

COVID-19 Update

Talbot County Emergency Services
Clay Stamp, Director, Asst. County Manager
www.talbotdes.org



Talbot County Health Department
Dr. Fredia Wadley, Health Officer
<https://health.maryland.gov/talbotcounty/>

Key Points for July 22

- ✓ Maryland added 627 new confirmed cases and 23 deaths in the past 24 hours, bringing the statewide totals to 80,172 and 3,402 respectively.
- ✓ Talbot County has three new confirmed cases of COVID-19 for a total of 265.
- ✓ A new multi-county testing site will open at Chesapeake College on August 3.
- ✓ Talbot County's testing site at the Easton High School Parking Lot continues to operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. To make an appointment, call 410-819-5632.
- ✓ Privately operated and state run labs have added capacity, reducing the amount of time it takes to get results to approximately three days.

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Food Service Licenses on the Line as County Health Officer Try to Slow the Rise of COVID-19 Cases

In response to Talbot County's rising COVID-19 numbers, officials are beginning to consider what enforcement actions they can take against businesses that refuse to comply with state and county directives.

Gov. Larry Hogan issued a letter on July 14 urging local officials throughout the state to consider taking action, noting the state's concern that numbers in the 20- to 40-year-old age group are rising even as Maryland's COVID-19 metrics have stabilized. The letter specifically noted reckless behavior at some of the state's bars and restaurants.

"This tends to be the age of people who have to go to work every day," says Talbot County Health Officer Dr. Fredia Wadley. "They are often on the front lines, working in positions where they come into contact with the public, and they are more likely to be out socializing after hours and on weekends."

Education has been the Health Department's first line of defense. But as the summer heats up and people become weary of the measures used to curtail the spread of the virus, officials are beginning to consider more stringent measures.

COVID-19 Update

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has increased dramatically since the Independence Day holiday. For several days last week, Talbot County led the state with a positivity rate over 8%, a number that indicates the percentage of the total number of people who were tested and found to be positive for the COVID-19 virus.

“We have worked with a number of restaurant owners who are trying to do the right thing,” says Dr. Wadley. “But we still see people standing shoulder to shoulder in bar areas, tables packed with customers, and people refusing, or simply forgetting, to wear masks.”

Dr. Wadley and a team of interagency partners have come together to examine the problem and consider what tools they currently have to address ongoing problems. The Maryland Code authorizes the local health officers, with authority delegated by the Secretary of Health, to suspend the food license of a facility that has conditions that offer an immediate health threat.

The Maryland Department of Health has encouraged local health officers to have their restaurant inspectors use a COVID-19 checklist on their routine inspections and when they investigate restaurant complaints. Restaurants that are not in compliance with the Governor’s Executive Order concerning restaurants and bars will receive a compliance letter notifying them that if they do not come into compliance that their food license will be suspended.

Specifically the Executive Order states that no one can be served at a bar and that patrons must be seated to receive service and further, that six foot distancing is to be followed. The COVID-19 checklist provided by the state will be placed on the Talbot County Health Department website as well as the Talbot COVID 19 website.

Public events that require a temporary license agreement must also be approved by the county health officer. While outdoor events are 18 times safer than those held indoors, Dr. Wadley says, allowing large crowds to gather where social distancing is impossible or unlikely will contribute to the spread of the virus.

The third option for action is that when complaints are received by the Liquor Board and the liquor board inspector finds that bars are not following the Governor’s Executive Order, the Liquor Board could consider suspending the facility’s liquor license.

Not only is Dr. Wadley ready to take action, she appeared at the July 21 County Council meeting to urge Talbot County’s elected officials to consider a local mandate to limit the size of gatherings, to require facial coverings for people inside public and retail facilities, and to impose civil penalties on those cited for violations.

“We have to recognize that we only have social distancing, facial coverings and hand hygiene to help prevent the spread of COVID-19,” Dr. Wadley said, “And to ignore these proven practices while this pandemic burns through our country with higher rates every day would be a sign of negligence on the part of any health officer.”

The Council will consider additional action at its July 28 meeting. “We are not trying to hurt the business community, but we’re trying to keep people safe,” says Council President Corey Pack. “Many businesses are operating appropriately, and we want to continue to encourage and work with them. Unfortunately, there are some businesses that are not doing all they can, and we are going to have to address those businesses.”

Emergency Services Director Clay Stamp agrees that it is time to take action. “Your Emergency Operations Center opened in response to this virus in March, and we have seen amazing things from this community in

COVID-19 Update

the face of this public health emergency. But we also recognize that there is an economic component to this problem, and we needed to get our businesses open.

“We want our businesses to be successful. We need them to be successful,” he continues. “No one is interested in shutting businesses down, but the fact is we have some businesses that are not in compliance. We need to step forward in a unified way and make some adjustments to maintain a balance between public safety and economic stability.”

For more information about Talbot County’s COVID-19 response, visit talbotcovid19.org.

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Where to Find More Information

- **CDC COVID-2019 Website:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- **Talbot County COVID-19 Information** www.talbotcovid19.org
- **Shore Regional Health COVID Information** <https://www.umms.org/shore/patients-visitors/coronavirus>
- **Maryland Department of Health Website:** <https://health.maryland.gov/pages/home.aspx>
- **Talbot County Health Department Website:** <https://health.maryland.gov/talbotcounty/Pages/home.aspx>
- **Maryland COVID-19 Website:** <https://governor.maryland.gov/coronavirus>