

- Good afternoon, . Today is Monday, April 13th, 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 our public information team. Thank you to all the members of the media for being here and for those of the public tuning in at home. This afternoon we have four speakers for you. We'll begin with emergency services director and County administrative officer, Mr. Wade Horton. He will be followed by San Luis Obispo County sheriff, Ian Parkinson, and District Attorney Dan Dow. We will conclude with County health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. After all their statements are complete, all the speakers will be available for questions and a reminder to the speakers, please remember to repeat your question before answering. Thank you again to Robin Babb, our American sign language interpreter. And now San Luis Obispo County, emergency services director and County administrative officer, Mr. Wade Horton.

- Thank you Michelle. Wade Horton, County CAO and emergency services director. I'm proud of what our community is doing to support each other. We're doing what we need to do to get back to normal as soon as possible. Because we are slowing the spread of this virus, we believe our County will be in a good position to enter a phased reopening in our communities while continuing to manage this disease. To do this requires a plan, and the tools and resources to manage any future COVID-19 outbreaks. We are building that capacity, while simultaneously building a plan to reopen our community spaces and our workplaces. To public life again, while ensuring public safety. We are working on the SLO County roadmap to phase reopening. To get you out of your houses, and reopen the doors of our local businesses. We've assembled a panel of experts that will develop a public health and policy strategy for when and how we will lift restrictions and return to normal life. Our goal is to ensure that the guidelines are practical and effective. And balance a broad spectrum of medical, community and economic considerations. To that end, this panel will work with our policy leaders, business education and faith based organizations to inform the development of these recommendations and guidelines, for a phase reopening. Ensuring the health of the community remains our top priority. Yet we are keenly aware, of the dramatic impact. The shelter in place order's having on the economic climate of our community. When we do begin to loosen the constraints on businesses and other sectors, it will be a step wise with a clear eye on avoiding or mitigating any secondary outbreak. We are poised to work closely with our state partners when we return to a jurisdiction by jurisdiction approach, to social distancing measures. You each have been working hard to keep your neighbors and community safe and slow the spread of this virus, thank you. And we want you to know, we are working hard to get you safely out of your homes and back to work. With that I'll turn it over to sheriff Ian Parkinson and District Attorney Dan Dow.

- Thank you Mr. Horton. I want to just begin, this is April and for those that are not aware, April is victims rights awareness month. And there's an important issue that is now on the forefront with respect to victims rights and public safety. And that is, that this last week on Monday, the chief justice of the California Supreme court issued an order to reduce jail populations, really designed to prevent the outbreak of the Corona virus in our County jails across the state. This order applies to all 58 counties, including San Luis Obispo County, and it takes effect today at 5:00 PM. Essentially that order has cut cash bail for most misdemeanors and many felonies that are not technically defined as violent, to zero.

That means that inmates who are currently in custody on those offenses, will be eligible to be released without posting a bond. That means that here in our community, people that have abused children, people that have abused the elderly or those who are in custody currently facing charges of trafficking heroin and methamphetamine around our schools, are eligible for release.

- Good afternoon. These news that the DA just shared, is troubling to us. And I strongly disagree with this decision. However, I have an obligation to follow this decision along with the other sheriffs in California. The California State Sheriff's Association, which represents the 58 sheriffs in California, is also opposed to it and has published a press release opposing this measure. We continue to work with our local law enforcement partners in order to try to ensure that safety is still utmost of our concern and direction on the street, and we're gonna continue to deploy resources accordingly.

- So what it means for us in San Luis Obispo County in terms of numbers, there's approximately 30 individuals based on our review, that may be eligible for immediate release on zero bail. So my office has been working very closely with the sheriff's office to identify, those particular cases, and my staff has been working very hard over the last few days to file written motions in court to oppose the release on zero bail for those cases. In fact, the court started hearing motions today at 1:30, where we are asking that these folks not be released. More motions will be heard tomorrow morning at 8:30 and again tomorrow afternoon at 1:30. But essentially the people that we described earlier, are very possibly going to be released back into our community. But our offices are working very closely with all the law enforcement agencies to ensure maximum public safety.

- As you may recall, this comes on the heels of a release from the California state prisons in California of about 3,500 inmates. I'm not sure that that number is going to stick to 3,500 and it might increase. So added to what we have in our community right now is a lot of concern. Now we're releasing inmates early and who would ordinarily get out on bail, and this is occurring throughout the state. We've been working very diligently since this happened because we have a couple of issues and a couple of concerns with the inmates that we have in custody that we will be releasing. Some with health and mental health issues. So our team of health experts have been working in order to prepare to release them back out into the community, when they've been receiving treatment in the facility and ensure that they will have the ability to receive treatment when they get out of custody, along with their medication and/or treatment they've been receiving. Now on the good side or the bright side, in response to the COVID shelter-in-place order, you may recall that San Luis County with its leadership, made the bold decision to step out in front of this prior to the state. We have had the ability to create a plan. So we created a plan and I can say at the Sheriff's office, we were able to increase our patrol force out there. I recognize the concerns that the public would have, the fear that they might have. So it was important that we deployed additional black and whites, rather than the standard number of black and whites that are out on the street, to be seen, to discourage criminal behavior and to really make the public feel at the end of the day safe. What does that mean? We've essentially increased our patrol deputies, about 75% on the street. We've done this by really removing deputies from specialized investigative units, and put them in marked patrol cars out on the street. This obviously is not sustainable. However, we are committed to

doing it as long as it is necessary to provide safety out on the streets. Currently, San Luis Obispo County jail has no cases of COVID-19 in the jail. And that's really important. It's our responsibility to try to protect the inmate, and try to ensure that we do not have this enter the jail, and if we do, we're prepared for it. In response to that, what we have done is we have created operations that amount to about a 21 page document, covering the health and safety of the inmates coming in, really with a philosophy of test and protect. And what I mean by that is that, all people that entered the jail, including employees, including inmates, including officers, are all questioned regarding any symptoms. Their temperature is taken on a daily basis to ensure that they're not bringing it into the jail. In addition, we have set up a quarantine system for all inmates coming in, to go to a particular housing unit, where they can be monitored for a period of about 14 days, to ensure that they're not transmitting that to the other inmates that are already in custody. This plan has become quite extensive, but we feel that it's been imperative in order to ensure the safety of the inmates and our employees.

- Thank you, sheriff. I just want to close with a reminder that April is victim's rights awareness month. The California constitution guarantees certain rights to every victim of crime. One of those is to be heard. To be heard by the court anytime they have a concern about a case. One of those is specifically to be heard about their safety with respect to bail. Our California constitution says that, when bail is to be set, each victim, that the most primary consideration that the judge must rely upon is the safety of the victim and the safety of the community. So we have asked the judges to do that today and tomorrow, when hearing our opposition to zero bail. And it's our belief that the judges will do their part and do their best job to make that evaluation. The District Attorney's office remains committed to working with our partners, like the sheriff's office and every local law enforcement agency to continue to fulfill our important public safety mission. And that is to provide service, security and safety to the community in a manner that is protective of victim's rights, as well as the rights of those who have been accused. I think we'll now turn it over to Dr. Borenstein.

- Thank you, good afternoon. I'm Dr. Penny Borenstein, the County health officer, and I will give you the daily update on where we are with respect to cases in this County. We now stand at 117. We have two individuals who are in the hospital, both are in intensive care. One of those I am happy to say, is a person who has long been on a ventilator and is now off that ventilator. So I'm happy about that development. We continue to see low numbers in our County and in our hospitals especially. Nonetheless, as you've heard from Mr. Horton, we are beginning to talk about and think about what an exit strategy will look like from our shelter at home. It will be a step wise approach, but right now we are still looking for more fact finding that we absolutely are continuing with our flat curve. We've been there for a couple of weeks. We want to see at least another incubation period worth, and then we're working with the state as you heard Mr. Horton say, to figure out when and if they will be ready to begin to allow jurisdictions to titrate the exit strategy, if you will on this. I do want to talk about antibody testing again. I know I've talked about it previously here, but we are continuing to hear a lot of questions on it from our consumers and academics and even medical staff were saying, "How come I'm hearing about antibody testing available elsewhere?" So let me address it head on. There is only one licensed FDA approved antibody test. The antibody test again, is not testing for current infection but testing for past infection. So we believe that there probably have been quite a few people in our community who had

the disease but did not get tested. People either who had mild symptoms or when testing was much less available early on or maybe had no symptoms at all. We very much want to get to the place that we can do that type of broad antibody testing, but we are not there yet. We're not there yet in the nation and we're certainly not there in our jurisdiction. There are a number of places in California that are beginning to test these products for testing for antibody. And you may be seeing some stories about that. So Los Angeles, for instance, released a new story that they've tested 900 people. Santa Clara's, another place that is working on this. They've tested through part of their research, 3000 people. Those sound like large numbers, but when we actually get to testing, we want to see those numbers way higher so that we can have a good sense of how many people in our County have actually had this disease. This is a different test than what we continue to do, the ongoing test for, do you have the disease now? And are you carrying the virus at present, and may you transmit it to someone else? So it's a two pronged strategy in testing. One is to identify people who currently have the disease, so that we can isolate them, identify their context, try to stop the spread from that active case, and the second is to get a better picture of how far and wide this disease may have been spreading over recent weeks or longer in our community. I also want to talk about, you have heard from our sheriff and our DA that a lot of things in the way we normally do business are not business as usual. You've heard that from Mr. Horton about, you know, the economic struggles were happening. Having victims being placed in difficult positions vis-a-vis zero bail. And just in general, I think anybody who is going through this experience knows that many people in our County are suffering in a lot of different ways. And so I want to address the mental health aspects and the wellness aspects of, how do we all as a community deal with what we are experiencing? So, really my message to everyone is to try to find ways that we can retain, enhance, improve our general health and wellbeing at this time. So certainly nurturing, supportive relationships. I've talked about this before, especially with teens, but all of us need contact. If we can't have physical contact, we need to have emotional contact. So I encourage people to use any manner of app that they can, whether it's FaceTime or Zoom or WhatsApp or, I'm probably playing favoritism. I know there are many more out there. But really, it's important to have connectivity. There's a lot of people who are forced to live alone, who normally would have had their family members over once a week or go on a trip with the family. So, it's important to nurture these relationships through other means. Exercise daily. That is so good for your mental wellbeing as well as your physical health. So whether it's doing a video in your bedroom once a day or getting out for a good walk, or you know, cleaning out your closets as a form of exercise. Any of these ways that we can really stay active, is important to do. Getting enough sleep is certainly important to our health and mental wellbeing. So, people should have in many cases, more time on their hands. Please make sure that you are getting a solid night's sleep on a regular basis. Along with that is eating nutritious foods. Again, we want people to be not medically vulnerable because they are not eating well, but also keeping a good diet. We're not asking that people lose weight during this time, but that they stick to a well balanced meal regimen. And finally, for those individuals who may need some extra support in terms of mental health or drug and alcohol services, behavioral health, that is still absolutely available to folks. It may not be in person, but our behavioral health department has built up its tele-health opportunities and we really want people to reach out if they are struggling while going through the conditions of the day. Finally I wanted to mention, I would be remiss if I did not give a shout out to my colleagues in the public health world. We were busy last week and neglected to bring to you the fact that public health week came and went. April 6th through 12th, was national public health week and no time like the present, for all of you to give a virtual hug to all of our public health brethren. So in addition to all the people that I've come and told

you about who are doing contact investigations and tracing and epidemiology, and talking with our providers about this disease, there are still quite a number of other public health folks who are out there on the front lines, be it doing STD testing or pregnancy testing or connecting with vulnerable pregnant women and their young children to get them the services they need. We are continuing to do intakes and help people get health insurance. Our laboratory is part of public health and up and running. Our environmental health is still doing inspections for compliance. So any number of people in our community who live in the public health sphere, both on the public sector as well as our academic friends. Just wanted to bring it to everyone's attention that we have recently passed our national public health week, and I wanted to say a personal thank you to everyone who is engaged in the business of public health. I'm not sure that many of us thought we would see an event like this in our lifetime, but this is what we've trained for. You're seeing amazing work being done by public health professionals throughout the nation and our locality, and I wanted to say thank you. With that, I'll open it up for questions.

- [Guest] Question for Mr. Dow. Clarify the 30 individuals that you mentioned that are eligible for early parole, they're here at San Luis Obispo County jail right now at five o'clock. And there's pending, you said, court hearing right now, will they be released or what's their status as of five o'clock tonight?

- So let me repeat the question. The question was, of the 30 individuals that we estimated maybe eligible for the zero bail release and when would that happen? Would that happen at 5:00 PM tonight? And the answer is, no, it won't happen all at once. There are several of those cases, approximately a third that are being heard in court this afternoon as we're here at this press conference. Another third will be heard tomorrow morning at 8:30 and the final third tomorrow afternoon at 1:30. The court is cognizant of the fact that, the sheriff's office is working diligently to make sure that anyone that has any special needs can have those things taken care of and just physically respond to a large release at one time. So we expect it will be phased in. I don't know if the sheriff wants to add on onto that.

- [Guest] Also the question for Mr. Horton too, just a quick update on Alternate Care Site. I know phase two of that was supposed to come online either today or very soon. Ventilators as well, I know there's an order out for those.

- Sure, the question was, where are we with the Cal Poly Alternate Care Site and then what's the latest status on our ventilators? So we have no patients at the Cal Poly ACS, I think that's a good thing at this point. If we need to have patients at the Cal Poly ACS, we're ready to see them. In regards to ventilators, we've been able to increase our ventilator supply in this County from 60 to 71, and then we are expecting another 25 ventilators to arrive in the next couple of days. So I think that's a good thing. We're seeing that that order is coming through and again, that'll prepare us, if they are needed and that we will be prepared to keep people healthy and well. And we'll have the supplies and the materials to do that.

- [Guest] And then another question, this may be impossible to ask, but I know people, you were talking about recovery, the exit strategy as we heard, a timeframe, you know, is there weeks, months, I know people are very curious about.

- So the question was, where are we in a timeframe? I think we're gonna know a lot more information in the next couple of weeks. So I would anticipate that we're gonna be staying the course, at least for the next two weeks. In those two weeks we'll have the ability to accomplish and finish the plan that we're talking about. The phase reopening plan. And then we'll also have more data, from an epidemiological standpoint to allow Penny or our public health officer to make that determination of when it's safe to start reopening, in conjunction and talking of course with the state and CDPH as well.

- [Guest] Have any citations been issued to businesses, for social distancing?

- So the question was, have any citations been issued to businesses for social distancing? So we have received hundreds of phone calls and we've performed hundreds of followups and I'm pleased to announce, to my knowledge that we have not had to issue one citation. Individuals and business owners, we're working on this together. It's more about education and that is about citations and they're doing the right thing and they're making the right decisions.

- [Guest] And just to clarify, so can individuals also receive citations? We've heard that like people will report parties and then they aren't sure of this.

- So the question is, can people receive citations? The answer is, it is ultimately, it is a misdemeanor. However, what we've found is just talking to people and letting them know, Hey, what you're doing right now could be putting folks health in jeopardy. That's where we're getting compliance. And again, the community is in this together and I'm really proud of SLO County and what we're doing to take care of each other.

- [Guest] And one more question. Do you anticipate any more park closures or have there been any violations of current park closures ?

- So the question was, will there be any more park closures? We don't wanna close any more parks. Again, that's really up to our citizens, and right now they're doing a great job. We just had a holiday weekend. I didn't receive any, any complaints or issues that's come to my attention at this point. And so again, that means SLO County is doing what it needs to take care of each other, thank you.

- [Guest] I have some questions for Dr. Borenstein real quick. So we saw a lot, at the end of last week, a high number of testing from the public health lab, and then it seemed to dip down in the last day. Can you talk about how many tests you anticipate the County will perform going forward?

- So the question was, how many tests do we anticipate the public health lab performing going forward? We saw some higher numbers for a couple of days last week. Again, our maximum continues to be at 50 per day. I think we did hit that perhaps one day. We've been generally in the high teens, twenties, thirties, and that's because we have preserved the resource of the public health department for a highest risk settings for healthcare workers, first responders, longterm care, congregate living essential workers. The reason we do that, is if we opened it up to the public in general, we would probably be overwhelmed. So we rely very much on the partnership of a private healthcare community, to continue to test in the outpatient world for patients with milder illness. We do also test at the public health department for inpatients at the hospitals.

- [Guest] Okay, and do you think private practices have the guidance and test kits they currently need?

- So the question was, do we think the private practices have the guidance and the test kits that they need? So we have been putting out guidance to our healthcare providers on a regular basis. We have asked them to continue to try to test as much as possible, and we have done at least every two weeks, updated survey to determine which providers are testing. We do that for all providers, and we're especially interested in clinics and urgent care settings, because that's somewhat the provider of last resort if someone's individual primary care doctor is choosing for whatever reasons not to test. And choosing sometimes maybe that they don't have the materials. Though we have been able to get more PPE, protective equipment out to providers as well as the material to do the testing. So we continue to ask our providers to test. We know that it is a burden for them, but nonetheless, many are. And we continue to make the public health department available to hear from residents who may be running into challenges in getting a test when sick.

- [Michelle] I'll take one more question.

- [Guest] I got a question for Dr. Borenstein. When you compare our numbers to neighboring counties, they're dramatically different. Some people have wondered the test here in this County, is it dramatically lower? Is that the reason or, I know there's a lot of different factors, but you know, a lot of people are watching from various, particularly Santa Barbara and Ventura counties are watching what's happening up here and are just kind of wondering about the differences.

- Right, so the question is, our numbers in San Luis Obispo seem to be dramatically lower than some neighboring counties, and do we have an understanding of why that is? Is it that we're doing less testing? I don't believe that to be the case. And unfortunately, as I've spoken out before, we don't have a really good denominator of the number of total tests that have been done. Neither do our counties to the South who do publish that information, but they believe it to be inaccurate. When we have talked to the private labs to just get a sense of the numbers that they're testing. While we're continuing to get that through a database from the state. We believe that we are doing proportionately similar amounts of testing. So we don't really think that's the reason. I do know that Santa Barbara, it's numbers have gone up dramatically and we think a lot of that is because of the outbreak that they are having in their state penitentiary in Lompoc.. They also had a larger number of cases for a period of time in Northern Santa Barbara County. That seems to be settling out some. If you look to our North, Monterey County has fewer cases reported than we do. So I think that the reasons for case numbers are all of the above, testing capabilities and amounts, I don't think that we are falling down there. Though we certainly would like to do more. Are there out clusters of cases and outbreaks? And we're not seeing that thankfully. And has our social distancing been working? And we think so, and we think that's why we are seeing a flattening of the curve. But with even all of that jurisdiction by jurisdiction, there are some places that are really struggling and others that are doing better and we consider ourselves lucky to be in that case and we also more than lucky to think that we've been doing all the right things.

- Thank you all again for coming today and for tuning in at home. Remember there are several ways that you can stay informed on the latest information about COVID-19 in San Luis Obispo County. We continue to update ReadySLO.org, and maintain our public health information line recorded message with daily updates. Our phone assistance center is also open eight to five on weekdays, Monday through Friday, and is open until 4:00 PM on weekend days. All of our information is also available in English and Spanish. Thank you again for tuning in today. Our next regularly scheduled briefing will be Wednesday at 3:15, please remember to tune in on San Luis Obispo County public health Facebook page, on our County homepage at www.slocounty.gov and then also on live streams of KCOY and KSBY. Thank you, and have a safe and good afternoon.