

- Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Shoresman and today is Wednesday, April 7th, 2021. Welcome to the San Luis Obispo County, COVID 19 media briefing. This afternoon, we will hear from San Luis Obispo County health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein and County administrative officer and emergency services director Mr. Wade Horton is also here and available to take your questions. Thank you once again to our American sign language interpreter Robin Babb and now County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you, good afternoon, happy April. So first as always, I will start with some of our statistics with this disease in SLO County. We've surpassed 20,000, we stand today at 20,671 cases of which 216 are active cases. We have 10 individuals in the hospital so we've bumped back up into double digits we'll try to push that down but 10 today with one in the intensive care unit. We have 256 deaths since the beginning of this pandemic with one of those having occurred in the past week. As you can see on the slide and I'll talk a little bit more about it later.

Unfortunately, we've really leveled off. We think that some of this may be the product of our last holiday St. Patrick's Day where we did see a lot of gatherings, with every holiday we tend to see if not an uptick at least we're not seeing the down slide that we'd like to see and perhaps that is related. On the positive front we are continuing to do great with our vaccinations, a lot more to go but we have now vaccinated countywide 144,820 doses have been administered in the County as a whole by public health. Almost 75% of those have been administered through the public health departments, three mass clinics and we very proudly gave our 100,000th dose last week and we're continuing to meet this great demand, 10, 12, 15,000 where we ultimately wanna get vaccinations a week from us along with our partners doing almost as much.

So from public health, we have vaccinated just under 39,000 people, fully vaccinated. And additional 25,000 individuals have been partially vaccinated by having received at least the one dose and are due for a second dose. We are starting this week, we're going to make yet another tweak to our registration process and this is partially because we're continuing to see a large number of no shows in our system. We believe that it might be related to the fact that we assign appointments. So even though we ask at the time of registration for people to tell us when they can be available I know I've previously described it as sort of waiting for the cable guy is tell us what date, what place generally time of day we have been for weeks now assigning appointments within those preferences.

We are now going to revert to giving those who are selected through the registration process the opportunity to actually select their appointment time. So, when we pull from the full number of people who are registered for an appointment the total number of people for whom we have appointments available on the following week we will make that poll on a Wednesday morning. We will then send to those people information that they've been selected and that they now need to go into the registration system again and pick their specific appointment, date, time and place. So, we're gonna hope that that helps us with our no-show rates and gives people even more control over their appointments scheduling. For those who don't get selected or don't make that appointment, when notified of the selection they will may remain in the registry and be able to be pulled the next time that we have new appointments available.

I'm also very happy today to announce that we have reached a milestone. This has been a long year. we wanted to get to the place that we could vaccinate everyone in our County who is eligible for vaccine by eligible in this case we mean for whom the vaccine products are approved by the FDA and that is age 16 and above. And we have met that milestone now that we are able to announce that anyone over the age of 16 may now register to get an appointment. Now, please note that that doesn't mean that everyone who does register will be able to get an appointment in the next days or even week. It may take us a couple of more weeks to move through this process but we now can accept registration from anyone above the age of 16. The best place to go for that is recoverslow.org/vaccine and we still have our phone assistance center available to help anyone who needs that additional assistance.

So what you will do is you go to that website you navigate to the place in the website that is called COVID-19 vaccine appointment reservation, click on register now and then fill out the form and complete the registration process. It's that simple. We will, however, continue even with this larger opening about 54,000 new individuals in this group, we will continue to prioritize on the basis of age and medical condition. Anyone who newly registers of an older age or who has the medical conditions of concern or a disability will get first preference for having their appointments made. Who should not use the system again reminder that this is not for second doses, we have made some changes in our second dose. Opportunity to make appointments as well we previously told people to wait for us to reach out to

you with a link, you no longer need to do that. Anyone can go into the site and make their second dose appointment.

Again, recoverslo.org/vaccine appointments and those second dose appointments will be made available also on Wednesday mornings generally around nine o'clock and you can go and check the due date. So there's a calendar app to this if you've gotten a Pfizer dose you can select and determine when your three weeks is due. If it's a Moderna dose when your four weeks is due and then go ahead and make your own appointment without waiting for us to notify you. We will still send out reminders but we wanna make this as easy as possible.

That said, we still only have the ability to make those second dose appointments one week out and this is because we are still beholden to an allocation that is unknown to us but for a week in advance. We have always taken the approach that we don't wanna ever have to cancel appointments. So, unfortunately at this time we still wait for our allocation for the following week and once we know what that is we can open up those second dose appointments. We have been able to accommodate the full demand of those second dose appointments at the three week or the four week interval. Some people may have to wait a little bit longer but again there's no harm in going out a little bit further from that due date and no one ever has to restart their vaccination series by virtue of being somewhat delayed.

I do wanna talk about changes in the blueprint, blueprint for a safer economy. So, yesterday the governor announced a milestone at the state level to actually so 20 million doses in the state of California, a vaccine have been administered and of those 4 million are in residents of the highest priority areas across the state. Again, the healthy places index the lowest quartile in terms of health dynamics. And so with that metric of 4 million doses having been achieved the state has changed the rates that need to be achieved to move to less restrictive tiers And in particular, going from the red to the orange tier now the adjusted case rate, the upper end of that adjusted case rate in the orange tier is 5.9. It was previously 3.9 so this gives counties more opportunity to have a few more cases on a daily basis and still be able to move through the opening process a little bit quicker. And at the yellow level, it has moved from a case rate of below one to adjusted case rate of below two. Unfortunately, for us in San Luis Obispo County as you saw the flatness of our case rate right now means that we are not yet in a position to move forward from red to orange. Our case rate for this week is 6.3, so still a little bit above that new

metric of 5.9 with that, as I always do I ask of our community to work together and collaboratively to meet the metrics that are necessary for us to move forward.

Again, this means though, we're seeing vaccinations, though we're seeing fewer people getting sick and dying we still have a long ways to go, we still need to wear our masks we still need to take all the protective measures of that will get us to even lower case rates and higher ability to open. We're keeping our eyes also on the variance and that's another reason why it's really important to keep our case rates low. The less the virus is circulating in the community the less opportunity it has to mutate or shapeshift is another word that has come out of University of California, San Francisco School of medicine professor there, Peter Chin Hong. I want to mention has been using this term shape-shifting, we use mutations or variation or genetic changes, all of those meaning the same thing which is we don't wanna give this Wiley virus the opportunity to take on new attributes in the structure of the virus that would either render the vaccines in effective or medications ineffective or increase the successfulness of the virus in transmitting from person to person. So, we're keeping our eyes very much on that as well.

I do wanna also mention the governor made one other very big announcement yesterday, which is that the anticipation is such that by June, 15th we will be in such good stead in terms of the proportion of the public that has been vaccinated. The number of people in the hospital will be stable and low such that by June, 15th, it is anticipated that we will be able to get back largely to business as usual. What does that mean? More specifically is all of our usual activities with some exceptions so still not massive events but still most of the activities that we're used to businesses fully open. However, this still will come in the short term until we get to that higher level of immunity, it means still using common sense, still using masks in the near term until we're really fully protected as a community and just being cautious. One of the good things that has come out of this if anyone can say there's anything good, out of this pandemic is people really have learned about infection control in ways that we hadn't.

I do hope we will absolutely get back to hugging and handshaking at some point but people have an awareness and awareness about hand hygiene and sanitation and how many people you're interacting with and the ways you're interacting with them and being in close quarters with a lot of people in the winter time when there's a lot of disease spreading these are all things that will continue in our lives hopefully because we have learned the lessons of how we can keep disease at bay,

whether it's this disease or flu or other winter or other seasonal diseases. So, I very much look forward. I very much like you hopefully excited by the announcement that we foresee a time in California coming very soon that things will dramatically change but we have to stay a little bit tuned in as to what the details are on that. And it's not a full-blown opening in terms of burning our masks just yet. So, stay tuned on that. Also, we have seen additional guidance come out and this is also great news.

A lot more activities are foreseen to be able to occur starting a week from now, really April, 15th is when many of these guidances go into effect. So first of all, gatherings for those of you who've been paying attention throughout we have not moved away yet from three households is the state guidance as to how many people can come together masks or otherwise at this point but by the end of next week, those numbers will change. And so this refers to social informal get togethers not meetings, not planned events but just gathering with your friends and families whereby in an outdoor setting in the red tier will be moving from three households can get together to 25 individuals. Those numbers will increase orange and yellow tiers looking at 50 and a hundred people that can get together in this informal way. In the purple tier which we hope to never see again but just to note that that remains at a three household limit.

An additional opportunity for coming together as community members is in private events. So this would be things like meetings, conferences, receptions, including weddings things that would have either a purchase ticket or a defined guest list with seating charts and assigned seating and no intermingling across events, these kinds of events can now begin as of April, 15th. Again, largely for outdoor settings limits of the same 25 people in the purple tier those numbers go up. Again, in red tier it would be 50 for people gathering outdoors but there is also an allowance for indoor gathering and that would be with a testing or proof of vaccination strategy so that all guests who would be attending a meeting a conference and event can gather outdoors at certain levels or can gather either at higher numbers, outdoors or somewhere in between number in the indoor setting with those indoors or higher number outdoors being based on having a testing or vaccination proof of requirement for those.

So, I'm not gonna go into all the numbers, it differs with each tier purple, red, orange, and yellow. All this information is available on the website so if you're planning an event, you can look at that to determine whether you wanna use the

testing and vaccination strategy or just without that what numbers would be allowed in these kinds of events. Again, that starting April, 15th. There has been yet another change in youth sports as we predicted, we are going back to where we went a few weeks ago which was to say it needs to be aligned with what is allowed for other types of live outdoor events be it a performance or a sporting event and so the state has now acknowledged that need to align use sports spectators, the allowance of spectators with other types of outdoor live events. So, this means in the red tier, that 20% of capacity with advanced registrations is allowed an increased capacity again at the lower tiers.

Finally, there is also new guidance allowed for indoor seated events and performances. So, we had previously the outdoor live performances and now starting April, 15th this is for indoor seated, live events and performances. And these will be in venues up to the capacity of 1500 people. The venue has that capacity. At this point, the allowance is four counties in the red tier to have either 10% of that auditorium field or up to a hundred people, whichever is less. And again, those capacities go up with two things either a less restrictive colored tier or again with testing or vaccination requirements that we can increase the capacity if those are brought to bay. These indoor entertainment events, however are available at this time only for in-state guest. Two more things, coming down the home stretch here.

One is I do wanna speak about the road to recovery efforts that the County has undertaken. So our emergency operations center in concert with a board consultant in advance of the federal American rescue plan had put together an opportunity for small businesses that have been impacted by this pandemic to take advantage of local funding. So, this information is available on recoverslo.org/recoveryresources. The website has new information about these small business grants and they are for businesses that have 50 or less employees and a location in the unincorporated areas of the County. So the amount that is available depends on the number of employees in the business. And one to 10 employees are eligible for up to a \$1,500 grant, 11 to 25 employees up to 2,526 to 50 employees up to a \$3,500 grant from the County. So, look for that information on the county's website.

And finally, I do just wanna acknowledge that this is national public health week. I'm sure that many members of our community didn't know before this pandemic, that there was such a thing as a County public health department. We like it that way,

we like when public health is quietly doing its work behind the scenes, it means that everything's working in terms of disease control and permitting and services that we provide to community members. But I would be remiss for not giving a shout out to our staff, both in the public health department as well as public health personnel throughout our healthcare system and our community who every day have labored not just in the pandemic and infectious disease but we continue to provide a full range of services in our public health department that includes everything from tobacco control, obesity prevention, home visiting for high-risk families supports of newborns. We have our laboratory, we do environmental health permitting, reproductive health, women's health care and on and on this list of about 63 programs. I won't list them all but feel free to go to slowcounty.gov and find information about your public health department and all the ways in which we are hopefully successfully serving our community and I do wanna say thank you to all the staff who work in my department. And with that, I will open it up for comments or questions.

- [man] Dr. Borenstein as you mentioned right off the top the case rate here in the County has remained really steady for about the last month or so. And you look at the blueprint, the other counties particularly in Southern California I'll just mention LA, San Bernardino, Riverside, Inyo, Tulare those were amongst the worst in the nation. When I say recently, just within a few months a couple months, they've all jumped ahead into the orange as SLO County remain in red, how are they doing it? And why isn't this County? I know a lot of people are kind of scratching their heads when they see some of those counties that were really behind this County just the short period of time ago.

- I share that question. What is it gonna take for us to catch up to all of our neighbors? Or why are we not? And I don't have a really good answer for that. There might be some small component of it that relates to other counties that had a lot more disease earlier that they've potentially got a little more natural immunity in their communities by having had higher case rates, that may be a piece of it. We may have let down our guard in this lovely weather that we're experiencing and as I mentioned, the holiday gatherings although the holidays not unique to our County. So I don't have a really good answer for that but we just really need to hunker down and try harder.

- [Man] And also in terms of the vaccines, what are you seeing in terms of people now you've expanded it even more today? Is there a typical wait time you're seeing

somebody who just signed up who had maybe 35 signed up last week, I mean, what's the average wait time to get that vaccine now that it's a lottery based system.

- Yeah, so it's a double-edged sword that we're seeing about being able to move through these populations as quickly as we are. For the most part, each new age sector that we've opened the last couple we've been able to within a couple of weeks meet all of the demand for vaccination. So, when I say that's a double-edged sword it means that only 30, 40, 50% of the population that are eligible are actually seeking a vaccine. So, if you recall that we have to get to coverage of probably 75, 80, 85% of the population we still have a long ways to go. So it's great that we are able to meet the demand of people who have been anxiously waiting their turn for a vaccine. We now are really turning our efforts to how can we provide comforting information to the rest of the population about the safety and efficacy and importance of getting this vaccine.

- [Man] Okay, and I know you mentioned this this would just be to reiterate if you're 30 between 30 and about 49 and you signed up last week you're ahead of those now that are eligible 16 to 29.

- Yes, we are continuing to prioritize on an age basis.

- [Man 2] I could probably sustain it in regards to the cases that we're seeing. Do you know if there are younger folks because it would you would assume that the older population have been vaccinated and might be more protected?

- We are seeing disproportionate numbers in our younger people of our new cases. I would also add though, there's still a long ways to go even with our oldest population in terms of vaccination. I have been surprised by that data to see that... I think I reported on it a couple of weeks ago we were at 55%, fortunately, that is moving up 65% now of our individuals age 75 or above, but still only 65%. I wanna see that at 95% for that age population. So, we have a lot of work to do in meeting people where they're at and their understanding about the pros and cons of this vaccine.

- [Man 2] And are there communities where fewer people are getting vaccinated and you'd like to see improvement in those communities ?

- Yeah, so we're looking at the data every which way we can in terms of age distribution, geographic distribution racial and ethnic breakdown of our vaccination

rates. We haven't had all of that information from the very beginning so we're really trying to dig into that now and target our efforts. We've been doing as a number of efforts with the farm worker community, we're gonna be moving next week into... I'm trying to work with the hospitality community but also geographic differences that we're seeing in the uptake of the vaccine and so we're really have been and we're gonna double down on our efforts to target populations.

- [Man 2] Last question for me in regards to travel a lot of folks haven't taken a trip, gotten on planes. What's your advice at this point about how soon they can start making those plans?

- So there's still a travel advisory in the state that says if you're unvaccinated, you come back into the state of California you still need to quarantine. So vaccinated people certainly are in much better shape for travel but there's still some risk associated with that. And, I do think by summer I think it will be reasonable for people to expect to be able to take their vacations but we really need to do the work collectively as a community to get ourselves to a level of protection through vaccination. I've said many times before I don't wanna see us get there by virtue of more cases of disease. At this point, it really hurts even more each death that we see from this disease when a vaccine would have saved that life.

- [Man 3] I got one more question for you, Dr. Borenstein. We're about a month into where a lot of the public schools have reopened with their hybrid models, in-person instruction. What do you see anything concerning or good news to share?

- We are seeing cases sporadically in schools. We're seeing some small outbreaks, we have not seen any large outbreaks and that's very consistent with the national data. That's come out quite a few studies have been published in the past months about in-classroom spread of this disease is quite low and almost non-existent when it comes to student to teacher. So we're seeing that same thing. Number of different studies in different states around the country have shown that most of the childhood spread happens outside of classrooms in family gatherings and communities. And so that's what we're seeing because our schools are just doing a phenomenal job with all the protective measures.

- [Man 4] And going off that question County schools are they on track to open fully in person for the fall and what goes into a competition?

- Yeah, I believe they are and the governor answered that question yesterday at his press conference saying it is an expectation that schools will be able to be full bore,

come fall. And I very much would like to see the same thing in our County and I believe that our school districts are gearing up for that.

- [Man 4] In San Luis City's seen a rise in cases compared to other cities in the County?

- San Luis... poor capital we've always seen a little bit higher in San Luis, in Nepal Mall and Paso, Atascadero, we've always seen a little bit higher. Yes, yes of late we are seeing more in San Luis than elsewhere. There's undoubtedly a contribution of our younger population that lives in this County particularly at Cal Poly and other... we're seeing some cases certainly in the K to 12 age as well. So that's not terribly surprising but we just all need to work harder at really getting our rate down.

- [Man 4] And you touched on this also earlier but talk to me about youth sports, seen rise in that what's sports?

- We do, oh, I mentioned, yeah that community spread amongst the student population. The other place that there is good data to support is that student athletics is another place where you do see more transmission certainly than in the classroom. And that's why we take those recommendations very seriously and I've worked very closely with the athletic directors across the County and school superintendents to follow all the guidance and to do the testing that's necessary to try to identify cases early and take them out of the risk population.

- [Michelle] I guess no more question.

- All right, thank you very much.

- Thank you once again, for being here today, just a few announcements. You can still get all our counties COVID-19 information on readyslo.org and all our vaccine information on recoverslow.org/vaccine. Our phone assistance center remains open seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and we still maintain our recorded public health information line that's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As Dr. Borenstein announced today, the vaccine registry is now open to any County resident, age 16 and up starting today. Anyone signing up for the registry before Wednesday of each week will have the opportunity to be selected at random within their age grouping for an appointment the following week. We will continue to prioritize older and more at risk groups before younger healthier individuals in our selection process. Vaccines are also available at a growing number of local pharmacies and providers. You can search availability at vaccinefinder.org or by

looking at the list on our website at recoverslow.org. If you do not have access to a computer or the internet as always, you can reach out to our phone assistance center for assistance with finding vaccine. Free COVID-19 tests are available at several locations around the County. And again, all that information can be found at emergencyslow.org/testing. If you think you have been exposed or feel like you have some symptoms, please feel free to reach out and get a test. You do not need an appointment, although they are encouraged and test results are frequently available within 48 hours. You can watch these briefings on the county's YouTube channel and they are also rebroadcast on our SLO County Public Health Facebook page as well as on public access channel 21 at 8:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. and midnight each day until the next briefing occurs. Thank you once again for staying informed, be well and we will see you at our next briefing, our next scheduled press briefing on Wednesday, April, 21st at 3:15 p.m.