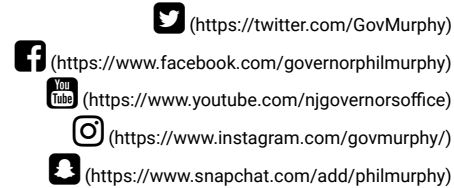


Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: February 5th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

02/5/2021

## Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. We are rejoined, it's so good to have her back, by the woman who needs no introduction, Judy Persichilli, our Commissioner of the Department of Health. Great to have you back. Two to my left, another guy who doesn't need an introduction, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. Another familiar face to Judy's right, the Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz, haven't seen you in a week or so, Ed, nice to see you. We also have with us today the guy to my left, who I will talk about in a minute, we welcome back the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development, Rob Asaro Angelo. Rob, great to have you here. And if that weren't enough, we have the First Lady of the Great State of New Jersey, Tammy Murphy's in the house. And remember, the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, which Tammy chairs with her extraordinary board members and staff, is continuing to do great work and continuing to need your help, njprf.org.

Rob has joined us, as you know, periodically to provide updates on the department's ongoing efforts to ensure that every eligible New Jerseyan receives the unemployment benefits they deserve and I'm happy to have him with us again today. I should also say Jared Maples is here, the Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

With Rob here, we might as well start with a quick note of this week's unemployment numbers which were released yesterday. So for last week, the department has reported a total of 14,606 initial claims for unemployment benefits. This is a drop of just over 2,000, Rob, I believe from the prior week and our third consecutive weekly decrease; but God knows for the folks who are there, they're not a number. It's their lives, it's their challenges, so 14,606 is still 14,606 too many.

Throughout the entire pandemic, going back to last March, the Labor Department has received 1,985,000 applications for unemployment and get this: included in that number is more than 200,000 of our fellow New Jerseyans who have had to reopen their claim because they lost work for a second time within the past year; staggering number. Eligible claimants have received, on average, \$15,167 in benefits.

The department has also processed the fourth week of the \$300 supplemental unemployment benefits, which is good news, because this is extra money for anyone who is collecting unemployment in any amount. As Rob will talk about in a few minutes, many claimants are also transitioning seamlessly to the 11-week extension of benefits authorized under the Continued Assistance Act. But as we are aware – and we are – roughly 75,000 residents whose original benefits have ended are experiencing a lapse and are waiting for their benefits to restart. This is due to the need, and we talked about this the other day, a lot of what we've seen over the past, really now nine months, has been unique to the individuals but when there's a big shift in policy, especially from the feds, it requires a system shift. This is the 75,000 who are still waiting is due to the need for our Department of Labor to reprogram its systems and administer the new federal relief. To be sure, this is not a New Jersey only issue and while I know that is of no solace whatsoever to those of you who are awaiting benefits, you will be made whole. As I mentioned, Rob will speak to this in greater detail.

All in all, the work of the department throughout this pandemic has been tremendous and Rob, to you and your team up and down the line, I thank you for never giving up and working overtime to ensure that our New Jersey family has been looked after.

Switching gears, as of mid-morning, Judy, I'm showing 925,579 total vaccinations. That breaks down first doses/second doses: first doses 745,552, second doses 179,956. I know everyone watches these numbers very carefully, as do we, but let's make one thing that they show particularly clear. They are not only growing, but the rate of growth is picking up steam. So in the past week, the number of initial doses has increased by more than 135,400. That's a 22% increase week over week. And the number of residents who have now received both doses, whether it be from Moderna or Pfizer's vaccines, that number has grown by 69,258, and that's a nearly 63% increase in just the past seven days. If you go back two weeks, the number of folks who have gotten their second doses has nearly tripled.

What we're seeing is a clear and sustaining growth pattern. First off, we've only been administering second doses for about four weeks, and those who have been receiving their first doses outside of our healthcare worker and first responder populations, are only now really coming online for their second. And, we are continuing to maximize every dose we are being given and as it was discussed on Wednesday, we are not tacking to the practices elsewhere of spreading out the second dose regimen to just pump more first doses into the arms.

Judy and Ed, I found Tony Fauci's comments on that to be crystal clear. That if it says 21 days or 28 days, either that's the cadence or sticking close to that cadence is still the guidance we're getting from the feds.

Yes, we clearly need more doses. Let there be no doubt about that, folks. The supply is not what it needs to be but the Biden team, I think, are doing a great job moving the needle in the right direction. We need those supplies to be able to open more appointment slots and get our mega sites working to the capacity to which they've been built to



handle. In fact, our mega sites alone exceeded more than 10,000 doses yesterday. That breaks down to over 1,800, on average, at each of the six mega sites. Some of these, in fairness were shots that had been rescheduled because of the snowstorm but it does prove that we have the capacity.

But let's be clear, more than 69,000 New Jerseyans are now fully vaccinated than one week ago, when there were nearly 50,000 more New Jerseyans who were fully vaccinated versus the week before that, and 24,000 more than the week before that one. This is clearly forward progress being made against intense scarcity. Again, let me just say that, again: the rate of increase week to week, first it was 24,000 over the previous week, then it was 50,000 over the previous week, now it's 69,000 over the previous week. And again, that's not perfect by any means, we need more supply but the rate of growth is encouraging. It's not just that it's going up; it's going up at a higher rate and we have no reason to believe that won't continue in terms of our supplies.

Let's not forget that our goal is maximum efficiency and equity. We have opened up eligibility to a large pool of highly vulnerable folks and frontline workers. And yes, we have more people eligible than we have vaccines. This was intentional to ensure that those more at risk have access and to ensure that there is adequate demand, so every single available dose is maximized and no shots are left on the shelves at the end of the day.

But we recognize, at the same time, that it also creates unwanted competition. What I like to hear about the stories -- and I know Judy and the rest of the team join me -- the stories about the instances where folks step back and let others more vulnerable seek appointments before them. Just because you're categorically eligible does not mean that necessarily that you need to or you will be able to get an appointment immediately. Again, vaccine supply is limited.

As our vaccine supply increases, we know we'll be out to put more people into the queue. At the head of the list our educators so we can support our school districts in moving quickly toward an in-person learning environment. We remain committed to getting the supply we need. It's educators, for sure, and there are other essential workers. I was on today with representatives of both our transit brothers and sisters, as well as our retail workers. And again, the cases that get made are always entirely meritorious so we'll do everything we can to broaden the net as fast as we can. We will get to our goals, and if the production and distribution schedules intensify and if additional facilities come on the market we'll get there that much faster.


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To that point, we are encouraged by the news that Johnson & Johnson has submitted an application for emergency use authorization from the federal government. If this is approved, this single dose vaccine -- regular refrigeration well -- will be a welcome additional weapon at our disposal to defeat the virus.

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We can also today mark the progress by both CVS and Walgreens as they continue vaccinating residents and staff at the long-term care centers that are part of the federally run pharmacy partnership. Judy and I were on with Karen Lynch a week ago today, the now CEO of CVS. We were on with John Standley and his team, he's the President of Walgreens. They each have a ways still to go but the progress two weeks ago, by the way, the blended CVS/Walgreens program had administered 12% of their total amounts. That number today is 53% so that is going up and it needs to continue to go up.

Again, the data to our federal partnership is going to be added to our online dashboard and these numbers, tracking scheduled clinics and total vaccinations, will be updated regularly. The dashboard updates will also reflect the total doses available to vaccination sites in the LTC program. I borrowed this slide, by the way, from my eye doctor. I just wanted to make sure I gave him some credit.

As we noted last week, both CVS and Walgreens are scheduling multiple clinics at each facility to ensure that all residents and staff are given the opportunity to be vaccinated. Today we can report that of all the facilities enrolled in the program -- and again to Judy and her team's credit, we submitted the broadest definition of long-term care of any American state. So today, we can report that of all the facilities that are in the program, 1,297 first clinic dates have been scheduled along with 1,271 second clinics, and 1,131 third clinics. CVS and Walgreens committed to three clinics at each location. Of these scheduled visits, 1,053 facilities have completed their first clinics and 404 their second, with 136,610 total vaccinations administered. As I mentioned a minute ago, that's 53% of total allocation.

With that, let's move on to the rest of today's numbers, some of which we literally got updated as I was driving over here, so these are hot off the press. 4,435 positive test results, that breaks down 3,723 PCR and 712 presumed positives from rapid tests. Positivity rate from Monday's 17,884 PCR tests was 6.83%. So on the one hand, Monday was the teeth of the blizzard so we were telling folks not to go out, so the number of 17,884 tests is a lot lower than our normal rate.

Having said that, we were just debating this, Judy, after we got off our call with some team members, I'd normally say on the weekends, which I did on Wednesday, don't pay much attention to the positivity rate, because it's probably folks who are going to get tested for a reason. They probably feel like they've been exposed or have symptoms. I would suspect Monday was similar to that, given a storm. I hope that's a trend on the positivity rate. I'm assuming you weren't out there getting tested for COVID unless you felt you really had to on Monday.

Statewide rate of transmission is down a little bit to 0.92. In our healthcare system as of 10:00 p.m. last night, and this is where the numbers moved around, 2,916 patients being treated across our 71 hospitals. That breaks down at 2,714 who are confirmed positive and 202 awaiting test results. In our ICUs yesterday, we had 515 patients and 349 ventilators were in use. All of those numbers are coming down. Let's hope they continue to come down and come down at even a faster pace.

Throughout the day yesterday, statewide 436 live patients were discharged while 377 patients were admitted. This runs the risk of comparing apples to oranges because these are not confirmed but we have been told of 54 deaths in our hospitals yesterday. However, we can report, with the heaviest heart, a confirmed 93 more losses of life from our extraordinary family. The overall total is now 19,699 confirmed deaths and 2,187 probable deaths. Let's take a couple of minutes to remember a few of those who we have lost recently.

We open this Friday by remembering Theresa "Terry" Romano of Park Ridge and formerly of Paramus, which she had called home for more than 60 years, having moved there in 1958 after her marriage. She and her husband Lou raised their family in Paramus, and Terry became a community fixture. She was the owner of the plant and garden store, Terry's Planetarium, and also worked as the office manager for a travel agency helping countless families plan their vacations. And she was deeply involved in numerous organizations and charities in Paramus, including both the Junior Women's Club and the Women's Club as well as the Rotary and I know as well as the Democratic Party there.

Lou mentioned to me, her husband, that he always knew it to be true but it's really come out since her passing that Terry was like a second mother to a whole range of folks in the younger generation and Mike DeLamater, our colleague, is on that list. Terry was 83 years old. She leaves behind Lou. I spoke to Lou on Wednesday. He was also COVID positive and had been hospitalized. Thank God he's doing better. Lou and Terry were married for 63 years, and where did they meet? At her Sweet 16 party. How about that? Unbelievable. She also leaves behind her children Louis who is in Maryland and daughter Sally Ann and Suzanne, both of whom are in New Jersey and their families, including her grandchildren Matthew, Andrew, Jessica, Alexa, James and Jacqueline, and she is been reunited with her grandson in heaven, Christopher. She's also survived by her siblings Lucretia, Michael and Alfred and her sister-in-law Joan, who was married to her late brother Rocco. For all her years of dedication to the Paramus community in particular, we honor Terry, we thank her. May God bless and watch over her memory and her family.

Next up, we recall Joseph McDevitt, and Joe was only 53 years old. He was a graduate of Stockton University and an educator at Atlantic City High School for more than 25 years, and the owner-operator of Leprechaun Lawn for nearly 30. He was also an assistant football coach at Holy Spirit High School, which was his alma mater, by the way, and he also had coached at Atlantic City High. At the time of his passing on January 21st, he was serving on the Ventnor

Board of Education, and was its representative to the Atlantic City Board. He had previously sat on the Atlantic County Freeholder Board, serving two terms as Freeholder At Large. He was also a proud union man, a member of the New Jersey Education Association, and the labor spirit runs strong in the McDevitt family. His brother Bob is a good friend of Rob's and mine and many others. I spoke to Bob right when I heard of Joe's passing. Bob is President of Unite Here Local 54, which represents literally thousands of Atlantic City's casino workers.

Joe leaves behind not only Bob but his wife, Alene and I had the great honor of speaking with her yesterday, and their two children, their daughter Jocelyn, who is 17, and their son Robert, who is 16. At his passing, the City of Ventnor lowered its flags to half-staff in remembrance of quote, "A tremendous civic champion, a good man." The way we should all be remembered. Thank you, Joe, for a career spent in public service. Thank you for a job well done. God bless and watch over your memory and your family.

Finally, today we celebrate the life of a Monmouth County rock-and-roll legend guitarist Billy Ryan. He was 76 years old and called Tinton Falls home. At first music did not seem like it would become a career, as after high school at Red Bank Catholic Class of 1962, Billy settled into the construction industry as a carpenter and member of the Carpenters Union Local 2250. Or maybe, if not a carpenter, perhaps he would become a lobsterman working off his boat. The Dreamer But it turns out music was his life's love in addition and second only to his family.

He started as a boy playing licks of the blues and became the Jersey Shore's Guitar Man, one of the creators of the Sounds of Asbury Park music scene that took hold in the 1960s and 1970s. He played with numerous bands across genres, most notably as a member of The Jaywalkers and in that band, he was alongside future E-Street Band fixtures Little Stevie, Steven Van Zandt and Gary Talent, and Clarence Clemons and the Red Bank Rockers. And, he led his own bands, Ryan's Express and Billy Ryan and the Blues Casters. He also played alongside The Boss, Bruce Springsteen, on numerous occasions.


Offstage, Billy was also an award-winning photographer, whose works went on display in juried shows and galleries as far off as Vermont, which was also by the way his second home. It was there that he continued to express his love of nature through his art.


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He leaves behind his wife of 40 years Michelle, with whom I had the great honor of speaking with on Wednesday, his two daughters, Megan who's in Red Bank and Kristen who's in Freehold, and their significant others. He is also survived by his brothers, Jay and Bob and his sisters, Nancy, Peggy, Joanne and Gina. Gina happens to be a close friend of The Murphys. He also leaves behind a pack of nieces, nephews and cousins. He was predeceased by his parents, his brother Bobby, and his grandson Cadence. And of course, he leaves behind countless fans and bandmates and a huge legacy at Asbury Park's rock heritage. Gary Talent said simply fittingly, and I quote Gary, "A giant lost." We trust Billy has found a new stage in heaven. May God bless him and watch over his memory and his family.

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We honor them as we honor all we have lost, all cherished members of our New Jersey family. They will not be forgotten.

Switching gears and moving to another of our regular discussion points, the small businesses who we have partnered with to ensure they have the resources to remain strong for the days ahead so they can be part of our long-term economic recovery. Today we're heading to nearby Hamilton Township right here in Mercer County, where you will find the Cross & Shamrock, which to the surprise of absolutely no one, has been one of Central Jersey's premier Irish shops since it opened in 1985. It is family run and it's owned by Anne Bauersachs and managed by her son, Tim, and there they are. The Cross & Shamrock is more than just a place where one can purchase any number of imported foods, clothing, housewares or religious items from Ireland. It is also active in Hamilton's community life, supporting many local organizations and charities.

With the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Bauersachs partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, which provided much needed grants and direct ecommerce assistance. So not only has the store remained open, its online presence has been upgraded so the Cross 7 Shamrock is now up-to-date with the current consumer trends, including social media integration and offering curbside pickup. Check them out. You can see right there, [crossandshamrock.com](http://crossandshamrock.com), 1669 Route 33, Hamilton Square, New Jersey.

I had the great opportunity to check in with both Ann and Tim on Wednesday and to thank them for all they're doing to be leaders in Hamilton, and since I'm a Murphy after all, I told them I needed to stop by and see them at some point someday, and I will likely take Callahan with me.

One other important item from our business world. Yesterday, a dear friend and a great leader, Ken Frazier, the Chairman and CEO of Merck announced that he will be retiring from that position and moving to the role of Executive Chairman during the transition to his retirement. He has been a leader in every sense of the word, not just in one of New Jersey's legacy iconic industries and iconic companies, but as an outspoken advocate for social justice and civil rights. In fact, since the spring, Ken has served as the co-chair of our Restart and Recovery Commission with former Princeton President Shirley Tilghman, and he's worked across our economy to help us position ourselves for the post-COVID future. He's been an incredibly invaluable resource and friend and supporter of ours.

Ken has spent nearly 30 years with Merck, the last 10 as President and CEO. He's been a great leader for the company and within our state's business community. Ken is the grandson of a sharecropper, who grew up to be one of only four black chief executive officers today of a Fortune 500 company You've got to be kidding me. Four, and Ken is leaving. I know I'm not alone in wishing him a smooth last several months with Merck and an exciting and fulfilling next chapter of his life and his families. I know we're not done hearing from Ken.

Before I turn things over to Rob, a reminder that effective this morning, indoor dining in our restaurants has now expanded to 35% of capacity. As we said on Wednesday, we're able to make this happen for one reason. It's because of the work that millions of you have put in to help stop the spread of this virus, which has lowered the number of residents in our hospitals. Let's hope it stays that way.

In addition, if that weren't enough, I had the honor this morning to sign Senate Bill 3340 into law. I was joined on a Zoom signing by Senators Paul Sarlo, Vin Gopal and Nellie Poe, as well as by Mary Lou Halverson who is moving on but is still the CEO of the New Jersey Restaurant Association. That bill gives certainty to the outdoor dining reality not just for the rest of 2021 but through next year as well. We were one of the great outdoor dining states when the weather was better but the restaurateurs came to the Legislators, they came to us and said we need certainty about what the rules of the road are going to look like and how long? Can you give us a window that we know we can do this, and I was incredibly honored to sign that.

Now one last point and caution. This is Super Bowl Sunday on the 7th, and we ask you to please enjoy the game responsibly. Just as 2020 wasn't the year for a huge Thanksgiving or Christmas, 2021 is not the year for a massive Super Bowl blowout. We encourage you to watch the game with your family. If you are enjoying with friends, please adhere to social distancing. Please wear your masks and remember, if you're gathering indoors, the limit is 10 persons, and please make sure you stick to it. When you're planning your spread, wrapping these last two points together, don't forget about your local restaurants and maybe get some extra takeout for the big game. Let's get through this weekend and keep pushing our numbers down so we can eventually expand indoor dining even more, so we can help our restaurants fully get back on their feet. We know we can do this, folks. Stay safe, keep doing what you're doing, we will get there.

With that it is my honor to introduce the guy to my left, the Commissioner of the Department of Labor, Rob Asaro Angelo.

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Thank you, Governor, for having me here today to give an update and address issues that are understandably frustrating many of our residents. Believe me when I say I'm frustrated as well, and so is our entire team. While New Jersey's unemployed received a boost with the signing of the Continued Assistance for Unemployed Workers Act at the end of December, the timing of the bill also caused significant pain for a subset of our claimants. Unfortunately, the frustrations our workers are feeling are taking place all over the nation right now as a result of last minute federal action. Former President Trump signed the stimulus at the last moment, not giving states enough time to program their systems for the 11-week expansion for all claimants without delay.

The two biggest benefits of the new stimulus package are the \$300 per week supplement for everyone currently receiving unemployment, and the 11-week extension of the federally funded unemployment benefits programs Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, or PUA, and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, or PEUC. We prioritized sending the \$300 a week supplement because it benefits the most claimants as in every single New Jersey worker receiving unemployment. We're also proud to say that the 11-week extension has already been added for more than half-a-million claims.

The challenge many are facing is adding the extension to claims already exhausted. The original CARES Act passed last year was set up so that when a PUA or PEUC claim hit its zero balance, the claim is then moved to 20 weeks of state extended benefits. Even though the federal government is funding 100% of all three of these programs, it mandates that claimants exhaust their PUA or PEUC first before starting extended benefits. The claims that have been grounded are those we had to stop from moving on to extended benefits and pause while we reprogrammed them to continue on to the 11 weeks of PEUC. About 5% of New Jersey claimants, or 75,000 people thereabouts, are experiencing a lapse in their benefits but we now expect this group to be up and running by a week from today, February 12th.

This is not solely a New Jersey problem. The same headlines you saw this week in New Jersey are being written all over the country for the same reason. In Texas, a backlog after unemployment benefits briefly expired; in Massachusetts, unemployed workers are on edge awaiting a slow-moving jobless benefit; and in national news, jobless Americans missed \$17.6 billion in benefits last month because of relief bill delays. Even states like California and Massachusetts, who have spent hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade modernizing their unemployment systems are having the exact same challenges with this subset of claimants.

Not only were states denied time to prepare for this new relief, the relief package also changed some of the rules, leaving us in limbo waiting for guidance on how to run new programs. I wrote to our federal delegation back in September, outlining the predominant issues plaguing the federal system. But as important as the federal unemployment reform is, it must take a backseat to paying claimants that are due benefits now. That's why we've done everything within our power to get as much information out to our claimants as possible on our website, through the press and via text messages and email, so our claimants have the resources they need to navigate this unquestionably complicated system.

I am proud of my staff for the work they've been doing to get payments out to our claimants. Since October alone, 10 million payments have been sent to workers. Since last March, we paid out \$22 billion to more than 1.5 million claimants. The average New Jersey claimant has received more than \$15,000 in benefits, with 54% receiving more than \$20,000. Even the population we're talking about currently waiting for this additional relief has received approximately \$25,000 to \$35,000 in family sustaining benefits these past months. But I know it's of little comfort to the small percentage of people who are waiting for their benefits. But during this pandemic, even a small percentage is tens of thousands of claimants.

Many of you have expressed your anger with us over the delay. We realize the hardship many of you are facing. Our hearts break with every email and phone call we get daily describing dire situations, and I know that nothing I'm saying here right now will help you pay the rent or put food on the table. This pandemic has been relentless and bringing you this additional assistance is our number one priority.

The previous presidential administration allowed these crucial benefits you are waiting for to lapse at the end of December. If they had acted just weeks before the expiration date they knew was looming for months, states would have had the time needed to keep benefits for some from lapsing at all. It would have been seamless for all claimants. But when the Continued Assistance for Unemployed Workers Act was signed at the end of December, that expiration date has already passed. It is estimated this delay has cost jobless workers nationally \$17.6 billion in benefits for the first four weeks of January alone; 38% less that unemployed claimants were due to receive nationally over that month.

We applaud the states that are up and running but even yesterday, multiple states said they don't expect to distribute PEUC for those that have exhausted benefits until March. The good news is we've completed the programming as of Tuesday, so that no one else who exhausted benefits will be stuck. Now our focus is on those who need to be placed back onto PEUC. We expect to be able to process the other 75,000 retroactive claims, as I said, by February 12th, which is next Friday. Claimants will receive an email from us that their claim is ready.

The time it has taken to turn new stimulus benefits into actual economic relief for claimants supports our call for a federal solution to the outdated, convoluted underpinnings of our federal unemployment system. The lapses some claimants are experiencing now and frustration that other claimants have had with unemployment over the past 11 months are because these vital programs were not already in place in preparation for emergencies like COVID-19. In fact, most of the programs we have today were not in existence 11 months ago. Benefits for independent contractors, extra weekly supplements to offer more meaningful support, additional weeks to collect benefits, these were all created to support workers affected by the pandemic. The real help comes, the real change happens, when we have a more long term solution passed by Congress. The next expiration is looming in just weeks. It'll be here before we know it. So we, and all the unemployed workers in New Jersey, wait on the edge of our seats to see if Congress will pass additional extensions. The fact that these extra laws have to be passed to support our residents clearly indicates that federal unemployment system as we know it is insufficient. The system was built nearly 90 years ago and does not sustain everyone who is unemployed. In fact, it was built for a narrow subset of workers who happen to meet a stringent set and sometimes arbitrary set of criteria.


These issues we have seen the past several months are issues that have been there all along. Like other problems, this pandemic brought them to the forefront because of the historic numbers of workers shuttered from their jobs nearly simultaneously. States across the country have been able to manage with and around these inadequacies for years, but with the sheer volume of claims and the exigent circumstances we're living through today, they become much harder to manage.


It bears repeating, we have made more than \$22 billion in payments to more than 1.5 million workers; more money dispersed than by 43 other states. In 2019, our unemployment system was best in the nation in percentage of unemployed workers who received benefits. The same team who led us to that success, along with some reinforcements, are still working on claims today, including many career employees who saw us through the best of times. I fully expect, Governor, that when the stats come out next year that we will be again towards the top of the pack in percentage of workers who are receiving unemployment benefits.


But unfortunately, if even one eligible worker is waiting for benefits, too many workers are waiting. We need to shore up our systems and I am confident the Biden administration and Congress will get it done. Just yesterday, Labor Secretary Designee Marty Walsh, during his confirmation hearing, had a promising back and forth with Republican Senator Susan Collins about not just the need for funding for technological improvements across the country, but about systemic reform to make UI benefits more accessible for all those who need them. We need long-term relief, not just stimulus packages that lasts for a few weeks or a few months, or that borrows money from another disaster relief agency like FEMA.

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But here in New Jersey, our goal is never wavered: to pay the most eligible workers possible, as soon as possible, within the law. Thanks again, Governor, for having me here today.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Rob, thank you for being here. I had several takeaways from your remarks, and let me make sure I get this right. The most important one is if you don't have what you rightly deserve, there's no amount of explanation that will make you feel better. You need action. Rob is committed to that, his team is committed to that. But it is important to frame it for folks as well in the sense of what the national picture looks like. It helps do to do that and frankly, we desperately need the feds to revamp their entire mindset around unemployment insurance. I couldn't have a better Labor Secretary than Marty Walsh, he's a union guy himself. He's been a great mayor in Boston. I know he'll get on this. But folks, know that Rob and his team will work morning, noon and night to get this resolved.


The second thing I heard you say by next Friday, a week from today. That's the marker. If there's any shot of obviously getting it faster, I know you'll be committed to whenever we can get it. I also heard you say the number won't grow, so the 75,000, that is stopped, so it is that unique group. And 75,000 people, that's MetLife, so that's not a small number but the good news is that's not going up, and your point on the timing was right on the money. So, again, to you and your team for everything you've done, thank you and keep up the great work. And to the folks out there who are in that cohort, you will get every penny of what's rightfully yours, and God willing, sooner than later. Thank you, Rob. My guess is there'll be some questions for you.

Judy, it's great to have you back. I missed saying the following: please help me welcome the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.


**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor and good afternoon, everyone. This morning, I joined Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman and Kean University President Lamont Repollet for a discussion on the importance of vaccine advocacy, especially among communities of color. This conversation was timely, given we just entered Black History Month. The department's work on the COVID-19 response and our vaccination planning has been done through an equity lens. We have been focused on bringing resources to underserved communities, because we recognize that the same long standing inequities that have contributed to health disparities affecting racial and ethnic groups have also put them at an increased risk for COVID-19.

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We are continuously evaluating access and uptake of the vaccine among communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Part of this is done through demographic information reported by our vaccination sites on race and ethnicity. Currently, 19% of the doses reported are recorded by individuals as unknown or other, which tells us that the vaccination sites need to improve their practices in reporting the race and ethnicity of individuals receiving the vaccinations, so that it can be reported accurately to the department. We are working with our vaccination sites to improve these efforts and we encourage individuals across the state to report these items as they feel comfortable. This data is used for public health purposes. It is vital to collect this information, because we will use it to carry out our commitment to equity as vaccine rollout progresses.

As the Governor shared, the number of doses administered in the state continues to increase. Just yesterday, our six mega sites set a record. They were able to administer over 10,000 doses in one day. We continue to have a greater demand for appointments and vaccine administration than supply available. To keep those who have pre-registered in the New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System informed, we will be sending updates through the system. The update will let them know that they will be notified when they become eligible for the vaccine, and notified again when an appointment is available for them through NJVSS. We will also remind those who are currently eligible for the vaccine, but have not yet been notified about available appointments in the vaccine scheduling system, that there are additional ways to get vaccinated, such as making an appointment directly with a vaccination location that does not use the state's scheduling system, or calling our vaccine call center 855-568-0545 or visiting [covid19.nj.gov/vaccine](https://covid19.nj.gov/vaccine) for more information about where and how you can get vaccinated.

The department is also working closely with the vaccination sites not enrolled in NJVSS to ensure they are making second dose appointments when individuals receive their first dose. I want to remind the public that they should be returning for their second dose at the same location where they received their first dose. Those who got vaccinated at sites using the State Registration System at [covid19.nj.gov](https://covid19.nj.gov) will automatically be scheduled for a second dose appointment and will receive an email to that effect. The appointment will not be scheduled before you leave the site. The New Jersey COVID-19 vaccination call center has operators available to assist individuals who have questions about the second dose appointments.

As we work to get more individuals vaccinated in our state, we still need the public's help to fight the spread of this disease. Everyone should continue to use all the tools available to reduce COVID-19 illness in our state, which includes continuing to mask up, physical distancing, washing your hands frequently, staying home when you are sick and getting tested.

For those who are excited about Super Bowl this weekend, we are asking everyone to enjoy the game safely. Gathering virtually, or with people you live with, is the safest way to celebrate Super Bowl this year. Given the weather, it will be difficult to have watch parties outside but we do not want people crowding together in indoor spaces. If you're with others outside of your household, wear a mask and stay six feet away from those you do not live with. But again, the safest way to enjoy the game is to connect with friends virtually and keep the party limited to your household.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 2,916 hospitalizations with 515 individuals in critical care and 349 of those individuals are on ventilators.

We are reporting today four new cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, so a total of 88 cases in our state. The children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19 or had antibody tests that were positive to COVID-19 exposure within four weeks prior to symptoms. In New Jersey, thankfully, there are no deaths reported at this time.

There are now a total of 19 reports of the B-117 variant in our state. That variant is the variant that emerged in the UK. Three of the individuals had known travel histories. Atlantic County has identified one, four cases have been identified in Essex, one in Hudson, one in Middlesex, two in Morris, eight in Ocean County, and one in Warren.

At the state veteran homes, there's one new positive case among residents at the Paramus home, and the state psychiatric hospitals report no new cases among the patients.

As of February 1st, the New Jersey positivity rate is at 6.83%. The Northern part of the state reported 4.85, the Central part of the state 7.72, and the Southern part of the state 7.8%. That concludes my daily report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, socially distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested. Remember for each of us, for all of us, please take the call. Download the COVID Alert NJ App. And as our friends at the New Jersey Hospital Association remind us, be super safe. Follow the rules. Don't let Super Bowl become a super spreader. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you for that. Thank you for all. Any quarantine tips for anybody? Any lessons learned from being on your own?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** It's difficult. I have to say, it is difficult to quarantine for a long period of time, staying really isolated as much as you can. It really takes a lot of patience.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah, I can imagine. And the person or persons in your orbit who were positive, you were never positive, are they okay?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Fine.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank God.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Actually asymptomatic, which is another warning. Asymptomatic spread is pretty significant.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And it continues to be.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yes.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Now that's going to get better, obviously with time, but it's still in our midst. Thank you. Great to have you back. David did a great job. I don't want David to think if he's watching us right now that we weren't happy to have him but it's great to have you back.

Pat, compliance, any more post mortem on the weather? Anything coming up on weather? Just one post-mortem item, which already I mentioned Mike DeLamater, he and I have been back and forth and we're going to comb through the Shore towns. There was some serious dune damage in some towns. There's a famous picture circulating on Bay Head and obviously that's a federal matter and our team has already reached out to the feds. But it was really quite striking, and the Bay Head mayor made a point which I thought was well taken. That is, it isn't just about getting some kind of normal replenishment for the season but those dunes offer protection and right now that community, I know Ortley Beach is like this and some on LBI, they are completely exposed right now so please God, we don't have another big one. So with that, great to have you and what have you got?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon and with regards to the dunes, Bob VanFossen from DEP had briefed out earlier this week on the calculations they did on the beaches, just to make sure that if that type of erosion happened that we had that number. We learned that after Hurricane Sandy, in order to go back to FEMA, we needed to know what the pre-storm conditions were, so a big thank you to DEP and their staff.

With regards to EO compliance, the same establishment was cited the past two evenings, Black Diamond Billiards in Union. They had also been cited last Sunday, so that's three in the week for being overcapacity and serving alcohol. With regard to the weather, Governor, we're monitoring two storms right now. One for Sunday, which looks like it'll be 1-2 inches of snow. Also, looking at a storm with unknown potential that's coming on Tuesday. Those models and forecasts for Tuesday are still developing.

And just to your point with regard to Judy's quarantining, when she needed to vent and get rid of some frustration, I just called her and allowed her to do that.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Taking one for the team there, Pat. Before we start, we'll start over here. Maybe we'll start with Dustin and come down to front and Matt and then go across. Do you guys have any questions or are you just working on the cameras?

One item, Judy and I both agree, we haven't said this so I'm going to say this and if I get this wrong... a restaurant owner who's a good friend of mine, I'll leave out who it is, came to me and said "Listen, thank you for opening up capacity to 35%." Again, that started this morning. And it's not just restaurants, it's gyms and casinos and indoor entertainment, as well as the calculation on houses of worship, which will really probably kick in tonight with our Jewish brothers and sisters, Shabbat Shalom. But he said, "Listen, thank you for taking the 10:00 p.m. off the table." And we're happy to do both of those. But we want everyone to be responsible about dealing with both of those, again, repeating Judy's admonition about Super Bowl Sunday.

But a guy who owns a restaurant who's got a bar, and we're not letting bar seating happen, right? That still is the case, you can't sit at a bar because we saw a lot of transmission bilaterally between bartender and patrons, and then we saw sideways between patrons. He said, "How come I walked into a diner and there are people sitting at the counter in a diner? What's the difference?"

And the answer is really, we've never said this, but there is no difference. We don't want that to happen. We want folks to use the capacity that they have at tables that can be properly distanced from one to the next. That's a point I wanted to make.

Secondly, we'll be on our regular -- Dan Bryan is here -- regular rhythm tomorrow and Sunday unless you hear otherwise we'll be virtual. We'll be back here on Monday at one o'clock again, unless you hear otherwise. So with that Dustin, Good afternoon.

Q&A Session

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** Good afternoon. Many residents who have not yet gotten a second appointment say the call center is not helping them schedule one, as you said last week it would do. How are you going to fix this problem?

Why haven't the Department of Justice reforms from last year for Edna Mahan not been implemented?

The Mayor of Fairlawn said the Nabisco factory was closing by late summer. You said you would make the case for them to stay in New Jersey and couldn't fathom how big of an impact it would have for its employees. Any comment on that?

And then I just have two for the Labor Commissioner. Workers continue to tell us that they can't reach a live person at the unemployment office, despite calling at all hours of the week. Besides asking for patience and pointing to the new call center, is there anything the Department of Labor plans to do in order to help individuals with claims issues who need the funds now?

Also, readers who managed to reach a claims agent say they're told their claim is being escalated, but don't hear back for months. What does an escalation mean? What happens when an agent escalates a claim? How long should it take to be resolved? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Dustin, I'll start and then I will turn things over to Judy, I think on the second appointments, the appointments from the call center and then Rob for the questions on labor. I will say only the following as it relates to Edna Mahan. I'm grateful to the Attorney General for taking swift action and filing criminal charges in the wake of the awful horrible incident at Edna Mahan on January 11th, and that resulted in severe injury to several inmates. Among other things, the indictment as we read it alleges that corrections officers committed official misconduct by abusing their office to injure or deprive individuals under their care. Any abuse of power is abhorrent and violates the public trust and it can never be tolerated or excused. I also understand from the Attorney General's announcement that the criminal investigation is ongoing. I'm confident that anyone who violated the law will be held accountable.

Beyond the criminal investigation, we must have a full accounting of how this incident was able to happen in the first place, so that we can put in place necessary reforms and safeguards. That's why I'm thankful to the former State Comptroller Matt Boxer, who's as smart and tough as anyone I know, for taking on this crucial task, and that is all that I will say on Edna Mahan.


Mondelez Nabisco Oreo factory, not happy about this whatsoever. I don't like the way they're doing it. We had a lot of deliberations with these folks. There's hundreds of union labor folks who are going to be impacted by this. I was on with the mayor this morning, back and forth. You know, we'll make the best of this. The good news is we have a lot of companies kicking the tires on New Jersey right now and specifically I know the mayor is on that. I have already myself reached out to a CEO who I think might be a logical person to go in there. I just think they've handled this really poorly. I don't know how else to put it.

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We've had really great citizenship among our corporate community. I'll give you an example, I was on with Hans Vestberg, the CEO of Verizon the other day. He's calling me asking me where we need help. We've had overwhelming examples like that of folks doing the right thing. Ken Frazier, who has been a star, Judy. You've been on every one of those commission calls, he's been extraordinary. I don't like the fact it's happening and I don't like the way it's being done, the treatment of these folks who are going to lose their jobs. The good news is we have a lot of folks kicking the tires and we're going to do everything we can to back and fill but not happy about that.

Judy, do you mind jumping in? We got clobbered by the blizzard here, in fairness, so we said that this Sunday, five days ago, the call center would be able to begin making appointments and then we said pretty clearly that had to be postponed because the roof fell in. What's the status of that?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, we suspended that application because we had to catch up for all the second appointments and a couple of the bugs in the system. My understanding is they can make appointments at this point in time, I can confirm that. The problem is there are no appointments available for weeks and weeks, so people are getting frustrated. They're getting the alert that you're eligible, you will get a notice for an appointment. All appointments are booked. We're hoping for some increased dosages in the coming weeks. That's been the commitment of this administration and I have no reason to believe that won't come through. I do expect more appointments to open up and the federal pharmacy partnership is going to be expanded. There will be more about that. There was some about CVS, that there will be more about that with CVS, Rite Aid and Walgreens, and more sites and more dosages will come with that.


**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, Chris Rein reached out as usual, he's watching us – asked to say hello to you – with some data points for the past week, 169,503 unique callers. They completed 4,049 preregistrations, and he thinks appointments are coming within a matter of days in terms of full scale. Thank you for that and thank you, Chris, for watching. Rob, you had a couple of questions your way.


**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Yep. Quick on the phone and the call center, we're very clear that we are very well aware it's difficult to get through to the call center, but thousands get through every single day. And quite frankly, I get as many people saying, "I hear something different every day from the call center" than I do there are folks who can't get through. That being said, we're in the process of doubling the number of agents at our contracted call center by the end of February, by the end of this month or early next month. We'll have double the number of call center agents than we had a month ago. We're very happy with increasing the supply. Also, it's about decreasing the demand as well.

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Escalation, what does it mean? It means different things for different people. People call the call center for all kinds of reasons. If they're calling with just a question about what does the Continued Assistance Act mean on supplements, they could get an answer right on the spot. Or, what is my weekly benefit amount? They can answer right in the spot. Getting escalated just means that person right there in that tier one call answer means they can't get into their claim to fix something or something else that happens.

For example, someone might call and they're already in an appeals process. They've already filed their appeal with us. That person on the phone is going to be able to help them with that. There's already an appeals process going on with an adjudicator, which is a separate process. They might need to submit documentation to us, so they might have something else to go on. So escalation means something different for different people, and for certain claimants it's going to be while and for certain claims it might be already happening behind the scenes. Obviously right now and for the past five weeks we've been getting tons of calls about this PEUC issue I spoke about earlier. It's not even that something has to be done, it's system wide that we're going to fix.

I'm not denying that clearly people are waiting a long time but it is different for different people. Certain people have the most complicated claims, as we've said, From March 17th last year, those are the ones that are going to take the longest to fix. Just like there aren't enough vaccines for everybody who needs them, there aren't enough claims examiners for everybody who needs one right now.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Rob. Thank you, Dustin. Matt, give us one second. Good afternoon.

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Good afternoon. Commissioner, are you 100% confident that the 75,000 people waiting for their benefits will have their claims resolved by the 12th, and that no additional people will be affected by that same issue?

And you said that it'd be resolved. How long will it take for them to get their benefits in their bank account after it's been resolved? We know the delay in the signing of the aid package affected all 50 states but other states have begun to pay out the 11 weeks to people who exhausted benefits. Can you explain why the programing is taking so long in New Jersey? Is the holdup old technology?

DOL is no stranger to these delayed payments for various reasons. Is this something that will keep happening as Feds pass new stimulus and different benefit programs? What's it going to take for these technological issues to stop?

Finally, people have been flocking to online groups and Facebook groups, maybe because we've heard from a lot of people, they can't get anybody from DOL on the phone. That could be the reason why. But it has caused some misinformation to spread at times. I'm curious if you have a message for those folks,

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Before you jump in, Rob, the other day I made the statement that obviously we're taking this deadly seriously, but that I thought it was best if Rob himself came to explain it. Rob sent me a note and he said, I'm always glad to come but the last time I was here no one asked me any questions. I think, Rob, we're making up for lost time today. With that, over to you.

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Thank you, Governor, and thank you for your questions, Matt. Let me know if I forgot one of them. Am I confident that it will be ready to go by next Friday? I mean, hopefully, yes. I am confident.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I assume you wouldn't have said it if you weren't.

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Right. At the same time, there's been problems in the past and I can't tell you what's going on in the future. I think the question was, what does it mean for them to be resolved?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Before that, Matt also asked in that first question, can you say with 100% confidence that the 75,000 doesn't grow?

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Yes, they are stopped. The first part of what had to be changed was to keep folks from having to pause in the first place, so that the folks who are in the same situation, that 75,000, as of Tuesday, they are now automatically going on to the state extended benefits.

Secondly, what does it mean to be resolved? I mean, I try to keep from being too technical in my remarks. Basically, it means that these claims have been paused, they will be unpaused and they will now be on to the state extended benefits program. They're going to get an email from us. And just for the record, we sent all these folks an email on Wednesday, sort of explaining, we're sorry, we're still waiting. When this is ready, you're going to get an email from us, it's going to say this, and it's going to mean you have to do this. So basically, they're going to be unpaused. They're going to go on and certify, like all claims have to do every week. No one just gets paid automatically. They need to go on, log on and certify or call in and certify and answer the questions. When they go through that certification process, they will do it for all the back weeks.

For example, if someone just got paused on Monday, they're only going to have to do it for one week. But folks who got paused back on December 26th, they're going to have five weeks available to them to go back and certify for, and then the money will be in their account, if they're obviously eligible the same timeline as always. If they certify on Saturday, on the 13th, or on the 12th, most likely the money will be in their accounts, based on their bank, on that Monday or Tuesday. And then on top of that, just the regular weekly wage or benefit they receive, they'll also receive the supplement on top of that. That will be a lump sum afterwards. Folks who are already receiving this already know, just like in the last, it is a separate payment that comes, usually a couple days later than the original payments.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** How about the observation that other states have figured --

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Listen, I can't speak for other states, what their systems are. But again, I know for a fact we had a call yesterday with all the Labor Commissioners across the country. Not everyone was on. I counted at least 10 or 11 other states that have not gotten this part of the process done, and I'm not saying -- it's hard to explain all the different facets of the expansion. We even saw early on, because there's so many different parts of the Continued Assistance Act, there was the \$3 supplement, there was the fact that PUA and PEUC can even keep going on. Before the bill was signed on December 27th, everyone on PUA or PEUC, even if it was their first week, they were going to be out of luck the next week. So the fact that even having those programs continue on was a separate set of programming that we got done automatically to keep them in existence. Then there's the \$3 supplement. You know, that was another part of the program.

I guess my point is, we heard news reports at the beginning, oh, well, state X has everything all set already. It was just one part of those five or six different parts of it. So this is the last part of it, basically, that we're still finishing up. Some states have other parts done and not that part. It's sort of based I think that state's priorities. There are certainly states that have gotten it all done. There's no doubt about that.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I guess the other two real quick, will it keep happening, whatever the reasons are? I think your last question was, is it possible that folks have gone on to group chats or Facebook meetings because they couldn't get through? Is that a fallout from that?

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**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** A couple things, two things. One, we're very happy that folks want to share their experiences and learn from others. The problem we've been seeing is that someone will go on there and talk about their own experience and what it meant for their claim and that'll be generalizable to other folk's claims when as you know, Governor, every single scenario, being right or wrong, might not be applying to somebody else's. I mean, for example, we get calls to the call center saying, "Oh, I saw on Facebook, that extended benefits was cancelled, that I need to call you to get my 11 weeks extended." That's just not true. We're doing that all in back of house.

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As far as this happening again, I don't foresee any more issues. I'm not going to lie, if this next extension has 17 new programs in it rather than just extending what exists, that'll probably be a problem for us and many others.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that. Sir, have you got anything?

**Reporter:** Good afternoon. One for the Department of Labor. Hundreds of thousands of people have gotten their 11-week unemployment extensions without interruption. Can we clarify how many have actually received their benefits? Or is the state not able to pay those extended benefits when the old ones expire, or is it just a clerical thing like you were discussing earlier?

Do we have a vaccine amount that's coming for next week? How many vaccines are expected to come next week?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Rob, real quick.

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Real quick, only that 75,000 are the only ones that are affected by this. Everybody else, all the other PUA claimants and anybody who was already continuing their claims, who hadn't exhausted all their benefits, they all continued right away, there was no break in their service or benefits at all. I can get you exact numbers later, hundreds of thousands.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, next week, how are you feeling about your outlook on doses?

**Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** If we can have confidence in what is in the federal system called Tiberius, we expect doses to be slightly increased from about, on average, we get 53,000 Pfizer, 53,000 Moderna. That might go up to 55 but we'll also get our second doses, which will be another 55. But they will be reserved for the second doses. A little bit of an uptick, but it's good we're getting the second doses.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** The progress, and I went through some of this, if you look week over week as opposed to Monday to Tuesday, I think that's the most instructive; not just what we're administering but also week over week what the supplies look like. And it's slowly, steadily going in the right direction. We all want to blow the roof off the place. Johnson & Johnson gets their emergency use authorization they've said I think publicly today that they could start shipping in early March. That'd be a game changer. That's four weeks from now. This is now getting to the matter of weeks here until this thing gets bigger and bigger.

**Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, I do have what is in Tiberius. We Pfizer 55,575 doses, and Moderna 80,900. That's a big uptick for Moderna. Additionally, we'll get 55,575 second doses for Pfizer, and 56,100 second doses from Moderna. Next week should be a good week.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** A good week. And as we can do it responsibly, we're going to continue to open this thing up as fast as we can. Thank you. Nina, how are you?

**Nina Pineda, WABC-TV:** Good afternoon, Governor. A question for the Commissioner. Commissioner, for people like Savannah and Robert Crowd who are from Three Bridges and Camilla Farley who's from Newark, choosing between their car and buying diapers and paying rent, you said February 12th the processes will begin to be claimed. They will get an email and then you said they should call and email to certify. But with so many people not getting through, how long after the 12th can they expect their checks? Could you clarify that?

And also, just to follow up, sir. You said that the 300 was prioritized? That was your first bullet point. Many people have not even received the 300. Do you have a dollar figure on how much is owed. Thank you, Commissioner.

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** I can get you that number. Real quick, I've not heard any reports about folks who are eligible for \$300, who is anybody who's receiving UI benefits, is receiving the \$300. Now, there's some confusion because it comes days after they certified. This happened last time too with the first original extension. Every time we've got an inquiry about this, we look in there and we just see that it comes a couple days after. But anybody who receives the underlying UI benefit for the week, they're receiving the \$300.

As far as the timing of how this works, like I said before, they're going to get an email that you are ready to certify, or a text message and they can just certify the way they always have. So folks in this situation have already exhausted their benefits. That means they've already claimed between 46 or more weeks, so they know full well how to claim and certify for a benefit. The backups on the phones does not affect somebody certifying their benefits. That's a separate phone line and online, so there's never any delay on certifying for that. When they get that email next Friday, or whenever it is, they can go right on and certify those weeks immediately. That's just a matter of the payments process that night. That's just a matter of how many days it takes for their bank, basically, to receive that deposit.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I don't know the people you refer to but I'm glad you did that because for Rob and his team, for me, for all of us, whether it's somebody who died, somebody in a hospital, a small business that went bust, a restaurant that's on the ropes, or in this case, somebody literally living penny to penny, we all have to remember that while we talk a lot about data and dollars and science and facts, this is about humanity in the state. Lives that are being lived or sadly, in some cases, lost. I know you will work with your team 24/7 to get this resolved. Thank you. Sir, have you got anything? Nice mask.

**Reporter:** Governor, New Jersey epidemiologist and experts in President Biden's COVID response team are asking people to stay home, not to go to Super Bowl parties. They see a potential super spreader event. So again why, on the eve of the Super Bowl, have you expanded indoor dining and let bars and restaurants stay open later?

For the Commissioner, 75,000 people in the state are waiting after six weeks for their 11-week unemployment extension. The Department of Labor told us in a statement that it's because it's taking time to reprogram the system with the extensions. We were told that New York and Connecticut got it done within a matter of days, with the help of a Google service. Why isn't New Jersey doing the same thing and getting outside help?


**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'm going to represent my colleague to the left. We have already answered your second question, so I'm not going to go over that ground again. What we've done on indoor capacities has nothing to do with the Super Bowl. In fact, I'm going to say this and see if Ed and Judy will throw a rock at me. If it weren't for the variants we might have made the move earlier and/or gone to a higher level of capacity. So people keep asking, aren't you worried about the variants? We are, which is why we're being as cautious as we are in those steps. It's not related to the Super Bowl. In fact, we rejected what many folks came to us with, could you just for that Sunday, February 7th, lift the 10:00 p.m. curfew?

Bars are different than restaurants, admittedly. There's still no bar service, by the way, in a bar. You have got to be at a table. But restaurants have long ago not been the place where people watch the Super Bowl. My concern is not a restaurant or a bar, although they have got to make sure they play ball. It's a house party that Pat Callahan or his colleagues locally around the state can't enforce.


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Let me be crystal clear. I mentioned this earlier. This is like Thanksgiving or Christmas or New Year's Eve. The maximum amount of people we want inside are 10. We want you to be socially distant. If it's not your immediate family or bubble, wearing a mask, kind of no two ways about it whether it's the Super Bowl or whether it's a rainy Tuesday in February. We need folks to hear that message loud and clear. That's just not related to the decision that Judy and Ed and team and I made to modestly open capacities. Thank you. Ma'am, good afternoon.

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**Jessica Moore, CBS2:** Good afternoon, Jessica with CBS2. I have received countless desperate notes from people who say this unemployment system has failed them and they have nowhere to turn. Governor, Commissioner, we have heard your plea to be patient, but I do wonder if there's anybody up here who understands what it's been like in this pandemic, to not know where your next check is coming from, to not know if you can feed your family? What would you do and what should they do?

Furthermore, Can you promise the people of New Jersey in this mess right now that this computer system lapse won't happen again with the next extension?

My last question is, with all of the criticism about not being able to get a live person on the phone in the call center, can that unemployment call center be staffed 24/7, even temporarily? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll start, Rob, and turn it to you. Do I understand it? Yeah, I grew up in a family that lived dollar to dollar, so I do. As I mentioned after Nina asked her question, it's important that folks out there who are not affected by this, never let this become abstract. This is about 75,000, or just under 2 million people since the pandemic, or 20-something billion dollars. Those numbers are all accurate but these are lives that are being impacted. And again, I grew up in a working poor family that wanted someday to get into the middle class. There were periods when my dad in particular wasn't working and it is brutal. So the answer is, do we understand it? We understand it. We have nothing but empathy, sympathy and we'll do everything we can to get to a better place, as fast as we can.

I think we've already answered the question about can you guarantee February 12th? Can you guarantee the technology will happen? To the best of our ability on February 5th, yes. Rob, anything you want to add to that, and/or expanding the hours of the call center capacity?

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** We're always looking to expand our capacity in many different ways. But I want to say, real quick that everyone in our department feels for every single person, for any reason, that are unemployed or in a bad economic situation. We're public servants. That's why we do what we do, is to help people. I know myself, many of my colleagues have been fighting their whole lives for workers' rights, to lift people out of poverty. I was on the board of a soup kitchen in New Brunswick, Elijah's Promise, which we mentioned up here many times. We are very aware of what hunger insecurity means to folks, food insecurity, what the dire situations they are in, which is why we are doing everything we can at all times to make our lives easier for these folks. But that's also why we're fighting day to day, every single day, every hour for these folks to get paid as soon as possible. We look at the big picture as well, because the current system wasn't made to help people in these dire situations. That's why we need the help. That's why I talked about the federal issues. That's why I think there's a glimmer of hope nationally now.

Because every state, while they might be fixed on this specific issue a week before New Jersey, I promise you, every Governor, every Legislator, every Congressperson across all political stripes in every state is hearing about this non-stop. The time for true UI reform is now, to make this system be able to serve the folks who are in these situations that you're talking about.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Call center?

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** We are always looking to expand capacity. Like I said, we're in the process of doubling the staff. We haven't seen that the hours are a problem. And again, when we double the staff, we can expand the hours. It's also about the ability to access our systems because the folks who are on the phones have to be able to look into someone's claim and that's a whole bunch of other stuff to set up, and there's hours on that as well.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Again, I want to reiterate before we close out with Nikita, this past year has been devastating. Over 20,000 lives lost, we still have thousands of people in the hospital. Thousands of people are tested positive every day. You've got now an unemployment reality which is unfathomable, not to be compared to any other period in our state's or our country's history, including, remember I said earlier, almost 2 million people have made an initial claim, including 200,000 of whom who have lost their job twice in the past year. Not once, but twice. I promise you, we will do everything we can to save as many lives, save as many jobs and to be there for folks in our hour of need.

You also I think heard Rob say something in what other states are doing. If we can learn from them, we rip pages out of their playbook, trust me. But we don't find solace that we did something before somebody else did it or an absolute test that State X got something done before us. What I think you also heard is there are so many different components of this, states that may have gotten one piece of this done first may not have gotten other steps accomplished. This is the one outstanding step for us, this group of 75,000. There's no other hole in the operation right now.

Again, that doesn't mean we don't have sympathy or complete understanding and empathy for those who are still in need and we will get there. Nikita, please.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Thank you, Governor. I want to ask first, do you feel comfortable still with Commissioner Hicks remaining in charge at DOC after reading the charges announced against the three guards at Edna Mahan? Separately, Assemblyman Zwicker has been an ally of yours in the Legislature and he's now seeking a State Senate seat. Should the politics of the county that he lives in affect whether or not he runs with you on the Somerset County line? Do you plan to endorse him regardless of whether or not he gets organizational support there?

Finally, Senator Scutari yesterday introduced a bill that would require candidates for office to report contributions and expenses on a rolling basis every 72 hours. That bill would also eliminate contribution limits. I'm wondering if you feel supportive of those reforms?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll start with the last first. I actually was with Nick yesterday and I take my hat off to him because he's consistently been there, doing an enormous amount in partnership with us. I'm not aware of the bill. We gathered for different reasons so I honestly don't have a reaction. I'd rather get read into it and come back to you.

As a general matter, I'm not wild about lifting limits, even though it makes, particularly for my wife these days, makes the work harder. But I have generally been a for limit person and always been for transparency, and that'll stay that way.

I'll go back up to the top and again, you'll forgive me, given the ongoing criminal investigation and an independent investigation which I've ordered, I've said everything I'm going to say about Edna Mahan and any individuals for now.

I'm a huge Andrew Zwicker fan. I love the guy. Brian Williams brought this clip out last week as a joke, but it's true. Andrew and I had each other at hello. I'll leave it at that. I think the world of the guy.

Thanks, everybody. I've got to ask one more question as we mask up. Ed, I've got to get you into the lineup here or you're going to stop showing up. Who do you like on Sunday? Tampa Bay or Kansas City?

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** The one thing I can say for sure about Sunday is that a New Jersey team is not going to win.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think we knew that a few months ago, but anything we've said, seriously, on the epidemiological or other science front that you want to add to?

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** No, I think basically we've covered it, obviously, we're watching things like the variants. I am encouraged by the overall case trends going forward. Hopefully we continue on our good path.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thanks for being here. Judy, who do you like on Sunday?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Not Brady, the other team.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That means you're a Kansas City Chiefs supporter, okay. Rob?

**Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo:** Have to go against Brady, unfortunately.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Unfortunately, that was the last word. Pat?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Giants.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Pat, you're going to be disappointed, that's all I can say, regardless of what the final score is. I'm going with Tampa Bay but I think this should be a good game. They're both really good teams. Judy and Ed, thank you. Rob, thank you, I know you'll stay on this. Pat, as always, Jared, Parimal, Dan, Tammy Murphy, thank you. To each and every one of you, stay strong. Again, we're virtual on Sunday and we'll be back with you at one o'clock on Monday unless you hear otherwise.

The White House approach so far has been telephonic, so they've been doing regular updates, led I think most days by Jeff Zients, who is the COVID Czar. The communication level is very high. I personally think, Judy, they're making all the right moves but they're digging out of a reality that's going to take some time to dig out of, but communication is as good as it can get. Transparency is as good as it can get. They've got the amount of bodies on this, not just the expertise, but the depth that I think this thing has sorely needed.

And again, because we won't see you before, all kidding aside on the Super Bowl, please enjoy the game but do it responsibly. We've just got to beg you to do that. If we keep doing what we're doing, we're going to get there. Vaccine numbers are going in the right direction, to your question and God willing they will continue to go in the right direction. I know Rob and his team will not stop until every penny is resolved and you get what you're deserving. God bless you all. Stay safe.

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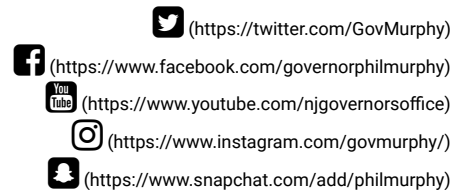
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