

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 18, 2020

**Contact: Joint Information Center on COVID-19 for the Bay County at (850) 329-8496,
Heather.Kretzer@FLHealth.gov**

BAY COUNTY ISSUES UPDATE ON COVID-19

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Bay County is responding to COVID-19. To keep Bay County residents and visitors safe and aware regarding the status of the virus, the Bay County Joint Information Center will issue daily updates. The Florida Department of Health has launched a [COVID-19 dashboard](#) that will be updated daily at 10 a.m. The state also provides a report detailing surveillance data for every Florida county. The surveillance data report is available [here](#).

Bay County's total COVID-19 cases is at 85. The percent of those testing positive for COVID-19 in Bay County overall is 4%. Of the 2,278 tests processed, there are 2,190 negative results. There are three Florida resident deaths in Bay County from COVID-19. The total Florida resident hospitalizations count is at 12.

The addresses of the 83 positive Bay County residents include; 55 in Panama City, 12 in Panama City Beach, seven in Lynn Haven, three in Youngstown, three in Callaway, one in Southport, one in Parker, and one in Tyndall Air Force Base.

Tuesday, May 19 from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. drive through COVID-19 viral testing will be offered at Deane Bozeman School located at 13410 Hwy 77, Panama City, FL 32409. Thursday, May 21 from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. we will be at the Youngstown/Fountain Recreational Complex at 12321 E. Hwy 20, Youngstown, FL 32466. At both sites, we will test all adults with or without symptoms. Antibody testing is not available.

The Florida Department of Health releases a list of long-term care facilities in Florida associated with COVID-19 cases with active cases and number of deaths in each facility in order to provide real-time data. The list of long-term care facilities with active COVID-19 cases is available [here](#). The list of long-term care facilities with deaths in available [here](#).

Symptoms of a possible infection with COVID-19, include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell, vomiting or diarrhea, and/or sore throat. For a map of testing locations, including private options that accept insurance, visit BayHealthCOVID19.com.

EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS

Get medical attention immediately.

- **Difficulty breathing** or shortness of breath
- Persistent **pain or pressure** in the **chest**
- New **confusion** or **inability to arouse**
- **Bluish lips or face**

For more information on what to do if you think you were exposed to COVID-19, visit FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov/exposure.

We continue to ask high-priority patients to make an appointment so those tests can be sent to the Bureau of Public Health labs which offers a slightly faster turn-around time. High priority patients include; hospitalized patients, healthcare facility workers, workers in congregate living settings, and first responders **with** symptoms, and residents in long-term care facilities or other congregate living settings,

including correctional and detention facilities and shelters, **with** symptoms. If you meet the above criteria, stop the spread and call ahead to DOH-Bay at (850) 872-4455 for screening.

FULL PHASE 1

Executive Order 20-123 will go into effect today, bringing all Florida counties into Full Phase 1: Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida's Recovery. The order provides the following:

- Restaurants and food establishments statewide may allow on-premises consumption of food and beverages so long as they adopt appropriate social distancing measures and limit their indoor occupancy to no more than 50 percent of seating capacity. Outdoor seating is permissible with a minimum of six feet between parties.
- Retail sales establishments statewide may open if they operate at no more than 50 percent of their building occupancy and abide by the safety guidelines issued by the CDC and OSHA.
- Museums and libraries statewide may open at 50 percent of their building occupancy.
- Gyms and fitness centers statewide are permitted to reopen at 50 percent of their building occupancy with social distancing in place and sanitization after each use of equipment.

BAY COUNTY SHORT TERM VACATION RENTALS

Bay County submitted its plan for short term vacation rentals on Friday and provided revisions to the plan over the weekend based on feedback received from the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulations (DBPR). DBPR has set-up a special page for vacation rental status here:

<http://www.myfloridalicense.com/DBPR/vacation-rental-status/?fbclid=IwAR1PmZv2KzsPh5sHiTLEJblu8hB4W5aqM6ZU46kk7ZDW7k9nVNxNZGqKYYKg>. Check the notes section of the Bay County Emergency Management Facebook page for details.

BLOOD DRIVE WITH FDA APPROVED COVID-19 ANTIBODY TEST FOR DONORS

The Bay County Board of County Commissioners will host a blood drive at locations throughout the county this week in an effort to help offset a "critical" blood shortage in the community due to the coronavirus pandemic. All donors who participate will receive an FDA-approved antibody test for COVID-19 and can go online 48 hours after the donation to check their results. No appointment is necessary.

The drive will be held at several county worksites but is also open to the general public at the following locations:

- Bay County Government Center – 840 W. 11th St., Panama City, FL 32401
Tuesday, May 19 from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Emergency Operations Center – 700 Hwy 2300, Southport, FL 32409
Thursday, May 21 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

BAY COUNTY BURN BAN

Bay County on Tuesday enacted a county-wide burn ban that prohibits any outdoor activity that could cause fires. The ban prohibits activities such as open burning; the sale or use of fireworks; lawn, debris or trash burning; improper disposal of matches or cigarettes; and any outdoor activity that could cause sparks or flames. The use of charcoal or gas grills for cooking is permitted under the order.

Illegal activities may result in penalties of a fine not to exceed \$500 or a jail term of no more than 60 days or both. Each day the violation exists is a separate offense or violation. Further, violators of the burn ban may be subject to civil action for abatement and damages.

The ban runs concurrently with the Hurricane Michael emergency declaration, though it can be modified or rescinded by the board. This order applies throughout Bay County, though municipalities may opt out by resolution or ordinance.

ANTIBODY TESTING

Antibody testing is a blood test that can tell you if you've had COVID-19 or a related coronavirus. Antibodies usually develop 1–3 weeks after symptoms start.

If a healthcare facility is offering this service, you will want to ask if it tests for just COVID-19 antibodies (and not general coronavirus, which can include the common cold). Ask if the test is FDA approved.

There are a few things we don't know about COVID-19 antibodies:

- We don't know if having them can protect you from getting COVID-19 again.
- We don't know how long the protection lasts.

What we do know:

- If you test positive and you haven't had symptoms—you've had an asymptomatic infection.
- If you test negative—you probably haven't had COVID-19, but you could have it now or you could get sick if you've recently been exposed.
- Some people may take longer to develop antibodies, and others may never develop antibodies.

HEALTH CARE

Hospitals

Bay County's hospitals are ready and willing to serve your emergency care needs. Ascension Sacred Heart Bay and Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center want the community to know that their emergency rooms are safe. If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to the emergency room at either hospital.

Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is offering a special website for COVID-19. Visit <https://gcmc-pc.com/covid-19/index.dot> for a COVID-19 self-assessment, information on visitation, and other COVID-19 resources. Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is now allowing one visitor per patient, but they have to identify the visitor when they arrive and they can't switch out visitors.

Ascension Sacred Heart Bay also has a special website for COVID-19 available at <https://healthcare.ascension.org/covid-19>. There you will find information on their visitation policies and education on COVID-19. Ascension Sacred Heart Bay has resumed elective surgeries and non-emergent cases as of 5/4/20. They have changed their visitor policy to allow one visitor per person in the building. They are now testing all elective surgical cases for COVID-19 prior to surgery in accordance with Ascension guidelines.

Hospitals are not testing sites but are testing their patients that meet criteria for COVID-19.

Mental Health

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people of all ages. Fear and anxiety about the unknown can sometimes feel overwhelming to adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others call Bay County's Crisis line at (850) 522-4485.

Mental health providers in Bay County are open and available to serve your needs, primarily through telehealth options.

More information from the CDC: <https://bit.ly/2XLPq57>

REOPENINGS AND CLOSURES

BEACHES

Bay County and Panama City Beach beaches are now open.

People who are 65 and over or living with underlying health conditions should continue to follow the safer at home public health advisory. Continue to practice social distancing. Do your part, stay 6 feet apart.

Keep groups to 10 persons or less. Pack hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching your face. For more information visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/visitors.html>.

FLORIDA STATE PARKS

St. Andrews State Park and **Camp Helen State Park** are open for day use, 8 a.m. to sunset, for active recreation only, such as walking, jogging, swimming and fishing. Restrooms and trash cans are available, all other park facilities are closed. Normal park fees apply. Visitors are expected to maintain safe social distances of at least 6 feet apart and limit group size to 10 people. View the full list of limited partial park openings at <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/safety>.

Bay County

The business lobbies of the Bay County Board of County Commissioners are closed to the public effective March 24, 2020 in an effort to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

Tax Collector's Office

The Bay County Tax Collector's lobbies are officially closed to walk in customers for the foreseeable future. They will serve the community through their call center, online services, and mail and drop box locations. For the most critical needs they are doing appointment only for customers who pass a health screening.

Courts

The 14th Judicial Circuit, is not holding court proceedings and trials until further notice. Essential court proceedings are still in place via video and restricted to the public. When possible they recommend you utilize online services or call for assistance (850-763-9061) whenever possible.

Libraries

All Northwest Regional Library System branches are closed to the public. Curbside services will resume at select branches starting on May 4th. Bay County Public Library Curbside: Monday - Saturday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. The BCPL computer lab is accessible for essential tasks during Monday - Saturday from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.; 1:30 - 4:45 p.m. for a 1-hour session per day. Panama City Beach Public Library Curbside: Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. There will not be any overdue fines at this time. Questions? Call 850 -522-2100.

UF/IFAS Extension Office

UF/IFAS Extension Bay County educational programs, events, and meetings scheduled through April 30, 2020 have been postponed due to direction from the University of Florida concerning COVID-19.

Bay County Shooting Range Reopens

The Bay County Shooting Range, operated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), is now reopened to the public on a limited basis and with social distancing measures in place.

The range will be available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Monday at 50-percent capacity.

According to the FWC, every other lane of the range is closed to encourage social distancing, and shooting is limited to one-hour sessions. For more information, call (850) 233-5005.

Bay County Sheriff's Office

Lobby is closed and fingerprinting services are suspended until further notice. The Bay County Jail has an additional method to "visit" an inmate. By going on a website or calling a number, families and friends of

inmates can visit from a home computer or using a mobile device. It does cost money, so the original video visitation is still available in the lobby of the Jail, which remains open. It is hoped the new method will decrease traffic into the jail.

Education

Bay District Schools will remain closed for the rest of the school year based on the guidance from the Florida Department of Education. Information on meal service and distance education can be found at <http://www.bay.k12.fl.us/COVID%2019>. You can also call their information line at (850) 767-HELP (4357). Bay District Schools is beginning to survey our employees to determine the level of interest in COVID-19 testing. Our meals delivery/distribution continues with great impact. Summer Bay Base registration and centralized registration for the 2020-2021 school year continues at the Nelson Building.

Florida State University-Panama City Is closed for face to face classes, but will finish out the semester with all classes moved to an on-line platform. Florida State University has made the decision to temporarily waive the Graduate Records Examinations (GRE) requirements and the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) for Master's and Specialist applicants applying to the Fall 2020 term.

Gulf Coast State College Is closed for face to face classes, but will finish out the semester with all classes moved to an on-line platform.

Callaway

The City of Callaway to close lobbies on March 23, 2020 to the following- Callaway City Hall, customer service, Utility Billing, Building/permitting, Code Enforcement, Public Works, Fire Dept. and Arts and Conference center. All services will remain available but the lobbies to these departments will be closed. For more information go to www.cityofcallaway.com

Lynn Haven

As of April 2, 2020, the offices at the City of Lynn Haven and the Lynn Haven Police Department remain closed to the public.

Mexico Beach

City Hall lobby will be closed until further notice. To make utility payments place it in the drop-box located outside of City Hall, call (850) 648-5700 ext. 1, pay online at www.mexicobeachgov.com

Panama City

City Hall Lobby is closed to the public, all services remain available. Utility Billing – Citizens may pay their utility bill either:

- Online at the City's website: <https://www.pcgov.org/358/Online-Payments>
- Drop-box at the backside of the U.S. Post Office in Downtown Panama City
- Mail-in
- 24-Hour phone line at (855) 748-3080, you need your account number available

The lobby of the Panama City Police Department is closed through at least April 15, 2020. Fingerprinting services at the Panama City Police Department are suspended through at least April 15, 2020. When visiting www.panamacitypolice.org, citizens of Panama City will now have the option to file a police report online. The online report system allows citizens to submit a report 24 hours a day, seven days a week via any internet-enabled computer or mobile device.

Parker

City Hall is closed to the public until further notice. Citizens are encouraged to pay their Utility Bills with the following options:

- Online at the City's website: www.cityofparker.com
- City of Parker drop box located at 1001 W. Park St, Parker, FL 32404
- Mail-in to City of Parker, 1001 W. Park St., Parker, FL 32404
- By phone 1-866-480-8552

Panama City Beach

The City Council is reopening public meetings at 25% capacity, in concert with the Governor's order limiting indoor restaurant seating and retail to 25% occupancy.

Springfield

City Hall will be in moderate lock down. We ask utility payments be made online or utilize the drop box located at City Hall. Please call or email if you need any assistance verses coming to City Hall. Staff will answer your questions or issue. (850) 872-7570. Online at the City's website: www.SpringfieldFL.net

PUBLIC SERVICES

Bay County Sheriff's Office

Watch for COVID-19 scams. 1) There is not FDA approved home testing kit for COVID 19. Do not buy them.2) Do not give personal information or click on a link or open an attachment in an email sent by the CDC. The CDC will not send you an unsolicited email. 3) Do not give to COVID-19 related fundraising events or charities you have never before encountered. Validate all charities before you give. 4) The IRS will not be calling the American public to confirm bank account numbers to facilitate the disbursement of COVID-19 relief checks.

New Map Tools

Bay County GIS has created online resources that map out important COVID-19 information such as testing sites, feeding sites and food pantries and open daycares. This information is available at bayhealthcovid19.org.

Food Banks

The United Way of Northwest Florida is posting information about food banks and other resources in conjunction with Rebuild Bay. Visit <http://unitedwaynwfl.org/>.

Feeding the Gulf Coast (FGTC) continues to serve our area. The food bank and its partner agencies are open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call (888) 704-FOOD or 2-1-1 for more information. Or, visit the website below and click "Find Help" to locate a food pantry by address, zip code, or city or to locate a FGTC-sponsored Summer Meals site for children 18 and under.

Text "FLKIDSMEALS" to 211-211 or "FOOD" to 877-877 to find Summer Meals sites.

United Way of Northwest Florida

The United Way of Northwest Florida is providing information on public service closures and what is available in our area. Please visit their dedicated webpage at <http://unitedwaynwfl.org/covid-19/>. You may also utilize their 211 service for referrals, just call 211 from any phone or visit <https://211nwfl.communityos.org/>.

Rebuild Bay County

Rebuild Bay County may have resources available to assist persons in need. Visit <https://rebuildbaycounty.org/> for more information.

State Resources

The Florida Department of Health has many public service opportunities available on their website including information for businesses, reemployment assistance, and mental health resources. Just visit <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov/public-services/>.

Resources to Support Youth and Families During the Coronavirus COVID-19 Outbreak

The link below provides resources on topics affecting youth and how supportive adults can help. <https://youth.gov/feature-article/covid-coronavirus-resources>

GUIDANCES

REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PUBLIC SPACES, WORKPLACES, BUSINESSES, SCHOOLS, AND HOMES

This guidance is intended for all Americans, whether you own a business, run a school, or want to ensure the cleanliness and safety of your home. This plan is part of the larger United States Government plan and focuses on cleaning and disinfecting public spaces, workplaces, businesses, schools, and can also be applied to your home. Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

CLOTH FACE COVERS/MASK

Wearing a cloth face covering CORRECTLY can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others when you go out on essential trips.

Your cloth face covering should:

- ✓ Reach above the nose, below the chin, and completely cover the mouth and nostrils
- ✓ Fit snugly against the sides of the face
- ✓ Be made of multiple layers of fabric that you can still breathe through
- ✓ Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damaging the material or shape

When removing your face mask, individuals should be careful not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.

If you have a child, remember those under age 2 should not wear a face covering.

For information visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

Mask Kits from Gulf Coast State College Available and Tutorial

Gulf Coast State College mask kits are available in packs of 20 at JOANN, 413 East 23rd Street Panama City and at Marie's Fabrics & Notions, 1501 Mulberry Ave, Ste 2, Panama City, FL 32405

JOANN store information: <https://stores.joann.com/fl/panama-city/2298/>

Marie's: (850) 784-4848

Watch this video tutorial from Gulf Coast State College: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSMpfJ8-TbU>

CARING FOR CHILDREN

Based on available evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults. While some children and infants have been sick with COVID-19, adults make up most of the known cases to date.

It's not known yet whether some children may be at higher risk for severe illness, for example, children with underlying medical conditions and special healthcare needs.

Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>

CARING FOR PETS

Until we learn more about how this virus affects animals, treat pets as you would other human family members to protect them from a possible infection.

There is a small number of animals around the world reported to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, mostly after having contact with a person with COVID-19. Talk to your veterinarian if your pet gets sick or if you have any concerns about your pet's health.

Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

COVID-19 CLEANING AND DISINFECTANT CHEMICAL EXPOSURE PRECAUTIONS

Reports of exposure to cleaners and disinfectants to poison centers increased substantially in March 2020 corresponding with the rise in #COVID19 cases. Learn more about these reports and how to safely use cleaning chemicals: <https://bit.ly/3eBv2d5>.

For Poisoning Emergencies Call 1-800-222-1222 V/TTY. Text POISON to 797979 to add poison control as a contact in your phone.

HOUSEHOLDS LIVING IN CLOSE QUARTERS

This guidance is intended for people living together in close quarters, such as people who share a small apartment, or for people who live in the same household with large or extended families. Read the full guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/living-in-close-quarters.html>

MORE INFORMATION ON COVID-19

For text alert updates from the Florida Department of Health in Bay County, text bayhealth to 888-777. For additional information specific to Bay County, visit BayHealthCOVID19.com. You may also contact the Citizens Information Center 7 days a week from 10 am – 6 pm at (850) 248-6090 or email ask@baycountyfl.gov.

For state level text alerts in the fight against COVID-19, text FLCOVID19 to 888-777.

To find the most up-to-date information and guidance on COVID-19, please visit the Department of Health's dedicated COVID-19 website. 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.

The free *StrongerThanC19* app is available to both iOS and Android users and can be downloaded from the Apple or Google app stores.

The *StrongerThanC19* app and website are designed to gather information to help the Department of Health track and slow the spread of COVID-19 in Florida; they are not intended to be used as a symptom checker designed to dispense medical advice.

Even if you have already submitted a survey via the website, please feel free to download the app and update your answers.