THURSDAY'S DEVELOPMENTS

Florida COVID-19 cases on the rise but positive rate is steady

BY DANIEL CHANG dchang@miamiherald.com

Over the past two days, as Florida has continued to relax coronavirus restrictions, the state has reported a worrying surge in CO-VID-19 cases statewide with Thursday's tally of 1,419 new infections representing the largest statewide increase in a single day since the health department began providing daily updates on the novel coronavirus in March.

But the number of new cases is only part of the statewide picture when it comes to determining whether we're experiencing a second wave of COVID-19 infections. While the overall number of positive cases has spiked in the past two days, the percentage of positive COVID-19 tests — out of all the results reported in a day has declined over the same time period, as the state provides testing to

more people. "As we test more people and get more results, the positivity rate is going down," said Alberto Moscoso, communications director for the Florida Department of Health, which produces the daily updates.

The percent of positive COVID-19 test results statewide has fluctuated between 4% and 8% over

BY DOUGLAS HANKS

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Miami-Dade is using \$25

million in federal coronavirus

relief to launch a micro-loan

program for small businesses

left out of other economic

Approved by county com-

aid tied to the pandemic.

missioners this week, the

Rise Miami-Dade program

uses community groups to

low-interest loans capped at

limited to Miami-Dade busi-

"Right now, we're looking

screen applicants for the

\$30,000. The loans are

nesses with less than \$2

than 25 employees.

million in sales and fewer

at a record number of clos-

Chad Cherry, who runs the

Chef Kulture culinary net-

working organization. "My

membership ... largely were

COVID relief funds. ... With

While some local and

grams are forgivable, the

Rise program would offer

traditional loans due for

federal COVID-19 loan pro-

repayment within 36 months.

the [county] program we can

ignored when it came to

get skin in the game.'

ings of restaurants," said

the past two weeks and was the pandemic is worsening. 5.3% on June 3, the health

department reported. Florida reports new CO-VID-19 cases based on the date when the health department receives test results. But how many results the department receives each day — from state labs and private ones — varies because some labs report within one to two days of processing a test while others can take a week or longer to deliver an answer.

On Thursday, for instance, the department reported receiving 5,247 test results for Miami-Dade - more than three times the number the agency said it received for the county on June 1, which was 1,139 test results.

But while the number of new cases in Miami-Dade on June 1 seemed low at 92, the positive rate was 8.1% the highest percentage of the two-week period included in the health department's report.

Two days later, the number of new cases in the county spiked to 280, almost three times what it had been two days earlier. But the positive rate for Miami-Dade dropped to 5.3%, according to the health department's report.

More cases is bad, of course. But the percentage of positive cases is another key indicator experts rely on to determine whether

loan fund for small businesses

All owners with at least a

20% stake in the business

must personally guarantee

ria laid out in a county

website for the program.

The idea is to use the

federal money to launch a

more long-term pool of dol-

lars for small businesses in

loans lent out again as the

coronavirus crisis recedes.

Miami-Dade also will seek

grants from foundations and

community groups to boost

the original loan fund of \$25

Commissioner Eileen

Higgins, the sponsor, said

she wanted the Rise fund "to

forever be a permanent part

of the small-business infra-

structure in Miami-Dade."

emergency loan program

launched by Miami-Dade to

economic disruption brought

on by the coronavirus crisis.

Last month, the county used

\$5 million in federal money

to create a forgivable loan

help businesses during the

This is the second

million.

Miami-Dade, with the repaid

the loans, according to crite-

Dade launches \$25 million

We worry, obviously, if there's more cases," said Mary Jo Trepka an infectious disease epidemiologist with Florida International University's Stempel College of Public Health.

'But we're especially worried if the percentage goes Trepka said fluctuations

in reporting test results, and the fact that the health department reports cases based on the date it receives test results as opposed to the date of symptom onset, make it difficult for epidemiologists to measure the effect of policy changes, such as Friday's Phase 2 reopening of bars and movie theaters outside of South Florida.

"There's no piece of the data that gives you the whole picture," she said.

For a more complete though still imperfect assessment of how Florida is doing, Trepka said she recommends looking at a two-week snapshot of positive test rates and the health department's data on hospital emergency room visits for cough, fever or shortness of breath symptoms associated with COVID-19.

"If I see that going up," she said, "it's very worri-

community-based financial

Miami-Dade hasn't set up

institutions.

MORE NUMBERS

The state Department of



A Florida Department of Health worker holds a box with swab tests at the COVID-19 mobile lab operated by StatLab Mobile at Residential Plaza for Elderly At Blue Lagoon in Miami.

Health announced 41 new deaths Thursday, raising the statewide toll to 2,607.

Less than half of the new cases but more than half of the new deaths were in South Florida:

• Miami-Dade County reported 323 additional confirmed cases of CO-VID-19 and 15 new deaths. The county's confirmed total is now at 18,779 cases with 746 deaths, the highest in the state.

 Broward County reported 123 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 and seven new deaths. The county's confirmed total is now at 7,462 with 325 deaths.

 Palm Beach County saw 211 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19 and four new deaths. The county's known total is now at 6,688 with 363 deaths.

 Monroe County confirmed one additional case of COVID-19 and no

the application process yet but launched a website for

applying when the program

opens in the next few weeks.

305-376-3605, @doug_hanks

businesses interested in

The website is

Douglas Hanks:

risemiamidade.com.

deaths. The Florida Keys now have 110 known cases

and four deaths. Miami Herald staff writ-

ers Michelle Marchante and Devoun Cetoute contributed to this report.



Jorge L. Guerra, Jr. 2020 Chairman of the Board MIAMI Association of Realtors

Rise in Pending Sales and Mortgage Applications

With stay-at-home orders ending and South Florida slowly reopening, listings and buying activity has definitely rebounded. Pent-up demand, historically low mortgage rates and the robust fundamentals of the South Florida housing market is already leading to increased buying activity.

Last week, pended sales, which is the best indicator of closed sales, were the highest of any week in the last six months, an increase of 146% since mid-April.

Surging pending sales should result in sales increases in the next couple of months. South Florida Realtors are seeing a rise in mortgage applications and additional homebuying interest from the Northeast.

homebuyers from New York and other tax-burdened Northeastern states searching and purchasing homes in South

The COVID-19 situation has accelerated the trend of

South Florida ranked No. 2 (behind New York-Newark-Jersey City) for where New Yorkers moved to escape coronavirus, according to mail-forwarding requests.

Mortgage applications to purchase a home rose 9% last week from the previous week and from a year earlier, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association's seasonally adjusted index. It was the sixth straight week of gains and a 54% recovery

The gain mirrors an unexpectedly strong sales pace just reported for newly built homes in April. They were forecast to fall 22% but instead rose nearly 1% for the month, according to the U.S. Census. Buyers are rushing into the new home market, as the supply of existing homes keeps falling to new record

Before the COVID-19 situation, the Miami-Dade market was exceptionally strong. Miami real estate had record low delinquencies, no subprime mortgage crisis, strong demand/low supply, low interest rates, strong population growth, demand from foreign buyers and tax refugees from tax burdened states, high consumer confidence and a strong job market.

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