

Michelle Shoresman:

ousisFor being here. My name is Michelle Shoresman, I'm the designated media contact for the County of San Luis Obispo, COVID-19 public information response team. We have our County public health officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein, who will speak first. I'm sorry. We have Dr. Penny Borenstein, who will be speaking today along with Wade Horton, our County administrative officer and Rita Neal, our County counsel. Wade will speak first and then Rita Neal will speak and then we'll turn it over to Dr. Borenstein.

Michelle Shoresman:

Before I turn it over to Wade, I'd just like to remind everyone at home and all the members of the media here, that with we have the public information access lines on the screen behind us and that all our information is being updated live on ReadySLO.org in pretty much real time. So now I'll turn it over to Wade for him to make some initial comments.

Wade Horton:

Good afternoon, I'm Wade Horton County administrative officer and emergency service director. I certainly appreciate my partners here from the cities and I'd like to acknowledge Lynn [inaudible 00:01:17] from before, always being here and our fire chief Scotty Jobber being here today.

Wade Horton:

The COVID-19 situation continues to evolve. We're taking actions based on the best evidence-based judgment of our public health experts, both locally and at the state level. We're also adjusting our response as the situation does continue to evolve. We now have seven confirmed cases in our County. As our public health officer Dr. Borenstein has already indicated this week, we anticipate additional cases. As such, in consultation with our hospital partners and the seven cities, we will issue a mandatory shelter at home order effective 5:00 PM tomorrow, March 19th. The attempt of this order is to ensure that the maximum number of people self-isolate at home, to the maximum extent feasible, while enabling essential services to continue to slow the spread of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible.

Wade Horton:

We are still refining the details of the order but we wanted the public to have advanced notification prior to that word going into effect. The actions we are taking will allow us to get back to normal as soon as possible. COVID-19 is spreading in our County, individuals who contract the disease could have little or no symptoms, which means they may not be aware that they are carrying the virus. We need to limit gatherings to prevent virus transmission and protect the most vulnerable, and to prevent our healthcare system from being overwhelmed. We're working closely with our primary healthcare providers, Tenet and Dignity Health to increase healthcare capacity if needed.

Wade Horton:

Today I authorize the emergency purchase of a hundred additional ventilators for half a million dollars. We are also in the process of identifying supplemental care sites if needed. In regards to the shelter at home order, that will go into effect tomorrow, essential services, businesses and functions will be exempt. I'll now turn it over to our County counsel Rita Neal to articulate these specifics.

Rita Neal:

Good afternoon, and I am Rita Neal, the County counsel for the County of San Luis Obispo. I want to make clear that the order at this point in time is still in draft form. We are trying to be very careful and moderated in what is included in that order. So I'm going to go over a list generally of what the order is going to include and what things and activities that people will be able to engage in. And again, I caution you that this is a work in progress. If you'll bear with me, it's a rather long list and I'll try and get through it as quickly as possible.

Rita Neal:

The order is going to allow people to engage in essential travel, essential activities, essential government activities and essential business. So let me first discuss what the essential activities are that people may leave their homes to engage in. You may leave your homes for essential activity of taking care of your health and safety and that of your household members, your family members and your pets. You may leave your home to obtain necessary goods and supplies, such as pharmacy items, grocery items, sanitary items. It also will include, you may leave your home for outdoor activity, including walking, hiking, and running. You may leave your home to perform work to provide for yourself or essential products or items that you will need to continue your businesses. And you will also be able to leave to care for pets or family members in other households. The order will also identify that you may leave your home to engage in healthcare operations. So you may leave to attend to a doctor's appointments, dentist appointments, veterinary appointments, hospital appointments.

Rita Neal:

Also, allowed under the order will be the ability engage in essential infrastructure activities. This will include public works projects, if there's roads or sewers or water that needs to be repaired, those activities will and can continue. Airport operations can continue, all operations as they ... Excuse me. As they go to water, sewer, gas, electrical, public transportation, solid waste and also telecommunications. First responders will all be able to leave their homes. That includes law enforcement, dispatchers, anybody included in emergency management and court personnel, to the extent that the courts remain open.

Rita Neal:

Essential government functions will remain open and it's important to under this category, to understand that each local jurisdiction will be identifying and defining what their essential government functions are, and we will leave it to each jurisdiction to identify those functions. Essential functions will also include nonprofit organizations and educational entities, to the extent that they provide essential services to the public. The list of essential businesses that will be allowed to continue is also rather lengthy, and that will again include healthcare operations and essential infrastructure, grocery stores, certified farmer's markets, food banks and stores that provide household items, such as cleaning items, sanitary items, personal care products. Food cultivation, including farming, livestock, fishing, and other AG operations will be allowed to continue. Businesses that provide food, shelter, social services, and other necessities, will be allowed to continue operating. Newspapers, television, radio, and other media services will also be continuing their operations. Gas stations, auto supply, auto repair and related facilities.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:08:04]

Rita Neal:

... auto supply, auto repair and related facilities will operate. Banks and related to financial institutions. Hardware stores will be allowed to remain open. Plumbers, electricians, exterminators and any other services that are necessary to maintain safety, sanitation and essential operation of your residences will be allowed to operate. Businesses providing mailing and shipping services such as post offices and post office boxes, will be able to remain open.

Rita Neal:

As will educational institutions. And again, that also depends on what orders those schools have put in place themselves. Laundromats, dry cleaners and laundry services, restaurants and other facilities will be allowed to remain open, but only for delivery and carry out. Businesses that supply products needed for people to work from home will be allowed to continue to operate.

Rita Neal:

Businesses that supply other essential businesses will also be allowed to continue operating. Businesses that ship and deliver groceries or other goods and services to residences will be continued to operate. Airlines, taxis and private transportation providing those services for the necessity of what you will need for your essential activities will continue.

Rita Neal:

Home based care for seniors, adults or children will continue. Residential facilities, shelters for seniors, adults and children will also continue. Professional services such as legal and accounting services will be allowed to continue to operate when they are necessary to comply with the mandated services within the order. Childcare facilities that are providing services that enable employees to work under this order will also be allowed.

Rita Neal:

At this point in time, that's the list we have. Again, as I said, it will continue to be changed and amended. And we should be ready to issue the orders sometime later this afternoon. Thank you. I need to introduce Dr. Penny Borenstein who will give you the health updates.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

[inaudible 00:02:18]. Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Penny Borenstein, the County Health Officer, County of San Luis Obispo. So an update on the number of cases I can provide to you. You heard the number is at seven. That's one more than we had yesterday. People seem to want to know the geography, so that additional one is in South County. So we now have three in North County, three in South County and one on the coast.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

All are home, are under isolation orders from us, and they are all doing well in recovering. Our laboratory capacity continues. I think yesterday we said that there was a hitch in our being able to meet our full capacity. And we have resolved that for the time being. We now have additional supply that will carry us through the next few days. And within that few days we expect to get additional material to continue to operate at the pace of 50 specimens per day.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We believe from both the fact of getting some of the positive results from private laboratories, as well as what we're hearing from our healthcare partners that many providers now are using the private sector for purposes of doing testing. And that's a good thing because their capacity far outstrips ours at the local Public Health Laboratory.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

As you heard Mr. Horton speak about, we are very much engaged in looking at our healthcare system surge capacity, particularly the hospitals. We had that important meeting yesterday. And now we have set aside a small work group to continue to evaluate the needs. And the response systems that will need to be put in place if we come to that.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I guess with that, that is the basic most important information. And we can turn it over for questions.

Speaker 1:

The question's for Wade. The enforcement of the shelter at home, talk about that. I mean, this is a voluntary ... I mean in terms of what you're asking, but I mean, how will it be enforced by the county?

Wade Horton:

So what we're trying to do is we're trying to encourage people to self-police themselves. We want them to comply with this order voluntarily, however it will be a misdemeanor. Again, what's important right now is that we ... you've heard about flattening that curve? That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to make sure that we don't spike the intensity of cases so we can accommodate the sickest of the sick in our hospitals.

Wade Horton:

So by taking these measures, we're helping to prevent transmission of this disease. And it allows our hospitals to treat the sickest of the sick without overwhelming their capabilities. If you'd like additional information as to the specifics of the enforcement, Rita address those. But again, our intent is compliance, voluntary compliance.

Wade Horton:

We're in this together as a community. We can get through this as a community. And that's what we need to take these majors in order to protect, particularly the most vulnerable among us.

Speaker 2:

Let's talk about activities like hiking or maybe surfing. A lot of people like to spend time outdoors that isn't necessarily a large groups. What does this mean? I know that the shelter in place, shelter in home, that's kind of the title of it, but are you able to do things like walking on the beach if you're by yourself or with your intimate partner? Or can you explain exactly how far this goes?

Wade Horton:

Again, the intent is to prevent the transmission of the disease. So if you're out walking your dog or if you're out surfing by yourself, or if you're with another person, maintain that six foot distance. The the

goal to limit transmission. So yes you will be allowed to go out and surf. You can go out and go hiking. But what we don't want is large congregations of people that allow for disease transmission.

Speaker 3:

What about businesses that have production facilities, like [inaudible 00:14:16], are those not supposed to be operating?

Wade Horton:

So as the re Rita outlined a pretty specific list of activities that would be allowed, and those that we are requesting that folks stay at home, it's a ... If a business is in the production of a critical component that is needed for an essential service, those businesses would continue.

Wade Horton:

For instance, we were contacted by a company that helps produce the reagent that we talked about for the testing kits that Dr. Borenstein was referring to yesterday. Of course, we'd want those businesses to continue because they support a critical component of a key essential capability that is an essential service.

Speaker 3:

Any plans for our homeless, trying to help them come up with something to [crosstalk 00:15:16]?

Wade Horton:

Yes. So we're engaged with Cal OES and we're also engaged with FEMA. We're looking, we're trying to create capacity for our homeless to get those folks out from the creek beds. We want to limit transmission in the homeless population. And we do have requests for track for trailers through FEMA. We are tracking those request, but today we have not received those yet.

Wade Horton:

I also want to indicate that ... One of the things that I didn't indicate regarding this order that will be put in place, the order we anticipate for 30 days. However, we will reevaluate after a two week period. If it's determined in consultation with the Appellate Health Officer that we can lift out order, we certainly will do that.

Speaker 4:

Question for Wade or maybe Dr. Borenstein as well. We've heard reports, unfortunately, of people trying to profit off of this. People going-

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:16:04]

Speaker 4:

... before it's unfortunately of people trying to profit off of this, people going door to door, claiming to be with some sort of public health entity and wanting to ask people about providing tests and you heard about those reports. What can you say to people to make sure that they're not falling prey to these people?

Wade Horton:

Well, I think that's pathetic and if we have folks that are doing that and trying to profit off of this crisis that we're in, that's unfortunate, and I would encourage it, if we do see price gouging, I encourage the public to contact our phone assistance center at (805) 543-2444 and report that.

Speaker 5:

Which county officers will say open?

Wade Horton:

So we're moving through that. We are currently working with our department head team to evaluate that. Again, the focus is maintaining social and health services, critical services. So of course the Sheriff's office will remain, and CAL FIRE will remain open, social services, public health. We will see service reductions in certain departments such as our planning department. However, we are also implementing and working with our county team to implement telework policies so we can allow our employees to work from home.

Speaker 5:

So the planning and building department will stay open?

Wade Horton:

It depends. They'll certainly have reduced capacity. We will be allowing telework, but business as usual is going to change. We won't be able to process the amount of throughput that we are now. So will the department of planning building completely close? No. However one of the public counter be closed? Yes it will. While we are adjusting our work process right now to try to maintain services to the public as much as we can, but it's going to look differently.

Speaker 6:

I have some questions for Dr. Borenstein. You mentioned we have capacity to test 50 people every day. Can you describe how we could possibly expand that? The capacity that you're receiving in the future, in the next few days?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We did not anticipate being able to go beyond that [inaudible 00:00:18:17]. It's difficult to describe, but in a public health laboratory where we are taking care of mostly hospital-based patients and using certain kinds of equipment, we don't have the same machinery, the same methodology, the same way agents that they commercial labs do where they have throughput of up to 5,000 specimens a day.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So we've got two machines. We added one more in the process of this. Our limitations are both the machinery, as well as our staffing. We have added staff to all of our capacity, we've brought back retirees. But there just aren't a whole lot of public health microbiologists turnkey ready to bring in the staff, as well as we don't even have the physical capacity, rather machinery, to expand beyond where we are today.

Speaker 6:

Are we not allowed to use those private facilities as [inaudible 00:19:11] facilities to actually use-

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Oh yes. We absolutely are, we are encouraging the outpatient healthcare providers to use those labs and not ours. We want to preserve our limited capacity for those who need as quick a diagnosis as possible because they're in either a hospital bed and undergoing potentially critical care or because we need to know as part of our contact investigation what the full circle of infected people are.

Speaker 6:

Do you know how many tests have been taken across the county and not just through your office but through commercial laboratory tests?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

We don't know that. We're trying to work with the state to try to help us get the phone number of tests for our county that are being done in the private sector. At this point, we only know that which we've done in our lab, which now exceeds 200.

Speaker 6:

Do you know how many people have, at least through the commercial system, also been tested positive for this virus within our state? Can you report those numbers at least?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes. Out of the seven positives we have, two of them have come from the private lab.

Speaker 6:

Okay, so they're reporting those numbers at least-

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes, we're getting positives.

Speaker 6:

So with a finite number of tests available, what's the criteria for someone to have a test ordered for them?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

So today we are allowing hospital based physicians to make their own clinical judgment and send the specimens to us. They are actually doing the testing, they're collecting the specimens, they're putting it in viral transport media, they're sending it to us and then we are running those tests. As far as contact investigations, if individuals either don't have a provider or provider who is willing to collect the specimen, we are having them come to our facility, the public health department and collect the specimen and then also hand it over to our lab.

Speaker 6:

So they'll need a doctor's referral to come in and get that?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yes.

Speaker 6:

How much do you project the virus to grow within San Francisco County? And can you say for sure, be confident in that number because you don't actually know how many people will test positive here? Can you describe the numbers. Could you an idea of like what it looks like?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

You're asking the \$64 million question that has all number of different methodologies and models out there, and we are looking at both best case scenario and worst case scenario, and the worst case scenario is what has led us to take this extra step of buying additional intensive care equipment, in the form of ventilators, and to be planning for worst case scenario, in terms of hospital beds and in intensive care.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I am of the opinion that we won't reach the worst of what you may be hearing or seeing in some of these models that are out there. In a typical epidemic curve and one that comports with this kind of illness, we tend to see a doubling of cases week over the course of the epidemic. Part of the problem is we don't know how long the curve will last. So we've got seven cases today, but potentially 14 next week or actually three to five days, maybe we see a doubling, rather than week over week. We've run all these different numbers and it leaves us with a pretty wide range and so we're preparing for the worst and hoping for the best.

Speaker 4:

We heard at the top, the way you describe the respirators that were on order for half a million dollars. Can you talk about that time frame and when those might possibly arrive in the county? Also do we have the medical staff to people that operate these things? I know it requires multiple medical people.

Wade Horton:

So penny can address that question. As far as our ventilator orders. We literally placed that order two hours ago. So I know it's on order. I don't have the status of when they're going to arrive, but I do know that it's very difficult to find ventilators right now. There is a very significant demand for them, not only in this state, but throughout the country. We were fortunate to find the ones that we did. I'll let Penny address the question.

Speaker 4:

Can you just talk about capacity for our system, and what if that looks like expanding it if we do exceed that 60 bed ICU capacity that we have?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Right, so 60 bed ICU, roughly 450 what we call called med surge beds. So that's decreasing from the total of labor and delivery beds, which will still need to be available. That is our existing capacity. Material is available to set up on-site mock hospital, mock probably isn't the best word, but alternative

sites for hospital-based care. You're absolutely right in asking the question, but who's going to care for the people if we have expansion of our ...

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [00:24:04]

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

... the question about who's going to care for the people if we have expansion of our hospital-based services. We do have some surge capacity with respect to licensed personnel. We have a medical reserve corps where we've got a list of mostly retirees. Some are double dipping. They have day jobs but are also available to us for extended hours.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

At some point, if we do see the worst-case scenario, there is the possibility that we will hit that point where either the staffing or the medical equipment might be our limiting factor. But, we're doing everything within our power to maximize what is available to us.

Speaker 6:

Do you have any numbers that you could cite for me? The surge capacity, how many you'd be able to expand beds wise, and then maybe staffing? Any kind of numbers that you could give us?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah, I don't have that today on the top of my head.

Speaker 6:

Okay.

Speaker 3:

What's the age or the age range of the latest case? Young or old?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

The latest case is, I believe, an individual in their forties, also with medical conditions. Also, like the others, at home and doing well.

Speaker 3:

Do doctors have the necessary swabs and equipment to take the tests? Is there an issue with that?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

There is an evolving issue, but at present we haven't hit that end of the road with that. Hopefully, as we're hearing out of the federal task force, that along with reagents or with test kits, or more of the specimen ... The swabs and the media, that all of that is hopefully going to keep up with the demand.

Speaker 7:

Earlier it was said that it's permitted for people to go to the grocery stores. What if those stores become increasingly crowded, especially given this announcement? Is the recommendation just to stay six feet away from people, or is there anything else that people can do in that situation?

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

Yeah. I may have also answered this, but the recommendation in association with this order is, in situations that involve essential services, to continue that social distancing of six-foot separation.

Dr. Penny Borenstein:

I would add ... I just want to get back to [Ethan's 00:26:21] question about, what if you're with your intimate partner on the beach? We consider social distancing to not include family units, because they are already going to be living in circumstances where social distancing in the home is not possible. Therefore social distancing on a beach or at a grocery store is also not required of household units.

Speaker 7:

Thank you.

Wade Horton:

I can address your question. That's actually a great example of community coming together. I've heard that there are certain retail outlets that are opening early just to serve our seniors right now. I think you're going to see more and more of that as our community comes together to address this issue.

Wade Horton:

We are in contact with the grocers. We are working through some issues with their supply chains. It varies. We're hearing that some outlets aren't having any problems with their supply chain, and then there are other outlets that are having difficult distribution issues. We're committed to working with them to see what we can do as county government to help them, to make sure we're able to provide the necessities for our community.

Speaker 7:

Thank you.

Speaker 3:

As far as Cal Poly students go, some haven't left for their hometowns yet. What do you recommend from them?

Wade Horton:

I understand that President Armstrong's going to be addressing that situation later this afternoon.

Speaker 3:

One other thing ... Is there a plan for eviction bans at the county level?

Wade Horton:

Yes, there is. My intent was to get that out yesterday. We were not able to get that out yesterday, but that will be out by the end of the day today.

Speaker 3:

Any kind of extension on any tax deadlines, or anything like that?

Wade Horton:

I'm talking to our controller treasurer tax collector about options, and how we can provide some relief to our constituents right now.

Speaker 8:

No more questions?

Wade Horton:

I would, in closing ... Again, I would like to thank the seven city managers that are standing behind me. This has been difficult for the county. It's also been difficult for the city. We have a very strong partnership with the county, working with the seven cities, and communication and collaboration is excellent. We will get through this together, working as a community, working as the seven cities, as a county together with our constituents, forward. Thank you.

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you all for being here today. We've brought up something that ... I neglected to recognize the city and county leaders that are here and that have been working with us throughout this incident, and will continue to work with us. Some, but of course not all of them, are represented here today behind us.

Michelle Shoresman:

We have Scott Collins from Morro Bay, Jim Lewis from Pismo Beach, Rachele Rickard from Atascadero, [Scott Each-Albert 00:00:29:31] from County Fire, Jim Bergman from Arroyo Grande. Matt [Benson 00:00:29:37], to slaughter his name here, from Grover Beach, Derek Johnson from the city of San Louis Obispo, and Lynn Compton from District 4 of the County Board of Supervisors. We appreciate all of their partnership.

Michelle Shoresman:

Again, before I close, I just want to call attention ... I'm going to read the numbers out that are on the board behind us just in case people are unable to read them on their screens. We have the phone assistance center that's open 8:00 to 5:00, seven days a week currently. That number is (805)543-2444. The public health recorded information line, that's (805)788-2903. Then, of course, ReadySLO.org. That's updated real time with all of our guidances and releases.

Michelle Shoresman:

Thank you again.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [00:30:28]