

- Shoresman and I'd like to welcome you all to San Luis Obispo County's weekly COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon, we will hear from County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director Mr. 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.

- Hi, good afternoon. So I come before you again with information on where this county stands with respect to COVID-19's case counts. We are not particularly moving or changing, our counts today stand at 3,933. That is an increase today of nine, but over the weekend, we had an increase of 42 over two days. So we continue to see these numbers stabilize right at that range of 20 or so cases per day. We do still have 94% who are recovered and only 5% or 190 active cases in our community. Three individuals in the hospital, one of whom is in intensive care. So that number is good, has consistently being good for a number of days now. We have had one additional death in our county in the past week and with all deaths my heart goes out to these families. These are real impacts to real people regardless of age or medical condition. So with that loss, I offer my condolences.

As I was mentioning, our case count keeps us this week in the red tier. It's now three weeks that we have been in the red tier. What we do have is the opportunity to look ahead each week because the announcement each Tuesday of where we are is based on really 10 days prior in terms of our case count. So the week before. So we can get a view into where we are and based on the actual reports each Tuesday, and looking ahead to next week, we seem to be going in the wrong direction. So for instance, three weeks ago, we had an adjusted case count of 3.5 cases per 100,000 population, two weeks ago 5.1, this week 6.1. The adjusted rate needs to stay below 7 per 100,000 population or roughly 20 cases per day. And as I said, we seem to be moving in the wrong direction or hovering right at that threshold. We do get the benefit of our very high testing rates, and so we have that adjustment that has been landing us at a lower case rates so that we you can stay in red.

But given that, we certainly and I know our businesses do not wanna take a step back. I know I've gotten asked by our reporters over time, what can we do? How do we move forward? How do we avoid going back? And my message is the same over and over again, that everyone in this community needs to take this seriously for the period of time that we are continuing to live with the pandemic. It will end at some

point but in the meantime, we absolutely need to all do our part. I know I sound a bit like a broken record but that means face coverings, indoor and outdoor when you're in proximity of others, indoor at all times per the state order, keeping physical distance, staying home when you're sick, not gathering with people outside your household and doing hand hygiene and sanitation. All of those things really do work, we're seeing it in places where people do so with fidelity and that's really our ticket to continuing to progress in this community and to live at the same time with this virus as it continues to circulate.

The state did come out with gathering guidance. I will say that I was personally a little bit disappointed. I was hoping to see more. I've met recently with a number sectors that we're hoping to see the opportunity for us to gather in greater numbers, but that's not where we are stand today per state guidance. Their guidance was very similar to that which I have been asking of our public over recent weeks in the concept of social bubble that you refrain from gathering with people that are outside your household in more than two different family units. So basically the state's guidance came down to there's now an allowance that three different households may intermingle, but with that, that same guidance remains in place to keep it within that cohort, if you will, for a period of time before you move to other households that you may mingle with, and when you do so, it is still preferred that these gatherings happen outside, that they have the smaller numbers of people, that they be kept brief. The state's guidance says no more than two hours is the ideal. Please don't attend or be party to any gathering if you are sick and continue to wear face mask during the visit especially if you're in proximity of others and especially if you're indoors. We continue to do our contact tracing and we continue to see that the majority of our cases for those that we get information on, that their source of cases are these social gatherings far and away beyond any other settings. So please keep that in mind as you do gather.

And related to gatherings, the state now has come out with Halloween guidance as well as Dia de los Muertos. And again, not dissimilar from that guidance that we have put out at a county level, but just to review what the state has issued with respect to their Halloween guidance similar to ours, please find alternate ways of celebrating other than door-to-door trick-or-treating, costume party, scavenger hunts, pumpkin carving lots of ways that you can experience Halloween mostly with your household, do Zoom meetings with your friends, have costume competitions but in a virtual way, any number of ways you can celebrate this holiday. If you do go

trick-or-treating again, very much ask that people do so with their household units, not in crowded locations, that the givers of treats keep their distance from the trick-or-treaters and keep your distance from others in the spaces in which you're going trick-or-treating. For Dia de Los Muertos, the state put additional guidance forward on that related to creating altars, best to do so outside or through a window so that people can see your altars, create virtual alters that you can share with your friends and family online. And if you do choose to visit cemeteries again, please do so within your household unit and not gather in large numbers.

One more thing I wanna add for today is that we have resurrected a face covering drive. The county is looking for donations for face coverings. We want to make these available at food pickup sites and other venues, especially for agricultural workers and others who can not easily buy or create their own. So we will be collecting masks at drop off sites across the county through November 20th. And the information for those locations is at emergencyslo.org/maskdonation. I want to thank everyone who did contribute previously in the spring. If you're still making masks or you can start a new, to do so we would very much like to receive those donations. And with that, I will open it up for questions.

- [Reporter 1] Dr. Borenstein, you said we're going in the wrong direction. I mean, if numbers continue like this, are we in danger of going back in anytime here in the near future or is it just, we'd still be like on that threshold there? I mean, how significant is this slide backwards?

- So, what are the risks of us sliding backwards are if we exceed a case count of 7 per 100,000 per day or 20 on average over a seven-day period, which is from a Sunday to a Saturday. And our number gets high enough that even with our testing volume adjustment, we land at that metric of an adjusted rate of seven, then we would revert to purple after two weeks of that situation. So we're continuing to live right on the border of that. What we would really like to do is certainly see our numbers come down even further so that we can move forward. I've met recently with people from gyms, from movie theaters. It is quite difficult, we know that all of our businesses have been struggling. There are some venues that at 10% or 25% capacity, it is a very difficult thing to sustain their businesses. So we're not happy with just staying in red. We want to move forward. We don't wanna move back and we are at risk of doing so.

- [Reporter 1] You look at the numbers. I mean, there, hasn't been a dramatic spike in terms of 40s, 50s, 60s. I mean, it's been in the teens some days, in the 20s. So I

mean, even cases per day like that, I know you want zero but I mean, it's not a huge number but that's still significant enough to place us where the county is at right now?

- Yes, our numbers have been pretty stable and what we want is for everyone to do their part with all the protection measures that will allow us to drive the number down.

- [Reporter 1] In terms of social gathering say, that continues to be basically the driver of transmission. Are you seeing anything in terms of particular places, Cal Poly, for example, things like that, any sort of other areas in the county that you're starting to see some red flags?

- Cal Poly has definitely had cases and they are a contributor to these numbers. They are not the totality of our cases. We actually have seen somewhat of a dip in the numbers after students first came back to campus and we did a lot of testing, not we, but testing happened both before students got here and afterwards, Cal Poly is doing surveillance testing. We're not seeing a huge number of cases coming out of that community, thankfully, but they are still very much a contributor to our cases. But, so I implore our student body as well as the rest of the community to really heed all this guidance.

- [Reporter 1] When you look at the numbers that the 18 to 29, that's the number one category of age over 1,300 cases. So that seems to be a trouble spot just the young adults, those in their late teens, early 20s. Is there anything you can say to that group or age group in particular?

- Yes, we're seeing it. We're seeing it in Cal Poly, we're seeing it in other non-Cal Poly students of that age group. We know that young people tend to think they're more invincible not just with respect to COVID, but lots of behaviors. And it's a good thing our bars are closed toward that end as a way to keep these individuals not in indoor crowded settings but even in other ways that they're coming together, house parties, beach outings as you've seen or other ways, we just really need to ask of our community members who are of that age group and our Cal Poly students that they need to understand that their actions contribute to where our county stands with respect to this pandemic and our business openings.

- [Reporter 2] Dr. Borenstein, can you talk about any measures the county is taking to make sure that we're maintaining the health equity metric?

- Yes, thanks. So with respect to the health equity metric to remind folks this is a focus on the positivity test rate in our 12 census tracts that are in the lowest quartile of the Healthy Places Index. I know that's a mouthful but basically it's our most vulnerable communities. And we're taking quite a few actions there. We've been making sure that we have testing available, not just through our regular community testing but offering popup testing. We've been doing some testing with homeless communities. We're supporting a lot of outreach and education and prevention packages delivered to these communities. We are working with community-based organizations to make available self-swab opportunities for testing. We have the Housing for the Harvest program that our county is now participating in. So we're doing quite a bit to try to make sure that we don't leave these communities in more shape than the rest of the county.

- [Reporter 3] How about hotel occupancy? Those that are selling out 100%, are we at that point where still too much tourism is not a good thing right now?

- So it's a good question. I actually haven't seen, I'm looking to it in casinos but we had been checking on a regular basis what our hotel occupancy is. It was upwards of 75% the last time I checked and that was a few weeks ago. I don't imagine that that has changed. It may come down a bit as we get into the school year and the colder months. It is true that travel at this time is still discouraged. There's a lot of it happening. We haven't seen any particular outbreaks in our county related to travel. So we do ask of our travelers, especially if you're coming from higher risk areas, please abide by our county's rules and expectations for not mingling and keeping to your family group, be outdoors as much as possible, absolutely wear masks when you go into our businesses and keep socially distance. And hopefully with that, we can find a happy medium between our tourist needs and desires and the situation in our county.

- [Reporter 3] Sort of a catch-22, we're rewarded by getting into the orange tier or a lower tier, but at the same time another communities that may be at a higher tier tend to flock here to have those experiences, going to a movie theater, being able to dine indoors.

- Yeah, most counties now are in the red tier where they are open for business at the capacity level. I don't think at this moment in time we're seeing much of that sort of displaced need for activities, but you do raise a good point.

- [Reporter 2] And, Dr. Borenstein, can you provide an update on school waivers?

- Yeah, so there are three public school districts whose waivers have been reviewed and they're undergoing some finalization in their plans. Those are Paso Robles, Pleasant Valley and Atascadero. Each one of those, I believe, has a plan to spread out their reopening even within the elementary school grades. We have received full reopening plans from just one district, I believe, in the public school setting, and the two individual schools, charter schools that are in the public setting. We have in addition previously approved 13 elementary school openings in the private school sector, and we since received eight requests for broader reopening in the private sector, six of which have now been able to move forward.

- [Reporter 2] Yeah, that's right.

- Thank you.

- Thank you once again for being here today and for watching online and on TV. You can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on readyslo.org, or by calling the Phone Assistance Center or the recorded public health information line. We continue to offer free, safe, and easy COVID-19 testing at a number of locations around the county, appointments are currently available five days a week in San Louis Obispo and Arroyo Grande, and three days a week in Paso Robles and Morro Bay. Same and next day appointments are often available and Saturday appointments are available at the Paso Robles site. All information and appointment links are located at readyslo.org. A few more reminders today, please save the date for upcoming drive-through flu shot clinic next Wednesday, October 21st from 12 to 5:00 p.m. at locations in Arroyo Grande and Atascadero. These clinics are completely free and open to the public. More details are available on our county's website at slocounty.ca.gov/flushot2020. Finally, we encourage the public to view these briefings live online at keyt.com and ksby.com. They're also broadcast live on cable channel 13 and shortly after each briefing we'll post our videos on SLO County Public Health's Facebook page, on our county's home page and on the County of SLO YouTube channel as well. They are also rebroadcast on cable access channel 21 at midnight 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. until the next briefing occurs. Thank you for staying informed, be safe, and we'll see you here all next week on Wednesday at 3:15.