

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, August 26th, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman, and I'd like to welcome you to San Luis Obispo County's COVID-19 weekly media briefing. This afternoon, we'll hear from two speakers. We will begin with San Luis Obispo County health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. She will be followed by Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo President, Jeffery Armstrong. We also have several others here available to answer your questions as needed. They include County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Wade Horton, Cal Poly Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Keith Humphrey, and Cal Poly professor, Dr. Aydin Nazmi. Thank you once again to our American sign language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now, SLO County health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Sorry. Thank you, good afternoon. So the first thing I wanna say today is regarding the seriousness of this disease because I think sometimes we have some members of our community who miss this fact. And so, you may have heard in the national news, we also wanna share that at a national level, in the United States, COVID-19 now represents the third-leading cause of death. And that's after just six months. So all the other numbers that are up here, 650-ish, 600,000 deaths for heart disease and cancer, respectively, leading causes of death. That's a year's worth of deaths. So in the United States, at 177,000, that's only six months, so you can see that this disease is significant. It has taken many lives and will continue to do so. It has moved ahead of things like accidental injuries, chronic lung disease, and many other causes of death. That said, I do wanna preface that in our community and our county, we continue to be relatively unscathed, with a modest number of deaths, and we're very grateful for that. And we continue to not fully understand how, with the increased transmission. We have retained our ability to tamp down the severity of this disease, our hospitalizations and our fatalities remain low, but I did want to bring it to the fore that this is a disease that we continue to need to keep our eyes on. And as we move about the community, do so with all the measures that we've been saying over and over again. So where we stand today in our county is at 2,793 confirmed cases. That is an increase of 24 since yesterday. So again, a relatively good number, but we are continuing to be above the metric we need to get to, and I'll get to that in a second. But to just fill out the communication about our case numbers, 2,332 have recovered, that represents 83% of all of our cases. 426 are recovering at home, we have 13 individuals in the hospital, four of whom are intensive care, and we did recently announce, unfortunately, the 21st death in our county. So, we continue to be in about the same place that we've been ever since we hit the State Monitoring List, some days better than others, but we continue to

be above that metric that we look to to get off the Monitoring List, which is the number of cases per 100,000 population. We're living today at about 150 cases per 100,000 population, and we need to get that below 100. So, what are we doing with respect to this? We're increasing testing where we can, we're continuing to do everything we can to identify all of our cases early, to isolate them, to trace contacts. We are continuing at every opportunity in different settings, in different communities, in events like this on a weekly basis, to remind people of all the protective measures that they can and should take. Physical distancing, mask wearing, avoiding community gatherings, washing your hands regularly. So, communication. We're engaging with businesses continuously to try to provide consultation and support for safe practices. We're continuing to onboard additional staff, contact tracers, and case investigators, and we deploy strike teams as soon as we get any cases in congregate care facilities, such as we've been having at our local prison, the California Men's Colony. And we continue to see outbreaks less of late, which is good news, but we continue to see outbreaks in our long-term care facilities. So, we look to our public. It is within our hands, collectively, to continue to drive down these case rates, and we ask that when you move about the community, that you are always cognizant of the ways in which you can prevent infection so that we can drive our case numbers down and get back to business. Our local businesses need your help. They need you to do this for them. If you're not worried about your own health, I know we've talked a lot about you're concerned about your grandparents' health, vulnerable family members, friends, those who are living in long-term care facilities, but think about it also in terms of this is what we need to do to open our schools, this is what we need to do to get our businesses open. We have had conversation with the state. We believe, forthcoming in the, maybe as early as this week, certainly within the week, we expect to see a change in the way the state is going to approach how to allow counties to open the businesses. For those counties who have been on the Monitoring List. We want to join that family of counties as soon as we can, and we want to be prepared to move forward with the state's new approach to allowing business sectors to open. At this time, counties that have come off the Monitoring List, there are several. They are still in a position of not being able to open business sectors. They can open their schools if they've been off the list for 14 days, but we know that more is coming from the state regarding particularly the business sectors and how we will be able to move into safe opening of those sectors, but we continue to need to drive our numbers down in order for us to get there. So a word

on schools, I do wanna update you on the school waiver process. We have now received 13, actually, 14 applications, 12 of them have been approved and posted on our website, two of them are still under review. Collectively, though, as these are all coming from private schools, this only represents about 1,200 students, and our entire county, K through 12, is around 35,000 students. So you can see it as a modest proportion of the total school population that we would like to see in school. In addition to the waiver process, though, that we've been able to manage, receive, and work with the schools that have applied to get to a place that we consider ready to open for in-person school, we have worked with a lot of other sectors on things that are called either learning hubs or pods or childcare centers, on-school campuses, off-school campuses, licensed childcare, exempt-licensed for childcare, day camps, a whole variety of ways in which families and organizations are calling various mechanisms for bringing together students to support their learning activities as we begin the school year with our schools largely shuttered. And so, with that, yesterday, the state-issued guidance, and the main piece of that guidance that I want to share is that the way in which all these different business sectors at different places and under different titles of organization can move forward is in stable cohorts of no more than 14 individuals of any age and no more than two adults working with that cohort to support their distance learning. So virtual learning is still happening in K through 12 in our public school system, but this is a way to bring students together with some wraparound supports for their virtual learning. It is also a way that students with special needs can get some of the wraparound services, so speech therapy, occupational therapy, students who have IEPs. This can now be done on school campuses as long as it's done under the guidelines that have been issued by the state with these limited numbers of students or children. It's not actually the school environment even if it takes place on a school campus, but 14 children coming together with two adults and not mixing cohorts, not mixing them within the course of a day and not mixing them day over day. So that is the way that the state envisions trying to support the many, many families who are absolutely struggling with being able to afford childcare, needing to go to work, not necessarily having two parents to support this. And we know that there are many families that are doing a variety of solutions to the fact that our schools are, for the most part, shut at this time. This provides particular guidance of how to do it legally, how to do it safely, and how to have some supportive wraparound services for especially those students who have additional needs. Finally, I want to, as a lead into professor, to President Armstrong, talk a little

bit about the Cal Poly reopening. I have heard from many members of the community, a lot of concern about that impending event, and I want you to know that you have been heard, that I, my office, and the Public Health Department has worked very closely with Cal Poly. We are working in tandem to create the conditions to do this as safely as possible. Our goal is not to absolutely stop the spread of COVID-19. We know that that is not a possibility, but we want to mitigate the risks to the extent possible and create the conditions whereby we keep the disease within the campus community, as well as off-campus as low as possible. So, with that, our Public Health Department and Cal Poly Operations Center has created a task force. We've been working together to look at all manner of solutions to implementing these safe methodologies regarding testing, regarding isolation and quarantine of students as needed, contact tracing, and other wraparound supports as well. I'm going to turn the mic over to Prof, I'm sorry I keep doing that. I've demoted Ms. Stearns last week, and now I'm doing it to President Armstrong, but he is our president of our Cal Poly University, and I'm going to turn it over to him to talk about more specifics about the university. Thank you.

- Thank you, and professor is actually a promotion.

- Oh!

- So that's good.

- It's great to be with you today, be here today, provide you an update on our campus plans as noted. I'm accompanied by Dr. Keith Humphrey, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Dr. Aydin Nazmi, an epidemiologist. Our planning has been guided by the advice of both on- and off-campus public health experts in our community, including our own faculty. I'm especially appreciative of the partnership with the County, Dr. Borenstein, and Wade Horton. On-campus housing and in-person classes are part of our DNA as a comprehensive polytechnic university and are inextricably linked due to the nature of our learn-by-doing pedagogy, and the fact that first-year students start in labs and work on projects day one. Because of the hands-on nature of our learn-by-doing education, we, more than most universities, have to be disciplined and learn how to deal with this virus. We must balance the continued success of our students with mitigating risk associated with the pandemic. Out of an abundance of caution and in consultation with health experts and Dr. Penny Borenstein, we have decided to limit on-campus housing to singles. As of today, we plan to host no more than 5,150 students, mostly first-time freshmen new to Cal Poly, in on-campus housing, in accordance with the guidelines

issued by the state. Also, in an abundance of caution, and again, with the recommendation of County Public Health and our experts, we will require that all students living on campus present a negative test result for COVID-19, taken within the 72 hours before arriving on campus. We do understand the logistics and other circumstances may make it difficult for a student to obtain a test within this timeframe. In the event that a student cannot obtain a test, students can still check in. We will work with the students in these circumstances to obtain a test over a very short interval. In addition, we strongly encourage all students not living on campus to test for COVID-19 before returning to the area. We're working on other plans for ongoing testing, and we'll be able to say more about that at a later date. Our consulting health experts do not believe having students on campus endangers faculty or staff if appropriate protective measures are followed. Those who have volunteered to teach in person will be at minimal risk from students living on campus due to the protective measures implemented in campus housing and our face-to-face classes. Our plan is to offer roughly 12% of our 4,300 sections in person. Our enrollment data suggests that fewer than 6,000 students will be taking at least one in-person class this fall. The classes being offered in person were identified by the faculty as being difficult or impossible to offer virtually. From labs to performance classes, milking cows, to testing rocket designs. For our friends and neighbors in San Luis Obispo, the biggest concern is likely having more students living in the community, especially those who may be returning to SLO from areas with higher rates of illness, and those who choose to participate in risky behaviors, risky group behaviors, i.e., parties. Our experts indicate that proper use of masks, distancing, hand-washing, et cetera, will clearly mitigate the risk of having additional people in our community. The key is compliance with these precautions. Every person has a responsibility to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. That means wearing a face covering, practicing physical distancing, and following all of the local county and state guidelines, including the safety enhancement zone established by the city of San Luis Obispo. Cal Poly receives daily reports from the San Luis Obispo Police Department and will enforce violations of these orders via the Student Conduct process. I wanna be clear on one point especially. Students or organizations that engage in behavior that compromises the health and safety of the Cal Poly or larger community will be sanctioned, including potential suspension or expulsion from the university. Each student that chooses to come to San Luis Obispo this fall is committed to upholding these guidelines without exception. To share more information and help understand the rationale behind our plans, we

will be hosting a live town hall tomorrow at 4:30 p.m. We've created a special website where questions can be submitted and where you can get directions on how to view the event. The website is [www.calpoly.edu/fallplans](http://www.calpoly.edu/fallplans). At this time, I believe we will open it up for questions. Thank you very much.

- [Woman] I have a couple questions. So, I guess one of my first ones is you've talked a little bit about the consequences of students not complying, who are on campus. Could you go into a little more detail about how you plan to, I guess, check up on these students, find those times when students aren't complying and so forth.

- I'll turn to Dr. Humphrey.

- Thank you. We do receive, as President Armstrong said, daily reports from the San Luis Obispo Police Department about students who receive noise violations, who are engaged in violations of the Safety Enhancement Zone, which are large, unruly gatherings, and we follow up with those students on a daily basis. Our approach is always primarily educational. This is something that we have been doing for years at Cal Poly. Our approaches has become stronger in the coronavirus, as we know that those types of activities bring students together and could unintentionally create spread. So we are talking with students, we are meeting with students. We met with students today. We will continue to do that on a daily basis, and as the President said, suspension or expulsion from the university will be a sanction that is on the table much earlier in the process for a student.

- [Woman] And then, if a student does test positive, what are the procedures following that positive test to keep other students safe?

- Sure. So our Campus Health & Wellbeing staff are excellent. They have the ability to test symptomatic students on a daily basis and return results to students that same day. Prior to testing, we take all contact tracing information for students so that we can immediately move into action and partnership with County Public Health. Should there be a positive test, we will reach out to that network to ensure that those individuals who are potentially exposed come in for testing. We have an entire residence hall set aside for isolation and quarantine. 117 apartment rooms on campus so that students can be isolated from themselves, have private bathrooms. We will plan to deliver food to those students, resources through our Counseling Center, through our Dean of Students Office, academic support through

our Mustang Success Center, so that those students, while they are in isolation, can continue their academic progress.

- [Woman] And then, for performance classes and other classes on campus that I know have a tendency to spread a lot, I know, for example, singing or dancing, you get more people breathing in a space. What are precautions for those types of classes?

- Now, the question is about performance classes or singing, and I would also extend it to labs, pouring gels. First of all, if we have a lab, all lectures are virtual. So it has to be something that absolutely requires in person. And so, whether it's a lab or working with an animal, they'll use the appropriate protective equipment. If they can distance, they will, but there are some situations where they'll have shields and they'll be, you know, beyond CDC requirements. We have had some very good discussions with Dr. Borenstein and her staff, and we have been able to approve some music classes, and those have even stronger restrictions. Multiple multiples of six feet. I don't recall all the details, but I can tell you, it went through a very heavy phase of scrutiny. And so it is deemed to be low risk, or we wouldn't do it.

- [Woman] Now, I know... Sorry, I'm throwing a lot of questions at you. I know that there's a lot of, not a lot of, some cases of other universities who've already had some outbreaks. I'm wondering if you have studied those and how you're planning things differently from them.

- Yes, we have. We track a lot of the universities, and we do it directly. And we have learned a lot from other universities. That's why we'll be building, we don't know yet, but how frequent will we test students. I'd like to ask Dr. Nazmi if he wants to comment on this as well because he's been looking at this, and I'd like to get him to help out with this question also.

- So, I will comment on asymptomatic testing. And we are currently in draft phase, so we don't have any, we don't have the definitive protocol at the moment, but we are looking at asymptomatic testing using our on-campus, existing capacity with the equipment and the reagents we have. So at the moment, we're in draft phase of creating some models as to how many students per day, over the period of one week, one month, et cetera, we could test in order to kind of get our arms around any outbreaks or spread of the virus.

- [Woman] Thank you.

- I wanna come back to your question, talking about other places. What's really clear is that a big driver is the off-campus behavior. So, you asked Dr. Humphrey that question, and we are really stressing that. And then the other part of it is testing students at some interval. And so that's what we're looking at. The good news is anyone that is vulnerable, they have had the ability to stay off campus, go 100% virtual, or teach their classes 100% virtual. So that really lowers the risk. And then what we're doing in our classes, you know, our experts deem that to be very low risk.

- [Woman] And I have one last question for Dr. Borenstein. And this is coming from my newsroom. They're asking if you could clarify the numbers that you were saying, the ones that you announced match the one on the first page of the COVID information on the website, but clicking on detailed statistics, the numbers don't quite match up. Total number of cases, number in ICU, and number of active cases are off just by one. Could you clarify that for us please?

- So if you give me a moment, I'll grab my data. So as of today's go live on our website, we have 2,793 cases. 426 are recovering at home, which represents about 15%. There are 13 individuals in the hospital, and of those 13, four are in intensive care.

- [Woman] Thank you.

- [Woman] Actually, Penny, I have a question for you. Our numbers are also off for the, so, this county is reporting different numbers for the CMC, the California Men's Colony, versus the state reporting different numbers. Why is there a difference between those two?

- Yeah, so the question regarding what is the actual number of cases at CMC. So the state CDCR that oversees state prisons posts on their website in a number of different columns, total cases, active number recovered, dead, we don't have any, and so, when we post the number of cases, that is, cases at CMC ever, is different than what you'll see in the website of CDCR as the total number of cases active. The other reason our number may be a little bit behind is we wait for the actual laboratory report, so they may have it in the facility in advance of us getting that into the CalREDIE state system, and so these numbers are always gonna be off by a small margin.

- [Woman] Thank you. And I have a few questions for President Armstrong. So, I was wondering if the number of students allowed in on-campus housing has to

decrease because of a policy change, or is it because there have been a large number of students who have deferred housing to winter or spring?

- So the question is the number of students on campus has decreased, is that a policy change or a large number of deferred. And it's really not been any change. Student affairs, Vice President Humphrey and his team have been, once we got the Governor's guidelines, have been communicating all along that if you're 100% virtual, we would encourage you to defer at least until January. And so the students have been taking us up on that. And so, that really wasn't a change. We suspect, now that first-time students get their schedules today, because we blocked schedule as part of our student success portfolio, that we'll see additional students defer by Friday. And then move-in starts next week, so it was deliberate. We did it with a balance because we don't want to push too hard and see students just move into the neighborhoods. We saw that in the spring, we saw students move out of housing, get their refund, and move into the community. If they're gonna be on, if they're gonna be in the area in that situation, we'd rather have them on campus. If they're gonna be home, which the majority of our students live more than 100 miles away, studying at home virtually, and have the connection, the Wi-Fi, then that's good. We're also worried about students with economic and other disadvantages. We want them to feel comfortable to be on campus where they have Wi-Fi and the ability to be successful, even if they're 100% virtual.

- [Woman] And do you have any budget, additional budget concerns because the lack of students that will be allowed on campus? 'Cause I understand on-campus housing, that they bring in a lot of money for you.

- We have multiple levels of budget concern from the result of COVID in the spring, over the summer, and into the next year. Reductions from the state. And just, fortunately, our enrollment is staying strong, but we are making our decisions first and foremost, on health and safety, and second, on student success. So there are some definite budget ramifications of our decisions, but we believe it's the right thing to do.

- [Woman] For apartment-style living, I understand there is about four to five bedrooms, and then a shared kitchen area, living area. Will there be any additional safety measures, health measures put in place for those living situations?

- Campus apartments are four rooms for individuals, no doubles in any of those facilities. One of the additional safety mechanisms that we're putting into place in

university housing is we're not allowing visitors from outside to come into the different buildings. We wanna maintain the integrity of that living unit. Our facilities inside will be cleaned, the public areas, on a much more aggressive schedule than normal, and students will be provided things like face masks from the university as well as cleaning supplies to make sure they are disinfecting their common area spaces in their apartments on a regular basis as well.

- [Woman] Are there, sorry, I have a few more questions.

- [Michelle] After this one, we'll have to let somebody else-

- Got you, okay. I understand there, you guys are working towards surveillance testing. Is there any benchmark of when you're gonna take, get to that? 'Cause I understand you can test up to 600 students a day. So what is it gonna take to do surveillance testing?

- We are planning for surveillance at the moment, and we're working closely with some outside vendors and also our internal capacity through some of our experts in biology. We are in the planning stages of that, so at the moment, what we are able to do is conduct what you might call quasi-surveillance at a lower level with our existing capacity. So the question now is how can we ramp up that capacity so that we can test more students more frequently.

- [Man] What will the cost be to the students for these tests, and how often will they, should they be tested?

- It's very complicated question. In the context of surveillance, typically, you wanna test frequently, at a low cost, with a quick turnaround of results, in addition to having a supported isolation and quarantine plan. So all of those things really have to come together. In terms of cost to the student, at the moment, we are planning no-cost surveillance to the student. And again, we are in the draft planning stages. And as Dr. Humphrey said, our on-campus isolation and quarantine units that have been set aside, we're keeping a very close eye on that because that will, that will contribute to being one of the limiting factors as well.

- [Man] And that turnaround time, you mentioned, is critical. What is the turnaround time that you're hoping to get the results from these tests?

- I would aim for same day or within 24 hours.

- [Man] And what happens when a student does test positive? What will the actions be?

- When a student tests positive, just to reiterate what's been said, a student will, on-campus students will be directed to isolation units where they will have, they will not be sharing facilities. And from there, will be following CDC guidelines as to the number of days in isolation and the parameters by which then they are released, if you will, from isolation.

- [Michelle] One more question.

- [Woman] Okay. What is your response, President Armstrong, to the open letter penned by the faculty members that has now, it's gotten well over 400 signatures now.

- Well, we've received lots of questions from a variety of individuals, and my response is I applaud and welcome any questions. We're all concerned about the coronavirus. The information is changing. We learn more every day, and that's why we consult with the experts that we do, consult with the county, follow the Governor's guidelines. And so we make decisions based on facts and data. So that's my response to that open letter as well as anyone else that asks questions, and please continue to ask those questions. I would go back to the question about the residence halls and isolation. One of the things that Dr. Nazmi and other experts, and you've seen, that surface, while we wanna be careful, is not the highest mode. It's a low risk. So what we're, again, worried about is the large gatherings and the noncompliance. People being within six feet for more than 15 minutes, and frankly, parties. That has been very consistent across the United States. With colleges open, problems. And the vast majority of our students do live off campus, so we're working very hard. And our team has had a good track record over the years of seeing positive changes in student behaviors. So I am optimistic, but we also have some measures in place to help encourage appropriate behavior, so thank you.

- [Man] Is there any way to expand any more on surveillance testing, what that entails? We're getting a lot of viewers that aren't sure exactly what that means.

- Yeah, and we are going to do surveillance testing, and as Dr. Nazmi said, we're modeling. And we have to look at what the resources are available, the frequency, and then the results of that. As I mentioned earlier, our modeling is pretty clear that we're dealing with a situation where a lot of vulnerable people, at least on campus, are not there. So we're looking at the number infected, the number isolated. And

another point that the experts have brought out is knowing what's really there. Knowing the number that are infected as soon as possible. So we will get that information out as soon as we can, but we don't wanna be out there prematurely, but we will be doing some regular testing. We just don't know the frequency yet.

- Takeaway. Thank you all for coming today, and just a reminder from President Armstrong about their town hall meeting that they'll be hosting tomorrow. I believe it's tomorrow. Tomorrow afternoon, if you have more questions or you wanna participate further in this discussion. This week and next, San Luis Obispo County is hosting an online survey regarding testing. The goal is to obtain information from residents about how SLO County can improve local COVID-19 testing efforts. Please participate in the survey by typing in the link that's on the screen here or by using the pop-up window link that appears on ReadySLO.org. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing by appointment at three locations around the county. Testing is available to asymptomatic people who think they might have been exposed to the virus as well as those experiencing symptoms or those who are at high risk. You can make an appointment at any of these sites on ReadySLO.org, and if you have limited access to the internet, you can also call the 888 number on the screen for an appointment. A reminder that you can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on ReadySLO.org or by calling the Phone Assistance Center or the Public Health Information Line. These briefings are found live on our SLO County Public Health Facebook page and on our county's website. They are also live streamed on KCOY and KSBY's websites. Finally, they are broadcast live on cable channel 13 and rebroadcast on cable channel 21 at midnight, 8:00 a.m., and 5:00 p.m. until the next briefing occurs. Thank you all again for staying informed. Please be well, and we'll see you next Wednesday at 3:15.