

February 25, 2020



## ICYMI: State Surgeon General Briefs Florida Senate on COVID-19 and Ongoing Preparedness Efforts

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**Tallahassee, Fla.** — On Tuesday, February 18, State Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees provided members of the Senate Health Policy Committee with an update on the latest available information regarding COVID-19 along with an overview of the extensive preparedness efforts currently being led by the Florida Department of Health's (Department) fully-integrated public health system.

*"The Florida Department of Health is diligently planning and preparing for any potential outbreak of COVID-19. After regular calls with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, our state's Surgeon General and his dedicated team of professionals are equipped with the necessary guidelines for screening, prevention and treatment options. Rest assured that under Governor DeSantis, the Sunshine State will continue leading in the field of public health and the safety of our residents is of top priority," said Lt. Governor Jeanette Nuñez.*

**State Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees** said, *"In terms of what is known, let me say, at the onset, that there are no cases of novel coronavirus, now called COVID-19, in Florida. This is a rapidly emerging situation that we are carefully following. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will provide updated information as soon as it becomes available.*

...

**"You can only contract this virus from an individual who is infected with it.**

...

*"In the US, there are [14] individuals with coronavirus. 13 of these individuals contracted the virus while in Wuhan and two of the [14] are immediate family members of individuals who contracted the virus in Wuhan.*

*Importantly, per the CDC, there is currently no evidence of community-based person to person transmission in the US.*

...

**"...public health happens quietly in the background, but this is what we prepare for every day. The Department has been fully engaged from the very beginning of this outbreak and has been monitoring the situation since early January. We have an Incident Management Team in place. We are working lockstep with the CDC, receiving multiple updates on a daily basis. More than several hundred members of the Department are engaged in this response. This includes members in our central offices and our 67 county health departments. Our fully**

**integrated county health department system allows us to respond quickly and accurately.**

...

*“We are having weekly calls with state health partners. Last week’s call on Wednesday had several hundred individuals.*

...

***“If there is an individual with suspected COVID-19, CDC and Department protocols are in place for health care providers.***

...

***“The goal of this public health response is containment of the virus and to stop person to person transmission. We hope to have lab testing soon in the state of Florida. CDC issued kits that were received at each of our three main laboratories, Jacksonville, Tampa and Miami, but, due to a problem with one of the reagents, the kits are being remanufactured and will be reissued. We will notify the public and the health care community when we are doing testing in our state.***

...

***“There are no COVID-19 cases in Florida. If there is a confirmed case, it will absolutely be reported to the public.***

...

***“Per Florida statute, patient confidentiality is strictly upheld, and it is very highly valued by the state. To read from the statute:***

*‘All information contained in laboratory reports, notifiable disease or condition case reports and in related epidemiological investigatory notes is confidential as provided in Section 381.0031(6), F.S., and will only be released as determined as necessary by the State Health Officer or designee for the protection of the public’s health due to the highly infectious nature of the disease, the potential for further outbreaks, and/or the inability to identify or locate specific persons in contact with the cases.’*

...

*“With there being no cases in Florida, and with isolation procedures in place, the potential for further outbreak is currently low, thus, per statute, we cannot comment on persons under investigation at present, but we are actively monitoring the situation for any potential needed changes.*

...

***“The State of Florida is firmly committed to doing everything we can to prepare for COVID-19.”***

To view this presentation in its entirety, courtesy of The Florida Channel, please visit:

<https://thefloridachannel.org/videos/2-18-20-senate-committee-on-health-policy/>

The best and most up-to-date resource for information and guidance regarding COVID-19 is the Department’s dedicated COVID-19 webpage, available at:

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/COVID-19/index.html>

## **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.

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and Twitter at [@HealthyFla](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit [www.FloridaHealth.gov](http://www.FloridaHealth.gov).

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