

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory 11 January 2021

Cases of COVID-19 are occurring in Florida and locally at an increased rate compared to a month ago. Local hospitalization numbers for COVID are higher than they have been, but relatively stable over the last week. On January 11, 2021 there are 139 patients with COVID in the two hospitals with 29 patients in intensive care. Ten patients are requiring the use of a ventilator. This is consistent with the trend we have seen of late. TVH has seen an increase in positive test numbers to 22% at the end of last week at our test sites. The trend over the last seven days is a much higher percentage of those who test positive over age 65. For the statistically inclined: the median age for people testing positive in Sumter County since March 2020 increased from 62 to 64. The movement of the median age in such a short time is consistent with the higher frequency of positive tests in those over 65. We are also seeing more COVID infections among our staff who are treating patients. We are seeing many people return for testing who know they are positive and this is unfortunate as it increases the risk for those who are doing testing and anyone else those who are doing testing may contact. Today, there is no role for retesting patients who test positive. These patients should complete their quarantine and seek to limit exposing others, especially in this community where so many are at risk.

Since the last advisory community vaccinations have begun at a slow pace. Two vaccines have Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A third vaccine is expected to receive review and approval in January 2021. Governor Desantis signed the Executive Order 20-315 (link below) prioritizing the order of those who will be vaccinated. The prioritization is guided by preventing death. The Departments of Health in Sumter, Marion and Lake counties have initiated vaccinations on a small scale. Select Publix locations have also been provided vaccine to help with the effort. There is a larger scale vaccination effort starting in The Villages Tuesday, January 12, 2021 (link below). This effort is the result of a state contract with Global Medical Response (GMR) for a drive through vaccination site.

The biggest issues with the two approved vaccines are still production and distribution. GMR has 4,000 doses for vaccination this week and a commitment from the state for up to 90,000 doses over 90 days. GMR is using the Moderna vaccine. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines each require two doses. The Janssen vaccine may be seeking Emergency Use Authorization at the end of January and will only need one dose. All producers are working to meet global demand. In Florida, there are 4 million residents over the age of 65 so there will need to be a supply of eight million vaccine doses to cover these folks.

Some general information about vaccines and what to expect: The three vaccines developed work to get the body to produce a protein that your immune system responds to that should protect against COVID-19. All have been projected to be 90-95% effective. There is no chance of catching COVID from the vaccine. These are a direct result of Operation Warp Speed (link below). As vaccines need your body to build immunity, expect this will take time. Since the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines each require two doses, expect immunity will not be present for 6-8 weeks after your first dose. This means that social distancing, limited attendance at gatherings, hand washing and mask wearing remain important to reduce the likelihood of becoming infected or spreading COVID-19.

TVH has been running rapid testing with support from the State of Florida using Abbott Labs Binax tests supplied by the federal government. To date, TVH is approaching 11,500 tests run and overall positive rate is over 10%. Peak day testing has been about 22%. Another 5,000 test kits were recently received so

testing will continue. There is no cost for testing and you do not have to be a TVH patient to be tested. Testing is being offered at our Brownwood and Creekside Care Centers by on-line appointment.

The website is [www.tvhcovidtest.com](http://www.tvhcovidtest.com) with availability on first come, first served basis. As stated above, **please do not sign up if you have already tested positive** as it increases the risk of infecting others.

As Florida moved into phase 3 in September 2020, there have been more people out and about and with increased prevalence, there is a higher likelihood of exposure. There is scattered evidence of “pandemic fatigue” and maintaining vigilance is important. Communities where large populations of seniors live are advised to take proactive steps to reduce the risk of disease transmission. The Villages is the nation’s largest 55 and older active living community. Seniors who have serious medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease, diabetes, or conditions reflective of weakened immunity, are at even higher risk. These individuals can make decisions that reduce their risk of getting COVID-19. To re-emphasize: they should consider postponing participation in large scale social events, particularly those events held indoors with multiple close contacts. Everyone can help reduce the risk of community spread until the magnitude and severity of this infection is under better control.

For mild or moderate disease, Bamlanivimab received Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA. The combination casirivimab and imdevimab also received Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA. Each is intended for use in infected patients within 5 days of symptoms who are at higher risk of hospitalization. It may be harmful for those with more severe illness. They were shown to reduce the likelihood of being hospitalized or need an emergency department visit with no effect on mortality. (Link for more information below.) These are given by single dose infusion followed by one hour of observation. Given the limited availability, for most with mild or moderate illness, rest, fluids, quarantine, and time are often the recommended treatment. Many different treatments are being tested and have their advocates and detractors. The science is not there yet for recommendation.

Of recent studies completed, it is unlikely that hydroxychloroquine or azithromycin will be effective for treatment. Evaluation of studies using ivermectin are currently being evaluated. For those with severe disease, in intensive care, and on ventilators, there are two medications that help with symptoms and survival: dexamethasone and remdesivir. There is an ongoing study of interleukin 6 inhibitors nationally. None of these are intended for prevention and should not be taken outside a hospital setting.

As we move into the new year, the best way to continue progressing back to normal is maintain practices that reduce the likelihood of spread.

**Everyone can help by taking the following actions:**

- People should not attend in-person events if they are sick
- Social distancing of at least six feet is important
- Consistent mask wearing is advised
- Frequent handwashing, avoid shaking hands and minimize hand-to-face contact
- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing, then wash your hands
- Avoid interactions that last 15 minutes and are within 6 feet of others, especially without masks
- Flu vaccines are available and people should strongly consider vaccination.

**The Villages Health current actions to create a safer environment:**

- Temperature checks and questionnaire for all staff, patients and guests who enter a care center.
- Employees who are ill or exposed are being quarantined at home until safe for return to work
- Social distancing practiced throughout the workplace
- Required mask use for all in the care center (patients and guests are provided masks if they need them)
- Telephone triage to help assess risk, need for testing and need for aggressive care like hospital visits
- COVID-19 testing, if recommended, is performed in the parking lot to avoid potential infection of others
- Patients will be called and offered a telehealth visit to provide needed care without risk of exposure in a care center

Resources for more information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

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

<https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/explaining-operation-warp-speed/index.html>

<https://www.fda.gov/media/143602/download>

[https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/orders/2020/EO\\_20-315.pdf](https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/orders/2020/EO_20-315.pdf)

<https://sumterfl.saferestart.net/>

The Florida Department of Health has established a call center for general questions at 866-779-6121, which is manned from 8 AM – 5 PM. Specific questions related to guidance may be directed to the Sumter County Health Department at 352-569-3102.

The Villages Health is working hard to keep you safe, while also assuring we take care of your health care needs. As we all work together, we will continue our path to becoming America's Healthiest Hometown.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Lowenkron, MD

Chief Medical Officer

The Villages Health