



Joint Information Center on COVID-19 for the State of Florida

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The State of Florida Issues Updates on COVID-19

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - The State of Florida is responding to COVID-19. In an effort to keep Florida residents and visitors safe and aware regarding the status of the virus, the Florida Department of Health will issue this update every day, seven days per week.

Governor Ron DeSantis is in constant communication with Florida Division of Emergency Management Director Jared Moskowitz and State Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees as the State of Florida continues to monitor and respond to the threat of COVID-19.

Today, in a briefing at the Florida Emergency Operations Center, Governor DeSantis announced the following:

Education

- Governor Ron DeSantis today made several announcements to keep Florida's students, instructional staff and faculty safe. He announced that all remaining assessments for school readiness and voluntary prekindergarten and all testing requirements for K-12 will be cancelled for the 2019-2020 school year.
- Governor DeSantis also provided more flexibility to local school districts so they can install and establish additional remote learning opportunities for students, including the ability to purchase devices and internet services.

Information on Restaurants, Bars, Nightclubs and Beaches

- Governor Ron DeSantis issued an [Executive Order](#) that will reduce density and crowds in restaurants, bars, nightclubs and beaches to mitigate the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- **Bars and Nightclubs**
 - Under the direction of Governor DeSantis, all bars and nightclubs throughout Florida will close for the next 30 days. Information is available on the website of Florida's Department of Business & Professional Management (DBPR).
- **Beaches**
 - The Governor is directing parties accessing public beaches in the state of Florida to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance by limiting their gatherings to no more than 10 persons.
- **Restaurants**
 - Restaurants across the state of Florida will now be required to limit customer entry to 50 percent of capacity. Seating must be staggered and limited to ensure seated parties are separated by a distance of at least six feet, in accordance with CDC guidelines. Restaurants are encouraged to remain open and expand take-out and delivery services. Information is available on the website for DBPR.

Reemployment Assistance

- Governor DeSantis reminded Floridians that if their employment has been negatively impacted because of mitigation efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, these Floridians may be eligible to receive Reemployment Assistance.
 - Individuals who are eligible for Reemployment Assistance may include:
 - Those who are quarantined by a medical professional or a government agency,
 - Those who are laid off or sent home without pay for an extended period by their employer due to COVID-19 concerns; and
 - Those who are caring for an immediate family member who is diagnosed with COVID-19
- Governor DeSantis and the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) encourage any Floridian whose employment has been negatively impacted as a result of COVID-19 to visit Floridajobs.org and click on the Reemployment Assistance Service Center to learn more about the program and to watch a short video on how to apply.

Private businesses assisting Floridians

- Governor DeSantis also applauded steps taken by private businesses such as FPL, Duke Energy, TECO, and Uber who are taking steps to assist Floridians with electric bills and delivering free meals to health care workers.

Presidential Preference Primary Election

- Leading up to today's Presidential Preference Primary Election, Governor DeSantis directed Secretary of State Laurel M. Lee to work with Supervisors of Elections throughout Florida to ensure a smooth election. Throughout the day, the Florida Division of Elections remained in constant contact with local elections officials to ensure voters who had not voted prior to election day, had the opportunity to cast their ballot. **The Department of State proactively worked with emergency management officials to ensure that Supervisors had the necessary resources for sanitization and cleaning at polling places to help ensure the safety of voters on Election Day.** Secretary of State Laurel M. Lee held a press conference to share updates from the day, once polls have closed statewide, that will be available for viewing on the Florida Channel.

More Information on COVID-19

To find the most up-to-date information and guidance on COVID-19, please visit the Department of Health's dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#). For information and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), please visit the [CDC COVID-19 website](#). For more information about current travel advisories issued by the U.S. Department of State, please visit the [travel advisory website](#).

For any other questions related to COVID-19 in Florida, please contact the Department's dedicated COVID-19 Call Center by calling **(866) 779-6121**. **The Call Center is available 24 hours per day**. Inquiries may also be emailed to **COVID-19@flhealth.gov**.

What you Should Know

COVID-19 can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, including when an individual coughs or sneezes. These droplets may land on objects and surfaces. Other people may contract COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as many as 14 days following exposure. Most people recover from COVID-19 without needing special treatment. The elderly and those with

underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems and diabetes are more likely to develop serious illness.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. The Department recommends everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick;
- Staying home when you are sick and avoiding contact with persons in poor health;
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
- Covering your cough or sneezing into a tissue, then disposing of the tissue;
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing;
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty; and
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

The CDC does not recommend that asymptomatic, healthy people wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for [health workers](#) and [people who are taking care of someone in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).

A person that experiences a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as fever, cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after travel from any other destination with community transmission should call ahead to their health care provider and local CHD and mention their recent travel or close contact.

If a person has had close contact with someone showing these symptoms who has recently traveled from this area or been in contact with a person with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19, he or she should call ahead to a health care professional and the CHD. The health care provider will work with the Department to determine if the person should be tested for COVID-19.

Actions the state has taken to prepare for and respond to COVID-19:

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

- At the direction of Governor DeSantis, State Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees declared a Public Health Emergency for COVID-19 in Florida.
- Governor DeSantis announced that the State ordered an additional 2,500 test kits to supplement the adequate resources already available to test for COVID-19. These additional test kits will enable the Department of Health, working with Florida health care providers, to test up to an additional 625,000 individuals. The Governor also suspended non-essential in state and all out-of-state travel for state employees for 30 days.
- Established an Incident Management Team to coordinate response operations.
- Defined a high-level phased response strategy for COVID-19.
- Activated a dedicated incident command post for on-site response activities.
- Conducted three public health and health care stakeholder conference calls to provide statewide updates on the current outbreak situation, response actions and guidance for pandemic planning. Over five hundred participants joined the calls.
- Established a public call center for questions regarding COVID-19. The call center launched Monday, March 2.
- Developed and distributed COVID-19 presentation materials to County Health Departments (CHD) for use at community meetings.
- Activated the Joint Information Center in coordination with the Division of Emergency Management.
- Developed and implemented protocols for investigation, surveillance and monitoring for COVID-19 to rapidly detect and contain cases.
- Established mechanisms for monitoring and coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding epidemiological activities.
- Distributed CDC Interim Guidance for public health personnel evaluating Persons Under Investigation (PUI) and asymptomatic close contacts of confirmed cases at their home or non-home residential settings to CHDs.
- Approved and disseminated an updated Clinician Screening Tool for identifying COVID-19 PUIs.
- Distributed a health care provider letter regarding enhanced surveillance and preparedness for COVID-19 to associations, licensed providers, Health Care Coalitions and CHDs.
- Implemented testing at all three State Public Health Laboratories.
- Distributed updated CDC guidance for schools to CHDs and the Department of Education.
- Distributed updated laboratory guidance regarding implementation of testing at State Public Health Laboratories.
- Developing a laboratory surge plan.
- Developing a clinician-level briefing for medical audiences.
- Identifying and monitoring close contacts of presumptive cases. Any close contacts with symptoms will be tested.

- Implemented private lab testing.
- Developed and disseminated pandemic planning guidance.
- Advised CHDs and HCCs to retain expired personal protective equipment until further until further notice.
- Continued development of public information resources.
- Developing infographics for first responders (fire, law enforcement and EMS) regarding infection control and personal protection for COVID-19.
- At the Governor's direction, a public-private partnership has been put in place between Memorial Healthcare in Broward and the National Guard to set up a mobile testing unit.
- At the direction of Governor DeSantis hiring additional epidemiologists from university health programs to help with workload.
- Governor DeSantis directed the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to extend all existing nursing home and assisted living facility licenses for 90 days to remove distraction from patient care.

THE DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Today, Governor Ron DeSantis and Division of Emergency Management Director Jared Moskowitz announced that Florida is continuing to order supplies and personal protective equipment in an effort to mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the state.
- After conducting a thorough assessment of needs, Director Moskowitz has requested the following supplies through Direct Federal Assistance. Supplies are being delivered on a rolling basis, and inventory is being distributed throughout the state 24 hours a day.
 - 5 mobile intensive care units
 - 5,000 ventilators
 - 5,000 hospital beds
 - 50,000 two oz. bottles of hand sanitizer
 - 250,000 coveralls
 - 500,000 gloves
 - 500,000 gowns
 - 500,000 collection kits
 - 100,000 16 oz. bottles of hand sanitizers
 - 150,000 Personal Protective Equipment kits, including coveralls, gowns, and goggles
 - 2 million N95 face masks
- Director Moskowitz is working with the federal government to determine if there is capacity to add US Navy Mercy-Class ships at Florida ports.
- Three field hospitals are being deployed:
 - One field hospital is currently staged in Orlando and can be deployed to other areas in the state as needed.
 - One field hospital is on its way to Broward County and will be set up there.
 - One field hospital is on its way to Ocala and will be staged there and deployed to other areas as needed.

- Mobile COVID-19 testing is also being implemented.

AGENCY FOR HEALTH CARE ADMINISTRATION

- Secretary Mayhew is working directly with hospitals and large health systems to identify potential vacant wings or buildings to provide additional hospital inpatient capacity should it become necessary.
- On March 16, Florida became the first state to receive [CMS approval](#) of its 1135 Medicaid Waiver giving AHCA more flexibility for its COVID-19 response efforts. This federal action lifts Medicaid prior authorization requirements for critical health care services and allows for expedited provider enrollment.
- AHCA distributed a provider alert to licensed health care providers regarding the Division of Emergency Management's new Emergency Order tightening visitation restrictions at residential and long-term care facilities.
- AHCA, in coordination with the DEM and the Department, is hosting ongoing statewide calls for nursing homes, assisted living facilities, intermediate care facilities, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, group homes, and adult family care homes in conjunction with the Florida Health Care Association. Secretary Mayhew and Surgeon General Rivkees are continuing to address critical issues impacting these providers such as restricting visitors and providing updates.
- AHCA, in coordination with DEM and the Department, is hosting ongoing statewide calls for hospitals in conjunction with the Florida Hospital Association. Secretary Mayhew and Surgeon General Rivkees to provide the most up-to-date information to hospital partners and residential facilitates caring for aging and vulnerable populations.
- After previously opening an event on the Emergency Status System (ESS) for hospitals to enter census information, emergency room status updates and isolation beds, AHCA expanded the ESS event to track nursing homes and assisted living facility bed capacity, effective March 15.
- The Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) will be granting a 90-day extension to all licenses for health care providers and regulated facilities.
- AHCA is distributing information regarding regulatory flexibilities created by waivers from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) related to skilled nursing facilities, critical access hospitals, home health agencies, durable medical equipment, provider enrollment, etc.
- AHCA participated in a collaborative call with the Florida Health Care Association, Florida Hospital Association and LeadingAge Florida to discuss patient transfer arrangements between health care facilities such as nursing homes and hospitals.
- The Florida Medicaid Program announced coverage of commercial testing for COVID-19 for dates of service back to February 4.

AGENCY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- APD is implementing telework for employees throughout the state as directed by Governor DeSantis to reduce possible exposure to COVID-19.
- APD and AHCA are hosting a conference call today with provider association leaders to share information on modifications to some existing policies and practices during this state of emergency.
- The agency's three state-run centers in Marianna, Gainesville and Chattahoochee, as well as APD-licensed group homes, are restricting visitors in compliance with the Executive Order to protect the health and safety of our customers.
- APD Adult Day Training programs across the state are screening visitors for possible exposure to COVID-19 using a visitor questionnaire. The questionnaire is also being used to screen visitors coming into APD Regional Offices.
- APD continues to provide an up-to-date status on COVID-19, best practices, preventative tips, and CDC guidance to APD providers, Waiver Support Coordinators, Stakeholders and APD employees.

DEPARTMENT OF ELDER AFFAIRS

- DOEA hosted a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) conference call. All PACE providers are following CDC guidelines for clients, staff, and vendors. They have called clients to check their status and make sure there are no outstanding needs, they have implemented disaster plans, and they have shared information across the state and with partner agencies.
- DOEA is coordinating with AHCA to ensure PACE providers continue to receive updated information on testing facilities.
- DOEA continues to provide technical assistance to Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) regarding program flexibilities including meals, transportation, respite monitoring, service delivery models, EHEAP, health and wellness activities, outreach, board meetings, office closures, work from home, HIPPA, and IT concerns.
- DOEA coordinated the delivery of over 3,000 shelf stable meals to a Miami-Dade County senior center who had expressed concern over some clients going without meals.
- DOEA continues to maintain and disseminate county-level statistics on the number and types of services for use in modeling statewide service interruptions. When service interruptions occur, the local Area Agency for Aging (AAA) providers call clients impacted by service interruptions to offer alternative assistance.
- DOEA's Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders (SHINE) / Senior Medicare Patrol program offered to send all online training modules to the 11 Aging and

Disability Resource Centers. The distribution of training modules to active and pending volunteers would allow volunteers to train from home, on their own time, over the next several weeks and serve as a re-certification process.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- The Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Office of Child Welfare is sending regular communication about COVID-19 specifically to licensed child care providers, directing them to follow the CDC's Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). An FAQ document for providers was also posted prominently on DCF's Child Care webpage.
- DCF's Office of Child Welfare is disseminating a survey to licensed child care providers to assess closures throughout the state. Currently, the decision to close is at the discretion of each individual facility.
- DCF Secretary Chad Poppell sent thorough communication to all DCF staff, contracted partners, and licensed facilities (including child care providers) about COVID-19, including precautionary measures (as outlined by the CDC) and temporary policy updates.
- DCF is working with AHCA, DOEA, and APD to compile and develop guidance for agency staff and stakeholders who work directly with Florida's elderly population and have a higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
- DCF is leading status update calls with both internal leadership and leadership from external contracted partners. For the time being, these calls will take place twice weekly, every Tuesday and Friday.
- DCF General Services staff throughout the state are working with lessors and janitorial contractors to increase sanitizing measures in office buildings, especially restrooms and common areas. They also began taking inventory of sanitizing supplies (disinfecting wipes, Lysol spray, hand-sanitizer, etc.) and are ordering more as needed.
- DCF established strategies for COVID-19 prevention at all three state mental health treatment facilities, as well as the South Florida mental health facilities run by Wellpath Recovery Solutions, a contracted partner. They are reporting daily updates to ensure compliance with virus prevention and monitor potential outbreaks.
- DCF has established a visitation protocol for all state-owned and contracted mental health treatment facilities, as well as vendors and patient families, requiring all outside parties to complete a Visitors Viral Symptoms Screening prior to entering a facility. At this time, there are no cases of patients or facility staff testing positive for COVID-19.
- DCF's Office of Economic Self-Sufficiency is communicating with DEO regarding work requirements and CareerSource operations and availability.
- DCF's Office of Economic Self-Sufficiency implemented screening procedures, including a set of questions that must be asked prior to entry, at all economic self-sufficiency storefronts.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIR

- Effective March 11, 2020, FDVA is restricting visitor access to its State Veterans' Nursing Homes and Domiciliary until further notice, with the exception of essential visitors, such as family members of those residents undergoing end-of-life care.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has also temporarily restricted access to their nursing and community living center facilities to only essential visitors until further notice.
- All VA Medical Centers in Florida are implementing enhanced screening protocols at their facilities. VA Outpatient Clinics are also implementing enhanced screening protocols. Please plan to arrive at the facility well in advance of your appointment to allow additional time for the screening process.
- All VA Vet Centers in Florida providing readjustment counseling and outreach services to veterans and families are open and implementing enhanced screening protocols. At this time, veterans may appear in person or opt in advance for an optional phone consultation.
- Veterans who are concerned they may have symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19) are encouraged to contact the VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center at 1-877-741-3400 (toll free). Clinical staff provide 24/7 virtual care and support, including nurse advice and triage. The service is available at no cost to veterans enrolled for care in the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8).
- Currently, all U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemeteries are open for burial and visitation by the public. Florida has nine National Cemeteries. To schedule a burial, please call 800-535-1117, option 1. In light of concerns regarding COVID-19, some families may prefer to proceed with direct interment of their loved ones and postpone the formal committal services to a later date. Cemetery administrators will work to accommodate these preferences. In addition, cemetery personnel will be discouraged from handshaking and any unnecessary physical contact to minimize the potential transmission of germs and viruses until the pandemic conditions are und