July 30, 2021
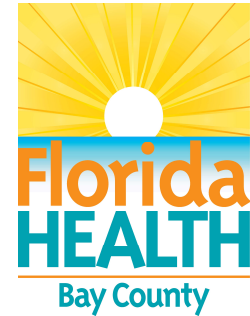
THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN BAY COUNTY ALONG WITH OUR HOSPITAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS WORK TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Contact:
Joe Scully
850-481-4806
joseph.scully@flhealth.gov

Panama City, Fla. –The Florida Department of Health in Bay County (DOH-Bay) along with Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center, and Ascension Sacred Heart Bay remind all residents and visitors to take effective mitigation strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"I can assure you that my staff and I, along with our community partners, are committed to protecting the health of all residents and visitors in Bay County," said Sandon S. Speedling, MHS, CPM, CPH, Administrator and Health Officer, Florida Department of Health in Bay County. "I am asking everyone to follow some simple mitigation protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

"Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is continuing to monitor the recent uptick in the number of positive COVID-19 cases within Bay County and the surrounding communities. Our hospital continues to practice the same mitigation strategies we have used throughout the pandemic to protect our colleagues and patients," shared Brad Griffin, CEO of Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center. "Locally, we are seeing a much higher influx of COVID-19 patients, who need treatment and hospitalization. We cannot stress enough the importance of becoming vaccinated. Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine has been proven to be one of the most effective tools we have to stop the spread of the virus."

"Recently, we've seen a significant and concerning increase in patients requiring hospitalization for COVID-19," said Robin Godwin, President of Ascension Sacred Heart Bay. "Within all the Ascension hospitals in Florida and Alabama, we have found that 96 percent of our hospitalized patients are not vaccinated. We're seeing many patients in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Vaccination is proving to be the best defense we have against the virus and keeping the public healthy. We encourage everyone in our communities to get vaccinated and partner with us to stop the spread. The approved vaccines are safe and effective, and the benefits of being vaccinated outweigh any identified risks or side effects."
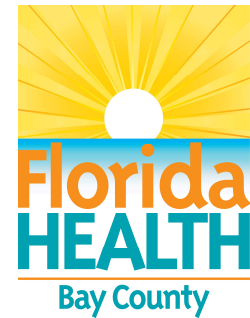
Vaccinations

The State of Florida focused on *Seniors First* and most vulnerable populations. Seniors have a very high vaccination rate of 84%. Per last week's report, Florida has reached a milestone of 60% vaccination rate of all eligible populations. It is essential to continue this stride and increase vaccinations across eligible age groups.

The COVID-19 vaccines teach the human body how to recognize and fight the COVID-19 virus and protect against the risk of severe illness. While some vaccinated individuals may still contract COVID-19, they are much less likely to be at risk for severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

DOH-Bay is offering the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines by appointment on Thursdays and Fridays. Please call (850) 872-4455, select option 1, to schedule an appointment.

Ascension Sacred Heart Bay is offering the Pfizer vaccine to individuals 12 - 18 years old Monday – Friday. Please call (850) 804-3870 to schedule an appointment.

Please visit here for a list of other vaccine locations.

Where to Get Tested

There are numerous locations in Bay County to get tested. Some sites are free, and some require a fee. A list of testing locations in Bay County is located here. Individuals should refrain from going to local emergency rooms for testing.

Mitigation Strategies

As cases increase, individuals should continue to watch for COVID-19 symptoms, **especially if unvaccinated**.

If you are vaccinated and develop symptoms of COVID-19, you should keep your distance and be evaluated by your health care provider and get tested.

Public health is everyone's responsibility. In addition to getting vaccinated, the best way to prevent illness is to practice tried and true public health mitigation measures, including:

- Getting vaccinated against other preventable diseases.
- Staying home when you are sick.
- Washing your hands frequently and for at least 20 seconds.
- Using hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol in the ingredients.
- Covering your cough or sneeze by using a tissue or your sleeve or elbow.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.

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About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board, works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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