

Michelle Shoresman:

Obispo County COVID 19 Public Information Response Team. We have here today our County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein and Emergency Services Director and County Administrative Officer Wade Horton here to speak with you this afternoon. They'll make a few comments. We'll take questions based on time allowed at the end and before I turn it over to Wade, I just want to point out to you the ways of getting more information that are posted on the monitors next to us here. When you're not in front of a camera where you can speak to Wade and Dr. Borenstein yourselves, we have three different modes of communication for you, online and two different phone numbers. One, a recorded message and one where you can talk to a live person, so I will go ahead and turn it over to Wade.

Wade Horton:

Thanks Michelle. Good afternoon, Wade Horton County Administrative Officer and County Emergency Services Director. The intent of today is we're beginning daily press conferences. This is a rapidly evolving situation. We want to make sure that the media and the public are aware and informed of the situation and up to date.

Wade Horton:

I have three issues, three points I'd like to put out today and then I'll turn it over to Dr. Penny Borenstein to provide additional updates and as Michelle indicated, we will be taking questions after that. Before I get started, I'd like to acknowledge the support of the city of San Luis Obispo, particularly the City Manager, Derek Johnson, who's here with us today. We've been working very closely with the seven cities and we appreciate their support as we go through and proceed through this situation together as a community.

Wade Horton:

The first point is today the board ratified the proclamation of the local emergency and declaration of a local health emergency that was made last week just to remind the public, this allows latitude in procurement for the County. It allows access to emergency reserve fund the board can use to address the situation and allows flexibility in the assignment of the county workforce as emergency services workers.

Wade Horton:

The second point I'd like to talk about today is SLO County is now eligible for federal disaster relief loans through the small business association. Once we receive a website, we will put that website up and ReadySLO.org that's R-E-A-D-Y-S-L-O-O-R-G. And these are loans for our small businesses up to \$2 million available for working capital. Their interest rate is capped at 4% and for terms up to 30 years.

Wade Horton:

The last point I'd like to put out today is we are all as the county is also working on an order to limit evictions within the county in alignment with the governor's guidance that was put out yesterday. We anticipate that order out this evening, tomorrow at the latest and with that I will turn it over to Dr. Penny Borenstein.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Sorry. Excuse me. Thank you. Good afternoon. So I have four pieces of information that I want to share today. The first is to give you an update on the number of cases that we have. It has indeed doubled overnight. We are now at six cases. The importance of that is when we step back now and look at our six cases, only two of them actually are what we would consider community transmission. We have travel as the source or community or I'm sorry, household spread for one of the individuals. So in terms of the number of cases and the spread within our community, the situation hasn't changed but the numbers have and we absolutely anticipate that our numbers will continue to go up at a rapid pace.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

The second thing I wanted to address is the guidance that came out from the California Department of Public Health yesterday, which was additive to the governor's recommendation of several days ago in addition to bars, brew pubs, wineries, nightclubs, strong recommendation that those facilities close at this point. Now we are also sharing the guidance from the California Department of Health that we should apply the same ruling to all restaurants that provide seated service. We are excluding from that any drive through opportunities or delivery of food or takeout orders, but that is new information.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

The third thing I want to tell individuals is that we had an important meeting this morning with our hospital executives. This is adding onto daily communication we have with them, but we actually sat down and went through a number of algorithms related to our emergency response plans for surge capacity. And what I mean by that is what we would do in handling patient demand on our hospital system if we've exhausted the number of beds. So I want the community to know that we are taking this very seriously and we are looking at all manner of plans for in-hospital expansion as well as potentially out of hospital expansion to meet any acute care health needs that may come our way as part of this pandemic.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And the fourth thing I want to update is related to our laboratory capacity. As I mentioned to you, every time we meet circumstances of the day dictate where we are. And today, we have found ourselves with a limitation on the extraction reagents for the test. And so we are having to pull back a bit from our capacity of 50 and waiting for additional reagents. And we hope that we will have them in our hands either today or tomorrow, but given that we want to maintain the limited capacity we have for our highest need individuals, which are those in hospital situations as well now as individuals who are contacts to known cases.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We have communicated this morning with our outpatient healthcare providers that we are no longer effective today able to accommodate the needs of testing of their patients. We do know again that there are private labs that are providing testing for that population and we very much want to see expansion of the testing capacity across our nation and our country and our community. So with that, I guess we will open it up to questions.

Male:

Dr. Borenstein, talk about the test that you did, how many people are being tested daily to the best of your knowledge? What's the number that is really needed right now in the county?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So we have through yesterday been able to meet the demand that left us with just shy of 200 tests performed to date. And we anticipate doing probably close to another 50 tests today. If we don't get additional reagents, we may be significantly decreased by tomorrow.

Male:

The ramifications of that are what?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We believe that, we will hopefully have capacity in the next couple of days to continue to provide for the highest concern patients, contacts of cases as well as hospitalized patients. Beyond that, we will have to send specimens to either the state laboratory or private laboratories who continue to have additional capacity, but the turnaround time is not as quick as we've been able to use.

Male:

So is this the testing kit that's on order from the CDC that just hasn't come yet? Is that-

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah. So it's nuanced. It's not actually the test kit. It is a component of the test process that is needed to complete the test.

Male:

Is that from the CDC though that you get the from or?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I think it's actually not directly from the CDC. It's IRR, which is International Reagents, something, I'm sorry, I don't know the exact name, but the IRR is who sends us all the components of the test kit.

Female:

Can you share of just shy of 200 test, how many of them, so there have been six positives, but can share how many negative results and how many are pending right now?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

None are pending now. 200 or 198 minus six is all negative.

Female:

Got you. And then in relation to the hospital capacity, can you share how many ventilators that the hospitals that SLO County have?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We have in this county at the present time available nearly 60 ventilators.

Female:

Do you know how many would be that are in hospitals or that's just total?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

That's total for our hospital.

Male:

Sorry, just to clarify the testing thing again. So do you have another testing kit from the CDC to pair with the reagents and not like, is that ...

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes.

Male:

You do?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes.

Male:

All right. Just one more?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Just one.

Male:

Okay.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Which accommodates, I think it's 300 patients.

Male:

And then earlier today you talked about this county being especially well equipped to do testing and to have sort of outpaced other county labs throughout the state. Could you elaborate on that a little bit? Like why that is and just talk a little bit more about that.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So we are one of 14 laboratories in the state of California that has a part of a laboratory response network and we have a very seasoned laboratory director, used to be the director of the state of Colorado's laboratory. He's just been extremely proactive in utilizing all manner of grant funding to getting extra machinery. And we have an amazing staff that are able to learn new testing methodologies on the fly. And beyond that I can't speak for other laboratories.

Female:

Okay. Do you know which laboratories in this County are providing COVID testing right now?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So to the best of my knowledge, there is no laboratory physically located in our county other than our public health lab that is providing the testing. Providers can send the specimens to out-of-state laboratory, well not out-of-state. In the case of Quest, it's in Southern California. In the case of Westpac, the headquarter lab that is being used is in Texas and I do not have an answer for where LabCorp is performing their tests and there may be others. As I mentioned I think yesterday, there are certainly other hospital labs. The state lab is available to us, but physically in our county, it is just here at the Public Health Department.

Female:

So right now people are showing symptoms, I mean are you recommending they go with their primary care provider to try and get testing? Are you still recommending that? If they're not-

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes.

Female:

Yes. Okay.

Male:

Quick question for Wade, the alcohol restriction obviously went in effect last night. It's in effect right now. I just returned from downtown and it certainly seems to be doing its intent. Talk about that and also maybe expanding that to closing down restaurants to maybe the drive-in or not drive-in here in San Luis Obispo but for the takeout and how the impacts of that when that might possibly happen.

Wade Horton:

Sure. The intent behind the closure over today, the St. Patrick's day, was to reduce the number of crowding that we would have throughout the day, particularly in the morning and the evening that we've traditionally seen throughout the county. I think it's working. We see that folks are complying, which we very much appreciate. In regards to restaurants, and then Penny during her brief, she addressed that, that we will be issuing and furthering the governor's guidance on restaurants. And on the request to limit or not limit but to request that there will be no more in person seating. Drive-throughs will remain open, take out remain open and we will reevaluate the compliance with the guidance and if the guidance isn't working, then we'll reevaluate and anticipate that there may be an order in the future.

Female:

And then a question for Dr. Borenstein. Can you tell us any more information about the three additional cases, are they like, region and like the ages?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I know that one of the individuals was an international traveler from a country that has quite a bit of spread at this time, was a younger individual. The others were older and one is again, from the North County and does not have any other known source, no travel history, and one was a direct contact of someone with a confirmed case. But that contact occurred outside of our county.

Female:

Okay, so one in our county and the other two, are they in other regions of the county?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

One is located on our coast and the other one is also located in North County.

Female:

Okay, so two in North County and one in-

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So three in North County, two in South County, one on the coast.

Female:

Okay.

Male:

So just a little clarification on the testing. Those in the private sector can go to their healthcare providers and request that the sample be taken and then it gets set somewhere else for testing?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes, and I can't validate whether all community providers or even urgent cares are able and willing at this point to do the testing. We have implored them to begin to participate in that process but it's very variable across our healthcare providers.

Male:

And those then who rely on public health for their well-being in their health care, they need to wait until more tests come in and this reagent becomes available for the testing to proceed?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the people who we're accepting today specimens from are either having their specimens taken at a hospital because they need hospital level care, either outpatient and they're very sick in the emergency department or inpatient. And we are accepting those specimens from the hospital providers. They are taking the specimens. If someone needs testing because they've had symptom onset while a contact of a confirmed case and they do not have the means to get that test done by another provider, we will continue to offer the actual specimen collection.

Female:

If patients go to a primary care provider and ask for a testing and they get turned away, what should they do?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

That's a really good question. I would say that they need to either ask their provider to not turn them away. That's one thing and we've provided all kinds of direction about what is needed in order for a provider to take the test, both the materials and the protective equipment and if they are not getting

that responsiveness from their established provider, they can either seek out urgent care elsewhere. We are still asking people to not use the emergency department to obtain a test.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And I suppose as we get further into this, if there are certain outliers in our provider community, then we would like to know about that and try to have conversations with them. At this point, we're not in a position to actually have individual conversations with providers, but we are trying to get the message out far and wide to our community physicians that we are asking them to be part of the solution here.

Male:

Another question for Wade. Are there any other measures the county's currently considering that would limit gatherings? I know I asked you yesterday about San Francisco, what we see on the Bay areas, something like that. What other measures are being considered right now?

Wade Horton:

Well, we're taking a very measured approach. For instance, I just discussed we're going to distribute the guidance from the governor to our restaurant community. We're going to look for compliance. If we don't see compliance based on voluntary guidance, then we will consider an order. Again, we're taking a very measured pragmatic approach. Our goal is to protect public health and then we want to use common sense measures as well too. This is a situation where the communities are in it together as we proceed through, which is arguably uncharted waters. Daily, Dr. Borenstein and myself, we are discussing how this situation can change to evolve.

Wade Horton:

There's new information that is available almost hourly and we will make decisions to protect the public health of this community.

Male:

Wade, a couple of questions. I think you answered this, but your orders that you're making apply to all the cities?

Wade Horton:

Yes, they do.

Male:

Those jurisdictions, because the city put out its own border, right? So that's just to kind of double down on on making sure that people know because city of SLO made its own border, right? Is that correct?

Wade Horton:

As I understand too, the cities of every specific order, we work with county council and with the councils of each respective city and concerning the specificity of the order, if the order doesn't imply within incorporated city limits then the city can issue their own order. But the orders issued thus far, those have been applicable county-wide.

Male:

Okay. Thank you. And then just a public safety question, we heard some stories that local PDs are like reducing their response to different situations trying to avoid spreading and keeping social distance. Is there like a kind of from the Office of Emergency Services standpoint, is there like a county wide recommendation or a plan that has been passed down to the PDs to how to maybe change their response patterns in this time or doing that-

Wade Horton:

I know we're working very closely with the seven cities, the city managers, they're working in turn very closely with their police chiefs. And we're in daily conversation with our with the sheriff Ian Parkinson, and we are issuing those guidance recommendations to keep those officers safe.

Male:

Is there anything you can say about what that [inaudible 00:19:49] for officers responding to calls, how it may change their behavior or their-

Wade Horton:

I think they're taking appropriate precautions in alignment with the situation that we have. As far as I have, that's news to me. I have not heard any instance of law enforcement standing off, doing their job because of this event that we're going right now.

Male:

Okay.

Male:

Wade, what about county government functioning as normal sort of speak, also like the county elections, we still have election results pending. Can you talk about the status of the function of the daily government here in San Luis Obispo County?

Wade Horton:

Sure. We're evaluating that daily. Keeping our employees safe is very important. It's critical and also providing services to the community during this challenging times. Right now, this county open and we haven't seen a reduction in service level. However, we continue to evaluate that daily and we will take the precautions necessary to protect our employees and also make sure the public's safe.

Male:

In terms of the election results that are still pending is that-

Wade Horton:

My understanding is this event that has not at all impacted the ability of our county clerk to conclude the election or ratify the election results.

Michelle Shoresman:

We'll have two more questions.

Male:

[inaudible 00:21:20] has a question. She's watching [inaudible 00:21:23] with Dr. Borenstein. She's asking if you can walk us through the steps someone would need to take if they feel that they may be experiencing COVID 19 symptoms.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the first thing they should do is contact their physician by telephone and perhaps they can get consultation by telephone and not need to come to the office depending on the situation. If the physician determines that they do need or a test is indicated, then the physician and that patient should make arrangements for the safest way for the specimen to be collected.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

When that specimen is collected then the private physician needs to determine what laboratories they have contracts with and send them. If they have a laboratory that they are used to engaging with that they can send it to. If that is not possible then we would be willing to help them get the specimen to the state laboratory as the backup plan.

Male:

And she'd like to know if the most serious symptoms are the most important symptoms to pay attention to.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Right. So still the large majority of patients experience fever, which is a temperature taken by mouth of over 100.4 Fahrenheit. Cough is a predominant feature of this illness and shortness of breath is also pretty common as is also fatigue and body aches. So very much like a flu. What is not a dominant feature and to help people distinguish is runny nose, sneezing and itchy eyes. Those kinds of things are probably something else.

Male:

Just two quick questions please.

Michelle Shoresman:

All right, go.

Male:

One, just the condition of the patients here, how are they doing?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah, thank you for that question because they are all at home and they are all improving and doing well.

Male:

They're all doing well. Okay, and then we got one concern about triage tents outside of the hospitals that the Sierra Vista in twin cities have set that up but that the Dignity hospitals haven't and they're concerned about ... They think it's a good idea to have the triage tents. Do you have a recommendation on that? I haven't talked about that with the hospitals.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I'm aware of what each is doing in order to protect both their staff and the patients, but you really need to connect with the hospitals to get further detail about their procedures and why they are using the methodologies that they are to try to separate patients who may have this disease versus others.

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you everyone for being here this afternoon. Thank you for staying interested in this topic and making sure that our community is educated on what's going on. Moment to moment, I just want us to close with two reminder announcements. The contact information on the screens behind me, ReadySLO.org is the best place to find all of our guidances and media releases. They're historically cataloged there so you can look back at everything that you might be interested in knowing, as well as those two contact information lines that are posted.

Michelle Shoresman:

The Public Health Information line, the 788-2903 is a recorded message that you can reach 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it's updated frequently. And then the Phone Assistance Center currently is operating from 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM. And you can reach a live person there to ask your specific questions to. And then the second thing is we will be back here tomorrow at 3:00, so feel free to tune in each day this week we'll be here at 3:00 conducting similar briefings and we will do our best to make them available via Facebook live as well. Thank you.