

- Good afternoon. Today is Wednesday, October 21st, 2020. My name is Michelle Shoresman and I'd like to welcome you to San Luis Obispo County's weekly COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon, we will hear from three speakers. We will begin with San Luis Obispo County health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein. She will be followed by manager of community health for Dignity Health, Central Coast, Patty Herrera. And we will conclude with program director of the Promotores Collaborative at Center for Family Strengthening, Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia. County administrative officer and emergency services director, Wade Horton, is also here and available to take your questions. Thank you once again to our American Sign Language interpreter, Robin Babb. And now County health officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Good afternoon everyone. So we're coming into fall and into the heart of our fall season and things somewhat stay the same. We have now surpassed 4,000 cases, today we have 4,092. It seems that on Wednesdays, when I come before the public that we have low numbers in the day before 12 is our count since yesterday. But unfortunately we continue to average above the threshold for the tier that we're in. We do still have 95% of the cases to date fully recovered with 5% recovering at home and two individuals in the hospital, non-intensive care. So with respect to the blueprint and the tiers that I alluded to a moment ago, we do continue at this time in the red tier, this has several weeks without any movement within the tiers, which is good news, that we are retaining our status and the amount of business openings that we have, but we're not progressing, which is what we want to do.

And, we are at risk of going back. Our actual case count would have us in the purple tier as exceeding the case metric of seven counts per 100,000 population or roughly 20 per day of new cases in this county. And our unadjusted case rate is at that 7.5 into the purple tier. The only way we've been able to retain our status in red is because of the adjustment factor, which is a product of the high volume of testing that we continue to do in this county. So our adjustment this past week was significant and our adjusted case rate is 5.1. But we very much need to keep an eye on what our actual case count is, should testing fall off. We do not want to revert, and as I said, we very much want to move forward.

So how do we get there? I know I've been saying the same things week after week, after week, but they remain true. Staying distance from others, staying home when you're sick, wearing a face mask routinely, and very much particularly avoiding any kind of gatherings amongst mixed households. As you know, we have been

allowing and now the state does as well up to household household in-gatherings, but we continue to see many large gatherings in our county that are the source of illness and the source of our cases. So I'm gonna give you some numbers associated with that. We don't post the, is routinely on our website, but I do periodically ask my team to try to pull together this data so that we can keep eyes on and keep me honest in terms of what I'm saying, that it is gatherings in many cases that is the source of transmission.

So with that, I can tell you that family and friend gatherings have been associated with over 500 cases since July. I can tell you that over 100 cases are some other type of gathering were involved and other types would be anything from place to a restaurant to daycare, funeral, sporting events. Over 60 of our cases have had an association with religious services or groups getting together. and over 20 have come from protests or rallies. So you can see that as I keep driving home, that it is coming together across families in mixed crowds, particularly large crowds, particularly indoors but not exclusively indoors, and for lengths of time that puts people at risk.

I do also want to add on to information about the blueprint for safer economy. There have been changes made at the state level. The two biggest changes don't actually have a real impact in our county because they pertain to theme parks and professional sports in outdoor stadiums, that those activities now can move forward additionally in the orange and yellow tier, that is for general information for the public but again does not particularly pertain to our county as we don't have those activities. We do have, and it will be important for our personal care service providers to note that the other change that was made yesterday by the state is that all personal care services may now be open in all tiers, regardless of our case count as long as they do so with all of the rules and modifications to business operations. So that applies to skincare, aesthetics, body, art, tattoos, piercing, massage therapy and electrology.

The next thing I want to touch on is related to vaccines for COVID. We are beginning to hear more and more about the forthcoming vaccines and the trials that are taking place. Just yesterday, the N.I.H. director, Dr. Francis Collins gave a report on where things stand with respect to the development. There are now six different vaccines in the United States undergoing clinical trials. This is by far the fastest development process that the world has ever seen. We're hopeful that the folks involved in these trials are seeing good results. A couple had to step back because

of some side effect issues, so there's no guarantee that we're gonna cross the finish line and when we're gonna cross that finish line but I do want to share that there is movement forward and some small light at the end of this tunnel.

So I also very much, he emphasized that that these vaccines at the federal level under an emergency use authorization will only be delivered when they are safe and effective, and that there is no cutting of corners that that can be done as we release vaccines into the public sector in the United States. That said, the Governor also has indicated that at a state level, for an extra measure of security on behalf of our state's residence he has authorized a taskforce comprised of physicians and scientists who will take a look at the products that do receive that E.U.A., Emergency Use Authorization, and make sure that they are ready to actually be administered in our state before they get to our residents in this state. So, as to timing again, Dr. Collins indicated that at the absolute best case scenario would be late November, much more likely is at the end of the calendar year. And at that point, and we've heard this out of the Governor, as well as out of the N.I.H., National Institutes of Health. We're talking about small numbers of vaccines available, such that this will be administered in a very tiered and phased way with hospital health care workers being in the first cohort of individuals who are likely to have vaccine available to them and followed thereafter by additional cadres of healthcare workers, medical first responders, longterm care, essential workers in certain sectors, and then also elderly and those with underlying certain medical conditions. So this will roll out as vaccine comes off the line, but I don't think for the general public we're looking at any time in the immediate future, everyone seems to indicate that that will be some months out even with a production system that is ramping up to deliver this as fast as possible, once a vaccine has been deemed safe for human use.

Lastly, I want to mention or not, lastly, I'm sorry. First I just, as a point of note, in case any of you are sitting in your cars and deciding where to go right now at this moment, we have our two free flu drive through clinics going on. They are taking place until five o'clock today and at the Atascadero Kmart Shopping Center at 3980 El Camino Real. And in Arroyo Grande at the Walmart Shopping Center at 1168 West Branch Street. Anyone above the age of two can get vaccinated today up until five o'clock. And we also have nasal spray available for those age two to 49.

And finally, I did, I mean, getting a number of questions related to the health equity metric. And I want to address first what that metric is. Again, just to be clear, there

is, this is not a new metric, although the details have come out in the last couple of weeks, that the case, that they test, excuse me, the test positivity rate for those geographic areas, as defined as more vulnerable in our county, cannot lag behind the county's test positivity rate as a whole. We continue to meet that metric and we are doing quite a bit of work to address the needs of our more vulnerable communities and census tracts. And with that, we have a couple of speakers today to address more fully, what it is that the County and our partners are doing in terms of ensuring that our more vulnerable communities do not fall behind, in particular today, we're gonna be focusing on the Latinx Community. So with that, I want to hand it over now to Patty Herrera, who is the manager of community health for Dignity Health of the Central Coast and we will start with her, thank you.

- Thank you to the county for inviting me to here today to talk about some of the Dignity Health outreach efforts in coordination with the county during this pandemic. Across America, Latino workers are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 in food processing and agriculture workplaces. SLO County is no different. To help ease the impact, local Dignity Health, Central Coast has joined SLO County Forum worker outreach task force to ensure the continued safety of our community. Together, our taskforce has educated many individuals and distributed more than 1600 COVID-19 prevention kits food distributions, housing sites, work sites, flu shot clinics drive-through events and other community activities.

Through this partnership, Dignity Health, Community Health department for French Hospital Medical Center and Arroyo Grande Community Hospital have been proactively informing the local Spanish-speaking community about safety precautions to protect against the coronavirus. We have collaborated with the task force to share culturally appropriate COVID-19 prevention flyers and COVID-19 prevention kits. We have established a Spanish hotline staffed by Bilingual Community Educators to answer questions from the community about safety, testing and much more. Dignity Health, Central Coast provided COVID-19 prevention education and prevention kits at eight free flu shot clinics with eight local growers in the Five Cities area and San Luis Obispo. We continued to collaborate with the SLO Food Bank, Los Altos Cares Inc, Promotores Collaborative and Paso Robles Housing Authority to provide COVID-19 prevention information and distribute prevention kits and masks to individuals participating in the food distribution.

Beyond the taskforce, Dignity Health, Central Coast has taken extensive measures to keep our local Latino community informed and connected. Since April 2020, Dignity Health, Central Coast has had a large presence in Spanish media to share important information about COVID-19 as well as provide a resource for questions about the Spanish hotline. We have participated in weekly interviews with primary care D.r Melvin Lopez on Telemundo Central Coast news, to share the most updated COVID-19 news and emphasize COVID-19 prevention strategies. We sent a Spanish public service announcements on local radio and Pandora stations throughout the pandemic, highlighting safety measures. Social media announcements were shared on our hospitals pages in both English and Spanish throughout the pandemic. Spanish information has been added to the Dignity Health Central Coast websites' and links to information and the hotline number as a resource. Spanish flyers and signatures have been posted in our facilities and distribute to our community about the safety of our hospitals, primary care offices and urgent care centers, as well as information about how our community can protect themselves against COVID-19.

We have actively engaged with both the San Luis' public taskforce and Santa Barbara County public health in response to COVID-19 and the farmworker community. We continue to stop the COVID-19 bilingual information live Monday through Friday 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Dignity Health is currently activating a mystical language COVID-19 hotline. We are distributing in Mixteco language flyers to appropriate populations along the Central Coast. Dignity Health, Central Coast continues to engage with community partners, local organization and community members to share information about masking, social distancing and hand-washing to slow the spread. Dignity Health, Central Coast has taken extensive measures to ensure the continued safety of our community far beyond the confines of our hospitals, in an effort to reinforce that we all do our part to stay safe together. We can make an impact too on reducing COVID-19 cases in our community, thank you. And now I would like to introduce one of our partners in this effort, Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia of Promotores Collaborative.

- Good afternoon. My name is Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia and I'm the program director at Center for Family Strengthening. And I wanted to share a little bit about the Center for Family Strengthening, which is a SLO County nonprofit organization, dedicated to strengthening families through education and advocacy. The Promotores Collaborative support that mission by seeking to develop a sustainable,

diverse and comprehensive culture that promotes equal access to community resources and services among all the members of the Hispanic community in San Luis Obispo County. The Promotores Collaborative has been pleased to work with our local public health department during this current pandemic to disseminate information to the Latino community in our County, to help keep them safe from COVID-19.

We have been distributing prevention kits created by the health department to members of our community that include brochures and information on COVID-19 prevention, testing and symptoms to look for that may indicate one has the virus. The material discuss prevention measures like physical distancing, wearing masks, disinfecting, how to limit the spread of COVID-19 in multifamily and multigenerational homes. And all their important topics. The kits also include face coverings. In addition to working with the health department to distribute these kits to people most in need, we have also been able to help spread COVID-19 information to people that speaks Mixteco. We are grateful that we have a promotora who speaks Mixteco, who helped create an educational video in Mixteco that explains how to prevent COVID-19 from spreading and how to take care of ourselves. We have noticed in North County, the Mixteco community has been growing so we plan to expand our outreach in that area and disseminate more information in Mixteco. This will include outreach to field workers, food bank distribution and other events. We want to ensure that all the families who speaks Mixteco and or Spanish get the information that they need.

Our ultimate goal is for members of the Latino community to feel comfortable and not intimidated. And I just want to share that we do have promotores all over the county and they will continue providing resources, information, and support to the Latino community, especially in these difficult times. And now we will turn it over for questions, thank you.

- [Michelle] Questions?

- [Dave] Dr. Borenstein?

- Yes.

- [Dave] In relation to the county staying in the red tier, when you look at the other around California, and I know there it's hard to compare and contrast San Luis Obispo with the other 50 plus, but how's the county doing in relation to other

counties, particularly the surrounding counties with case numbers staying in the tier that, you know? .

- I'm somewhat disappointed that we've kind of lost our edge, if you will, for a very long time. I kept pointing out that we're unique amongst all the surrounding counties in terms of our case count and the impacts of this disease and I feel that I can no longer say that. We're sort of in the middle of the pack, if you will, there are certainly counties to our South and other counties to our North: Monterey, Los Angeles I know are still in purple and others that are struggling, Riverside with moving backwards. Santa Barbara County, for example, has met metrics this week for being in orange and are hopeful that they will be able to move forward. So I know that we can do this as a community and I continue to drive home this message that we all have to do it. COVID remains a serious disease as we're getting into winter as we're seeing what's happening in other places around the country and the world, I would like this pandemic to go away, but we're not quite there yet. And so we know what it takes to actually tamp down our number of cases of transmission and I think we can do that.

- [Dave] So are you just seeing people not adhering to some of those safety measures with you and all the health medical experts have been saying for months and months and just not kind of seeing that as consistently as you would like in the county?

- Yeah, I think I gave you some numbers about the number of cases that are associated with various types of larger get togethers across family units. And you know that the key to this is if you are going to get together with those, I understand people are very impatient, people need social connection, do it in ways where you're outside for shorter periods of time with mask wearing, if you're gonna be sharing food, take the mask off only during the eating and drinking part, and, you know, keep the numbers small.

- [Male Voice] Dr. Borenstein, due to the hospitalizations, I noticed the numbers were pretty low, but the case is obviously very high over the past few weeks and before that even why did that hospitalization numbers settle low in your opinion?

- Yeah, we've asked this question all throughout that our severity of disease in this county is not consistent with what is being seen again, the state and across the nation in the world. We have some thoughts about that. We tend to be a healthier county to begin with. The cases that we are seeing tend to be in the younger age

groups. So we think that vulnerable populations are largely adhering to the protective measures. And quite frankly the, you know, the level of hospitalization and deaths are not what they were at the beginning of this pandemic because healthcare has improved. There's more knowledge among the healthcare community about how best to treat this disease.

- [Male Voice] And when you were speaking to the Latinx community and this could be a question for anyone, but what's your sense of the impact, is it growing, is it can evolving up or down in terms of spreading?

- For the most part, we continue to see disproportionate impact on the Latino communities. And it's not getting worse, it's not particularly getting better. It is better here than it is in many other places and I attribute that to some of the good work that I heard you heard from our partners, and we're gonna continue to drive on those areas of disease control.

- [Female Voice] Dr. Borenstein, can you talk about the number of cases in San Luis Obispo, specifically the city we've been looking at the numbers and we've seen an increase, I mean, it's right under the number of cases in Paso, which is the peak numbers right now. Can you talk about like, what specifically is going on in San Luis Obispo that might be attributing to these numbers, but has anything to do with Cal Poly affiliated events or any of the businesses that are reopening?

- So with all the communities where we're seeing grow, you know, you're absolutely correct that Paso has continued to see the highest numbers and San Luis Obispo has ratcheted up in recent months with part of that is Cal Poly but not all of it. Again, young people and people, in different communities that are different contributors. We don't have a really good handle, I don't have data to give you per se, community by community, it's the mix of people mixing across households, not taking the disease seriously, not doing, you know, preventative measures, be they young or be they older and not believing that this disease could impact them or their family members in SLO city, it's the same combination of a variety of things.

- [Male Voice] Are you worried about the holiday season in terms of governance?

- Yeah, so we have put out messaging for Halloween, we will do so shortly for thanksgiving, Christmas is just behind that the New Year, you know, the message remains the same and especially when the urge is very predominant in our society

to come together, especially around celebrations and holiday times and birthdays and quinceaneras and all kinds of ways that we are used to as a society to come together across families. I heard Dr. Fauci just the other day say, you know, normally my 27 extended relatives get, oh no, it was 20 I'm sorry. The number I'm remembering is it's 27 years of my family across the country coming together for thanksgiving and this year we won't be doing that. So I would urge our public to consider that as a way that we can all contribute to not seeing an upsurge, especially during the winter months.

- [Male Voice] I just have one real quick. When you get on the vaccines, you know, you've got, seems like an ambitious schedule, like later this year to have that, what level of confidence do you have that, that it can be done quickly even to get to that first year of people will receive it?

- I don't have a crystal ball on the, you know, end date of the phase three clinical trials for the vaccines. I'm listening to the experts who are involved in those trials and reporting up through the federal system. I believe when Dr. Collins indicates, you know, it's unrealistic, but there's more possibility, it would be late November, more realistically, the end of the calendar year. So I don't really project that we will see much in the way of vaccination in this state or in this county until 2021.

- Thank you, once again for tuning in today. You can still get all our county's COVID-19 information on readyslo.org, or by calling our phone assistance center or our recorded public health information line. We continue to offer free, safe and easy COVID-19 testing at a number of locations around the county. Appointments are available five days a week in San Luis Obispo and Arroyo Grande and three days a week in each of Paso Robles and Morro Bay. Same and next day appointments are often available and Saturday appointments are available at the Paso Robles site. All information and appointment links are located on readyslo.org. As Dr. Borenstein noted earlier now is the time to get your flu shot. You still have time to head on over to one of the free drive-through flu shot clinics at Walmart in Arroyo Grande, or Kmart in Atascadero. And I have it from a source that there is no weight at the Arroyo Grande site right now. Vaccines for people two and up are available until 5:00 PM. If you can't make it to one of these sites, please reach out to your primary care provider or a local pharmacy for information on how you can get vaccinated against the flu. Finally, we encourage the public to view these briefings live online at K-E-Y-T.com and K-S-B-Y.com. They're also broadcast live on Cable Channel 13. And shortly after each briefing, we rebroadcast the videos on SLO County Public Health,

Facebook page, and our county's homepage. They also continue to be rebroadcast on Public Access Channel 21 at 8:00 AM, 5:00 PM and midnight each day until the next briefing occurs. Thank you all for tuning in once again and be kind be well and we'll see you here next Wednesday 3:15.