

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, July 8th, 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 County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. She will receive translation assistance from American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb. Thank you, Robin. And County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Mr. Wade Horton, is here and available to take your questions as well. And now, San Luis Obispo County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you, Michelle, good afternoon. So, I don't think it's a surprise to anyone that we have had a dramatic uptick in the number of cases in our county. We stand today at 844. That is an increase from a week ago of 202, so nearly 25% of our county's cases have happened in the last week, and just since yesterday, we were up 36. 601, over 70%, 71% plus are fully recovered, and 227 individuals are recovering at home, and we have today 14 individuals who are in the hospital, 6 of those are in intensive care. Unfortunately, I also have to announce today that we have had our third death in this county. This is an individual in their 60's who had considerable underlying medical conditions such that the COVID infection was a contributor to this individual's death and our condolences very much go out to the family and we are thinking about her at this time. So with this increase in rise, there's a number of things that we wanna talk about. First is that, as you know, many counties now are starting to be on the state monitoring list, or actually, it's called the county monitoring list, and how a county gets that status is by failing to meet one of the state metrics that are being followed, which are symbols of whether or not the community has stability related to COVID. So in three different areas, the metrics are being measured is related to disease transmission, so case rates and positivity rates, hospitalizations, the number of hospitalizations, and also hospital capacity, so whether there's sufficient ICU status or ventilators available for the individuals. So while we at this time are not on that list in San Luis Obispo county, we do know from our metrics that we are following on a daily basis that we fail to meet one of those criteria and that criteria is to have to no more than a hundred cases per hundred thousand population in a 14 day period, so in brief, what that is for our county is over the last two weeks, if we exceed 283 total cases, that puts us in the county monitoring status. The reason we are not on that state list yet is because the state's data trails behind our real time data that we get from laboratories. Sometimes they don't make it to the state in the same time frame, so they're looking at data that is a week old. So we have been watching and we know

that we meet that metric and we fully anticipate that the state will find us to be in that status. It may be as soon as tomorrow and what that will mean when we go on the county monitoring list is that we join 26 other counties that are now on that list, 22 of them have been on the list for at least three days, and when you are in that status for at least three days, the state has mandated that certain sectors of the business community need to either shut their doors or change the way they're doing business. So in particular, being three days or more on this list, either by state order or by local order, there will be a mandate that bars and brew pubs and breweries will need to completely shutter and restaurants can only do outdoor dining. Also, the sectors that are included in this are movie theaters, though we think, in our county, few if any movie theaters have opened. Family entertainment centers, card rooms, wineries, and tasting rooms are also part of the sectors that by state mandate will need to shut. There is the possibility that we could turn a corner in the next few days and remain not on the list. But I bring this to everyone's attention because the direction of our case numbers and the consistency of those numbers over the past week or two are such that I have every anticipation that we will be added to the list of counties on this monitoring list. So what does it mean when we get on the list? So first and foremost, we have a conversation with our counterparts at the State Public Health Department. We will discuss information that we already have been looking at on a regular basis, which is from whence do we think our cases are coming? What additional protective measures or policies we might put in place to try to turn the curve? We all want to get back to a place where we can continue to be at the level of opening that we are at and ongoing, so there's an engagement process first and foremost with the state, and that will be our working plan for getting back open on the assumption that we will reach this metric and may have to close in the coming days. So after that engagement process, the state will list and publicly make known that this county is on the monitoring list and then you have to be on that list for three days before this sector closes. So I want folks to know that even though we're not on the list yet, we've already begun that dialogue with the state, and we are doing everything in our power to try to analyze where our numbers are coming from, and we continue to ask of the community and work with the community to try to maintain all of the best practices so that our numbers don't get worse and so that we can find our way to stabilization and a downturn so that we can get back to or so that we can remain over the long term at the level of opening that we have been able to enjoy in this county for quite a few weeks now. So all of those things, I know I've said it many, many times in this facility

to the public, but it bears thinking about them on a regular basis and committing one more time to doing all of the things that will help us to coexist with this virus in an open community. So that means wearing a mask, especially indoors, especially when you are in proximity to others. It means staying home when you are sick. It means maintaining distance from others. Working remotely, if at all possible, so many business sectors can actually achieve their work without being in office spaces together. Continue to practice good hygiene and stay close to home. So the less that people move from county to county, state to state, community to community, the less likely we are to move the disease across our local community. So having talked about this engagement process and we're looking at what are the drivers of transmission in our county, that is a very difficult thing to come by. Basically, and I've said it last week, that we continue to see a lot of different things going on and so we see disease spread in different communities. We're seeing more spread in some of the communities that were living at a very modest level of disease cases for a while. We're seeing uptick there. We think in SLO City, based on some of the feedback we're getting from our cases, some of it is from bars or other types of gatherings, even in restaurants with large groups. We are seeing, across the board, lots of people gathering in multiple family units or friend gatherings or large parties, in some cases. We are definitely seeing a large number of at least one case, but in some cases, many more than a single case in our congregate care facilities. So these are residential facilities of a variety of types. We've had some staff cases, again, in skilled nursing facilities or nursing homes, but we're also beginning to see it in a variety of types of facilities, so residential care facilities for the elderly, adult developmental disabled facilities, small group living situations. A wide range, from very small congregate facilities, assisted living, to large community facilities or congregate living sectors. We're seeing, again, in staff, but thankfully not in in-mates at this time. Cases at our California Men's Colony, and we're also seeing from a lot of people that they have traveled, so that is, again, a good reminder. We still are under a state order that is variably complied with in terms of we should not be doing leisure travel at this time, and yet, that is happening amongst quite a few individuals who are especially of concern going to places throughout the country that are experiencing much higher rates of disease. So not only are they putting themselves at risk by going to these so-called hotspots, but they're also bringing back to our community more disease. So I know that this pandemic continues to be very challenging in terms of how do we live our lives in a co-existing fashion with this virus, but one of the things that continues to be of concern and a vulnerability

for us is travel. Travel both into the county and travel out of the county. We also just want to make people aware in case they are not, there are more states, the ones that have gotten a lot of attention, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, that now have California on a list of states from which travelers need to quarantine upon arrival for a 14 day period. I believe that there are other states. I don't have that at my ready, but people who are going to travel, and some people do absolutely need to travel. There may be some major family issues happening. There may be cross-country custody of a child. You know, there's definitely reasons that people are traveling, but if you are going to travel, please do it for the right reasons, and also please make sure that you understand what the conditions are in the place that you are traveling to, both in terms of how widespread the disease is there and whether or not you may need to quarantine. I also wanna talk about testing. That has become a challenge in our local community, state-wide, with regard to both getting an appointment and getting results. So what we are seeing now is the demand for testing has dramatically increased and we are no longer in a situation where we can continue to say anybody who wants a test can get a test. So people who are going onto our website and looking at our community testing locations are seeing we're now about a week out before you can get an appointment, and obviously, if you're sick and you need a diagnosis today, a week later is not particularly helpful. So what we'd like to do is ask, what we are doing today, is asking that we change the parameters for getting testing. So, first and foremost, anyone with symptoms should absolutely feel free to go to either their private physician as a first stop, urgent care, still many of them are testing, and we're gonna be updating that information about who continues to test, and we have available as well testing in the community sites. But other high risk categories that individuals should continue to seek out a test is if you work in a high risk environment, particularly industries that have an awful lot of people of the public that you are interacting with. So high-risk environments, essential workers, our utility workers, grocery workers, food supply workers, public employees, first responders, health care workers, et cetera. Anyone who works in a congregate care setting should also. That's a high priority group who we want to see testing on, and when we do, as we've said many times, see any case in persons who live or work in that setting testing positive, we will do rapid-fire testing of the entire facility as one of the means of controlling the outbreak in these settings. So that means correctional facilities, homeless shelters, residential care facilities, or dorms, should that come to pass. Individuals who have had close contact with a confirmed case and what I would say about that is, really, it

should be at the direction of the Public Health Department. There are lots of people who maybe hear from Aunt Sally or Uncle Rick that, you know, oh, yeah, so-and-so was tested positive, and they think, oh no, I've been exposed. I better go get a test. What we are doing is we reach out to all the identified close contacts, and in appropriate cases, ask that those individuals get tested. So what a close contact is 15 minutes in close proximity without either party wearing a mask. That's our definition for close contact. So there may be other individuals who believe that they have had an exposure, but again, asymptomatic people, we are asking you to save what is becoming a decreasing resource for the people in these highest risk categories and those with symptoms and to defer testing if you don't fall into one of these categories. I would also ask that people who have made appointments and are not able to use their appointments or choose not to, you can actually go in and cancel the appointment. We have started to see an awful lot of no-shows, and that is just using up an important resource for people that are waiting more days to get a test. So please do cancel an appointment if you have one. Okay, and then lastly, I wanted to talk a little bit about contact tracing in businesses. We're beginning to hear a lot from businesses. Well, what's my responsibility? Will I be notified if someone has a case? What do I need to do to take care of my business and facility? So first and foremost, we do not communicate medical information about employees to their employer. What we do is notify an employer if an employee has been put off work or isolated or quarantined at home by order of the Public Health Department. Now, that may seem like, well, you are pretty much telling the employer what's going on in a time of COVID, but what I want to say about that is this is something we have always done, and there are still other diseases happening. So there can be a food worker who might have salmonella. There can be someone with tuberculosis. We do continue to see other diseases and there are reasons that we issue isolation or quarantine orders that are non-COVID. So to the extent that we do communicate with an employer about an individual employee's restriction from work, we do not tell them what the diagnosis is. We do also ask that the employer allow the Public Health Department to do the contact tracing and to notify the employees that we believe fit the criteria for a close contact and thereby need a quarantine order, rather than have the employer tell their entire workforce you all need to go home or we're closing down for business because someone tested positive. In some cases, it may be necessary, if it's a small business and there are a number of exposed people. I know a number of doctor's offices have had unfortunately a period of two weeks where they said, we're closing down

because we've had either, you know, one or more cases or one case and quite a few of our employees who need to be on quarantine because of close exposure, and they've had to back off business for a two-week period of time. And that may be the case in some businesses. In other businesses, the situation may be such that the business can remain open and there may be some employees who are put out of work because of quarantine, or it may just simply be the one employee who tested positive. So that is our process. If businesses do ask for consultation, we absolutely will work with them on how to effectively sanitize the facility, if that is a necessity, and we certainly will provide all manner of technical consultation. We generally do not notify patrons, because at this point in time, there's so many different locations that people walking in and out of businesses, or maybe having a meal at a restaurant that might have been affected. It doesn't really put that larger population of people who may have walked through a large department store at any greater risk than they have in their routine life, and so unless we have a situation where we have a real outbreak at a business, we are unlikely to be announcing, you know, if you were at Costco on June 29th, you all need to go and get tested or you all need to stay home for 14 days, but situationally dependent, there may be moments where we would make a broader community announcement, if we had a really significant outbreak in a business setting. So with that, I have covered all of my points, and I am open to any of your questions.

- [Audience Member] Dr. Borenstein, so the monitoring list, if the county is put on that tomorrow, let's say, when would the businesses have to modify and/or close? Is it three days after that or immediately?

- No, so, a county that is on the monitoring list for three days will fall under the state order for closure, specific to that county, or if the local jurisdiction chooses to do it themselves, and we've been having some dialogue about whether or not it matters whether it's the state or a local order, but it is at the three day point after hitting that monitoring list.

- [Audience Member] According to the numbers, there's really three trouble hotspots. There's three communities that really stand out right now. Paso Robles, San Luis Obispo, and Nipomo. San Luis Obispo and Nipomo recently really have seen a rise. What have you seen? Is there something that you can pinpoint? I know you mentioned bars in San Luis Obispo. What would you suggest?

- So we don't have a lot of good information community by community, because in general, we're often unable to determine the exact source. Obviously, you know, an

in-mate, we know that they got it in that location. We know someone who has been living in a skilled nursing facility as a resident who becomes positive, we know that that was, you know, someone was the source in that community. If we talked to someone who says, "Oh yeah, I was at this bar on Thursday and I had this family party on this day, and oh yeah, and I went for the weekend to Las Vegas." We can't really know what their source was. So all of these things that I'm communicating are, you know, in some cases, we can. Oh no, the only place I've been in the last 14 days was at that birthday party for my friend's 30th birthday or what have you. In that case, we're pretty sure that that was the source, but many of the cases that we're seeing, and there are many, we can't actually pinpoint a source. So what we're getting in the way of feedback from people is their movement throughout the community or beyond the community, and those are the generalities I've been sharing with you, that people are gathering in numbers with friends and family, that people are going to bars and restaurants, you know, and we're seeing it in facilities like congregate care facilities. So it's all of those things in any one particular community. Why is Nipomo experiencing it more than Arroyo Grande or Atascadero? I don't really know but I think what I've tried to convey is the manner in which in general terms people are putting themselves at risk by the varying types of activities that they're engaging in. We do ask for people who have had those types of get-togethers, you know, were they wearing a mask? Or you know, were they socially distant? And in many of those cases, the answers are no. So you know, I guess to some extent, the answers are, and my continued drumming, beating that drum of if you are going to do these things, and we recommend that you don't gather in groups and we recommend that you don't, you know, be in a bar with no physical distancing and no masks, but please continue to do all of the protective measures that you can. So even to the point of, you know, yes, you're drinking in a bar, so how can you wear a mask? Well, you can, you can on the way in the door, you can while you're ordering, you can while you're having a conversation and not drinking, so we're really asking for people to just change their lives for this period of time until such time we can go back to full measure of normalcy, but to do that, so that we can continue to have some measure of normalcy, continue to do the kind of social engagement that we'd like to do, but do it smartly.

- [Audience Member] One last thing from me. In changing your life, it really sounds like you are asking people to forgo leisure travel. You've talked about it before, but you know, we're in July now. People understandably wanna try and get away,

perhaps go to other places in the state, but you're really asking people to stay home, particularly right now this summer. Don't travel unless you have to.

- I am asking that. I know my 14 year old asks me every week, are we absolutely done, no summer travel this year? We usually take a two-week vacation, and I'm like, yeah, sorry, honey. This is not the year. I, like everybody else, am experiencing, this more than ever, might be the time that people feel the need to get away from their lives, but unfortunately, this is not the time to be doing that type of leisure travel.

- [Audience Member] Dr. Borenstein, can you talk about the new fees for COVID testing? I know the county was talking about that. Can you say how much they will cost or can you just talk about that change?

- Yeah, so let me be clear. The question is regarding fees for laboratory testing, and this pertains only to the public health lab, which again, has been prioritizing these higher risk testing locations, and so we've done nearly 6,000 tests to date. We've got another 30 days before the fees can actually kick in, and now that we are seeing higher numbers of tests being done at the Public Health Department and we've expanded the groups for whom we are able to test, given the county's fiscal situation and given that this is becoming a little bit more like routine healthcare, we have added it to all the other fees that we charge for communicable disease testing. That said, individuals by federal mandate will not bear any of the cost of that fee, so this is to charge people's individual health insurance for the cost of the COVID fee, of the testing. So as with any healthcare setting, I know if you've ever gotten your healthcare bill and it says, yeah, it cost \$10,000, but you're on the hook for a hundred. The healthcare provider is not getting the \$10,000. They're getting whatever that is paid by the insurer and maybe a co-pay, so there won't be any co-pays, so we may charge \$138 as the fee is, but we may only get \$30, but we're doing that in order to buoy up the fiscal stability of our lab and our county.

- [Audience Member] What about the uninsured?

- So, uninsured, there will be no charge.

- [Audience Member] Then regarding the list and all of that, I mean, are there any other sectors that may, you had mentioned, like, gyms or hair salons. What's the earliest that they would have to modify their business operations?

- So at this time, there is no reason. So at this moment in time, we would be complying with the state mandate as to which sectors need to close, and the ones that are not among those required closures, we would not be closing.

- [Audience Member] For coming up with plans for how to open in about a month, what sort of guidance are they gonna get from the County Health or State Health as far as best practices?

- So, all school systems have received what was put out several weeks ago, both from the State Department of Public Health and from the State Department of Education. That is the only guidance that is still available to them. We at the county are providing, again, technical consultation to our school districts for perhaps interpretation or some best practice recommendations on how to use those guidances to make it come alive in individual schools or facilities. As I am still today recommending, as is the American Academy of Pediatrics, the governor of this state, the president, we all, especially those of us who have children, want to see our schools be able to open, but we want them to be able to open safely, and so the schools have, I've reviewed, I think, now, there's 11 districts in our county, I think there are two or three that I haven't received a plan from. All of the ones that I have received are very well thought out. They do not necessarily have every protective measure in place at all times, and the major one that is challenging is physical distancing, so for schools that are looking to bring back students full-time, and that is one of the major plans that schools are moving forward with, masks is gonna be an important protective measure in lieu of consistent six-foot distancing between students at all times, but they have built in many protocols and procedures around sanitation, around hand washing, around, you know, hand sanitizer in the classrooms, designing for the best space available, health screens and temperature checks, and providing distance learning for those who are in those medically vulnerable groups, both teachers and students. So I know, with the rising numbers state-wide, there's a lot of dialogue going on among school systems as to whether or not they are still gonna feel comfortable moving forward, and we are, you know, just a number of weeks away. My hope and recommendation is that they do so and that we continue to find a way to co-exist with this virus.

- [Audience Member] So masks and six-foot distance are gonna be a part of the-

- Masks, for sure. Six-foot distancing, to the extent practicable, and for some school districts, they may choose to try to universally comply with that six-foot

recommendation by doing a hybrid system. Not all the students in the school every day, all day, but each one of the school districts are looking at that.

- [Audience Member] Just a question. Dr. Borenstein, you mentioned the Costco example. Can you elaborate why businesses who had customers or employees test positive, why they are not identified?

- So, it's the same reason throughout this pandemic or through any disease that we have previously done is we identify those who we believe have had true exposure in close contact and notify those individuals and put them on quarantine. In a setting like a big box store, there's no way to indicate that, you know, a customer walking through for a short period of time is any greater risk in that setting than they do at their home or at, you know, wherever they go next, so it really isn't... We don't wanna create a sense of alarm and it's also not particularly useful information.

- [Audience Member] Well, contact tracers, have you increased the number? Well, what is our number currently and how has that increased?

- Thank you, I knew someone was gonna ask that, and I meant to get that exact number before I came, but we have increased our contact tracers. I think we are up to about nine today. We were at five, and next Monday, we anticipate having another half a dozen added, so we are looking at having 15 in the near term. Thank you. And I will put on my mask and leave you back to Michelle.

- Thank you all again for coming today and for tuning in online and on TV. You can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on [ReadySLO.org](https://www.ready-slo.org), or by calling the phone assistance center or the public health information line. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing by appointment at several locations around the county. Next week, County Public Health will be holding a pop-up clinic in Nipomo from July 13th through July 16th. That's gonna be held at Dana Elementary School. Again, those appointments are by appointment, and you can get the information on how to sign up for an appointment on [ReadySLO.org](https://www.ready-slo.org). Please note that some of our testing locations have become booked a week or more in advance because the demand for testing has increased. Please take note of the risk factors Dr. Borenstein discussed today. Please defer testing if you are asymptomatic or at low risk, allowing those at higher risk for exposure to obtain timely testing appointments. Thank you all 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. You can also livestream them

on KCOY and KSBY's websites. Finally, the live broadcasts are available on cable, channel 13, and re-broadcast on public access channel 21 at 8 a.m., 5 p.m., and midnight. Thank you again for staying informed. Be kind, be well, and we will see you here next Wednesday at 3:15.