

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

Friday, September 11, 2020

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Dr. Joe Smith – Chief Medical Officer at AdventHealth in DeLand

Holly Smith – Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

Kelly Schulz – Director of Community Information for Volusia County Schools

Jason Brady – Director of Emergency Medical Services

Howard Bailey – Volusia County Fire Chief

Mike Chitwood – Volusia County Sheriff

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Good afternoon, I am Kevin Captain, Director of Volusia County Community Information. Thank you for joining us for today's briefing. Today, you will hear from Dr. Joe Smith, he is the Chief Medical Officer at AdventHealth in DeLand; Holly Smith, the Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County, and Kelly Schulz, the Director of Community Information for the Volusia County School District.

First, a quick reminder about the state's COVID-19 testing site operating at the Volusia County Fair Grounds. The site is open from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., Thursdays through Tuesdays, with no testing on Wednesdays. The site offers both viral and antibody testing. Testing is free, but viral testing does require an appointment. And, it's highly recommended that if you get an antibody test, you should also get a viral test. To register, please visit DoINeedACOVID19Test.com. It's a quick and easy process. And all of this information, as well as other testing locations, can be found at Volusia.org/testing.

And a quick reminder about the county's COVID-19 rental and mortgage assistance; it is still available, as well as business assistance. All these programs are still funded and accepting applications. The

applications for rental and mortgage assistance can be obtained by calling the Volusia County Community Assistance Division at 386-736-5955, or by visiting Volusia.org. And to learn more and apply for business assistance, just simply visit volusiabusinessresources.com.

And with yesterday being the mid-point of hurricane season, it's a great reminder to always be prepared. In fact, September is National Preparedness Month and Volusia County Emergency Management is sharing content on their Facebook page all month long helping individuals to prep and prepare for disaster situations. If you have a few minutes, check it out.

And now, joining with us virtually is Dr. Joe Smith, the Chief Medical Officer at AdventHealth in DeLand. Thank you Dr. Smith; take it away.

Dr. Joe Smith – Chief Medical Officer at AdventHealth in DeLand

Thank you for having me Kevin. I'd like to just remind everyone thus far Florida has seen approximately 660,000 cases of COVID-19. With about 12,500 Floridians having lost their lives. In Volusia County those numbers 9,961 infected with 205 Volusians having lost their lives to COVID-19. These numbers are very sobering, but I am pleased to report that we at AdventHealth and throughout the state of Florida are seeing a decline in the rate of infection of COVID-19 patients. That decline is not only patients hospitalized in ICU or non-ICU settings, but we are seeing a decrease in the number of patients who come to the emergency department who test positive who are treated on an outpatient basis.

Now, I want to caution everyone, that is not a permission slip to stop with social distancing, wearing your masks, being disciplined about your hand hygiene, and certainly staying home if you feel ill. That is really a rallying cry, to say that as we continue to roll back some of the restrictions, and get closer and closer to what resembles pre-COVID life, that this is a good indication that the measures that we are taking are working. What we are seeing now is that as children return to school, there was a lot of concern as to whether we would see a spike in the number of cases following that return; thus far we have not, which is very encouraging. Again, we want to make sure that we continue to use that as the energy we need, encouragement we need to continue being vigilant, but thus far that appears to be going quite well.

I do have some information about some changes in the way that the CDC has recommended that we handle patients who have been infected, and that would be apply to someone out there in the community who has become sick and wants to know when they can return to work or to school.

Obviously you want to consult with your healthcare professional. You can always call us here at 1-877-VirusHQ, at AdventHealth and someone here will be glad to answer your question. Certainly you can see your primary care physician or certainly a school nurse or health official with your employer. But, at this time we are recommending, and congruent with the CDC's most updated guidelines, that after of at least ten days have passed since your symptoms first began, and 24 hours have passed without fever, and you are without symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath, you could actually return to work, provided that you are not immune compromised or working with a special population group of patients who themselves are more susceptible to this illness.

If you have severe or critical illness they are recommending at least ten days and up to twenty days have passed since your symptoms first appeared and at least 24 hours without a fever without the use of a medication such as Tylenol or aspirin to lower your fever. Again, that would also require you to be asymptomatic, no cough, no shortness of breath, and you have consulted with your health care officials. So, what we continue to see then that it is safer and safer as we learn more and more about this virus to return to normal life. I want to continue to emphasize the importance of wearing masks, whether they be the double ear loop surgical type masks that are commercially produced or a double or triple thick mask such as this one that is made by volunteers that helps to contain any respiratory droplets that you may be expelling as you breath or talk or cheer on your favorite team, and help to reduce the community spread.

I've had some personal experience with COVID-19 recently and I actually contracted COVID-19. It was a community contraction, and it did not come from work here in the hospital, or even in my home. I don't know where I contracted that; probably out in public, but I want to reiterate is that you don't wear the mask for you; you wear the mask to protect the person who is going to inhale your respiratory droplets. And so I was very fortunate to be cared for here at AdventHealth and I am doing quite well, I feel well. I've applied by CDC guidelines and am back here at work and doing fine. But, that was a direct result of someone else in the community not wearing a mask. I want to reiterate, you wear the mask to protect those around you. So, please, please, remain vigilant.

As we continue to move forward I think that there are some interesting questions that remain to be answered. As the school year ramps up and maybe the kids become a little more cavalier, we may see an increase in cases. I am very happy to report that we have not seen that yet. Sports is an area that we've seen that the coaches and the teachers are doing their very best to maybe tamp down some of the locker room behavior; high fives, drinking after each other, those sorts of activities that may have made sports unacceptably dangerous. Those changes have been implemented and we are hopeful that the kids are able to play sports this year to the best of everyone's ability to keep that safe. That so far has continued to go well.

I think additionally, you know, as the holidays approach, we think about holidays, and gee, it's hard to think about Thanksgiving when it is so hot outside? But, when we start to gather with friends and loved ones in the months to come, around the dinner table for holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, I think that those are other times when we may see an increase in the number of cases, or the transmission of this illness, if people become a little too comfortable.

I want to remind you that this illness now has an average age of 43 years, which is eerily close to the average age of Floridians. This illness affects every age, every demographic group, every gender and really, every socioeconomic class. So, you can't look at someone and say, "Hey, that person is low risk for COVID-19; you don't need to wear a mask," that's just not how this works. Again, so as you continue to re-enter life and become more and more comfortable, which is a wonderful thing; returning to exercise, returning to things like going out to eat with friends; I think that it is very, very important that you continue to remain vigilant so that we can all get to as close to a normal life as we can, until we have a vaccine available.

It is too early to report anything concrete, but there is some very interesting information coming out about vaccines that should be available much sooner than you would really expect in the Central Florida area. Obviously there will be a huge logistical lift on the infrastructure of the entire United States to make sure that we are able to provide vaccines for all of our citizens, particularly our higher risk individuals first. But, I am very pleased to report that the scientific literature, the information coming out thus far is extremely encouraging about the efficacy and safety vaccines out there being developed.

In the interim I think the best that we can all do is try to stay well informed. Remember that social media is not always a reliable news outlet. Remember that CDC.gov, your primary care provider, resources like AdventHealth 1-877VirusHQ, those are going to be your best sources for evidence driven, up to date,

accurate information about COVID-19 and the things you can do, or not do, to help reduce the risk not only to you, but to friends and loved ones.

In the interim, I want you also to know it is very safe to come here for healthcare. We have continued to have great success with elective surgeries. Patients are returning to their preventative healthcare like tests and mammograms, they are seeing their primary care physicians. We are seeing extremely low risk of coming to the hospital as we have gotten very, very accustomed to managing that risk of patients who might come in contact with COVID-19 until such time that we know their status. And, I want you to know that we are here for you, so please continue to listen to your officials. Continue to do what you are doing, it is working. We are extremely optimistic as we are going into the fall, but we just need you to remain vigilant. Thank you Kevin.

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Thank you, Dr. Smith. Thank you so much for joining us virtually this afternoon. With that, I'd like to bring up Holly Smith, who is the Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County. Holly?

Holly Smith – Communications Manager and Government Liaison for the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County

Good afternoon, I'd like to provide a brief COVID update for Volusia County and it's going to be a little bit of an update of the numbers Dr. Smith gave you with some graphics to put that information into perspective. So, as of this morning, Volusia County has 10,027 cases and we also have 205 deaths related to COVID-19 here in Volusia County. And, this chart shows the number of cases reported daily through last week. The number of new cases has been on a downward path since the surge that was in July. You will notice the uptick at the end of this line that reflects a bundle of positive labs that were received on August 31st. Those were from the Quest data dump you heard the Governor talking about, just about two weeks ago. The overall trend of new cases each week has remained stable for Volusia County over the past two weeks. This chart is updated weekly. It is going to be updated over the weekend and that will reflect the data from this week.

The next chart is the 14 day positivity rate. It's also better than it was this time last month. We are hovering right around 5.5 – 5.7% for the two week average as of today. The Department of Health in Volusia County monitors the metric for the two week average since it shows the current trend since it is over the past 14 days and not over the duration of COVID.

When we look at the number of emergency room visits with COVID-like illness, this graph shows a strong downward trend. All of the data points that the Department of Health uses are either trending downward or they stabilized or have been stabilized for a couple of weeks.

When you look at the graph of emergency room visits for flu-like illness or influenza-like illness, this also demonstrates a downward trend, however, we are heading into flu season and this means this line is expected to show an increase in the next month or so. In Florida a typical flu season can run from October or November, and all the way into May. And, with COVID-19 this year, it is even more important to get a flu shot. So, to ensure that you are protected before the flu season really ramps up, the CDC recommends that you get a flu shot before Halloween. That is because once you get a flu shot, it takes your body a couple of weeks to develop antibodies to help fight off the flu if you are exposed to the flu. So, again, the CDC recommends that you get vaccinated early.

If you'd like to get a flu vaccination but are unsure on where to go, the Department of Health has a flu shot locator on its website. Just log on to [FluFreeFlorida.com](https://www.flufreeflorida.com). That is [FluFreeFlorida.com](https://www.flufreeflorida.com), and look on the right side for the flu shot locator.

Right now I'd like to pass it on to Kelly Schulz, the Community Information Director for Volusia County Schools. Kelly?

Kelly Schulz – Director of Community Information for Volusia County Schools

Thank you Holly. Good afternoon, I'm Kelly Schulz, Director of Community Information, as she mentioned, for Volusia County Schools. First, I want to take a moment to remember 9/11. This somber day reminds us of our nation's resilience amid tragedy and loss. We commend the heroes and remember those lost 19 years ago today.

Volusia County Schools went back to school August 31st with classes offered in schools and virtually. 60% of our 62,000 students have returned to the traditional classroom setting and 40% are attending

virtually, either through our Volusia Live option, which is done in real time through live streaming, or through our more flexible enhanced Volusia Online Learning Program.

Our traditional classroom setting is following health and safety procedures in classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias, as well as frequent hand-washing, ongoing cleaning, Plexiglas dividers, and the use of face coverings when social distancing is not possible. We are being supported by the Volusia County Health Department through additional staff, as well as guidance, and we are also partners with AdventHealth and we are thankful for all of that support.

For our virtual learning options, we deployed 5,000 laptops and iPads to students who do not have access to technology at home. We launched a technology hotline and are providing ongoing technology support to our families and teachers as many of our students learn from home.

As we close out our second week of school, our students, teachers, and staff are back in the fall routine, making new friends, and focusing on student education. I also want to make the community aware of a few announcements for this week. The USDA has extended the meal program that allows all children 18 and younger in schools and the community to eat for free through December 18th. Starting this week, all students attending in-person classes in Volusia County Schools receive their breakfast and lunch meals at no charge. Additionally, a free, weekly curbside meal service will be provided for children not attending in-person classes. Families can arrange for curbside meal service by registering weekly through our website, which you are going to hear me mention several times here, VCSEDU.org.

Because large gatherings are not possible, we are participating in the Virtual College and Career Expo with more than 600 colleges and universities expected. The Expo will be offered on several dates this fall, with the first being this Sunday from Noon to 8:00 p.m. Information on how to sign up for that is also available on our website, VCSEDU.org.

And, it wouldn't be fall without football! After a delayed start to the fall athletics season, our first games will be a week from today, on September 18th. We ask that our fans bear with us as we implement changes to stadium capacity and ticketing. Masks will be required, and fans will be spread out, but we are excited to cheer on our favorite teams, of course!

I'd like to share some information about our COVID response in the schools. Before schools reopened, our Student Health Services Department set up all of our school clinics and separate isolation areas in our schools that could be needed in case of a sick student who has symptoms of COVID-19. All clinic staff have been trained in proper COVID protocols and provided with PPE. We are also grateful to the Volusia

County Health Department for providing two certified epidemiologists to support us, along with four support personnel for contact tracing; two in east Volusia and two in west Volusia.

On the first day of school we launched our COVID-19 Data Dashboard, and twice a week we release the number of students and staff who have tested positive. Also, we have the schools that have been impacted. The COVID-19 data dashboard is located on our Reopening Roadmap, which is also on the Volusia County Schools website, VCSEDU.org.

Our superintendent, Dr. Carmen Balgobin, gave a comprehensive report on the start of the school year this week at our Tuesday school board meeting. The presentation is posted on our website for anyone who would like more information. Again, our website is VCSEDU.org, and I believe it's on your screen.

And, in closing, we want to thank our teachers and staff for the teamwork, the training, and dedication required for this successful start of school during a global pandemic. We appreciate the support of all of the community and our parents. And most of all, we want to commend our students for their positive, can-do attitude and readiness to learn. They inspire all of us.

The reopening of Volusia County Schools has shown, in so many ways, that together we are stronger!
Thank you. Kevin?

Kevin Captain – Director of Community Information for Volusia County

Thank you Kelly, and thank you to all our speakers today. And thank you to everyone tuning in.

As always, to get the latest updates you can tune in to Volusia.org. And this week, Volusia County Emergency Medical Services launched their own Facebook page. You can find that, and follow them, at Volusia EMS.

And, as we close, we want to recognize the tragedies that occurred 19 years ago today, and the heroic actions that took place that day. To close today I'd like to invite up Volusia County Sheriff, Mike Chitwood, and members of Volusia County's Department of Public Protection: Volusia County Emergency Medical Services Director, Jason Brady and Volusia County Fire Chief, Howard Bailey.

Jason Brady – Director of Emergency Medical Services

Good afternoon and Happy Patriot's Day. On September 11, 2001 a senseless act of terrorism killed 2,977 men, women and children. Of those killed 343 were firefighters, 60 police officers, 10 EMTs and paramedics, and 1 member of the NY Fire Patrol among those who perished.

The magnitude of this loss in a single day is astounding. People who left their homes with the intention to be home for dinner, taken from us literally in the blink of an eye. This tragedy struck us right in the heart of America. In Shanksville, Pennsylvania, right there in middle America, the Pentagon right outside of our Nation's capital, and New York City, the literal melting pot of the world.

Today is a day to reflect on the loss and pain that we suffered. To pray for the 1,400 plus and counting first responders who have died since that day because of the effects of their response on 9/11. But it's also a time to remember what it meant to be an American on September 12th, 2001, to wake up and know that we had been changed forever. That we would never let that happen again, and to realize we were all in this together as Americans. As Patriots. So, I say to you today, Happy Patriots Day.

At this time I would like to turn over the microphone to my colleague, Fire Chief, Howard Bailey.

Howard Bailey – Volusia County Fire Chief

I just want to make a brief comment to not only remember those whose lives were lost on September 11th, but those who continue to lose their lives because of that incident on that day. And, a quick closing comment would be for the importance of continued support for all of the men and women in emergency services throughout the year, every year. Thank you.

Mike Chitwood – Volusia County Sheriff

Good afternoon. I think all of us look back 19 years ago and can tell you where we were when that first plane struck the tower. There are some memories from that date, 19 years ago that are indelibly seared into our memory. The fire fighters with a hundred pounds of equipment on their backs, trudging into the North Tower, and the South Tower, knowing that there was a chance that they would never return to their loved ones. Those who were trapped inside of the Tower with no other option but to plunge to their deaths. The heroic folks aboard the flight that averted a terrorist attack in Washington, D.C. in

Shanksville, Pennsylvania. So, as you remember those things I think that it is imperative for us to keep one thing in mind; America was probably never as united like it was on September 12th, 2001.

Now, I would ask everyone who is listening and watching if you would observe a moment of silence for all of those heroes and for all those who were murdered on that fateful day. Thank you. May God bless each of you and your families, and may God continue to bless and guide this great nation.