

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, July 29th, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon, we will hear first from San Luis Obispo County superintendent of schools, Dr. James Brescia. He will be followed by county health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. We also have several others here today to take your questions as needed. County administrative officer and emergency services director, Wade Horton; Shandon superintendent of schools, Christina Benson; and assistant superintendent of educational services at San Luis Coastal Unified School District, Kim McGrath. Thank you to our American sign language interpreter, Katie Voice, and now San Luis Obispo County superintendent of schools, Dr. James Brescia.

- Thank you. And I would like to thank the County of San Luis Obispo and specifically Dr. Borenstein, for inviting us here today to update you on the status of schools as we head into the 2021 school year. Counties that are unable to meet certain public health case count and testing criteria are being placed on the state county monitoring list and are subject to different opening allowances than those counties still able to meet those criteria. Unfortunately, SLO County is currently on the County monitoring list. And as a result, a number of business sectors that had been opened previously were forced to close again. While our county attempts to slow the speed of the virus, schools are impacted with this situation. On July 17th, the governor further announced that counties on the monitoring list would not be allowed to open for the fall term and only provide distance learning, with some exceptions. One of these exceptions described in the state's updated reopening guidance allows for a waiver process by which elementary schools in a county on the county monitoring list may apply to their local county public health department for the ability to resume in-person instruction for elementary grades only. Over the past week, we have received several interest applications from local elementary schools wishing to pursue a waiver. And we've been working with the public health department to complete the waiver process. Today we have prepared a frequently asked questions document that should answer many of the questions our schools may have about the waiver. Individual districts, charters, private and parochial schools will need to notify students and families about the waiver process application and status. It's important to note that the state's guidance requires that these waivers can only be granted when an elementary school district, charter, private, or parochial school has consulted with their labor, parent groups, and community organizations about the waiver, and they can show evidence of the

consultation and collaboration on the decision making. Dr. Borenstein will address some of the other criteria necessary to request a waiver. The waiver is now available online, on the ReadySLO.org website, as well as a letter and frequently asked questions. All schools will continue to work with public health on this process, and they have worked throughout the pandemic. We all have the goal of getting our children back into our schools to the best of our ability. Regarding childcare, I'd like to take a moment and give you a few new information appoints on childcare. Although most of San Luis Obispo County will start the year in distance learning, the state is allowing childcare centers to operate on school sites, as well as existing facilities. All of the districts throughout the county have been working closely with nonprofits and government childcare centers on plans for opening or expanding childcare. Interested providers should contact the regional office, which is on the website, or you can contact the county Office of Education. And finally, I would like to thank everyone for their continued support. It takes our entire community to act proactively to reduce the transmission of this disease. We all want our children back to in-person instruction. I think we all desire that as soon as possible, and we can do this if we work together. Thank you. And especially, I would like to thank our public health officer, Dr. Borenstein. Dr. Borenstein.

- Thank you. Good afternoon. So, I am first gonna talk about where we stand with our cases. We have now in San Luis Obispo County, 1,710 cases. The good news over the last 24 hours is that we've had our lowest increase in quite some time. So that's an increase of 21 cases since yesterday. To-date, over 1300, exactly 1,304 of the cases have been deemed recovered from the virus, and that's 76% of all of our cases, with less than 400 people recovering at home. And that also is a number that has been falling recently, with 381 people recovering at home. We have less people actively infected in our community at this time. We continue to see relatively low numbers compared to many of the surrounding counties, with respect to our hospital cases. We have 13 people in the hospital, four of whom are in intensive care. So we continue to be pleased that with the increase in cases over several weeks now, we haven't seen the correlate increase in our hospitalizations. We have however, seen an increase in our number of deaths. Though again, we are considerably in better shape with respect to the number of individuals in our community who have passed away from this disease. We are seeing that we have an increase, in that we have 12 individuals now who have died from COVID and four of them have happened just in the last week. All of these individuals were in their 70s and 80s and had underlying health conditions. But what that says to me is it

really drives home the point that we need to take care of our vulnerable population. Most of the folks who have died, certainly in the past week, have done so in a residential care facility where they had not been outside of that facility over the period of infection. So it stands to reason that they received their source of transmission from staff or others who have been moving about these facilities. And so it really does drive home the point that we need to continue to do all of the best practices that we've been saying in order to protect our vulnerable population. We in no way want to blame the facility or the staff. The facility and their staff are working diligently to try to contain outbreaks that occur at our skilled nursing facilities, at other residential care facilities. But again, I just want to remind people of why, even though you, as a healthy young person, might have a mild course of disease, might not even have any symptoms, and you recover very well from this disease, it's the ability of people to transmit in a multitude of settings that we are very concerned about. So, that's just one reminder again, to do all of the right things with respect to wearing masks, avoiding gatherings, and keeping distance. I am gonna speak about the school situation as Dr. Brescia mentioned. We have put together a process to allow schools and school districts to ask for a waiver from the school requirement that at this moment in time, for counties on the monitoring list, they are not able to open for schools unless, I mean, they're not able to open for in-person instruction unless they receive a waiver from my office. And in order to do so, they need to have all of those components in place, which is a collaboration and consultation with labor, with parent groups, and with community organizations. The reason that we are able to offer this in-person waiver for younger students is particularly under the age of 12, the elementary school age, science tells us that they are much less at risk for getting the disease, for passing it to each other, for passing it to staff and teachers, and to become very sick with the disease. So all of the considerations with this disease, with that age group, put them at the lowest risk of problems from COVID-19. They also present a lesser risk to the staff that are engaged with them in in-person instruction. That said, however, we still, with a waiver, are looking for the schools, to implement the school guidance in all of its parameters, and will need to have that as part of the school plans that are submitted with their waivers, that show that they have attended to the requirements around mask wearing, which is for third grade and up as a requirement, and a strong recommendation for the lower grades. There needs to be hygiene practices put into place, staff and family education, physical distancing parameters, health screenings, and all of the other components that are part of the

state guidance regarding operating schools safely. We're also asking schools that they designate a point of contact who will be the singular point of contact between public health and an individual school. So not just at the district level, but that each school have a named designated person who will be the point of contact. And that person will be our go-to if and when, and hopefully there won't be, but I think it's not unreasonable to think that there will be some cases of disease that happen in a school setting. So we want to have rapid and collaborative communication with the school about how to address any outbreak in a school setting or any cases within either the student or the staff population. We do recognize that time is short. Many schools have been living in this period of uncertainty about how they are going to deliver school. Most of the schools have decided that they will be in a virtual or distance learning environment, but for those that do want to proceed with a waiver for moving forward with in-person instruction, we have agreed to try to turn around their application within a one week's period of time. We do ask that there's an allowance for, you know, a two week period between submission of proposal and actual school opening date, but we will do our best within my office and my staff to turn around those applications as quickly as we possibly can. So that information is now available to schools. Individual superintendents and school directors are getting that information directly from Dr. Brescia, but the information is also available so the public can see what is being looked for in terms of application. Along with the application is a frequently asked questions about school openings and school activities. And all of that information is available on our website at ReadySLO.org. I do also want to talk a bit about childcare, as did Dr. Brescia. And I want to first and foremost, ensure that everyone understands that this is an allowed essential activity. So licensed childcare providers, be they family homes, be they childcare centers, may operate as they have been allowed to throughout this pandemic. As I said, especially the preschool children present the lowest risk, and that's why we're able to do that. It is an essential industry, but even again, with that in the childcare setting, we have worked collaboratively with childcare providers and leaders of that industry to ensure that they're including all the protective measures, like teaching children about hand hygiene, separating cohorts of children into small groups that stay with each other the entire day, and day after day, and week after week, cleaning surfaces, avoiding sharing of toys, distancing as much as possible, which we recognize maybe difficult with two year olds, but that's why we say as much as possible. And as I mentioned, the requirement for face coverings, when we're talking about the ages of grade three

and above, as well as trying to encourage even our youngest citizens between the ages of two and third grade to wear a face covering, if they are able. We know that childcare even before the pandemic was a very strained industry. The demand for childcare services far outstrips the capacity, and we do not want to allow the situation that we're experiencing now to further erode that critically important component of our society to provide childcare, especially when we are trying to get families and parents back to the work site. So as I mentioned, we have been working, my office, with leaders of the childcare community, we've been working with governmental agencies, with Dr. Brescia's office, in consultation and providing the recommendations that will allow these facilities, or these daycare homes, to operate fully safely. I want to applaud the businesses and community groups that are thinking very creatively about how to stand up new and additional ways of providing for childcare in the setting where we have children whose parents are going back to work, and yet they are not going back to school. And we've received a number of proposals about how to augment the childcare capacity in ways that can happen in businesses or additional community groups. So, all of this information can be found again, online on our ReadySLO.org. There's state childcare guidance and it talks through all of it, it walks you through all of those best practices regarding hygiene and distancing and use of outdoor spaces. We live in this lovely county. That is one of the things that we can use year round for distancing and improved ventilation. And so with that, I just wanted to make sure that our families feel supported and that we continue to support the childcare industry as we move forward through these challenging times. And speaking of difficult times, I want to circle back to talking about gatherings. I know full well that as a human species, and our human values, are that we are used to and need to come together, as families, as friends. We organize, we celebrate together. We pray together. That is who we are as people. And this is an especially difficult time when you're hearing from your public health department and other community leaders please don't do that at this time because of the public health risks. And yet to circle back to where I started, and I've said this many times, we are in a period of time where we have to, for the foreseeable future, do things differently. So in no way am I ever suggesting that we don't stay connected. It's why you have heard us at this county, and many others drop this term, social distancing. We need to physically distance, but we absolutely do not want you to socially distance. But with that physical distancing means physical separation, using online app opportunities to stay connected as much as possible. If you are getting together, do so outdoors. Absolutely wear face coverings

regardless of the distance between people, especially indoors, and really try to limit as much as possible the number of people who you engage with. I've talked previously about this concept of social bubble. If you have that one friend that you've been seeing, and that one friend has only been seeing you for the past few weeks, and the only places that you go are either together or with your family units, you know, that's a type of gathering that is not putting you at risk. If you come together with that friend and their son has been at a party, and at that party, those children have been with 14 other families, that is the means of transmission for this disease at this time. So we are absolutely asking people to work with us, to continue over a much longer period than any of us would like, to find ways to be social, to connect, but not physically come together in large groups of people. If we do these things, we will be able to drive our numbers down. And what we want is to open our schools and to open our businesses, but we need to do so safely. And with that, I will open it up for questions.

- Yes?

- Okay. Dr. Borenstein, how are hospitalizations being tracked? You said there's 13 now. How is the county getting those numbers? How do you know they are accurate from the hospitals?

- So we communicate on a daily basis with people who are in their period of disease. So, for most people, that is a 10 day period; either if they were asymptomatic from the date of test or if they it's from the date of symptoms for people who had a test when they were symptomatic. So the onset of symptoms to recovery is a minimum of 10 days. We communicate with all those people who have active disease. If they are in the hospital, we either communicate with them directly while they're in the hospital. If they are unable because of their health condition, we communicate with the medical professional staff that are in their care, but we, we also have access to the hospital data portal for patient information. And so we keep very close track on, on which of our recently tested positive individuals are in the hospital at the present time. Yes?

- Is the delay from when you get a test, a COVID test, to when you get your results still up to seven days, or is that changing?

- So, today I heard some good news that our community clinics are beginning to see some improvement in the turnaround time. We had gotten to more like seven to 10 days, which is a really unacceptable period of time. Because if it's 10 days later, you

may have already recovered and then we've lost the opportunity to intervene in any way. We're now hearing that our community clinics are starting to see more like a four or five day turnaround time that we were seeing earlier. I hope that trend continues. I do think it is likely a product of our asking lower risk and asymptomatic people without a known, confirmed contact to not test at this time. So we are seeing a decrease somewhat in the demand, and with that, we're seeing some better turnaround.

- [Reporter] And that better turnaround, what are the days like, what are the time frames?

- So again, with our, with the highest risk settings, outbreaks, hospital patients, first responders, et cetera, we're still seeing 24 at, the longest is really 48 hour turnaround time. With the healthcare system, they are seeing, so if you go to an urgent care or your own physician, they're seeing more in the range of two to five day turnaround time, and now our community clinics are also seeing, we don't get so much two day turnaround, but we're seeing four, or five, six day turnaround in those settings just over recent days. Yep?

- [Reporter] So, we're seeing some beaches around the county getting more crowded, especially as is still closed and so forth, what is your advice to those people who are going out the beaches and gathering on those beaches?

- So, they advice for using our vast and wonderful beaches is it is good to be outdoors. It is good to get fresh air. It is good to recreate. When you are in those communities, do all of the right things, which is stay with your family unit, keep far apart from other parties that are also on the beach. When you do go into town, keep yourselves especially physically distanced from others and wear a mask if you're going to go into a business, and, you know, just do all of those same things continuously.

- [Reporter] If schools that choose in-person instruction report a positive case in their student body, or with families or staff, will the in-person instruction go to distance learning immediately, or will there be a backup plan as part of the waiver requirements?

- Yeah. So we have constructs around what action at what levels of disease in a particular school or in a school district that might mean stepping back from that in-person instruction. It's not absolutely prescriptive, so it's not a first case in a school is gonna close that school down. We would need to see or want, not want to see,

but probably what would lead us to take action to move toward a school closure is multiple unrelated cases in a school, When we got to a state, and this is all in state guidance, when we got to a stage where there are many schools that are under the need to close because of multiple cases, that may be when the school district at large would have to pull back from the in-person instruction.

- [Reporter] Will families have the option to choose full distance learning if the schools choose to apply for the waiver, or is there a hybrid option?

- I believe so. I'm gonna let Dr Brescia address that particular question.

- I have two of our district representatives here from different agencies, but my understanding is that all of our local education agencies will provide some form of distance or independent study for families choosing so. Kimberly McGrath is from one of our largest districts.

- Thank you, yes. Kimberly McGrath from San Luis Coastal. And in our case, we would still offer a virtual learning program for, we would keep both programs running, even if it was an in-person, or virtual learning program option would be available for both.

- Dr. Kristina Benson, I'm the superintendent for Shandon, and we too would be able to offer both a distance learning and an in-person. It's a little more challenging with the size of the district that we're at, but we would strive to do both.

- [Reporter] Is there a notification requirement for schools to staff or to families, if someone tests positive within that school environment?

- Each school would have a communication plan and that was part of the requirement from the state in the reopening plans as to what would happen if there is an outbreak, if someone is infected. And we have done that throughout the summer with programs that are still running, in consultation and in collaboration with public health. So, yes.

- [Reporter] Actually I have a question for Dr. Borenstein, if you're done. So with the increase in numbers, Nipomo increased recently over San Luis Obispo. With all the communication that you're having with those who've tested positive, is there any indication on why this trend has happened?

- The reason I emphasized so much today gatherings is because as we look at among the cases where we can try to get a sense of where the source of

transmission is from, far and away the highest number, when we look at occupational settings, we look at protests, we look at worship services, we look at other types of restaurants, et cetera, far and away the highest number of sources that we are able to identify is through friend and family gatherings. And that's why we've really emphasized that as a place that people really need to take that extra measure of behavior change around how we gather at this point in time.

- [Woman] Any more?

- Thanks.

- Thank you for coming again today and tuning in online and on TV. A few final notes. You can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on our ReadySLO.org webpage, or by calling the phone assistance center, or the recorded public health information line. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing by appointment at locations around the county. Appointments are available at both San Luis Obispo and Grover Beach testing sites as early as tomorrow. You can make an appointment online at ReadySLO.org, as well as see a list of criteria for determining whether or not you are appropriate for testing. Please defer testing if you do not meet one or more of these criteria, allowing those at higher risk to obtain more tests, more timely testing appointments. You can also make an appointment by calling the phone assistance center if you have limited or no access to the internet. Thank you again for tuning in today. You can find these briefings live on SLO County's Public Health Facebook page, or on our county's website homepage. They're also livestreamed on KCOY and KSBY's websites. And finally, they are broadcast live on cable channel 13 and rebroadcast on public access channel 21 at midnight, 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. daily until the next briefing occurs. Thank you again for staying informed. Be well, and we will see you all here next Wednesday at 3:15.