



5/15/20 Press Conference on COVID-19 (@ 12 PM from Jacksonville)

- DeSantis emphasizes the need for people to seek care for heart issues and get their kids vaccinated
- DeSantis wants to recognize the need for addressing issues that are effects of public health mitigation, such as behavioral help
- Mayor Lenny Curry
 - Jacksonville Fire Rescue Reports (COVID related) are way down, along with a decrease in their positivity rate
 - Opioid abuse is high, tied to mental health issues with public health mitigation
- Tom Vanosdol, President and CEO, Ascension Florida
 - They've cared for about 3,000 suspected COVID patients, 300 tested positive for COVID
 - Hundreds of patients have gone home safely and healthily
 - They (Ascension Medical Group) opened drive-thru testing sites and tested 10,000 people
 - They began to reopen for non-urgent medical procedures on May 4th and have grown in number of operations that they do. They test every patient first
- Dr. F. Huson Gilberstadt, Chief Clinical Officer Emergency Medicine, Ascension Florida
 - Tells people that if they need care, the emergency room is safe
 - Suffering out of fear of COVID is not a good idea
- Dr. Estrellita H. Redmon Chief Medical Officer, Ascension St. Vincent's Medical Group
 - Across North Florida, Ascension Medical Group provided drive-thru testing
 - Now providing testing to residents and staff at long-term care facilities
 - Seen a major increase in virtual care. Have had 25,000 virtual visits over the last 6 weeks, average is typically 100 visits over that period
- Dr. Mandy Klipa, Clinical Service Line Director, Ascension Medical Group
 - Established respiratory clinics for symptomatic patients
- DeSantis asks if going forward, they could handle another outbreak
 - Vanosdol states they are watching the data, and they are fully prepared
- DeSantis emphasizes that outside of Southeast Florida, spikes in numbers are from three things:
 - Prison outbreaks
 - Long-term care facilities, which they are continuing to address
 - New testing sites creating result dumps
- DeSantis asks Curry about their involvement in mitigating the virus in long term care facilities
 - Curry responds that they already have the capacity and are using federal money to add to that. Collaborates with the hospitals every week to stay on the same page

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- Drive-thru testing will continue at Jaguars stadium, recommends testing for long-term care staff every two weeks especially with testing sites that may not have followed regulations and asymptomatic carriers
 - Redmon states they have tested 7 facilities today
 - Klipa states they are testing at facilities that have not had cases
- DeSantis states they had 1,000 facilities with no cases and a few facilities with 1 or 2 cases but not a big cluster.
- The virus spreads differently in different environments, so outdoor areas have been fine, but prisons, meat packing plants, and nursing homes have had issues. They are continuing to protect the vulnerable like they already have been
- DeSantis is working, at the president's request, on a plan for mitigating international travel. The new concern is Brazil, and they are also screening New York travelers
- Throughout the country, the bulk of deaths are linked to nursing homes. They recognized this early and started doing mitigation for that early.
 - Dolphin Point was able to isolate positive patients, which is helpful for mitigating the spread especially for patients that did not require ICU hospitalization
 - They are going to follow this model across the state since not every nursing home has that ability
 - US Veterans Association has been going into nursing homes, especially veterans nursing homes to test
 - 10 million masks, 1 million gloves, ½ a million face shields, 60,000 gowns to long-term care facilities
- Mobile testing lab: 500 tests a day with a 45-minute turnaround. Commercial labs can take 2-3 days.
- They are doing a surveillance system of long-term care facilities: testing samples for communities, they already doing this for flu. Something like this is likely to happen nationally for the population
- 32% of the fatalities are 65 and over, have not had deaths for anyone under 25. DeSantis states they can open up an economy and still protect that vulnerable group.
- Phase One: they were following white house guidance for this. In Florida, they decided not to do movie theaters, but did do limited sit-down dining. As far as religious centers, states that they couldn't constitutionally close those.
 - They put elective surgeries back because that's a public health issue, but they did not open gyms even though they could according to that guidance.
 - Got a request from Orange County Mayor about barber shops and salons after Phase One began, that's been going well
 - They are requiring all hospitals to test all patients returning to long-term care facilities even if they were not in for COVID
 - Telling long-term care facilities that if they can't isolate, they need to work on other options

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- There was a peak for new cases on April 3rd but declined by the end of April and early May. In the last week, if there is a new peak it's usually related to prisons or nursing homes. There are fewer cases coming in even with more testing
- Positivity rate: end of March beginning of April, it was around 10%, no higher than 15%, it never skyrocketed like New York or New Jersey
 - Recently it's been between 1%-2%, but there have been prison outbreaks of the virus that have pushed the rate to 4%. They are separated from the general population though and its close quarters, so the rate just for prisons is around 15%
 - They have capacity for 15,000-20,000 for testing sites, and they can do more but there hasn't been a push for it.
- With serological tests and antibodies: lots of people said they were sick in January but negative on flu. It's likely there is lots of immunity if it was here in January
- At the beginning of Phase One, they had 600 ICU patients statewide. Now it's 472.
- Ventilator use: May 4th was 340, now it's 232. 32% decrease. About 6,000 available.
- COVID fatalities is much lower than other states
- Moving into full Phase One effective Monday
- Yesterday, Mayors of Broward and Miami-Dade wanted to move forward. Moving into Phase One on Monday.
- Mitigation happened nationally in order to prevent overwhelming hospitals.
 - Predictions of 470,000 hospitalization by April 24th , and we only have 70,000 hospital beds. That number wasn't based on data. On April 24th, they only had 2,000 hospitalization. The curve has been flattened.
 - Moving forward doesn't mean they are no longer doing nothing for COVID
 - The most important thing going forward with new cases: how many of these cases are clinically consequential?
 - Going forward: they would like there to be no cases, but that's not likely. But keeping track of the clinical consequence is important
- Full Phase One (In most counties, effective Monday May 18th):
 - Long-term care employees must be tested.
 - Dedicated testing lanes, serological testing, especially in South Florida.
 - So: frequent diagnostic testing, but also do the antibody testing
 - Continuing to do elective surgeries. It's important for people's health and the hospitals can handle this
 - Restaurants: operating up to 50% capacity based on spacing of tables OR putting up plexiglass partitions, effective Monday
 - Retail will also go to 50% capacity.
 - Museums and libraries: 50% capacity, but local governments can make those calls

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- Gyms can operate, respecting social distancing. Outdoor fitness is lower risk if these gyms do that (like CrossFit). Gyms should be sanitizing machines and equipment after use.
- Professional sports venues: Any Florida team can train of course, once the season begins they can use the venues to play. If there are states that aren't going to budge, that's fine. Fans may not be in the stands. It's low risk to let them play in empty venues if they test everyone. Talks about UFC and WrestleMania coming back, letting people from other states use additional facilities in the state.
- Amusements parks: parks can submit reopening plans to the state and identify the date they can open safely and get an endorsement from the relevant official in the county they are based.
- The only things they are not doing are movie theaters because enclosed indoor environments are great for spreading the virus. Drive-thru theaters are fine.

Questions:

- Using outside vendors for unemployment: are there concerns about data security?
What do you say to people who have been waiting for weeks or months?
 - The old system was designed to accommodate only 1,000 people. They had to fix the entire system because they suddenly had hundreds of thousands of people on the system. They made the decisions necessary to send out payments. Work still needs to be done.
 - Part of the issue is they have to check the application against a federal database, which is really slow.
 - "The system was never designed for a voluntary cessation of the economy"
- Question about the many people brought on to answer unemployment calls who may not have been trained to handle it
 - Originally a lot of calls were to reset PINS, and that is still a big part of this.
 - They can't just go off of an anecdote with this. They are doing their best with every case, but there are a lot of incomplete applications. If you applied in late March and you had a complete and were eligible for unemployment, you should have received payment
- When will bars and short-term rentals be able to operate?
 - Bars were not included in phase one for the White House guidance. Short-term rentals can operate if they submit their safety plan to the local government. They should not be renting to people from epicenters of the virus, like New York. But renting to other Floridians should be fine
- There are concerns about a second wave. How do you make sure that Floridians feel their communities are still safe?

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- DeSantis states that nobody really knows, but they just have to be prepared. There has not been a wave of cases in May so far. The way it's going, throughout the country it is receding and it's only peaking in certain spots like prisons and long-term care facilities. They will be looking to see if there is a big outbreak in communities.
- People are now saying there is a need for contact tracing. Florida already does this through the integrated public health system. That will continue in a way that does not violate people's rights.
- Also looking at European countries: they have not seen a big second wave.
- There's a lot of concerns about resurgence in the fall, but no one really knows yet. A seasonal resurgence may or not happen. You will never get to a point where it's gone, and a vaccine is not a guarantee. You just have to be prepared. As long as you're protecting the vulnerable, the cases will be less likely to be clinically significant
- Should parents prepare to send their kids to summer camp?
 - They are looking to move forward with that. But to deprive kids of summer activities is a big mistake. Extracurriculars and events are a big part of life that were just taken away, and these are a big part of life for kids. The data is showing that this is a low risk for young kids. The CDC says the kids are more likely to be hospitalized for influenza than for COVID
 - In Switzerland, Sweden: they are thinking the parents are more likely to infect the kids. That's not been proven yet, but the research and Florida's experience should be taken seriously.
 - There have not been a lot of outbreaks tied to daycares. The school year is distance learning for the rest of the year, but there is a significant cost to depriving kids of activities indefinitely.