

## COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Friday, August 21, 2020

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

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

**Heather Edwards** – Information Specialist, Economic Development for Volusia County

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

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

Good afternoon, I am Kevin Captain, Director of Community Information for Volusia County government. Today is a COVID-19 Briefing, it's Friday, August 21, 2020. Today, you'll hear from three speakers: Jim Judge, who is the Director of Emergency Management for Volusia County government; you'll hear from Heather Edwards who is the Information Specialist with Volusia County's division of Economic Development, and you will also hear from Patricia Boswell, the Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County.

Before I hand it over to Jim, who is going to give you an update on the weather, I'd like to provide a quick reminder about the COVID-19 testing site at the Volusia County Fairgrounds. That site is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Thursdays through Tuesdays, there is no testing on Wednesdays because of the Farmers Market they have there. So, both viral and antibody testing is available. So, if you'd like to have an antibody test, you certainly can do that too. Testing is free, but it does require an appointment, and to register to get that appointment just visit [DoINeedACovid19Test.com](https://DoINeedACovid19Test.com). It's quick and easy. It's a very quick process. All you'll need to log in to get the results, and speaking of the results, the viral results can be expected in two to five days, and antibody results are resulted within 30 minutes.

So, very quickly, viral testing it's available for people ages five and up. Adults 18 and older must bring a photo ID, and a consent form is required for children five to 17. Antibody testing is also for adults 18 and older. Again, all this information can be found at [Volusia.org/testing](https://Volusia.org/testing).

With that we will bring up Jim Judge, the Director of Emergency Management for Volusia County government. Jim?

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

Thank you Kevin and good afternoon everyone. Well, we have certainly had some pretty significant weather over the last few days, and certainly on Tuesday evening and Tuesday afternoon, with an F2 tornado, EF2 tornado with 115 mile an hour winds, that really cut a swath of about 550 yards wide in some areas, and four and a half miles long. So, you know that not only impacted unincorporated areas of Volusia County, but also portions of the City of DeLand. And, even yesterday we had some strong straight line winds come through that flipped a couple planes out at the DeLand Airport, and even brought down more debris. And, I want to mention that we are anticipating additional severe weather this afternoon, this afternoon and into this evening, so, please be aware of that.

So, with the tornado and trying to get things back in shape, Duke Energy, I want to do a big shout out, they did an incredible job getting power back, restored to pretty much everyone in the community. There are some homes that are just unable to accept the power because of the damage, but Duke Energy has done an incredible job. Also the Red Cross. That was one of the first calls we made when we heard about a tornado, was to get the Red Cross on standby. And then we activated them and they have been out Lowe's on International Speedway Boulevard now for several days. And, they are handing out tarps, water, clean up kits, so they have been doing a terrific job. And also, they have provided some assistance to over 36 individuals with some financial assistance helping them get into a safe location because of the damage.

Some other good news is that we've got Team Rubicon coming in; 25 individuals that are part of the military, ex-military, veterans that will be setting up and operating within the affected area.

So, a couple of big things, is that if you are a homeowner or a business that needs some help, call 211 and let them know you are in need, and they will assign some volunteers with our community organizations. Active in Disasters, Mr. Frank Bruno, Sherrie Brandon, are also working closely with the United Way, to be able to deploy those volunteers to the affected area to be able to help those homeowners and businesses get some of that debris pushed to the road.

But also with that, talking about the debris, in unincorporated Volusia County, Road and Bridge began a vegetative debris removal on Thursday and of course that continues right along. Residents should bring their storm debris to the public right of way, not in the road. And also, please do not put debris in bags or mix it with normal household garbage. It is so important to make sure that your debris is separated from any fences or anything, so that it makes picking it up very, very easy.

If you do hire a contractor to handle large tree debris or even household damage, make sure the contractor is licensed and insured and knows that they are required to take the debris, and that, to the landfill. Contractors are required by law to dispose of debris properly, and they cannot place it in the right of way. The DeLand transfer station extended hours this Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, instead of closing at 3:00 p.m., it will close at 4:00 p.m. No change in hours at Tomoka Landfill, which closes at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, and both facilities are closed on Sunday.

So with that, how about a tropics update? Well, we now have Tropical Storm Laura, and that system is moving pretty steadily heading toward the islands. It does look like it will go over Puerto Rico. It does look like it will impact the Dominican Republic, and then even over Cuba, as it moves towards southwest Florida and then into the gulf. Right now, again, it is a tropical storm, but it is projected and forecast to be a hurricane as it does move into the gulf and up toward, it could be Mississippi, Alabama or even the Florida coast up along the panhandle.

The good news is that it did shift a little bit further southward which actually takes the weather further away from Volusia County, and it is moving between 20 and 22 miles an hour, which is pretty significant for a tropical storm. But with that, what conditions can we expect for Volusia County? Well, quite honestly pretty much what we are seeing every afternoon in our summer weather pattern. But again, I want to emphasize the severe weather pattern threat that we do have for this afternoon. We have a lot of water out there; you look at the ditches, the ponds, everything is full. And, we really don't have a rain amount from the National Weather Service, but we do anticipate receiving that tomorrow, as far as the weather impacts, or the water impact that we can anticipate.

Tropical Storm 14 will become Tropical Storm Marco as it moves over the Yucatan peninsula and heads on again into the gulf, and it looks like it's going to possibly head to Texas and possibly even Louisiana. So, while that is no threat to Florida, we can continue to track that and the potential impact that it may have with Tropical Storm Laura. And you know that some of the questions have come up, Kevin and I were talking about it, "What happens if you have two storms that merge?" Well, that is actually called a

Fujiwara. Something a little unusual, you don't hear that often, but we don't think that will take place, but they will be in close proximity with the cone of uncertainty for both Tropical Storm Laura and Tropical Storm 14 coming very close together. And this would be a Monday afternoon, Monday evening, overnight Tuesday, as it moves up the coast.

So, with that, let me introduce Heather Edwards, Information Specialist with the Volusia County Economic Development.

**Heather Edwards** – Information Specialist, Economic Development for Volusia County

Thank you Jim. My name is Heather Edwards, and I am with the Division of Economic Development, to provide you with an update on PPE distribution. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, on June 16<sup>th</sup> the Volusia County Council approved \$1 million to purchase personal protective equipment for local businesses to help insure the safety of employees and customers. With the successful distribution of PPE occurring in early July, a second round of PPE has been scheduled and is being coordinated through the Volusia County Chamber Alliance, and this will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the following dates: On Tuesday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, in East Volusia at the Ocean Center at 101 N. Atlantic Avenue; On Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, to cover the West Volusia area, at the DeLand Elks Lodge at 614 S. Alabama Avenue in DeLand. And finally, on Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, in southeast Volusia, there will be PPE at the Marine Discovery Center at 520 Barracuda Boulevard in New Smyrna Beach.

PPE kits include masks, hand sanitizer and cleaning solution. Businesses must prove eligibility with a business card indicating they represent a Volusia County businesses or provide a copy of their city business tax receipt or utility bill. They will need to sign off that they have received the product. Businesses may visit any site and receive one kit. As a reminder, finally, we still have two grant programs dedicated to assisting businesses, and this is still available for our brick and mortar businesses in commercial zones, as well as businesses located out of their home. For complete details, criteria requirements, and to apply on-line, please visit [www.volusiabusinessresources.com](http://www.volusiabusinessresources.com). Thank you, and stay safe.

And now I'd like to introduce Patricia Boswell, the Administrator for Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. Patricia?

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

Good afternoon, Patricia Boswell, the Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. Let's start with reviewing the data which we monitor to determine spread and how effective our mitigation measures are.

Today the Florida Department of Health is reporting 8,761 cases of COVID-19 in Volusia County. That is an increase of 96 cases since yesterday. As a reminder, people are only counted once no matter how many times they are tested.

The next data point is our positivity rate. That is the number of new people who have tested positive divided by the total number of tests that day. People who have previously tested positive are not included in these numbers. To monitor the trend we look at a 14 day positivity rate. At this time last week it was 6.97%; today it is 6.26%. Since August 10<sup>th</sup>, the percentage of laboratory tests positive for COVID-19 daily has been below 8%. So, we are moving in the right direction, downward.

When looking at hospitalizations in Volusia County, 8% or 675 people who tested positive, have been hospitalized. The number of COVID-19 admissions across our hospital system are on the decline. The indicators that track out-patient or emergency department visits, for illnesses compatible with COVID-19, such as influenza-like illness and COVID-19-like illness, continue to decline.

We have been reporting new deaths every day, and today we had two. Up to this point 172 people have died of COVID-19 in Volusia County. The number is 2% of all cases.

So, to summarize the data, the number of new hospitalizations and the positivity rate, is on a downward trend. And, for the past week, there were 455 new cases compared to 658 for the prior week. So, the total reported for those two weeks were both approximately 8,900 total tests. So, the total tests were the same, the positive cases were less this past week, creating a lower positivity rate. It appears that all of our efforts of social distancing, mask wearing and hand hygiene, is helping to slow the virus. Please remember, if you think or know you have COVID-19 with symptoms, you can be with others after at least ten days since your symptoms first appeared, 24 hours with no fever, and symptoms improving.

So, as our schools begin to reopen, please, if you are a teacher, student, staff, planning to return to school, and you or a family member has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or are waiting for test results, please stay home until you can be around others, which is ten days after symptoms first appeared, or if you've had no symptoms, you can be with others after ten days have passed since you've had a positive

viral test. For anyone who has had a close contact with anyone with COVID-19, you should stay home for 14 days after your last contact with that person. Even if you test negative, or feel healthy, you should stay home, since symptoms may appear two to fourteen days after exposure to the virus. If you are waiting on test results, please stay home until you know the results. And finally, because of the COVID-19 pandemic reducing the spread of respiratory illnesses like flu, this fall and winter is more important than ever. The single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year. And, good health habits like avoiding people who are sick, covering your cough and washing your hands often also helps stop the spread of germs and prevent illness. Everyone six months of age or older should get a flu vaccine this season.

And with that, I welcome Kevin for the closing. Thank you.

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

Thank you Ms. Boswell. Thank you Ms. Edwards and thank you Mr. Judge. Thank you to all of our speakers today and for everyone for tuning in. Sheriff Chitwood couldn't join us today, and that is basically because he is preparing for another news conference at 3:00 p.m. The Volusia Sheriff's Office, along with the City of DeLand, and the members of the Volusia Building Industry Association, are hosting a joint news conference this afternoon on the tornado that damaged the area of DeLand, to raise awareness of repair scams and unlicensed contractor activity. You can watch that release at the Volusia Sheriff's Facebook page.

I'd like to also mention that we've been doing these news conferences every Friday at 2:00 p.m. Moving forward we may scale back to every other week, but it's going to all be dependent on the prioritization, and the amount of messaging that we receive and need to bestow onto the residents. So, with that, we will close this conference. Take care, stay safe, and be sure to help your neighbors.