

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 23, 2020

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BAY COUNTY ISSUES UPDATE ON COVID-19

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Bay County is responding to COVID-19. In an effort 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 twice daily. We also encourage all Floridians to take the COVID-19 Community Action Survey by visiting www.StrongerThanC19.com

Bay County's total COVID-19 case is at 60, including 59 residents and one non-resident. While Bay County's testing is increasing, the percent of those testing positive for COVID-19 overall is 6%. **Of the 970 tests processed, there are 909 negative results.** There are two deaths in Bay County from COVID-19. The total hospitalizations count is at ten including nine residents and one non-resident.

There are currently two long-term care facilities in Bay County that have or have had positive cases of COVID-19. The Florida Department of Health has published the list at FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov. [The twice daily COVID-19 report also includes information by county about](#) cases and deaths related to staff or residents in long-term care facilities. There have been two residents or staff in long-term care facilities that have tested positive for COVID-19.

The addresses of the 59 positive Bay County residents include; 35 in Panama City, 12 in Panama City Beach, one in Southport, five in Lynn Haven, one in Parker, three in Youngstown, one in Tyndall Air Force Base, and one in Callaway. The non-resident case is from Texas.

Age, gender, race, and ethnicity data is available on the dashboard. Zip code level case numbers are also available. The dashboard is updated twice daily around 10:30 am and 5:30 pm. For more detail on Florida resident cases, please visit the live DOH Dashboard [here](#). More information on a case-by-case basis can also be found in the Daily Report at FloridaHealthCOVID19.gov.

Beaches Reopening Friday

Bay County and Panama City Beach beaches will be open beginning Friday, April 24 from 6:00 am to 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. There are no limitations to activities or to what people can bring to the beach. In accordance with Governor DeSantis' executive order, vendors considered non-essential are not allowed to operate on beaches. Violators face up to a \$500 fine and/or arrest.

Bay County's beaches offer abundant opportunities for recreational activities. While it is important for your health physically and mentally to continue physical activity, it's also important to continue to take precautions against COVID-19.

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 about protecting yourself and others from COVID-19 while visiting parks and recreational facilities, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/visitors.html>.

Bay District Schools

BDS meals delivery/distribution continues, as does planning for graduation. We are implementing a centralized registration site to facilitate new students for the 20-21 school year. All 600 hotspots have been distributed to our students in need.

TESTING

Stop the spread and call ahead. Please review the criteria for testing for community-based testing sites below. There is no out of pocket costs for testing at any of these sites.

The Florida Department of Health in Bay County is using the CDC guidance for testing. We are able to test persons who are in Priority 1 or Priority 2 as listed below. Call (850) 872-4455 for screening and an appointment.

Priority 1

- Hospitalized patients
- Healthcare facility workers with symptoms

Priority 2

- Long-term care facility patients with symptoms
- 65 years of age and older with symptoms
- Underlying conditions with symptoms
- First responders with symptoms

Private labs, including Ascension Sacred Heart Medical Group and PanCare Health, can also test CDC Priority 3.

Priority 3

- Critical infrastructure workers with symptoms
- Individuals who do not meet any of the above categories with symptoms
- Healthcare facility workers and first responders
- Individuals with mild symptoms in communities experiencing high numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations

For screening with Ascension Sacred Heart Medical Group call (850) 746-2684. If you meet the criteria an appointment will be scheduled. Testing will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 am – 1 pm at Tommy Oliver Stadium in Panama City.

In addition to CDC priorities 1, 2, and 3, PanCare Health is testing at-risk groups who are asymptomatic as follows:

- Residents in long-term care facilities
- Persons who are 65 years and older
- Persons with underlying health conditions

Call PanCare Health's COVID-19 hotline at ((850) 215-4181 Monday – Friday from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm for screening. If you are eligible for testing, you will be given an appointment and instructions. For more information visit <https://pancarefl.org/covid-19>.

If you don't meet the criteria for testing, please consult your medical care provider for instructions. Most people who get sick with COVID-19 will have only mild illness and are able to recover at home without medical care.

If you develop these emergency warning signs for COVID-19, 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](https://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-exposure.html).

CLOTH FACE COVERS/MASK

The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. It is important to note that these face coverings:

1. Are not surgical or N-95 respirators, which continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and medical first responders, and
2. The use of cloth face coverings does not mean we can remove previously set social distancing measures.

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

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.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar in children and adults. However, children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally shown mild symptoms. Reported symptoms in children include cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. Vomiting and diarrhea have also been reported.

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. There is more to learn about how the disease impacts children. You can learn more about who is most at risk for health problems if they have COVID-19 infection on [Are You at Higher Risk for Severe Illness](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html).

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.

- Do not let pets interact with people or other animals outside the household.
- Keep cats indoors when possible to prevent them from interacting with other animals or people.
- Walk dogs on a leash, maintaining at least 6 feet (2 meters) from other people and animals.
- Avoid dog parks or public places where a large number of people and dogs gather.

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>

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.

Older adults (65 and older) and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for severe illness from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The following information is aimed to help you protect those who are most vulnerable in your household.

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

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. They are following CDC guidelines to keep you and your family protected from COVID-19. They say they are seeing persons who are coming in for care later than they should and they are concerned for the well-being of the community members they serve. 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.

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.

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>

Bay County Sheriff's Office

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.

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.

The sandy beaches of Bay County are closed. The exception is property owners. If someone owns waterfront property, whether directly or through a property owners association, they can be on the sandy beach down to the high water line. Property owners are not allowed in the water right now. Boats are allowed in the water. Surfers are allowed in the water if they arrive and leave by boat and don't surf to the sand. Property owners are allowed to sit on the sand and engage in recreational activities, as long as they are not in groups of 10 or more.

ORDERS

Bay County

The Bay County Board of County Commissioners convened on March 17, 2020 where they voted 5-0 to declare a Local State of Emergency (LSE) (Resolution #3700) for Bay County as part of our response to COVID-19.

The Bay County Emergency Management Division is at a Level I – Full Virtual Activation supporting the Department of Health in Bay County.

Callaway

The City of Callaway is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners.

Lynn Haven

To follow the lead of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Bay County Board of County Commissioners, the City Commission declared a Local State of Emergency (LSE) for the City of Lynn Haven on March 18, 2020. In an effort to better distribute information and updates for the City concerning COVID-19 (Coronavirus) we have added an alert section on the City website title COVID-19 City Updates/Alerts. To subscribe to these alerts please select the light teal subscribe button on our main page of the City website: www.cityoflynnhaven.com.

Mexico Beach

The City of Mexico Beach is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners.

Panama City

To follow the lead of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Bay County Board of County Commissioners, the City Commission declared a Local State of Emergency (LSE) for the City of Panama City on March 18, 2020.

Panama City Beach

The City of Panama City Beach is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners. Visit www.beachpolice.org for more information and to file a police report online.

Parker

The City of Parker is under a State of Health Emergency as declared by Bay County Board of County Commissioners. Check our website, www.CityofParker.com, for important links to the Health Department, Bay County EOC and other resources for information on COVID-19 and what you can do to try to stay safe.

Springfield

To follow the lead of Governor Ron DeSantis and the Bay County Board of County Commissioners, the City Commission declared a Local State of Emergency (LSE) for the City of Springfield on March 17, 2020.

Tyndall Air Force Base

The 325th FW Commander has directed Health Protection Condition (HPCON) CHARLIE (SUBSTANTIAL, Sustained community transmission) in response to COVID-19. This action is precautionary. In the case of an unusual health risk, the Department of Defense uses health protection measures known as HPCONs, to determine what actions are needed to best protect the base populace and surrounding community.

Naval Support Activity Panama City

Navy Region Southeast has directed Health Protection Condition (HPCON) CHARLIE (SUBSTANTIAL, Sustained community transmission) in response to COVID-19. This action is precautionary. In the case of an unusual health risk, the DoD uses health protection measures known as HPCONs, to determine what actions are needed to best protect the base populace and surrounding community.

PANAMA CITY BEACH

CLOSURES

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 are 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 in response to COVID-19. Please do not return your library items until the libraries have reopened. There will be no overdue fines. Questions? Call 850 -522-2100. The computer lab is accessible for essential tasks at the Bay County Public Library (898 W 11th Street) Monday - Saturday from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. for a 1 hour session per day.

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 Sheriff's Office

Lobby is closed and fingerprinting services are suspended until further notice.

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 continuing our meals delivery/distribution efforts. Graduation announcements were made by Mr. Husfelt today as well as updated grading guidelines for the 4th nine weeks.

Florida State University-Panama City Is closed for face to face classes, but will finish out the semester with all classed moved to an on-line platform.

Gulf Coast State College Is closed for face to face classes, but will finish out the semester with all classed 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.cityofcalloway.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

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

Beaches

- Bay County and Panama City beaches will open starting Friday from 6:00 – 9:00 am and 5:00 – 8:00 pm. Social distancing must be maintained.
- Tyndall Air Force Base has closed their beaches
- NSA Panama City has closed their beaches and marina facilities
- Mexico Beach City Council open for residents from 6:00 – 9: 00 am and 5:30 – 7:30 pm. Social distancing must be maintained. Individual recreational activities are permitted. No sports equipment and no gathering. Public parking remains closed.

PUBLIC SERVICES

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/>.

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.