

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, April 29th, 2020. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I am the designated media contact for our public information team. This afternoon we have three speakers for you. We will begin today with the Mayor of the City of Atascadero, Heather Moreno. That's H-E-A-T-H-E-R M-O-R-E-N-O. She will be followed by Lead Pastor of Grace Central Coast, Tim Theule, T-I-M T-H-E-U-L-E. Finally, we will close with our County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director Wade Horton is also here and available for questions. Speakers, please remember to repeat the question before answering, and thank you to our American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now Mayor of Atascadero, Heather Moreno.

- Good afternoon. My name's Heather Moreno. As Mayor of Atascadero, I have been proud to serve on the Board of Supervisors subcommittee that is reviewing the guidelines and considerations for reopening. Our group has served at the request of public health officer Dr. Penny Borenstein to provide input and guidance about what cities need to effectively reopen our communities. Our input plus the input of many others is being put into the framework that will be released Friday of this week. Dr. Borenstein has asked for, and greatly received, an immense amount of input but I want to be clear, this is a public health issue. I'm confident that Dr. Borenstein will make the right decision for our community after the Governor lifts the statewide order and this framework will provide a flexible criteria for her to make those decisions. Personally, I am pleased to see the breadth of input sought from so many local stakeholders across industries throughout the seven cities and the County. While undergirded by medical science, the participation of community leaders, residents, and business owners is crucial to ensure the framework works for everyone. I want to speak frankly about some of the issues that our community is having concerns about. Our county is a popular tourist destination. We're lucky to live here. But it creates a challenge when you live in a place where people want to vacation. We are also challenged by an influx of a significant number of college students that travel frequently to and from hometowns that may have been more impacted by COVID-19 than we have. While we are so happy that our communities have slowed the spread of coronavirus by sheltering at home, we don't know yet how much immunity there is in our communities as a result of our low case numbers. The draft guidelines I've seen recognize these concerns, as does Dr. Borenstein. As others said during Monday's briefing, it allows for us to take two steps forward and, if needed, one step back based on the data and trends. We have a long road ahead of us. The County is working with cities to create focused communications around each phase of reopening. While the authority to set guidelines for reopening rests with Dr. Borenstein, she is working very closely with cities to address issues specific to each community while also setting guidelines for the entire county. While we await Dr. Borenstein's comments this afternoon and the release of the framework on Friday, there has been a lot of public discussion around gatherings at beaches and public open spaces. I'd therefore like to address gatherings at inland areas, particularly in Atascadero. We are fortunate to have beautiful outdoor recreation available, like the walking trail at Atascadero Lake and hiking trails such as Three Bridges, Pine Mountain, and Jim Green. Parks and open spaces are great places to exercise and stay physically active outdoors, which Dr. Borenstein has repeatedly said is good for our health. People from all across the county come to enjoy a good one-mile walk around the lake or to hike on our gorgeous trails. So far we've been pleased with the diligence people have been showing in observing social distancing at these locations and we will continue to monitor that distancing. At the lake, there is signage reminding visitors to keep a safe six feet apart,

observing social distance from those who don't live with you. We know other communities have taken similar action and we encourage folks to respect these guidelines so that we can keep all of these areas open for use by all of us. While we are enjoying nice weather, we must continue to follow safe distancing practices and avoid gathering in groups. Our county has done a terrific job so far of keeping our rate of new COVID-19 infections in check and we don't wanna risk undoing all of that good work and I thank you for doing your part. And now I would like to turn this over to Pastor Tim Theule of Grace Church Central Coast.

- Good afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be a part of today's press briefing. A week and a half ago, I had the great privilege to be a part of an online gathering of 50 faith leaders from multiple faiths and different sized faith communities across SLO County. There were leaders from the Islamic, the Jewish, the Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Evangelical communities. The purpose of our gathering was to hear the concerns and needs of these faith leaders and their communities as we look forward to the reopening of San Luis Obispo County. This was followed up last week with a smaller gathering of a cross-section of 10 faith leaders to review the draft guidelines for reopening and how they might be applied in our various faith communities. We produced a feedback document for consideration by the larger regional planning team. The faith leaders of SLO County are in full support of County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein and her commitment to a science-driven, public health-led process to determine the right plan for reopening our community. Dr. Borenstein could have developed a reopening plan without input but she took the time to invite input and discussion from community leaders and groups, including those of us who are leaders of faith-based communities. We very much appreciate that and the opportunity to be a part of this process. Thank you, Dr. Borenstein. I've been wondering, Dr. Borenstein, how you sleep at night and I've been praying for you. You must be under such immense pressure. We support the science-based guidelines that we've seen and appreciate that we are able to share our concerns and describe some pain points we foresee moving forward. While our faith communities are eager and anxious to gather again face-to-face in our services of various sizes, we also understand the need to limit our numbers and continue the practice of social distancing as part of this phased process. The greatest challenge for our faith communities will be to maintain two or three methods of operating simultaneously. For example, continuing to create online services for those who need or who choose to continue worshiping at home, while also producing live services for campus events going forward. As we all continue to go through this extremely unnerving and stressful pandemic, we believe that we will get through this terrible time together. We believe that we're better together. We're all here for each other. We can navigate these uncharted waters, protect everyone's health, safety, and livelihoods, and slowly get back to a more familiar lifestyle while emerging as even stronger community than we were before. We will all need to adapt to a new normal as the communities and businesses of SLO County open up gradually in phases. The faith leaders of SLO County are standing with our fellow community leaders. We're committed to the phased reopening plan and leading our various faith communities in support and compliance for the safety of all and for the future thriving of San Luis Obispo County. Thank you very much.

- Thank you, hi, I'm Penny Borenstein, County Health Officer. Before I go into our regular report on numbers and what we're doing, I wanna take a moment to thank both Mayor Moreno and Pastor

Theule. I do sleep at night. So thank you for your caring. And the reason I can sleep at night is because we live in an incredible community and this is not about me, this is about everyone. Everyone who's been part of our county team of leaders and workers and hundreds of county employees, city employees, people who don't work for government who are on the front lines in oh so many ways, and our residents who have continued to comply with what we have asked of them under these very terrible conditions. So I want to say thank you. I also want to use that as a springboard to asking our public to continue to bare with us. I am gonna talk about this plan that you've been hearing about now for days but I also want to acknowledge that we have the potential at this moment to be very fractured. We're hearing very different voices on what we should do moving forward and so I wanna build on the pastor's comments and just ask of our community to continue to go down this road together. That is going to be our most important weapon in fighting this disease. So with that, I will give you our daily numbers. We stand at 181 cases today. 135 of them have recovered, so we continue to have high numbers, uh, a high percentage of our community that gets through this disease with either no symptoms, in some cases, or mild disease. We do have five individuals in the hospital but none in intensive care. And some of the increase in numbers, I want to mention, are from two of the settings that, as I have come before you many times and spoken about the areas that we concern ourselves most with are congregate settings where this virus can easily take hold and spread. So we have had one more case in the same skilled nursing facility that we had our first case in. It is in a staff person. We're continuing to work with that facility in a very aggressive way to make sure that it doesn't get out of hand. And now we have five new individuals who are inmates at our California Men's Colony prison. We're working very effectively with the management at that facility and the medical staff at that facility and we are going to continue to ramp up testing. As we do that, we may well see more cases, as we did in this case. Five individuals with no symptoms. That was a direct product of our testing everyone who might have been in the midst of this, of the last case that we reported, regardless of their symptoms. So don't be surprised if we do see some more cases but I have a confidence in the management of the facility and our partnership with them to address this as we move forward. Speaking of testing, I think I gave some early insights into the fact that we were ramping up our testing. I now can tell you that early next week we actually do plan on making available to the community, that we will be working with a state contractor to stand up ongoing testing. It will be a Monday through Friday operation. I'm not sure when it will start next week, we don't have an actual date determined, but it will be 12 hours a day, 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., with one clinic in Paso Robles and another in Grover Beach. We're still working with the State and the company, OptumServe, to get all the finishing details on this. So I can't give you a whole lot more than that but stay tuned in the coming days. Our information team is going to be putting out a lot more information about who can come for testing, when they can come, where specifically they can come, and it will be based on appointment. So when you begin to hear the information about the where, when, and who, make sure that you have either the capacity to go online and schedule an appointment or we will also be making available a phone bank for appointments. So I know that I'm not giving you all the level of detail that we might want to but we're still trying to put some of the finishing touches on this. So let's talk a little bit more about this reopening framework. I put that in quotes. I have a name to share with you now because I believe there's been some confusion. We have called it a guide, a framework, a plan. So we are now, so that everyone can talk about this document that we will be putting forward in a couple of days time, is our START Guide. So START stands for Steps To Adapt & Reopen Together. This document, as you've heard, has had a great bit of community feedback thus far. It is going to be a dynamic document. So I do not want people to expect to look through the table of contents and say,

there's the name of my business and I can go to page 42 and figure out exactly what I need to do. This is going to be an ongoing dialogue with our community and refinement as we move forward. But it does have certain measures and components to it. So three things are gonna be part of this document, either the document itself or as appendices. So the first is this actual, the framework. So the phased reopening, we're looking at three phases. I know the governor yesterday talked about four. We call our first phase sort of pre-planning. So we think we're already in phase one. And so then our three subsequent phases are going to be looking at what types of businesses, what types of facilities, what types of activities can resume, continued with some measure of infection control, our social distancing or modifications to the way of doing business. Our phase two will be a minimum of 30 days later based on what we're seeing in response to our phase one actions and then our phase three will allow us to get back to almost full normalcy with a minimum, and I wanna stress minimum 'cause it will depend on what we actually see in each one of these phases, but potentially as soon as 60 days after we start phase one. So just to give you, again, a sense of how we're gonna be measuring and monitoring those different phases, we're looking at three sets of criteria. So we have epidemiologic criteria which are things like, you know, how many of our healthcare workers are testing positive? How much time are we seeing between a doubling of cases? Do we see a rapid increase in cases over a number of days? We're looking at healthcare criteria. Is the healthcare system still ready to handle any measure of patients that might present? So that means having adequate PPE, having adequate bed capacity, having all the masks that they might need for themselves as well as face masks for sick patients. And the third component of it is looking at public health criteria. So is there enough hand sanitizer for these businesses to operate safely? On the Public Health Department side, successfully at home, or is the severity of the disease increasing? So those are some of the things that we'll be looking at in this guidance. The second component of it is we will have some general guidelines for what businesses need to look to to stand up their businesses if they've been closed or to make modifications or ongoing retention of the types of modifications that they've made in terms of social distancing, in terms of your recommendations for masks, for hand sanitizer, for maximum capacity, a number of things. We are also looking to and still in development that sector by sector there will be additional guidance available. All of that may not be nailed down by this Friday but we are beginning to put out all of those guidances. It will be mirrored in our forthcoming modification of legal orders about how to implement this as we move forward. And the third component of this is basically a status summary, both for our state leadership and our public, to say, this is the six indicators that the State of California has asked our localities to meet in order to show a state of readiness. And so we have gone through all of those indicators and provided in a form of response to, this is where we are vis-a-vis each of those indicators. And so that will also be available to the community at large. And with that, I guess I do wanna say one more thing vis-a-vis this plan. I know I've said it already but I wanna reiterate that it is not gonna be a complete and detailed plan. That's why we're calling it the START Guide. So I don't want people to be disappointed if they don't see the level of detail or specificity that they're hoping for. I know we've built this up. But I do want the public to understand that we are hearing you, we are working with you, both through leadership and through individual comments, calls, texts, et cetera, and we will continue to do through over the course of this entire pandemic, however long that takes us. So with that, I will open it up for questions.

- [Reporter] Dr. Borenstein, the additional testing you refer to, that will be on top of the testing that is already being provided? What kind of numbers will that be able to handle on a daily basis?

- Thank you. So the question is, is the additional testing that I spoke of on top of that amount of testing we're already doing and what kind of numbers are we talking about? So yes, this is a new and additional testing. All of the resources are being brought by this company, OptumServe, that is going to, with the exception, perhaps, of some security and some monitoring from the county side. But it will be no cost to the county and no cost to the consumer. They will be bringing the specimen collection, they will be sending those to their laboratory, and they will be bringing staff. And we can, between the two locations, we are looking at 132 at each location. So 264 people is the maximum over a 12-hour day in our county.

- [Reporter] And I'm sure you're anticipating a pretty great reaction from the public. So people will have to make appointments, like you said, first come, first serve, and they'll be able to do that online, phone calls, how so?

- Yes. So the question is, I expect that you anticipate a large demand and people will be looking to make appointments and how is that done? So with respect to the demand, it is still, we are still asking of the community that we prioritize people with symptoms. As I have said throughout this, or in recent weeks, that even mild symptoms, people with some of the newly recognized symptoms with this disease may stand alone. So even loss of taste or loss of smell is now on the CDC's official list of symptoms. So anyone with even one symptom, a sore throat, with or without fever, cough, body aches, chills, all of those things. Any symptomatology would be the people that we want to prioritize. We certainly wanna prioritize our higher risk folks, elderly and those with medical compromise. But to the, it is on a first come, first serve basis and they will be here for a minimum of two weeks and we hope considerably longer, especially if the demand continues. And it will be based on appointments that primarily should be made online but if folks do not have access to an internet service, they will also be able to make a phone call to make an appointment.

- [Reporter] Two-part question. Update on the antibody testing you're trying to bring in and any update on the plasma therapy, as well? Anyone has donated and is that, what's happening with that?

- So two questions. The first one is update on antibody testing. I continue to say, from everything I read from our state experts who have stood up a testing task force, antibody testing is not particularly helpful for the individual to know whether or not they have had this disease. People who test positive for the antibody can believe that they probably have had the disease at some point and they probably are immune for some period of time but we are still learning about it. We also do not believe that these home tests that are starting to get a lot of, a lot of recognition in the community, and use, they have not been tried or true. They have not been through any FDA approval process, nor even the emergency use authorization process. And so I would really ask people to be very cautious if they're gonna look to using their own home-based antibody test. I don't know if we even have any in this county but they are

coming fast and furiously. So it's with a great deal of caution that people would take into their own hands to get antibody test results and use that for making individual decisions. There are still a number of research efforts going on to validate the tests to make them more useful and to provide us with community prevalence information to give us a range. Again, not a very highly solid result for the individual but we're beginning to see some studies coming out of universities that give us an idea of where we are in terms of how many people have had the disease. The second question you asked was about convalescent plasma. We have had at least, I think, three individuals in our county that have gone through the process of donation. To the best of my knowledge, as of today it has not been used medicinally as treatment for any of our positive patients but it is very helpful to know that there are people who have recovered from the disease and are willing to donate and that that treatment is available in our county when and if warranted.

- [Reporter] I have a question, Penny, in regards to the beach situation. I know last weekend there were folks on the beaches, especially Pismo. Would there be something that could trigger, say, this weekend, any more restrictions in regards to beaches?

- I'm gonna let Mr. Horton address that because he has spent a lot of time with a lot of people talking about the beach situation.

- [Reporter] Okay.

- Good afternoon, Wade Horton. The question was about beaches and what would trigger additional restrictions on the beaches. I think that the, our community's, for the most part, doing a really good job with the beaches. Just because there's a lot of people on the beach doesn't mean that they're closer than six feet together. So what we're looking for is we don't want large crowds on the beach. We don't want a group of 50 people on the beach that are doing something they shouldn't be doing. If you're going to the beach and you're practicing physical distancing and you're staying with your only family unit and you're standing six feet apart, okay, that's doing the right thing. If you're going to the beach with 45 of your good friends, that's probably not something we want you to do. So as far as further restrictions on the beach, I think we've been very consistent through this whole incident that we don't want to, we don't wanna take opportunities away from people to get outside. We saw instances at Pismo Preserve, we saw incidents at Pirate's Cove, that we had to react to folks deciding that they didn't wanna do the right thing. We don't wanna do that. We want to work with the community. So as of today, do we anticipate further restrictions at the beaches? No, we don't, we don't. We want to continue to encourage our community to do the right thing, take care of yourself and take care of your family and take care of the community.

- [Reporter] And then a followup to that, I know some folks are questioning the reopening of some businesses. Can you explain why we're at this point where we're considering, thinking about reopening businesses, just in general?

- Well, I think again, so the question was folks are considering we're at a point to reopen businesses. The community's done a really good job working in partnering with the county, with what we're trying to do to protect each other. And because we've done a good job, you look at our numbers, I believe today we have five folks in the hospital and we've, when you look at how many folks, and our mortality rate, again, tragic for that family, but we've had one death. It's because the community has made good decisions. That's allowed us to be at the point where we're at to unveil a plan on Friday. And I wanna remind the public that we are still underneath the governor's order. So we cannot move forward with our local plan, as you heard today from Mayor Moreno and Pastor Theule, that we've had a lot of stakeholder groups, a lot of input, come together to make this plan, we can't move forward until the governor transitions authority back to the county. However, because we are where we are today, from a medical standpoint, when the governor does transfer authority back to the county, we will have a plan in place and we will be ready to move forward with the community with the START plan. And, again, that's a very pragmatic plan that's based on risk analysis, it's science-based, it has triggers, and we will continue to analyze the situation and make sure we're providing for that public health and, at the same time, to be able to allow to open businesses in a safe, straightforward manner.

- [Reporter] And then one last thing. Fire season coming up, is there a plan for evacuations? I mean, obviously, you probably don't want a bunch of people in a gym or something like that. What do you envision for that?

- So the question was, with fire seasons coming up, do we have contingency plans in place in case of large-scale evacuations? The question is yes. Yes, the COVID response is taking, is the focus right now, but that doesn't mean that other emergency responses stop. So we are fully engaged with our Cal Fire partners and Cal Fire as an actual department with the county in contingency planning. No one wants a large-scale fire at the same time we're having this event but if it does happen, we'll be ready for it.

- [Michelle] Any other questions?

- [Reporter] I have a question for Dr. Borenstein. You mentioned the testing that's being done at the California Men's Colony. Is there any other steps that are being taken or any other measures to try to prevent an outbreak there like we saw in the Lompoc prison?

- Yes, thank you. So the question was, in addition to testing, are there other measures being taken at the California Men's Colony to get this modest cluster of disease under control? So yes, I have a lot of

confidence in the management at that facility. They are doing all manner of things like health checks for both staff and inmates, temperature checks, symptom checks on a daily basis. They are using face coverings for everyone, staff and inmates. They have, unfortunately for the inmates, shut down utilization of the yard where these cases have occurred. They've got any, you know, at the first sign of symptoms in anyone, they do isolate them from the rest. They're doing extra cleaning. There's just a whole lot of efforts that they have put into place in order to not let this become the next Lompoc.

- Anything else, no more? Thank you all for coming today and tuning in online and on TV. As a reminder, all of our information is available on ReadySLO.org, all our guidance documents. That is where the framework that we've been talking about, the START Guide, will be located as of Friday and we'll be talking about that more on Friday during this briefing as well. There are several ways that you can view these briefings. They occur on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 3:15. They can be viewed on Public Access 21, channel 21, at midnight, 8:00 a.m., and 5:00 p.m. until the next briefing occurs. You can also continue to view these live on Facebook at the San Luis Obispo County Facebook page as well as the county's homepage as well as the livestreams of KCOY and KSBY. Finally, we continue to maintain our public health information line recorded message and our phone assistance center that's open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekends. Thank you, again, for tuning in today and staying engaged during this unprecedented time. Be well and we will see you on Friday.