

- Good afternoon, today is Wednesday, June 24th 2020. My name is Michelle Schwartzman. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon we have four speakers for you. We will begin with San Luis Obispo County District Four Supervisor and board chair, Lynn Compton. She will be followed by the CEO of the South County chambers of commerce Jocelyn Brennan. After Miss Brennan, we'll have Chair of the Coalition of the Central Coast Chambers and CEO of the San Luis Obispo, Chamber of Commerce, Jim Dantona, and finally we will conclude with County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borestein. County Administrative Officer and Emergency Services Director, Wade Horton is also here and available to take your questions. Thank you to our American Sign Language Interpreter Kelly Turner, and now San Luis Obispo County District Four supervisor and board chair Lynn Compton.

- Good afternoon, everybody. I'd like to address something that I'm increasingly concerned about. In the past few weeks, I've seen more division in our county and country than I've ever seen before. And I feel it's important to discuss some of these aspects with you here today. These are trying times and we must stay united. These past few months have been extremely challenging for all of us. Each day seems to bring new challenges. I often hear from my constituents and neighbors, that they are afraid or angry or anxious for a wide variety of reasons. While it might be easy to blame that fear, anger or anxiety on others, let's try to remember that we all want the same things. We all want our individual communities to thrive. We want to be able to put food on the table, pay our bills, and have financial security. We want our friends, family members and colleagues to stay safe and healthy. So I'm asking you today to help us get through this pandemic together. Let's start thinking about public health the same way we think about public safety. When there is a wildfire, we're asked to evacuate and most of us listen. When there's a shooting, we're asked to shelter in place and most of us listen. So when there's a pandemic, and we're asked to take precautions to protect our health, still, again, most of us listen. Let's also remember to lead with compassion during this COVID situation. We can show compassion for those who are vulnerable, or at risk for a COVID-19 by staying at home when we're sick, practicing proper hygiene, maintaining at least six feet of physical distance from others outside of the home and wearing a face covering when available. We can show compassion for the workers in the places we visit, by respecting them and following the COVID-19 prevention policies. We can show compassion for those living with someone who's particularly vulnerable by staying at least six feet away from others outside the

home. We can show compassion for those not wearing face coverings by not rushing to judgment and instead, assuming they may have a legitimate medical reason or medical health reason for not covering their nose or mouth. Ultimately, we depend on each other for our health, safety and prosperity. Only time will tell how we navigate through this pandemic together. But rather than pointing fingers let's try to give each other the benefit of the doubt. Thank you for that and I will turn it over to Jocelyn Brennan, CEO of the South County Chamber of Commerce now.

- Thank you, I'm Jocelyn Brennan with the South County chambers of commerce and thank you to the county of San Luis Obispo for inviting us here today. And a special thank you to supervisor Compton. Wade Horton and Dr. Borenstein for your continued leadership and for continuously considering the business community. We're here today to thank everyone for your support of our local business community over these past few months, and to tell you a little bit more information about what you can expect and how you can help our local economy to recover. Local businesses have been working really hard to make ends meet, to keep people employed and to keep the community safe. This has looked like everything from switching to a remote workforce, to pivoting to online sales, offering delivery, adding new products and services. And for some it even meant closing their doors. Your purposeful support through shopping local, buying gift cards, placing takeout orders and your words of encouragement have really been the fuel for what the business owners needed to get through these uncertain times. It's been difficult, and we are not done yet. But I can tell you that your efforts have made a difference as additional sectors begin to reopen. It's important now more than ever that you continue to support our local businesses. So how can you continue to support our local businesses? Keep buying those gift cards, keep ordering takeout. Shop local, shop online with local businesses. Enjoy open slow and the other opportunities for outdoor dining and shopping. Bring a face covering with you and for every member of your family when you go out into the community to shop or dine, and thank the local business owners and employees for everything they've been doing, to keep our community safe and to keep their staff safe. We face these challenges by coming together, thinking of creative and innovative ways to move forward. And we've made the necessary changes that we had to, to keep our community safe. So we thank you for your continued support. Please keep shopping local. Keep showing your love for local and thank you with that I'll hand things over to Jim Dantona from the San Luis Obispo chamber.

- Economic Development and recovery aren't abstract phrases, or concepts. They are something that each and every one of us has the power to accelerate. An economy can't exist without people. And as we've all seen the health of customers, employees and our broader community is key to a healthy economy. As you continue to shop and support local, you will experience new and continuing health and safety precautions. Things like more frequent cleanings, availability of hand sanitizer and hand washing stations. Staff and customers being asked to wear face coverings, instructions to stay six feet apart when in line and open and safe signage. In some businesses like those preparing food or providing services that require close contact, salons, barbers, body art, some gym provided services, there may be additional precautions required or requested of you, as a customer or employee. Please be patient with these changes, and those implementing them for trying their best to keep you safe. Please understand, that the health measures we take will help keep businesses open and ensure that our economy can continue to rebound. As small businesses try to get back on their feet, let's do what we can to help them stay in business. Even if that means adjusting some of our own behaviors. Along with local businesses, you are key in our economic recovery. The way you each of us choose to behave can eliminate distractions and let safety and service continue to be the focus of business as they rebuild. I'm so grateful to be part of a community that has a unique passion and gift, for supporting one another, and meeting previously unimaginable challenges. We can and will continue to work together to rebuild and come out of this pandemic stronger than ever. Thank you, I will now turn it over to Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you, Jim. Good afternoon, everyone. So I have three things I'm gonna address today. One is where are we in this pandemic locally? And secondly, I wanna talk about contact tracing. And thirdly, I'm gonna talk about the mask covering order and where our community is with that. So first and foremost, I wanna talk about the fact that we are seeing increased cases, but I do wanna remind people that the ultimate public health goal here is to keep our hospital cases low, to keep people from getting very sick and winding up in critical care, and ultimately, to prevent deaths. We are continuing to do that. I know that people are worried that they're seeing our case numbers rise. But we are following these metrics very closely and as of today, we remain in a good position with our hospitalizations. It was never our goal to stop this virus dead in its tracks, that is something all of us are powerless to do. But we continue to take all of these measures to limit the spread and particularly protect our vulnerable population and to keep them out of

the hospital or worse outcomes. So I wanna be very clear about our public health goal related to this pandemic. It's not going away so we're learning to live with it. So where we stand today, in terms of our case count is at 473, that is up 20, and that is up nearly 100 over the last week. And we still have, 75% of our community has recovered part of that number going down is we're with more cases, it may be, is taking a little bit more time to get to that release from isolation stage for folks. But in general, we still have very high numbers of all of the cases have recovered. We do have at this time, 109 individuals recovering at home, we have nine individuals in the hospital, and two are in intensive care. And I can also tell you that those two individuals are the same two that have unfortunately remained in intensive care for a long time. So again, the point being that in terms of the severity of illness in our county, we continue to be in a reasonably good position. As you can see, these case counts are going up more quickly than we're used to, this is not completely unexpected. We are reopening our community. And as I've said previously, cases beget cases, it is a communicable disease. So we are seeing spread. But, we continue to have good hospitalization rates, we are very closely watching what's happening around us, as always, and with a particular mention and note that Santa Barbara County and particularly Marion Medical Center hospital just to our south in Santa Maria, is very much struggling with capacity of their hospital beds being filled with patients with COVID. And they also have a high number in intensive care. So that's something we're keeping our eye on very closely. Secondly, I said I want to talk about contact tracing. I think that there's some mythology out there about what this is. It's not all that complex or magical. But we've been talking about it for a number of months and so I wanna address it a little in more detail. It is one of the most powerful public health tools that we have for controlling a infectious disease. And I'm proud to be able to say that even though our case numbers are going up, we continue to be able to do case investigation and contact tracing for 100% of our cases. This is something that our community should be proud of, and that has allowed us to keep our numbers low. It's a time tested public health practice. And it does require however trained investigators to identify and communicate with those who may have been exposed to disease. What I do wanna be clear about, is this is not anything approaching law enforcement. When people hear about going after people who may be involved in a situation, in this case, an infectious disease, there's fear when you hear from a government official, "I'm calling you because of your potential exposure "to a bad situation." There may be some fear involved in that. And so, I want to very much emphasize that the reason for our communicating

with individuals with positive cases, and their contacts is all in the name of trying to protect these individuals as well as others who have been around them. So if you do test positive for COVID-19, you will receive a phone call from a contact tracer who works for public health. They will ask you if you need additional help. So we are very much looking for information but we also are available to help individuals if they need to get to medical care, if they don't have access. If they don't have insurance. If they feel they need help with wraparound services like food or pharmacy, or any other thing that will help them safely stay in their home. We provide those additional services to those people. We talk about what the steps are for self isolating at home and how long that's likely to go on. And we ask the person, who they have been in close contact with over the previous 48 days or since symptom onset. In many cases, some of our positives may not have symptoms. So we use that same timeframe. And we are looking to identify people who may be harboring the infection, who have not yet become infected or are able to spread it to others. So once we identify those individuals who are contacts, we are in communication with them. We tell the case that we'll be reaching out to those people completely privately. We never name who the source is, in some cases, it's obvious if it's your spouse, in some cases, it might be your children. But for others who have had close contact and by close contact, I mean a period of a minimum of 15 minutes in direct relationship to the person within the six foot distance. So we use this method in many public health outbreaks. This is not new to our public health team, it is not new to us. We've used it for tuberculosis, we use it for identifying foodborne outbreaks. And sometimes that's the way we can determine what food is at issue in a different type of outbreak. So this is one of our tried and true public health methodologies. So again, I wanna reinforce that contact tracing is not about enforcement, it's not meant to judge anyone or shame anyone for having gotten the disease or for being a contact of someone with the disease. The investigators simply need to know where you've been, who you've seen, who you've been in contact with, so that we can continue to try to prevent the spread. It's very private as I said, there's an absolutely rigid wall around public health investigations. We don't disclose information of who the cases are, or the contacts. Contact tracers may actually read from a script. So if you get a call and it sounds rather formalized, the reason we do that, is to make sure we're not omitting any important questions, we need to get a certain kind of information. And so while it may feel a little bit formal, the contact tracer will communicate that to the person, that, "I'm going to read from a script. "So I'm here to help you, "but it's gonna

sound, rather formal." I also want people to know that there are a number of scams out there, and we need to be aware of that. So the California attorney general has issued a consumer alert related to this. Some of these scams have involved collecting personal information, that is not something we would ever do. So if anyone claims to be a contact tracer, is asking about your immigration status, is asking for your social security number. Asking for any type of payment. You can be sure that you're not hearing from your local public health department, and that you need to report that as a scam to law enforcement. So, once again, just to sum this up on this point that contact tracers are really there to help you with your household needs, during a time of isolation, or quarantine. To help you with clinical consultation or get to a doctor if you need more care, to get information that will help us as a community and to be a general resource. But please comply with the requests, pick up the phone, be as open and complete in your answers as possible and be reassured that all of the information that's obtained is very much private and only for purposes of identifying where the disease may be moving. The third topic I said I want talk about I said is face coverings. So, as you know that the governor has made this a statewide mandate as of last week. I have actually just today, this was a work in progress. But we've finalized and posted on our website today and updated position statement about the benefit of face coverings as you know, much more information has been coming forward over recent weeks, much more medical research. And in fact, wearing a face covering, as I have said previously, and with the information growing it appears to be a very effective way. It's one of the tools in the toolbox for limiting spread. So just what I want to say further about this, however, is we continue as you've heard from Supervisor Compton, to ask for a balanced approach, as we have with everything in this regard. Not every minute of every day is every person more than six feet away from other individuals. Once in a rare while you may forget to wash your hands hopefully not after you've gone to the bathroom. The same is true with mask usage. This is not 100% solution. What we want to see is the majority of people and everyone who can, wearing a face covering in all the settings that are public and especially indoors, and especially when you're in crowded situations, and to always do so as we move about the community. But to also understand that there are some portion of the population that will not be able to wear a mask. This includes young children, but it includes many people who may not have an obvious condition to you, but may have a legitimate reason for not wearing the mask. So what we're aiming to do, as with all of our pandemic protection is utilize all of the mechanisms that are at

hand. Good sanitation, good personal hygiene. Staying home when you're sick, I can never emphasize that one enough. Wearing a face covering when you are in a situation indoors or for a length of time in a space, even if you're not within six feet of someone else. But we are trying to protect the entire population by doing all these things. So I just ask once again for everyone to continue to do their part. This includes the use of face masks. Many of us have been doing it for a long time, but we are hoping to move toward a new social norm. We're gonna be in this pandemic for a long time. And if we want to continue to see the good situation in our county, we are adding this as one of the additional measures of protection under the state's mandate. But I have continuously said for a number of weeks now that it is one of the important measures. And so we are going to be abiding by it and asking our entire population to do so as well. And with that, I will turn it over for questions.

- [Man] Dr. Borenstein, I read on the Supervisor Compton's, social media today that some people are, this is in regards to mask wearing, calling the compliance line, calling other other agencies. If they see somebody walking down the street or in other settings, I mean your message to people in that regard that maybe feeling compelled to call whomever, authorities when they see someone not complying.

- Yeah, so our focus with respect to compliance. Again, this is largely indoor spaces that is the most important place and it's so it's gonna be largely in businesses or office settings. And so if we see a particular business that's absolutely flaunting the directive, then we may take that additional measure and use law enforcement to assist us with compliance. But that's not our primary goal. Our primary goal is to change the conditions under which we live on a regular basis, to not be, getting to the point where any one individual for a short period of time, outdoors, especially wearing a mask is a reason for a citation. We're looking to get all of our businesses, we're looking to get all of our population to comply and I think in general terms, in most settings, and this is increasing with every passing day and week that we're seeing more compliance, I think we're heading in a good direction.

- [Man] You have mentioned this, even before the ordinance, the order last week by the governor. If you're walking your dog on the sidewalk, no one's around. If you're at the park with your family, no one's around, in other settings where you're outside that six foot distance, that is okay. You do not wear need to wear, that just probably needs to be re emphasized to some people that are maybe concerned when they don't see people wearing masks.

- Yeah, let me talk just a bit about how a virus is transmitted, right? You need time and dose. So you need a period of time when you're breathing it in, and you need a certain amount of the virus. So a fleeting, passing of someone on the street, if you happen to be out jogging, and someone else is jogging in the opposite direction, and they're within your six foot space, and neither one of you is wearing masks, that is an exceedingly low if not, impossible means of transmitting it unless the person coughs or sneezing on you. The reason that the indoor masking has come into play here is, one needs to have a significant amount of exposure to the virus, which comes with either being directly coughed or sneezed on, or having the aerosol droplets that come from that and linger in the air and may be breathed in. So with that you need a certain dose, which requires a certain amount of time of exposure. If you're working in a grocery store, for example, all day and you happen to be infected, and you're breathing all day without a mask, you may be putting germs into that environment, which is why people who are spending long periods of time, unfortunately, need to wear a mask for the entirety of that time indoors. If one person out of 100 in a low prevalence community is walking through that same grocery store and spends, 15 minutes gathering their goods. The likelihood of them creating enough virus in that environment for a whole lot of people to get infected is exceedingly low. But if there were 10 or 20 or 30 people in the grocery store who are all infected and not wearing their masks, then the risk goes up tremendously. So I know this is a little bit wonky as I'm describing it. But I want to have people begin to really think about, we're not using face coverings as 100% protection. It's about creating a community environment, especially in indoor spaces where we don't have a lot of virus circulating in that space.

- [Man] One more question. You mentioned Marion, if you can, maybe we might be able to interject here. What, if any communication have you had with Santa Barbara County with maybe if they exceed that capacity with the alternate care site that has been empty?

- Yeah, we're in communication with them near daily. We follow their numbers every day. We know that they are at the maximum capacity within that hospital. We know that they have transferred patients within their system, they have not yet asked us if. We don't need to, and we have not been asked to take any of their patients yet, but we will continue to be remain engaged with them directly and watch their metrics as much as we're watching our own. **CORRECTION: Marian Regional Medical Center is not at capacity. They are prepared and are a large**

medical center with private rooms and the ability to care for our community during this and future surges.

- [Man] For a sec, what, if anything, is the cause of this hundred or so cases? I mean, have you tied into anything specific with the contact tracing or otherwise?

- Yeah, so we've had a couple of small clusters. Again, more than half of our cases are household transmission, or at least known person to person transmission. So as we get more cases, we're gonna get more of their contacts testing positive and that explains, at least half of all the cases that we get are known sources of transmission. In terms of the community transmission, it really is all over our county, we started to see a little bit more in South County and even central County. And so, we've had a couple of, non household settings like a party I think we spoke of last week, that's part of it. We had another small setting of people coming together where we identified people who are not household members. So, as people are starting to come together outside of their family units, we're likely to see more of that. So that's why we continue to ask of people, continue to take all these preventive measures, continue to limit your engagement with people outside your household, stay out of large crowds. Because, nothing worse than spending an hour or two in crowded conditions without a mask, close to each other to amplify these numbers.

- [Man] As a follow up to that, the positivity rate, I'm not sure I'm getting that term right, but has gone up double or so over the past couple of weeks?

- So the positivity rate is, among all the people who are tested, what percent of them are positive. We continue to have a very low rate, we were below 1%, and now we're at like 2%. The state metric for that as a source of concern is set at 8%, so we're still a ways from that. And so in terms of the amount of disease we're seeing amongst those tested, we're still at a good place.

- [Man] Last question from me, I looked at Ventura County, they have far more deaths than we have, I think it's at 35 or so, if you look at it, it's pretty high. Our death rate at the total remains at one is that correct? How concerned are you with the ICU patients or others that are in this category of confirmed cases at this point?

- Yeah, so this is a serious disease. It is a pandemic, we may well see other fatalities. We don't want that to happen. As I said, at the outset, we cannot absolutely eliminate spread of disease. So what we can all do is continue to take all these

preventive measures, and especially take care of those who are more at risk for these worse outcomes. Thank you.

- Thank you all again for coming today and tuning in online and on TV. You can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on our website at readyslow.org. You can also still call our phone Assistance Center or our recorded public health information line for more information. We continue to offer free COVID-19 testing at a number of locations around the county. Currently we are testing Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m To 7:00 p.m in San Luis Obispo and in Grover beach. Tomorrow, there's also testing appointments available in Cambria at the Veterans Memorial building. All the details for these testing sites are again available at the testing locations tab on our website at readyslow.org. Please go there frequently so that you can see any new test sites that we open. Thank you again for tuning in today. You can find these briefings live on our San Luis Obispo County Public Health Facebook page. You can find the most recent one on our county homepage, as well as on Public Access, Channel 21. This briefing will be shown on that channel between at 8:00 a.m 5:00 p.m and midnight each day until our next briefing occurs. Thank you for staying informed. We are all in this together, please be kind, be safe. And we will see you here next Wednesday at 3:15.