Mission:
To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.

Florida HEALTH

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Scott A. Rivkees, MD
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

A Message from the Florida Department of Health in Franklin and Gulf Counties on COVID-19.

We continue to read about new cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19) across the U.S. and now cases in Florida. The latest COVID-19 Florida information can be found on floridahealth.gov. I've also found the Twitter page to be very helpful for up to date information by following @HealthyFla.

We are continuing to work closely with our local healthcare partners and other members of the community to reduce people's risk of being exposed to COVID-19. If we do have a presumptive positive case, we would issue a press release to make our residents aware and provide as much information necessary to decrease risk of exposure.

Illness due to this new coronavirus or COVID-19 is generally mild, especially for children and young adults. Most people will be able to recover from COVID-19 at home. However, it can cause serious illness for some who may need hospital care. People who are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness include older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease.

So how does it spread? You can only get COVID-19 from someone who has COVID-19. The virus spreads form person to person. Someone who is actively sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others through small droplets from the nose or mouth, including when an individual coughs or sneezes. Usually this means between people who are in close contact with one another (about 6 feet). These droplets can then land in the mouth or nose of people who are nearby or possibly inhaled into their lungs. Droplets may also land on objects and surfaces. People could get the virus by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose and mouth. While some things about this novel strain of coronavirus are uncertain, infectious disease scientists believe that the virus has the potential to survive on surfaces for up to several days. Some people are thought to be the most contagious when they are the most symptomatic. In other words, when they are the sickest. Symptoms appear between 2-14 days after exposure and can include fever, cough, difficulty breathing. But some spread could occur from people showing no symptoms, although this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

For those who fall within the higher risk category for COVID-19, it's important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick. There is a lot of helpful information on the cdc.gov website to help you prepare. Steps include stocking up on over-the-counter medicines to treat fever and other symptoms as well as purchasing supplies like tissues. These are good tips especially since we are still in flu season.

Florida Department of Health in Gulf County
2475 Garrison Avenue • Port St. Joe, Florida 32456
PHONE: 850-227-1276 • FAX 850-227-7587
Florida Department of Health in Franklin County
139-12th Street • Apalachicola, Florida 32320
PHONE: 850-653-2111 • FAX 850-653-1727
FloridaHealth.gov

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Also, have conversations with your healthcare provider about how you would obtain extra necessary medications if there were to be community spread in your county and you needed to stay home for a prolonged period. If we were to ever have community spread in our area, we are going to ask individuals at higher risk to stay home as much as possible and avoid crowds. Please also make sure you get your flu and pneumonia vaccines. The health department has flu vaccines available for adults and both flu and pneumonia vaccines available for children. Please call 850-653-2111 to make an appointment in Franklin County or 850-227-1276 to make an appointment in Gulf County.

Hearing all of this information and with the extensive media coverage COVID-19 is getting, it is quite normal for people to worry about how the COVID-19 outbreak will affect them and their loved ones.

However, together we can channel our concerns into actions to protect ourselves, our loved ones, our at-risk populations, our healthcare workers and our community. We are all in this together.

Here is our **community plan** thus far:

1. **First and foremost among priority actions, is exercising good personal health behaviors and hygiene habits.**

What does that mean?

Let's talk about washing your hands. Handwashing is one of the most important ways you can keep from getting sick and spreading germs to others. Dirty hands spread disease. Wash 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.

Watch this CDC detailed 3-minute video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZw4Ga3jg3E.
This video has been shared with our schools and can be used for:

- All age audiences
- Discusses the steps and doesn't rely only on reading ability
- Great detail, discusses how germs are spread

In addition to regular and thorough hand-washing, practice good respiratory hygiene:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. It's harder than you think! According to the CDC, studies have shown that people touch their eyes, nose and mouth about **25 times every hour.**
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. Do NOT even think about stepping near our Assisted Living Facilities or Nursing homes if you are ill. These places are tightening up on their visitor policies to keep these patients safe.
- And cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask. The CDC does not recommend that people who are well 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).

2. **Second, keep informed and follow the advice of your local health department on any restrictions put in place on travel, movement and gatherings. CDC travel guidance can be found using this link**.

   https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html

- You can call your health department for questions related to international travel. Level 3 travel requires residents to self-isolate for 14 days following the date of return to the United States. Level 2 and Cruises are recommended to monitor your health and limit interactions with others for 14 days after returning to the United States. If you become symptomatic, immediately self-isolate and contact your county health department or health care provider. **Further guidance on cruises and specifics to social distancing per DOH is sent from DOH-Franklin/Gulf titled "Returning International Travelers (Foreign Countries and Cruises)".**

Contact the health department for any questions related to home isolation. If you become sick during self-isolation, call your county health department. CDC also recommends travelers, particularly those with underlying health issues, defer all cruise ship travel worldwide. Franklin: 850-653-2111, Gulf: 850-227-1276.

3. And third, if a person thinks they have COVID-19, they should call their health care provider ***before*** going to their office so the provider can take precautions to prevent exposing other people. In some cases, they are going to meet you in the parking lot. It's just a precaution. We are really trying to keep our healthcare workers safe. Other patients safe. Review your signs, symptoms and travel history with your physician. Your physician will evaluate you for other possible causes of respiratory illness and also contact the county health department to coordinate COVID-19 testing. If you are without health insurance or a health care provider, please contact the county health department so the health department can coordinate your medical evaluation and testing. (Gulf: 850-227-1276, Franklin: 850-653-2111).

The health department is here to help you answer any questions you have about COVID-19. Franklin: 850-653-2111. Gulf: 850-227-1276. There is also a call center managed by the state at 1-866-779-6121, available 8 a.m. to midnight.
Thank you.

Sarah Hinds
Administrator