

- Good afternoon, today is Wednesday July 1st, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon, we have two speakers for you. We will begin with County Administrator Officer and Emergency Services Director, Mr. Wade Horton. He will be followed by County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. Thank you to our American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now, County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Wade Horton.

- Thank you Michelle. Saturday is July 4th. My grandfathers both served in World War Two. One in the European theater, one in the Japanese, or in the Pacific theater. Myself and my uncle both served in Iraq and I know patriots that made the ultimate sacrifice and they didn't make it home. So I more than understand the desire for Americans to wanna come together and celebrate the courage, the conviction, and the spirit that this country was built upon. To celebrate those that got us here to this point in our country's history and also to appreciate those that challenge the status quo, to help us become a better people and to help us grow and mature as a nation. This year, we'll be celebrating the Fourth of July in the face of COVID. Our case counts are going up. Now, this isn't to be unexpected as we reopen, we were prepared for this. But nonetheless, we are seeing our case counts go up. And I just wanna remind everybody what our goal was. Our goal since this started, since the pandemic started, was to make sure that we had the healthcare capacity to care for those that got sick. And we are prepared. We're doing much better than many of the counties around us, but we all need to still do our part to make sure we're managing the spread of this disease. So this Fourth of July, please keep your celebration small. Make sure you're taking measures to protect yourself and those around you. And if you do go out, wear a mask, use some common sense, wear a mask, keep your distance, wash your hands. If we all keep working together, we can keep our county, SLO County, moving forward and we don't have to retreat. So I wish you all a great Fourth of July, safe Fourth of July, and thank you.

- Thank you, good afternoon. So as you heard Mr. Horton say, our case numbers are going up, I don't think that's new to any of our viewers. But let me give you the statistics of where we are right now. We stand today at 642 confirmed cases. This is an increase of 169 from a week ago today. Up 31 since yesterday, so obviously these are new types of numbers that we're not used to, but we've hit sort of a new normal, if you will. We still have 73% of our total number of cases ever have recovered, and 166 individuals now have active cases recovering at home. With

that, we continue to have good measures with respect to severity of illness, and at this time, we have nine individuals in the hospital and five in intensive care. So while we have moved up a little bit, it is still modest compared to what we are seeing around us. And with that, we are still meeting all of the metrics that the state is looking at, county by county, to make the decisions that they are making, that the governor has made vis-a-vis which counties need to put a pause on some of their sectors vis-a-vis reopening. So we, in this county, are meeting all of the metrics in terms of our numbers of cases, our case positivity, our hospitalization increases, adequacy of care, ICU, ventilation, et cetera. So we're doing relatively well. I'll come back to that. I do, unfortunately, need to announce that we have had a second death in the county that occurred overnight, it was a 94 year old individual who has been in the hospital for nearly two weeks, and I want to express my prayers and thoughts for the family of this individual at any age, this is a harsh impact to a family when you lose a loved one, and we understand that and our wishes go out to that family. We especially emphasize the age of the individual and as we have talked all along, that this disease is harsher on people of older ages. Obviously, that occurred here, so we request that everyone continue to stay, keep special attention for elders who are at risk for severe outcomes from this disease. So SLO County has been fortunate. Up till now, we continue to be, but obviously the situation is changing. For many weeks, I have stood here and talked about our good statistics, which frankly have been somewhat surprising given where we are in the state and our surrounding neighbors. With that, we have been willing, not only willing, but eager to open as much of all the industrial and business and organizational sectors as we can, and we have moved forward in all of those areas in order to get back to some sense of a new normal, with respect to life, social existence, schooling, work, et cetera. We've been eager to do this not only because people wanted to, but because there are public health implications from the stay at home order that we had for two months. We have social economic impacts, we have mental health impacts, we have seen children regress in their academics and development, we've had a loss of commerce, we've seen people put off healthcare, and so we are not eager to take a step back. And so we continue to measure very carefully where we are in this pandemic, as we are moving into numbers that are a little bit more troublesome, but that does not lead us at this moment in time to step back. However, we can only continue to be as we are today in our existence in this community with the many sectors that we have opened if everybody does the right things. And so, I have drummed this home, you've heard it from Mr. Horton today,

you'll hear it from me again and again and again, that this means that everyone needs to do their part, vis-a-vis, staying home when you're sick as the most important thing, good hand washing, physical distancing, and yes, the addition of wearing a mask which I am happy to say, I, as I move about the community in all sectors of our county, are seeing that become the social norm. And that is exactly what we expected. Now, it may well have come from a state order, but I think with all measures in this disease, we have seen that the vast majority of people in our community are willing to do what they need to do in order to allow us to continue to have some measure of normal in our society, engagement in business, engagement in schools, engagement with each other, and work, et cetera. So with that, we have, as you know, we've stood here many times and talked about law enforcement as being the last step we will take, or any type of hammer, if you will. However, we continue to think that the best approach is to get people to do the right things and only engage in citations or law enforcement when people are flagrantly flying in the face of all of the important and required public health recommendations. That is true even for this coming weekend. We have heard from many, many people that in order to stay safe, we need to close the beaches, we need to close the bars, we need to step even further back, we need to close everything as we are seeing in other parts of the state. We have consistently said to our public, please continue on this journey with us to keep our communities safe by doing all the right things and in return, we will allow us to live in the way that we have been able to move forward until such time as we need to pull back or stop. So I wanna thank our community very much so for all of these challenging and difficult measures that they've taken in this new normal, but to say that we are not going to be shutting things down this weekend, and we have an expectation that our community can rise to the occasion and do the right thing. We will have additional code enforcement and Sheriff's deputies out in numbers making sure that that's the case so that we will be ready to first and foremost remind people, educate people, and only if need be, take additional actions if we are seeing egregious behaviors. So that has worked for us all the way through this pandemic and we will continue to use that as our first approach and take more difficult or challenging measures on behalf of everybody if we need to do so. That said, I wanna talk, I wanna be reflective today about the entire picture of this pandemic. We're now a number of months into it, today is July first. And thinking back to where we were a very short time ago in February, many of us in public health and the medical community, myself included, were saying things like, "We think this is gonna be "a

really bad flu year." I still hear that today from many people. I'm not sure how they come to that conclusion, but with everything in this disease, as we have moved forward, we have gained new information and new insights as to what the cold hard facts are regarding this disease. So maybe because we had bad data out of China or maybe we overestimated the case fatality rate because early on we didn't have testing. But actually, this is not a bad flu, this is way worse than that. And I'm gonna talk about that a little bit more. We have had the luxury in this county to consider it other places, other places globally, other places in the U.S., even other places in the state. We have that advantage of being a somewhat rural community, beautiful community, we don't have population density, and with that, we have been able to not have the same level of restrictions that people either in the New York area or the Bay Area have experienced and we want that to continue. But we are at a bit of a turning point. So lessons that we have learned. As I said, I would reflect more on this concept of it's a bad flu. We're now six months into this pandemic globally. We have 127,000, I don't know actually what the number is today, I'm sure it's inching up to 130 in this country. So let's compare that to the fact that in the United States, previously, our worse flu year in the past decade and actually if you go way further back than that is 61,000. So more than double the number of deaths in the United States from this disease, and we are just getting started. So it is not just a bad flu. Asymptomatic spread is something that I know I stood here some months ago and said, "All the literature "seems to be saying that that's not the case, "that you at least have some symptoms when we start." But we now know that that is not true. 40% or more of all cases are thought to be spread during a period when a person doesn't have symptoms. They may never go on to have symptoms or they may be transmitting the disease before they have symptoms. So that's a significant component. We also, in Public Health, infectious disease, for many, many, many years thought about masks as simply for healthcare workers who needed to protect themselves from the organisms, the germs that they were in contact with in a healthcare setting. And that we thought masks did not have a lot of utility for people in terms of tamping down disease spread. We now know, and as you know, I have put up a new information piece on our website regarding the utility, the use of face masks, or face coverings, and that is absolutely information now that we understand is one of the important protective measures. And thank you all for wearing them. And I, again, ask of our community, regardless of what you think about this disease, these are some facts. Worse than a flu, asymptomatic spread happens, and with that, it is important, even if you are not

sick, to wear a face covering for purposes of controlling the disease in terms of you spreading to others. We also, one other thought we had early on was that this is not a disease of children. And while that is still largely true, we do see much smaller numbers in children and of the ages of zero to 17. We are absolutely seeing, as you can see on this slide, that young adults, older teens, young adults are beginning to contract this disease in large numbers. And they have now surpassed, if you look on the slide before you, the 18 to 29 year old age group and the 30 to 49 year old age group are the highest number of cases that we have. So these individuals do get the disease in large number, they do have, in general, a better course than do their older counterparts. But A, as we've said many times, they can transmit to others more medically vulnerable people as well as older individuals and they themselves are playing a bit of a game of Russian Roulette by taking their chances of getting the disease while the vast majority will do well, will have a mild illness, will recover quickly, we have now, I think it's four individuals in the hospital of those age groups and one in intensive care. So everyone is putting themselves at risk. We do not want to get to a place of protection by letting everybody just get the disease. I've heard that on many occasions. Well, let's just get to herd immunity by getting everyone infected, that is taking a real risk. So I wanted to put up these numbers so that we had a better sense of what's going on particularly in the younger population. They probably are, we are seeing many more cases in that group, because I think they are out and about more and they are taking more risks in terms of where they are out and about. So based on these lessons, here's what I advise that we all need to do. We need to understand that our community is at risk, even though we have had very good metrics up till now, we continue to do so, relative to everyone around us. But we also know that that can change quickly and we do not want to be the next Houston or Maricopa County, either Imperial County in our own state backyard. So we need to keep our eyes and ears open and we need to, unfortunately, retain focus on this disease, because things can happen quickly. An incubation period two weeks or less and you can see us going like this to one of those curves that many of you may have seen regarding other places that are experiencing that. We want to keep our hospitalizations low and in order to do that, we need to keep our cases low. So we're continuing to focus on that. Hospitalizations do tend to lag. Eight to 10 days after cases is when, when you have disease onset. It's not usually right away that you get into trouble, but a week or so later. So with this new set of higher numbers of cases, we're gonna be keeping obviously, as we do every day, but in particular, a real keen eye on what's going on

with hospitalizations of these individuals. And the hospitals are obviously keeping and eye on that as well. We don't want them to have to revert to shutting down any measure of healthcare services. That was one of the things I mentioned at the outset is one of the sectors that was closed down in the first couple of months was healthcare, and that has serious repercussions. So we need to keep the balance of keeping our hospitalization numbers low, not only for the individual's sake of not being on a ventilator, not being in a hospital uncomfortable, but also so that our healthcare system can thrive and we can continue to do all measure of healthcare services that we've been able to do in this county. We need to pay attention to and understand better how this disease spreads. So I've said here many times, that passing someone on the street is not the same thing as spending an hour in a bar, in a crowded situation with no mask. So the three Cs, which is part of the white paper or background statement on mask wearing that if you care to go and look at that. But the particular things that I want people to think about as the highest risk settings are indoors, closed spaces, poor ventilation. So closed spaces, the second C being crowds. We want to make sure that people are not gathering in large numbers and in confined spaces. And thirdly, close contact. So the three Cs, close spaces, crowds, and close contact. That means where you're within six feet, especially without a mask and having conversation or singing in a choir or any of the ways in which you are having direct communication with someone face to face, and especially if without a mask. So where have our cases come from? I want to address that because I've been getting a lot of questions about what is our understanding about how this is moving through our county? We do 100% case investigations and with that, we have a better understanding with all of these new cases that the highest, that the most common setting is in people's social gatherings. So it's getting together with friends, it's getting together with extended family, it's having parties that people had on Father's Day, it is going to bars. We've had a number of cases, that it's not just on a walk that we and many counties are looking at bars as one of the places we need to best control the disease spread. We have seen all of those. I've also been asked about protests, that is obviously a large gathering. Fortunately, it is outdoors. I think for the most part people have used masks, but I have said many times, we don't wanna see these large crowds, we don't wanna see people gathering in close quarters in great numbers, and we haven't seen that in some period of time, and so hopefully we'll continue to not see outbreaks from those settings and that people will be smart as they move through the community if we do have additional rallies or protests. So we also, however,

with looking at the ages and looking at the settings, we've also continued to keep our eye on the communities and what you see before you now is a slide that shows where the disease is growing. So we have continued to see high numbers in Paso Robles, that has been our throughout this event, the place in which we see the highest number of cases, but the shape of the curve is also important. And so, you can see in San Luis Obispo and Nipomo in particular, that those communities have taken a sharp turn up and we are very much keeping our eye on that, we are in communication, especially with the city of San Luis. They know that their vulnerability is youth going to bars and they are taking a hard look at what they can do to make sure that that doesn't happen. A number of businesses are taking it upon themselves to close down this weekend as a time they are would normally expect very large numbers and so they, some of the communities themselves, especially San Luis City is looking at ways to ensure that the attendance at bars over this holiday weekend is if not eliminated, at least is stamped down considerably. So just in summation, again, I think you've heard it ad nauseum, but bears repeating. Social gatherings and crowded bars are places that should be avoided. Other guidance is if you are going to get together, please do so in very small numbers, do so outdoors rather than inside, keep your distance from other people, wear face coverings, and I'm gonna introduce a new term, social bubble. So if you are connecting with other families, please do so only with one or two families and stick within that social group or social bubble for a period of no less than three weeks, and then if you need to move on to a different group of friends, do that. But don't be getting together with this family or this friend on this day and then the next day, a different one, and then the third day, another group of individuals, because that's how we can move disease more quickly through our community. So that is one additional piece of guidance is people are starting to come together, please don't do so in great numbers, please don't do so with parties, please don't crowd the bars, and if you are going to get together with other people, do so within the confines of a social bubble, staying with one or maybe two other families and sticking with that cohort for a period of time. It's the same thing we're saying to our schools. Keep your cohorts together, day camps. Stay together with the same people day after day after day so that we don't have the ability to spread the disease between many different groups of people. And with that, I wish you also a happy Fourth of July. Be safe, be smart, and please heed the advice that we are sharing with you today. And with that, I will turn it over for questions.

- [Audience Member] Dr. Borenstein, you mentioned the metrics in the county remain good for the most part. Despite the recent spike, we saw the governor today close down certain business sectors in several counties, including nearby here next to us. How close are those metrics are to that happening here? We still have a little bit of a cushion before that could possibly happen here?

- Yes, so there are about, I don't know, six or eight metrics that the state looks at on a daily basis in each county, some of them I mentioned. And in all cases, we have a ways to go before we hit even one of those being, getting on the state's, what's called the County Monitoring List, because we have exceeded a particular metric. That said, we definitely are moving closer to some of those caps, but we still have a ways to go. For instance, I'll just give you a for instance. The percent positive testing, I think not that long ago, a matter of weeks, we were at 1%, maybe a couple weeks ago we were 2%, today we're at 3%. The state metric that is looked at is 8%. So we certainly don't wanna get there, but we're still a ways off.

- [Audience Member] You mentioned the county, as you go around the community, has been wearing the mask, the coverings a lot more and you think the county. So when we head into this holiday period, we'll see a large amount of tourism in our areas, particularly those places like Pismo Beach and those type of communities. How concerned are you that people from outside of our county that may the mask wearing, the face covering wearing may not be as great in numbers, they're on vacation, people may not wanna wear them on vacation. How concerned are you about seeing that type of activity? I know you mentioned code enforcement will be out.

- Yeah, so I think our businesses are doing a really good job of enforcing the state mandate by themselves. Some are not, and they will, as I said, get the reminders, the education and citations as need be. So I think whether you're coming from, whether you're a local or you're an outside tourist, if you're entering into spaces in our county for the most part now, we are seeing most businesses requiring mask wearing. Tourists are also gonna spend time on our beaches, that's a less risky proposition, as long as people continue to spread out and keep their distance and stay within their cohort. If they come from another jurisdiction, all the better for them to stay by themselves than to party or gather with people in our county. So we're being realistic, we know that travel is happening. We continue to advise, remind people that they should be staying close to home. But within, I guess what I'm really reflecting today is kind of a harm reduction model, is if people are going

to do some of these things, be smart about it. Stay spread out, wear the mask, especially indoors. It is going to be required. If you are coming from somewhere else, you need to know that this county is serious about it. And stay within your small, your family preferably or your small group of contacts that you're visiting with.

- [Audience Member] Just one more question for you. You mentioned how reticent really the county is to stepping back in closing certain business or any business. That being said, as the case numbers do increase, I mean, I would imagine something to know, because you had mentioned that previously that that is certainly something that would be on the table seeing certain business sectors close, re-close.

- Yeah, so this is our response to this pandemic has been about making good decisions quickly. And so, I know that there are a lot of people who think we don't respond as quickly as we should. And I continue to take the approach of being diligent and have eyes and ears on this situation on a daily, on an hourly basis, and be prepared to make the changes when we need to make those changes based on actual circumstances on the ground. So I know there is a sense of yeah, but it could get ahead of us and we have, we'll have lost the opportunity. I think this county has been very responsive. There was a clamor two, three weeks ago for oh my God, I can't believe that you have not done a mask mandate yet. And I always said, and I meant it, that we will do it when our metrics indicate that we need to. We were prepared to do that, we updated the information saying that mask wearing is a very important tool. We've asked our community to do it. And then right on the heels of that, it became a mandate. And but even before that, we were beginning to see it become the norm. The same thing with social distancing. All these measures, I think the vast majority of people are doing the right thing and we just need to stay the course and continue to take that approach.

- [Audience Member] Dr. Borenstein, as the graph showed, there's been a rise of cases in SLO and Nipomo, and also in smaller communities as well. Can you speak to why that might be.

- So I don't have the hard data on me, but what I believe that in SLO, we're seeing a lot of cases in younger people and we think that they're gathering in more frequency and larger numbers in many settings, but bars included. I don't have a good answer for Nipomo per say, except that when a community begins to see more cases, then there's a greater likelihood to spread it within your local

community amongst family members, amongst people living together, et cetera. And I don't have anything more definitive than that.

- [Audience Member] In about a third of the cases now are under the age of 29, I know you said in SLO the case might be that people are gathering and there's the bars. Is that kind of across the board or is it more concentrated in SLO?

- I would have to get back to you on that with specific data.

- [Audience Member] And you had mentioned that bars are a point of concern. Would there ever be an instance where one or two bars, many people have reported that they'd been at one or two bars, that the county would step in for closures of that specific location.

- So one of the enforcement tools that's available to every jurisdiction is called a TRO, or a temporary restraining order. So that would be a next step after either an administrative citation which many of the cities have available to them in the county and incorporated areas. If reminders didn't work, a TRO would be a possibility and the same for all of the other municipalities that they have that as an available enforcement mechanism. What that mean, so let me, I know a TRO, temporary restraining order, basically means you can't do business until you come up to speed with all the recommendations and guidance of how to safely operate your business.

- [Woman] Any other questions?

- Thank you.

- Thank you all for coming today and tuning in online and on TV. Just a few closing notes. You can still get all the counties COVID-19 information on our website at ReadySLO.org or by calling the Phone Assistance Center or the Recorded Public Health Information Line. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing at a number of locations around the county. Next week, from July sixth through July ninth, Public Health will be hosting a pop-up test clinic at the Pavilion on the Lake in Atascadero. The sites at the SLO Veterans Hall and Grover Beach Ramona Community Gardens, or I'm sorry, Ramona Gardens Community Center will remain open as well with testing appointments available as of the ninth. Also, a reminder that testing is available at many local primary care providers, as well as urgent care clinics. All these testing details, including the list of urgent care clinics that are offering testing are available on ReadySLO.org. Please check the testing locations page for new

testing sites and availability. Thank you again for tuning in today. You can find these briefings live on our SLO County Public Health Facebook page and on our county's website homepage. They are also livestreamed on KCOI and KSBY's websites. They are also broadcast live on Cable Channel 13 and rebroadcast on Public Access Channel 21 at 8:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m., and midnight each day. Thank you for staying informed, have a wonderful safe Fourth of July, and see you all here next Wednesday at 3:15.