

Charlotte County update for 6/3/20

COVID-19 or Not, Plan Now for Hurricane Season COVID-19 drive-up testing available at sports park

By Patrick Fuller, Emergency Management Director

Few disasters have had as far reaching impacts across the globe as COVID-19. Interactions with family, friends, loved ones and colleagues have taken place virtually or at safe distances. Financial hardships due to the inability to conduct business and the subsequent contraction of the economy are a reality many are experiencing. The cause of all this, COVID-19, persists as a threat to our community, nation and internationally. As predicted, the response to this virus is truly more appropriately likened to a marathon than a sprint and with that many are experiencing the stress and fatigue that can be expected during such an event. The efforts and sacrifices of public health, first responders, healthcare professionals, retail and service industry workers and the public at large are humbling and there is no doubt we will come out the other end of this precedent-setting event with a new appreciation for each other and the things that make Charlotte County such a wonderful place to live, work and play.

Unlike COVID-19, the start to the 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season was foreseeable and a part of the life we accept living in Florida. The conditions that allow for tropical cyclones to develop are unaffected by pandemics, as is our vulnerability to the powerful storms. Not since Hurricane Charley in 2004 has Charlotte County experienced the full brunt of a hurricane and though we hope that string of luck continues, only time will tell us when it is once again our turn. We ask that our residents and visitors treat each year as if we will experience a storm; not to cultivate fear but to ensure our community is as prepared as possible for the potential impacts of tropical weather. We have to face this hurricane season head-on and continue down the road to preparedness. If anything positive can be derived from our current situation, it may be that every resident and visitor in our state understands the difficulties associated with a disaster, even those living here for their first hurricane season.

This hurricane season will be unlike any we have experienced as none of us have dealt with hurricane preparations while in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. Emergency Management, along with our disaster partners locally, regionally and statewide have been planning for the realities of hurricane response in the time of COVID-19. The message continues to be: "Get a Plan." It is imperative that you make your preparations now before the winds are blowing and the water is rising. Know your individual vulnerability to storms: What zone are you in? How strong is your home? Do you have enough supplies to sustain yourself and your family for a week? Are you appropriately insured? Where will you go if directed to evacuate? Remember, shelters should only be used as a last resort. This is true during any year and even more so during the current pandemic. Having a plan in place in advance of storms and communicating that plan with your loved ones is critical.

Staying informed is equally as important as having a plan. Knowing what storms are potentially threatening our area well in advance allows you to make informed early decisions. We encourage all Charlotte County residents to monitor trusted forms of media and to subscribe to our emergency notification system Alert Charlotte (alertcharlotte.com) for real-time emergency notifications from the National Weather Service and Charlotte County Emergency Management. We also offer the CharCoCares text messaging service, for occasional texts of local updates on

COVID-19, hurricane preparation information, area resources and more. To subscribe, text CHARCOARES to 888-777 (service is free, text and message rates may apply).

Hurricanes may test our resolve with social distancing and other COVID-19 measures, but we still must get a plan, prepare ahead and stay informed.