

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, August 19th 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I'd like to welcome you to this week's, San Luis Obispo County weekly COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we will hear from San Luis Obispo County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein, county administrative officer and emergency services director, Wade Horton is also here and available to take your questions. Thank you once again to our American Sign Language Interpreter Robin Babb. And now SLO County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Good afternoon. So, I wanna, as always give you our metrics for where we are with this disease in this county. We have 2579, is our case total. And the good news is two days in a row, we've had very modest numbers. Numbers that we haven't seen in a long time. So today's increase was eight, yesterday's was nine. This does not yet a trend make. In fact, I have some insights into tomorrow's number. As you know we only report it once a day. So I think we will see a slightly higher number tomorrow. But we are cautiously optimistic that perhaps we're beginning to see a decrease in our case counts. We have over 2000, who have recovered, amounting to 83% and 411 individuals who are considered active cases recovering at home. We have 19 individuals in the hospital and still our number of individuals in intensive care is five and that's relatively low. Unfortunately, I do have a report that we have had a number of deaths increase, so we stand at 20 today. And I'm very aware that I stand here on a weekly basis and give you these numbers and that they are just numbers. But I also wanna take a pause and have us all realize that while some of these cases are asymptomatic and doing fine with their disease, many of these numbers do reflect people who are at home having the worst flu or respiratory illness of their lives and having some significant impacts. Some land in the hospital on ventilators, and then the number of deaths that we've had all represent real people, our friends, our neighbors, and our hearts go out to them. And we continue for those reasons, need to be aware both that we have numbers and we need to make meaning of those numbers, but not to forget that each one of those numbers has an association with an actual person. We have been seeing these lower numbers in the last few days, as I've said, and if you were to look outside, business is not usual because of the smoke and the air quality. So we believe that the decrease in testing that we are seeing this week, that's even way down from what we were seeing last week may in fact be that people are appropriately staying home. But I do want to remind folks that we have a lot more testing capacity now available. Last week, we mentioned that we were opening up testing again to people who do not have symptoms, people who believe that they

may have been exposed to someone. So I just want to remind the public that we do have three testing locations, and that all of them have the opportunity for same day appointments. If you go on to readyslo.org and register, you'll be able to get an appointment. I do want to also publicly apologize to 27 individuals, who do have appointments for later today, we did close down our two testing sites because they're running 100 degree heat inside the facilities where we are, at our SLO Vets hall today, as well as even with air conditioning in Atascadero we are seeing really horrible conditions in our testing facility. And so we made the decision to close down a few hours early, so we're reaching out to those individuals. But with that in mind, keep an eye out for tomorrow. It may be the better part of valor if you can make an appointment to do so early in the day and we will take this day by day as our heat conditions continue. I want to talk about the data on our website. I know many times we have spoken about what is made available publicly and how we have continued intense interest in a number of different metrics and we have tried to be responsive to what the community needs and wants and also what we, our staffing resources are and what we can provide. So with that we have been able last week we amended our website, as I had previously reported. We had new statistics related to the age distribution of our hospitalized cases and our deaths. And just yesterday, we were able to update our website with two additional metrics, that being ethnicity to report on Hispanic and Latino percent of cases versus non-Hispanic Latino. And still, unfortunately, we have a number of our cases for whom we don't have that information. But we are continuing to plug away at trying to get full information on every one of our new cases as we move forward. But with that the public can see and it's not news to us. We've known it before, we've had a local media report on the fact before, that there is a disproportionate burden on our Latino population in this county as is true across the state as is true across the nation. And we're very aware of this disproportionate burden on this population in our county it is, as of yesterday we reported 46% of the known ethnic distribution of the cases are in the Latino population. That compares to 20% of our population at large being Latino, so as you can see, there is an extra burden on that community. We have periodically reported this metric before but now it will be part of our routine metric going forward. And in transparency comes some challenges. So I want to just address this head on. We have had some discomfort, if you will, in talking about this because we want to make sure that while we focus attention on the differences that different communities in different populations are experiencing with this disease, we certainly do not want to cause any harm or create

the opportunity for stigma. And so we've looked into the populations and have some thoughts on what the reasons are for this disproportionate burden. Some of them are systemic, and that has always been the case with many diseases that we see disproportionality of disease impacting individuals of color. And in our county, Latinos being a significant proportion of our population. But also with this disease in particular, we know that there's an extra burden because of the nature of the work. Our agricultural community is very much one of the Latino population. The types of jobs are often in the essential workforce. There's limited sick pay for some of the jobs that are done. And some of this population or a good proportion of it may be living in multifamily housing or multi-generational housing and have less ability to isolate within the confines of their home. So we think these are some of the reasons that we're seeing this effect. So what have we been doing in terms of trying to address this? First and foremost, we've been trying to reach the population through peers, through community groups, through all manner of effort to provide, education, outreach, support in a number of ways. We've done it through written materials. We've done it through social media, in Spanish language as well as Mestizo. We've collaborated with partners, those partners include the Promotores, they include the Latino Outreach Council, dignities, health community outreach program, First Five Community Foundation, a number of individuals, our own agricultural commission, who have really been working hard to make connections, and to provide education as well as supports where we can and where need be, when we identify cases if we can provide that wraparound support of food and housing. And remind folks that even with farm labor jobs that there is a requirement for paid sick leave. And so we're trying to get that kind of information out so that we can better support this particular community. In general, moving off of that, just with respect to data, we continue to have lots of requests for different ways to show the data and we will continue to try to respond again where we can, where we have capacity, when data is meaningful, and is reliable and solid. So, with that, also with respect to data, I just wanna mention where we are with the state's backlog. This has now been officially yesterday by the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. The entire backlog has been deemed removed, and so we believe that our case numbers are real. And, and as I had said previously, but it bears repeating, we did not, we fortunately because of that period of backlog did not see a spike in our cases. So we continue to emphasize with our providers and with local labs that we need to get that information and in immediate basis, so that we can do that which we've been able to continue to provide

immediate case investigation and contact tracing. In fact, yesterday was the first time in a long while that we actually sent some of our temporary workers, our contact tracers home because we were able to keep up, we were able to do all this work typically within 24 hours of each case identification. So we remain very proud of that approach in our local county. So let me talk a little bit about heat and wildfire safety. There is a nexus obviously with COVID, but it is an important public health measure that we keep an eye on. I actually used to have a more fulsome job with related to public health and not just COVID. So, but first, let me make the connection for you if you haven't already, that they both, poor air quality, smoke and air pollution are obviously contributors to a respiratory system that can be put at risk. So what we want to do certainly is avoid having the co-occurrence of being, having smoke inhalation and COVID disease. So for both reasons, this is a really good time to be spending more time in your home. Certainly in air conditioned settings that is the most important thing that we can do in this type of environment at this time. We do wanna mention that there is a cooling center available in North County in the city of Paso Robles that is at 600 Nickerson drive. And that is one cooling center, but our county libraries are available. Any manner of stores where you can get inside for air conditioning, if you don't have it in your home, take advantage of the opportunity, at least at some point during the day to get yourself cooled down through air conditioning. If that's not a possibility, then fans and especially fans with cold water spray in front of the fan, use cool cloths while you stand in front of the fan and really make it a concerted effort to bring your temperature down if you're spending day after day in these heat conditions. Also use a buddy system. Very much so we worry about the elderly, many people who live by themselves and may not even be aware of the health impacts that they're experiencing. So make sure that you have someone that's checking in on you. If you have an, you know both the person themselves, but we also ask of you if you know of a neighbor, a family member, a friend, who lives by themselves and doesn't have air conditioning or is potentially at risk from this type of heat, please check in on them as well. Don't wait until thirst hits, drink water. For anyone who's an outdoors person knows that mantra, that once thirst hits you are way behind. So drink plenty of water, force feed yourself water in these times, rather than waiting for thirst to be your signal that it's time to drink. Light-colored clothing, loose fitting clothing, hats if you're outside to protect against any sun, even though it doesn't look like the sun is out all of those are additional protective measures. And lastly, react immediately if you or if you notice someone else is getting into trouble with this

heat. So there's two levels of concern, heat exhaustion will show up as heavy sweating, weakness, cool clammy skin and a fast and weak pulse. But even more importantly, is heatstroke, which is an absolute medical emergency and the person needs to be cooled down immediately. Put them in a cool bath, cool towels, shower, any way to get that person's temperature down. Heatstroke presents with a high sudden fever of over 103, the skin becomes hot and red, sweating ceases and a rapid and strong pulse is what you will see in that case. Also confusion might set in. So be aware of these kinds of symptoms and take immediate action. If you see smoke and ash in the air as we are doing today, it is important to get indoors. Again if you are gonna go outdoors to run errands or try to do some type of, walk gets some kind of, outdoor experience or just even need to go someplace do so on either end of the day, not in the heat of the day. This is especially true for children, the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions. So for most up to date information on the air quality conditions we have our air pollution control district's website at slocleanair.org or follow them on social media. You can also sign up for text alerts related to dust, wildfires and the air quality that we're seeing. And finally today, I just also want to mention as we're getting well into August, we're beginning to see flu vaccine become available in pharmacies. This is important to think about, getting your flu vaccination this year more than ever. We don't want to have people additionally needing hospitalization because of flu, or having a challenging time in distinguishing the illness of flu and COVID because they do have a lot of similarities. So please take the opportunity, either through your private physician, through pharmacies and look forward also to public health having their usual forthcoming flu clinics later in the year. But please take this opportunity this year especially to get a flu vaccine. And with that, I will open it up for questions.

- [Man] Dr. Borenstein I noticed that San Diego County has come off the monitoring list. That's obviously significant, since is a much larger population than our county. What can you take from that? Is there anything you can learn from what they're doing or have done?

- Yeah, and we've been in touch with them because certainly I look to those counties that are having success. I think that their, their populations are adhering to all of the recommendations more universally. That's what I've been told, is you don't see anyone without a mask in public places. They are using pretty heavy enforcement in some areas. I know Santa Cruz also in San Francisco is about to come off the list. It's all the same measures that I've been saying over and over

again and that we all have to do it. You know, I would love for people to make that adjustment that if I think our businesses should be open, the best way I can contribute to getting there is by doing all the things that we've asked of people, wearing masks, stay away from large gatherings, keeping your distance. I know I say it over and over again. But I think those are really the tried and true methodologies and they're working in some jurisdictions. I think we will get there, I'm hopeful that we're beginning to see signs of that. And I think that's really the answer at this time.

- [Man] So to provide an update to the public. I mean, how closer or not close is the county? Because I know now we're not meeting two metrics, right? There's a hospitalization in addition to the per 100,000. So where does the county stand in terms of trying to get off that monitoring list?

- Right. We for a number of days now, we lived just on the margin of the hospital count, the number of people in hospitalization, in the hospital. We saw a bit of a dip today and hopefully that will follow with case decrease that we also will have fewer people in the hospital. Our case numbers over the past two weeks are coming down. And we are allowed to subtract the cases that were in CMC. Fortunately we're not seeing increases there in recent days, but that will not be held against us in terms of our metric. We're still a ways off though, from getting below that hundred per hundred thousand or roughly 20 cases a day over a two week period. We're heading in the right direction. I continue to hope and ask of everyone that we work hard to get there.

- [Man] I asked you last week, I'll ask you again, any update on the school waivers here in the county?

- Yes. So we issued six more today, to small private schools. To give you a sense of what I mean by small private schools I looked at them so we now have seven in total. They range in population from 20 to 150. So between the 12 requests that we've gotten, we have about 1000 students that that covers at the TK, pre-K, and pre-kindergarten through sixth grade level that compares to 35,000 students district, county wide across the public sector. So it's a small number. But I'm hopeful that we can use that as a tool to understand how to introduce in-person instruction and see how well these smaller schools do it and then use that as a way to expand on it in other elementary schools, and eventually, I hope to be able to get all of our kids back in school. What we need to do is get our community transmission down.

- [Man] So there are schools that have been approved and will be having in-class instruction?

- Yes, again at the elementary school level, we now have seven private schools, private and parochial schools that have received a waiver for in-person instruction. Yes.

- [Lady] You talked earlier about how the case numbers have been pretty low the past two days, but it's not a trend yet. And you're expecting or worried about cases going up in the next day or so. Can you expand a little bit more upon like, why it's not a trend yet and your expectations for the coming days?

- Yeah, well, I think for those reasons, the state has a metric that looks at two weeks, because we've consistently throughout this pandemic seen changes day over day, but what you really need to see is a full incubation period of what's going on in your county, that's a 14 day period. So it may be that people are testing less right now. People may be not feeling well but saying I'm not gonna go out to get tested in the middle of this heatwave and with smoke in the air. So I think we'll just really need to see what it looks like over that two-week period.

- [Lady] Are you reporting on the location of the individual who died recently?

- We have not reported for any of the deaths on their particular location. We indicate their age and whether they had medical conditions, but that's all the information that we provide.

- [Lady] And for Cal Poly is also expecting to bring a little under 3000 students on campus for their fall term. And we've seen recently schools like Notre Dame, UNC, having to backtrack and go to online classes after outbreaks have happened. How are you advising Cal Poly on this matter right now?

- Yeah, just yesterday, I was in touch with President Armstrong. We're fully aware of what's going on in other jurisdictions. I think they have a very good plan in place. A lot of it will depend on whether or not you can convince people at a time of life in their upper teens and young 20s to do the right things in terms of trying to stay out of situations like large parties, large gatherings, they have plans in place to, for instance, they've canceled the fall rush, their sororities are doing online. And, the SLO Police Department is gonna be assisting Cal Poly, with enforcement of those kinds of large gatherings and we'll just have to see how it goes. We've got, good ideas about how this could go well, but we certainly recognize that it hasn't gone all

that well in some of these very large universities. But we'll work hard together to try to support this, the in-person instruction for a very limited number of must be hands-on classes, as well as having a student population in our community, both on campus and off the campus, in ways that we continue to do all the right things, again, with mask wearing and distancing and avoiding large gatherings. And in addition, I would say Cal Poly has really done a good job about thinking about things like their meal service and how that's gonna go, and, shutting student lounges in the dormitories and things of that sort. So, long winded answer, I think a lot of it, the short answer is that we'll have to wait and see.

- [Interviewer] For families where both parents work and now they have children that are at home, are there any new programs that are gonna be coming online to help families in those situations where no one can't return to work?

- We definitely have heard from a number of businesses and even there's a couple of gym facilities who have talked about trying to transition to a child care environment, they have to go through the process of licensing or get an official exemption from licensing. I think there's a lot of creativity going on in looking at ways to provide that expanded childcare need. You know, we the county are not in the business of childcare, but we're certainly supporting all these entities with technical assistance and consultation.

- [Lady Interviewer] So I understand childcare businesses are allowed to be in-person and so forth they're deemed essential. How are childcare why business is different than in-person schooling? Because you have a group of children with a older adult, they're in the same room. How is that different than in-person schooling?

- Well, childcare is childcare, it doesn't have a certified instructor. The staff are not doing the instruction, in the ways that we have been consulting, where, through the childcare guidance trying to ensure that they have all of the same, facility and sanitation measures in place. The thing that's most challenging for the schools is how do you bring back the kinds of numbers that you have where you've got 25, 30, 35 in some cases students in a classroom where you cannot do the physical distancing and putting teachers at risk. So it's, I think a number, I think all of the schools are willing and able to get there but what we have to see is lower transmission rates. And I'm hopeful, I know if you've been paying attention to every time I talk about schools, I am very much in favor of getting our schools open. So we have to meet the metrics and we have to continue to support all our schools

which are looking at all kinds of ways to spread students out, to have different class times, to have students not moving through the hallways, have the teachers change. There's so many wonderful ideas in place, but we have to get our community transmission down in order for the state to allow us to move forward.

- [Announcer] We'll take one more question. Unless there're none.

- All right, thank you.

- Thank you all for coming today and tuning in online and on TV. This Saturday the San Luis Obispo County and Pacific Gas and Electric Company, will hold its annual early warning siren tests at 12 and 12:30. During each of these tests, all 131 sirens located throughout the county will sound simultaneously for three minutes. No action is required by members of the public when these sirens sound on Saturday. More information about the sirens and this test can be found at www.prepareslo.org/sirens. You can still get all of our COVID-19 information on readyslo.org or by calling the phone assistance center or public health information line. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing by appointment at San Luis Obispo Veterans Hall and Grover Beach Ramona Gardens Park Center. Through tomorrow, August 20th, testing is also available at the pavilion on the lake in Atascadero. However, starting Monday, that testing site will move from Atascadero to Nipomo Senior Center. As Dr. Borenstein stated, testing is now available to asymptomatic people who believe they might have been exposed to the virus as well as those experiencing symptoms, and those in other high risk categories. You can make an appointment for any of these testing sites at readyslo.org. If you have limited or no access to the internet and need to make an appointment, you can also call 888-634-1123. Thank you again for watching online. You can find all of our briefings on SLO County Public Health's Facebook page, as well as our county website homepage. They're also live streamed on KCOY and KSPY's websites. Finally, they're broadcast on cable channel 13 live and rebroadcast on Public Access channel 21 at midnight, 8 a.m and 5 p.m each day until the next briefing occurs. Thank you once again for staying informed. Be kind, be well and we'll see you here next Wednesday. Thank you.