

- Good afternoon. Today is Friday, April 24, 2020. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I'm the designated media contact for our public information team. This afternoon, we have two speakers for you. We will begin with San Luis Obispo County District One Supervisor, John Peschong. He will be followed by County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director Wade Horton is also here and available for questions. Please, speakers, remember to repeat the question before answering it. And thank you, Robin Babb, once again, our American Sign Language interpreter today. And now, San Luis Obispo County District One Supervisor John Peschong.

- Thank you. As has been discussed in previous briefings here, our community has been actively preparing for reopening our small businesses, communities, and our economy. While we don't know what date we are opening on, we are doing everything possible to ensure that we will be ready on day one. In our efforts to prepare for a smooth and safe reopening, I'd like to report that this has been an incredibly collaborative process. One that has included over 250 stakeholders, including local small businesses and businesses from different sectors, non-profit organizations, and medical and public health experts. The process has been swift. We began drafting the plan just over a week ago and we will be ready next week to release a roadmap for a phased reopening. Our goal is to get this out quickly to the community members, but not at the expense of being thoughtful, deliberative, and inclusive. This roadmap will include a high-level overview of each new phasing of reopening. Specific guidance and additional details will be coming later. We're sure the community will have questions after the roadmap is released and we hope to be able to answer all those questions for the community. Also, today, I just wanted to let you know that on Tuesday this week, our county Emergency Operations Center reached an important landmark. That is we filled our 500th resource request for PPE and supplies. This means that when a healthcare provider, they've asked for supplies, we've been able to get them the help that they need and the materials and supplies they need to keep their staff and their patients safe. These requests have come from all types of providers. From small private practices to ambulance companies and our local hospitals. Having enough supplies is one of the key factors that shores up our medical system so that we can be prepared and begin to consider our phased reopening. With that, I would like to introduce Dr. Borenstein to come forward.

- Thank you Supervisor Peschong. I'm Penny Borenstein. I'm your County Health Officer. So, I am going to give you the daily report of case numbers. We now stand at 163. We have still 119 recovered and a lot more information going on related to the newest cases. We have three individuals in the hospital and one in intensive care. So, you may be asking with this increase of numbers that we are aware of, well, how does that comport with this phased reopening? And what I want to say about that is we, we are watching the case counts closely. We want to be transparent. We will tell you that we had eight new cases two days ago. Seven yesterday, and 14 today. And this may seem like it's in stark contrast to what I communicated just two days ago about we've had a long period of time of very low numbers - zero to four - and yet we're talking about reopening. However, as I said on Wednesday, the last time I had come before the media, is that we're not going to be overly reactive to a day or even two days or three days of relatively small numbers still, but we are very interested in watching these trends and so we are watching it closely. There are a number of factors that goes into what we are seeing and particularly we want to take care to note what's going on with our hospitals. So, we continue to have low numbers of individuals in the hospital, and that's a good thing. We're looking at healthcare sector, healthcare worker cases, and long-term care and other congregate settings. Those are some of the markers in

addition to the raw case number that we're paying close attention to. So, the other thing that is important is our contact tracing. I want to remind folks that we in this county continue to investigate every single case we get. We do detailed investigations and we follow up with every contact that we become aware of so that we can issue quarantine orders and ask those individuals to stay home. This is going to be, ongoing, the hallmark to our continuing to manage this disease outbreak in our communities. There is disease that continues to spread in our community. We expect that will continue. We are anticipate that we will see some higher numbers, but it is absolutely critical that we dig in deeper into what the meaning of these numbers are and these new cases. So, with this uptick of 14 cases yesterday, we've already begun those contact investigations and are, in some ways, pleased. Though the number doesn't make us particularly happy, the situation is somewhat reassuring in that they are all but one that we haven't yet had communication with are person-to-person spread. And so, what I mean by that is every individual who tested positive - with the one exception - had a known already positive close contact. So, someone in their household. Someone who they spend, you know, a partner. And so, what that tells us is that we're not particularly seeing more spread, new areas that were otherwise unknown to us. We in this county continue to test for contacts who become symptomatic. Many counties have actually ceased to do that, counties who have very large numbers. And so we anticipate that we will see more of that type of thing. In fact, three of the individuals - if anyone is looking very closely at our data online - are children. And so, these were all known to be contacts of existing cases. Very important to what we're watching, as I mentioned, is congregate care settings. So, you may - the public may have already heard about one case that is associated with a skilled nursing facility. This is the first of that type in our county, but it's important to note that's, what we know about this case thus far, is this is one of the new cases that had a contact in the community. So, this individual has had close contact of a household member who was already known to be positive. We have aggressively jumped on that situation and are in the process of investigating whether or not there may have been any spread within the facility, but at this moment, we do not have any information about any additional cases or patients, and that's what we're going to be keeping an eye out for as we move forward. So, I guess in talking about these numbers, what I want to say is that these new cases are not overly worrisome but they also are certainly of note, and it does illustrate the point that we have to continue with our diligence. So, even as we talked about our phased reopening, and we are not stopping that process, but I once again will emphasize,, as I have continued to do, that this will be done slowly and cautiously and with all manner of continued recommendations around social distancing, staying home if you're sick, incredibly good hand hygiene, hand washing, and all the other measures that we have put into place at this point to try to tamp down the number of cases of disease in our county. That said, I do also want to address what we're seeing in another area of statistics that we've been collecting, and that is around emergency department or emergency room utilization. We have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of people using our emergency room and we think that that is probably because a lot of people continue to be scared of the hospitals being the place that are seeing this disease and they don't want to put themselves in harm's way. So, I would like to make sure that our public gets the message from me that the hospitals are a safe place to go, especially when you have an emergency event. So, we do not want anyone to succumb to a heart attack or a stroke or a broken bone because they have chosen to not go to the hospital because they're concerned about that setting. Our hospitals are open. They're available. The emergency departments are fully equipped with personal protective equipment and skilled staff, and I would like to reiterate that message of the importance of use the emergency department as indicated and appropriate for all manner of other conditions, as well is, as

well as if you are very sick from a respiratory illness that may be COVID because they are prepared to test for that and to provide care for that. So, with that, I once again want to ask the community for patience and indulgence as we go through this process together. It is not easy for anyone. We continue to hear all manner of input from the public. I do not at all mind hearing that input. It helps us know what the community is experiencing and thinking, and we are continuing to try to move forward with a balanced and smart and evidence based approach to our phased reopening of sector by sector in this community. So, with that, I will open it up for questions.

- [Male Reporter] Dr. Borenstein, if you're out and about, and I know you are, I mean, you can see where there's more traffic on the road, more people are out. I was at Pismo Beach today with people on the beach. How concerned are you that people are starting, as you talked about in the last several days, starting to just kind of take their hands off the wheel, so to speak, and not be as mindful as you'd like them to be?

- Right, so the question is are you, like I am, the reporter, seeing more traffic on the roads, more people at the beach, and what level of concern do you have regarding that might people be moving too quickly or taking their I think you said their hand off the wheel? So, yeah. With everything in this, it is understanding the ways in which this disease is spread and responding appropriately. So, as people can go out or can increase their amount of outings, whether it's to the beach or to a store, it has to be done with all of the precautions that we have asked for, which is keeping your distance from other people, only travel with those who you either are in a household with or the minimum number of people going into the supermarket or the pharmacy. Do not go out if you are sick and particularly I need to keep emphasizing if you are in a particularly vulnerable population, my advice is absolutely stay home either completely or as much as absolutely possible. And by vulnerable population, again, it's older individuals particularly above the age of 65. And as you go up, the risk increases, and those with medical conditions that puts them at higher risk.

- [Male Reporter] Earlier in the week, you said the county had flattened the curve. Are we just seeing the ebbs and flows of this disease where it can do just that - the ebb and flow, and this is a period where it's flowing?

- Right, so the question is earlier in the week you said this is the curve was flat and is this changed more of what a normal ebb and flow would be? And my answer to that is yes. Three days of a slightly higher number does not put me into a panic. It is absolutely worth noting and watching and digging into the details of these cases, as I stated. Somewhat reassuring is that these are not unexpected cases for the most part. They are contacts of known cases. So, we are absolutely going to see bobbles in our trend line. We are - I expect that as we begin to very slowly and cautiously move into our new phases that we will continue to see an increase in cases, but we absolutely have to keep our eye on not just that raw number, but where they're coming from both in terms of geography and severity of illness. So, very much keeping an eye on hospitalization rates and critical care and continuing to message to the most vulnerable populations that they take that extra measure of care to not put themselves in situations that are of high risk.

- [Male Reporter] One last question for me. We've seen a couple of additional cases at California Men's Colony. How - I had asked you about that I think last week. How concerned are you with seeing some additional cases there?

- Yeah. So, the question was we've seen a couple of additional cases at the California Men's Colony and how concerning is that? Yeah, these kinds of congregate settings are the types of things that keep me up at night is that's where we don't want to see it in places that we know from other situations, other diseases and, with this disease, other facilities. These are the kinds of places that can get out of hand quickly if not managed appropriately or aggressively and early. We are doing that in concert with CMC leadership staff and medical staff on-site. They have plans in place. They are addressing it and we are working with them to do a large number of tests so that we can be sure that we've identified what is present in the facility and we hope to be able to, with them, manage the situation at that particular facility.

- [Female Reporter] Dr. Borenstein, so, by my calculations, it looks like Paso now has about 30% of the county's total cases. Do you have any explanation for why there's so many in that community? Is it more testing? Is it greater transmission? Like, what do you see there?

- So, the question was Paso Robles appears to have the highest proportion of cases at 30% and to what do I attribute that? I still think, in general terms, in every community in this county, we've got pretty low numbers. Per capita, we don't match any of our surrounding counties. Some of the suggestions you put out may well be true, that there may be more testing going on there. The population may be -may be out somewhat more. It tends to be a younger population than some of the other areas in our county. And I don't know to what extent there may be some slightly higher population density. I'm just theorizing along with you, but at the end of the day, I really don't put a lot of stock in the fact that they have, you know, 10 or 15 more cases. When we're talking about those level of, that order of magnitude of numbers, I really don't think there's a whole lot we can say about it.

- [Female Reporter] With the recent uptick in cases in the past few days, do you still think it's advisable to loosen restrictions on certain, like the churches allowing a for a drive-in church and that sort of thing?

- So, the question was given the uptick in cases recently, do we think it's a good idea to continue down this path of phased reopening? Particularly one area of concern is the churches? As I've said all along, we will continue to intensively monitor what's happening in real time with our case counts. The numbers that I'm seeing are not overly worrisome. They are notable but not something that I think will cause us, at this moment in time, to pull back from our plans.

- [Male Reporter] Does it push it back at all? I mean, you say you won't pull back completely, but does it push back a few days, maybe a week?

- So, the question was does it make us pause and pull back maybe even a week? So, so let's remember that we are still under a state order. So, all of the easing that we've been able to do is within the construct of the state and the county's order. Many of these things have been allowable under those orders all along, but we gave guidance earlier. For instance, the healthcare sector. Maybe it made sense to not see people in-person in offices and move toward a telemedicine approach. Hospitals canceled elective surgeries, not just at my recommendation, but their national organizations. At, you know, so drive-thru church services. In some ways, you know, it's not a prohibition that we ever had before, but we're trying to give guidance within the existing orders that are allowable and move in a slow and steady fashion and then reassess based on where the numbers take us. So, so there isn't a date certain for any of these things and, under the state order, there isn't - even when the state lifts it's order. If and

when that comes. It will come. It is not going to be okay, now everybody go back to business as usual. So, I don't think that - the short answer to your question is no, it doesn't really change our timeline.

- [Michelle] Any other questions?

- [Female Reporter] Yeah, we've got one for, I think for Wade. We were just curious if, do you guys have an estimate on how much the county's annual budget has declined? I know in some cities like Morro Bay, they're projecting like 30% decline.

- So, the question was what's going to be the impact on the county's budget moving into the next fiscal year? That's certainly something that we're looking at and, right now, we anticipate it to be of a magnitude of tens of millions of dollars from our funding sources. We're coming up with contingency plans for how we're going to address that, especially as we move into budget season.

- [Female Reporter] But you don't have like, an estimate right now? Like a percentage estimate or anything?

- It's going to be north of \$20 million.

- [Female Reporter] Okay.

- [Michelle] Anything else?

- Thank you.

- Thank you all, again, for coming today and tuning in on live - I mean online and on TV. As a reminder, you can get all our updates and information about the county's response to COVID-19 on [ReadySLO.org](https://www.ready.slo.org). These include a method of signing up for a weekly email news update, media releases, guidance documents, information on face coverings, updated statistics, and more. There are also several ways to view these media briefings on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons. You can, of course, tune in live here on San Luis Obispo County's Facebook page. On the Public Health Department Facebook page. On the county's website, and on the live streams of KCOY and KSBY. You can also view them on public access channel 21 at midnight, 8 a.m, and 5 p.m. each day until the next briefing occurs. Finally, we continue to maintain our public health information line that's a recorded message in English and Spanish, as well as our phone assistance center which will be open this weekend from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thank you, again, for tuning in today. Be well and we will see you next week.