

**Speakers**

## Panelists:

- Mike Powers, Ventura County CEO
- Rigoberto Vargas, Ventura County Public Health Director
- Supervisor Gregg Hart, Santa Barbara County, Chair of the Board
- Dr. Van Do-Reynoso, Santa Barbara Public Health Director
- Mark Hartwig, Fire Chief, Santa Barbara County
- Sheriff Bill Brown, Santa Barbara County

## Moderators:

- Assemblymember Monique Limón, [Website](#)
- Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson, [Website](#)
- Congressman Salud Carbajal, [Website](#)

**Acronyms/Abbreviations:**

BOS = Board of Supervisors

CalOES = California Office of Emergency Services

EIDL = Economic Injury Disaster Loan program

IMT = Incident Management Team

PDH = Public Health Department

PPE = Personal protective equipment

PPP = Paycheck Protection Program

SBC = Santa Barbara County

VC = Ventura County

**Introduction**

Assemblymember Limón: Thanks for joining us tonight, I hope you're having a good evening. Our focus is to give our communities a chance to hear from our County leaders. We've gotten several leaders to join us on this call to discuss what the counties are doing, what our next steps, etc. This is a good opportunity to hear from them. While these are different, distinct counties, many of the principles and rationale are similar, and we are hearing from both sides. We will also cover the 6-point plan for transitioning our state forward in this crisis. Governor announced plans to allow healthcare systems to perform elective procedures and surgeries, further supporting our collective health and well-being. In SBC many of us are concerned about Sansum Clinic. Please feel free to email any of our respective offices who are happy to follow up with you and your questions.

Senator Jackson: We are happy to share what our local leaders are thinking for the next steps to address our problem. I understand how frustrating and difficult this can be as we move through this pandemic together. This is a problem that has affected the entire world. While there is no end date to the Stay At Home orders, and these orders are likely to change, every decision that is made at every level and action taken is being done with utmost consideration of ensuring your



ASSEMBLYMEMBER

**Monique Limón**

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well-being. We know that we have to balance many needs, we know the economy is in a world of hurt, we know that there are 42,000+ people who have died from COVID-19 in the United States. We have a history of pandemics, such as the 1918 flu that killed over 50 million people. There are lessons learned that show that social distancing is an important and key measure to prevent more deaths; we cannot celebrate too early. What we have been doing has been effective. We have to do our part to flatten the curve, slow our death rate, and we do need to stay on track. Governor Newsom introduced 6 indicators that our public health officials have been and will be following in order to maneuver how we will open and return to normal. This is based upon the science. We have a new normal, and we have steps to modify our stay at home orders while protecting our health and our loved ones. We are going to learn more ways to protect each other. Our great set of speakers will shed more information with us. Website: <http://www.sd19.senate.ca.gov> and click on the coronavirus link.

Congressman Carbajal: Thank you all. I am joining you from my Washington DC office, tomorrow I am voting on an interim relief package of \$484B that will focus on replenishing our SBA loan program, and boost our nation's ability to test and trace for COVID-19. This is HR 266: the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and the Healthcare Enhancement Act. Briefly, it provides \$310B for the PPP, \$50B for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, for \$75B for healthcare funding including PPE and emergency hospital funding, \$25B for testing and contact tracing. With that, I'm looking forward to tonight and hearing from our county officials about the latest updates on the COVID-19 response.

## **County Updates**

### **• Mike Powers, Ventura County CEO**

In VC, we are like in SB County, we are flattening the curve. Largely in part of setting the public health order early. We have a very stringent order, and we are seeing great compliance from our community members. Incidence rate is up by 5.6%. Our doubling rate has increased from 15 days to 21 days, which is even better. We have good hospital capacity. As there is a health impact, we acknowledge the economic impacts seen in trying to help stop the virus—such as job losses and business closures—that compel us to find the right balance. But we focus on the welfare and wellbeing of every single member of our community. We extended the Order by one month. We eased some areas of the Order, including outside activities such as golf, transportation-related businesses, some small businesses that are under 10 employees and are not public facing like retail businesses. One of the other things we want to clarify, this order is stricter than the Governor's order. While we did do some easing, we want to encourage folks that the compliance sustains. We have great partnership with our police and sheriff and code enforcement. We acknowledge the need to go out, exercise, and appreciate your compliance and the collaboration we have with our partners. We appreciate the Governor's office in working with us and his 6 point plan on moving the State forward. We are focusing on expanding our testing, we are doing more compounding swabs, but good to hear that the Governor is getting more tests this week and next from the federal government. Also expanding our tracing system.



At risk vulnerable populations has been of great focus, this county has been identified as one of six counties leading the charge in terms of housing our medically fragile, 65+, and homeless populations. We have been focused on long-term care residents and collaborating with our hospitals on this population. The surge capacity in our hospitals has been great. The last two steps are therapeutics: we started a plasma-donor registry, and lastly the regular monitoring and gathering the most recent data: where people are in hospitals, who is self-isolating at home, etc. We need to continue compliance and sustain this moving forward.

- **Rigoberto Vargas, Ventura County Public Health Director**

Mike did a great job in summarizing our larger efforts. We are increasing our capacity to test in our public health labs, we were doing 100 per day but we are now able to double it due to amazing donations from local colleges and businesses. Our current number is at 451 positive individuals. We have gone over 200+ increase of COVID-positive patients over a 2-week period. There are 8,000 VC residents who have been tested, and that is doubled from 4,200 from April 7<sup>th</sup>. Testing capacity increase has resulted in an increase of COVID-positive patients. We are not only monitoring COVID-positive patients, but we are keeping an eye on hospitals and their surge capacity. 25 currently hospitalized and out of those there are 8 in ICU. Both of those numbers are within the current capacity of our hospitals. If there is a surge, our hospitals are ready for it. We are confident in our situation and capacity and will continue to expand it. We are keeping an eye out for phasing into modified orders for social distancing.

- **Supervisor Gregg Hart, Santa Barbara County, Chair of the Board of Supervisors**

Yesterday our Board sent a letter to Gov. Newsom asking him for financial assistance to successfully implement his 6-point framework for transitioning our State towards reopening our economy while keeping us safe. While there are different perspectives among my fellow Board members, the vote to send this letter to Gov. Newsom was unanimous because we know we are stronger together. SBC is meeting the dual challenge of reducing COVID-19 infections while increasing our local medical capabilities to meet any unexpected surges. We see very encouraging results from our community's successful social distancing, but we must avoid being complacent. We understand that our statewide efforts comes with huge social and economic costs, and we all want California and SBC to open for business but the challenge is to reopen safely. We asked Gov. Newsom to continue working with our state legislators and federal representatives who have been outstanding advocates for our county to offset the COVID-19 response costs, and to backfill lost local and state revenues. The County's ability to successfully work in alignment with the Gov's framework and to alleviate the social and economic consequences that will worsen as each month goes by depends on the new resources received from the State and Federal government. The BOS set our County's reopening strategy to align with the Gov's framework. This plan will be developed in conformity with the Gov's approach, and will result in the fastest possible path forward. This is done in close consultation with professionals, experts, and stakeholders representing a wide cross section of the business community. The challenge is to be fast and inclusive. I am confident in our community's ability to move forward with a plan. Working together we can get our economy to move forward again while also protecting public health and safety.



- **Dr. Van Do-Reynoso, Santa Barbara Public Health Director**

I would like to announce that we have an additional 11 confirmed cases in SBC today. That brings our total confirmed cases to 440. We have created an amazing portal of information and resources. We invite you to check it out, it includes very useful data and links.

[www.publichealthsb.org](http://www.publichealthsb.org)

Regarding the Gov's 6 initiatives for reopening, SBC is fast and furious working on his first three. That is the ability to monitor and protect our communities through testing, contact tracing, isolating and supporting those that are positive and exposed. Currently there are about 4,000 tests being run. We are estimating about a 13% positive number of cases among those tests. The Public Health Dept (PHD) knows that public health facilities and private labs are building up their capacity to test. The PHD is building up capacity for testing those who are displaying symptoms, those who are healthcare workers or first responders, and those who are living in congregate settings such as skilled nursing facilities and nursing homes. We are planning to expand to community-wide testing in the very near future. Part of testing is contact tracing and isolating positive cases. We are amassing a work force to ensure that that is done. In regards to the ability to prevent infections among those who are at more risk for severe COVID-19 illness, as the second part of the Gov's 6-part framework, we have done a robust study of the demographics of our positive cases. We are focused on providing additional support for our at-risk community members. What is novel to our county, early on we were quickly able to have an immigrant health rapid-response task force for COVID that was very inclusive. There were about 33 different groups represented in the task force who are partnering with us to ensure that members of our community are receiving both prevention and intervention and treatment care. I hear a lot of concerns from our community as to when we will reopen, I share that pain with our community members. I must share that we must be in close alignment with the Gov's guidelines. Initially we did not issue a more restrictive Health Officer Order than what the Gov issued in his Executive Order. Thus we have not seen a need to modify our current health officer order. Even so, we are looking now at clarifying businesses and services that can reopen within the Governor's guidelines. We have been in close daily contact with the California PDH to give them a glimpse of local struggles while offering some input and data that informs decision-making. We are looking at current cases, the % age of increase in cases, the death rates, healthcare worker infection rates, hospitalization rates, taking everything into account. I want to applaud both of our counties with the incredible efforts of physical distancing. That compliance is why we are seeing such success in flattening the curve, we must keep it up and stay the course.

- **Mark Hartwig, Fire Chief and Fire Warden, Santa Barbara County.**

I also serve as the CalOES Operational Area Coordinator for Fire and Rescue. I am specifically mentioning our work locally. We are coming up with strategies to address the 6 pillars of the Gov's plan with dealing with the pandemic and opening up. We do these plans as separate counties. We came together to develop a plan to maintain a ready workforce and maintain adequate supplies of PPE. Came together across jurisdictions as a County. As we work through this we are focused on maintaining our Fire & Rescue and EMS infrastructure and capability especially as we get our first sundowner season here in SB County. We got late rains, so we do believe we will get a little reprieve early on and the brushes and vegetation will dry out quickly



and we will enter peak fire season even as we continue deal with this pandemic. The county fire chief has mobilized the fire incident management team (IMT) to coordinate our planning and response efforts countywide. This IMT is comprised of fire and law personnel from agencies throughout the county. Our IMT is fortunate to have 1 of 8 people throughout the State that is rostered to be deployed throughout the country. In fact, ours is the only that has gone across the country into another state to assist a flood emergency on the East Coast. Our IMT is now part of the countywide Incident Management Organization. You might hear people refer to “Unified Command” when we talk about our efforts here in SBC. The county is now in Unified Command and our efforts are with the County Executive Office, Public Health, Sheriff, and Fire Department. CEO Mona Miyasato is the County Emergency Services Director, and we all serve under the capable direction and guidance from our BOS.

- **Sheriff Bill Brown, Santa Barbara County**

I want to outline the role of SBC Sheriff’s office in response to this pandemic and share what law enforcement does during an emergency incident like this, and what we are doing collectively to safeguard our community. I want to share what we have been doing to manage our jail populations, those who are in our care as inmates. The Sheriff’s office has from the outset, has been involved in the planning, preparation, and response. SBC is too familiar with large-scale disasters and other critical incidents. We have learned that no individual agency is capable of handling complex emergencies like this alone. This applies to public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. They are particularly applicable to protracted events like this pandemic. We in the County have come together as a team of teams to work through this crisis and to manage this incident together. The Sheriff’s Office stands in unified command with the PHD, County Fire Dept., and the County Executive Office. As a team we work on all aspects of planning, preparation, and response to this crisis. Law enforcement like other services serves a unique and important role in response. Primary function is the protection of life and property in the communities we serve. We continue to provide frontline law enforcement services, maintain our custody facilities, protect our courts, take care of those who have passed through our Coroners Bureau, and investigate crimes. The focus we have is on collaboration with the public and businesses, providing guidance and warnings to violators using education and persuasion to achieve voluntary compliance using citations and arrests as a last resort. We’ve seen great levels of compliance within our county. The curve has truly been flattened due to the actions of the people of SBC and VC. Our enforcement actions have been relatively minimal. Another focus of law enforcement has been the potential for increased domestic, elder, child, and animal abuse and cruelty during these difficult times since groups of people and families continue to be continuously isolated during this time. We continue to raise awareness for our See Something, Hear Something, Say Something campaign which is supported by all of our law enforcement officers to encourage reporting possible domestic abuse and other relationship crimes during this time of isolation. A success I would like to share is how we have been keeping our jail populations safe thus far. We immediately recognized the potential rise in and devastation and strain on our medical system that would be caused by an outbreak of COVID-19 in our jail. We made operational changes to protect staff and inmates including screening of temperature checks and health questions of all coming in and out of jails. There is a 14-day quarantine period for



those taken in to jails before being transferred to the general prisoner population. Steps have been taken to reduce the overall number of inmates in the jail. Crime has been down significantly since the Public Health Orders went into effect and a likewise reduction of bookings in jail in law enforcement agencies throughout SBC. This has reduced the risk posed to prisoners and staff. We have released 135 inmates early through a combination of early release for lower-level offenders, screenings through the probation department, and per the Justice Council of California's Emergency Rule 4 which now mandates \$0 bail for a wide range of felony and misdemeanor charges. I am extremely proud of those in the Sheriff's office for all they have done, and I am proud to be a part of another great team of teams.

### **Q&A:**

**Q: When the stay at home order is lifted, will the County require COVID-19 testing before returning to a work site or school site?**

**A:** Rigoberto: We are not planning to do so. Unless there is expectation/guidance at the state level or unless counties jump in on that, we do not anticipate doing that.

Von: I agree.

**Q: What can you tell employees who are concerned with returning to the workplace without others being tested? What can you tell about the protocols or guidance to make sure workplaces are safe?**

**A:** Mike: We are screening employees with temperature screenings, questions about wellness and conditions. We have specific workplace physical distancing guidelines laid out in our Public Health Order. We encourage all of our businesses to abide by and enforce those rules.

Dr. Henning, SBC PHD: We have not planned on testing widely prior to letting individuals entering their workplaces or schools. Unless testing becomes more readily available that this would be a viable option, we do not have such plans.

**Q: How are the federal guidelines to reopen being reconciled with our state guidelines? Do we plan on reopening by county by county? All at once, state-wide? City by city?**

**A:** Von: We have been in constant communication with CA Department of Public Health, I do not want to speculate. I can tell you our county has been fast at work in preparing our county for that moment when he does lift that order.

Mike: We will follow all those six steps. In terms of doing it region-by-region, the virus does not care what County it's in. The data on regions is going to be important. The opening of hospitals to elective procedures is a step. But we continue to depend on data, looking at hospitals statewide. It will be incremental and data driven.



**Q: How do you plan to strategically ease the lockdown restrictions while maintaining social distance guidelines? With disparities among cities and counties, how will you treat them differently? Are you treating them differently? Will there be regional approaches taken to reopening considering the differences among cities/areas?**

**A: Von:** As we are finding out, one size does not fit all when you go from business to business, same for communities to the next one. There will be challenges depending on the businesses or communities you are talking about. We would need to work with our community partners to arrive at a solution that works for everyone. The underpinning of our continued success is physical distancing. How could we achieve physical distancing is a good question. I've heard some creative solutions just by talking to different restaurant owners, pastors, and more. People are very creative. We need to look at our creative stakeholders and engage them for that creative problem solving.

**Mike:** Same, working with our cities and county partners and working with leaders in SB and LA Counties. Regional coordination is helpful. What I like what our businesses have been doing is, "I understand why we need to do what we do. But here is what our business can possibly do while complying." People are getting it. Social distancing is going to continue for a while and this is crucial for our more vulnerable community members, such as our medically fragile and senior populations. This will be gradual and incremental, and done thoughtfully.

**Q: There is a small faction of people who want us to reopen completely now. From them: Why can't our next step to be allowing all businesses and schools to reopen? We will have been 6 weeks of shelter at home by the end of April. I think everyone can reopen with the precautions we are already practicing. If people want to stay home, that is their choice. For those who have lost jobs or lost classes due to going online or shutting down, that is something to consider. Businesses and schools, at the very least private schools, should not be forced to close. Those people who want to come to those spaces should make their own decisions. Reopen California.**

**A: Von:** We do not have the data to support that we can throw wide open our doors. We still as a community are getting cases, still seeing hospitalizations albeit at a steady rate. I do not believe we are in a position to resume. We need to ease with regards to lifting the order. We have to understand that we need to do things thoughtfully, data based, and incrementally. The timing and the responsible opening of businesses is critical, however there are members of our community who are quite vulnerable to COVID-19. Death and serious illness is a real threat. We need to safeguard our hospital systems so it doesn't buckle under an overwhelming spike if we quickly loosen up what's in place.

**Mike:** I totally agree. This is a totally transmissible virus, which is part of the dangerous. People may carry it and be asymptomatic and unknowingly spread it. That's a real danger. We do not have a testing capacity that can take this. The Governor has put a plan in place. That's the plan that is supported by our leaders, especially our Health Leadership, and we need to follow it. Our testing capacity, our tracing capacity—we have it and need to expand it. If we did open, cases



would spike back up, and that would mean that all the sacrifices everyone has made would be wasted. That's a shame. We have to keep the momentum going.

Von: I think we can look at countries and cities that quickly opened and had to retract because of a spike on cases. Mindful that these were severe cases, not mild cases. We must learn from their lessons.

Senator Jackson: We saw with the 1918 flu that the second round killed more people than the first "wave" of the flu. We must learn from that.

**Q: Should everyone be required to be vaccinated against COVID? Would a vaccine be available soon?**

A: Rigoberto: I'm not sure about requirement, this depends on the effectiveness, efficiency, availability of the vaccine when it comes out. We would follow our national, state guidance on the vaccine.

Dr. Henning, SBC PHD: We cannot expect a vaccine to come on the market within the next year. If sooner, it would be a miracle. It may be 1.5 years. It will help in the future to have, but maybe not with reopening California at this point. People would be well advised to get it, but we do not know enough yet to make a broad recommendation.

**Q: I work in the wedding/event industry. I have a small wedding scheduled on May 20 which the couple does not want to postpone. I'm worried about the safety as well as violating any of the Stay At Home physical distancing orders that are in effect. Will there be guidelines issued for small private events and gatherings? As well as when we would be allowed to have private events and gatherings again without physical distancing, masks, etc.?**

A: Von: I think that a wedding around the corner in 4 weeks is something that I would speculate that we could have a lifting of orders that quickly. I wonder first about the ability of social distancing at something intimate like a wedding. It is a huge milestone, a life event. Weddings involve a lot of close contact with people you haven't seen in cases many years. I worry about something like that coming on the heels of so much success seen with physical distancing.

**Q: My mother is 77 years old and lives with me, and has health issues. She needs someone to care for her. Will it be safe for me to go along guidelines to be with her as Ventura County reopens little-by-little? Or will I need to stay at home for her safety? Will there be future guidelines for vulnerable people like my mother?**

A: Rigoberto: Good question. The at home population, seniors and those with disabilities, are of special attention and priority to us. Caregivers and family members would need to continue to be very vigilant around protecting themselves and their family members by wearing face coverings, limiting traveling, etc. What comes from the State will also guide VC.



**Q: With schools being closed through the rest of the school year, what is being done to provide childcare for young children so parents can return to work?**

**A:** Dr. Henning, SBC PDH: We are looking into that. We know that the working parent needs to go back to work. We are in discussion about what requirements look like for daycare/childcare facilities. Their prospects are that they will be open sooner than regular schools because they have limited number of children they need to care for, and it is always the same group. It is easier to test the teachers and therefore have the kids in a safe environment. Smaller children are less sensitive to infection. It is definitely a priority to get childcare back in shape.

Mike, VC: We are allowing childcare facilities to operate in our Public Health Order. There are some mandatory conditions. 12 or fewer attendees, among other conditions. There are YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs open too.

### **Closing Remarks**

HBJ: Special thanks to our speakers. I think we will likely do another one of these moving forward. As information changes, we are all adapting. We are all learning together. While we are celebrating Earth Day, we are obviously not only protecting our planet but also the people on it. Must recognize the importance of our planet, keeping it safe and clean, addressing the viruses and bacteria that evolve. As elected officials are listening to your questions, concerns, we are dedicated to connecting you with resources. Gov. Newsom announced that CA volunteers initiative, #CaliforniansForAll, encourages those that are unable to physically volunteer to find ways that they can contribute too. Be creative about it, check in with neighbors, share food, etc. Visit my website <http://www.sd19.senate.ca.gov>, and click on the coronavirus lin. Thank you to our speakers and to my fellow moderators.

Congressman Carbajal: I hope you all stay safe during this time. I think that many of you have received your stimulus checks, small business relief checks, etc., please reach out to my office with any questions you may have. Thank you everyone! Continue to heed the advice of our Public Health officials. Continue to social distance and venture out unless absolutely necessary. Goodnight and stay safe!

Assemblymember Limón: I want to echo my gratitude to both counties who have been at the forefront. Hopefully this conversation and the speakers highlighted that all decisions are made with a collective body of leaders and stakeholders and experts that contribute to the conversation. Thanks for our panelists, and thanks for sending in your questions, and as my moderators have said, our offices are open to you and continue sending us your questions.