

Michelle Shoresman:

Good afternoon. Today is Thursday, April 2, 2020, and you are watching the daily media briefing for the San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 Emergency Response. My name is Michelle Shoresman, and I'm the designated media contact for the Public Information team.

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you to all the members of the media for being here today and for the members of the public tuning in at home. This afternoon, 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 Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein, and our last speaker today will be San Luis Obispo County District 5 Supervisor, Debbie Arnold. That's Debbie Arnold, D-E-B-B-I-E A-R-N-O-L-D.

Michelle Shoresman:

Supervisor Arnold will speak last before they all take questions. And once again, we'll request that the speakers repeat their questions before answering. Again, as we have been, thank you to Robin Babb, our American Sign Language Interpreter today. And now, San Luis Obispo County Emergency Services Director and County Administrative Officer, Wade Horton.

Wade Horton:

Thanks, Michelle. Good Afternoon. Wade Horton, County CAO, Emergency Services Director. As of today, our community is sheltered at home for two weeks. In the Shelter-at-Home order, we specified that we reviewed the need to continue the order every two weeks. Our order will remain in effect, and is consistent with the Governor's Shelter-at-Home order. We need to stay the course, and I'm going to share with you why it's so important.

Wade Horton:

Our primary objective for San Luis Obispo County is to slow the spread of COVID-19 so we don't overwhelm our hospitals. That is why you are staying at home. We don't want people to die because they can't get the medical care they need. We have 403 licensed hospital beds and 60 ventilators in our County, and we don't want to spike the number of patients all at once, but spread out the number of people that need hospital care over time so we can take care of everybody. There are three ways we are doing this.

Wade Horton:

Number one, the most important thing you can do is shelter at home. This slows how fast the disease is spreading by reducing person-to-person disease spread, by reducing that person-to-person contact. The message is simple, stay home, save lives.

Wade Horton:

Number two, behind the scenes we are creating more capacity in our healthcare system. This is why it's so important to get the alternative care site at Cal Poly up and going. It will increase our capacity by up to 900 beds. This is also why we are asking for more Medical Reserve Corps volunteers. These volunteers will staff to the alternate care site. By slowing the infection rate by sheltering at home, it's bought us time to get the alternate care site ready.

Wade Horton:

Number three, we are working to supply our healthcare workers and our first responders with the personal protective equipment or PPE. They need care for our sick. This also includes purchasing additional ventilators, and provided them to our four hospitals so they can provide acute care for the sickest of the sick. Right now, we have eight COVID patients in our hospitals. Three of those are intensive care. That number will increase, but the steps we are taking in partnership with you, the community, is preparing us for that increase, and we are doing everything we can do to prepare. We are all in this together, and we will be ready. I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Borenstein to provide additional details on why and what we're all doing to fight this disease.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Thank you, Wade. I'm Dr. Penny Borenstein, the County Health Officer. What I want to do at this point is I'm going to ask for a slide to be put up. Sorry. Okay. And I'm going to walk over to this slide and we're going to talk through this. So building on I hope... Sound good? Okay.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So building on what you just heard Mr. Horton say about what it is that we are trying to do with our action steps in response to the pandemic, this is a slide that mimics something that was shown yesterday in the governor's press conference, governor of California and the department director of the department of health and human services agency. And so there's two things that we are trying to do. We're trying to both slow the onset of diseases by moving the curve forward in time. And so what you see here on the white line is slowing the disease onset by moving it forward in time.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And the second thing that we are trying to do is lower the curve by having less spread. So let me just walk folks through this a little bit. This blue line here is symbolic of if we did nothing, if we went about our business, we didn't shelter at home, we didn't keep our distance from people, we didn't wash our hands, we just gathered in the same ways that we are used to, this is a model of at the state level of what we would see getting up over 160,000 cases in the next week basically.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

If we put into place the kinds of measures that we have, the best models that we have show not only that the numbers are lower, but that the peak is not even shown on this curve. So we go beyond May in this model before we actually see the peak number of cases.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

The reason we are doing that is shown by this white line. So in the state of California, and you can apply everything I'm saying to the County of San Luis Obispo, we have a certain number of hospital beds as you just heard. In California that number is like 50,000, 60,000. In the County of San Luis Obispo it's only 400 and so our line of number of hospital beds that can accommodate patients with this disease is static. It's a straight line across this chart.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So what we are trying to do is move the peak number of cases out in time so that we can take this white line and move it up. So that's all the efforts that are taking place locally as well at the state level to build

what's called surge capacity. Build an alternative care site, ask our hospitals how many additional beds that they can bring to bear in the hospital facilities to house people who need care for their disease outside their home.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So these numbers down here, these little dots represent the number of people at this point in time who are sick with the disease or in the hospital. And what we ideally want to see is that the number of people with the disease does not cross the availability of beds. So even in the best scenario with all the social distancing we do to tamp down the number of cases, we still see that we're crossing the line at which we can no longer put people in hospital beds.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So again, I just want to emphasize the two things that we're trying to do with all of our protective measures is decrease the number of people that are getting it so that we can attempt to not cross the line and that we can push out in time when we see the peak of the disease so that we can work on this white line and move it up and get additional bed capacity, get additional ventilator capacity, and be able to take care of the people who are still going to get sick with this disease over a period of time, weeks to months.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

That I hope is an explanation of all that the public has been hearing regarding modeling for this disease and why these models are so important. They are not a perfect science. They take into account lots of different things like how long someone on average stays in the hospital, what proportion of the people who get sick need hospital care, but all of those models really come down to those two things. Can we push out in time when we see the peak of cases, and can we use that time to our benefit by that time to create more hospital bed capacity? We in this County are doing those two things toward that end.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So with that, I'm going to hand this back so nobody gets hurt in the process, and certainly we'll take questions but I would like to talk about two more things before I turn it over to my esteemed colleague, supervisor Arnold. So, first I want to just say where we are at present. And I think what I want to say about that is we're at 89 cases and some might ask, well if these are state numbers, why didn't you give us the actual situation for our local numbers? We could put up... It's gone, but we could put up 400 beds in the County and our 89 cases, but our numbers are so low in this County that the lower the number we're looking at, the less certain is our modeling.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So while the concepts that I shared with you today are every bit as true for our local area, showing it in terms of state numbers that has a higher level of reliability because of the raw numbers that we're at is a better way of actually portraying it.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

As I said, we are at 89 cases in the County today. We continue to tick up slowly and perhaps, perhaps that is in large measure because of the protective measures that we're taking. We'd like to believe so

and we do believe so. Of that, as you heard, three of our residents are in intensive care, five other individuals remain in the hospital.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And as I mentioned yesterday, I was going to report a new number. I may not do so on a regular basis, but this is the first time we're reporting it, so out of those 89 cases, 15 of them are healthcare workers and I think it's important for our public to understand that it is our healthcare workers are really in the firing line on this pandemic and they are not immune to this disease. So that is not an insignificant number. That 15 out of, basically one out of six of all the people that we have tested positive with this disease are in fact health care workers.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I also wanted to talk about, one other issue that has been in the news quite a bit in recent days is the issue of covering your face or using some type of mask as protection and the state health department, the California Department of Public Health yesterday came out with specific guidance on this and we in the County are in concert with the state guidance. We are not going to issue our own County guidance on this point but we do point our residents to the state guidance. We have made it available on [readyslo.org](https://www.readyslo.org).

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And in a nutshell what the guidance is regarding covering your face is that for the vast majority of people is likely not to be harmful. And the reason I say vast majority is there are probably people who cannot wear a face cover or a mask or a homemade mask because they have respiratory issues where that protective barrier might actually interfere with their ability to inhale full force if they have asthma. It might not be the best choice or a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

But for most people who are healthy and the fact that we are seeing some people who may be spreading this disease without even knowing they have it, it is another layer of protection literally as well as figuratively.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We also want to make sure though, as the state guidance says that if people do choose to use the type of face cover that they do so with all the knowledge of how to do so effectively. So it can't be something that you take off after a day out and about and throw on your side table and put it back on the next morning. They need to be washed, they need to be cared for, they need to be taken off carefully. They do not replace all of the protective measures that we have been emphasizing for weeks or months now or years in the case of other respiratory diseases.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Hand-washing first and foremost is your best form of protection. Staying away from people who are sick do not go out when you are sick. Do not touch your face. So when wearing a mask, there might be a tendency to adjust. It may be uncomfortable. The fabric may be irritating or itchy. So please, if you choose to use this type of additional protection, you have to do so wisely and carefully in terms of taking

care of it, washing it, and not messing with it and going under the mask to continue to touch mouth, nose, et cetera. And with that, I will turn it over to supervisor, Debbie Arnold. Thank you.

Debbie Arnold:

Thank you, Dr. Bornstein. As Dr. Bornstein said, I'm Debbie Arnold, I'm the Fifth District Supervisor here at the County and today I'm here to outline services and resources that can help you right now.

Debbie Arnold:

Sheltering at home is a tremendous sacrifice we're all making to save lives. We're all in this together and there are things that you can do if you're struggling. Our virtual local assistance center at readyslo.org is a one stop shop for residents who are currently being impacted by COVID-19. You'll find a wealth of information by clicking on the COVID-19 link and from there you can click on the local assistance center box for helpful services. You can also find out which businesses are open, which businesses are closed, and which are open partially on this website.

Debbie Arnold:

In a typical emergency or crisis, our County would open a physical center that would provide these kinds of assistance and information, but we want people to stay home as much as possible, so rather than open a physical local assistance center, we've created a virtual one to provide residences with the help that they need. So many people have been affected, employees, employers, students, parents, families, homeowners, renters, homeless individuals. All of us have been impacted in some way by the COVID-19 virus.

Debbie Arnold:

You can get all your information and updates at readyslo.org or by calling the number of 805-543-2444 and I give the phone number, especially for those that don't have easy access to a computer. One of the most urgent needs that some people are facing right now is putting food on their table and we have resources available to help with that. We're delivering food regularly to seniors and people with health conditions or sheltering at home. As of today, we've made 683 food deliveries and plan on making 528 food deliveries tomorrow. I want to emphasize this is a free program.

Debbie Arnold:

Unfortunately, we learned today about a phone scam related to this program, someone calling seniors in our community and telling them that they must purchase a gift card to receive the food they need. This is not true. You will never have to pay for this service, and we want people to have access to the service.

Debbie Arnold:

This is one of the several programs in our community providing food to more people during this crisis. Many of you know that our schools are providing nutritious to-go meals for the kids. Our food bank is providing food for pickup and meals that connect are delivering meals to seniors. As many of people in our community are now suffering the economic burdens of this health crisis and have lower household incomes, more people qualify for additional food assistance programs such as CalFresh or the WIC program for parents with young children.

Debbie Arnold:

And again, you can go to readyslo.org to find out more information about all of these programs or call the assistant center, 8-0-5-5-4-3-2-4-4-4. A vital part of navigating any crisis including this one is accurate information. Rumors and misinformation can unfortunately take hold in times of crisis and we want all of our residents to know where they can turn for accurate information. As I've mentioned, Readyslo is our one stop portal for local information and resources and you'll find daily updates on cases, you'll find links to our virtual local assistance center and you'll find the information I mentioned about food and much more.

Debbie Arnold:

You can reach our phone assistance center seven days a week from 8:00 to 5:00 at the 805-543-2444 number. The governor spoke about 211 yesterday and I want to assure you that we're also coordinating with 211 to make sure they have the latest local information and of course you can tune in to these briefings five days a week. We'll continue to provide the latest updates and answer questions and I want to thank our team here at the County for all the work they've been doing these past two weeks to try to ensure that the citizens of our County will be able to remain safe and healthy here.

Debbie Arnold:

And lastly, I just want to mention all of us get a lot of calls from our constituents, but many local restaurants are offering safe options for takeout or delivered food, and ordering takeout is a great way to support some of our local businesses. Thank you so much. And at this time, we're ready to take questions.

Speaker 8:

I have a question for Dr. Borenstein. In light of the disclosure of 15 healthcare workers that have been diagnosed as positive, we understand there's a group of nurses from French Hospital that are planning a vigil tonight to essentially protest what they say is a lack of PPEs at that facility. Does your reaction of hearing that for the first time or how concerned are you about maybe a dwindling supply of those PPEs at some of those very hospitals we have here?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Ah, so the question was what is my reaction to a planned vigil tonight by nurses at one of our community hospitals, French hospital, I think you said?

Speaker 8:

Yes, French, yep.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

They are seemingly protesting the lack of sufficient PPE or personal protective equipment. So this is the first that I've heard of that event being planned, and so on the one hand, I would say that you need to ask the hospital how they are responding in the moment to the availability of PPE for their staff.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

In a general way however, I can say that we have been getting additional PPE in on a regular basis to the County. We are making supplies available to the hospitals. If they don't ask us for supply, we are not offering it, so I am actually unaware of insufficient supply at any of our community hospitals at present.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

There is guidance out there for all healthcare workers about ways that they can safely reuse, reduce the use of personal protective equipment, particularly in the area of face shields and goggles. Those can be cleaned and reused. Certainly, there is good evidence now that UV light even can be used to recycle some of the other protective equipment, but in a general way in the County, yes we remain concerned about the supply chain and we know that from some sectors we are not able to meet every request.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

For instance, if it comes from a part of the healthcare community that is less critical to the treatment of COVID patients. I'm not going to name an example, but you know our hospitals are frontline, and we have been able to fulfill their orders.

Speaker 8:

I wanted to ask you or maybe Wade. There was a post on social media that, the county's social media account today, some photos of medical supplies being received, photos of trucks and boxes and all that. Were those supplies going to be directed towards the alternate care site only or those being distributed also amongst other hospitals, healthcare providers, et cetera?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Right. So we have a detailed plan for the PPE as it's coming in to continue to meet the community demand, be it from hospital or other healthcare providers, as well as our first responders, and at the same time begin to make sure that we have adequate supply for the ACS when it is up and running and when we have patients on hand, but we are not setting aside all of our new shipments for future need. We are continuing to meet the current need as well.

Speaker 9:

Are the 15 healthcare employee or workers, are they hospital employees or other healthcare facilities?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the question was are, of the 15 healthcare workers that I mentioned, where do they work? Are they all hospital-based or otherwise? It is a real mix, so some are from hospitals, some are from clinics, one at least is an emergency, an EMS worker, emergency medical services worker on the front lines in the field. Not all of them are direct healthcare providers. We are including in that category, individuals who work at a clinic, so a front desk staff would be included as well. Yes.

Speaker 10:

With Paso Robles having to highest number of cases at 24, our North County viewers are asking is there any data or is anything to support why they would a higher number of cases or is it purely just more tests were done up in North County?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the question is, do we have an understanding of why we're seeing more cases in North County and particularly Paso Robles? And the short answer is no. We don't have enough data. We don't have enough, strengthen our numbers to know if there's more testing being done in North County or if it's even statistically significant that they are running a slightly higher number than some other areas of the County. Whether they're seeing more disease versus whether they're testing, we don't really have a good answer for that at this point in the outbreak.

Speaker 8:

Doctor, your concern, I mean there's been seemingly a new story in the national media every day about important topics like the spread, possibly through talking or breathing that relates to the mask wearing, of course. Your reaction to probably hearing that and now there's concerns that it could be spread as easily as that.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So, the question is can I reflect on new information related to means of transmission being simply talking or breathing near someone, and I think all along we have understood that that is an opportunity for spread and that's why we have emphasized keeping distance from other people because you never know who might be infected.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And now additionally with a greater understanding that people may not be showing any symptoms and could possibly spread. So talking, singing, coughing, sneezing perhaps in that order are all means of transmission and that's why we recommend keeping your distance from other people. That's also why, especially people who may not have symptoms but have the disease and are able to spread, that's why the new guidance is coming out, that wearing a face covering may add an additional measure of protection to our community at large. I see no other questions.

Michelle Shoresman:

There's no other questions?

Speaker 9:

Actually, I have one question for Wade. So, from my understanding, there's been no citations given for the shelter-at-home order. Do you anticipate greater enforcement efforts and has there been any warnings issued?

Wade Horton:

So the question was in regards to the shelter-at-home order and have there been citation issues and do we anticipate a greater level of citation issues? The community is doing a great job. We've received hundreds of concerns over the phone line over the line that we've set up for where the community can express concerns and of those hundreds of concerns, we probably, I'm going off the top of my head now, but we've made probably 150 contacts and in every single instance that we've gotten compliance just by visiting and talking to these individuals and they're willing to comply.

Wade Horton:

Part of it is just it's about educating the community and once people understand that what they're doing can put their neighbors in danger, they're compliant because we've got a great community in SLO County and everyone wants to do their part, but that's why it's so important is as Dr. Bornstein indicated sheltering at home, keeping six foot distance. Everybody, every individual in our community needs to do their part so we can come together and beat this thing.

Wade Horton:

Penny did mention what we can do and why we're doing it, particularly when she talked about that line of capacity in our hospitals. What we're doing is allowing us time to increase that line so we have the capacity to accommodate the sick in our community so we can take care of them and it requires everybody to do their part and I'm really proud of our community because that's happening and we're seeing it. Thank you.

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you all again for coming today and for tuning in at home. Few final reminders and a thank you to supervisor Arnold for mentioning all the services and resources available on readyslo.org. She also mentioned our public health information line and the phone assistance center. Those remain available. This phone assistance center seven days a week and the recorded public health information line 24 hours a day.

Michelle Shoresman:

Finally, one last plug for our medical reserve corps. We are still looking for volunteers to sign up and help staff our alternate care site and provide important needed health services to our residents. Please sign up for that at readyslo.org.

Michelle Shoresman:

And lastly, one last briefing for the week will be tomorrow afternoon again at 3:15. Please tune in on our San Luis Obispo County Facebook page as well as on our County homepage and you can also see these briefings on KCOY and KSBY. Thank you. And we'll see you tomorrow.