

- Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Shoresman and today is Wednesday, January 20th, 2021. Thank you for watching today's San Louis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we'll have two speakers for you. We will begin with County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Mr. Wade Horton. And he will be followed by County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. They'll take questions after providing their prepared statements. Thank you once again, to our American sign language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now I'd like to introduce County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Mr. Wade Horton.

- Thanks Michelle. Good afternoon. In addition to providing for public safety, distributing vaccine to our county's residents is the county's highest priority. We opened our second vaccine point of distribution on Monday or POD, at the Paso Robles Event Center. This is an addition to our SLO POD operating at 2156 Sierra Way. Today I'm pleased to announce that we'll be opening a third POD this coming Monday in South County at Arroyo Grande High School. We have enough vaccine doses right now to cover appointments through next Thursday. And we'll know next week, if we can open additional appointments into Friday. Our goal is to administer about 4,000 first doses this week and a similar number of first doses next week. Because we have a limited number of vaccine, at this time, we must allocate based on who is most at risk for serious illness or death.

This week, we began Phase 1B of our vaccine distribution plan, by vaccinating people age 75 and older. This age group is more at risk of serious illness or death than any other age group due to COVID. In fact, three out of four people who have died from COVID in our county we're 75 or older. I know the governor specified that those over 65 are eligible to receive a vaccine at this time. The State has not provided us enough vaccine to meet this heavy lift. By getting the 26,000 people in our County who are 75 or older vaccinated first, we're all helping to prevent the most serious outcomes. If you are 75 or older, you can sign up for a vaccine appointment next week, at recoverslo.org or by calling 805-543-2444. We will be opening up approximately 4,000 appointments starting tomorrow at 9:00 AM.

For those next week's vaccines, on a first come, first serve basis. If we receive more vaccine, we will open up additional appointments. At this point, our main constraint remains the number of vaccines available to us. We continue to request more vaccine from the State. I'm working with Assembly Member Cunningham and Senator Laird, who are advocating on our behalf to receive more vaccine from the

state. And we have created a vaccine dashboard that is now available at recoverslo.org, we will report our weekly shipments to you there. We are prepared for a time when vaccine is no longer the limiting factor. When that time comes, we can open up COVID-19 vaccine appointments to more groups of people in SLO County. And our goal is to be able to vaccinate 3,000 people a day or 15,000 people a week.

A little bit on partnership, we can't do this alone and we appreciate all the agencies and community members who have stepped up in service to our County and its residents. While we work hard to administer as many vaccines as possible and move through the CDC and State tiered phases, this is not an operation that we as a County organization are doing alone. As with the planning we conducted in building and standing up the Cal Poly Alternative Care Site, we have also worked as a team with other local organizations, and numerous volunteers. SLO County tasked our local government Incident Management Team, to stand up and provide command and control over the Paso and soon to be operational AG sites. The IMT is made up of primarily of local fire personnel and includes resources from local law enforcement, Office of Emergency Services and is supported by our public health department.

Each location takes about 30 onsite personnel to operate, supported by IMT resources, County Disaster Services workers and SLO County Medical Reserve Corp volunteers. We anticipate City Disaster Services workers also join in the fight. For those listening, if you are able to volunteer, please visit emergencyslo.org/mrc and sign up. We looking for both clinical and non-clinical volunteers. I'd also like to recognize and thank Dignity Health, who will be administering limited number of vaccines to County residents, 75 and older next week. Sign up information is available at recoverslo.org.

RTA and Ride-On are also providing free transportation to seniors to the vaccination PODS. Contact information for RTA is 805-541-2544. And the phone number for Ride-On is 805-541-8747. Last, I want to thank all who are involved in these efforts, in particular, Dr. Borenstein and her team who have been working seven days a week now for nearly a year. This is a significant lift for our community. And I'm proud that our people are stepping up and answering the call. And with that I'll turn over to Dr. Borenstein.

- Thank you. Good afternoon, I am very pleased to hear about the vaccination efforts and you'll hear more from me on what's happening with vaccine in our

County. But unfortunately, I continue to have the dubious role of telling you what's happening with the disease in our County, which continues unfortunately at this time to be as high as it's ever been. We have surpassed 16,000 cases, exactly 16,056 as of today. 84% of those have recovered. And we have just shy of 2,500 who are active cases in our community at this time. It does bear noting again, that nearly one quarter of all of the cases that we have had in this County since the very beginning, our first case in March through today, 24% of all of the cases have happened in just the past 14 days.

Fortunately, as you can see on the slide in front of you it does appear that we are seeing a bit of a decrease in the number of cases. However, you can see that that case number remains very high compared to where we were in the heyday of the spring. And you can also see that with each holiday, starting with Halloween, right before the Thanksgiving surge, we had a bit of an uptick that went down shortly thereafter. We had a much bigger increase at Thanksgiving, we began to see the decrease. And then as we got into the Christmas and new year season, we saw a dramatic rise. As I said, we're beginning to see perhaps, a leveling off of the cases and that's good news. And we hope that continues in the next holiday event, if you will, that's before us is Super Bowl. So let's begin to think about how we will celebrate that safely.

But unfortunately we haven't yet seen the turn in the tide on our hospitalizations or the number of deaths. Our hospitalizations today are at 55. That includes 10 individuals still in intensive care. And we've been staying level for the past week between 50 and 58. Our death rate continues to remain high. In the last week, since I've stood before you, we've had 21 more individuals in our County who have lost their lives and an additional 34, who we believe will turn into COVID deaths but we are awaiting their final determination of death. So all told in our County, this is 140 individuals who died from a preventable cause of death. And we would very much like to see that... We would like to see a downturn in that and we would like to see that our County residents continue to understand that this is the impact from this disease and that there are ways that we can mitigate against it by doing all of the same old things you've heard us say many times; wash your hands, stay away from others, don't gather, wear a face covering and stay home when you're sick. So our hearts go out to these 140 individuals and many more that stand behind them from the ravages of this disease. I did say I would circle back to the vaccine.

So, there has been news made available to the public about a particular lot of the Moderna vaccine that is in our hands, as well as across the State of California and other places in the United States that we are not using at this time. For us, we have four 4,400 such doses in our hand, that is a significant impact to our supply. It has also affected other providers in our community. So some of the doses that we allocated this week to pharmacies who were beginning to get ready to start to vaccinate and one of the urgent care centers, they also have received this particular lot of vaccine. Let me be clear that none of the doses have actually been administered in our County, but on the other hand, many have across the State and across the nation without dramatic impact.

However, in one clinic in Southern California, there was a much higher than normal rate of adverse effects particularly serious allergic events from this vaccine, such that the state made a determination until they can get to the bottom of that and determine if the issue is only in that clinic on that day, that they've asked us all to put a pause on using this vaccine. There has not been a recall, we are not anticipating replacement doses, but this is out of an abundance of caution that the state is trying to drill down further into what may have happened in this circumstance, before potentially releasing these additional doses back into the supply chain.

With the temporary pause or loss of these doses, there's a couple of issues. One is these are all second doses. So, the timing of people getting their second doses may start to be affected. We only began using our Moderna doses in the last couple of weeks. So fortunately, there aren't people ready to use the supply, but were we to lose it in the coming couple of weeks it would be an issue of concern. Secondly, we have been hearing from many people about why aren't we using second doses to vaccinate more people. We have now made the decision that we will do that in accordance with the state's guidance on this that we should convert or can convert and we've decided to do so. Half of our allotment of second doses into first doses. But again, this pause on this large supply of Moderna has an impact on our being able to do that, while we await further guidance on this particular lot. Again, I just want to-- I want the public to be reassured that we take vaccine safety very seriously. There are no problems with any of the doses that we have administered Pfizer or Moderna. We have not seen any significant impacts and we're hopeful to be able to move forward with this large supply as well.

I do wanna talk about making our vaccine process more transparent to the public. We've heard from many people repeatedly about how many doses. Wanting to understand what the volume of doses is that we've received and how many we've administered. So we have been able today to add to our vac-- Our COVID dashboard, we've added a special place for vaccines, so that we will provide that information and do so transparently on our vaccine dashboard. We will update it only weekly however, because this is a moving target. We get doses sometimes delivered in the evening, we get notification of forthcoming doses sometimes on the weekend, mostly at the early part of the week. But in order to have clarity and transparency and accuracy, we will post this information once a week.

So what you see before you is through last Friday. The number of first doses that we have received in totality is 9,925 through the end of last week. And on second doses, the totality of the doses we have received is 7,325. So the total doses that our County has received through last week is just over 17,000; 17,010. And oh, if anyone's doing the math, I misspoke. Our second dose, total is 7,085, so let me correct the record on that. And out of all those doses we have administered through yesterday we've exceeded 8,000 doses through last Friday that this dashboard presents is 6,266. First doses were administered through last Friday. Through last Friday, we delivered 1,060 second doses. Though I said we will not provide the dashboard update, but for once weekly, as I come to you in the middle of the week, I'm available to tell you what our current number is to the best extent that we have it.

Through yesterday, we had just over 8,000 doses. So you can see that we continue to ramp up. People ask us why we're not giving more of what we have. I just wanna put in context that we are now looking at nearly 80% of all first doses received, having been administered. We anticipate being basically out of vaccine by the end of this week. We are getting more supply this week and that will allow us to carry forward next week. But this is a week in, week out operation at this point. So, it is very challenging for planning and it is very challenging for us to tell the public what to expect and how much vaccine we will have in less than-- I mean, sorry, in greater than a week's period of time. We find out one week how much vaccine we're gonna receive the next week and that's all that we have eyes on at this point.

With that transmission-- Transition, from moving second doses to first doses, there are a couple of things that I want to say about that. As I mentioned, we are going to go forward with using as much as half of our second doses as first doses, the ones

that we can use, as well as hopefully, the paused vaccine. So with that, we definitely are hearing from people some concern about availability of their second dose. So toward that end I want to reassure people that while there's a minimum interval between your first dose and your second dose, that's important to make sure that that second dose has the booster effect it does. Waiting a little bit longer to get that second dose is not expected to impact your ultimate immune response. Meaning, if instead of 21 days or 28 days, you get that second dose a couple of weeks later or even more than that, further out, the expectation is you will still be fully immunized even if you did not get that second dose right on time. So people should not be concerned about that wait. And as you heard, Mr. Horton say, we're not only advocating and pushing on getting more first doses, we also want to ramp up our second dose supply, so we don't have to make these difficult choices between first and second dose.

And the last thing I want to mention is, that has also been in the news, is related to a new variant in the State of California. So, a couple of days ago, the California Department of Public Health issued a press release that noted that there is a new variant of COVID-19. This is not the same variant that people have heard of that was in the United Kingdom and has had some cases here in California, that one is B117. The new variant that's been detected in the State of California is L452R. This is a new variant in terms of its identification but as the State has looked into it, they- - And gone back and looked at prior specimens, we think it's actually been around for some time. In the press release, it stated that San Louis Obispo County has also had a number of specimens of this variant. Right before I came here, that was called into question. And we are beginning-- We're trying to determine if in fact some of these specimens that were claimed to have been from our county are indeed from our county. We've gotten counter information from the state laboratory.

So we are digging into that and we will report back to you as soon as we have that clarification. We do not do our own genomic testing and that's why we don't have this in our hands to tell you whether or not this variety is in our laboratory. These are random specimens tested at a variety of labs across the state. And we are trying to get more information on whether or not in fact this variant is in our county. Regardless of that, what we do know about this variant at this time is it continues to appear to be amenable to the vaccine. So we don't think that there will be issues of vaccine in effectiveness if we do have this variant. And secondly, we do not have

information at this time about whether it may or may not be more transmissible or spread more easily. So with that, I will end our talking points for today and open it up for questions.

- [Male Attendee 1] Dr. Borenstein, the individuals that are 65 and older, we heard from I think the last week the governor, mentioning that they're eligible. Is there any sort of timeframe? I know this is super hard to ask, but there's a lot of people that are 65, between those 65 and 75, they're interested in if there's some sort of target date that the county is looking at or a timeframe.

- Yeah. So, to... the challenge for us and the community is without having any idea of how much vaccine we'll be getting next week, the week after, the week after that. It is nearly impossible for us to plan when the demand of this initial group will wane to the point that we can begin to open it up to other groups. Absolutely, those age 65 to 74 will be at the top of the list for providing vaccine. As soon as the demand signal for those over age 60-- Over age 75 begins to trail off. But knowing... If we had 30,000 doses in our hands, we'd be able to get those out in a couple of weeks to the population of above age 75 and we'd be able to move on much more quickly. If we get a trickle of doses, a thousand or 2,000 or 4,000, it's gonna take us much longer.

- [Male Attendee 1] And you touched on it, in follow up I was gonna ask you, what what is the criteria for determining whether or not to begin vaccinating those 65 and older?

- Yeah, so we look every single day at what the appointments are showing us in the next day and the next days and the follo-- In the week for which we have appointments open. And as soon as they begin to trail off and we give some days without the appointments filling up, that would be our signal to move into a new sector.

- [Male Attendee 1] And then real quick, I've asked you this before, I'll ask it again. The CMC continues to be problematic, I know. Can you give us an update on what's happening out there?

- Yeah, well, we are beginning to see a decrease in the increase at CMC. So that's about as good news as we can get that it's not continuing to increase at the same rate, but they are continuing to see new cases on a regular basis.

- [Female attendee] Can you say how much of our supply from the State of the vaccine fluctuates per week? About how many do you normally, would you normally be receiving? Or is that a huge--

- Unfortunately, there has been nothing predictable about our vaccine supply. We have ranged from a high of 5,000 doses to a low of 600 doses.

- [Female attendee] Wow. This might be a question for Wade, but how does the State calculate how many doses they're going to be sending us? And what can be done to kind of figure out this disparity we're seeing?

- That's a great question. Bluntly, we don't know. And we've asked and we're waiting for that answer. And that's one of the things that we've asked Assembly Member Cunningham and Senator Laird to help us out with.

- [Male Attendee 2] Either of you who want to answer it. I guess there's a lot of challenges that are occurring at the vaccination clinics. We're hearing from seniors that the wait time is long and it's harder for them, the 75 and older. And parking is an issue in some cases. What is being done? And what advice can you give to those seniors who have appointments yet to come?

- Sure, we certainly understand that the wait time can be a challenge for our seniors. And the San Louis site was stood up originally because of its proximity to our Public Health Department and the ability with the cold chain required and some of the technical requirements to keeping the vaccine cold. We've come a long way in figuring out how we can improve upon that. And thus we were able to expand our sites. Particularly, to the San Louis location, where parking is an issue, we're evaluating different sites in the central part of their County. And we do plan to move locations to help accommodate the seniors with a shorter travel time, a shorter-- More ability to park, more handicapped parking spots probably within the next two or three weeks.

- [Female attendee] We heard that Cuesta was one of the options for that, can you--

- It was. We are currently looking at Cuesta and evaluating if that's a good spot to move. There's a couple of other sites that we're looking at too, but again, we will be looking to make that move probably in the next couple of weeks. But we decided this week, that instead of moving to Cuesta in order to relieve some of the stress on San Luis Obispo site, we'd open that AG site. And that way we can help accommodate the folks down in South County as well.

- [Male Attendee 1] Question regarding vaccines and those receiving it, maybe Dr. Borenstein or Wade. Healthcare workers, are still receiving that. And are you guys nearing completion of the target for those people, the first line people in healthcare, medical? Those individuals are they... Are you guys getting to a point where you're filling up that industry?

- We're seeing more demand now from the 75 plus. But certainly one of the things that we're concerned about and making sure we have capacity for is those healthcare workers' second doses.

- [Male attendee] There-- So they're just receiving second doses right now?

- There's still some that are trickling in, that are still doing the first doses, but for that group, the focus would be making sure they get the second doses.

- [Male attendee] Also, Wade, to talk about enforcement, I know there's been some businesses that have received orders to cease and desist some of their operations, indoors operations. What can you tell us in terms of how that's going right now in the County?

- It's the same. We're using the same procedure that we've used all through the pandemic. We try to work with these businesses. If need be we issue them a cease and desist or a public health order to correct their actions. And moving forward, if that doesn't work, then we could pursue other options such as a temporary restraining order. The County at this point doesn't have the ability to do an administrative fine. And, but that could be an option moving forward as well.

- [Male Attendee 1] In terms of compliance, are you seeing businesses though that are failing to comply, more and more businesses? I think as long as the pandemic continues, we certainly have experienced some COVID fatigue in our communities. And I'd like to remind everybody that even though there's a light at the end of the tunnel right now, we s-- Its still gonna be a bumpy ride to get to it through to the end of the tunnel. And we need to do... You saw the chart that Dr. Borenstein put up about the spikes that we saw after Halloween, after Thanksgiving, after Christmas and new year's and Superbowl's coming. So it's really something that we need to think about, we don't wanna see another spike after the Super Bowl. Certainly, the spike that we've seen after Christmas and new years is causing us concern and has put stress on our hospitals.

- [Female voice] Any other questions?

- Thank you.

- Thank you once again, all for being here today. I have just a few closing updates and reminders. As of this past weekend, our phone assistance center is now open seven days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Staff at the center are available to answer questions from members of the public or to help individuals make appointments at the vaccination clinics, if they do not have access to the internet or a computer, or for those that just may have trouble using a computer. We also continue to maintain our recorded public health information line. Readyslo.org remains your main online source for information about the county's response to COVID-19. However, we have also recently created a series of new webpages about vaccine and its local distribution on recoverslo.org/vaccines. There you can find out the risk groups currently able to get vaccine, information about what groups will be next and how to sign up for an appointment when it's your turn to get vaccinated. You can subscribe to receive email updates there as well. New vaccination appointments for next week will become available tomorrow morning at 9:00 AM. COVID-19 testing continues in San Luis Obispo, Morro Bay, Pasa Robles, Grover beach and Nipomo, with Saturday appointments still available in Pasa Robles and Nipomo. Please go to readyslo.org for the most up-to-date info and for the link to make a testing appointment. Once again, you can watch these briefings live on our county's YouTube channel or on the county's homepage or on cable channel 13. They are also livestreamed on KSBY and KEYT's websites. And finally, they are rebroadcast on SLO County's public health Facebook page and on public access Channel 21 at 8:00 AM, 5:00 PM and midnight each day until the next briefing occurs. Thank you once again for staying informed, be well. And we will see you here next Wednesday, January 27th at 3:15 PM.