

Michelle Shoresman:

Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I'm the designated media contact for the San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 Public Information Response Team. This afternoon we have three speakers for you. We will begin with Emergency Services Director and County Administrative Officer, Wade Horton. He will be followed by Cal Poly President, Jeffrey Armstrong. That's Jeffrey Armstrong, J-E-F-F-R-E-Y A-R-M-S-T-R-O-N-G. County Public Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein, will speak last before they all take questions.

Michelle Shoresman:

As we did yesterday, we request that the speakers repeat their own questions before answering them. Before we begin, thank you again to today's American sign language interpreter Robin Babb. And thank you to all the members of the media who are here today as well as the public who are tuning in at home. And now San Luis Obispo County Emergency Services Director and Administrative Officer, Wade Horton.

Wade Horton:

Thanks Michelle. Good afternoon. Wade Horton County CAO and Emergency Services Director. I want to thank the community for the sacrifices they're making to protect our seniors, the most vulnerable among us. We're doing what we can to slow the spread of the disease. One of the things we have going for us here in SLO County is that we are geographically isolated. And that's an advantage for us. Looking at the weather forecast, sunny days are coming, nice weather and a beautiful open space is one of the many blessings living on the Central Coast. And normally we appreciate the opportunity to share those blessings by welcoming visitors to enjoy what the Central Coast has to offer. However, now is not the time. In close consultation with the cities, Morro Bay and Pismo Beach, we'll close beach parking lots and implement parking restrictions. County parks will be closing all campgrounds throughout the county to new reservations.

Wade Horton:

Pismo Beach [has] restricted parking to one hour and close the Pismo Peer yesterday. Morro Bay and county restrictions will go into effect tomorrow evening. The reason why we are doing this is to discourage large groups from other areas coming into our county to recreate. We are not closing the beaches themselves or the regional parks. We want locals to have the ability to get outside. Again, the intent behind this is to discourage large groups of visitors to come to our county at this time. In regard to state parks, Pismo State Beach and Oceano Dunes Vehicle Recreation Area are still open from 6:00 AM to 11:00 PM. People are still able to drive onto the beach from both park entrances at Pier Avenue and Grand Avenue. Port San Luis remains open but Avila Pier is closed and the barbecue fire pits are currently restricted. Details on specific closures will be provided in a press release and posted on readyslo.org. We also have a handout for the press in attendance.

Wade Horton:

I'd like to take a moment regarding a question received by The New Times regarding a petition asking SLO County to freeze rent and mortgage payments due to this pandemic. On March 18th the county issued an order to temporarily suspend residential and commercial eviction proceedings when the basis for the eviction is nonpayment of rent due to COVID-19. This order is currently in effect until May 31st. The Governor also announced yesterday a major financial relief package for Californians. That package

calls for a 90 day grace period to make mortgage payments. It also called on financial institutions to remove any negative impacts to credit reports for those impacted as a result of COVID-19.

Wade Horton:

We are also looking at any and all local options for recovery relief for our business community and affected property owners. I also want to provide an update on establishing a safe parking program to assist homeless individuals or families that need access to safe and clean places to park and sleep overnight. The first pilot site will open tonight from 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM tomorrow, at the Los Osos library parking lot at 2075 Palisades Avenue in Los Osos. Again, that's 2075 Palisades Avenue in Los Osos. Sites will be equipped with port-a-potties and we are working on getting them shower facilities there as well. We will also have an onsite staff person to check families and individuals in and ensure a safe environment throughout the night. We are looking at expanding this program as we move forward to meet the need.

Wade Horton:

Before I turn it over to President Jeff Armstrong, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Jeff and his team for everything Cal Poly is doing to help our community in this time of our need. Including the offer to host the alternate care site to accommodate hospital overflow on the Cal Poly campus. Thank you Jeff for your leadership and support. President Jeff Armstrong.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

Yes, it is Jeffrey Armstrong, Cal Poly. First of all, thanks for having me here today. As we have made our decisions and moved along every step of the way as Cal Poly, we've been in close contact with the county. Dr. Borenstein, our County Administrator, Wade Horton, have been amazing and very helpful. And all of our decisions have been made with the goal first and foremost of the health and welfare of our community. Let me give you a quick snapshot of where we are as a university. Our classes will be virtual for the remainder of the academic year. That's through the middle of June. I also want to acknowledge the Herculean efforts of our faculty and staff as they're transitioning classes to virtual in just a matter of two weeks. We're now offering nearly every one of our classes, that were originally scheduled for spring, in a virtual format over 98% of over 4,000 courses.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

Transforming these is a much more difficult task to imagine, especially for a hands-on polytechnic university. Our academic leadership in faculty and staff deserve my thanks, appreciation and praise for the work that they're doing. Our faculty's efforts ensuring classes are offered virtually and that will help immeasurably in keeping our students, employees and the San Luis Obispo community safer during this health crisis. I also want to thank our students for their understanding and flexibility. We understand that moving back to their permanent residences and taking their courses virtually is not what they expected, especially for our seniors. We're working on a number of things beyond classes that can be done virtually to keep our students excited and engaged from wherever they may be.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

Unfortunately, earlier this week we learned of the first Cal Poly student who tested positive for COVID-19. First and foremost, our hope is for the quick and full recovery of the student. The student did not live on campus and left the San Luis Obispo area prior to being diagnosed. But may have been infected prior to leaving San Luis Obispo. We worked immediately with County Public Health who conducted contact

tracing to identify and notify all those who may have been exposed to the student. It's important to note that we have asked all students who are able to return to their permanent home addresses. Any Cal Poly student who is currently at home, outside of the San Luis Obispo area, should stay home. As Wade said earlier, there are plenty of times to visit and participate in our beautiful area, but now is not the time.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

We really need to make sure that students do not travel back after spring break. Vital services such as housing and dining will remain open on our campus to serve students who do not have a permanent home residence to return to, who cannot return or for other reason are here. We're trying to limit the number of students on campus and in the community for the safety of our overarching community.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

As I mentioned earlier, I'd like to recognize and thank both Wade and Penny who have been invaluable partners to Cal Poly. They have been available 24-7 and it provided advice and support to us and I want to say on behalf of Cal Poly and our community, thank you.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

As was announced earlier this week, the county has identified the Cal Poly Recreation Center as an alternative site for providing overflow health care to COVID-19 period patients should it become necessary.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

The county chose this location over other options because of its large size, access to water, electricity and because the interior primarily contains hard surfaces that are easy to sanitize. The County has been hard at work and preparing the location should it be needed and we're happy to work in partnership with the county and do everything we can to safeguard and protect the San Luis Obispo community.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

I would like to close my comments by speaking directly to our Cal Poly students and parents. Students, whether you are living on campus or in the San Luis Obispo community, I implore you to come to continue to fully comply with prevention guidelines and shelter [at] home orders. This means not congregating in groups and always following social distancing at a minimum of six feet from others. Students, not only is this important to safeguard your health, but it is part of your social responsibility as young adults in society and members of this wonderful San Luis Obispo community. These are unprecedented times and we must do all that we can on an individual basis to protect the health of others and our neighbors. Thank you for allowing me to be here today and I'll turn it over to Dr. Borenstein.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Thank you. Good afternoon, Dr. Penny Borenstein, the county Health Officer. And I just want to also chime in my thanks to President Armstrong for all that he has done as he used the word Herculean task. I think that is probably an understatement of what it takes to move an entire city of 20,000 plus individuals to a new way of learning. And so thank you and for all the measures that Cal Poly has taken to keep our community safe. So the daily health update, I will tell you that we are now at 54 cases. Five of those individuals are now in the hospital, the same individuals in intensive care and now we have four other individuals hospitalized, all are stable. We now have 10 recovered individuals and the remainder

are at home and doing well in home isolation. I do want to talk a bit about our agriculture community and our farmer's markets.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So there has been a lot of confusion in some areas about the farmer's market staying open. That is considered basic needs. We want the fresh produce that comes from the bounty of our county to be available to our residents. We also want to ensure that the services that are provided do all that they can at the locations of the certified farmer's markets to stick to providing the food products but not other forms of services. So we have communicated through our Agriculture Commissioner, Marty Settevendemie. And we're actually inspecting through our environmental health inspectors that only food is to be sold at our certified farmer's markets. And we have discontinued and notified all of the managers that we do not want to see entertainment or other products being sold at these markets. That allows them to spread out a little more because many of the markets do sell other products. So that allows for some of that physical distancing. And even within that space to have people queue in a way that they are separating themselves the same way we are asking our grocery stores, our pharmacies and other essential businesses to do.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I also want to mention an area that I think came up yesterday and that we have internally had some dialogue with our agricultural community. And we now have moved to a frequent and detailed communication with farm workers in multilingual mechanisms for communicating to them if all of the shelter at home components that they need to be aware of even when working in the field. Now outdoors is obviously a lesser risk than being enclosed confines, but still much of the agricultural work does involve people being within close spaces at some point during the harvest or the planting. So we have asked again the agricultural businesses as well as the workers themselves, to have situational awareness and to try to the extent. It is absolutely feasible to continue to honor the the precepts of physical distancing.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And lastly, I want to mention an order that was put out today by me. It is related to visitation at healthcare facilities, both our hospitals as well as residential facilities, assisted living facilities, longterm care facilities, youth programs, independent housing with case management services, a host of art, various types of residential facilities for special populations that we have now promulgated in order for there to be no visiting with some exceptions. And those exceptions include for children, for end of life care, for women delivering at hospitals that they may have their partners with them during labor and delivery. And on a case by case basis for other selected individuals that may have one visitor at a time if the situation warrants. So that information has gone out to all the facilities. I don't think this is huge change in our community because many of the facilities had already voluntarily gone to this approach. But we have now made it an official order to all the facilities in our county. And with that, I will conclude my comments and make all of us available for any questions that you may have.

Speaker 5 - audience:

I do have a question for President Armstrong. We heard from Dr. Borenstein yesterday, essentially recruit, train and expand in the medical reserve field. She cast a wide net out into the community, all sorts of people. Do you, if you heard that, do you anticipate maybe any employees from Cal Poly maybe

being redirected into that if necessary? Or is Cal Poly involved in that discussion and using some of their employees in that role?

Jeffrey Armstrong:

So the question was Dr. Borenstein asked yesterday to cast a wide net to recruit as many health specialists, healthcare specialists as possible. Is that correct?

Speaker 5 - audience:

And also beyond healthcare she said people have business skills, other skills that might be utilized.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

So yeah, our emergency operations center is in close contact with the county and so there's all discussions back and forth on how we may assist and help one another.

Jeffrey Armstrong:

I'm not aware of specific details but I do know that we'll help any way that we can, if we do have individuals that are available.

Speaker 5 - audience:

Yeah. I was curious as besides hosting this alternate care site, if it is open, any other role at Cal Poly will play as well?

Jeffrey Armstrong:

We'll just take it one day at a time and see what the county's needs are and we will step up and see if we can assist. But we certainly know that besides the personal protective equipment, the healthcare workers are very, very important. But I know the county has many options and are looking at all avenues to meet the needs should we get to the point of needing it.

Speaker 5 - audience:

And then a question for Wade, or at least a couple of questions in terms of Pismo Beach and Morro Bay, obviously those are very popular tourist destination areas. Were you seeing trouble in those cities specifically and are there other parts of the county that you feel may also potentially have closures in the future if that distancing is not observed?

Wade Horton:

So the question was, "In Pismo and Morro Bay specifically, have we seen issues or challenges with those locations and why are they being closed now?" The reason why we're being proactive because we do have nice weather coming. And I talked with both city managers last night. In fact, I talked to all seven city managers last night. We were on a conference call and we all agreed that in order to protect the public health of our county, it's best that we limit, we discourage individuals from coming into our county to recreate.

Wade Horton:

Again, we have a wonderful, beautiful county. People like to come here and enjoy spending time on the Central Coast. But now's not the time to do that. So trying to get ahead of that, that's why we made the decision to close the parking lots. It closed up and Pismo Beach made the decision to close the pier.

Wade Horton:

It's an order to discourage folks who would generally maybe think about coming Central Coast to enjoy a nice weekend, stay home, because that's best for them, for their health, and it's best for our community, for our health.

Speaker 5 - audience:

And quick clarification, you mentioned golf courses in county parks yesterday. In terms of the golf courses, is that the county golf courses, the three or all of the golf courses within the county?

Wade Horton:

So, right. The question was in regards to golf courses, "Are we going to be closing any golf courses?" So right now we do not plan to close golf courses as long as physical distancing requirements are being met. And we ask the public to help us out with that. We don't want to close golf courses, we don't want to close other forms of recreation. We think that's really important.

Wade Horton:

But we need to meet those physical distancing requirements in order to keep our community healthy. We will be closing Cuesta Park on Monday. And in addition, as part of that closure, we'll also be closing the golf course. And the reason being is we are going to use Cuesta Park as a site to a house homeless individuals that are showing symptoms of COVID-19 or being diagnosed with COVID-19 but do not need hospitalization.

Wade Horton:

So we will be putting individuals there, at Cuesta Park. And because, because, I'm sorry, El Chorro Park. Let me be very clear. That's El Chorro Park, not Cuesta Park. And the reason we're doing that is because we want to isolate that area. And if we kept the golf course open, there's a likelihood that that golf course parking lot would be used and then for access to El Chorro Park. So thank you for that clarification. El Chorro park, not Cuesta Park.

Speaker 5 - audience:

And then Dairy Creek Golf Course then as well. And then just to follow up question for Dr. Borenstein. With parks, since a lot of parks are still open, how safe is it for parents to take their children to a park? And have them on the playground?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So if we haven't said it enough times, if we want people to be outside and we want people to recreate, we want them to honor our request to measure their distance literally and figuratively. So you can have a kid on a tot lot. They just, have to be reminded as three-year-olds do, that they need to keep their distance from the other children. They can raise their voices. We have actually eliminated noise ordinances for purposes of bringing supplies into our county. And if that applies to small children, all of us, if we want to shout to each other across the divide, that's perfectly fine at this time. But we really

are asking for that type of physical distancing. So no pickup basketball games where kids are sweating on top of each other and so with all of these decisions, that's really what we're looking for.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

It's what our compliance checks are about is if you can do so within the confines of the intent of the shelter at home order, which doesn't literally mean stay in your house 24-7 for the remaining weeks or upcoming months. But it really does mean that certain types of recreation are going to be looked at very differently. So I yesterday talked about a tennis game. That's okay golfing as long as you keep your distance. Basketball is probably not going to be an allowable thing or a bunch of people climbing over each other, small children on a Tot Lot. So that we're really looking to have the community work with us to honor the intent of the order.

Speaker 6:

On that note, Penny, we've seen some other areas in California that have issued advisories for people to basically stay in their neighborhood. Like you can go to the park and go to public places, but they're asking people to not drive across the county to go somewhere else. Is that something that you considered advising on here? Or what's kind of your recommendation now?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

That I would absolutely recommend here and now today that to the extent that people can stay close to home, that will avoid spread throughout our county. I know that the public and others have been asking for more detailed geographic information on our cases and we do plan on getting that done by tomorrow. And so I can tell you right now, Paso Robles is going to be the high point. That doesn't mean we want everyone in Paso Robles to shutter in their houses. It does mean that perhaps people from Templeton, stay away for now. Or I think to the extent that people can stay within their own communities, we will stop the transmission from community to community, even within our small local area. So yes, that's an absolutely important point.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And I'm sorry, I keep forgetting to ask the questions even though there's a big sign there that says repeat questions. So the question was after the fact, I think it's important for the public to understand what's being asked is, "Is it important for people not just to not go to San Francisco or to Los Angeles or San Diego, but to even ~~not~~, to stay in their local neighborhoods?" And my answer to that is yes.

Speaker 6:

And we did notice in your most recent press release that there are more cases in North County and you're saying that Paso is going to be a hotspot. Do you have any reason for that? Do you know why that's happening?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I don't, honestly. I think to some extent it may be a little bit related to demographics. No, I think my honest answer is I don't know why we might have a dozen cases in one city and four in another and six in another. I think the numbers are really too small to make any real assessments about why that's happening.

Speaker 6:

Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about right now who is qualifying for tests? Is there, what kind of guidance is there given to doctors about who they should be testing? So is it people who have severe symptoms only or people who have pre-existing conditions? What are those guidelines and are they different for the public versus private medical care professional?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Right, so I will thank you. I actually remember but thank you. So the question is, "Who is being prioritized for testing?" So first and foremost individuals who need inpatient care and who are very sick would be at the very top of the list of who should be tested. It's needed for diagnostic and treatment considerations and decisions.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Secondly, we are prioritizing people who get sick who are on the front lines of our response. So healthcare workers themselves as well as our first responders as well as the people who are basically living in our Emergency Operations Center. The people who are handling this response, they are also very much at the top of the list. Household contacts of our confirmed cases. If they become sick, we are continuing to test them. And then we are also prioritizing residents of high risk facilities or institutions. So if we get anyone who meet clinical criteria from jail, from CMC, from ASH, those would be high priority facilities.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Our sheriff's watch commander, any of our first responders as I said, but also longterm care facilities, congregate living settings. The kinds of places that we just limited visitation to would also be high priority for testing. There are definitely other people who are doing well in their normal lives who have very significant underlying medical conditions and the elderly. And if they become sick we certainly want to avoid them becoming our next hospitalized patient. And so we very much want them to know their status but we at the present time are asking them to communicate with their private physicians. And work through their doctors as first line in order to try to obtain that test through their doctor and then have that test sent to a outside laboratory.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

The reason the differential between the public health laboratory, where we've got very rapid turnaround, is because we need to know right here and now if that person in intensive care has this disease. And that will help make treatment decisions versus someone who maybe just had onset of the disease, has underlying conditions, but they're still doing well and maybe they can afford a few more days in order to get that result. That doesn't mean that they go about their lives while they are sick. If someone has been tested, they need absolutely to stay out of the community. And always, meaning not go to the grocery store, not go to the pharmacy. So if you are being considered a possible case of COVID-19, then I would say the stricter isolation order remains in place for you.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We're not actually issuing a Health Officer Order for those individuals, but we certainly want that message to get out that if you are a suspect case for COVID stay at home until you get your test result.

Speaker 6:

Is there follow up? Is there a specific guidance to private practitioners about who should be testing? I keep touching my face.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah. So-

Speaker 6:

[crosstalk 00:33:42] should be tested.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

The question, so two things. One is very difficult not to touch one's face. And so we keep saying it over and over again and I catch myself doing it as well. So give yourself a little bit of slack and continue to try to honor all of those infection control measures. But secondly, the question is, "Do physicians have sufficient information about who they should be testing and-

Speaker 6:

What is the guideline?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

... Right. And we have put out guidance to them. So one thing that is consistent across the state of California is there is no recommendation to test asymptomatic individuals, especially... Even, not especially, but even those who are contacts of cases, we actually want to... That testing for asymptomatic is not really going to change the picture. But if physicians have patients in their care who do present with symptoms, that is who we want them to test in the outpatient arena. If that individual requires evaluation at an emergency department, they absolutely should send that person to the emergency room. But they should not send them to the emergency room just for purposes of obtaining a test.

Speaker 6:

Thank you. And there was a report, sorry-

Michelle Shoresman:

We're just going to take one more question.

Speaker 6:

No!

Speaker 7:

The confirmed cases, what are the numbers that ASH and CMC and will they be treating them at those locations? And have they been treating them there or will they be transported?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the question is, "Have our correctional or forensic institution, ASH and CMC in our County had any cases to date?" They have not. And, "Will they be treating patients if and when if they do have cases?"

And I think that will depend on the level of illness in those patients. Both institutions have plans to isolate within the confines of their facilities that they can maintain and provide care to individuals onsite. If their numbers exceed the availability of their ability to cohort basically patients, we certainly have some thinking on alternative plans. But for the most part, patients from either Ash or CMC or our county jail will receive their care onsite at their facilities and be transferred to a hospital and possibly even alternate care site should it come to that. If the care provisions that are needed are not available onsite at the facilities.

Speaker 6:

What about Cuesta College do we're hearing reports that there was a Cuesta College student who tested positive.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I'll take that question before we end. So the question was, "Is there a Cuesta student who is positive," and the answer today is no.

Michelle Shoresman:

If you have additional questions, I'm happy to entertain those from the media after the briefing is over. Thank you all for coming today and tuning in online and on TV at home. A final few reminders. All the information and resources are available on [ReadySLO.org](https://www.readylo.org) for a COVID-19 in San Luis Obispo county. We also continue to maintain our public health information line. That's a recorded number as well as our phone assistance center number for members of the public to call seven days a week between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM. All those phone numbers in addition to the county enforcement line and email address are available on [ReadySLO.org](https://www.readylo.org). Lastly, tomorrow, again at 3:15 please tune in for our briefing on San Luis Obispo County Public Health Department's Facebook page, the county homepage or on KCOY or KSBY. Thank you again and we'll see you tomorrow.