

- Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Shoresman and today's Wednesday, March 17th, 2021. Thank you for watching today's San Luis Obispo County COVID-19 media briefing. This afternoon, we will see here from San Luis Obispo County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein, County administrative officer and emergency services director Mr. Wade Horton is also here and available to take your questions. Thank you to our American sign language interpreter Shelley Lawrence. And now I'd like to introduce County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

- Thank you and good afternoon. So once again, I wanna mention that we are at the anniversary of the beginning of this COVID-19 pandemic in the County of San Luis Obispo. Obviously it started earlier in some other places but we experienced our very first case on March 14th. We had our initial stay at home order on March 18th the tasks that we did not take lightly with our declaration of emergency and proclamation of public health emergency. And then the state of course followed the day after with the stay at home order, which lasted for some time. We begun to see cases from our number one on March 14th all the way through the current of over 20,000 cases. We have unfortunately lost 253 souls to this awful disease. But fortunately, we are seeing the bright light at the end of this tunnel. We have not experienced a pandemic of this sort for more than a century. And I like you certainly hope that we will get to the end of this and we will live out our lives without this type of event again.

We have come very far but we still have a ways to go. In coming far, I want to point out that it is fairly remarkable that we have a vaccine within less than a year. In fact, three vaccines. And that we in this County have administered collectively over 100,000 doses of this vaccine within the period of time that those vaccines have become available. Public health alone has administered nearly 70,000 of those doses. And about 10% of our population are fully vaccinated at this time and many more happening with each passing week. Our hospitalizations are down into the single digits and we've had no deaths for a couple of days. So I do want to have people focus on that bright light. I do also want to ask people to stay the course for a little while longer. We are beginning to see other areas of the country that are beginning to have an uptick. We ourselves had a very small uptick this week.

I'll talk about those statistics, but we need to stay the course for a little while longer. So I'm grateful to our community for all that we have achieved and ask you to please remain focused on getting us to the other side. So our exact statistics today we stand at 20,136 cases, 262 active infections. So if you recall, that is still a number

that puts us about where we were in November, not the very low metric that we want to achieve. So we've made progress but we still have a ways to go.

With that, we remain in the red tier for our third week. So looking at the blueprint metrics what we need to achieve to move even further into reopening our schools are moving forward, our businesses are opening but there are many sectors that are still impacted. And in order to make progress in those areas, we have to push deeper into the orange and into the yellow tier so we can really retain normalcy. So how do we get there? Is we drive down our case rates. In order to move to the orange tier we have to be below 5% of, we have to be below four cases. I'm sorry, four cases per hundred thousand population. And that puts us at about 10 cases a day is the maximum on average over the course of a week for us to move into the next tier.

We also need to have our test positivity rate overall and our lowest quartile test positivity rates below 5% a little bit of an adjustment factor allowed for the health quartile. And we are there, we are well there in terms of the test positivity rate but we are hovering right on that line between red and orange in our case rates so we need to do better. So the other way we can move forward is if our test positivity rates improve even further and get below 2%, and we retain that very low test positivity rate in the yellow tier for two weeks that would also allow us the opportunity to move to the next less restrictive tier down into orange. We need in order to do that, to have people still testing we have seen the amount of testing in our County dropped considerably, and in order to obtain both the adjustment factor for our case rate and also to know that we are capturing all the cases and be able to react appropriately, we need for people who are symptomatic and people who continue to be exposed to this disease have a known exposure that you go test it, go get tested. It is free, it is available county-wide it is fast and easy. So we do ask that people continue to use our testing resources. The turnaround time is less than two days. And in most cases, within 24 hours we're seeing testing results.

So back to the topic of vaccination, as I mentioned this is our gold star, this is our North star. We have vaccinated in the last week, almost 12,000 people, 11,600. This was a new high for us. We expect to do about the same this week. And we look even better for next week. Additionally, we have new providers that are coming online. More and more pharmacies are starting to get doses. We've allocated some small numbers of doses to small medical practices. Another important provider that is now vaccinating at their clinics as well as through some mobile opportunities

is Community Health Centers of the Central Coast. They are a very important partner in this as they serve a large proportion of our residents and particularly those most impacted by the disease. Lower income folks, individuals who have Medi-Cal and people of diverse backgrounds who have had worse impacts from COVID disease. So we're very happy to have them onboard as a partner in those vaccination efforts.

Again, I mentioned that in the County across all these providers, we have done more than a hundred thousand doses administered. That includes today's numbers. If you want an exact number to match the state dashboard as of yesterday, that number is 99,861. Some have accused us of having a slow rollout. And I had the opportunity today to look at our per capita vaccination rates. And we are doing quite well compared to most of the counties around us. The Bay areas had quite a bit of success. They have a number of health systems like Kaiser and Sutter and Adventist and others that we believe has brought them extra doses. There's a handful of counties who are very small, and with minimum dose shipments they have been able to vaccinate a larger proportion of their population. But putting those two entities aside we're in the top three in the state outside of the Bay area and outside of these very small counties in terms of our per capita vaccination rate. I'm very proud of our team for achieving that. And I want to address it because I don't want people to mistake how we have very definitively moved through tiers in a more conservative way to allow the higher risk people to get vaccinated first, does not mean that we have vaccinated fewer people.

With that I am happy to announce today that we have now achieved the same place in the eligibility categories that many other counties preceded us with. As I mentioned, we did it in a very considered way but we now have been able because the demand has come down from the older individuals to be able to fully open certain workforce sectors for vaccination. So in addition to our persons over the age of 65, healthcare workers that have been eligible for some time, we are now fully engaged in vaccinating everyone in the education and childcare sector, the emergency services sector, food and agriculture, public transit workers are now eligible as our janitors, or custodial staff, informal unpaid caregivers. We are now allowing them to self attest to their meeting that categorization. And we've also met the governor stated date of March 15th to open for those individuals who have higher risk conditions.

So this is a list of certain medical conditions as well as disabling conditions. So I'm just to give you an idea of those medical conditions, cancer, undergoing treatment or people in a debilitated state from cancer people with end stage kidney disease people with pulmonary disease who are oxygen dependent those who have very high body mass index which means they are in a morbidly obese category sickle cell anemia, diabetes without control. So certain laboratory testing that says that your diabetes is not currently under very good control and there are several others, but I wanted to list those so people could get an idea of what we're talking about in terms of the medical conditions. The full list is available at [RecoverSLO.org](https://RecoverSLO.org). If you need to check, if you qualify. The disability categories are pretty broad and it can be physical disability developmental disability, behavioral disability. So folks with serious mental illness also qualify. And for those categories, again, it's a self attestation.

Additionally, the final category that you can see is those living in certain congregate settings. So these are in correctional facilities or homeless shelters, as well as persons experiencing homelessness who are not presently living in a shelter but are at risk of needing shelter. So those individuals are also now eligible. So with that, that opens at least 40,000 new eligibles. You can go online to the [recoverSLO.org/vaccine](https://recoverSLO.org/vaccine) to register to be selected for an appointment next week. For those that have access challenges with the computer system you can still call our phone assistance center. That phone number again is 543-2444. And I want to remind folks that with the registration system, you will hear from us at least once a week to tell you if you have been selected for an appointment based on your pre stated preferences of location and date. Or if you've not been selected, we will notify you of that as well that you will remain in the registry and have the opportunity for a vaccination in the following week.

We also have seen, however a large number of no shows as I've mentioned that we have more opportunities now available to individuals in the community, especially through pharmacies. We very much request that people who have gotten a vaccine elsewhere or if you simply can not make your assigned appointment to please let us know that you need to cancel so that we can open that slot for someone else. You can do that by responding to the text or the email, or if need be again call that phone assistance center to let us know of your need to cancel. We wanna maximize our utilization of doses. And when we see the kinds of no-show rates that we're having over 10% on one day this week, we had even a 20% deficit. Those are doses

that are sitting in the refrigerator when they could have gone into other people's arms. So we are requesting that people, fine, go and get your dose as soon as you can, wherever you can. But please let us know to take you out of our system.

I've also been hearing from a number of people who are age 50, 55, 60. are we gonna just be lumped in with the rest of the population after we get through this? And my answer is no, that is not our intention. We will proceed on an age basis because there is still higher risk. If you're 15 than if you're 20, if you're 60 versus 40. So we do intend to proceed with age based opening when we get to the next when we get more doses that we can deliver to people outside of the currently eligible sectors, we don't yet know specifically what age we're going to set that at but please stay tuned. We believe it will be a matter of weeks a short number of weeks and we will get to you and we're making great progress so please hang in there.

Shifting two new state guidance. I want to mention two new things that have come out just very recently yesterday, clarification was provided to us from California Department of Public Health on the youth sports. And particularly, I want to note in the face of our having issued a news release on this late last week that things are unfortunately changing slightly again. So in the absence of clarification on parent observers for the purposes of supervision, we issued a news release in which we were allowing 20% capacity consistent with what is forthcoming in live performances. With the new state guidance, we now have clarity that the intention and the expectation of our youth sports spectators are that only household observers may be present and only in outdoor settings the outdoor settings that is consistent with what we had, but rather than a facility capacity limit, it is limited to one household member who is of an older age than the athlete themselves to be a spectator. Additionally, at this time, the state has asked that there be no scouts and no college recruitments at the present period. We hope to be able to move forward more quickly again, that will happen as our case rate drops.

So indoor spectators will be allowed when we get to the orange tier 25% capacity endures when we get to yellow, that will double to 50%. I've gotten quite a bit of feedback from parents who are very understandably interested in being party to their student athletes participation in sports both because of them wanting to cheer on and support their students and also in the realm of supervision and making sure that everything is being done safely. So fortunately we do have this allowance for individuals but only in the outdoor sector. I've heard from a number of folks how is this different than allowing restaurant opening or allowing movie

theater opening? Why can we not observe our student athletes in the indoor space? And so particular to indoors I just wanted to point out that that is an area especially when there is robust physical exertion going on among the athletes that even in a large space there have been quite a few outbreaks in indoor athletics facilities. It's the same reason that fitness centers and gyms have a lower capacity allowance. We do see more transmission in indoor spaces and especially when you've got very active respirations going on. So with that I my heart goes out to these families. I know that people have been waiting for a long time to engage in participating with their student athletes. Fortunately, we're back in school, and hopefully very soon we will get to the place where parents can also watch the indoor sports games be it volleyball or basketball. So please hold tight. With that and let's collectively continue to drive down the case rate as I've mentioned.

The other student, I mean the other state guidance that I wanted to mention now again are breweries, wineries and distilleries may be open for outdoor service for those that don't fall under the restaurant category, they don't serve food. They can have patrons in the outdoor environment through reservation process with limited timeframe of 90 minutes, still masks are required when you're not actively eating or drinking and increased sanitation is required of the facilities. Bars however do remain closed in the purple and the red tier. Again, all of this guidance can be found on ReadySLO.org.

And I just wanna mention one final thing. Unfortunately, we are beginning to see another period of time of scams. This one now is related to vaccinations and I just want folks to be very wary of being either texted or emailed or phone calls related to asking you for any type of payment. That is not something that would happen from ourselves or any of the vaccination providers seeking payment either just to get a vaccine or to get a higher place in line for the vaccine. These are some of the things that we're seeing. No one should be expected to pay any money at this time for their vaccinations in the public sector. The pharmacies may submit for your insurance for a small administration fee, but there is no no manner of payment over the phone that anyone should expect. If anyone wants to get more information on these scams I direct you at this time to Google OIG which stands for the office of the inspector general, OIG COVID 19 scams and you will find information about this. And also we have posted now all the places that you can go to at the local state and federal level to get information about vaccines, these are all are reputable sources. And with that, I will open it up for questions.

- [Man] Dr. Borenstein the youth sports guidelines just to clarify one spectator per family, is that correct? One spectator is that a County guide or is that state?

- That's the state's guidelines that came out yesterday in the form of frequently asked questions related to their guidance.

- [Man] No matter how big the stadium is, could hold 10,000 people and.

- That is correct.

- [Man] And as of right now, no family members at all for an indoor sport.

- That's correct

- [Man] So they must, a parent must drive their child to a sporting event and then sit out in the parking lot I guess.

- Those are the current guidelines from the state.

- [Man] And now there's like you said other similar outdoor settings, beaches, parks, facilities like that are okay.

- The reason there is no perfect, there is no perfect here in any of these pandemic control measures. When it comes to athletics, there have been many large outbreaks particularly in the indoor setting.

- [Man] I ask you 'cause I've been asked to ask you about that 'cause you said you've heard from a number of upset parents and and rightfully so also you mentioned the correctional folks in correctional facilities are eligible for vaccines. Can you explain, is that CMC County jail? I mean are those inmates that are now currently being vaccinated?

- Yes, so any inmate setting be it federal state or local now can have their inmates vaccinated, if as long as they're of the age of 16 and above that would include our juvenile hall.

- [Man] Is there a certain allotment you can say that has been directed towards facilities here in I should say also the Atascadero as well.

- Yeah, so the so the state facilities have gotten their own allotment outside of the County system. They have begun that process of vaccinating higher risk inmates, and now available to anyone in those settings. We are beginning we know in our County jail we have a census of about 400. We don't know how many of them will

take the vaccine at this time but we have decided to allocate as many as are necessary to our local County jail as well as our juvenile hall. Again, there may be limited uptake. We have a low census there now, but yes.

- You kind of touched on this earlier but can you expand a little bit for those who are eligible to get the vaccine right now What is the best way for them to do that? Is it going specifically and only through the County lottery system? Is it calling individual pharmacies? What would you say?

- Yeah, so unfortunately there isn't one door at the present time. The County does administer about three quarters of all the vaccines that are coming into the County that includes federal allocation. It includes state allocation to multi County entities. We on our website at [RecoverSLO.org/vaccines](https://RecoverSLO.org/vaccines), we list all of the possibilities. So people can get into our registry and continue to attempt to get an earlier dose from a community pharmacy, if they do so we just ask that they pull themselves out of our registry to free up that slot.

- Another question, there are some websites that kind of show you where your place-making in the vaccine line of [vaccine finder.org](https://vaccinefinder.org). and are you familiar with this and are those lines?

- So vaccine finder, to the best of my understanding, let's you know, where which facilities are offering vaccines. I don't know of them, ranking people per se and you know where you are in the queue and I'm not familiar with the other one. Thank you.

- Thank you all for being here today. Just a few reminders, [ReadySLO.org](https://ReadySLO.org) remains your main online source for information about the county's response to COVID-19. And [RecoverSLO.org/vaccine](https://RecoverSLO.org/vaccine) is the best place to go for information about vaccine and vaccine appointments. Our phone assistance center remains open seven days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. And our recorded public health information line remains available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you are currently eligible for vaccine, please go to our vaccine registry page at [RecoverSLO.org/vaccine](https://RecoverSLO.org/vaccine) and sign up for the opportunity to be vaccinated as early as next week. You only need to register once and you will receive updates after that. If you do not have access to a computer or the internet the phone assistance and our staff can help you sign at 543-2444. Testing also remains available at several locations around the County. If you think you may have been exposed or feel any symptoms please go to [EmergencySLO.org/testing](https://EmergencySLO.org/testing), for location and links to make appointments. These



sites are also now accommodating walk-up appointments and test results as Dr Bernstein said are frequently available in less than 48 hours. You can watch these briefings live on our county's YouTube channel. There are also rebroadcast on the SLO County public health Facebook page and on public access Channel 21 at midnight at midnight, 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM until the next briefing occurs. Thanks you once again for staying informed be well, and we will see you here next Wednesday, March 24th at 3:15 PM.