

- Good afternoon, today is Wednesday, July 15th, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman and you are watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we will hear first from county administrative officer and emergency services director Mr. Wade Horton. He will be followed by county health officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. They will both be available for questions after their prepared statements. Thank you once again to our American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb, and now county administrative officer and emergency services director Wade Horton.

- Thanks, Michelle. Good afternoon. Our case counts are going up and I know that's a cause of concern for many, but I just wanna remind everybody that our mission when this pandemic started wasn't to stop the spread of the disease. It was to manage it so we would have the healthcare capacity available to take care of those that got sick. As of today, we have 11 COVID patients hospitalized. Six in regular beds-- I'm sorry, five in regular beds and six in ICU. To put those numbers in context, the county has 369 regular hospital beds and 53 ICU beds across our four hospitals. In addition, we have surge capacity in the Cal Poly ACS. Regarding the ACS, we've been receiving some questions about its status, so I'd like to give you an update. Right now the ACS is in a standby status. We recently extended our agreement with Cal Poly so that we can continue to maintain the facility to meet our surge capacity needs going forward and we could have it ready within a week's time to accept patients. Agreement allows for Cal Poly to use parts of the facility that aren't needed to take care of patients. Our recent modeling indicates that 164 beds could be needed in a worst case scenario. Now this is significantly down from the 900 beds we thought we may need when the pandemic started, so that's good news. We've also signed a mutual aid agreement with Santa Barbara county for the use of the ACS if the needs for their beds exceeds their capacity in that county. Mutual aid is commonly used in emergency responses where counties and cities work outside of their own jurisdictions for wildfires, earthquakes, and other disasters, and allows us to maximize the use of staffing, supplies, and fiscal resources. The agreement calls for Santa Barbara County to augment care resources if needed and reserves 50 of those 164 beds for Santa Barbara County residents. Those 50 beds were included in our modeling and will not take away any capacity from San Luis Obispo County residents. We hope that the ACS is not ever needed and does not see a single patient, but if it's needed, we'll be ready. Now I'll turn over to Penny.

- Thank you, good afternoon. So as you heard, our cases are going up. We have an increase of 34 from yesterday and the day before we had 72, so we stand today at 1,112 with those 11 individuals in the hospital. Sadly, again, I need to announce that we have had one additional death. This individual was in their 90s, was living in a residential facility for the elderly, and did not go to the hospital, was on hospice when the illness presented, and died several days into the illness. Our condolences go out to the family and we're sad as a community that we are continuing to see more deaths occurring, but thankfully they continue to be low in number. So as you know, there are statewide closures that went into effect at the beginning of the week. So let me reiterate what those are. For bars, it is both indoor and outdoor services for bars, brew pubs, breweries, and pubs, and in addition there are a number of industries that have been closed for indoor activities and those include dine-in restaurants, wineries and tasting rooms, family entertainment centers which includes bowling alleys, miniature golf, arcades, movie theaters. However, drive-in movie theaters may remain open. Indoor museums and indoor components of zoos need to be closed and also card rooms. So with that it's important to note that in these industries, some of them, many of them, can move their businesses to the outdoor environment. I have seen that happening in this community of San Luis Obispo City. More and more restaurants are figuring out ways to provide the same provisions for sit-down table service in the outdoor environment and that is what they are able to do under this statewide closure. Unfortunately we do not have any information about the timing of reopening. Much of that will of course depend on what happens both at a local level and statewide related to our cases, which at this time are not continuing to abate. But we hope that with these closures we will begin to see the tide turning. So in addition to the statewide closures, for those counties that have surpassed at least one of the state metrics for the criteria to remain fully open, our county is now among them, there are additional closures. So let me first talk about what those metrics are. There are six different areas that relate to disease transmission. It is the number of cases per capita, it is the percent positivity of case rates, it is hospital occupancy, it is the availability of ICU beds and ventilators. And amongst those metrics, the one that this county has exceeded the criteria is in the area of the number of cases per 100,000 population. So with that cut-off being 100 per 100,000 population over a two-week period, over 14 days, we exceed that metric when we have more than 280 cases in a two-week period, and we've been in that situation now for over a week. So the process statewide is that first we got flagged for a number of days, on

Monday we actually were put on the list after we came to the attention of the state because of our exceedance in that metric, and so today ends our third day of being on that county monitoring list. What that denotes is that we now join another 29 or 30 counties on that list that have to close certain additional indoor activities. So for us, that starts at midnight tonight. And those additional sectors include gyms and fitness centers, places of worship, any indoor protests, indoor office activities that are not on the list of critical infrastructure, and that can be found on our website, personal care services in two categories. So there's nail salons, massage parlors, tattoo parlors, as well as other services like facials, estheticians, waxing services, et cetera. And it also pertains to hair services at hair salons and barbershops. And finally, though we don't have any in our county, it would apply to indoor malls. We definitely have outdoor malls or shopping areas. But if you have an entrance to the outside it doesn't pertain to retail in general and to strip malls as well. So that's where we stand in this county. In addition to the statewide closures these new closures will go into effect starting tomorrow. And again, with no end date that we can report at this time. So with that, what we really need to do as a community is to bring down the number of cases that we're seeing, new cases, on a daily basis.

We're seeing 30, 40, 70. This puts us in dangerous territory with respect to many of these people having the circumstances where they may land in the hospital, they may land in intensive care. So though our numbers remain good in those areas, we want to bring down the case rate because we don't want people landing in higher levels of healthcare need and we want to be able to open our community. So we continue to ask of our population to continue to do all of these things that we've been saying ad nauseum for months now but it is critically important that we continue to be patient and continue to commit to spending months and potentially a year of our lives doing these unpleasant things like wearing masks whenever you are indoors, staying home for certain when you are sick, keeping your distance from other people, hand washing, sanitizing surfaces, and covering your coughs and sneezes via mask or whenever, even at outside, certainly important to do that. Stay close to home. Of course we've been emphasizing this for a long time. That hasn't changed, the state order remains in place. We know that people are getting tired of this pandemic. I am as well. But we are gonna continue to have to find a way to coexist and keep our case numbers down so that we can continue to have people earn a living, to have our children be able to go to school. I know some school districts are beginning to make choices about that. And so as a community, whatever your opinion is about whether this disease will affect you personally, as a

community at large we need to do all of these things so that we can continue to live our lives in a way that we can have mental wellness, economic wellness, social opportunities at a distance, and good health. So with that I'm going to turn it over to you all for questions.

- [Man] Dr. Borenstein, either you or Wade, when these closures were announced, similar closures in the springtime, enforcement was a little bit soft and it approached more educational. This time around, what do you forecast? Maybe a little bit more rigorous in the enforcement?

- So we have, as you know on Fourth of July weekend we closed bars, we were worried about that being a significant impact to our county. We did do enforcement checks both by law enforcement and by environmental health and code enforcement. All of those are in place. They are continuing to make those checks, they are continuing to take as a first approach reminders, spot checks, are people actually distancing within the business, are people actually wearing masks, do they have provisions in place like hand sanitizer at entranceways? And for the most part, we are seeing a lot of compliance with our businesses, so that is good. We are seeing some defiance and we have issued notice of violations for some permitted businesses and there have been a couple of citations from code enforcement in a couple of locations. And as need be we'll continue to do that. But our first approach, and we're seeing greater compliance, so people are listening, is to really try to work with the community and the businesses to achieve the best practices and all the protective measures that have been recommended for months now.

- [Man] As these cases continue to climb, hospitalizations, deaths, things like that, is the county looking at other possible closures? I.e. beaches, parks, trails, things like that. 'Cause there's a lot of people that say shut those down.

- More and more we're not, as information continues to pile up related to the transmission of this disease, in so many ways we've learned a lot about how it affects younger age groups, what kinds of very specific medical conditions put people more at risk, asymptomatic spread, there's a whole number of things that we've learned and we're continuing to learn more about this disease. One aspect that made sense all along but we now have a lot more data on it is that indoor spread is very much more so the mechanism than outdoors. So you know I said from the very beginning of this pandemic, we don't want this to be a shelter at home literally where people do not go out of their houses. There are implications to that. Certainly psychological wellbeing and health. So we continue to say that

people should, in safe manners, by themselves or with household contacts, get outdoors, keep physically active, that is important to do, it is available through parks, it's available through beaches, but please do so with all the other protective measures in place. Keeping distance, masks if you're gonna be in a setting where there are a lot of people around.

- [Woman] What is the cost of the alternate care site so far?

- I'm gonna turn that over to Mr. Horton.

- Question was what's the cost of the alternate care sit thus far? It's about 2.2 million. Yeah.

- [Woman] I'll ask a different question for Dr. Borenstein. What is your reaction to schools reopening, their plans coming out? As you saw, I'm sure, Lucia Mar decided to go fully online, other schools are kinda up in the air, what are your thoughts on that?

- Yeah, I've been having weekly dialog with district superintendents, with presidents or direct managers of private and parochial schools. At this time in this county I know that this is not the dialog that's happening in every jurisdiction around the state, but I believe that due to the lower prevalence and the lower student to student spread and the protective mechanisms that we can put in place that should a school district choose to open that they can do so safely. This is notwithstanding our higher numbers. And I think it's critically important for the wellbeing and the academic achievement and the developmental milestones for our student population. I know that individual districts are gonna make their decisions on a basis of a number of different factors, but it is not coming from me as public health guidance at this moment in time in the situation that this county is in that ordering any closures.

- [Woman] For testing capacity, what are we looking at right now? How many per day are we testing versus previously? What does that look like?

- So we're continuing to test, as we have been for a number of weeks, at a similarly high level. I don't think I have the numbers at the top of my head. We're able to do probably a couple of hundred a day at the public health lab and about 300 or so more in our community sites, plus we have an additional pop-up site that we move around the county. So we're meeting our metric, which is over 425, I think, is the established metric of 150 per 100,000 population. And we're going beyond that. I

think the last figure I saw on that is we were over two per 100,000 population per day. So that, yeah, puts us over 500.

- [Woman] Has that been increasing since previous--

- Yeah, I think we've been steady on that for probably the past couple of weeks. We've reached a bit of a maximum and we have a lot more demand than we're able to accommodate at those clinics, which is why last week and through our news briefings we have asked for people of lower risk and without symptoms to cede their spot, if they will, to people who are a vulnerable person in a high-risk occupation or setting, or who have symptoms.

- [Man] Dr. Borenstein, speaking of testing, you've been in Nipomo this week, it will conclude tomorrow. I think I may have asked you this last week. That community is now third most in the county, has really shot up recently. Per capita is number one in the county now, considering its population. What have you seen in that community? Drivers, reasons, anything in particular that you may be seeing that maybe you didn't see last week or things like that?

- Yeah, so we, like you, are very interested in understanding our data better. We are in the process of bringing on data analysts to look at that. We've been trying to onboard them for a number of days now and I'm hoping that next week we'll have some more detail to share with you around sources of transmission, occupations, et cetera. As I've said previously, however, for many of the cases, because people have been moving about the community to different places and over the course of their potential period of them becoming infected, in many cases it's really difficult for us to nail down what their source of transmission is. We continue to see a majority of people who are getting it in their households or with close, known contacts. But our rate of community transmission, which means we don't know exactly where you got it, has gone up in every geographical area. The same is true for Nipomo. We hope to come back to the public with more information on occupational settings, nature of the settings, as we try to distill all the information of these hundreds of cases that have come forward in recent weeks.

- [Woman] Yeah, sorry, so next, are things gonna go back to being completely closed if cases continue to stay on this spike that we're on? Is there any perception of what the future may look like if we continue on the trend that we are now?

- Yeah, I don't have any particular information about additional closures at this time and there's none on the horizon.

- [Woman] And then one more, sorry. Is the rate of positivity perhaps going up because we're doing more testing?

- So that's a good question. The reason that we track the rate of positivity is because it's not tied to the number of tests done. It means that more people amongst those getting tested, whether it was 100 or 1,000, it's the rate of positivity that matters and that has been going up. So that means that there is more infectivity in our community.

- [Woman] I am so sorry, I have another one.

- That's okay. I'll take this.

- [Woman] So you mentioned the 90-year-old who recently died was in a care facility. Is there any risk to the other individuals who may have been in that facility?

- So we have had a number of outbreaks in residential facilities both for elderly in our skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, facilities for those with developmental disabilities. I hate to use this term but it's a bit of a whack-a-mole situation where we are trying to identify those first cases in each one of these facilities as quickly as possible. That's why we use the public health laboratory for those settings. We can get quick turnaround and once we identify one or more cases, we go in and do very aggressive testing of both staff and residents. We have over the past couple of weeks had at least 15 different facilities that have had an outbreak of some sort. And that is absolutely one of our biggest worries in congregate care living situations, and so that's why we respond as aggressively as we do. Yes, absolutely with any one case, be it from a resident or a staff member, it puts everyone in the facility at risk, but we are also very much working with those facilities to do their best procedures for infection control. So they cohort anyone who's infected, they've stopped new admissions, people stay in their rooms if they need to to isolate the sick and quarantine those who have had exposure, so we're working very closely with all these facilities and they really are stepping up to try to make sure that when they do get cases that they limit the spread within the facility.

- [Man] One final question for Wade. The mutual aid agreement with Santa Barbara County, we've seen the cases there dramatically higher than our county, specifically Santa Maria. Would this be an indication that perhaps that might be have to be activated here in the near future or maybe they're getting close to needing that center at Cal Poly?

- So the question was if Santa Barbara County, with their case count, when will potentially, or could we potentially activate the Cal Poly ACS? In the MOU, it's tied to capacity of Santa Barbara County hospitals and it's not just Maria and our southern border. It's all their hospitals throughout the county. And if they reach a certain criteria as far as occupancy in their hospitals, they would contact us and say, we've reached that threshold limit and essentially there's a ramp-up time. And in that case, where there capacity does become to the point where they need to move patients into the ACS, we'd be able to accommodate that.

- [Man] Nothing appears to be imminent right now?

- Not imminent, no. All right, thank you.

- Thank you once again for coming today and tuning in online and on TV. You can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on ReadySLO.org or by calling the phone assistant center or the public health information line. We continue to offer free testing by appointment at several locations around the county. There are still a few appointments available at the Nipomo site for tomorrow at Dana Elementary School. Next week there will be a new site set up in Paso Robles at the Paso Robles City Library Study Center from nine a.m. to four p.m. This site will be available Monday July 20th through Thursday July 23rd. All this information can be found on the testing location page at ReadySLO.org or by calling the phone assistance center. Please note that our San Luis Obispo City and Grover Beach testing locations have been booked a week or more in advance. If you have made a testing appointment at one of those locations but no longer need the test, or can't make the appointment for some reason, please cancel the appointment to make room for someone else that needs one. Also, please defer testing if you are asymptomatic or at lower risk, allowing those at higher risk to obtain more timely testing appointments. Thank you again for tuning in today. You can find these briefings on SLO County's public health Facebook page and on our county's website. They are also livestreamed on KCOY and KSBY. They are also live broadcast on channel 13 and rebroadcast on public access channel 21 at midnight, eight a.m. and five p.m. until the next briefing occurs. Thank you again for staying informed. Be kind, be well, and we will see you here next Wednesday at 3:15.