

- Good afternoon, today is Wednesday June 17th, 2020 my name is Michelle Shoresman and thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we will hear from San Luis Obispo County health officer Dr. Penny Borenstein, county administrative officer and emergency services director Wade Horton is also here and available to take your questions. Thank you again to our American sign language interpreter, Robin Babb, and now county health officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you and good afternoon. So, the daily update today. I know it's been awhile since we have reported on camera, our case load. So this reflects a couple of days. But today since yesterday we are up 20 cases and we now stand at 376, that is you will note, our highest daily count since the beginning of the pandemic in our county. We still have 300 individuals who have recovered. So that's 80% and we have five individuals who are in the hospital, two of them in intensive care. And those two, you may note, are folks who have been in intensive care for quite some time. So we continue with a good metric with regard to severity of disease but our day over day case numbers continue to rise some what. Along with that case count we have reported that we have an outbreak in one of our residential care facilities for the elderly. We now have seven cases that have been identified. Four in staff, three in residents at that facility. Our team jumped on this with the first case and we have tested all of the individuals who are either residents at the facility or staff at the facility. So we have a baseline of testing for everyone associated with that site and we will go back and retest everyone in two weeks as part of our cluster investigation and trying to get clearance for that facility. But it is a moment of pause that we are not immune from having these types of outbreaks in our residential facilities, or congregate care facilities. And as I've spoken about many a time, those are the areas that give me greatest pause and so we need to jump on those circumstances immediately. We have done so, and I want to report that the facility has been a great partner in cooperating with us on this outbreak investigation and response. I do wanna talk some more about face coverings. I still get a awful lot of input from the public in both directions about the importance of face coverings. And so I first want to address it in the context of fires because we have had a couple of fires and there may be a sense that hey, I happen to be wearing some type of face covering anyway, this is gonna protect me from the wildfire smoke and I want to report that people should not have that level of security, especially when wearing either a surgical face mask or a cloth face covering. It is not believed to be protective of the particulate matter that you see in wildfire smoke. So if you are out and about, and you do have health issues, well first of all, the recommendation is to not go out when there is smoky conditions and high particulate matter from a fire. Secondly, if you do need to and you have the ability to use an N95 respirator, that is the only protective measure that you have in face of wildfire smoke. But better yet to stay indoors. So, secondly just talking about face coverings in general. I want to readdress it as we have gotten a lot more information in the medical literature. I have repeatedly said we will come

back to it, we will update information as it becomes available. And I plan to do just that in the coming week. I know I've previously spoken about a white paper or position statement and many have referenced that as evidence that the information regarding the effectiveness or concerns about the use of face coverings is unclear. But I do want to, at this point in time, say that the evidence in favor of and in support of the effectiveness of face coverings, particularly again in situations where you cannot do physical distancing or other protective measures and for extended periods of time and particularly indoors. That absolutely, face coverings are an additional protective measure and should be utilized. It will slow the spread of disease. It can potentially stop recurring waves of outbreaks or interrupt outbreaks. And it potentially allows for us to continue to open fully our economy. If we continue to see huge rise in our cases, this, as I have always said, may be one additional measure to slow the spread and to allow us to continue to get back to economic activity. So, I will be posting on our webpage a new position statement as I'm pulling all of that information together. And right now we have pulled down the previous statement about face coverings and have a holding statement on our website. So, I just wanna ask that people again, not have a personally held position on this but do it in accordance with what we understand about public health protections. That these masks are best used when you're frequenting businesses, especially for extended periods of time and especially indoors, and especially when you cannot maintain physical distancing. So, I will leave it to that at the moment. One other area of concern that I want to raise because we have seen reports at a national, state, and local level of increased number of calls to poison control centers regarding the use of cleansers and disinfectants. We are constantly harping on the need to use these products but they need to be used appropriately and carefully. They're not without risks or harms in some cases and so, first and foremost, hot water and soap is one of your best cleansers. When you are using any of these products, however, open windows to the extent possible. Allow ventilation to occur. Use gloves and eye protection as necessary especially if you're handling stronger chemicals like bleach. And store the products absolutely out of harms way especially from children and pets. Do not mix different chemicals together, they may react. Do not spray disinfectant on your skin. And if and when you use bleach as a cleanser, do so appropriately. Not meant for food and not meant for any ingestion. So, if you do have any kind of issue, you know any health impacts that you're experiencing related to this and need to call the poison control center I'm gonna give you that information. It is 800-222-1222, or you can actually get help online if it's not at that level of urgency through Poison.org. Next thing I wanna talk about is weddings. We have updated information from the state of California that they now are viewing the wedding ceremony itself as an allowable event as a type of religious ceremony. And so it falls under the same guidance as worship services. And so to reiterate what is permissible at this point in time for those services is up to 100 persons in attendance, or 25% of the usual capacity of the facility. And that's for indoor events. If it is going to be outdoors then that wedding needs, it can have as many people as can be spread out by

using that six foot distancing between attendees. However, the state still does not permit the reception or the party to go along with the wedding. Just the service. And so we continue to try to message to our public that we are abiding by what is permissible or is not permissible vis-a-vis the state order that remains in place. One additional sector that you know is available to open up as of this Friday is in the realm of personal care. So this refers to nail salons, body art, tattoo parlors, facial services in the form of waxing, electrolysis, facials, and massage therapy are all part of the same guidance. That said, I do plan to allow our community to move forward in these sectors as I have continuously said. We need to support the reopening of our community. We need to do it safely. We need to do it smartly, but we need to support the economic engine and the financial well being of our community. But within that sector, as was the case last week, I am very much discouraging the inclusion of openings at this time of those services that take place in a small enclosed room. So in many cases, that is going to be massages. It may be facials, it may be other services that take place in a small space where it's just you and the therapist and the service provider. I am very much asking as I did with indoor, in small room gym classes of an aerobic type, along the same lines. Extended exposure for a period of time, direct person to person contact, or in the case of gyms, aerobic activity increasing your respirations. This is one area that I ask of our providers that we be smart and delay for at least another couple of weeks. An incubation period, so we can continue to see if we're getting into trouble with the full range of areas that we have opened up for business. So, I want to thank people in advance for complying with that. I know that there are definitely people who's sole business would remain shuttered on the basis of what I am asking for. But we're continuing to ask those areas of business and that includes the wedding industry at this time to comply with the state orders and the county is going along with those state orders and watching our metrics continuously as we move forward in various sectors, opening in a timed fashion so that we can get updated metrics and see if we're still okay to move forward additionally. And lastly, I want to address testing, community testing that we have had in our community in a number of different settings. As you know, we've had these steady ongoing testing sites in partnership with the state. And those are now at San Luis Obispo Vets Hall and remains at Grover Beach. But we have moved about the county in partnership with a vendor that the county contracted with to do pop up clinics in various communities. And I want to apologize on behalf of many individuals who have gotten tested through that process. Unforeseen to us was quite a number of problems with our vendor in getting quality results back and getting timely results back. So we have been doing all that we can to push to get those results and to retest those who need to be retested. But there is still a large number of people for whom the results have been very, considerably delayed and so we share the frustration with our community residents who went and got tested and still do not have their results in some cases as long as two weeks. We have reached out to all of these people offering retesting and we are making a change and an improvement in the system such that we are bringing all that testing in house with

the expansion of our public health laboratory capacity to do that testing. So, I want to assure our community that though this has been extraordinarily frustrating to a large number of people, ourselves very much so included, we are taking all the steps necessary as we move forward to assure that this won't happen again. And with that I will open it up for questions.

- [Reporter] Dr. Borenstein, circling back to that masks, face coverings. It sounds like you may be considering an order or moving closer to doing that, is that accurate?

- So the question is, am I considering an order? I have been, will continue to consider an order. What I have said on this matter is we will continue to look at our metrics and only invoke additional legislatively or legally mandated actions on the part of our citizenry if we get into trouble with the metrics in our community. I know that there are quite a few people who feel that there is no downside to a mask order. I don't share that view. I think that we have been working as best we can with a large and diverse community who have different perspectives on the importance and the need in different settings for this and I remain committed to pulling the trigger on that if and when it is indicated that our community is experiencing danger from not having that in place.

- [Reporter] We understand Santa Barbara County could be in danger of losing their ADA station with the rise of cases there. Any concerns, you know, that could potentially happen here if these cases in our county continue to rise? And certainly, they're not rising at that level, but I mean there's the potential.

- Yeah, so my understanding the process with the state monitoring watch list, if you will, is that it's an engagement between the state and the county in looking at metrics and brainstorming additional protective measures that can be put into place. If a county is getting into worse metrics it is not, to my understanding, there's no hammer from the state, if you will, as to pulling back. That will be a county decision. And we are no where near that in our county.

- [Journalist] How concerned are you with the uptick and have you drawn any conclusions about, aside from the facility where it's coming from, is it reopenings or is it, the gatherings that we've seen in the streets, etc?

- So we, in our case investigations we continue to get robust data from each new case and we continue to do contact tracing. We have not, with the one exception, identified a particular event or geography for these new cases. We have asked about participation in mass gatherings and as I said, with the exception of one case, we do know that a large number of our cases in the last 24 to 48 hours did emanate from a graduation party. So, that is good information for the public to understand. That as I've been saying all along, these types of gatherings, especially without protective measures in place, are the best way to spread disease. So we continue to ask of our community to tamp down the number of

disease cases we see by continuing to social distance, wear masks when appropriate, stay away if you're sick, get tested if you think you've been exposed and other measures.

- [Journalist] We've seen some photos of bars and businesses where folks drink alcohol and it seems like there has been quite a number of people gathering in pretty close quarters. Any concern there or outreach to some of those facilities?

- I continue to ask of all of our businesses, bars included, that they look at the guidance, that they use the guidance, that they ask their customers to comply and we do have in many cases, bars that have food service on site also fall under our environmental health permitting. So we will have inspectors out in many of these facilities trying to support those businesses to do the right thing. And remind them to do the right thing. And that will continue to be our first and prominent approach to asking and expecting that our bars and other types of businesses that are not complying with best practice actually take a pause and reconsider how they can better do delivery of services. Okay, is that it?

- [Reporter] Yeah, another question Dr. Borenstein. Kind of non COVID related. The San Luis Obispo City Council declared last night a resolution affirming racism as a public health crisis and is recommending that public health officials, I guess namely you, to declare a public health emergency. That racism is a public health emergency. If I could, I guess react to that.

- Yes, I'm aware that the SLO City Council did take that action. I have not any consultation with members of the council or the community on that front. I do know that racism is absolutely an issue in our community and we're seeing a lot of action that is trying to address that. As to declaring it a public health emergency, I'm not prepared to do that at this time. But I am open to dialoguing with members of the community on the concern.

- [Journalist] Just one more from me, sorry. In terms of facilities like the one that had the outbreak, what's the best way to prevent that from happening and limit the spread in this case where it has? You know, I don't how this gets to be a spread so quickly for example.

- So let me be sure, the question was with respect to the outbreak, or this event. Are we talking about the graduation party or are we talking about the facility?

- [Journalist] The facility.

- Okay, thanks.

- [Journalist] Yeah, why is that such a concern for you?

- Yeah, well so in particular the facility houses fragile elderly, so people that move into these facilities. In this case it is not a skilled nursing facility so it is a step down from that. But nonetheless it caters to people in an age demographic that are at higher risk for bad outcomes. In fact, one of the individuals is in the hospital. And so, we want to take care of

our most vulnerable community and all of these, whether they be SNF's or skilled nursing facilities, or other residential settings for elderly or other vulnerable populations, those are the ones that we most worry about getting into trouble with the disease should they become infected.

- [Reporter] Another question also, as we see these cases rise, we're in June, there's a lot of tourists. We've talked about tourists many, many times here and some of these high tourist places on the central coast are seeing full capacity now. I mean, I know you limited it in May. As we see these cases potentially rise is there a chance we may see some pull back on that and some of the limitations that we'd seen earlier perhaps revisited?

- So the question of how do we manage tourism in this county is a very tricky situation. We've talked before about there isn't a great ability to be able to put up road blocks in our county, nor do we want to. All we can do is continue to look at the outcomes of what's happening with this disease in our county and ask that people continue to be smart. And I know that there was some confusion generated when the hotel and lodging guidance came online. It initially had for tourism in the title of that, and that has since been pulled back by the state. There's some discrepancy between the fact that we remain under a state order that says essential travel only and yet a state guidance document that says, well if you are gonna travel, do it in these ways. So, with everything, we continue to watch our metrics. We will pull back if and when we need to. We will never do that lightly or at the drop of a hat. We will, you know, look for trends, and those trends absolutely have to be related to the severity of disease in our community. So, while I know that it is troubling to people. It is troubling to me, as well, to see our case numbers tick up. What is much more important in terms of the impacts of this disease on our community as balanced against the impacts on our community of being sheltered at home, will be very much related to the severity of disease or hospitalizations, our ICU counts and hopefully not, but should it come to fatalities, that those are the metrics that are the most important in terms of our level of concern about how this virus is moving about our community.

- [Journalist] Just one more, thank you. So today's the highest case number of 20. Is there a point at which there's sort of a more rapid spread, I mean, I don't know if it's 20 or 30. Does that number grow to 50 or 60 in a day or something like that or is it hard to predict?

- It is very hard to predict. You know, the more, I think I've said before this expression of cases beget cases. So, as you see a rise in cases it stands to reason that we may continue to rise. Especially if members of our community do not continue to be vigilant and take all the protective measures that we've been harping on for months now. So, to the extent that we have clusters of disease in a couple of cases, hopefully those stay within those communities and we don't see a wide, or a large uptick because those are more compartmentalized, if you will. But, I would not be surprised if we continue to see this level or even potentially higher number of cases of disease. We are not trying to get to herd

immunity. I've heard that said before. But what we are trying to do, and consistently have emphasized through this entire pandemic is protect the most vulnerable from having really terrible cases of this disease. And we've seen that in many communities and we do not want to be one of those communities that has our hospitals filled and people waiting for critical care. So, that's where we stand with that. All right, thank you.

- A few closing notes for today. With today's briefing we're moving to a weekly media briefing schedule. Starting today we will hold regular news briefings. Once a week on Wednesdays at 3:15. We may choose to hold more news briefings if needed and if this is going to occur we will be sure to let the media outlets as well as the public know ahead of time. In the meantime you can still get any of our county's COVID-19 information on ReadySLO.org or by calling the phone assistance center or public health information line. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing at a number of locations around the county. Testing is available Monday through Friday from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. In both Grover Beach and San Luis Obispo. There are also several pop up clinics that Dr. Borenstein referenced, around the county in the next week or so. Tomorrow there are still testing appointments available at Morro Bay, at the Veteran's Hall and then next week there will be clinics at the Oceano Community Center on Monday and Tuesday, and then at Cambria's Veteran's Hall on Wednesday and Thursday. All the details for those testing sites are available on ReadySLO.org or by calling our phone assistance center for more information. Thank you again for tuning in today. You can always see these briefings live on San Luis Obispo County Public Health's Facebook page. On our county's homepage, as well as on the live streams of KCOI and KSPY. Briefings are also rebroadcast on public access channel 21 everyday at midnight, 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. Until the next briefing occurs. Thank you for staying informed and we will see you here next week on Wednesday at 3:15.