

## COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Friday, July 31, 2020

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

**Jim Judge** – Director, Emergency Management of Volusia County

**Tammy Malphurs** – Senior Captain, Beach Safety of Volusia County of Volusia

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

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

Good afternoon, I am Kevin Captain, Community Information Director for Volusia County government, and this is our first news conference on hurricane Isaias. With us today is our Emergency Management Director, Jim Judge; Beach Safety Public Information Officer, Tammy Malphurs and Holly Smith, Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County.

Sheriff Mike Chitwood wanted to be with us today on this conference, but he announced earlier today that he had COVID-19. He has reported that his symptoms are very mild and we certainly wish him a speedy recovery. We know that many, and the Sheriff, take every precaution that he could do himself to keep others safe and himself. This is an important reminder that we all need to step up to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wash your hands often and thoroughly. Back up and mask up when physical distancing cannot be achieved.

And now we will move on to the weather. As we know, with being a Floridian, most storms are unpredictable, and hurricane Isaias is certainly following that trend. That is why we emphasize the importance of preparing for each hurricane season. And that is why we at the County also prepare. The Emergency Management Division and County Officials have been participating in meetings and conferences all week, with the National Weather Service, the Florida Department of Emergency Management and with our City Managers and community partners. We are working with the cities to provide information to residents on sand bags, which are being distributed throughout the County today, and in many locations tomorrow as well. For sand bag information, visit [Volusia.org/Isaias](http://Volusia.org/Isaias). The Volusia County Citizens Information Center is open for any questions that you might have that are storm

related. They will be answering calls today through 6 p.m. tomorrow, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and again on Sunday and Monday. That telephone number is 866-345-0345.

Now, due to hurricane Isaias, some COVID-19 testing sites have been provisionally closed. Before going to get tested, please check the status of the site either by visiting [Volusia.org/testing](http://Volusia.org/testing) or by calling the testing site directly. Additionally, Volusia County Animal Services Free Pet Food and Microchipping Event originally scheduled for this coming Sunday, has been rescheduled, or postponed now to next Sunday, August 9<sup>th</sup>.

Also, since March 13<sup>th</sup>, the County has been under a local state of emergency due to COVID-19. As of 5:00 p.m. today, July 31<sup>st</sup>, that declaration will be amended to also include hurricane Isaias. This is a precautionary action and it is expected that when the County reviews the declaration Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup> at the County Council meeting, it will again only reference COVID-19.

And, now I will invite Jim Judge to provide the most updated information on the status of the storm and how it's to affect Volusia County. Jim . . .

**Jim Judge** – Director, Emergency Management of Volusia County

Thank you Kevin and good afternoon to everyone. Well, it's July the 31<sup>st</sup> and we've already had eight named storms, and now nine with hurricane Isaias. So, we also have August, September and October, which have traditionally been fairly busy active months. November is still in the hurricane season, but traditionally November is fairly quiet, but the way things are going we will just have to see how things go. So, with that, you know, we are certainly monitoring the current track of the storm. So we've been on conference calls for days now with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, National Hurricane Center and also the National Weather Service out of Melbourne.

An import area is the National Weather Service, Melbourne, because they give us really good information for our region, which is Region 5. That is Volusia County south to Martin County, so it's a pretty big region. But, then we also get specific information for Volusia County, so that we are able to provide that information to you all on specific circumstances that we can anticipate with this tropical storm hurricane.

So, really, right now we have a hurricane watch and a tropical storm warning from Brevard County all the way south to really into Miami. So, the Governor just put out a local state of emergency for all

coastal counties from the very south end of the state all the way up through to Nassau County. Also, this afternoon at 5:00 o'clock we have a local state of emergency already for COVID-19. But, starting at 5:00 o'clock tonight we've also included hurricane Isaias out of an abundance of caution in case we do get some situations that would impact the county in a negative way. So, we have that all ready to go.

So, right now for Volusia County the storm is anticipated to come up the coast. You know it has sometimes changed three or four times a day over the last week? It did change a little bit early this morning and in fact the briefing that I got at 6:00 o'clock this morning, by 9:30 had already changed, with a little bit of a wobble toward the west. We like the wobbles further east, so that wasn't the news we were exactly looking for. But, the system is anticipated to move up off the coast of Florida and will certainly be about 70 to 80 miles east of Daytona when it gets up toward our way. But, the good news is once the system moves around Cape Canaveral, that's when we anticipate a little more of an easterly jog, and then to the north - northeast.

There is high pressure area right now that is up over South Carolina/North Carolina that is pulling toward the north and that is actually what is going to pull this system to the east and northeast over the next couple of days. So, you know, mostly the conditions we are anticipating are along the coast. So, what are those conditions going to be? So, we can anticipate squalls from anywhere from 50 - 65 miles per hour as the bands move through. So, starting Saturday afternoon, late Saturday afternoon, overnight Saturday, into Sunday morning, we are going to get rain, wind and occasionally squalls as the system moves up the coast. Once we get into Sunday morning, between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. is when we are really going to get potential for tropical storm sustained winds of 35 to 45 miles per hour. In addition to that we can expect squalls throughout the day. And again, those squalls may be a little more frequently, than what we will anticipate Saturday night and Saturday evening.

Storm surge right now we are looking at about one to two feet. The National Weather Service does provide storm surge watches and warnings. We don't anticipate that now. Those watches and warnings would take place when we get to about the three foot mark. But, for the most part up and down the coast about one to two feet, but the good news is that high tide is anticipated around 7:30 in the morning, give or take a little, to the north or south end of the county on Sunday. And then the next high tide will be that 8:00 o'clock approximate time frame that night. So, the high tide early morning when the conditions are starting for the county. And, then another high tide as things are moving off the coast, or moving to the northeast.

So, rainfall, we anticipate two to four inches of rain Saturday night through the day Sunday. It could be one to two inches inland, but that is to say that we couldn't get a pocket, or a certain area that may have had up to six inches of rain. We do not have any evacuation orders or shelters open at this time. And, that is pretty much the case for not only Volusia, but Flagler and also counties to our south. We are also coordinating with our partner counties; both Flagler and also our Region five counties that include Seminole, Brevard, Orange, Indian River and so on. Right now everybody's not anticipating any shelter openings, but we are ready should the need arise. We've been talking with Greg Akin with the school district. We do have schools on standby. We also have the fairgrounds if we need to pull the trigger on opening something up there. And, also, we do have trailers already loaded with cots, water and MRE's that we can quickly deploy if necessary.

Lots of sand bag information is being provided through public information and our Community Services so that information will be forthcoming. So, "What should you be doing right now?" Well, you know, we've got a good day tonight and a pretty fair day tomorrow through the day for most of the day. So, it wouldn't hurt to pick up around the house. You know, take the wind chimes down. Take the hanging plants down. Pick up your lawn furniture. Because, you know those squalls can come through and can be pretty significant and take smaller items and make them a missile. So, you don't want to have any damage to your home, your windows, by something that you could have just picked up and removed from your yard.

Help your neighbors. If you have elderly neighbors or folks that could use a little help, hey, good opportunity to meet your neighbors, pitch in, and help them secure their home and their belongings as well. So, right now it is extremely important to continue to monitor the system. The next briefing we get will be at 5:45 tonight, again from the National Weather Service out of Melbourne. Tomorrow morning at 6:00 o'clock another briefing by email, and then again briefings tomorrow at 11:45, 5:45, and that will continue through the weekend. The good news is that our Citizen Information Center is open and able to take phone calls, but it's been fairly light, and most of the phone calls we're getting are, "Where can I get sand bags?" So, again, that information is readily available.

So, the Emergency Operation Center, really, right now are at a level one, but we are doing that virtually due to COVID-19. This weekend we will have our Emergency Management staff in the EOC, Saturday and Sunday, monitoring the conditions. And, we will not only continue with monitoring with conference calls, but keeping county leadership informed, our city managers informed, Fire and law enforcement as well, to make sure they are prepared for anything that may come our way. We also have WeatherBug

systems out there so you can pull up WeatherBug and monitor the cameras. We also have Weatherstem, you can pull that information up. We've got a great site out in Oak Hill. We have another site at beach headquarters, Embry Riddle has a location. There is also one of the schools, so literally, you can look at Weatherstem, there's cameras, and you can also monitor those conditions from your home just the way we do here at the Emergency Operations Center. So, we will continue to monitor; continue to push information out, and with that, let me introduce the Public Information Officer, and my favorite lifeguard, Tammy Malphurs.

**Tammy Malphurs** – Senior Captain, Beach Safety of Volusia County

Thanks Jim for that. On beach preparations, we are now in the process of securing all of our nonessential assets. That includes trash receptacles and port-o-lets, things that we don't need on the beach for the next couple of days. We do expect to have a somewhat good beach day tomorrow, so we do need to keep our essential assets out there like our lifeguard towers and traffic signs. Those are the types of things that as the storm gets closer, we will monitor the storm, and if we need to take those off, we can do that in usually a few hours.

The beach may be closed to driving during high tide. We do have an early morning high tide Saturday and Sunday, so expect some beach closures especially on Sunday. You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and download our beach app, because we have all of that information on our beach app. If you download our beach app it will tell you what ramps are open and closed for the day.

We do expect high tides and intense surf. We will be flying the red flag throughout the weekend. Please, when you come to the beach use good judgement and swim in front of those staffed lifeguard towers. When we get storms like this come through it is not the time to bring your surf boards out and paddle boards, especially if you are not used to using those things on a normal basis.

We have had a lot of soft sand issues, so this storm actually may help our soft sand issues or solve it all together. Usually we hope for a little bit of surf and tide during this time of year because of our soft sand issues.

Post-storm you could expect some debris in the water. We're not sure but we will be monitoring that as well. If we do see a lot of debris in the water, especially large items, we will have to fly that double red flag and keep people out of the water for their own safety. But, we hope that we don't have to do that.

We will give you more information as it is provided and the storm gets closer. As I said, follow us on Facebook and download our app. Use good judgement when you are coming to the beach. If you do come to the beach this weekend, make sure you swim in front of staffed lifeguard towers.

And, I think that's it. Now, I'd like to introduce Holly Smith, Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County.

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

Thank you Tammy. Good afternoon, Holly Smith from the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. My shift today is focused on storm preparations so I'd like to provide a little bit of good news on COVID-19 here in Volusia County.

Just a little bit of good news, to do that I'd like to share a few of the data points that we are seeing. The first is the number of new COVID-19 cases here in Volusia County. Today the Department of Health here in Volusia County is reporting 6,834 cases of COVID-19. That is an increase of 127 cases since yesterday, and that is actually good news, because a week ago, maybe two weeks ago, we were seeing about 200 cases a day, so we are actually down. One hundred and twenty seven is still high, but the good news is that we are not up around the 200 mark as we were before.

As a reminder, people are only counted once, no matter how many times they've been tested. So, that number of new cases is the number of people, the number of individuals, again people are not counted more than once in the total number of cases, no matter how many times they have been tested.

The next data point is the positivity rate. This calculation is done by taking the number of people who have tested positive in a day and dividing by the total number of tests reported for that day. People who have previously tested positive are not included in these numbers. So we use this to monitor the trend in the positivity rate. We look at the 14 day positivity rate. Yesterday marked the first time since early July that the 14 day positivity rate has been below 10%. Yesterday it was below 9.9%. Today it's 9.4%. We'll take that little bit of good news because it is at least showing we are trending in the direction of where we want to go, which is down.

Another notable statistic that is related to testing is the number of people who have no symptoms at the time they are tested. Over the past two weeks nearly one in three people had no symptoms at all when

they got tested, yet they did test positive. That underscores how asymptomatic spread can happen. Symptoms may develop later or not at all, but these people can spread the virus.

The Department of Health also looks at hospitalizations. Admission for COVID-19 across our hospital systems, not individual facilities, but the systems as a whole; those numbers appear to be stabilizing and starting to decrease. Emergency room visits for COVID-like illness and influenza-like illness also have decreased. Those statistics, the declining number of cases; the declining positivity rate and the declining hospitalizations are the bits of good news. However, there is one metric that has increased and that is not good news; that is the number of people who have died because of COVID-19 in Volusia County. Today that number is 112 people. Volusia County's death rate is 2%. This number is rounded up to a whole number, so the actual number is 1.6. As the number of cases starts to surge like we saw a few weeks back, the number of deaths also will increase a few weeks later, and that is what we are seeing right now.

Again, to put these statistics into perspective, the number of new cases every day, the number of hospitalizations, and the positivity rate appear to have stabilized and started to trend downward, however, we are still elevated so much higher than where we want to be. Again, the positivity rate is 9.4%. To compare where we were in mid-June, the 14 day positivity rate on June 15<sup>th</sup>, was 2.3. Significantly different from where we are today, so you can see how elevated we are. And we had been at 2.3 since May and now we are in the mid-nines. So, everyone needs to continue to practice social distancing, wear a face covering and practice good hand hygiene, and that is how we are going to continue on the decline with these numbers.

I'd like to close with a reminder that DOH Volusia has four COVID-19 testing locations. Due to the storm these locations will be closed through Monday, but they do expect to reopen on Tuesday. So, again, those locations are two in Daytona Beach, one in New Smyrna Beach and one in Orange City if you'd like to look those up, you can go to [Volusia.org/testing](https://www.volusia.org/testing), and the information on how to schedule an appointment and the actual locations is right there on the web page. With that, thank you. Kevin Captain. . .

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

Thank you Holly, and thank you to all of our speakers. I want to thank everyone for watching today and for taking the precautionary measures to be prepared for this storm. I do believe that we have a couple

of questions. One, Holly, if you want to come back up? I believe Abigail from the News Journal has a question?

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

**Question 1:** (Kate Sark) Holly, we had a few people on Facebook comment that they know people who were never tested, but received a positive notification. Can you speak to that?

**Answer 1:**

Yes, please, because we have been continuing to put out this message, and I think that I was standing here last Friday, and got the same question. I know that one of the reporters on Channel 9 asks me at least a couple times a week. We continue to see posted on Facebook, and hear about posts on Facebook, about people who say they are getting positive results, or even in some cases, being called by someone, and saying that their tests were positive, but yet these people were never tested. So, people are looking to us to explain it.

We have yet to be able to get anyone to come forward and provide us with information so that we can backtrack and confirm that this is actually happening. So, best guess is that this is either something on Facebook that is continuing to take legs and resurge; it's been going on for about three to four weeks, and we are seeing the same types of posts. All they are doing is filling in the name for where they got tested is the only change. And this is occurring in different counties in the state, so this is not unique to Volusia County.

Last week I stood right here at the podium and asked people to please call the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County; go to the Corona Virus hotline and give us your name so that we can call and get the information to look, and not one person came forward. So, with that said, it is either something that is taking on legs on social media or there are people right now who are trying to take advantage of others and doing different sorts of scams. So, you need to know that the Florida Department of Health does call people who have tested positive, or who have had close contact to someone who has tested positive, but we never ask for money and we never ask for your Social Security number. So, you need to guard that personal information closely. And, again, just know that this is not something that the Health Department has received locally any information on, and no one has called us directly with any reports.

So, if this has happened to you, not someone you saw on Facebook, but, if this has happened to you, please call the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. The telephone number is area code 386-274-0500, press pound (#) for Corona virus information and give them the information, and we will look into it and get back with you. Thank you for the question.

**Question 2:**

(Abigail Brasher – Daytona News Journal) So, you said that four locations in Volusia County are going to be closed for COVID testing. How do you think that's going to impact testing results in the next week or so?

**Answer 2:**

The Florida Department of Health has four locations, they are parking lot locations, so they are outdoors, so obviously we can't do them in the rain, and we test about, we have the capability of, testing about a 120 people at each of those locations, so we are just one place that does testing in Volusia County. We are not even 25% of the total tests performed. There are private providers, Urgent Care, so there are other places people can go to get tested. Thank you.

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

Thank you Holly. And, I do believe Abigail from the News Journal; you have one more question, for Jim Judge, Emergency Management Director. Jim. . .

**Jim Judge** – Director, Emergency Management of Volusia County

Yes, ma'am.

**Question 3:** Abigail Brasher – Daytona News Journal: Yes, thank you. I know that you were talking about not having any plans to open shelters at this time, but obviously just in case, do you have a list of shelters that you would open if that were to happen, and if so, specific statistics on PPE and that kind of thing?

**Answer 3:**

Yes, we do maintain a list of shelters. Every year we work with the school district and basically we have about 32 schools on standby should we need them. And, also, we have the Volusia County Fairgrounds. Six of those shelters we would use pretty much right off the bat, like we've done with Dorian, Erma, Matthew; those are special needs shelters. So, if you have an individual at home who needs assistance with activities of daily living; they need to plug in their oxygen concentrator, then the school district, they serve as the shelter managers, but then our Health Department, they provide the medical oversight. But, we always tell the folks who are going to come to a special needs shelter to register with us, but also, they need to bring their medications, any special diet that they might have. Bring a caregiver, someone that can help support their needs in that facility. So, we are going to take a school, maybe a cafeteria, and we are going to turn it into a sort of a quasi-medical, you know, but oversight type of a shelter.

Then in addition to that, the fairgrounds, that's pet friendly, all of our special needs are pet-friendly. And right now we have all of our personal protection equipment on standby. We've got thermometers, we have gowns, we have thermometers, signage, so if we do activate shelters that we will have everything covered and ready to go. And, in addition to that, we had hurricane Hanna go into Texas. I reached out to some contacts that I've got in Texas and asked them, "How did it go?" And, so, they were very helpful. I went down everything that we had planned for with our pandemic preparedness plan; we hit everything. So, we got kind of high marks from the folks that have been through it.

And, right now again we continue to stand by because, you know, we always say individual responsibility; have your preparedness planning. If you are in an area that you are concerned about, make your plans. There are certainly hotel rooms west of town that if someone is on the coast and feels like they want something better or further inland, then a hotel is certainly an opportunity. Again, because right now pulling the trigger on shelters and going through that with COVID; we will if we need to. We just don't see that right now being a big concern. Neither do the other counties in the surrounding areas, but we are watching it closely. We still have time to pull the trigger on that should the need arise and the storm move a little more in a west direction.

Abigail Brasher – Daytona News Journal:

Okay, thank you.

**Question 4:** Abigail Brasher – Daytona News Journal:

And, with that, do you have the specific name on which shelter that you plan on opening first?

**Answer 4:**

Absolutely, I don't have that list right now. Our key guy is Greg Akin with the school district, so Greg has a list of schools that are the first. The north, central or west, or north, central and south, with a first set of schools and as those fill up, they get about 65% to 70% full, and then we go to the next group of shelters, and then the next. We can pull the trigger on an awful lot of shelters, but we only need what we need. And, with hurricane Matthew we sheltered about 4,500 in our shelters. It was about the same for Irma, with Dorian about 1,200.

But, of course, we continue to put the messaging out right now with COVID-19, that it would be a last resort to go to a busy shelter. Although, that is what they are there for in an emergency. We always say it's a lifeboat. It's a peanut butter sandwich and a safe place to stay. You get 60 square feet and what you do with that 60 square feet is up to you. Special needs a little bit more. The caregiver comes in with a special needs client, they get a cot, you know because often times they are elderly with medical conditions and we want to make sure that we do provide what we can provide for them. But again, individual responsibility, your preparedness. It's July 31<sup>st</sup>, we've got a long way to go to get out of this hurricane season and it still looks like it could be even a more active season as we continue on. Thank you.

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

Thank you Jim. Thank you Holly, for those answers to those questions. At this time we will have another press conference only as needed as information changes with regard to the storm. As a reminder, the best source, resource for information at this time is [Volusia.org/Isaias](http://Volusia.org/Isaias). You can also call the Volusia County Citizen's Information Center, and that number is 866-345-0345. With that, we will close this afternoon's briefing. We ask that everyone stay safe, take care and help your neighbors.