

Charlotte County update for 4/22/20

## **County reopens beaches, sports fields and dog parks**

By Hector Flores, Charlotte County Administrator

Charlotte County sports fields and dog parks will reopen Friday and Englewood Beach and Port Charlotte Beach will reopen Monday for regular hours. Parking lots will be open and free.

Baseball, softball, soccer and football fields will reopen. No organized activities are permitted, including youth and adult leagues holding practices, scrimmages or games.

Boat ramps remain open. Fishing piers, tennis courts, pickleball courts, basketball courts and disc golf courses remain closed. All public restrooms at Charlotte County parks and beaches will remain closed.

We closely coordinated with Sarasota County on the beach openings to ensure neither county faced an influx of beachgoers were one or the other county's beaches not open.

Please continue to practice social distancing at the beach and fields as you have been elsewhere.

I have heard and read many comments about these opening and closure decisions as Charlotte County responds to the coronavirus pandemic. I appreciate the input and feedback. Respectful of everyone's opinion, I believe opening the beaches, sports fields and dog parks is in line with our earlier decision to leave open parks, trails and boat ramps so people can exercise, recreate and enjoy some quality time (with proper social distancing and hygiene) outside their homes.

There has been much discussion about leaving restrooms closed. There are many reasons for this. First, the safety of the public and our staff is paramount. Public restrooms require frequent cleaning in normal times. With the virus outbreak, the procedures we would have had to put in place would limit access, create dangerous gatherings outside the restrooms, put our staff at risk and require personal protection equipment reserved for first responders and medical staff.

The county Emergency Operations Center, working with the Department of Health and our partner agencies, has created several teams to respond to the virus outbreak, including task forces assisting with testing, education and supplies at hospitals and long-term care facilities. Another work group is beginning to explore strategies and actions for near-, mid- and long-term recovery efforts. We've recently opened a facility to house people infected with coronavirus, but not hospitalized, so they don't pass along the virus to family members or fellow residents. Our "mass care" team is distributing food in partnership with the Harry Chapin Food Bank. Department staff are taking turns assisting Human Services handle inquiries to our 211 call center to connect people with the help they need.

I've been encouraged by recent declines in the number of new cases and several models that show how our community's efforts have effectively prevented a more severe outbreak in Charlotte County. I've seen people wearing masks when in public and the roads are clearly less busy than normal. Businesses have placed social distancing markers on floors to remind patrons to keep their distance and implemented protective measures at checkout counters to keep workers safe. It's working. Keep it up.

The county is using every resource to keep you informed about what we are doing and where you can find current, accurate information, using our website, social media pages, an opt-in text alert service and working with our media partners. Visit [www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov) or look for our pages on Facebook (@OEMCharlotteCounty or @CharlotteCountyFlorida), Twitter (@ccoem or @CharlotteCoFL), Nextdoor and Instagram (charlotte\_county\_florida). Text CharCoCares to 888-777 to opt in for text alerts and virus information. The service is free; message and data rates may apply. You can always ask a question or report an issue using the Charlotte County smart phone app or click Contact Us on the website.

We will get through this together. As a thought exercise to brighten your spirits, think of a few things you're looking forward to doing when it's safe to return to our new normal. For me, one thing I'm looking forward to is another family trip to one of nation's great national parks. Thinking of our most recent trip brings a smile to my face.

I wish you all good health and safety. Thanks for doing your part.

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