. And, as you know, physical distancing measures were implemented in an effort to reduce to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

These measures are working and we need to continue to prevent transmission from accelerating again. We are monitoring COVID-19 data in multiple ways, including emergency room visits, case counts and laboratory test results. The following two charts illustrates this trend of new cases in Volusia County since April 12th. Volusia County was on a steady decline until we saw an increase in mid-May. An increase in cases is primarily a result of increased testing in long-term care facilities, more testing at community sites and by our hospitals.

The next chart demonstrates Volusia County's positivity rate. This is the number of positive tests each day divided by the total number of tests conducted on that day. The chart illustrates another decreasing trend overall. You will notice an uptick on the week of May 7th. These have been occurring on the days when the overall number of test results reported was very low with positive cases still being reported.

And, now, I would like to introduce Dr. Margaret Crossman, Chief Medical Director at Halifax, who is participating on-line.

Dr. Margaret Crossman - Chief Medical Officer, Halifax Health

Thank you, Patricia. Halifax is happy to join in and get all of those updates from everyone. I would like to share a few of our own. Today we have 14 in our special containment unit and we have limited our visitors to one visitor per stay; that's better than none, as this is better than what we had previously, so we are very encouraged by this. We still have plenty of our protective gear. We are ramping up our OR volumes and they are actually very close to normal now. Our emergency room volumes have increased, although not at the pre-COVID levels. We are maintaining good capacity with our intensive care units. Our ventilators, we have plenty of those so we are doing very, very well, and I would like to assure our community of that.

One of the things that I want to talk with you about today is something that you have been hearing more in the news about. We talked about rash a couple of weeks ago. This is a specific syndrome that we are finding in kids. It is called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children. It is known as MIS-C. Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children, some of you have heard something about this. Last week one of my favorite pediatricians, Dr. Ahmed, did a really great Facebook Live here from Halifax and spoke to this. He did a really nice job. What I really want to do is just highlight some of the takeaways from that.

First of all, we know that COVID disease in children is generally very mild. If they have symptoms at all, they are generally mild. There are a handful that will need a little more supportive care. A few that will need hospitalization. I want to talk about a very small subset of those that will need hospitalization and critical care. And that is this group, the MIS-C, that we are learning more about.

Again, very rare, and keep in mind that kids in general don't appear to being large reservoirs as far as giving it to other people. They just aren't as much when we do our contact tracing from a child to an adult, so keep that in mind, too. This MIS-C, this Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome disorder was not reported in much of the early Asian literature, but we started seeing it come out in April, late April, from the UK. We heard some reports from Spain, Italy and France, and now we've had some cases reported here in the United States. France reported recently over 30 cases, most of these children were over the age of five. Most tested positive either for the virus or for recent infection based on an antibody test. A few others had significant exposures in the last month, but had not tested positive on either of those tests.

Some of these children were admitted to the intensive care units, but more than adults typically seeing respiratory failure, we were seeing more of the cardiac involvement, or cardiac heart failure with these kids. They were treated with supportive care and some of them received that immunoglobulin you hear about. Some of them received steroids. The good news is that all survived, though a few were hospitalized at the time of this report coming out. But, their heart function seemed to be returning, so that's good news.

In New York there are over 100 cases that are under investigation. There were some reported deaths, and it was noted, at least there, there seemed to be a predominance of African-American in children presenting, which is interesting and could be why we didn't see this in the early Asian reports. One of the diseases that this has been likened to is Kawasaki's disease and that is something that we have seen more of in the Asian population. But, again, that has not been the case with COVID, so we know that we are not dealing with Kawasaki's disease which is another post-infection type syndrome.

A couple of things about this; the CDC now has come out with criteria for what this looks like and what we as a medical community need to be watching for. Again, this would be in children under the age of 21. Someone with fevers, prolonged fevers, at least 24 hours' worth of fevers. And, then laboratory evidence, so it's something that we find in the hospital of inflammation; there are significant laboratory markers that we see. They would have at least two organ systems involved. So, they might have a rash;

they might have cardiac or respiratory complaints, neurological complaints, but in general these kids are going to feel. They are going to have fevers. They are going to feel bad and they are not going to be themselves. And, the other interesting thing that is emerging is the way of abdominal pain with our kids. And, I don't know if it has to do with the mode of transmission that they are getting it from their hands to their mouth and stomach first, or if that is just the way it is presenting. There is a little bit more of the abdominal pain going on. And, so, they also need to test positive for the virus or at least recent exposure. That means either the PCR or the antibody test should be positive. But, again, we've had cases where it is just the recent exposure.

Now, the age is different. If they are under five they are more likely to exhibit the rash that can be associated with this. For more older, they are more likely to get into heart failure and respiratory issues. So, just keep in mind that this appears to be a host infectious disease. Kind of like rheumatic heart disease or toxic shock syndrome, or things that you've seen in the past, that you may not be actively infected, it's something that is coming from a prior infection. Fortunately, it is rare, and there is much more to learn about this, but with the proper medical support it appears to be something that has a good prognosis. So, if your child or adolescent is sick. They have had persistent fever, abdominal pain, with or without a rash, seek medical attention.

And, before I go I'd like to remind everyone that this virus is going to be in our midst for a while. Most of our citizens are susceptible. We've talked recently about a reproduction number. And, remember that is the average number of people that any one person can infect when they have the infection. Now, in worst case scenario, this RNOT that we talked about for SARS COV2 was about 2.5. That means that two and a half people infected by every one person infected. But, the good news is that this "R," reproduction number, is significantly affected by our behavior. We are so appreciative when Patricia mentioned and reminded everyone that you need to make sure that you are doing those things that will reduce transmission. And, the good news is as this "R" presses down and we get it to one, this pandemic will cost fewer lives and take a less toll on our communities. So, as restrictions ease, pretend you work where I work. Take precautions, social distance where you can, mask if not, use good hand hygiene, sanitize frequently and remember that what you do and our behavior will make a difference. Thank you.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you so much Dr. Crossman. We certainly appreciate your, and Halifax Health's participation every week and the strong relationship the County has with our area's hospitals and the cohesiveness with this. It is wonderful that we are all in this together and it certainly shows that by way of these briefings.

I know that we have a couple of questions. We will begin with our first question and then we will move on to the Subject Matter Experts on the other questions. Go ahead, Kate.

Question 1: So, Natalie B. on Facebook has asked, "What the PPE status is, in case of a second wave of cases?"

Answer 1: So, the PPE status, meaning the personal protection equipment, which would be gowns, gloves, masks, all of those things. In just speaking with our Emergency Management Director, Jim Judge, we have a very good, more than adequate stockpile of PPE. And, in addition to that, we are trying to procure more supplies to be able to continue to distribute to some of the long-term care facilities and other areas that might need it. So, we are in good shape with PPE. Certainly a good question, and to touch on the emergency management perspective is back to PPE and the hospitals; our goal is communicate, coordinate and collaborate. That is what we are doing all of the time.

So, for the next couple of questions, we will move to the Volusia County Chair, Ed Kelley.

Ed Kelley - Chair, Volusia County Council

And, I will try not to knock the microphone over this time.

Question 2: Chair Kelley, Kellie G., on Facebook has asked, "If Volusia is prepared for a second possible wave of cases?"

Answer 2: I would have to say, yes. When you listen to Dr. Crossman with Halifax Health, and you look at where they are right now; how they are prepared, how they operated during the crisis, along with Advent, the way they operated; never once was the intensive care units at capacity. Vacant beds, vacant rooms. We will be able to be more prepared, working with our partners, in the hospitals, both of the hospitals, than we were before, because we would have, in the event it happens, we would have a whole lot more time than we did when this first hit March 7th. So, the preparation will be there, and have much more time. As you mentioned, the PPE, where right now we are in good shape on that and the longer we wait from point "A", which we are not at, we are more like point "B", but you go to the

next point, we have more time to acquire the material that is necessary. And, also, remember, just as the hospitals are ramping back up now for elective surgeries, they can also turn the spigot off and ramp down on those elective surgeries and free up any number of beds that require that. So, I think that we will be a lot better prepared than we were March 7th, when we were scrambling for every piece of mask. I remember the Health Department said, "We have 60 tests that we can use." People didn't have masks. Now you have people making their masks for themselves. There are plenty of masks available for the hospitals and they've got a way to sanitize and reuse those masks, with the UVA, UV lights. So, we will be more than prepared in the event that there is a second wave.

I think that the thing to do is not to worry about it; just be prepared for it.

Question 3: Hi, Vicki Karr, with Fox 35. My question for you is given the situation that happened over the weekend with the crowds on the beach side, is the County taking any steps in crowd control in the future?

Answer 3: Well, I think that the crowd control is under the direction of the law enforcement agencies; the Volusia County Sheriff's Office, and in this case, an instance that happened, the Daytona Beach Police Department, as well as Ray Manchester and our Beach Patrol. They had worked together. They were aware that something was going to happen. They had also asked and been assured that an event that was scheduled to be permitted was not going to happen. But, sometimes when you put things out on social media, not everybody gets that message. They did what they could with that event. I think with the notice that they had with that one, in the event if anything happens, the experience that they had with this one. Whether it worked 100% well, or there were some issues, they should be more prepared for that. We discussed what we could do from the County Council level as far as trying to reduce crowds, reduce people from coming here. We are destination city. We are a vacation resort. We have ten million people that come to our area every year. And, the crowds were especially larger because Disney is not open, the theme parks are not open in Orlando, and we are one of the next closest things where you can have a beach that is open, and it was Memorial weekend. I believe, from what I've heard from the law enforcement and the County, working as close as we can. I know that the Sheriff is working with Daytona's Chief Capri, as well as the Beach Patrol; I believe that they will be even more prepared this time, in the event that something were to happen.

Question 4: Mark Harper, with the News Journal. I guess that my first question has to do with the discussion about the rash that Dr. Crossman was talking about; I don't know if she is still on the line or

not, but basically I just wondered if Volusia County has had any of these cases? Or, it's rare, so I would be surprised if there were.

Answer 4: I can only say, the Health Department, Patricia Boswell, is saying right now that we have not had anything like that. From the information I have read, I don't know if they have fully determined exactly the cause and whether it is in fact even related to the COVID-19. Dr. Crossman that would say whether it is. I know that I have read several reports on that because we are concerned with that. If you are here Dr. Crossman.

Dr. Margaret Crossman - Chief Medical Officer, Halifax Health: I am happy to respond. We have not had any here, to my knowledge, in Volusia County. There is increasing, the medical community is increasingly convinced that this is probably related, and this is why the CDC did come out with criteria. And we will continue to learn more about it, but we think that it is a post-infectious phenomena that is happening after COVID, probably by about four weeks, actually. So, unlike the cytokine storm in adults, that seems to happen maybe day ten to fourteen, or later, for the adults. It's at least a month before when the exposure happens in these kids, or the minor symptoms and this COVID. But, we do have, and in the majority of them, the criteria, we do have to have evidence that they had the COVID virus, and or they had exposure as evidenced by the antibodies. And, now the virus has cleared but they have the antibodies, and that is the group of kids that we are studying and doing more research on.

So, it's a unique bird and different from what we have seen in the past and we do believe that it is related, but we haven't seen it here in Volusia Count.

Question 5: One other question that I have is on grants and mortgage assistance programs that were discussed earlier. There was some talk yesterday at the County Council meeting about how many folks had applied for these programs. I guess I was wondering if I could get an updated figure on that, and really, you know, after that discussion yesterday had there been any changes or any different ways on how we are approaching or making people more aware of this program?

Ed Kelley - Chair, Volusia County Council

Answer 5: I've said this all of the time in trying to drive people to the website. We can provide the water; these are the funds that are available. Remember, the funds for the mortgage had only been out there for about a week. The funds for the rental assistance had been out there, and I know the numbers on that were very good. So, I don't know if you can expect something. The other thing is that you had to be current on your mortgage March 13th. Which meant that you then, between March 13th, I think that's the date, Carmen, recalling from memory and that's not always that good.

But from March 13th you had to be current and from that time you had to go forward. Probably the other reason is, the mortgage companies: A. They cannot foreclose on anyone. Maybe, if you are a month behind, or coming up on two months behind, maybe they were able to make that March payment, so they were good maybe through April. So, I'm not sure there are that many. The money is there, that is not the point. The point is that we want people to know that the funds are there, and available. It is very easy to qualify, and as you said, we've adjusted the income level up to \$77,700 for a family of four. And, if there are extenuating circumstances that can also be adjusted if a person is in a situation where they need to be able to stay in their home.

So, the staff is looking; I know Kevin briefly shared some thoughts with me, that we are looking for ways to try to drive people to find out the resources. He did also mention that we had, how many . . . 3,000 hits on the . . . 34,000 hits on just a week's time on that, on line. So, the people know it's there. And, maybe there aren't as many people who have the mortgage issues, but it's there. We are trying to make people aware of it. And, any of you that hear this or see this, share it with your neighbors. Share it with your friends, share it with the people that you work with. Go on-line, all of the information is there. It is very easy peasy, Volusia.org is right there. And, that is what the money is put out there for you to take advantage of something in this trying and unique situation that we are all facing right now. Do you have anything to add to that Carmen? If you want numbers, Mark, Carmen says that she can give you some updated numbers. Here, Carmen Hall.

Carmen Hall – Director, Volusia County Community Assistance Director

Good afternoon again, Carmen Hall, Community Assistance Director, for our mortgage assistance program, we have received 360 applications at this time. And, rental assistance applications has risen to 959 applications at this time.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Mr. Chair, thank you Carmen, and thank you Mark for the questions. Very good questions. I do believe that we have one more question, Kate?

Question 6: This question is actually from Nikki Ross for the News Journal, for Ms. Boswell with the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. Since Florida has begun its phased re-opening, Corona virus cases and deaths in Volusia County are on the rise again. Is this a cause for concern or was this something that was expected?

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

Answer 6: So, we look at data over time. It is called trend data, and so specifically we look at the last 14 days to determine what that looks like for the number of new cases, and that has kind of levelled off. So, there are some peaks during that time period. And, those peaks are related to if we get a high number of reported case results, negative test results, or low number of reported test results, and the number of positives that day, which will indicate the positivity rate. So, if we get 12 cases in a particular day, because we get a lot of test results, the positivity rate may not even change that significantly because of that ratio. And, the next day we may get eight cases, so that is why we look at it over time, and look at what that trend is. And, as I indicated, that positivity rate is declining, and that is the important number to look at in terms of number of cases, positive cases.

And, then, when you go to the COVID-19 data and surveillance dashboard at the Florida Department of Health's webpage, you will see the Health Metrics tab, and that gives us the other types of health metrics to monitor what's happening with the disease in Volusia County. And, that will include Emergency Department visits for flu-like symptoms or Emergency Room visits for COVID-like symptoms.

Question 7: And, as a follow up to that, "If the current rise isn't cause for concern, what increase would be concerning?"

Answer 7: Well, so the current, what we are seeing happening now is a lot of testing happening in a lot of different parts of our County so we have a lot of long-term care facility test results being reported.

We also have pre-ops at the hospitals coming in, and we have community based testing. If we didn't have all of that testing, but we were seeing a lot of positive results coming in without a lot of testing, that would be a concerning fact. Thank you.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Ms. Boswell. And, I just want to thank all of our speakers for participating today in the briefing. So, for the remainder week, based on the information flow and the future re-opening phases that we are experiencing, we will advise if there is going to be another briefing, and if there is going to be one, it is going to be on Friday. Also, too, Friday morning we have been typically doing panel discussions that are on Facebook live, with the exception of this Friday, where there will be no panel discussion. With that we just ask that everyone stay safe, wash your hands, do everything that you can do to help your neighbor, and take care, and stay safe.