

Michelle Shoresman:

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Michelle Shoresman:

Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, April 1st, 2020, and you're watching the daily media briefing for the San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 emergency response. My name is Michelle Shoresman, and I'm the media contact for our public information 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 San Luis Obispo County District Four supervisor, Lynn Compton, that's Lynn Compton, L-Y-N-N C-O-M-P-T-O-N. County health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein will speak last before they all take questions. Once again, we request the speakers to remember to please repeat the question before answering and again, thank you to our American sign language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now, San Luis Obispo County Emergency Services director and county administrative officer Wade Horton.

Wade Horton:

Thank you Michelle. Wade Horton, county CEO and emergency services director. Today, I want to talk about a way every resident can help our community in these uncertain times. Take the census. Today is census day and while in the grand scheme of things, this may not seem like a high priority for many, it is vitally important that all SLO County residents be counted. The crisis we're facing today is a powerful reminder of why the census matters. Federal funding for our local emergency services and health services are allocated based on census population data. That means that the team and the resources were deployed today to protect our community in this crisis are directly shaped by the census participation 10 years ago. The results of the 2020 census will help determine how billions of dollars in federal funding flows into the communities every year for the next 10 years. These federal funds support public health services, law enforcement, child welfare services, education programs, highways and more. Census data informs local school districts and helps communities like ours plan for new schools and new hospitals.

Wade Horton:

Companies use census data to decide where to open new locations and create jobs. The census ensures that our community gets its fair share of representatives in government, including the number of seats our state has in the US House of Representatives. It's quick and easy, you can complete the census questionnaire online. It'll take about 10 minutes. All households and SLO County should have received in the mail a code for their residence, but if you have not, you could still respond online at my2020census.gov again, that's my2020census.gov. By following these prompts, on the online survey, you can still complete the census, if you've not yet received the card in the mail. Your participation today will help our community for years to come. Please take 10 minutes of your day to make a difference.

Wade Horton:

I'd like to pivot for a moment and remind the public how important it is to maintain physical distancing. I want to be clear, we do not want to close down any additional open space, especially that to look at what's available to locals right now. We encourage people to get out in their neighborhoods for fresh air to recreate locally. Yesterday we had 50 people at one time using the Los Osos Skate Park. It's important to limit crowding at sites such as skate parks, in order to maintain safe physical distancing. Again, we do

not want to close any additional open space to the locals. If people cannot self-regulate congestion, we'll have to close the skate park and other open spaces in areas in order to protect community health.

Wade Horton:

The Bob Jones Pathway has also become busy, although passing briefly on a trail does not pose a significant health risk, what's important is non-household members don't clump together. Just maintain that six foot physical distance. I appreciate everyone who's doing their part in our county to maintain our safety. I'll now turn it over to county fourth district supervisor, Lynn Compton.

Lynn Compton:

Thank you Wade and good afternoon everybody. My name is Lynn Compton and I am the fourth district supervisor. Today I'm here to provide a status update on the alternate care site and its expected function. I'm pleased to report that our alternate care site is coming together and we'll be ready if local hospitals reach their full capacity. I just toured the facility this morning and was very impressed. We are on schedule to open this site in one week, on April 8th with 165 beds to start, but with the availability to accommodate 931 individuals in total. Beds are arriving on that site today. This is truly amazing and something our entire community can be really proud of. We're working with leaders in both the public and private sector to make sure our community can fight and succeed in this difficult situation. I want to thank Cal Poly, Dignity Health and Tenet Health for their guidance and partnership, RM Design Group, Thoma Electric, Trust Automation, McCall's Plumbing, and many other private sector partners for stepping up to the plate to fill the need and to support this endeavor.

Lynn Compton:

These local businesses and their local employees are working to keep our local community safe and to save lives and they should be commended. I also want to thank our disaster service workers from the engineers who developed the plans to convert the space for medicinal use to our logistics team who are working to make sure the site is stocked with the appropriate gear and medical equipment. Because of all of you, the alternative care site will be well-equipped and if needed, will provide safe and quality care for our patients. The bottom line is this, we are preparing for the worst case scenario unfortunately, but we are certainly hoping for the best case scenario. Right now, our local hospitals are able to meet the needs and care for the patients in our community, but every day, we see additional cases of coronavirus here in the county and we know we need to prepare for additional facilities and we certainly know how things can change very quickly with this type of a situation and with this virus.

Lynn Compton:

The alternate care site is vital to providing care up to 931 sick individuals if our hospitals reached their limits. That's a staggering number of people to accommodate and I'm proud to live in a community that's doing so much to take care of its own people in such a short timeframe. We still need volunteers to assist at the site. We have had hundreds of people sign up to join the counties medical reserve corps and to offer to devote their time to assisting the public health efforts during this crisis. These courageous volunteers will staff the site. We are dependent on them to achieve success at this site. I would say to those who have been signing up to be part of the medical reserve corps, thank you from the bottom of my heart. We will certainly need your help and expertise in order to be successful here.

Lynn Compton:

If you are a trained medical or a mental health professional, assistant, technician or have American sign language experience, please sign-up today for the medical reserve corps at ReadySLO.org, that's R-E-A-D-Y-S-L-O-O-R-G. And in short, building this site is one of the most important things we as a county can do for our local citizens. The ability to accommodate the influx of those who have acquired the virus, is a testament to the hard work and hours of dedication that our local elected officials, the emergency operations center, our health care providers, the many volunteers and countless others have given. These individuals have put the county before themselves during this crisis in order to save lives. I want to personally thank them for all of their efforts, and also thank you all out there for being a part of the solution by continuing to shelter at home, following our order and maintaining the social distancing requirements. Thank you very much. I will now turn it over to Dr. Penny Borenstein.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Thank you. Supervisor Compton. I'm Dr. Penny Borenstein, the county health officer, and I will give you our daily report on number of cases. It continues to tick up, but modestly. Today we're at 83 cases. We still have 10 individuals in the hospital and two of them are in intensive care. We have done at the public health laboratory now over 450 tests, but we would like to see the capacity of the laboratory system across all of our providers really ramp that up. I believe that in part, our numbers continue to be low because we still have limits on testing. What we've told you previously that we are looking to get additional equipment for testing, but I once again want to reach out to our providers who may be tuning in, as we are doing also in writing in the next day or two, is we're planning to do another survey of our healthcare providers to see if those who we originally surveyed are in fact continuing to test.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We know that people can get tests at most of the urgent care settings in the community. We know that our clinic system, our community health centers at the central coast are doing a lot of testing, as are some of the other outpatient clinics that are run by Dignity Health or Family Care Physicians Partnership. So, I just wanted to once again put that plea out that we can't really know where we are in this epidemic, unless we have really clear eyes on how many people in our County have this disease. I know that some people have been turned away from the emergency department and told to go to urgent care. So I want to send that message again that if you do not need emergency room care, please go to either your private physician, if they are testing or to an urgent care facility or similar clinic for the testing. The last thing we want to do is have our emergency departments not be able to see all the people they need to see for all the various types of emergencies that walk through the door of a hospital.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I also want to talk about access to testing and screening if you don't have insurance. So we know that some people are not seeking care, as is traditional in our community that people without health insurance often forego care or delay care. This is a situation where people should not be worrying about their insurance as a decision point for whether or not they get tested. So they're both at the federal and the state level, there should be zero cost to individuals for getting tested. And so that's one thing, but even beyond that, Covered California has extended its open enrollment period, so people who don't have insurance should seek health insurance. They may qualify for Medical. Now as many people are beginning to suffer economic burdens and the lowering of their household income, they may actually qualify now for Medical, and should absolutely seek that as a source of insurance or if they've lost their

insurance due to lay off but maybe have still a slightly higher household income, they should seek insurance through the Covered California route.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

And so, individuals can go to coveredcalifornia.gov, let me just make sure I am getting that right, .com. Coveredca.com is the place that you can go to enroll in a health benefit plan through the state of California's benefit exchange. If anyone has difficulty with that, we have enrollment counselors available at the Public Health Department. And I will read that phone number, where if people need to have the assistance of a certified enrollment counselor for either understanding if they're eligible for Medical or getting enrolled through a Covered California plan, they can go to the health department at 2180 Johnson Avenue. But probably better yet in this social distancing environment, is to make that phone call to (805) 781-4838. Let me repeat that. If you need help with trying to get health insurance in place for yourself or a family member, we have certified enrollment counselors and the phone number is (805) 781-4838. And that's all I have to share with you today and I will open it up for questions.

Speaker 5:

Dr Borenstein, there's been a lot of talk nationally about use of masks. The CDC I guess, is reviewing their recommendation. Can you shed some light on that, what people should be maybe thinking about here in San Luis Obispo County?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Absolutely. It's a very timely question. The question is, there's a lot of discussion going on across the country from CDC, California as well, regarding the use of masks. I believe just yesterday, I got asked the question about the use of homemade masks and I said they should not be used in the healthcare setting. I still believe that to be true. With this disease, we continue to learn new things all the time and there is now instead of what public health has said for decades, which is don't believe that a mask is going to protect you from disease and therefore there's not a great utility from wearing masks. Masks should be used only by those who have the infection and can transmit it to others by way of they're coughing or sneezing primarily. But there's also, because of an increasing recognition that people may be mildly symptomatic or completely asymptomatic or presymptomatic. Meaning that symptoms haven't come on yet, but they are now able to spread the germs.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

There is a lot of thought and attention being given to the possibility of adding one more protective measure, and that being wearing some kind of face cover. So that people who may not appear ill and may not be coughing or sneezing, in fact may in some cases be able to transmit. And so, this is an area that's right today in the last couple of days, been getting a lot of attention. We in this county don't yet really have enough of an understanding of whether or not we should make that recommendation. It's something that we are very much tuned into and thinking about in the coming days. There does not, as I've said in the past, there probably isn't harm for the vast majority of people to wear some type of face cover, be it a bandana, a homemade mask or what have you. So we're not saying that you should not do that, but in terms of a widespread recommendation for any public outing for our entire community to wear some type of face cover at this moment in time, we as a county are not putting out that recommendation, but stay tuned.

Speaker 6:

Are you receiving point of care tests, since those were supposed to go out on the market yesterday?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So the question was, are we receiving a point of care test? This is the newest test that's been FDA licensed from Abbott Laboratories, which apparently has a 15-minute turnaround. It is based on the same methodology that rapid tests or point of care test for influenza and other rapid testing has been done for other types of respiratory illnesses. We have ordered them, we have not received them and I do not know if other providers have put in orders and I don't know what the turnaround time is for those orders being fulfilled.

Speaker 6:

And then when, other follow up, on folks who have COVID-19 in their home, what is the recommendation for them, other than to stay at home? Is there check-ins or other kinds of services the county's providing?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes. The question is, other than for someone who has tested positive and has been deemed to be able to care for themselves at home and given an isolation order, they are in fact given an isolation order, what more can we do for them or what are we doing for them? So to rephrase the question, what does the county do for people who have tested positive? So yes, we are checking-in with them on a daily basis throughout the course of their disease, until they land in that recovered category. We are checking-in whether or not any of their household contacts have become ill and are in need of testing and diagnosis. And shortly, when our ACS center comes online, if those individuals need a little bit more than home care, that those are exactly the kinds of people that we would envision to populate our alternate care site. People who don't need the hospital beds that we want to preserve for the sickest people but may be a good candidate for the ACS site.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So we haven't had that situation yet. We have had a couple of people who were on home isolation, who we've directed to go to the hospital because the nature of their illness seemed like they needed hospital care. In fact, they did get admitted to the hospital. But we will continue ... in short, we will continue to monitor people on a daily who are in home isolation, as long as we can. If our numbers start getting into the hundreds and thousands and we don't have capacity, that may change. But for now we are doing that.

Speaker 5:

Question for Lynn, and then, well you can jump in here too. Lynn, in your letter, a daily update to your constituents yesterday, you spoke about the alternate care site and the medical reserve corps and how that might be impacted with Governor Newsome's newly established Health Corps. Can you give us an update on where the County stands with that situation and what's going on with that?

Lynn Compton:

Sure. And I'll probably turn that over to Wade. The question was, in a daily update that I do on my Facebook page, I post recent topics and things we discuss at the county to just inform my constituents, so anybody that wishes to have them in. One of the postings I did yesterday, was about our county

reserve Corps and people volunteering for it, and there was some discussion that the state had hijacked some of those employees to use and to pay them, instead of sending them back here and I believe that issue has now been resolved and I will turn that over to Mr. Horton.

Wade Horton:

Thank you, Supervisor. Yes, in the governor's press conference yesterday or the day before yesterday, Governor Newsome indicated that he is standing up the California Medical Corps, which I think is a very worthwhile endeavor. However, we were concerned that local registrants that we need for our alternative care site would then be dispatched through the state of California and may not necessarily be dispatched here locally. So talked to assembly member Cunningham and he worked with other legislators to write a letter to Governor Newsome. We're also working with Mark Lisa with Tenet Healthcare, who's talking to the California Hospital Association, who's also going to use their contacts to talk to the governor and ... The goal is to keep our local volunteers local. So what the county's done, is to ensure that local stay local, is we are now vetting those volunteers through the county.

Wade Horton:

So we're checking licensures through the county, we're processing those applications through the county, where previously they would be processed through the state. And that way, we know that those locals will stay here and serve at our alternative care site until we can work this out with the state on the states, in the mechanism you use in the process, you use a sign-up through the state. So that does not change locals who want to volunteer, still go to ReadySLO.org, still hit the link and still proceed with the questionnaire and proceed with the process. Instead of going the state, you're going to go to the county. So on the back end it's different, but they won't see anything. And again, the reason we're doing that is so we can keep our local volunteers local, so they can help their neighbors in our alternative care site.

Speaker 5:

How many people do have registered so far? And again, those that are registering with you guys, will stay here.

Wade Horton:

They will stay here. So as of yesterday, we had over 200 individuals registered. I haven't received an update yet this morning. Of those 200 we've already vetted 50, and we are slotting those individuals into an org chart so we can be ready to go. And again, our target opening date is April 8th.

Speaker 5:

The governor mentioned that those that sign up with Health Corps would be compensated?

Wade Horton:

Yes.

Speaker 5:

The ones here would not be I guess, and-

Wade Horton:

So the-

Speaker 5:

Or could they possibly be through California?

Wade Horton:

The question is, for the ones that have been signed-up locally, will they be compensated, where the governor has indicated, he will compensate those that sign-up through the state? So as of now, the answer is locals that sign-up locally will not be compensated. However, we're working on that and we're trying to deconflict what the governor's intent is locally. But from what I've heard is, the reason why individuals are signing up locally is because they want to help their neighbors out. It's not about, they have a very servant mentality, they want to help their neighbors out in the middle of a crisis. Are we going to work to try to get them paid per the governor's intent? Yes. Have we solved that right now? No, we're looking at it. But again, please, if you are a medical ... if you're medically trained, please sign-up at ReadySLO.org, because we're going to need you, we're going to need your help. Again, we are hoping for the best, but we're planning for the worst, and if the worst comes San Luis County will be ready. We just need your help.

Speaker 8:

I have a question for you, Wade or Lynn as well on this one. But in terms of federal stimulus applications, how is that going to look over the next two to three months or sooner for you guys as a government, as well as for local businesses who are really struggling right now?

Wade Horton:

So I can take that, and then the supervisor can jump in if she'd like to. But we're working. The question was how is federal stimulus dollars going to work and how will the county move forward with that? So, we are in very close communication with Congressman Carbajal. We're in daily calls with him and Congressman Carbajal is definitely keeping us apprised of opportunities for the county. Very large stimulus monies that have been announced and we're right now, we're working through the process of how we can get those dollars allocated the county. And then, move forward with using those dollars to the best extent possible to bring relief not only to those that have been impacted by the shelter at home or losing their jobs, but also helping businesses get back on their feet and also responding to this crisis.

Lynn Compton:

So that's one of the big questions that I've received. I have a lot of constituents that are really hurting right now. Where are they going to get the money to pay their rent, put food on the table, et cetera, a lot of small business owners. Government is dependent on small businesses to function, if we don't have income from small businesses, we don't function. So they're very concerned. The first step that we took at the county was declaring the order, and once we declared the order, then that stimulus money opened up for our constituents. I know there are several programs out there, I believe there are three right now. Some of them assist in payroll for up to two years, et cetera. The Chamber of Commerce, all the different Chamber of Commerce's have good information about those. They're doing workshops to explain those to people. They're changing every day. I just know that we had to declare the order first and then people could apply, and I know people applied as early as two weeks ago. And so there's small business loans, et cetera, to help the constituents.

Wade Horton:

And just to add on that, if businesses can go to ReadySLO.org and apply for a federal small business loan, through those Federal Small Business Association, and that provides up to \$2 million of working capital, with up to a 30 year term, and a capped interest rate.

Speaker 6:

Have you heard anything about ... Last question for me at least. Anything about unemployment applications, have ... obviously the numbers are probably through the roof right now, but are they coming along quickly or is it really sluggish in terms of processing?

Wade Horton:

So the question was what's the status, to paraphrase, of unemployment application rates? Yes, they've increased dramatically. They've increased dramatically in our county, and one of the things we're doing is making sure that on our end, from our Department of Social Services, that we are fully staffed in order to process those applications as quickly as possible. And I know that our social services director is working with his state association to help streamline that process as much as possible, because it's the demand that we're seeing right now.

Speaker 6:

Thank you.

Speaker 9:

Any more questions?

Wade Horton:

Thank you.

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you all again, members of the media, for coming this afternoon and for those at home tuning in online and on TV. A few final reminders today and one new reminder.

Michelle Shoresman:

If you are having accessing healthcare or do not have health insurance, now is the time to enroll on Covered California. As Dr. Borenstein said, help is available at (805) 781-4838. That information will also be available on ReadySLO.org. As always for general COVID-19 questions, reach out to our phone assistance center or listen to our public health information line recorded message. If you have questions or concerns about businesses and their compliance with the shelter at home order, call the enforcement line at (805) 788-2222. And again, all these resources and other information is available on ReadySLO.org.

Michelle Shoresman:

Lastly, our next briefing will be tomorrow afternoon again at 3:15, please remember to tune-in at the San Luis Obispo County Public Health Facebook page on our county's homepage or at KCOY or KSBY. Thank you, be well and have a great afternoon.