

- Good afternoon. Today is Friday, June 12th, 2020. My name is Whitney Szentesi and I serve as a public information officer for the county of San Luis Obispo. Thank you for watching today's COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we have two speakers for you. We will begin with SLO County Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Brescia. He will be followed by County Health Officer Dr. Borenstein. County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director Wade Horton is also available for questions. And thank you to our American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb. Now SLO County Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Brescia.

- Thank you. And thank you to our first responders, medical professionals, essential workers, school employees, students, families, and the community for doing their part to keep us safe. Your patience, professionalism, and dedication navigating these challenging times is much appreciated. I'd like to start by emphasizing that the safety of our students, families, employees, and the public is a top priority. We look forward to welcoming everyone back to school and are committed to doing so safely. Locally, education leaders are working with the county health officer, Dr. Borenstein, on a unified approach to returning to in-person services for the fall. Most local education institutions will finalize plans in early July for approval by their local governing boards which in turn will consult with Dr. Borenstein before formal approval. All agencies are working with the county health department on response protocols and subsequent actions if a student, an employee, or volunteer becomes ill with COVID-19. Here are some of the changes parents, teachers, and students can expect to see in schools this fall. Health checks as well as enhanced cleaning, disinfecting, and ventilation to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Signs, partitions, and protective barriers in our facilities. Personal protective equipment, or PPE, at all educational facilities, care centers, private and parochial schools consistent with guidelines and recommendations established by Dr. Borenstein and approved by the local governing boards. The use of PPE may vary by agency based on recommendations and practicality. The California Office of Emergency Services is working with the County Office of Education to provide PPE supplies for all educational agencies. Once received, these supplies will be distributed in the coming weeks to school districts, charter schools, childcare centers, private and parochial schools. All schools in San Luis Obispo County will likely also offer some type of distance education program for families that do not wish or cannot participate with in-person services. Parents, students, and teachers should also expect to see their school practicing protocols for physical spacing, transportation spacing, and hygiene recommendations by the California Department of Public

Health and the California Department of Education. I encourage anyone interested in more details about the state public health guidance for schools or the CDE guidance to consult ReadySLO.org. Each agency is evaluating its capacity to provide summer services and childcare in collaboration with the Public Health Department. These programs will look different across the county, depending upon local staffing, finances, and enrollment. The SLO County Office of Education will provide more updates over the next weeks and months as we prepare for the forthcoming year. Thank you.

- Thank you, good afternoon. So before I talk about COVID, I do wanna take a moment to recognize the events of the last couple of days. I, like you, watched these shocking details unfold over yesterday, I mean, over two days ago and yesterday, and I just wanted to take a moment to thank our brave officers, our firefighters, our EMTs, who put their lives on the line to protect the rest of us and our thoughts are with the heroes who have succumbed to injuries and we hope that they recover very quickly and fully. As your health officer, I know that as a community we can and we will heal from the events that unfolded yesterday. For those of you who may be struggling, I want you to know that there is help and support can be gotten through the SLO Hotline at 800-783-0607. So thank you for that. We do still have COVID and a pandemic going on, so let me update you on the numbers. We stand at 324 cases in the county today and that is an increase of seven since yesterday. We have, 88% have fully recovered and three individuals are in the hospital today, two of them in intensive care. So as you can hear, yesterday, an increase of seven, the day before, an increase of 11. Previous days, we were still running three, four cases over the past week. But in general, we are beginning to see a bit of an uptick of cases and that's not unexpected as we reopen our businesses. We continue to be concerned about importation into our county and the types of events that we've seen in many different sectors, beachgoers, rallies, et cetera. So I want the community to know that we continue to contact trace and do full investigations on every one of our new cases. What I can tell you is that we haven't been able to tie these new cases to any particular event or gathering and they are spread across the entire community. So we will continue to investigate, as we move forward, every case, but at this time, we can't stand before you and tell you that any particular activity or business sector opening or tourism is responsible for the small increase that we're seeing in the cases. We do, as I've mentioned, remain concerned because many of our surrounding counties, and I'll name a few, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Fresno, Imperial, are really struggling with not only case

increases but what we all most worry about is hospitalization impacts. And so in many of those counties, their hospitals are now full with COVID patients. So we very much are keeping a close eye on that, not just in our own county but in neighboring counties, or other counties in the state as well. So we ask you to basically be sensible. There's a lot of guidance out there. We get a lot of requests for, can we approve plans? And we are absolutely available for consultation to provide in an addition to the guidance that's available but we hope that both our community members and our businesses will just use common sense. Again, we don't expect every single person at every moment to use every protection that's available but we do ask that people continue to consider that we are still in an environment of increased cases. And so that means handwashing, I've said that about a billion times before you, continues to be important, sanitization of surfaces, especially those surfaces that are frequently used. If you go out to a restaurant, please continue to do so in your household group, or if you go with another party, please consider whether or not they have been honoring shelter-at-home quarantining over recent months. We're just really asking that people are sensible. Use masks, absolutely, face coverings, when you are in settings where you cannot physically distance and you're going to be with a group of people for any length of time. That is a critically important element of the mitigation strategy. So I can't say enough about all these things. I believe that we are seeing quarantine or pandemic fatigue and it is not ever, we need to continue to do all of these sensible measures. One of the other measures that we continue to need to do is testing. So especially if you have been in any setting where you think you may have put yourself at risk by the nature of the gathering and especially if you have any kind of symptomatology, so any kind of fever, respiratory symptoms, cough, fatigue, aches, chills, we very much ask you to go and get tested. And the places that we are doing that continue to be at Grover Beach at the Ramona Garden Community Center. We have moved this week and will continue at the SLO city Vets Hall and starting next week, we have two additional sites. That's at Nipomo, at the high school in Nipomo, on Monday and Tuesday, and on Wednesday and Thursday of next week, we will be at the Morro Bay Vets Hall. All of those opportunities for testing are available to people on the ReadySLO.org site. If by chance you have trouble getting tested for whatever reason, you can still reach out to the Public Health Department at 805-781-5500 and we will help walk you through the different locations. They include still urgent care centers, community health centers, as well as these community sites. So please do not give up on getting tested. We do know that some of the testing that

we have been party to with one of our vendors over the past couple of weeks has had some challenges. We know that there are quite a few community members who are frustrated by not having gotten their results. We share in that and we are making lots of efforts to improve the process and so please hang in there, continue to rely on all these testing locations as we move forward and we continue to try to work with our state and local vendors, and contracted services, to turn these around quickly. We also are happy to announce that we at the Public Health Department now have a new technology available to us that will allow us to do a lot more testing in-house at the Public Health Laboratory. It's got a great name. The machine is called the Panther. And we have the capacity to do up to 300 tests a day. So, again, we're still prioritizing congregate settings, first responders, essential workers, but we're beginning to take specimens as well from other health settings. So let's talk a little bit about business openings. Today is a big day on that front. There are 12 guidances that were released by the state health department last week, a week ago today. I reviewed them over the weekend, the early part of this week, and we have approved and posted all of them on our website at [ReadySLO.org](https://www.readySLO.org). And so let me, I'm gonna list, if you'll indulge me, just so that everyone is aware of the various sectors that these guidances apply to. They number 12. So it includes childcare, which was an update to that which was already there, day camps, casinos, entertainment production in the form of music, film, and television, professional sports without live audiences, campgrounds, RVs, and outdoor recreation. And on that particular one, I want to add a mention that people should really look at that guidance in detail because that term, outdoor recreation, covers quite a few things that you might not think about: fishing, canoe rentals, paddle boarding, bike rentals. Just a whole lot of things fall under that category, so you may wanna look at that for your particular business type. Hotels, lodging, and short-term rentals had some additional guidance posted. Card rooms, satellite wagering facilities, and racetracks, racetracks without audiences, similar to the professional sports. Family entertainment centers and movie theaters are able to now open. Restaurant guidance has been updated to now include bars and wineries as well. One more category has four items listed in it. Museums, galleries, zoos, and aquariums are all under one set of guidance. And, finally, fitness facilities or gyms, and I'm gonna talk a bit more about that in a moment. So as with every sector that has reopened, we ask of the business owner or manager to go onto [ReadySLO.org](https://www.readySLO.org) to read the guidance, to review their individual business practices and the facilities and do an assessment of their ability to use all of that best practice

guidance, put it into place, and do a self-certification and make that self-certification available to consumers, to staff, to code enforcement, should any of those individuals ask for it. It is a sign that the business has actually read the guidance, thought through how to implement the safest measures that are possible within that industry's opening, and that they have self-certified that they are ready to open for business. So a few additional protective measures that the county is recommending, I want to go over, and one of them is in the area of pools. So pool guidance doesn't live on its own in the state's guidance but we have posted the three sectors under a category of pools for which the state addresses pool openings. So those areas include the outdoor recreation, family entertainment centers, and, I'm sorry, I think it's the outdoor recreation, oh, hotels, that's the other one, and fitness facilities are the three places that you can find guidance about pools. We have linked to each one of those under a category called Pools and provided some additional recommendations regarding pools. So in particular, we are allowing for small group swim lessons for up to four individuals, and the reason that we have limited it to a small number is because those who can't swim need to be within a close distance of the instructor and that is hard to do with a lot of people and especially if you're trying to spread out your students to maintain that distancing. So as our first approach to reopening swim lessons, we have asked that instructors limit their class size to four. We are allowing aquatic group fitness outdoors with physical distancing in pools but at this time, consistent with what the state is saying, they still are prohibiting organized sports and, thus, swim team practices are not allowed at the current time. So let me talk, also, a little bit about fitness facilities. We have gotten an enormous number of calls because of some of the guidance that we put out in our press release and I want to address that. So first of all, we have asked, to the extent possible, that these fitness facilities allow for special hours for the most vulnerable populations, those being people over the age of 65 or with underlying chronic medical conditions. This is not a mandate but it would be a nice thing, just as the grocery stores and pharmacies and some of areas of our community have done. In addition, we have called for there to be no indoor group fitness classes of the type of aerobics or intense cardio, spin classes, Zumba, and the reason for that, I feel it's necessary to explain, is one of the great conveyors of infectious diseases are in those exact settings, in a small enclosed space with a lot of people for an extended period of time, 45 minutes to an hour, all raising their respiratory rate considerably, all breathing hard and spewing, potentially, organisms in an aerosolized fashion. And so we initially said that these are

disallowed. Subsequently, we have received a hundred calls of, "Does it mean this?" "Does it mean that?" "What about my yoga studio?" "What about this particular nuanced version "of an indoor fitness class?" So what I am saying at this moment in time is we do not have a health officer order prohibiting indoor classes, but, again, we are absolutely asking that fitness facility owners do the right thing, which is to not hold the exact kind of class that I'm talking about where there may be 10 or 20 people in a relatively small space, in an enclosed room, within a gym facility that otherwise is open for business. So we continue to be available to consult business by business, to help the business owners understand what they can do, what they should do, but I wanna clarify that there isn't a particular health officer's order on the subject of disallowing of indoor classes. We are asking, as we have through this entire pandemic, that people be smart, think smart, do smart. And so this particular industry is one that is very subject to widespread disease transmission. Outdoor classes, on the other hand, if you wanna take all of the bicycles outside and have a spin class and have people separate by six, or better yet, 10 feet, that's doable and that really considerably lowers the risk of spread of this disease. As I mentioned earlier, and, unfortunately, I know that there are a lot of families who are waiting for the go ahead on organized sports, but the state at this time has still called out that that is not an allowable activity under the state order. So we will continue to look at that and push for that because outdoor volleyball, soccer, baseball, are activities that may be able to be done safely. We're continuing to dialogue with the state public health department on that front but at this moment in time, that is not allowed. Additionally, probably about an hour ago, we received guidance from the state on another sector that is now under consideration for opening in that the state has published guidance and as was the case for these other 12 sectors where they were posted a week ago and we went through the process of reviewing them and considering them and approving them to move forward, the same is going to happen with this new guidance that has just been issued. And this guidance refers to personal services. So that includes facials, electrolysis, waxing, skincare, cosmetology, nail salons, body art, tattoos, piercings, and massage therapy. So stay tuned if you are in that industry sector, that I will be reviewing this over the weekend and the early part of next week and, again, looking at whether we just move forward wholesale or whether we want to nuance some of the messaging about additional protective measures that can be put into place. But I imagine that a week from today that this industry will be able to move forward. So with everything, these business owners of that type ought to be taking a good look at

the guidance, reviewing it, developing their risk assessment, their self-certification, so that they are ready to move forward a week from today. And with that, was an awful lot today, but thank you. I will turn it over to you all for any questions you may have.

- [Reporter] I was just curious about the uptick and process for trying to determine that and at what point you get more concerned. I know that there's times when you see numbers and you're less concerned or more concerned, but how concerned are you at this point and what's the process for finding out more?

- Yeah, so to repeat the question, how concerned are we about the uptick in numbers, what's the process for looking into that, and what actions, if any, would we take, if I can paraphrase. So, you know, I like to see zero on every day. That rarely happens. So whether it's one or four or eight or even 12, I consider that to still be relatively low levels. We have had times previously, I think our highest all-day count was 14, we've had a nine, we've had other eights, so we're still living in that same realm of a relatively flat curve. I am more concerned now with business openings and the patterns of behavior that we're seeing and especially because of the patterns of disease that we're seeing in other locations. That said, nothing has changed with regard to how we address every single case. We do a detailed case investigation. We ask the individual who tests positive, we go through in great detail where they've been over the period of their potential spread based on symptom onset or, if they're asymptomatic even, the previous 14 days. We identify all contacts. We're in communication with those contacts and we monitor them over the period of their disease. So with that, as I mentioned, we have not determined any specific reason or any hotspot or any particular kind of activity that is seeming to be the cause of our slightly higher number of diseases in the last couple of days. We will continue to do that on an ongoing basis and keep you all informed if we do have meaningful information for the community about locations, setting, et cetera.

- [Reporter] What are some of the concerns with bars reopening? Or what should people keep in mind?

- So I do always have a bit of pause when we bring alcohol or any other substance that changes the best practices of people in their thinking process. So, you know, bars, certainly. I like a good glass of wine or a beer now and then. It's just to ask people to do so responsibly, to understand that even as they imbibe that we're still asking for distancing and face coverings when you're not drinking, if you're in the setting where you cannot, if you're in a setting that you cannot distance from

others. And I think that industry, as well, has been a good partner as we move forward and we'll hopefully continue to do all the best practices that are recommended in terms of sanitization, making hand san available, making their bathrooms open for handwashing on a frequent basis, all of those same practices.

- [Reporter] Regarding the uptick of cases that you've seen, I know you can't point it to a specific event or sector or geography, are you able to make any general attributions? For example, reopening, more of a phased reopening, or people becoming more relaxed at home, anything?

- At this point, we really, again, even during the period of complete shelter at home, we saw case numbers of this type. Based on a couple of days of a somewhat higher number, I'm not concerned. So back to Nick's question of, you know, what are you really watching for?, is our hospitalization rates is really the thing that we all need to worry about. If we get lots of cases, we would anticipate that we would get some people who are more severely ill and that's what we really wanna worry about. I'm not saying it's okay for everyone to go out and get infected if you're a young, healthy person, because that is the leading edge of transmission to others, but watching our hospitalization rates and thinking about that is why I continue to recommend that people in vulnerable populations do their best at staying away from any setting that puts them at risk. And when they do go out, to do so, if we can have special hours, all the better, if they can do activities in a way that minimizes their risk, that is the most important population. Although, you know, it's been clear that not only people who are in those high-risk settings have had negative outcomes from this disease, but the predominance, if you look across the state and the nation, it very much is those most vulnerable communities and so we very much continue to recommend that they take extra precautions.

- And, sorry.

- Go ahead.

- [Reporter] If you do see more increased hospitalizations, especially with more sectors being able to open, how are you preparing for that and is there any possibility that some of these openings may be phased, or rolled back, I guess?

- So as we have throughout these three months, we will continue to monitor our metrics of all types, including hospitalizations, including whether we're doing sufficient testing, including whether we're able to keep up on case investigation and cluster outbreaks, et cetera. We're not gonna be overly reactive to small changes



built into our attestation. And if you go way back to our START Guide, are a number of different metrics that we will continue to look at. And if trends continue over a long period of time, we may have to start to step back but we will react in the moment based on what we are seeing over a period of time, not on a day-to-day basis.

- [Reporter] You were talking earlier about the other counties that have seen more cases and hospitalizations in particular. When you're comparing different counties, are you looking at certain things? And are we doing anything differently or is there a different strain, perhaps, that we're subject to here?

- I get asked very frequently, "Why has SLO County, amidst a regional geography, "continue to do so well?" I think it's, personally, because I've got the best public health team in the world. But, no, to be very serious about that, we have been very aggressive in identifying cases through enhanced testing, through working with our congregate settings, both in the corrections area as well as long-term care. We, in fact, very recently, had a visit from an academic institution, UC Berkeley Public Health School, that CDCR, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, asked them to come and visit us and understand how we are able to manage our corrections facility so well and have such a small outbreak. I just think we're, you know, I'm not in any way disparaging my peers across the county, but to some extent, I do think that we have been very aggressive in our approach to contact investigations and I think, I've always said, I think we have some measure of luck. We have a rural community. We have a lot of people who are really following the rules and doing smart responses to infection control and I think all of those things put together have left us thus far in a very good situation. We are not immune from seeing a spike of cases and so that's why I continue to come before the public and ask that everyone continue to do their part.

- [Reporter] I just wanna go back to the Panther that you were talking about. When you are putting that to use and is that 300 cases just for that machine in addition to the other testing?

- Yes, so the new laboratory equipment is a slightly different methodology than what we've been doing and it is in addition to what we've been able to do thus far. They are in the process of validating the equipment this weekend and hopefully next week we'll be able to start using it.

- [Reporter] And how many tests are you doing now per day?

- So I know I've said, on average, our maximum is 50. We have had occasions, even with our existing technology, that we've gone well above that when we have been doing a outbreak investigation. So at the prison, when we've had a couple of cases in staff, and long-term care facilities, we have used our lab to step up and do overnight runs as well as our usual 50. So on average, we've been doing 50. Let me reframe that. We have had a capacity in a day of 50. In many cases, we have been running less than that because we were still initially limiting it to the higher risk settings.

- [Reporter] I had a question for Dr. Brescia, if he's available, thank you, unless you have one more.

- [Reporter] I have one more question.

- Yeah, go ahead.

- Okay.

- [Reporter] Now that campgrounds are able to reopen, what precautions should campers and visitors keep in mind?

- So with our campgrounds at the county, we are still asking, we are still allowing locals to use the walkup system for getting a campground. So we're still very much recommending in all settings, including our own county campgrounds, that the recreation be done as much locally as is possible. So that's what we're doing with it. At a campground, we're, again, asking that people stick to household units, or maybe if they are getting together with one other household or family members from another household, that they know what that person's movement has been over recent weeks and, really, to limit the spread within the camp facility. I don't know if Mr. Horton has more information. I'm not sure that I am aware of the actual other facilities within the campgrounds, both on the private side and the public side, related to asking for enhanced bathroom cleaning, for lack of use of the playgrounds is still one of the state's conditions, that playgrounds are not open at this time. So minimizing the shared surfaces used as well as, as much as you can, stick to your own cohort. He says I covered it.

- Thank you.

- All right, Dr. Brescia. Thank you.

- [Reporter] So, thanks. I just wanted to try to get a, as much as we possibly can, just a picture of what school looks like in the fall. If you have any sense of what we can expect and the types of things teachers, parents, students can start thinking about?

- I think looking at some of the images that you've seen in other countries as they're reopening in terms of the protective barriers, the equipment, the hand sanitization, the checking of temperatures, those will be things that I see utilized across our county, again, depending upon the individual situation. Going to school in Cuyama is very different than going to school in downtown San Luis Obispo. So you're going to see variances depending upon the setting. Some of our schools can physically space now based on their size, many of them cannot.

- [Reporter] And with virtual learning, or models where you could combine virtual learning with in-class learning, is that still on the table? How do you--

- Well, even prior to COVID-19, we had independent study and online opportunities for families. I just see these being increased as people choose or are not able to return to in-person and we'll probably see it in every jurisdiction.

- [Reporter] Thank you.

- Okay, thank you again for coming today and tuning in online and on TV. A few closing notes for today, as our county moves forward under the state's executive and public health orders, local officials have fewer announcements related to COVID-19 and reopening. As a result, we are updating our news briefing schedule. Starting next week, we will hold regular new briefings once a week on Wednesdays at 3:15 here in the Joint Information Center. You can also watch the news briefings online live on our SLO County Public Health Facebook page, on our website homepage, or on KSBY or KCOY. Briefings are also rebroadcast on Public Access Channel 21 at midnight, 8:00 a.m., and 5:00 p.m. until the next briefing occurs. Thank you for staying engaged. Be safe and see you here next Wednesday at 3:15.