

- Good afternoon, today is Wednesday, September 9, 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 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 San Luis Obispo County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you, good afternoon. So we are well into September, and we are still living with COVID, and we have not made a lot of change in our COVID numbers, on a day-in or day-out basis, or weekly, but I will report that we now have 3,174 cases for the county since the beginning. That's an increase of 26 cases from yesterday. Fully, 92% have met the criteria for recovered, and that is 2,908. We have 10 individuals in the hospital. Three of them are in intensive care.

I want to remind people that this is the second week that the state has posted a map with the color-coded Blueprint for a Safer Economy in this county, because of our numbers exceeding that, the next threshold. We're experiencing on average still more than 20 cases a day, leaves us in the purple tier. We need to get below that case number on average for two weeks before we can move into the next tier, which will allow more business openings, and our schools to consider opening more fully.

One of the metrics that is a part of this new blueprint, there are two. There's the case numbers, positives per population, but also the positivity rate. We do well on the positivity rate, but I also want to point out that with more testing, we can actually get some credit against our case rate. And so for that reason alone, we invite you to test, and test as often as you think is necessary to be sure that you do not have the COVID infection, but also because this testing metric has been shown now through research to identify more of the positive cases in our county, such that with each increase along a continuum of testing per population, we know that if you go from 150 to 250 cases, you're, 250 tests per day, that we are likely to find an additional two to three cases just by doing that.

And so, the importance of testing is simply to make sure that we identify all cases, so that we can take action in public health, by issuing isolation orders. I have heard that many people say, "Well, if we don't test, we won't have these high numbers, "we'll be able to move forward." But that isn't a very good approach to not know where our infections are and how to prevent them from transmitting. So testing is an important part of everything that we've been doing. We've been saying this continuously, I do wanna talk about testing, because we recently did a survey in the county. Thank you to all those who responded, more than 3,300 people. It helped us get an idea of reasons why people might not be testing. I mentioned one of them, some concern about adding to negative metrics, but there were some also key findings around people who thought perhaps it wasn't safe, or that it takes too much time, or the results are not as meaningful.

So I wanted to talk about those components of testing and for our public to understand that it is safe, easy, and free. So with respect to safe, we did get quite a few people who thought that going to get tested put themselves at risk by virtue of the actual test or by virtue of being in the testing environment. So people should understand that we have trained professionals doing the testing at our community sites. The actual test takes just a few seconds. It may be a little bit uncomfortable, but the persons who are doing the testing are in full protective gear, and there have been no cases reported of actually transmitting the virus through testing, nor are we aware of any cases that have occurred by virtue of

going to a testing site. So we're certainly open to any and all questions regarding the safety of testing, but I believe that the environments and the test itself are quite safe.

The test is fast. It only takes a few seconds. It, we're doing the test by taking a swab in the nose a little bit beyond the first opening, and it has to be kept in there for a few seconds, but it actually, while maybe mildly uncomfortable, is not painful, and again, it does not cause any damage. The test is fast. It, in terms of turnaround time, we are now seeing that you can both get same day, or in some cases, next day appointment, but we now have a lot of appointment availability. And we welcome that for anyone experiencing symptoms or anyone who feels that they may have been exposed in the last five to seven days. That's the best timing to be tested if you don't have symptoms, but think you may well have been exposed is to wait five, six, seven days to get the test, because that's how long it will take from exposure to test positive.

We are seeing much improvement in the turnaround time of getting results, averaging now one to three days. And that's with respect to how fast it is to get a test. Again, I wanna mention in terms of the ease of getting an appointment, we're now available same day in many cases, and you can go onto readyslo.org for that, or still we have phone availability of making an appointment if you don't have internet. So the sites that we are at for community testing continue to be San Luis Obispo Vets Hall. We now are at the Morro Bay Vets Hall, and Arroyo Grande South County Community Center. Also, individuals can continue to get tested through urgent cares or their primary care provider, and we continue to emphasize, please do not use emergency departments for purposes of testing, unless you have a true medical emergency. We have been providing testing 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, at least two of our community sites. And we are beginning to look into the opportunities for adding additional hours on weekends. So stay tuned on that.

I do wanna talk about youth sports. We have been getting quite a few questions related to that. And basically, everything you need to know about youth sports is available through the state guidance that can be found at readyslo.org or the state site covid19.ca.gov is where you'll find the few, the full document. But just to review what is in there, and the basis of the conditions that are allowed is based on a number of different factors and the idea being we want to keep transmission low. So it depends on the location. So indoors is not as safe as outdoors. It depends on the number of people who might be working out together. Lower numbers of people are better. Keeping distance between people, the length of time that you might be exercising, or training together.

Again, shorter periods are gonna be better than spending a lot of time together. Physical contact between people and touching of shared objects should be avoided, and use of face coverings, especially if any of these conditions of longer periods of time or periodic interactions in passing, it's always okay to add a mask as an additional protective measure. Mixing of people from different communities is not a good idea, and that's why competitions are not allowed, because we don't wanna be bringing people from other communities that potentially have higher rates of transmission into our county. So what is allowed is conditioning and strength training, especially keeping distance between people, between the athletes, keeping stable cohorts of athletes, so continuing to train and work out with the same individuals, that includes both the athletes and the coaches, avoiding or not having any of the competitions that bring people together, and that even means within an individual school, and training indoors at this time is not allowed. We've also been getting questions about adult athletics, and we have not yet seen, though forthcoming, I am told is additional guidance related to youth athletics, I mean,

adult athletics, I'm sorry, but the same precepts that I've laid here with respect to youth is what should be followed at this time.

The final thing that I want to talk about today is a program at the state level called Housing for the Harvest. So this is where farm and food processors have the availability of support should they test positive. We know in our county that we benefit greatly from the contributions of our agricultural workers, and that they play a vital part in not only producing our food, but also our economy. In 2017, 2.54 billion was added to the local economy, and the agricultural community supported 14,000 jobs. So what this program is is to provide housing through hotels that will be provided by the state, secured and paid for under the state opportunity, if a county signs on, and what the county's participation is is to support meals, transportation, and wellness checks. Any county or city can participate, and FEMA reimbursement is available for those localities that are participating. So the reason for doing this is to provide opportunities for people who do test positive from the agricultural community to safely isolate in a location away from their family members, away from others who may also be in the agricultural workforce. Sometimes we see multi-generational participation in farm workers. So I will be providing more information on this program going forward, but wanted to highlight it here, and we anticipate that the county will move forward in its participation in Housing for the Harvest. And with that, those are the comments I wanted to offer today, and I'm open for questions.

- [Reporter] Dr. Borenstein, the case average, if I saw correctly on the website today, 27 per day, does that seem accurate, that, over the last two weeks?

- That seems about right. Over, it's been running 9.3. So you divide, multiply that by 2.8, that sounds about right.

- [Reporter] So I mean, how encouraged are you? It seems like that's getting, you know, it's going down, it's getting closer to that magic 20 number you refer to to go up into the next tier. So overall optimism is where right now?

- So we've been fairly stable for quite a number of weeks now. It goes up, it goes down, but we have been exceeding that threshold for a number of weeks. I continue, I absolutely believe that we can get our numbers down, and I think that we are seeing more of the behaviors over time that we need, people not coming together in large groups, people increasingly wearing masks, and physically distancing. And I know that I sound like a broken record when I say this week after week, but those are the simple measures that are needed to prevent spread, and get our schools and our businesses back open.

- [Reporter] And building on that, so Cal Poly is gonna be returning here in a few days. Students are in the process, limited students, as we've seen the last several days, concerns about gatherings. We've seen this locally in Isla Vista around UCSB, parties, people gathering in large numbers, not distancing, no masks. That must be a concern too to the county as well.

- Yes, I am talking every day with upper management and leadership of Cal Poly. They are extremely tuned into this. They recognize that what happens amongst the Cal Poly community affects our general community, and they are being very aggressive in their actions with students who are not following the rules. We have had a few cases on-campus. We will be posting that when we hit the next metric. As with other cities, we've said, when we get to five, we will begin to post that publicly. We have had quite a few

cases off-campus, and we are working with the Cal Poly community to address those as they become apparent, just in the same way we do with any other large housing setting or congregate care setting.

- [Reporter] And also just with youth sports, I mean, I know personally there's youth teams both in this county, also, I know you can't speak about Santa Barbara County, but also there as well that there's youth teams traveling to competitions within the state. You say competitions are not allowed. Is that just for San Luis Obispo County, or is that statewide, or, you know-

- Yeah, you-

- Competitions are happening in California, I know that from different sources-

- Yeah, we'd be happy to hear about them with specificity of where they're happening and under what umbrella. They are not allowed, and our county has been routinely committed to following state guidance and state orders on all measures, including youth sports. So if it's happening, and we'd be happy to accept any detail on that.

- [Reporter] If you, if the county were to see, say, law enforcement or anybody else where to see clearly a competition game, not just a practice or something like that, what would happen?

- Well, so we have an enforcement line. We have, through cities or through the county, issued either TROs or citations, or, you know, I know that our sheriff's department is willing to go the next step if we see egregious violations, and so we use that enforcement process to move up in the chain of events through first an initial complaint. We investigate the complaint, we take action, depending on what arena it's in, environmental health code enforcement, and then ultimately law enforcement, if needed.

- [Reporter] Dr. Borenstein, can you talk a little bit about how our hospitalization rates are looking right now?

- Our hospitalization rates, since we, you know, they used to be just like our case rates, extremely low. They ticked up about two months ago, and they have held steady ever since. So we haven't seen a dramatic decrease, but we have not seen an increase.

- [Reporter] And the county website no longer, or hasn't been reporting the number of tests being conducted since I think like August 31st. Is there a reason for that?

- Yes, so the question was why is the county website not reporting the number of tests? I just became aware of that today. I understand there's a glitch in the system, and we're working to improve that.

- [Reporter] I had one question for Wade. Non-COVID, just with all the fires going on, does that have an impact on the county budget?

- So the question would the fires going on had an impact on the county budget? Not yet. However, we do know that we're receiving some evacuees from Monterey County. There's some coming in today, and our OES is working with Red Cross to get them housed and situated. Yes?

- And this might be for Dr. Borenstein. Are we looking down the pipe towards Halloween, and are starting to make plans towards the end of the month?

- Yeah, actually we just started talking about that today. So we're gonna get together, and talk about the best way forward with Halloween, and then we will make sure that we explain that to all of you.

- [Woman] Any other questions?

- Thank you.

- Thank you all for coming today, and tuning in online. Just a few closing notes for today. Dr. Borenstein talked extensively about testing today in her comments. So just a quick reminder on that. We do have three testing sites, public testing sites, currently available in SLO County. They are located in Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo, and Arroyo Grande. And as she stated, all the information and a link to make an appointment is online at readyslo.org. And if you have limited or no access to the internet, you can also call 888-634-1123 to make an appointment by phone. You can continue to get all our county's COVID-19 information at our website, readyslo.org, as well as through the phone assistance center, or the public health recorded information line. These briefings are held live online at San Luis Obispo County Public Health's Facebook page, and on our county website homepage, and they are livestreamed on KCOY and KSBY's website. Finally, they are broadcast live on cable channel 13, and then re-broadcast on public access channel 21 at midnight, 8:00 a.m., and 5:00 p.m., until the next briefing occurs. Thank you all for staying informed. Thank you, again, for being here. Be well, and we'll see you next Wednesday at 3:15.