

Michelle Shoresman:

Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I'm the designated media contact for the San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 public information response team. Today, we have three speakers for you. We will begin with Emergency Services Director and County Administrative Officer, Wade Horton. He will be followed by county of San Luis Obispo Director of Social Services, Devin Drake. That's Devin Drake, D-E-V-I-N D-R-A-K-E. County Public Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein will speak last before they all take questions.

Michelle Shoresman:

We are aware that we had some technical issues with our Facebook feed yesterday and we are continuing to seek solutions, one of which will be to ask the speakers today to repeat their own questions before they answer them. This will allow all of the folks at home to hear all the questions, as well as those in the room. Before we begin, I'd also like to thank our American Sign Language interpreter, once again, Robin Bam. Thank you to all the members of the media for being here as well as the public who are tuning in at home. And now San Luis Obispo County, Emergency Services Director and County Administrative Officer, Wade Horton.

Wade Horton:

Thank you. Good afternoon, Wade Horton, County CAO, Emergency Services Director. There's a lot of discussion on flattening the curve or slowing down the rate of infections so our healthcare system is not overwhelmed. Social distancing is critical to that success. I was listening to a local podcast last night on the way home and it was recommended to change the term from social distancing to physical distancing. That's a really good idea. It's important that we all remain connected with friends and loved ones over this difficult time. To remain socially connected, but physically distant. With today's digital age, it's never been easier to do that, so please check in with friends and family, and your neighbors. We are on this thing together.

Wade Horton:

This is a stressful time. One thing we don't want you worrying about is how to put food on the table, particularly folks that are currently without a paycheck. If you need food for you or your family, please visit readyslo.org for resources that are available to you. You can also call our phone assistance center at (805) 543-2444. If you're a senior over 65 or you have an underlying medical condition, give us a call. We will deliver food to you. We'll be making deliveries to about 335 households tomorrow.

Wade Horton:

Many first responders and emergency service workers have young families and the need to help with childcare while they are on duty. Our school employees, substitute teachers, and childcare providers have always played a vital role in our community. We are calling on existing childcare providers to provide emergency childcare across the county. If you're younger, healthy, and able to serve, please visit readyslo.org and fill out the emergency childcare form to let us know how you can help.

Wade Horton:

I want to wrap up today with a plea to all of you to please respect social distancing of six, or I should say physical distancing of six feet from another and from those other than your immediate family when you are conducting essential business, such as a waiting in line for groceries or even being outside. We want you to get outside and enjoy our open space. As you know, the Pismo Preserve unfortunately had to be

closed this week to protect public health. We're taking a look at county parks and golf courses. We don't want to have to close them, but will if non household units decide to ignore the six foot standard. Please do your part and help us all protect our community. I'll now turn it over to Devin Drake, Social Services Director for our county, to talk about additional resources that are available during this situation. Thank you.

Devin Drake:

Good afternoon. We know a lot of people in our community are worried about where their next paycheck will come and how they're going to put food on their table. I'd like to say that the county's Department of Social Services is here to help. I encourage people to please visit the [readyslo.org](https://www.readyslo.org) site to find additional information about what I'm about to explain. While the county does not handle unemployment insurance claims, we want anyone who has lost their job to file for unemployment with the state employment development department or EDD. This is often the first step to receiving assistance. For food assistance, we offer CalFresh, a program that helps those in need buy nutritional food. The program will benefit the most number of people who have lost their jobs.

Devin Drake:

For cash aid assistance for families with children at home, we offer CalWORKS. This program helps those in need pay for housing, food, utilities, clothing and medical care. For health insurance, we offer Medi-Cal, a public insurance healthcare program which provides healthcare services for low income individuals and families, children, pregnant women and aged and disabled adults. Through our general assistance program, the county also provides reasonable support and assistance for low income individuals who are not otherwise eligible to receive benefits through federal and state programs, or through other community or personal resources. Again, we are here to help and there is information going into great detail on each of these programs at [readyslo.org](https://www.readyslo.org). Lastly, I'd like to thank the staff at our Department of Social Services. I think they are doing incredible work and they are doing it during an incredibly stressful time. They continue to provide excellent service while making every effort to reduce risk to themselves. I am very grateful for all that they are doing. Thank you.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Penny Borenstein, the County Health Officer. I will give you the current status on our number of disease cases, which in our county today stands at 46. We have done over 300, exactly 315 tests in our public health lab to date. We continue to have the one individual in intensive care, and now two individuals in the hospital. But still, our numbers are staying low and we are grateful for that. We have seven individuals now who are in the recovered category and the remainder of the cases are all doing well in their homes.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I want to speak to the Medical Reserve Corps, which we are looking to dramatically expand so that should we need it for our alternate care site, that we will have the staffing resources to go along with the medical material and the housing opportunity there as well as all the wraparound services. We're a little bit concerned that the medical staffing and all the ancillary staffing may be our limiting factor in taking care of folks who need a level of care outside of their home. So the plan is that the hospitals themselves will surge and add as much in the way of hospital acute beds as they can. But should we begin to see overflow, that is where we intend to put patients who need some level of medical care, but less so than certainly in an intensive care unit and even in the hospital. What we are looking for is as

many people as possible to help us staff our Medical Reserve Corps to provide for running that alternate care site that is currently being planned for Cal Poly.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I'm going to list, for our viewers, exactly what type of people we're looking for. And if you don't hear your profession or who you are in the list, then you weren't paying attention, because it's basically everyone, but I'm specifically going to read out who we're looking for. Physicians, nurse practitioners, physicians assistants, nurses, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, licensed therapists and social workers, certified addictions providers, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, dentists and veterinarians are absolutely welcome to join in this fight, pharmacists, respiratory therapists is a very important component of this. Physical and occupational therapists, and any community member without medical training who is available to help with sign language interpretation and any form of administration.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

As you can hear, we are basically looking for you. We particularly want individuals who are not in the most at risk categories. If you are young and healthy, and even if you have a full time permanent job and already have been working on the front lines of healthcare, we in the medical world are used to, especially during our training, and for many ongoing through our careers, we are used to working many hours and I implore those who are continuing to put in eight hour days to perhaps make themselves available to work a 12 hour day or a 16 hour day.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We will not put anyone into force until the need is there, but we want to have assurance that we will be able to staff this very important alternate care site, should it come to that situation. Qualified volunteers all only need to fill out a profile. It's on our... Actually, let me give you a different email address. This one is not readyslo.org. Where qualified volunteers can sign up is at healthcarevolunteers.ca.gov, and then email that to our counties Medical Corps coordinator which is at slomrc@gmail.com. That will make our county aware of your interest in volunteering. The Medical Reserve Corps coordinator will then reach out to you to complete the process.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Lastly, I want to talk again about what's going on with respect to childcare centers. We have definitely received some inquiries about the optics quite frankly and the concern about bringing together children in a congregate setting, and we are doing everything that we can to create a balance between meeting the needs of our frontline healthcare workers and other emergency responders while continuing to keep safe those who are stepping forward to provide the childcare and the children themselves.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

It certainly is a challenge, especially with little ones, but we are absolutely taking all measures to try to continue to impart physical distancing within these settings. We will be checking the health status of the children, even taking temperatures as well as for the staff and really trying to find a balance between absolutely needing to do this so that we do not lose the resource of our healthcare workers that we need, because of their concerns for childcare or their absence of childcare. But at the same time, doing our absolute best to maintain the safety of all those involved with that setting. And that's all I have for today. With that, I will turn it over for questions.

Speaker 5:

Dr. Borenstein, an update on personal protective equipment, testing ability I know you have in the past, and things still stable, looking good for the most part here in the county?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah. We have, within the last 24 hours, received 56 requests from healthcare providers. That means the messaging has gotten out as to where providers can make those requests. It is again on the readyslo.org site and there is a tab for providers to put that request in through a form on that site. We have been able thus far to meet the vast majority of those requests. The one component that we do not have sufficient capacity for is the gowns, but as part of our communication to providers, we have given them some work arounds and prioritizing use of those gowns when they are doing procedures that might cause more splashing of body fluids, et cetera. We anticipate getting even more PPE in within the next day or two through our order from the state. And we are hopeful that going forward we'll be able to keep up with the requests.

Speaker 5:

And testing's about the same [crosstalk 00:17:15]?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Our testing capacity, we got some new material in yesterday and we now are looking good for the foreseeable coming days.

Speaker 5:

Roughly 50 with the public health department and then obviously [crosstalk 00:17:27]?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah that is... Oh, I'm sorry. I was supposed to get a note from our media liaison that I'm not effectively repeating the question, so let me now try to repeat all the questions. One question was how are we doing with our PPE? Hopefully you all heard the answer to that. The second question is related to our laboratory capacity and there too, we are doing well in being able to meet the demands of the public health laboratory as well. Private laboratories, we're seeing more and more test results from them. We're incrementally increasing. We are continuing our efforts to procure additional equipment on behalf of the county so that we can see even greater numbers in the near term with respect to laboratory testing.

Speaker 6:

In terms of the overall testing and the number of cases we've had, it seems as though our county is highest. We looked at the different counties around us, our county has the highest number of cases compared with Ventura, Santa Barbara, especially per capita. Is there a reason for that?

Speaker 7:

Repeat the question.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I will repeat the question, thank you. The question was, it seems, and I think it's accurate, that the numbers of cases in San Luis Obispo County exceed that of others in our region, including Ventura, which obviously has a much higher population. I can speak to it somewhat. I think with respect to Santa Barbara, they are using our public health laboratory. We are a regional lab and so for hospitalized patients, we are actually running those specimens on their behalf, but for all of their other patients, they are having to send those out to other laboratories that are not having the same turnaround time as we have. So they may be a little delayed in their numbers because of that turnaround time. I also can't speak to exactly what the other counties are doing in terms of who they are testing. I think that we are doing, we're offering our testing to contacts of household cases, and in certain cases, with vulnerable communities, we're doing additional testing. County by county, I'm not sure exactly what their criteria are, so it may... All of that to say that our higher numbers may, in some respect, reflect more aggressive testing and not so much more disease, but that's just my best understanding of the situation.

Speaker 6:

Kind of a quick follow up to that, it seems today's number is much lower than yesterday's number. Is there any correlation or reason?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I think when we're dealing with relatively small numbers, in the single digits day over day, that's bound to happen, that we have a particular day that slow. As I've been saying all along that we expect to see an exponential rise in the number of cases, but at a level of four or eight or 10, it's within the realm of chance to have a slower day. Okay, if that's it?

Speaker 5:

I do have ne question for Wade about the alternate sites. Have those been finalized? I've heard Cal Poly, not the dorms, but what can you say about anything that you've finalized or places that you're still looking at?

Wade Horton:

It's going to be Cal Poly. We had a site assessment team... So the question was alternate site, do we have those alternate site picked, and yes. The alternate site will be Cal Poly. We conducted another site assessment yesterday. There's a team on site today and our goal is to begin actual move in and construction on... Well, I'll just say site improvements next week.

Speaker 5:

What facility at Cal Poly?

Wade Horton:

It will be the Rec Center.

Speaker 5:

And in terms of, you said construction or creating that, what kind of components would go into that?

Wade Horton:

What type of components would go into that? We'll have to have power enough to run it, extra power. We'll have to have a means of manifold oxygen to provide oxygen to the patients. We'll have to stage a receiving center where folks can come in and be processed. Really what we're looking at is using the shell of the Rec Center to create really a field type hospital.

Speaker 5:

How many beds do you anticipate being there?

Wade Horton:

We're going to build it so it's scalable coordinating the need, but four to 700.

Speaker 7:

Four to 700 beds?

Wade Horton:

Four to 700 beds.

Speaker 7:

Four, two, seven hundred beds?

Wade Horton:

I'm sorry. 400 to 700 beds.

Speaker 6:

I have a question for you, Wade. In terms of getting the word out to homeless, or folks without shelter who are either camping in their cars or have RVs, are there being tickets issued to them and is there any county area for them to park and be?

Wade Horton:

The question was for individuals that are homeless that are living in their vehicles, are tickets being issued to them and will there be a place for them to go? I did talk to the city managers last night. They are looking at reducing the level of ticketing in their respective cities and the county is working on a location for a safe parking site or locations for a safe parking site. Planning is underway. I had one brief on that yesterday from the team that's working on it. I'll be having another brief on it today, and the plan is to approve that plan and then put it into operation, probably, I would say the end of this week, next week time frame.

Speaker 6:

And a follow up to that, there was a question from a colleague about farm workers and whether some of them are aware of all the issues, physical distancing, guidelines that you guys are recommending. Do you know if that community is getting the word, getting the message?

Wade Horton:

The question was about farm worker outreach. I can't speak to that right now, but I certainly will find out.

Speaker 6:

Sounds good. Let me see if there's one more for you guys. Oh, going back to the golf in the county, I don't know if this is a Penny question or one for you, but is it more of an issue of social distancing or one of like touching the same pins and folks that are on the tee box and things like that, and in parks, sitting on the same benches and things like that?

Wade Horton:

I think I can take a stab at this one. Penny, you can fill in if I get it wrong, but the question was in regards to golf and parks, why are we considering potentially closing these areas? Is it because of social distancing or is it because of folks touching the same types of equipment? I would say that touching the equipment can be mitigated with hand sanitizer or wipes. It's really maintaining that physical distancing in order... we've talked about that before, six feet allows you not to get, not to be blunt, but to get sneezed on or coughed on. Six feet is what you need to protect yourself from that. It's really the ability to maintain that physical distancing. The other concerns can be mitigated again by washing your hands frequently, using hand sanitizer or hand wipes.

Speaker 6:

And so the determining factor there would be seeing large groups of people gathered together?

Wade Horton:

The question was would the determining factor be people congregate in the same area and not paying attention to that physical distancing requirement? And the answer would be yes.

Speaker 6:

And it's still pending?

Wade Horton:

We're reviewing it, and so the question was, is it pending? I want to be very clear, we do not want to shut down trails. We do not want to shut down golf courses, but we will do what we need to do if individuals decide that they don't want to comply with the physical distancing requirement. Again, for flattening the curve for this to work, we all need to do our part. And what's critical right now, these next two or three weeks are critical to flattening that curve we need to physically distance.

Speaker 6:

And I have one more for... Thank you Wade. I have one more question for Penny. You may have answered this previously, but just to double back a little bit, Penny, on the private labs, are we going to know how many tests are being issued from those labs?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the question is are we going to know how many tests are being done by the commercial laboratories? We continue to work on getting that information. We think we have new mechanisms for trying to get that information on a regular basis, so stay tuned over the coming days.

Speaker 6:

Okay. Thank you.

Speaker 7:

Any additional questions for them?

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you. Again, members of the media for coming today and for the folks at home tuning in. Just a few, my usual reminders. I have three phone numbers and a website for you for all the local information being updated live, pretty much real time. You can go to readyslo.org most of the information as it's becoming available is being posted there. We also have our two, well three now phone numbers that you can get assistance at. We have our phone assistance center that is open seven days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM and that number once again is (805) 543-2444. We have our public health information line which is a recorded message in both English and Spanish that can be have access 24 hours a day. And that phone number is (805) 788-2903. And then now we have one more line that has been added, the county enforcement line which gives people a place to report violations to the counties order for further investigation. And that new number is (805) 788-2222. There's also an email address associated with the enforcement line, covid-compliance@co.slo.ca.us and that information is also available on readyslo.org.

Michelle Shoresman:

Lastly, tomorrow, again, we will be here at 3:15 so please tune in on either the County Public Health Department, Facebook page, the county's home page, or KCOY or KSBY. Thank you again and we'll see you tomorrow.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So we have an answer to.