

SunSentinel LOCAL

TODAY'S MONEY STORIES CAN BE FOUND INSIDE THIS SECTION

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

State cases now over 621,000

Takeaways about nursing home visits under virus restrictions

BY CHRISTINE SEXTON
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE — A ban on visitation at Florida's 4,000 long-term care facilities expires in early September, and Gov. Ron DeSantis is poised to reopen doors to residents' family members and friends who have been unable to visit because of the coronavirus pandemic.

DeSantis will consider recommendations finalized Wednesday by the Task Force on the Safe and Limited Re-Opening of Long Term Care Facilities. The governor appointed the panel, made up of Agency for Health

Care Administration Secretary Mary Mayhew, state Surgeon General Scott Rivkees, Department of Elder Affairs Secretary Richard Prudom, Florida Health Care Association Executive Director Emmett Reed, Florida Senior Living Association President and CEO Gail Matillo and Jacksonville resident Mary Daniel, who has gained national notoriety for working as a dishwasher at a memory-care facility so she can see her husband.

Here are five takeaways about the panel's deliberations and recommendations:

See VISITS, 5B



MIKE STOCKER/
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

Health care workers collect samples at a testing site at the Miami-Dade County Auditorium in Miami on July 23.

Deaths reported Sunday represent a sharp decline from Aug. 11 record

BY SUSANNAH BRYAN

Florida's coronavirus cases maintained a downward swing Sunday, with the state reporting 2,583 new cases and another 14 deaths in the past 24 hours.

No deaths were reported in Broward or Palm Beach counties and only four were reported in Miami-Dade County.

State officials have tallied 621,586 COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began — only 21,015 cases more than a week ago, reports from the Florida Department of Health show. As of Sun-

day, 11,263 people have died from the disease, including 144 people who lived elsewhere but died in Florida.

The deaths reported Sunday represent a sharp decline from the record 277 coronavirus deaths reported on Aug. 11. The one-day peak for new cases was July 12, with 15,300 infections.

Sunday's daily report from the Department of Health reflects deaths that occurred over recent weeks, but were only confirmed in the past 24 hours. The new cases follow a lag between the collection of swabs over several days and the confirmation of positive results.

South Florida

Broward County: 186 new coronavirus cases were reported

See VIRUS, 3B



MICHAEL LAUGHLIN/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

Pebbles, a 6-month-old American pitbull terrier, enjoys the afternoon at Kapow Noodle Bar in Boca Raton's Mizner Park last Tuesday. Wednesday is National Dog Day.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Tattoo parlors, tanning salons OK to reopen

BY AUSTEN ERBLAT

Tattoo parlors, body-piercing studios and tanning salons can reopen in Palm Beach County today, as long as they follow necessary COVID-19 health and safety guidelines.

Palm Beach County issued an executive order Sunday allowing the businesses to reopen, but they must adhere to guidelines from the Florida Department of Health. According to the executive order, county and local law enforcement will enforce the new reopening order, but officials said if they follow guidelines, the practices should be safe.

"These establishments have a low risk of transmission or low risk of community spread when facial coverings, physical distancing, enhanced cleaning protocols and proper guidelines are followed," the order read.

"The Governor and I spoke directly about these industries and based upon the operational plans submitted, we have little concern that these industries will be any source of transmission of COVID-19," Palm Beach County Mayor Dave Kerner said Sunday. "This decision was made, in part, due to the effective suppression of the virus."

The move comes less than two weeks after Gov. Ron DeSantis said he was considering allowing South Florida to move into Phase 2 of reopening, which would open these types of businesses and others in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

DeSantis cited "significant downward trends" in new cases when he first hinted at the move on Aug. 19, but at the time, some local officials, including Kerner, expressed concern about opening some businesses prematurely.

Cases were still trending downward Sunday, but did go over 621,000 with 11,263 total deaths in the state.

The reopening was welcome news to tattoo parlor owners, some of who believe they should have been able to open months ago.

"There was no reason we shouldn't have been open three months ago," said John Wylie, co-owner of Aces High Tattoo, which has four locations in Palm Beach County. "We appreciate the county officials that helped make this happen."

IT'S BEEN RUFF

Letting the dogs out at S. Florida restaurant patios

BY ROD STAFFORD HAGWOOD

The one thing that coronavirus hasn't managed to shut down is outings with our dogs.

And now that restaurants have expanded their outdoor seating in order to comply with social distancing and 50% capacity rules, many South Florida eateries have become the place for pups and people to enjoy some time out of the house.

"This is our first outing," says Jodi Moro, looking down at Tula, her 3-year-old Dogo Argentino sitting beside a courtyard table at the Blue Fish in Boca Raton's Mizner Park. "I'm super careful. She hasn't been able to mingle."

She isn't the only one; Peyton has missed mingling, too. The Old English sheepdog is holding court at Kapow Noodle Bar on the other side of Mizner Park. He eagerly greets passersby at a sidewalk table at the al fresco shopping/dining/entertainment enclave.

"He loves happy hour," says Jessica



ROD STAFFORD HAGWOOD/SUN SENTINEL

A check at Kapow Noodle Bar in Boca Raton's Mizner Park which takes into account that the happy hour dish will be shared by Peyton, an Old English sheepdog.

Gray-Patterson, who is enjoying fries with her husband Jesse and, of course, Peyton. "It's good to get him out of the house and socializing. He's so excited."

As more people stop and admire Peyton, Jesse adds, "Yeah, we couldn't hold him on a leash. He likes the attention. I like the attention. She likes the attention."

Todd Lawrence, the general manager at

Blue Fish, thinks that dogs have cabin fever, too. He's seen it with his own two pets, a Boston terrier and a poodle/shih tzu mix.

"I just know when the dogs are outside of their home they always seem to be happier," he says. "My dogs love to go for car rides. When they are in the park they are very, very excited."

The dog days of the pandemic

Before COVID-19 some restaurants were a regular puppy palooza.

"The big difference that we've seen [is] in the past, pre-pandemic, guests coming in all the time [with their dogs]," recalls Peter Lopez, the director of operations at Shooters Waterfront in Fort Lauderdale. "Now what we've seen ... they are not coming back in big groups."

But he adds that while the clusters of people and pets sharing a table alongside the 340 feet of dock space at the Intra-coastal restaurant may be smaller, the tail-wagging just might be more enthusiastic.

"The dogs are getting to see each other

See DOGS, 5B

STATE

Legal fees pile up to \$1.7M in challenge to felon voting law

BY DARA KAM
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE — Florida taxpayers have spent more than \$1.7 million — and are on the hook for hundreds of thousands more — in the state's defense of a 2019 law requiring felons to pay "legal financial obligations" to be eligible to vote, according to state records.

Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration has authorized more than \$2.3 million in contracts with pri-

vate lawyers, including a \$265,000 agreement with Washington, D.C.-based Cooper & Kirk PLLC law firm, to represent the state in a federal appeals court, the records show.

"It's a complete waste to defend such an unconstitutional system and, frankly, they knew going into the [2019] legislative session that they were going to be sued for it, and they have taken this course even though the law is just so fatally flawed," Leah Aden, NAACP

Legal Defense Fund deputy director of litigation, said in a phone interview this week.

Aden's organization represents some of the plaintiffs in the challenge to the constitutionality of the law.

The state's legal fees started piling up shortly after DeSantis signed the measure (SB 7066) requiring felons to pay court-ordered fines, fees, costs and restitution associated with their convictions to be eligible to vote.

The law, approved by Republican lawmakers, was aimed at carrying out a 2018 constitutional amendment known as Amendment 4, which restored voting rights to felons "after they complete all terms of their sentences including parole and probation."

Groups including the American Civil Liberties Union filed lawsuits challenging the measure, alleging that linking voting rights to finances amounts to an unconstitutional "poll tax." DeSantis and

GOP lawmakers, however, maintain that the state law carries out the language of the amendment and the intentions of its backers.

Wrangling over the law is expected to wind up at the U.S. Supreme Court, with the protracted litigation inevitably spiking the state's litigation costs. Attorneys have battled in federal district court in Tallahassee and at the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Ap-

See LEGAL, 2B

DOGS

Continued from Page 1B

for the first time and they have a little extra pep in their step," Lopez says.

Brian Bagley, the director of operations for the company that owns Loch Bar restaurant in Mizner Park, notes that the pandemic and the summer heat is giving the outdoor seating new emphasis.

"We are seeing people arrive earlier than normal to catch the happy hour specials," he says in an email to the South Florida Sun Sentinel. "It is very common for the majority of our patio tables during happy hour to have dogs at them."

The Ben West Palm, on the waterfront of the bustling downtown area, sees the patio at its Proper Grit restaurant as a draw for dog walkers.

"There are two beautiful parks across the way, the Jose Marti Park and [Flagler] Banyan Square," general manager Bernardo Neto explains. "We have a beautiful patio at Proper Grit. We're tying that in with people going to these downtown parks by the water where a lot of our guests walk their dogs. You can come in and have brunch and you don't have to go home and put your dog

away before you meet your friends."

Over at Casa Sensei on Fort Lauderdale's Las Olas Boulevard they've seen an increase of guests bringing their fur babies to enjoy the dining at the outdoor dock seating alongside the Himmarsh Canal.

"I would say 50% more," estimates co-owner Patricia Lara. "I think everybody is looking for dog-friendly places and kid friendly places, a place outside. Instead of going out to dinner at night by themselves, they choose to come for brunch with their kids and bring their dogs. I think people appreciate being able to sit outside and have fresh air and feel safe. Outdoor [seating] has doubled on weekends. Our brunches have probably tripled."

Lara, who also owns Wonder Paws animal rescue, says that the restaurant has enacted all of the safety protocols from the CDC and have added large fans outside to help keep guests cool.

Who's a good doggy?

Back at Boca Raton's Kapow, co-owner Vaughan Dugan says while he has seen the numbers starting to return, he hasn't seen much of a difference in doggy din-

ing attitudes from before the pandemic hit just short of six months ago.

"I think it has a lot to do with everyone's level of comfort," says Dugan. "It's whether people are comfortable as humans on whether they are or not going to bring their dogs out. Wherever everyone is with what's going on with COVID, that's where they are."

Dugan, who also co-owns the Dubliner Irish Pub next door, says he thinks seeing the tables spread six feet apart, staff wearing masks and gloves, paper menus and other safety measures is allowing guests to start venturing back into the restaurant scene.

"As far as Mizner Park, we're seeing a ton of people coming out, doggy parents sitting in restaurants with their furry friends. They are part of the family, too."

Outside, on a courtyard next to the indoor/outdoor bar at Kapow, a 6-month-old American pitbull terrier named Pebbles — brought there by Patrice Zoumas and her daughter Nina — plays with Louie, a 3-month old Siberian husky.

Juan Salamanca, Louie's pet parent, says the two are regulars at Kapow because of the attention the staff gives dogs.

"They always give him doggie bowls immediately without ask-

ing, which is amazing," explains Salamanca.

"Even though many places say they do, they really don't. And this is just a very dog friendly environment. It's nice to be at an ... open area where dogs are cared for and admired. And you feel at peace instead of that you're bothering [people], they're welcome into the space."

■ Kapow and the Dubliner also do special orders in the kitchen for the pets. "In Boca we all have a finicky palate, the people as much as the pets that belong to those people," says Dugan.

■ Shooters Waterfront on Fort Lauderdale's Galt Ocean Mile has a new Doggy Menu with menu items ranging from \$8-\$14, including veterinary-approved savory dishes created by Meals for Dogs in Fort Lauderdale.

■ Quarterdeck Seafood Bar and Neighborhood Grill in Fort Lauderdale on 17th Street just launched a Puppy Chow menu with items such as grilled chicken with rice for \$6, sweet potato treats for \$2 and an unseasoned hamburger patty for \$5.

■ Stoner's Pizza Joint on Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale is putting photos of dogs, cats and other pets who need to be adopted from the Humane Society of Broward County on their pizza

boxes and are offering a year of pizza (one large pizza per week) to anyone who adopts a pet from the fliers. "With over 500 pizza boxes being delivered a week, we have already made an impact with five pet adoptions and counting," says John Stetson, the CEO of the restaurant brand.

■ At the Ben West Palm, when guests check into a room with their dogs, they are given a gift bags with a dog bowl, a treat, a leash, collar and a pet waste bag. There's even a miniature dog robe in the room. "All they need to do is basically pack their own clothes," says Neto at the Ben. "They can bring their dog ... and we'll have everything in there when they get here and they don't have to worry."

■ Fort Lauderdale's Casa Sensei, the restaurant known for its Pan-Asian fusion fare with Latin American flavor profile, also serves sushi ... for dogs. "We're doing everything in-house," says Lara.

"We have doggy sushi rolls, which is basically ground beef and/or chicken or a sushi roll with vegetables and rice. We can also make them a little stir fry. Everything is fresh. A lot of places keep things frozen, but that doesn't make sense now, so we make everything fresh."

VISITS

Continued from Page 1B

Masks on all the time: While DeSantis has refused to require Floridians to wear face masks during the pandemic, there's no disagreement about whether masks should be mandated in long-term care facilities.

Under the recommendations, "essential" caregivers, who assist with daily living activities such as eating, bathing and grooming, would have access to residents' rooms and would be required to wear the same personal protective equipment donned by health-care workers. Members of the general public would have more-limited visitation rights and wouldn't be allowed into facilities without wearing masks and agreeing to adhere to social distancing requirements.

Human touch: Most of the task force's visitation recommendations track guidelines that the federal government already had issued, causing advocacy groups such as AARP Florida and Fam-

ilies For Better Care to ask, "Why now?"

But the task force recommended that emotional support, which includes touching and hugging, should be added to a list of daily-living activities that "essential" caregivers might provide. That would put Florida in a unique position, said Rivkees, who argued against its inclusion.

In a rare glimpse of public disagreement, Mayhew countered: "Dr. Rivkees, we've got a lot of people in our nursing homes and assisted living facilities who are suffering from significant depression."

Testing: The panel altered a recommendation that would have allowed nursing homes to require visitors to be tested for COVID-19 before entering buildings. The change was championed by Rivkees, who said rapid point-of-care tests are suggested for use on symptomatic people only. He said those people wouldn't make it past screening practices, including temperature checks, at the front doors of facilities. The recommendation was altered to

make clear that facilities' use of testing "must be based on current CDC and FDA guidance," referring to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration.

The return of Rivkees: The task force meetings signaled a re-emergence of sorts for Rivkees. He had largely disappeared from DeSantis' news conferences after publicly saying in April that people might have to continue to socially distance for a year.

DeSantis later shot down questions about whether he continued to support his top public health official. Rivkees made his voice heard during the task force's discussions.

In addition to altering the testing recommendation, Rivkees convinced the panel to include COVID-19 infections for staff members in a 14-day lookback period that will be used to determine if facilities can be open for general visitation.

When staff infections were taken into consideration, 60% of facilities would have qualified to

offer visitation, compared to 83% that would have qualified based only on whether residents had suffered infections, Mayhew said.

Voices not heard: DeSantis didn't appoint Florida's long-term care ombudsman, Michael Phillips, to the panel. The ombudsman is charged with advocating on behalf of nursing home residents. Brian Lee, executive director of Families For Better Care and a former state ombudsman, noted Phillips' omission from the panel and sent the governor a letter asking that Phillips be appointed so "residents will have their voice included in the process."

Phillips' absence from the process was notable, especially when the panel's discussions centered on whether voluntary ombudsmen across the state who work with Phillips have been allowed entrance into facilities during the visitation ban, which started in March.

Christine Sexton writes for the News Service of Florida.

Boil water notice in effect for area near Las Olas Blvd. after water main repair

If you live or work near the beach by Las Olas Boulevard, the City of Fort Lauderdale is advising that you boil your water before drinking it, using it for cooking or brushing your teeth. A water-main break prompted the city to issue the notice at 11 p.m. Saturday. The city said water service was restored at about 5:00 a.m. Sunday after crews made overnight repairs.

The notice affects the area of Las Olas Boulevard to the north; Holiday Drive to the south; Northbound A1A to the east; and the west side of Seabreeze Boulevard from Las Olas Boulevard south to Holiday Drive.

"Temporary restoration work will take place (Sunday) to reopen the southbound lane of Seabreeze Boulevard near SE 5 Street," the city said in a statement.

Aric Chokey

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