

- Good afternoon. Apologies for the delay, we're having some technical difficulties a few moments ago. Today is Wednesday, September 30th, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I'd like to welcome you to San Luis Obispo County's, Weekly COVID-19 Media Briefing. This afternoon, we will have two speakers. We will begin with County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. And she will be followed by Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau, Mr. Brent Burchett. We have several others here and available to take your questions as needed. These individuals include, Megan Harrington our County Emergency Operation Center Care and Shelter Branch Director, Laura Zarate, our Multilingual Outreach Coordinator for our County COVID-19 Public Information Team, and last but not least, County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Mr. Wade Horton. Thank you once again to our American Sign Language Interpreter, Robin Babb.. And now County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you. Good afternoon. So, as always, I'd like to share with you where we are in terms of our case counts and transmission in this County. We have 3,629 cases as of today, which is an increase of 17 from yesterday. 94% have recovered and only 187 are active cases, recovering at home. We have a low number in the hospital at six with only one in intensive care, so that is good news for today. Unfortunately, we do have to report that we have had two additional deaths in the prior week. Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones previously and these two most recent individuals. So where are we with this disease? Let's talk about the blueprint and how we are able to open and move forward. As you know, last week we reported that we had moved into the red tier. Fortunately, again, we are now in our second week in the red tier, so that has allowed our businesses to open at certain capacities and with modifications and our schools have the opportunity to consider opening if we stay here as we enter next week.

However, I do want to give a word of caution. We are concerned that we have seen a doubling in the case rate. The way we are able to stay in this red tier, is we have seen high testing rates, and testing is one of the ways in which a community or a County can actually adjust its case rate. So we are benefiting from that. Our unadjusted case rate puts us in the purple tier. Our adjusted case rate has us in the red tier, but we want to stay there and we want to move forward. So once again, as we have looked at the data and the individual cases that we have seen, social gatherings continues to far and away be the means by which when known, we're able to identify as the cause of transmission. So I again want to implore people, do

go outside, do activities, do socialize with your household members, your loved ones, do visit our businesses, outdoors better, but please stay in your social bubbles with that one or two other families for a period of three weeks, and this has proven to be very effective to not bring together large numbers of people, where the disease gets transmitted frequently. Along with that, all the protective measures that I harp on week after week, they work, they will allow our community to stay open, so please continue to do your part. That means wearing a mask when in the presence of others, it means staying physically distanced if at all possible, washing your hands, absolutely stay home when you're sick and don't mix with people that you don't live with, or as I mentioned do so in very limited ways. If we take these actions we actually can continue to see progress. And I think that we can continue to coexist with this virus. We, as I mentioned, testing is an important strategy.

Thank you all for continuing to utilize our community testing sites. We will be changing our sites in the coming week. So beginning next Monday, we will be at the Paso Robles Event Center, and we're doing something different in next week. We're not gonna just be at one place for our County sponsored community site, we will be at two different sites. So, Paso Robles Event Center is Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. And I want to highlight that Saturday. This is the first time we've had community testing on the weekend. We've heard people's requests and we've been able to honor that and move into weekend testing. The other location is at Morro Bay Veterans Memorial Building and we will be there on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. You don't have to remember this, you can go onto readyslo.org or emergencyslo.org/testing, will take you right to the information, about where you can go for testing, what the specific cities and locations are, make an appointment. And I want to point out that these new testing sites are gonna be operating 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM. We're hoping with adding the weekend time we're making it available for those with day jobs.

Also, as a reminder, this is open to anyone who feels that they need a test. So, symptoms or no symptoms, if you've been exposed, absolutely do go get a test, but I caution to wait at least five days, generally, maybe four or five days, because doing so earlier after an exposure may result in a negative test or meaning you don't have the virus at that point, but you may still be incubating. So you want to wait those several days, five days, ideally, after a known exposure before getting tested. This testing, as I've mentioned, is one of the adjustment factors in our metrics. So we

really do ask people to test as often as they need to or can. And it will help, not only us identify all cases of disease, so that we can take action. We can isolate individuals who are positive and thus control our transmission. But as I mentioned, it's also a way to help our businesses open more by having these elevated testing rates.

The State has come out with new guidance, I want to mention. There are two areas. One that we'd been waiting for for a very long time, is around playgrounds. So outdoor playgrounds are now approved to open. There are a lot of precautions that are part of the State's guidance on this. I encourage people to look at that guidance on, again, our website readyslo.org. The main takeaway messages are, do so safely, even with your young children. If they are above age two, wear masks, try to keep your children in household groups, try to contain the amount of time that you're there, a half an hour might be a reasonable period of time, as opposed to interacting. I know children have a tendency to meet at the playground and look at each other curiously and sometimes touch or bump into each other on the slide. Parents, if you can help control those direct interactions between strangers on the playground, that will go a long way to helping keep children safe. But we're excited about the opportunity for our community playgrounds to reopen. The other guidance is around boarding schools. The State has added a notation in the schools guidance that boarding schools at this time are not allowed, because of the living nature of that particular environment.

We also are still waiting for the State who says it will be out on Friday, regarding Halloween and other holidays. I know I committed last week that we would go forward, if we did not get that, we are anticipating it very soon. We will wait until the end of this week and if we do not receive that guidance from the State, we will go ahead with our local guidance. But once again, I encourage people to look on our website. We have posted the CDC Holiday Celebration Guidance and there's a lot of good information in there.

I do want to talk about a new program that the County has entered into in partnership with the State, it's called Housing For The Harvest Program. And what this partnership looks like, is that the State has secured through contracts, the availability of hotel rooms in communities that are participating, whereby the State will pick up the cost of a hotel room that may be needed for farm workers or others in the food production industry who cannot safely isolate or quarantine at home. And the State makes that hotel room available. The County's level of participation

or partnership, is that we provide the wraparound services. So, meal support, transportation support and wellness checks for individuals that may need to utilize out of home or this hotel placement for their period of isolation or quarantine. We think that this will help reduce transmission, and family members can be kept safe as well. In a few moments, you'll hear more about this from Brent Burchett of SLO County Farm Bureau, who is here as well. And he will talk about the other efforts that are taking place in the agricultural community to keep people safe. Before I turn it over to Brent, I just want to also mention the other players in this who have contributed quite a bit of their energy to trying to keep our agriculture and farm worker community safe. So our County Department of Agriculture, many different community partners I won't list, but especially our Promatores collaborative and Dignity Health Community Outreach Team who are working on these efforts. So with that, I will introduce Brent Burchett, the Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau. Thank you.

- Thank you, Dr. Borenstein. Good afternoon. First we want to start off by thanking all of our County staff who have really worked very hard to bring this program to our County. We know this program fills an important gap in the central coast agriculture community. Monterey County to our north and Santa Barbara to our south have previously enacted the Housing For The Harvest Program, so we're glad it's now here in SLO County. As many of our government leaders know the very nature of farming and logistics of managing a farm workforce presents unique challenges that are distinct from many other segments of our economy. Our Farm Bureau will work with the County to make sure that Ag businesses and their employees are aware of this program and understand how to use it. We're very grateful to have this new resource available, but I'm also proud to say that efforts like this are not entirely new to San Luis Obispo County.

Several months ago, local Ag industry leaders, like, Talley Farms and Edna Valley and other Ag employers, took initiative to implement their own worker housing programs to minimize the risk of transmitting COVID-19, coupled obviously with a host of other key changes and operational procedures on the farm. Keeping Ag workers safe is priority number one. This is not just our ethical obligation, but also is key to our businesses and to our food supply. We know how important this work is. We know how essential food production is to feeding our neighbors, both here in SLO County and across the nation, and we fully appreciate that none of it can happen without a safe and healthy workforce. Just last week, we joined forces with

the SLO County Department of Agriculture/ Weights and Measures, and the pastoral role was one country lines to host an online forum with a local infectious disease specialist, to specifically address recent questions about COVID-19 from the Ag industry and increase awareness about all the resources that are currently available to help protect our workers. For those that are interested, you can find a recording of this forum on our SLO County Farm Bureau Facebook page.

Since March, the Farm Bureau has coordinated with our regional partners that Dr. Borenstein mentioned earlier, community groups, governmental officials, and more than 800 SLO County Farm Bureau members, who have never stopped producing food during the pandemic. Starting back this spring, we pulled together industry leaders to develop best practices and guidance, specific to our local farms, wineries and other Ag businesses, to help our local agriculture industry operate safely during the pandemic. We have disseminated the latest health information and connected our members with critical resources, like testing and personal protective equipment. We've given practical feedback to government leaders about what works and what doesn't always work on the farm and articulated what resources and support we still need to keep our central agriculture industry operating.

Our Ag community has responded and risen to the occasion, but we know we aren't out of the woods yet. Not even by a long shot. We're not gonna pat ourselves on the back and say mission accomplished. We know we need to be willing to constantly reevaluate our practices, our procedures, how we're doing things on the farm, and really take this on the ground feedback from both our farm workers and our employers alike and try to evolve when new information is provided by public health officials. We certainly know there is still so much more work to do, and the stakes are very high. This Housing For The Harvest Program is another positive step in our fight to mitigate new COVID-19 cases in agriculture. And we really appreciate the special attention that's being placed on the unique challenges faced by our farm workers, our farmers, our ranchers and everyone involved in our industry. Dr. Borenstein, thank you.

- Thank you, Brent. I will take this off. As he mentioned, please visit again, readyslo.org for more information on the Housing For The Harvest Program. So now I want to talk about flu. Flu season is upon us and flu vaccination and getting one is all the more important this year. We certainly are concerned about COVID-19 and filling our hospitals with that disease, but we usually fill our hospitals with flu illness during the winter seasons. So we don't want to have this, what some are

calling, a twindemic or the constellation of cases of flu at the same time of COVID, which may be worse in the winter season, it remains to be seen. But all the more reason because of COVID, to protect as many in our community against flu, so that we don't have a surge in our healthcare system and exceed capacity. Both of these illnesses can be very serious, flu, we always recommend flu shots. It causes great illness in many people, hospitalizations and deaths, but for the reasons that I mentioned even more so this year. So, flu vaccination is for anyone aged six months and above, we recommend it for children, working age adults, older adults, people with chronic healthcare conditions, basically anyone.

Also, many people talk about getting the flu shot and it didn't work. Either they feel a little bit sick after the vaccine, which is the inflammatory response, not the flu. Or for some people, they may actually get the flu, despite having gotten the vaccine. It is not a perfect vaccine, no vaccines are, but what it can do, is be the difference between life and death. So the severity of illness, if you've gotten the flu vaccine and you still get the flu, is considerably less than it might have been if you didn't have that vaccine. So please go ahead and get vaccinated, protect yourself, protect the people around you, protect our community from this potential twindemic and do get vaccinated. So here's where you can get vaccinated, from your primary care provider, from local pharmacies, most health insurance cover a 100%, but some do have a small copay. The Public Health Department is going to be doing its annual public flu pods this year a little bit differently. We're doing drive-ins for the first time. Partially, this is to test a mechanism for doing mass vaccination for when we get COVID vaccine. And these vaccinations will take place on October 21st from 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM at Arroyo Grande and at Atascadero. And we will get more information out to the public about the exact locations, but please mark your calendars. We would love to see a large number of people coming through those clinics, so that we can in fact test our ability to deliver drive-thru vaccines in a coherent and consistent way. So, with that, we're gonna take the opportunity today to have myself and Mr. Burchett on camera, get our flu vaccines to show you that it's an easy, fast and healthy thing to do. So, I'm gonna invite up Alice Bollock, one of our wonderful public health nurses to help with this.

- We'll have you step over here.

- Okay. All right. Let me put my mask on.

- Thank you.

- I've got to model our...

- Okay.

- While we are indoors and in close proximity. Thank you. And for all you children and adult children out there...

- [Brent] The one next to you.

- There you go.

- Thank you.

- Thank you. I can't remember what I told you before.

- You told me you're giving me a sucker.

- That's right, only if you didn't cry.

- Is that high enough?

- Yeah, that's high enough, thanks. Wipe my hand off a little. Okay, here we go. Not so bad, huh?

- Not so bad.

- Let me give you a bandaid, so you can show everybody that you got your shot. Okay, there you go.

- Thank you.

- You're all set, thanks, Brent.

- And with that, we'll open it up for questions for any of our speakers.

- [Man offscreen] Dr. Borenstein, you mentioned right off the top, the case rates have doubled in the County, was that accurate since last week or would you mind clarifying where we stand in terms of case rates from last Wednesday?

- Okay. So, case rates, the question is, has it in fact doubled? So, the data is by the time you see it on Tuesday, it represents the previous Sunday to Saturday, a week and a half prior. So, the most recent report we got showed us with a case rate of 8.6 per a 100,000 population per day. And the metric to be in the red tier is to be below eight, no, below seven, sorry. And so, our undigested rate at 8.6 for the past week puts us in purple. The previous week, we were at four point something. So it has gone up substantially. And our test positivity rate though has remained low.

- [Man Offscreen] So another week of similar numbers, that means purple again for the County next week or how soon would the County, you know, fall back if these rates hold?

- Right. So, in order to move forward, you have to have two weeks of the metrics in the less restrictive tier. The same is true, you have to have two weeks of metrics in the less restrictive tier. We are still in the red, because of the adjustment we get for our high testing rates, but if both our case counts continue to stay where they are or go higher, and our testing volume goes down, we would be in the purple tier.

- [Man Offscreen] So I guess what I'm getting at, I mean, it looks like the County's kind of stepping backwards and it's potentially you know, going in reverse rather than forward. And that's a serious issue for the County to have to do that. If it does go backwards.

- We watch these metrics, we have from the beginning on a daily basis, we are concerned that we continue to live right on the edge between purple and red. We don't want to revert. So we continue to make all the same recommendations about how to keep transmission low.

- [Woman Offscreen] Dr. Borenstein, can you provide an update on school waivers? I know you had mentioned that schools could potentially reopen soon, and I know Paso Robles school district and Pleasant Valley Elementary school district have applied for reopening waivers.

- Yeah, so Paso Robles has submitted for a waiver for the elementary school opening under our waiver process. Pleasant Valley has submitted a plan for reopening for all of their grades. Both of those are under review at this time.

- [Woman Offscreen] Other questions?

- [Man Offscreen] Question for Wade. Wade, there was a widely seen video on social media this week with some young adults, one of our beaches in the South County participated in behavior less than socially distant would be an understatement. You're reacting to that. The County's reacting to that. And is there anything that you are investigating or to the colleges, anything that you can update us with that?

- Yes. In the EOC, we're focused on moving through the governor's stages as quickly as we can, so we can get our schools open, our businesses open, get folks back into their places of worship. In order for us to do that, the County has, we either move

forward together or we fall back together. And the event that you're referring to does not help. We all need to do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19. I don't like wearing a mask, but I do it, because that's gonna help get my kids back in school quicker. The event that we did see at Pirate's Cove. Again, that's not something that's going to help us move forward as a community or a County. I have spoken to Ian, Sheriff Parkinson about it. He is coordinating with the Harbors district. We learned about that event after the fact, and we will be stepping up patrols in that area to prevent something like that from happening again. I've also been in discussions with Cal Poly and President Armstrong. They are investigating the incident. And again, President Armstrong has been a very good partner with the County as Cal Poly has reopened, and they're taking this very seriously. And that situations like that, they are looking at disciplinary actions, including and up to expulsion. So, we're taking this seriously, again, I ask the community that's watching right now, whether you agree with all the measures in place, whether you don't, again, we're gonna move forward or backwards together, so if everyone would do their part, it would help us all achieve our goals that we want to see. Thank you.

- [Woman Offscreen] Any other questions?

- Thank you all once again for being here today and for tuning in online. 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. We continue to offer free, safe and easy COVID-19 testing at a number of locations around the County that Dr. Borenstein mentioned. Same and next day appointments are often available. All that information, once again, is available on readyslo.org. I'd like to announce today some new resources from the State of California to help all of us in navigating this stressful and difficult time. Yesterday, our Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, announced the website calhope.dhcs.ca.gov. It's a website with resources to support mental health and wellness during COVID-19. She further announced a warm line, eight three three three one seven H O P E. The Warmline is a number that you can call to talk to someone with experience in dealing with stressful situations in times like these. Finally, as always, these briefings are found live on our Public Health Facebook page, our County website home page and live streamed on KCOY and KSBY's websites. There are also rebroadcasts on public access channel 21 at midnight, 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM until the next briefing occurs. Thank you once again for staying informed, be safe and we'll see you all next week at 3:15 on Wednesday.