

Florida residents on COVID-19 pandemic: “There is no way we can go longer than a month at this rate.”

Matthew MacEgan
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More than 200 new coronavirus cases were confirmed in Florida Monday as the state's death toll increased to 18. The total number of coronavirus cases in Florida now stands at 1,227, according to figures released by the Florida Department of Health. The numbers include 1,147 Florida residents and 80 non-residents.

The Twitter hashtags #Floridalockdown and #Floridacoronavirus were trending on Twitter on Sunday, and many social-media users responded to requests made by the *World Socialist Web Site* to speak on conditions in their counties and workplaces.

A university registrar living in Broward County who asked to be kept anonymous said that, fortunately, he is able to work remotely, but that this is not the case for other university staff, such as custodial workers, whose work requires the university to be physically open and operating.

When asked about the economic conditions might be for such workers, he responded, “At the risk of being hyperbolic, catastrophic? These are people, potentially, living check to check with the prospect of not having income for the foreseeable future. These are individuals who may not already be in the best of health, and now this is thrown into their laps? This could be a death blow for some.”

Corryne who works as a waitress explained that she and her boyfriend have both been laid off from work with no pay. When asked how long she thought they could survive without work, she predicted, “Maybe two months? If I’m super diligent about it. But it’s not like that is money that is saved for emergencies. It’s literally all the money I have. March is our busiest month of the year, and by the time work starts back up, we’ll be out of season and playing catch up all year.”

Another student living in Palm Beach County spoke to

our reporters about health policy in the state. “For starters, not a single primary care physician can be reached. Trump is saying the test is free. Yea, if you wait on the phone for two hours and meet an inordinate number of criteria.”

She also spoke about the drive-through testing center that was recently opened in Palm Beach County, explaining that people have to call first and be screened. She reported that even if the person is “accepted” for a test, the testing sites are not taking any more appointments until April.

As of Monday morning, Florida had performed only 11,000 tests. Medical professionals are still awaiting the results of 932 of those tests. Hillsborough County received 900 test kits on Saturday and will reportedly be opening a drive-through testing center at Raymond James Stadium, though it is clear that these limited efforts will not be adequate to accommodate the influx of patients.

An administrative worker named Jen who lives in Pinellas County expressed deep concern over the fact that the surgical center where she is employed has yet to notify their patients about their response to COVID-19.

“Ninety percent of our patients are seniors, and as of today we have publicly told our patients nothing. The clinics should be closed for their safety, but we have failed to even tell them whether we are taking precautions. Employees have been receiving emails from human resources saying that more info is coming soon. We still have appointments booked for Monday,” Jen explained.

Jen also spoke on her struggle finding needed supplies in Pinellas County stores. “It’s scary to try to get food. I wear a mask, but not many do. You have to go to multiple places if one is wiped out. It just feels like there’s no end in sight. I worry a lot about getting the virus transferred to

me while at work or in the store and then bringing it home to my family. I have a 78-year-old mother. She's in good health and takes great care of herself, but her age definitely has her in one of the at-risk categories."

While workers reported that there was not a shortage of food in the stores, two Florida residents reported chilling scenes in which armed policeman have been patrolling the meat section and other sections containing the most popular items. One worker commented, "People are panic-buying everything. My grandmother went grocery shopping and had to stand in a line of 200 people. We have tried to get her to use a grocery delivery service, but even that is delayed by several days."

Melanie who lives in Brevard County also expressed concern over the lack of basic supplies noting that she cannot find baby wipes for her toddler who has had a 100-degree fever for four days. "I haven't gone out since Thursday, but my dad is out every morning to see if there are wipes. He says he can't find chicken and was finally able to get bread only today, after four days of trying." Melanie's father works as a mystery shopper to supplement his social security benefits, but that all of those jobs have dried up. "He does it to pay off medical debt, so I guess he just won't be able to pay."

Workers across almost every industry are feeling the effects of the pandemic. Meridith, who lives in Alachua County and owns a small hair salon, told the WSWs that she had to shut down her business a week ago. "I'm not bringing ANY money in. I will owe my home mortgage and my business rent on the first. I will be using money intended to pay the IRS to live on. I don't want to get behind on bills. I don't want to destroy my credit. I can juggle things for maybe two months, but the savings that I had has been destroyed by the market collapse."

A freelance writer named Alexa who lives in Marion County explained that like many gig-economy workers, she and her family are living paycheck to paycheck. "There is no way we can go longer than a month at this rate. We will have to make tough choices in the coming days so that we can save as much as we can for the long haul. By the looks of it, help isn't coming any time soon."

Melissa, a student and waitress who works in Lee County, said that her restaurant had been forced to move to takeout and delivery only. "I have been a server there for almost two years, and when I worked yesterday it was so slow. The cost of living in Florida is very high, so without an income we are screwed. We've waited out six months of slow season for March and April, and our sales

on a normal Saturday in season are about \$13,000 to \$14,000, but yesterday [Saturday evening] we probably only made about \$2,000."

A high-school student who just turned 18 and attends school in Seminole County also spoke to the WSWs about her conditions. "Frankly, a lockdown is needed. My abuelo [grandfather] is already in the hospital due to other issues, and if he gets infected, there's no way he has the strength to survive." In Florida a quarter of the population is older than 60.

The young high school student, who asked to remain anonymous, explained that the current conditions are also going to heavily impact what she does after graduation. "The current situation actually swayed my decision to stay local for UCF [University of Central Florida] instead of FSU [Florida State University], since the situation is still very much unpredictable. Financially, I'm trying to pay for college on my own, but I know that pretty much everything I've been working for during the past four years is crumbling. My family is at least here to help."

A current FAU (Florida Atlantic University) student named Corryne, who is studying psychology and planning to attend medical school, said that FAU was one of the last state universities to move online. Corryne explained that students had organized petitions calling for the school to move classes online that garnered over 10,000 signatures before the university administration took action.

"Pretty much all of my friends are from other states but live on campus, and they had very little warning before they had to pack up and leave for the semester," Corryne explained.

Students across the state and throughout the country face similar conditions. A young international student named Alicia, who attends Florida State University (FSU) in the state capital of Tallahassee, wrote that she is struggling financially due to her international status and job prospects: "As an international student, I'm only allowed to work on campus. I would need a different kind of visa to do other work, or a green card. Right now, I'm depending on my family and student loans. I need a job, but that's pretty much impossible right now."



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