

TODAY'S FDOH-GULF UPDATE

3/23/20 COVID-19 UPDATE:

Your local health department is here to assist you with questions related to COVID-19 (new coronavirus). There are NO confirmed cases in Gulf or Franklin County.

Gulf and Franklin County Health Department Locations are OPEN and will remain open as staff continue to work on the COVID-19 response efforts.

Florida Department of Health in Gulf County: 850-227-1276

Florida Department of Health in Franklin County: 850-653-2111

There is also a hotline available at 866-779-6121 or email COVID-19@flhealth.gov.

If you'd like to learn more about COVID-19 we encourage you to visit Information Is Beautiful COVID-19 #Coronavirus Data Pack <https://informationisbeautiful.net/.../covid-19-coronavirus-.../>. This site dedicated to helping you make clearer, more informed decisions about the world. All our visualizations are based on facts & data: constantly updated & revised.

MENTAL HEALTH

COVID-19 have you feeling...STRESSED/ANXIOUS/DEPRESSED/UNSURE? NEED SUPPORT? CALL 850-270-8911, available 9-5pm EST. If you are in need of immediate mental health services call one of the agencies below available 24/7:

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- SAMSA Disaster Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 or the Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741

VISITOR ADVISORY

Visitors need to be paying attention to their own hometowns and maintaining situational awareness of community spread in these areas. With cases continuing to pop up in other counties, visitors have a responsibility to protect their own health and to protect the health of Gulf County residents. Following travel advisories, county ordinances, social distancing, good hygiene practices and respiratory care are all prevention tactics implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

GOVERNOR ISSUED EXECUTIVE ORDERS:

RESTAURANTS

On March 20, Governor DeSantis issued Executive Order 20-71, directing all restaurants and food establishments to suspend on-premises food and alcohol consumption for customers. The kitchens may continue to operate for take-out and delivery services for both food and alcohol, as long as alcohol is accompanied by food and is in a sealed container.

For more information on your local restaurants:

Check out the Digital Directory: Restaurants in Gulf County and Mexico Beach, FL

Gulf County Chamber of Commerce resource list: <http://business.gulfchamber.org/list/>

MEDICAL PROCEDURES

On March 20, Executive Order 20-72 was issued prohibiting medically unnecessary, non-urgent or non-emergency procedures or surgeries.

GYMS AND FITNESS CENTERS

Executive Order 20-71 directs the closure of gymnasiums and fitness centers within the State of Florida. This order does NOT apply to gyms or fitness centers which are in hotels with a capacity of 10 persons or less, are in a residential building, are inside fire or police stations or are located inside single-occupant office buildings.

CLOSURES & RESTRICTIONS:

Florida State Parks will close to the public effective Monday, March 23, 2020.

BEACHES: An order issued March 20, states ALL GULF COUNTY BEACHES are TEMPORARILY closed for 7 days. Emergency Order Closing Gulf Beaches

ALL Government Buildings will be closed to the public effective at the close of business on March 18. You may reach any department by telephone or email.

PHARMACY UPDATES

Effective immediately, all BUY RITE DRUG Pharmacies will be operating via drive-through only. Staff will do what they can to assist with store items through the drive-through.

SCHOOLS

All schools including Early Head Start and Head Start will be closed until April 15. The district is working on an Instructional Continuity Plan for home-based learning until schools reopen. This plan will be implemented on Monday, March 30th. Beginning March 23rd, lunches will be served at Port St. Joe Elementary and Wewahitchka Elementary from 11:30 – 1:00 PM, local time. Lunches will also be delivered by school buses. Buses will run their regular morning pick-up routes on a PLUS- 5-hour adjustment for time. An example is, if your normal pick-up time is 7:30 AM, then add 5 hours... which means your lunch will arrive at your regular bus stop by 12:30 PM local time. Lunches will be delivered Monday through Friday. At this time lunches will be delivered through April 15, but can be adjusted longer, if necessary. Again, lunch program begins today! With questions. Please visit your schools website or Gulfcoschools.com

LIBRARIES

Port St. Joe County Library is closed until further notice. The Wi-Fi services will remain on 24/7 and is accessible from the parking lot.

TESTING

Call your health care provider first or if you are symptomatic to determine the need for testing. 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.

- To be prioritized for testing, patients must meet the state's criteria, which evaluates a combination of symptoms and risk factors. Their samples will be sent to the closest laboratory.
- If you don't meet priority criteria, you can discuss with your provider about possibly getting tested at a commercial laboratory (e.g. LabCorp or Quest).

- State lab results are generally available within 24-48 hours. Commercial labs can take three to four days. Turnaround time can for all be affected by demand.

MASS GATHERINGS

Continue to follow information from the CDC on mass gatherings. CDC, in accordance with its guidance for large events and mass gatherings recommends that for the next 8 weeks, organizers (whether groups or individuals) cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 10 people or more throughout the United States.

SMALL BUSINESS LOANS

On March 17, Governor DeSantis activated the Florida Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan Program to support small businesses impacted by COVID-19. The bridge loan program provides short-term, interest-free loans to small businesses that experienced economic injury from COVID-19. The application period is open and runs through May 8, 2020. Interested businesses should visit [FloridaDisasterLoan.org](https://www.floridadisasterloan.org) for more information.

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR LOCAL TDC:

Due to Public Health Concerns, the Gulf County Board of County Commissioners voted to TEMPORARILY close all public beaches as of 3/20/20 for seven days. This will be reevaluated weekly as the situation is monitored. This decision was made for the health, safety, and well-being of our residents and visitors. By working together, we can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Please see the attached documents at the bottom of this email for reference.

Answers to FAQ surrounding this decision:

1. Is the state park closed? If it isn't, can we go to the beach there?
-DEP has also closed all state parks, including T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park
2. Is the bay open? Can we kayak on the bay?
-Yes, St. Joseph Bay is open
3. Can we launch a kayak/SUP at the public launches in the state park or by Stump Hole?
-The state park is closed, but county boat launches are open as of 3/22/20
4. Can the horseback riding companies still give private group rides on the beach?
-No, horseback riding is not permitted as beaches are closed
5. What are the fines or penalties for being caught on the beach?
-Those who do not adhere to the ordinance will be given a notice to appear. Details in ordinance.
6. Can locals access the beach on foot or by vehicle?
-No, beaches are closed
7. Can commercial fishing occur from the beach?
-No, beaches are closed
8. Can Gulf Front homeowners access the beach from their property?
-Only the named property owners are permitted. NO GUESTS OR VISITORS will be permitted.

9. Can we still use the bike path?

-Yes, bike paths are open as of 3/22/20

10. Can fishing charters still go out in the bay?

-Yes, charters can operate as of 3/22/20

11. Can we still rent boats (i.e. not with a captain but on our own)

-Yes, boat rentals are permitted as of 3/22/20

12. Once a "reopen" call is made will it happen immediately?

-This will depend on circumstances. (We will work to distribute information as quickly as possible)

Please know that county commissioners, administration and the TDC are working hard to keep our locals and visitors safe and to keep you informed as information changes rapidly. Please reach out to us if you have questions. We are here for our industry and our community.

In order to better understand the situation within our local tourism industry during this time, please complete this GULF COUNTY TDC short survey.

Our Room to Breathe landing page is being continuously updated. If you would like to add any business resource to the page, please email kristy@visitgulf.com.

If you would like for us to share anything socially, you can either tag us on all social media platforms or text photos and copy to 850-340-3904

STAY INFORMED:

To get the latest information, visit [FloridaHealth.gov](https://www.floridahealth.gov) and follow on Social Media:

Florida Department of Health: Twitter [@HealthyFla](https://twitter.com/HealthyFla) or Facebook

[@FLDepartmentofHealth](https://www.facebook.com/FLDepartmentofHealth)

Gulf/Franklin County Community Health Improvement Partners: Facebook Gulf/Franklin County Community Health Improvement Partners