

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Friday, May 8, 2020

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Ed Kelley – Chair, Volusia County Council

Ray Manchester – Director of Volusia County Beach Safety

Dr. Peter Springer – Volusia County Medical Director

Dr. Holly Smith – Florida Department of Health in Volusia County of Volusia

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

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

- Volusia County Chair, Ed Kelley
- Director of Volusia County Beach Safety, Ray Manchester
- Volusia County Medical Director, Dr. Peter Springer
- Holly Smith – Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

First, I would like to briefly touch upon topic of wellness. May is Mental Health Month and during this ongoing pandemic we've obviously spent a lot of time discussing COVID-19's medical and economic impacts. However, as a nation and as a community we've spent less time discussing the importance of maintaining our emotional wellbeing. This morning we did just that, hosting a panel discussion on mental wellness and health. If you have a few minutes, check out the Emergency Management Facebook page and watch the discussion.

Our panelists provided some great information ranging from ways to stay active, to eating healthy and for tips for handling stress and maintaining mindfulness. And, for those who may be struggling and looking for emotional support, Stuart-Marchman Act Healthcare has a 24/7 hotline available at

1 (800) 539-4228. And, now I'd like to bring up Volusia County Chair, Ed Kelley.

Ed Kelley – Chair, Volusia County Council

Good afternoon and thank you, Kevin. It looks like we've made it through another week almost as we enter into this Friday. This weekend as we begin to celebrate Mother's Day and Mother's Day Weekend, which is traditionally one of the busiest weekends that we have throughout the year. What a better way to get the family together sitting in the surf, sitting by the surf and enjoying the sunshine and the UV lights that goes with it.

We've got some good news for all of you beach lovers like me, and those of you out there that have been asking. We announced earlier this week that the bathrooms and showers will re-open tomorrow. We have now crafted a plan to open up select vehicle access ramps to allow beach parking. Which means, guess what that means? We have vehicular access which means you can drive your car down the beach ramps. Beginning tomorrow, May 9th, a total of 14 vehicle ramps will be open to facilitate a limited number of parking on the beach.

The open ramps are clustered and put together in seven sections on the beach from Ormond Beach south to New Smyrna Beach. Driving will be restricted on the rest of the beach outside of the parking zones that are set aside so that you can still park and social distance with the vehicles as well as people. Vehicles will be required to park at 25 foot intervals. We put markers out so at these intervals so that all the cars need to remember is to park at a post. If you park at a post you will be social distancing whether you are getting in or out of your vehicle. Our off beach parking lots are open as well, but Beach Safety will be monitoring and limiting them as well, so as social distancing is possible. We have taken all of these measures to spread out and allow people and vehicles both to be socially distanced. We know that beach access is most important and we are happy to be able to offer safe options to beach goers.

Another bit of good news for our annual beach pass holders. If you are an annual beach pass holder and purchased your pass prior to March 20th, you will be credited a 57 day extension, which is about a \$3.80 credit. Our annual passes are now valid for 365 days from purchase date. So, this means that you get almost two months tacked onto to your pass.

Actually, I think its 49 days, but that's close. I am really excited to be able to announce these reopening measures. We've been waiting for this, all would have hoped that we could have done this weeks ago. Thank you very much for your patience. And, as I often say, these decisions are not made in a vacuum, but we have the responsibility to ensure that the actions made foster a safe environment for all of us in the county. And, because of our community's willingness to focus on the needs of the many, even if it

might mean a little inconvenience at the time. We are at a point where we can refocus on the re-opening and recovery safely. With that I'd like to bring up, Ray Manchester, Director of Beach Safety, with a little more detailed information regarding the changes being made at the beach this weekend.

Ray Manchester – Director of Volusia County Beach Safety

Thank you Chairman Kelley, good afternoon! We're looking forward to being able to increase beach access this weekend. As the Chairman Kelley stated, beginning tomorrow, a total of 14 vehicle access ramps will be open. And again, the ramps are clustered in to sections, which means beach parking will remain restricted on the rest of the beach.

We do anticipate a busy weekend with the Mother's Day holiday and increasing of beach access. Our toll contractor is working to get our booths staffed as quickly as they can. For this weekend, toll attendants will only be selling day passes. If you intend to purchase an annual pass, you must keep your receipt and, within the next 30 days, you can upgrade to an annual pass and be credited the \$20 spent on the day pass. We're doing this expedite beach access over the busy weekend and limit interactions with our toll attendants when possible.

If you currently have an annual pass, that'll get you on to the beach. Effective Monday, May 11, toll attendants will resume the sale of annual passes. So once cars access the beach, they'll be required to park at 25 foot intervals to maintain spacing. We've installed blue markers in between our conservation polls, and cars must park in front of a wooden conservation zone polls or a blue marker. All cars must park at a post.

It's very important for people to realize the opening of ramps is for beach parking, not for beach driving. Our beach safety team will be enforcing these parking measures and addressing anyone who does not abide by these rules. As always, we aim to educate violators and expect that everyone will comply. The Beach Safety team's number one priority is to keep people safe, and most of the time, that means helping those who may need assistance in the ocean. The best thing people can do to help us is to follow the guidelines that we're laying out today. This allows the Beach Safety team to dedicate resources to saving lives and not scolding rule breakers. And we need to spend our time watching the water, since we're expecting some rough surf and we will be flying the red flag.

We'll also be keeping a close eye on the weekend weather and tides, which could impact vehicle access on to the beach. High tide will occur at 10:15 am on Saturday and 11:06 am on Sunday. With that potential for some larger-than-usual surf conditions this weekend, the drivable portions of the beach

could be under water during high tide and necessitate temporary closures to vehicle parking on the beach. And with that surf, it's imperative that beachgoers always swim in front of a staffed lifeguard tower. We've got our guards out there to keep you safe, please make the choice to swim in front of them.

For updates throughout the weekend, follow Volusia County Beaches on Facebook and Twitter, visit www.volusia.org/beach or download the Volusia Beaches mobile app on the Google Play or App Store.

And now, I'd like to bring up County Medical Direction, Dr. Peter Springer.

Dr. Peter Springer – Volusia County Medical Director

Thanks, Ray. Good afternoon everyone and thank you for tuning in and listening to our podcast today and I appreciate your interest. I had the pleasure of speaking before the County Council earlier this week and I just want to recap some of the things that I went over at that time. I represent the County's EMS system which includes our first responders, both fire and transport agencies, as well as the com center for the Emergency Medical Dispatch Center. As far as EMS transports, I am happy to say that our transports are down, which is good for our county because it frees up the access for our emergency medicine units to actually respond to true emergencies. With those numbers being down, our crews are actually spending more time scrutinizing each and every one of the calls for potential COVID patients. They are in tern alerting the hospitals of patients representing the symptoms consistent with COVID which allows the hospital systems also to appropriately triage and care for those patients in the safest manner possible.

We still have our nurse triage up and running seven days a week. We actually increased their hours from five days to seven days when this COVID pandemic started. And, what we've seen is actually an increase in our calls on the weekends. That is likely to do with some of our private physician's offices being closed, or even closed during the pandemic, as well as some of the urgent care centers not being open on the weekends. They have been providing great information to all of those who call. They have given information, for potentially not having to go to a facility and maybe caring for themselves at home. Or, when they feel that the patient needs to be seen but can wait, until the following day or even a couple of days later to be seen by their primary care physician or an urgent care physician or having to go to an emergency department.

Our hospital emergency departments are also down with this pandemic crisis. We are about a 30 to 40% decrease in volume when this pandemic initially started. We are now starting to see an increase in volume in our emergency departments. This is likely due to some of the operations opening the county back up as well as the state and the country. I will share with you there is plenty of room and plenty of opportunity to be seen and treated and please know that those departments have made your safety their utmost priority.

As far as emergency medical dispatch we are still screening every single call that comes through our call center. No matter if you call in for a sprained ankle or for chest pain our call takers are going to question you about potential COVID-19 symptoms or whether or not you have been exposed or have potentially had exposure. We will make sure that they make sure that our first responders are alerted so that they can actually prepare to see you, treat you, and protect not only you but themselves from potential exposure.

The last thing that I would like to discuss is please, please, please understand that if you have significant medical issues, or significant medical complaints, please do not be afraid to call 911. We are now ready to take care of you as we have always have. And, please note that there is minimal exposure to you contracting COVID-19 if you utilize our 911 system. We've done everything we can to potentially protect you from any cross-exposure, as well as the emergency departments that receive you. They are ready to care for you in a safe manner, so please do not put off calling 911 if you have a true medical emergency. An unfortunate national and statewide statistic is that people are actually not calling 911 and our home cardiac arrest have increased because of that. Please do not make yourself a statistic and please make sure that you use 911 when necessary. With that I thank you, and I will bring up Dr. Holly Smith with the Florida Department of Health.

Dr. Holly Smith – Florida Department of Health in Volusia County of Volusia

Good afternoon. I'm Holly Smith from the Florida Department of Health here in Volusia County. This afternoon, I will provide a brief look at the current statistics. Then I will spend a minute or two sharing some of the efforts occurring here in Volusia to help to prevent the introduction and the spread of COVID-19 in our long-term care facilities.

According to the most recent reports distributed by the Florida Department of Health, a total of 537 people in Volusia County have tested positive for coronavirus, that is, since the beginning. 28 deaths

have been attributed to COVID-19 in Volusia County. That includes one new death reported since yesterday's report was released. 17 of those deaths were residents or staff of long-term care facilities here in Volusia County.

Later today the Department of Health will be updating its online reports. This will include the information on the number of cases in long-term care facilities and the number of deaths associated with those facilities.

All long-term care facilities are a priority for the Florida Department of Health. Here in Volusia County, health department teams have been visiting each of the nursing homes and assisted living facilities in the county. Our staff are looking at infection control practices and providing infection control education to workers in these facilities. All long-term care facilities are a priority

The health department also is contacting each facility to offer to test all of the facility's staff. This is a proactive measure to help to prevent the introduction and the spread of the virus in these facilities. 55 of those facilities have accepted the department's offer to test all staff. We are awaiting a response from others. This testing is being conducted by a regional team that includes nurses. That regional team determines the testing schedule.

Again this team testing approach is a proactive measure to look for any asymptomatic cases. If a long-term care facility has a positive case or a symptomatic resident, we also will test all residents of that facility.

Facilities that do not currently have a positive case but would like to take a proactive approach on their own, those facilities are encouraged to work with the facility medical director to arrange for testing through the facility's lab. A few of Volusia's skilled nursing facilities have taken this proactive approach by conducting testing of all of their residents and their staff.

I'd like to mention one more measure that the local health department is doing to help to prevent the spread in these facilities. Health department staff call each of the county's 29 nursing homes twice a week. They call the assisted living facilities and adult family care homes once a week. There are 111 of those. We are calling and asking questions about the status of the facility's staff, and their staffing levels, their PPE and if they need additional resources.

Finally the statistics for the long-term care facilities will be updated online sometime this afternoon. That will include the statistics on the long-term care facilities. The web address is [Floridahealthcovid19.GOV](https://www.floridahealth.gov/covid-19/long-term-care-facilities).

Once you are on this page, scroll down to the bottom where you will see several orange buttons. Two of these are reports on long-term care facilities. One button lists the facilities by name that have positive COVID-19 cases. The button right below that links to a report of the deaths listed for each long-term care facility. This report on deaths by facility is updated weekly. We expect the update to take place sometime later today.

And finally here's a reminder as we head into the weekend. You have heard about all of the changes and the additions that have been made to help people maintain their social distance. The health department wants to remind you to maintain your social distance for your protection and to protect others. Please consider wearing a face covering when in public and around others. However, please do not place a cloth face covering on children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing or anyone who is unable to remove the covering without assistance. Thank you.

Kevin Captain – Interim Director of Community Information of Volusia County

Thank you Dr. Smith and Dr. Springer, Mr. Manchester and Chairman Kelley. Thank you very much to all of the speakers today.

So, there no questions, so with that we give a shout out, Happy Mother's Day to all mothers out there. We hope that everyone has a great and safe weekend. And, if you're going to the beach this weekend, park at a post! With that, take care, and stay safe.