

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, July 22nd, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we'll hear first from County Behavioral Health Director, Ms. Anne Robin. And she will be followed by County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. They will both be available for questions after their prepared statements. Thank you to our American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now SLO County Behavioral Health Director, Anne Robin.

- Thank you, Michelle. Good afternoon, everybody. Go with me. Thank you. Today what we're gonna talk a little bit about is self-care and how to deal with the anxiety, the frustration, the fear, the anger, the depression that many of you may be feeling as the pandemic continues. I wanna start with talking about our kids. It's an extremely difficult time for the youth and parents in our county. As schools discussed opening or not opening, virtual or live, a lot of families were put, again, into a position of feeling anxious about, "Well, what am I gonna do? Do I have to telecommute and take care of my kids? How do I help my kids?" We wanna reassure everybody there's a lot of help out there, but I have some tips and some guidances that I'd like to provide for parents and for the community, how to help our youth who are missing out on quite a bit of their usual activities that they would have done in a regular school year. Each of you can help support your youth locally by validating their feelings, recognizing their grief, and reminding them that their sacrifices are recognized. While they're missing out on seeing friends and going to football games, these may not seem as important to adults, but remember our kids don't have the life experiences adults have, and those are extremely important life goals for them, to see their friends, go to a football game, interact, be in a school play, and all of that's gone for them now. That's really important and so important that the adults in the community, parents, support our kids and give them alternatives. They may not be achieving those things, but there's a lot of other things they can achieve. Focus on reminding the young people in your life that this time will pass. We're not sure when, but it will. This school year, please help arrange alternative school interactions to help continue to honor local students' personal and academic milestones in creative ways, such as have a family Friday night pizza to celebrate the end of the schoolwork, schedule weekly family games or backyard sporting events to substitute for missed activities such as sports, and allow for regular virtual hangouts with friends. Activities such as these are vital to bring normalcy in a time of so much uncertainty. And for parents, many of you have to stay home. You're trying to work from home. You're trying to figure out how to do

one more Google session or Zoom session for your kid's school. Many of you aren't prepared to assist with schoolwork either the technology or the content. That's okay. You have still many things that you can help teach your kids, budgeting, cooking, how to be quiet, how to schedule time. All of those are important life lessons that your kids can learn now, when they aren't perhaps getting as much academic training as they would in a face-to-face school year, and those are all valuable. For you, check in with friendly phone calls, video chats, emails, drop a greeting card, or a message to a friend you know who may be struggling by juggling their job and their kids and all of their different responsibilities. It's important that we support each other. I wanna talk a little bit with how to deal with your fear over the rising case counts and some tips for keeping your anxiety at bay. We started with just a breath and even in this room, I felt people relax a little bit. Remembering to breathe, check yourself, it's so important. Just taking a moment can help you get a hold of your anxiety, your fear, help give you a chance to take a moment of relax. It's natural and it's okay to be fearful about the rising positive COVID-19 numbers in our county. We want to remind everyone that there's comfort in knowing you're not alone in your concerns. Our agency and many others, including your neighbors, community members, and spiritual leaders are available and want to support you. Remember to take things day by day. Work to ground and center your feelings of uncertainty. It's important to focus on what you can control, not what you can't control. You can control and focus on your own physical distancing. You can control how much news and social media you engage in. If you notice that you're very anxious every time you watch the news for the fifth time, don't watch the news for the fifth time. You've already gotten the good information you needed to have. Give yourself a break. Expand your connections with loved ones virtually. Go on more FaceTimes, Zoom calls or just a regular old telephone call. Hear a loved one's voice. That's very grounding and very supportive in many times. And then keep to a daily routine. Don't just stay in bed 'til 11, if you could. Get up. Do your normal routine, walking, having a healthy breakfast, some of the other things that keep you centered. We also want to say that you can control your stress by getting outside daily. Some people feel they can't even go outside. Yes you can. We encourage and Dr. Borenstein encourages people to get outside for some daily activity. It's safe to do so. We want you to breathe fresh air. We live in such a beautiful county. Take advantage of it. Exercise, whether indoor exercise or outdoors, walking your dog, working in the garden, that helps relieve your stress and anxiety. Again, limit your social media use. People can spin up the more they read all the different rumors

and all of the different information. Give yourself a break. Schedule a social media break every day. You can create a calming daily or nightly routine by reading, meditating, sitting and doing some deep breathing, just sitting and watching outside a window to see what's going on outside without doing anything else. Give yourself the chance to do that. Take care of your mind through creative outlets, music, art, journaling, drawing. Give you your mind a chance to relax from all the information and just create. Even if, I'm a horrible artist, but even if you just scribble, it's really relaxing to doodle. That's why so many of us did it in our margins when we were in school. It's a relaxing, diverting kind of thing. Give yourself a chance to be creative. Remember to eat nutritious meals. And finally, we want you and your friends, family members, and neighbors, to reach out for support, if they're feeling stressed or afraid. We are so much stronger together and we'll get through this together. So thank you for your time. I appreciate it. And I'll turn it over to Dr. Borenstein.

- Thank you, Anne. I, for one really appreciated that and I'm going to make my children watch that about the staying in bed too late in the morning. So thank you. So I am going to share where we are in terms of the disease, as I always do. Our case counts are going up. It's not all bad news though. We did have 24 cases yesterday, but for the past week we had a new high of 281 over a week's time. We have nearly a thousand, now 917, of all of our cases from the beginning have recovered, which is 66% or 2/3 but we have a new high number. We're continuing to see more people who have active disease who are hopefully not out and about in the community. They've all been issued isolation orders, but that number's 457. We do have 12 individuals in the hospital and four of them are in intensive care. And also, unfortunately I am reporting that our seventh individual has died with COVID-19. The individual was in their 80s, was already on hospice care and then contracted COVID-19. So had a number of health issues already, but COVID-19 came and infected this person during their last period of their life and our condolences very much go out to the family. So let's talk about hospitalizations, which as I've said on many occasions is our probably most important metric. It is an indication of not just the disease, but severity of disease, which is of course what we all worry about. So the good news, as I said, there was some is that our hospitalization rates have stayed very stable during this period of the last two, three, even longer weeks of seeing our case counts rise. And quite frankly, I get asked all the time, "Well, why is that?" And I don't have a really good answer. For one thing, what I can say is that people who do become infected often start to see

more severe impacts of the disease a week out, 10 days out, even longer. And so we may be in a period where we haven't yet seen our hospital rates go up, but that may still happen. It may also be related to the intensity and the work that we're doing in terms of contact tracing. We continue even with our high numbers and our addition of resources, to be able to contact all of our cases within a day, in most cases, and do contact elicitation and communicate with those contacts in order to give quarantine orders, ask people who have had close contact of positive cases that they stay home. And we issue the isolation order to people, as soon as we learned that they are positive. So perhaps that is also very much in our favor is our ability to identify individuals and issue those isolation and quarantine orders quickly. But in some cases we are seeing from people that they are not responding to our contact tracer calls. So I want to put the word out to our entire community that if you do receive a call from SLO County Public Health, or I think it even says EOC Contact Tracing, please answer the call. This is vitally important for our community, that if you do test positive that you engage with us so that we can get information from you, that will help us better understand the source of transmission, the source of infection for yourself, and also help us to understand who amongst your contacts may need to be communicated with from us in order to issue those quarantine orders and keep them for themselves out of harm's way by being aware that they may have been exposed and they need to be aware of the symptoms and they also need to be aware that they need to be staying home during that two week quarantine period because if you recall, we have many, as much as 40, 45% of all cases who do not develop symptoms, but can pass on the disease. So all of these actions are pretty important. I do wanna say, so one more thing about the phone, if you see either the caller ID or be sure that the message is coming from an 805 area code and either 788 or 781. That's how you'll know it's legitimate. We also very much never ask of people information that is of a personal nature. We don't ask for Social Security numbers. We don't ask for immigration status. We will leave a message, if you're not available. And we have a mechanism for you to call us back. So with that, I also wanna talk a little bit about a scam that we've become aware of whereby some people are getting calls that are not the public health department, but being identified as such. So these are individuals who are being told, "You've had a positive test. I'm calling from the health department and I'm here to get more information". So again, be very wary if it's not from 805, 788, 781 and doesn't have a caller ID identifying as a County Public Health Department or contact tracing. And the reason we think that perhaps this scam is

going on, we've gotten a number of people who've reached out to us and said, "Hey, I got called, but I never got a test. How is it possible that I'm positive?" So I'm seeing and our information officers are seeing on websites, on social media that we're miscounting people. We're identifying people who never had a test who are positive. Let me assure you that that is not the public health department, local or in any place where people are getting information wrong. This is simply a scam. And so please be aware of it. It may be that people are trying to indicate that Public Health doesn't have the correct numbers. We think that is potentially where it's coming from, but we are not miscounting people. With every single case that we get we get bonafide laboratory confirmation of a positive result. So please be aware of that. The last thing I wanted to talk about is a little bit with regard to how this disease is spreading in our community. We, in many cases, as I think I've mentioned before, we cannot determine that, especially if people have been during the period of time, when they likely contracted the virus in a lot of different places. So we can't say for certain, for many of our cases where they got the disease but we are continuing to look at these numbers. And in many cases of those for whom we can determine, a discrete number of places that they've been, or people that they've interacted with in a large number of cases, these are individuals who have had private parties or gatherings or get-togethers with family and friends and that is one of the largest reasons that people are contracting this virus. We also are seeing and had been seeing now that the bars are closed and restaurants, we're not seeing as much of that or other types of very specific gatherings, like worship services. We have had a number, a small number, very small number from the protest and a small number from church gatherings but the largest proportion is people who are just doing the kind of socialization of getting together in person that you just heard from Miss Robin can just as well be done, not in person through cameras, through audio, through cards. It is important for people to connect, but not in person and not in large numbers. So with all of these cases that we're seeing in our community, what worries us the most is we are seeing a lot of cases in our young individuals and these are people who may have no symptoms at all, or mildly sick and continue to move about the community and they are moving about the community in places that are more worrisome and impact our vulnerable populations. So it is young adults who often are the workforce in our nursing homes, in other assisted living settings, in corrections facilities, in large number of other types of places where the infected people who may themselves not struggle very much with the disease, but can pass it to these more vulnerable populations.

So that's why we continue to drive home again and again, and again, I'm sorry, but this is our new normal at this time is stay engaged with people, but do so at a distance. Do so with a face covering, and if you are out and about. Absolutely stay home when you're sick. Maintain your physical distance from others. Work remotely when you can. And even in that period between getting a test where you're concerned that you either have symptoms or you know yourself to be a close contact of a case, do not wait for that test result. Self-isolate until you know whether you are positive or negative and consider yourself to be sick until proven otherwise. So I do wanna say a word about what's happening in our community with these closures and particularly around schools and why it's important for all of us to continue to do our part to drive these numbers down, because the only way we can get back to reopening some sectors, and most importantly in my mind is our school system is to turn the curve, to flatten the curve, to bend the curve, to get our numbers back to a place where we're not seeing as much transmission as we're seeing right now. So with regard to the school system, we do, within the state order, have the opportunity for superintendents or school directors to submit for a waiver for attendance in person of elementary school level children. And I'm beginning to receive some of those, and we are going to be responding, myself and Dr. Jim Brescia, our County Office of Education superintendent. And the reason that that's okay at the younger level is because the information is becoming very clear that young children, particularly under the age of 10 or under the age of 12, elementary school ages, really do not get this disease at the same rate or in the same way as the rest of the population. They are infected in much fewer numbers biologically, and they also do not appear to transmit to other people. And so with respect to that population, we're open to the idea of getting elementary school children back into in-person instruction in some fashion, in some settings where all of the other protective measures can be adhered to. As to adolescents and the middle school and high school students, the information is a lot less clear about rates of transmission and rates of infection in that population. And so while there's a lot of uncertainty in that age group, the state order for school closure does not have the same allowance for those older age groups. So I will just end today with reminding everyone that as you heard from Anne Robin, and thank you again for that, we are a strong, hardy community. We will get through this. It may take a long time. We have to do these things continuously that are unpleasant, but we have to do it in order to get to the other side of this pandemic and we will. But thank you for

everything that everybody is doing to work as a community to get us through these difficult times. And with that, I will turn it over for questions.

- [Man] Dr. Borenstein, so if you could just clarify real quick that waiver regarding education. So let's say the county receives that waiver. It would be up to each, I would imagine, up to each individual school district, school board to decide whether or not they use that waiver and bring back elementary school children, or they could still continue on an online format. Is that right?

- Right, so there's no requirement in any way that elementary school students that a school pursue this waiver, a school district, in the case of our public system. But what is required in order to even make the request is that everyone has to be on board. So that's the school teachers, the staff, the community in which the schools are located, parents, the superintendent, and then a request is made for a waiver to myself and it also requires engagement with the state health department to review that waiver request and look at our metrics and look at the plans quite frankly, of the school and how they envision bringing students back in an in-person fashion with safety measures in place.

- [Man] Also just a couple updates. I think it was a couple of weeks ago, you were expressing some frustration with testing and the turnaround time that the county had been receiving, or people had been receiving. If you can update on how that's going and also last week you talked about assisted and residential care centers and how that was becoming a big concern and what's it been like in the week since. So how are those two?

- Sure. So the testing demand and capacity are still not well aligned at this moment in time. The state is aware of that. The state being the Department of Public Health and Health and Human Services. The governor talked about it again today. There is definitely an awareness that in many communities, ourselves included, that there is a demand for testing that exceeds our capacity, both in terms of appointment availability and in terms of turnaround time of the results. Things have stabilized. So it's not getting worse, but we are awaiting solutions that we can't provide at the local level in terms of expanded laboratory capacity. We, at our local level, continue to provide the same amount of testing, but until we can get quicker turnaround from the laboratory and really manage the demand, we're still asking at this time that people who are of low risk and asymptomatic defer testing. Then the second, okay, the second-

- [Man] Are those numbers getting better or what do you think?

- Yes. So we have had a number of outbreaks in varying types of congregate living situations, including obviously the jail has gotten some news about that recently that we've had our first small outbreak, just a very small number of inmates at this time, as well as correctional deputies and other congregate settings, like residential care facilities for the elderly or for developmentally disabled or our skilled nursing facilities. We continue to see new outbreaks on a weekly basis. And we are able to continue with our public health laboratory capacity to address those in an immediate fashion, by doing widespread testing, identifying people who are infected, and the facilities have worked wonderfully with us in terms of their plans for isolating sick people, as well as quarantining contacts and we've been able to keep up with the demand of repeat testing until a facility is cleared. As of yesterday, out of about a dozen of these types of outbreaks we've had, we have already cleared half of them. So thus far we're able to keep up but as you've heard me say on many occasions, this is one of our most vulnerable and concerning areas. So it's why we continue to ask of everybody, especially if you work in one of these facilities, to take extra precautions to avoid becoming infected and bringing it into these facilities.

- [Woman] Dr. Borenstein, is there a reason why nursing homes, the County Public Health Department hasn't given specific names of the nursing homes that, or other congregate living facilities that have been affected?

- Yeah, we largely, unless it becomes a really big outbreak and other people may be impacted by it, just by virtue of their connection with people to that facility, we do the same with businesses. We don't give out whether it's a particular housing community in the farm worker community or assisted living or Costco or, I'm sorry, Costco. I always sort of use them, but we just generally, unless it's important for the more general population to understand that there's a high risk associated with a particular facility that may impact a large number of people, we allow all manner of businesses to have their privacy and the residents of that facility as well.

- [Man] Daily number, oh go ahead. I'm sorry.

- [Woman] Oh, so you had touched on this, but there appears to be a lot more unknown rates of transmission at this time, cases with unknown rates of transmission. Are contact tracers overwhelmed? Is it people not answering the call? What's leading to that?

- So increased transmission in the community and what's-

- [Woman] Well, it's increased numbers of unknown, either unknown location-

- A source?

- [Woman] Unknown source of transmission.

- Yeah, so I think I, as I mentioned, in many of the cases there've been a lot of different contacts during the period where the person was susceptible or exposed and so often it's difficult to nail down a particular source. We still largely get wonderful feedback from people who we're in communication with, but as our numbers go up, the raw number of people who we're not able to contact is going up a little bit and that is worrisome to us, which is why I spoke today about please answer the call. It's very important to the entire community.

- [Man] With the testing, with the numbers you give out each day, how far back are those numbers from, like the numbers that came out today, when were those tested?

- Oh, today's positive, when were they tested?

- [Man] Roughly.

- So, yeah, so there's a range of turnaround time as our public health lab has a one to two day turnaround time. And so when we do testing in those higher risk facilities, we get those answers very quickly. Sometimes that's hospitalized patients, skilled nursing patients, staff, the jail, et cetera. All of those we work to get those answers within that 24 to 48 hour timeframe. Our community clinics are running somewhere between four to seven day turnaround time. A little bit less, if people have gone to their private physician or an urgent care. That's running more in the two to four or five or eight day range turnaround time.

- [Man] And the isolation of patients that have tested positive, how do you enforce that when somebody has to be isolated?

- We check up with people. They're answering their phone. I know with a cell phone you can go anywhere. You can sort of hear if someone's got a lot of background noise. In most cases the cooperation is really wonderful. We have had a couple of cases where we've actually had to send out someone to remind people that they are under an isolation order. They're subject to law that they are required to stay at home. We haven't had to go further than that, but that is how we enforce.

- [Man] Yeah, another question. In terms of the spread, Dr. Borenstein, you were saying that most, I guess a large number, is socialization, large gatherings, parties, people you know, basically. So are you really seeing small numbers in the county with spread in community places, markets, stores, restaurants, those type of places where somebody contracts it via door handle or handrail, et cetera?

- Yeah, so we've always said and it continues to be true, if you listen to the experts on this. One of my experts I go to is the director of CIDRAP in Minnesota, Centers for Infectious Disease. I forget what it stands for. But Dr. Mike Osterholm, Dr. Anthony Fauci, there's a number, Dr. Ashish in Harvard. They all, and a lot of the medical literature makes it clear that touchpoints are a much less risky source of exposure than direct contact or in a room for a long period of time where infected people have been and there may be some period of hours of aerosolization. So all of these ways in which the virus can be spread are true, but they have different associated risks, some lower, some higher. So with that said, we have not been able to really nail down any particular, "Oh, I got it at the grocery store because so-and-so was working there and was touching the cash register or the PIN pad and then I touched it." And we really haven't seen much of that. We haven't seen much in many of the industries that have been working as essential workers in some of the more traditional retail areas. We have seen some numbers in our Ag community. Again, yeah. And I know that information is desired and we've been working hard to create new metrics that we hope to make available to the public in the coming week.

- [Man] And generally speaking, most cases here in the county people that have contracted it, it's through somebody they know, either a friend, loved one, coworker, et cetera.

- Yeah, of the cases where people can say, "Well, the only place I was in the last 14 days was us inside," so "or one or two places", and we, excuse me, we'll sort of count these numbers. The largest number that we're able to pin on a source is family and friend gatherings.

- [Man] Question from a viewer asks are people who are hospitalized, tested daily? And if so, are the daily positive results added to the overall total or is it counted as just one case?

- Right. So people even in the hospital or outpatient are not repeat tested. Hospital discharge early on in the pandemic, when it was considered to be recovered, CDC

guidance was to have two negative tests. So some of the early cases may have had repeat tests. That is not typically done now, although it may be, if they're being discharged from the hospital and sent to another high risk facility, like a skilled nursing home. However regardless of the number of times that a person is tested, they will only be counted once. So among our numbers, those are 1,393 individuals.

- [Woman] We'll take one more question and we're over here for the day.

- [Woman] Dr. Borenstein, so you had mentioned that a small number of cases had mentioned they'd gone to protests. If you're asymptomatic, but have been to a protest, can you get tested at this time?

- So, again, so our recommendation at this time, given the demand is that low risk people who have not been in contact with someone known to be positive, especially if you're wearing a mask that asymptomatic people do not get tested through our community resources at this moment.

- [Woman] Okay the question that I had emailed in was what would it take for the county to get off the watch list? For example, do we have an average number of cases needed per week? And how are we trending?

- So unfortunately we're still trending up. The metric that put us on the watch list amongst a half a dozen state metrics is the one that is the number of cases per population. It's per 100,000 population. So, in our case, we're a population of roughly 280,000. So 280 cases in a two week period is what puts us on the list. And so that means we'd have to be below an average of 20 cases per day. All right, thank you all so much.

- Just a few closing notes and reminders. You can receive all of our COVID-19 information from our county's COVID-19 webpage at readyslo.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. Appointments are available at the San Luis Obispo and Grover Beach testing sites as of Monday next week. That's the first available appointment right now. There are still appointments available tomorrow at our Paso Robles site at the Paso Robles Study Center on Oak Street. Next week from Monday through Wednesday, July 27th, through the 29th, there will be a new site open at Morro Bay at their Veterans Building. All of this information can be found on our website at readyslo.org or by contacting the Phone Assistance Center. If you have made a testing appointment, but no longer need a test or cannot make the appointment, please cancel the

appointment to make room for someone else who needs one. Also, please defer testing as Dr. Borenstein said, if you are asymptomatic or at lower risk at this time, allowing those at higher risk to obtain timely testing appointments. Thank you again for tuning in today. You can find these briefings live on our SLO County Public Health Facebook page, as well as our county's homepage. They are also livestreamed on KCOY and KSBY and they are broadcast live on cable channel 13, as well as rebroadcast on public-access channel 21 at 8:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m., and at midnight. Thank you for staying informed. Be kind, be well, and we'll see you here next Wednesday at 3:15.