

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: October 19th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I'm joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have you both, as always. To my left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. The Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, is with us, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg. Welcome, everyone.

First, with Election Day just 15 days away, I'm pleased to report that just about 1.75 million ballots -- it's even up since they did the slide this morning -- have already been returned to county clerk's offices across the state. As a point of reference, there were nearly 3.9 million votes cast in total in New Jersey in 2016, so we are already at 45% to match the number from four years ago. So folks, if you have not yet returned your completed ballot, I urge you to put it in the mail today, the postage is already paid. Or, if you don't want to do that, utilize one of the secure dropboxes in your county. You can also hand deliver your ballot in advance to your county board of elections or show up and give it to a poll worker on Election Day. No matter how you do it, your vote-by-mail ballot is safe and it is secure.

Next, I am pleased to note that the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs is providing additional clinical staff to help us protect the health and safety of residents in our long-term care centers. The staff support began this morning and will continue for at least four weeks. I want to thank a guy who has been there consistently for us over these past eight months, Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie, who I have

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remained in direct contact with. I want to thank him for his and his department's continued partnership and support throughout the pandemic. Especially as we begin to transition to new leadership at our veterans homes, these additional hands will play an essential role.

Next, I am pleased to announce that the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control will be allowing the expanded liquor license permits that we enabled for outdoor dining to be extended from the end of November through the end of March 2021, for a nominal \$10 fee. For many of our residents, having the ability to serve liquor to their customers beyond their normal premises has been meaningful; in some cases, life saving for them and helped them survive during these challenging times. Given the current uncertainty, extending these permits is the right thing to do. I mentioned that uncertainty, let's with that turn our attention to the overnight numbers.

We are reporting an additional 1,192 cases, bringing our statewide cumulative total since March 4th to 221,205. As it relates to geography, Judy, five counties are reporting more than 100 today, as you well know, Ocean with 154, Essex with 132, Union with 109, Middlesex with 108, and Bergen with 103. Monmouth County, just under 100, is reporting 84 and Camden and Hudson Counties are reporting 75 and 78 new cases respectively.

The positivity rate for all tests recorded on Thursday, October 15th was 3.36%. The statewide rate of transmission today is 1.14. With these numbers, I again encourage everyone to put the COVID Alert NJ exposure notification app on your smartphone. The app is available for download through both the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. The app – this is good news, Judy – has been downloaded more than 205,000 times since its launch, but we need even more of you to take this quick and easy step. It can be an important tool for us in not only notifying those who may have been exposed to this virus, but to extinguishing hotspots. The more phones that have the app, the better we can fight this pandemic everywhere across our state.

In our healthcare system yesterday, our hospitals were treating a total of 758 patients, 579 of whom tested positive for coronavirus, and another 179 listed as persons under investigation as they await results of their tests. Of these patients, 166 were requiring intensive care and 62 ventilators were in use statewide. So while these numbers are a far cry from where we were at our springtime peaks, they are also significantly higher than where we were throughout much of the summer and until just a few weeks ago.

Many of the new cases we are tracking are coming not from our schools or businesses, or many other activities, but from private gatherings inside private homes. Especially as the cooler weather pulls more of us back inside we have to remain extra vigilant.

We are also reporting, with a heavy heart, four additional confirmed deaths from COVID-19 complications. That brings our statewide total to 14,425 blessed New Jerseyans, another 1,789 deaths remain listed as probable. Again, apples to oranges, Judy, but I have 16 deaths reported in our hospitals yesterday, but we will not again add them into our official counts until they are lab confirmed to have passed from COVID-19 complications.

Just as we do every day, let's remember three more of the New Jerseyans we have lost throughout this pandemic. We'll begin with this guy, Domenic Parisi, there's a smile Pat, who moved to Garfield from his native Sicily 61 years ago at the age of 15, and he stayed ever since. Back in his native Sicily, Domenic train for a career as a farmer, changing horseshoes. But after his father noted in a letter that New Jersey needed barbers more than farriers, he switched course. For more than a half a century, Domenic worked as a barber and was the longtime co-owner of Domenic and Pietro's Barber Studio in nearby Ho-Ho-Kus. The shop became a local institution, and Domenic became one as well. Former President Richard Nixon was among the many clients who sat in Domenic's chair. He was seeing customers, by the way, right up until he fell ill.

Domenic leaves behind his wife of 56 years, Linda, with whom I had the great honor of speaking; and three of their children, Jennifer, Paul and Joseph. Jennifer and Paul, I also had the great opportunity to speak with. By the way, Joseph followed into the family business and continues to run the shop where he worked side by side with his dad. Domenic is now reunited with his daughter Rosa who predeceased him.

In addition to a daughter and son-in-law, he is also survived by four granddaughters, Amanda with whom I had the great opportunity of speaking, Alexandria, Caitlin, and Megan, and his four surviving siblings, Joseph, Virginia, Tina and Marianne. We thank Domenic for making New Jersey his home and for adding so much to the community, and may God bless and watch over him.

Next we stay in Bergen County to remember Vincent Alamia of Rochelle Park. Vinnie was 76 years old. Vinnie was a native of Passaic, nicknamed Breezy as a child because he was always moving from one thing to another. He carried that same momentum through adulthood as a residential real estate appraiser and later on buying, fixing up and selling houses. Even in the toughest of times, Vinnie showed an essential quality of perseverance. After he and his wife Carol experienced the heartbreaking losses of two newborn children, the couple focused on the good they already had, and not the bad. Their call and response became their mantra. Carol asking, "how do you give up, Vin?" And his reply, "You don't."

Several years ago, Vinnie was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, but he wouldn't let it shake his will to live, and to keep pushing ahead. He knew he was still a lucky man, even as the disease slowly robbed him of his memory and his ability to speak. As he told Carol, "I thought I had everything because I still had you and our son."

He leaves behind Carol with whom I have the great honor of speaking, after 49 years of marriage, and that son, Jim, with whom I also had the great honor of speaking, his daughter-in-law Susan, and three grandchildren, James, Sierra, and Sadie. Carol said this to me, which I thought was an incredible statement. She called him, and I'm quoting her, "The most extraordinary ordinary guy." Vinnie's life is a reminder that even in the face of immense tragedy, we must keep moving forward. And for him, we will as a state, and as one New Jersey family. May God bless Vinnie and watch over him, and all he left behind.

And finally today, and this is a tough one, we remember Ramon Ramirez Lucas of Passaic. He was a commercial painter. He came to the United States from his native Mexico roughly 20 years ago, and he was only 39 years old when he passed. Last year – let this sink in – Ramon lost his wife Margot to a heart attack. He therefore took on the role of family anchor to the four children he and Margot had together, daughter Beatrice and sons Angel, Raymond and Juan, and also Margot's five older children. But even through her loss and the tremendous weight of carrying on, he never gave up the promise of America to provide a better life and future for his family. He instilled in his children the promise of the American dream.

Now friends and family have established a GoFundMe account to support Ramon and Margot's children, and our administration is also working to provide the family whatever assistance they are eligible to receive, including higher education assistance for Beatrice, who is a student at Passaic County Community College, as well as for Margot's older daughter Marlene, with whom I also had the great honor of speaking, who was one of our state's proud Dreamers. Our goal is for Ramon and Margot's family to achieve their American Dreams, because this is New Jersey and we look after everyone who is a part of our family. May God bless Ramon and watch over him as he watches over his family. I will tell you, Ramon, so will we.

Three more incredible people from among the more than 16,000 this virus has taken away. Their stories are the New Jersey story: those who came here for a better life, and those who built a good life through hard work and perseverance. We honor them and we honor all the families left behind.

Switching gears, I'd like to acknowledge another of the organizations that has partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to continue in their missions, even in the face of these uncertain times. For the past 22 years, the Goddard School of Quakerbridge Road has provided children from children from six weeks to 13 years of age from throughout Mercer, Monmouth and Burlington counties with a safe and nurturing learning environment. The owner, there on the right Deepa Chaloni and her team never gave up on looking after the health and safety of their students and fellow educators. So to cover essential expenses and keep the school's doors open, Deepa worked through the EDA to receive a COVID-19 Phase 2 grant.

I had the chance to check in with Deepa at the end of the week. She also wanted me to give a shout out to Jessica Schultz, who's the center's director. And today the Goddard School of Quakerbridge Road is open, offering both in-person and remote learning to their students. And I'm especially proud of the partnership we've provided so Deepa and her team can continue to provide a strong educational foundation to their students.

I want to give you their website which is, I believe the singular most complicated website I have ever enunciated. [GoddardSchool.com/Philadelphia/Hamilton-Quakerbridge-Road-NJ](https://www.goddardschool.com/Philadelphia/Hamilton-Quakerbridge-Road-NJ). I probably should have given you the street address and just asked you to show up, because that probably would have been a lot easier but Deepa, good luck to you and Jessica and the rest of the team.

And finally today, with a heavy heart, I want to acknowledge the passing at the end of last week of a giant, of Newark's iconic civic and political leader Steve Aduato Sr. Big Steve, as he was known, was a giant in the North Ward and beyond. He founded the North Ward Center, which provides community services from afterschool programming to workforce training to activities for seniors, as well as the Robert Treat Academy. By the way, that is the North Ward Center behind Steve in that picture.

He also never gave up on his native Newark. He showed his passion for his hometown in 1970, when in the wake of the 1967 uprising and sensing the tectonic shift in New York's politics and future, and with the city's racial tensions at their height, he endorsed Ken Gibson for mayor. Mayor Gibson was the first Black mayor of Newark.

Steve was a mentor to so many not just in Essex County, but across our state. He was old school and was never one to hide his true feelings. But that's what made him so effective as a leader. He practiced what he preached. I had the opportunity to provide my condolences to his widow Fran, and Tammy and I each exchanged notes with his son Steve Jr. He also leaves behind two daughters, Michelle, who runs the North Ward Center, and Teresa. This is a family raised in civic service and that will be the legacy of Steve Aduato Sr.

And with that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, we continue to see an increase in COVID-19 cases in our state. This trend began about a month ago. Until September 15th, our cases were in the high 300s each day, then they climbed to 500 to 600 daily. Now daily reports of cases have doubled since last month and we are now up on as high as 1,000 a day. This trend is similar to what the nation is experiencing, but we have seen hotspots in Ocean County and at our universities. Overall, we are seeing more widespread cases throughout the state due to community spread and not any single event or reopening step.

Excluding schools, congregate living and healthcare, from March to the fall – October – we see the largest percentage of outbreaks, 16%, are related to parties and gatherings, with daycare settings and farms right behind at 13% each. That was tracking 118 outbreaks. From the beginning of September to October 5th, tracking 36 outbreaks, the data again shows that gatherings and parties are contributing to most of the outbreaks, with 17% associated with these activities.

I know we are all tired of COVID-19 and all the precautions necessary to prevent the spread of disease and the restrictions we have endured. It is understandable that residents want life to go back to normal. But as we approach the holiday season, now is the time to double down on social distancing, wearing face coverings and good hand hygiene. As the weather gets cooler, colder and more people move inside, the risk of transmission increases. The trajectory of the next few months will be determined by all of us now, and in the coming weeks. Our behavior will be critical in shaping how our holidays will be celebrated. Now is not the time to let your guard down. The virus has not stopped circulating, so we must continue this fight.

Moving on to my daily report as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 758 hospitalizations of COVID-19 and persons under investigation, with 166 individuals in critical care. There are thankfully no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are a total of 59 cases in our state. In New Jersey, no deaths have been reported at this time. The ages of the children affected range from 1 to 18 and none of these children are currently hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 54.2, Black 18.2, Hispanic 20.2, Asian 5.5, other 1.9.

At the state veterans homes, there are a total cumulatively of 394 cases among residents and as you know, 146 deaths. At our state psychiatric hospitals, the numbers remain the same.

The Daily percent positivity as of October 15th in the state is 3.36. The Northern part of the state reports 3.57, the Central part of the state 2.95, and the Southern part of the state 3.47. That concludes my daily report. Stay safe and remember, for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I made this comment, I think when we were together on Thursday, they're not quite as tight, but the regional positivity rates are pretty close to each other. And when you listen to the numbers by counties, some of the highlights of which – or lowlights – that I referred to in my remarks, it's pretty clear that this is up and down the state. At one level, you'd love to be able to point to right there is 500 cases and that's just not the case. And your point is well taken. We're not alone. The rest of the country is seeing this and in fact, some states are in the crisis mode that we were in in the spring, and we wish them nothing but a speedy resolution. But it's everywhere and it is going to be incumbent on all of us as individuals. It's really not one – I mean, we had higher ed, we had Lakewood, and perhaps we're still seeing some run off of those realities but at this point, it's up to all of us, right? Personal responsibility, battle through that fatigue. The cold weather is not our ally here, unfortunately. It's driving more activity indoors. We've got to do everything we can, I know this sounds silly, but we've stay outside as much as we can. We have our strategy discussions frequently. And that was a big part of today's, so thank you as always.

Pat, you and I did something pretty special this morning and I would love for you to tell us about that and also any other news and reports you've got on your side.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Nothing to report since we last met with regard to Executive Order violations but what the Governor alluded to was this morning at State Police Headquarters, that family there from South Toms River, the Covalito family dad is Michael, mom Lindsay, older sister Isabella, and the smallest one there, although certainly not the weakest is Sophia, who is four years old and in the fight of her life against cancer. We made her an honorary New Jersey State Trooper this morning, and I thank Dan Bryan, who had flagged this for us, Gov, from your office. She simply wanted patches from around the state. She now has patches from around the United States as well as the world, because she's just fascinated and she simply said she thinks they're cool. But that four-year-old embodies the definition of trooper at her young age, and we were honored that the Governor, troopers, we had our mounted unit there with five horses and it was just in a day when we needed a good story, I think it certainly fit the bill. So God bless to the Covalito and to State Trooper Sophia Covalito.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dan, thank you. That's one in a row. And secondly, Sophia, by the way, I left the parking lot, she pulled me over. That's not true. But what a strong young lady and what a great family. It started, if I'm not mistaken, Dad has a friend who's a policeman in Lavallette, right? And they delivered cookies to them?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's right, and it just went from South Toms River around the state and like I said, the world now. So she's just an inspiration for us.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless her. Keep Sophia Covalito in your prayers and root for that gal and her family. With that, we'll start over here. Aswan has got the mic today. I've lost Dan Bryan. We're going to be back on the Monday-Thursday routine, although we'll be out and about from time to time. I know I've got Ask The Governor tonight. I think we've got an announcement we're going to make some place tomorrow, but we'll be live back here unless you hear otherwise. We'll be virtual Tuesday and Wednesday, back here live Thursday at 1:00 p.m. Dustin, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Why did you replace the Military and Veterans Affairs officials on Friday? Why now? When will the new administrators for the two nursing homes be named? Why do those homes need more clinical staff right now? Have you met with or talked with any of the veterans homes' residents' families?

With cases increasing, is contact tracing working to keep new cases in clusters, or are we in full-bore community spread? I think, Commissioner, you said there is no community spread. What are the thresholds for triggering a reversal of indoor gatherings and other opening up guidelines?

And finally, do you have any worries about hospital capacity or supplies like PPE? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: The last one is what are we most worried about, hospital capacity or PPE?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Yeah. Do you have any concerns similar to in the Spring?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy can address the back end of the questions. On our call earlier, you're adding a whole bunch of contact tracers over the next couple of weeks so that still is relevant. And on reversals, Dustin, you never say never, right? But we don't have the evidence of the stuff, I mentioned this on Thursday, of the things that can be enforced and regulated, we don't have the evidence right now that would lead to our reversing. I don't want to put words in Judy's mouth. I think PPE is less of a concern, hospital capacity, less of a concern. I think your concern is actual manpower and staffing, but you'll jump in in a minute.

I want to just say as a general matter on the moves that we announced on Friday, I want to thank Brigadier General Jamal Beal for his leadership of the department and our National Guard, and wish him all the best for his future. I will not have any more comment on personnel matters. Our mission remains to ensure the strongest leadership at the department for our active troops and for our honored veterans once their days of service are over. These are our core values, not only frankly as New Jerseyans, but as Americans. I am confident in Interim Adjutant General Colonel Dr. Lisa Hou's ability to ensure the readiness of our military personnel and the care of our veterans. And as we've said many times before, there will be a full accounting to get to the bottom of what happened, and that's all we'll say on that matter.

Judy, can you add some color to my predictions as to where you would see our limitations?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. First of all, we have about 212 individuals in the pipeline, contact tracers that will be deployed within the next two weeks. On hospital capacity, every day we look at what we call the operational stockpile of our hospitals and our long-term care facilities and the strategic stockpile, and we monitor that at 10:00 a.m. every day. I believe we have adequate PPE and definitely adequate operational and strategic stockpile. We also keep a close eye on the volume of Remdesivir that we have.

As far as shortages, my anticipation is that our biggest struggle will be staffing as we experience community spread. People that work in hospitals and in long-term care facilities also are members of a community. And we're just urging, as we do for everyone, mask up, socially distance, stay outdoors as much as possible, hand hygiene. These are very valuable individuals that we need, but if they fall ill, backup will be difficult. It'll be difficult because every other state in the nation is having the same difficulties we're having.

Governor Phil Murphy: And again, this is an important one. When Dustin asked about can you see reversals of steps we've taken? That's not to say that everything isn't on the table, but there's no step that we've taken that we think is right now singularly contributing to this. This is all over, up and down the state sort of community reality, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I mean, we look at the map that Dr. Tan's group puts together which separates the state into six regions. It's all yellow, which is moderate, and we look at that every week and we'll continue to look at it. If it moves into the red, what I think we will do is increase testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Matt, we'll come to you. Good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Afternoon. Governor, our numbers in our seven-day rolling average currently would qualify New Jersey to be among the list of states added to the New Jersey, New York and Connecticut travel advisory. I wanted to know, what does this mean for the tristate compact? Could we be added to the list when it's updated tomorrow and what your conversations have been with the governors of New York and Connecticut about this?

I would also like to know the status of the rapid test that you announced a couple weeks ago that we'd received from the feds. Curious maybe how many we've received? Are they being used and will the DOH dashboard reflect those tests and not just the PCR test?

Commissioner, you talked about some stats just a moment ago and you mentioned cases involving farms. I just want to make sure that you're referring to farm workers.

Different subject. Governor, regarding the early prison releases, an estimate from your office said about 243 prisoners do not currently have a safe place to live when they're released on November 4th. Do you know where in the process parole and corrections are in helping those people find housing?

And finally from Dan Munoz, there have been threats from the New York Stock Exchange that the proposed tax that has passed and you signed it, that they would move out of the state. Senator Sweeney and Assemblyman McKeon have been highly skeptical they would follow through, Dan would like to know if you think that they would follow through with their threat to leave the state if the tax is enacted?

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it, thank you. On the rolling averages and the travel advisory, I think I said on Thursday, we've already been on advisory lists. I believe Vermont, which Dan experienced, and Massachusetts at a minimum are two states where we've been on. We're still actively coordinating with New York and Connecticut on a whole range of things. And my takeaway is a simple, two-part takeaway. Number one, my advice is not to travel, frankly, regardless of where you're going. Number two, we're going to focus on getting our numbers down.

The status of the rapid tests, we're getting these in tranches of 170-something thousand per week and Pat, I don't know if we have this week's in yet? Do you happen to know?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: You know what? I'm waiting on that answer, but we did get that first batch of 175,000 ultimately, I think it is.

Governor Phil Murphy: And they have been deployed, Judy, correct?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The first tranche I don't know the number, but they were deployed to Ocean County. By October 26th, we hope to deploy to higher ed and some school districts.

Governor Phil Murphy: I actually took that test this morning for the first time and it's exactly what they said it was, I had an answer in 15 minutes. Farm, I assume that you mean farm workers? Is that correct? I've got nothing specific on housing for anyone who's getting released, but Parimal is with us? Parimal, anything you want to add to that? Otherwise, Matt, we can come back and follow up with you.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: We've been working closely with our Department of Corrections and the State Parole Board, as well as nonprofits and advocacy groups to ensure that inmates will have access to housing and social services after they're released.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is a broader point in the context of reentry, which is not just for your question, Matt, but the broader point is you cut down dramatically on recidivism, you cut down dramatically on life's challenges if you've got a plan that's holistic, including where somebody's going to live.

I've addressed the New York Stock Exchange before. We've had, I thought, constructive discussions, in my case personally with NASDAQ and the New York Stock Exchange. They expressed their concerns. I can't read their minds. But the fact that, you know, we are in an hour of need. This is not a forever and always consideration. I think our side of the argument is also reasonable, I've found them to be reasonable, and we shall see. This is something we still are studying and we still like what we see, but it's complicated, there's no question about it. Thank you. Real quick, Matt.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: As far as the travel advisory though, I'm curious if you've spoken with Governor Cuomo?

Governor Phil Murphy: I haven't spoken with him directly, but our teams speak all the time.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: And just on the testing, the rapid testing currently, the PCR is the only thing reflected on –

Governor Phil Murphy: Oh, you asked about the dashboard, I apologize.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Right, so will the rapid tests fall into that or will it be a separate metric?

Governor Phil Murphy: That one's on me, I apologize.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yeah, right now, what's reflected on the dashboard do not include the antigen test, but we do count them in terms of the public health management that the local health departments do follow up on them as if they were confirmed cases.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would think that over time, that's something you'd consider adding to the dashboard, I would think, right?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: We are working through issues with getting those reports to us. The challenge –

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, that's an issue. When I spoke to the CEO of Abbott, he himself brought this up, that actually having folks not just do the test, but sign up for the app so that there's some place we can actually get the data accurately is more challenging, because this is broadly distributed. Judy's mentioned before, for instance, the notion of school nurses being able to administer this in, you know, thousands of schools potentially around the state. We'll come back to you if we've got any more on that.

Alex, how are you? Sorry, I didn't see you. I apologize.

Reporter: You've relied on the bully pulpit quite a bit through this pandemic. Are you worried about sending a mixed message by pressing ahead with reopening, such as possibly expanding indoor dining capacity soon, while also calling for greater vigilance for folks who are gathering at home?

And then I have a follow up on Dustin's question on rollbacks. I just want to narrow the scope a little bit. Earlier this month you were very clear that you were working with local leaders in hotspots and would consider scalpel-like restrictions. Did you discuss targeted rollbacks with any of those local officials? And if so, was there any pushback from them? That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'm sorry. I didn't see you there. You were in Matt's slipstream. Listen, we're working, we're wargaming, I was part of a pretty intense discussion today about steps we could take to help our restaurant industry, particularly as the weather gets colder. I would be lying to you if I didn't say, and I think the folks to my right who are the health experts and the guy to my left who helps enforce compliance, these numbers are sobering, I have to say. So we are wargaming a whole lot of potential steps that we can take, whether it's indoor or outdoor or both dining to try to relieve some of this burden without adding to our already rising numbers.

I have to say, we don't have any evidence that indoor dining per se is contributing to this. But we also have to be pretty – and your question gets to this – we not only have to help our restaurants, but we've got to, I think, be consistent in the plea for responsibility among citizenry. We don't want to cross purposes on those.

On the scalpel steps, everything remains on the table. I would just say we talk to communities literally all the time. Right now, I mean, the biggest concern we had over the past sort of two to three weeks, Judy, was Lakewood and some communities around Lakewood, but Ocean is still over 100 today. We take all of those cases seriously but there are almost 1,200 cases in the state today.

I would just repeat the plea that Judy had, which is right now, our best sense and our best advice is this is an individual call to arms right now, that folks have to do everything they can, especially when they're in a place, typically a home, congregate living, which is beyond our ability to either regulate or easily enforce compliance. Now Alex, apologies.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Good afternoon, Governor. Can you tell us right now if you believe this increase in cases means we're in a second wave or are we still at the end of a first wave? I'd like to ask you and the Health Commissioner about the relation between new cases and the RT. As we've seen, the number of new cases has been going up, the spot positivity has been going up, but the RT is not. Is that because it's a lagging indicator or is there some other reason?

I'd also like to ask about testing. Some days we'll have 60,000 tests, some days we'll have 20,000 or 30,000. Why is the testing number so erratic? Are there moves being taken to make sure that that number is consistent?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I've answered it this way. I think these are largely answers that are going to have to come from my right, including you, Tina. I'll just preview that and say I haven't spent a lot of time wondering about whether this is the end of the first or the beginning of the second. I just know that the numbers, you know, just again, positive cases from today back over the past five days, 1,192, 1,282, 958, 823, 973, that's five days and my eyeballs tell me it's about 5,000 cases.

Yeah, I do think spot positivity is up. It's at 3.36%. That looks, eyeballing over the past week, to be a hair above what the average has been, but it does tell you we're testing a lot of people, which is to your third point. The RT has been literally stuck in a band of 1.15 to 1.8 for the past week. I guess today it went down a hair to 1.14, but my data tells me it's a little fresher than the spot positivity. The spot positivity is as of tests taken on the 15th, the RT was as of October 17th. But any comments on any of that, Judy or Tina? First or second wave? Connection between rising new cases, yet an RT that's staying in a range and testing certain days being much more significant than others.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: So related to the testing fluctuations, that could depend on a lot of different factors, one of which relates to what's being done in the community. Other factors also relate to when we actually get the results in and how they're processed in our reportable disease system. There's always going to be fluctuations in terms of those numbers up and down and the positivity, it always reflects several days before when we actually report out the numbers, because we want to make sure that we have enough stability in the number so that the number of reports have the time to catch up in our system. Then we're more confident in the numbers that we report out.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, anything you want to add to that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Testing variability also relates to accessibility. Some testing centers are closed on Sunday so obviously, testing usually goes down over the weekend. It's also impacted by the testing schedules. For example, in congregate living arrangements, there's a certain schedule, how many you do a week, how many positives you test, retest. There's a lot of fluctuation. Our goal was 20,000 a day. It's now between 30,000 and 35,000 a day.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, can I ask you to come back to one, sort of the Rubik's cube of RT, which is really not meaningfully coming down from a tight range nor going up; spot positivity that's up relative to a couple weeks ago but is still among the lowest rates in America, and positives which have been clearly up. So you've got over 1,000 a couple days in a row. Can you help folks sort of make sense of that triangulation?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yeah and again, that's why the Commissioner had alluded to our COVID regional map because that takes into effect takes into account several different metrics that we look at. The number of cases per hundred thousand, the COVID-like illnesses that are showing up in our emergency departments, syndromic surveillance indicator, as well as percent positivity. We know from looking at the data from the last several months that there's a strong association among those particular metrics in terms of direction of activity. We're pretty confident in those particular metrics.

But that said, to the question about the first wave, second wave, I would be with the Governor and with the Commissioner that whether or not we characterize this as part of a continuum of the first wave that we saw back in March and April versus this being the beginning of a new wave, so to speak, the fact is that we've got a lot of activity going on right now and what's most important is taking some actionable steps in terms of making sure that we maintain vigilance with the measures that we know that we need to take to keep these numbers down, as well as to continuously monitor what's going on in the community if we can identify any other steps that we can take to prevent illness.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Tina. Thank you. Sir, you've got anything? You good? Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. Since New Jersey is qualified for its own travel advisory list, you said your advice to people is not to travel, but some people just have to travel for work. What's your guidance to people who cross the border into New York every day? Do people need to quarantine or does the list become obsolete?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think there's been, from moment one, there's been a carve out for essential travel and that has to still be the case regardless of where you're traveling to. That still is the case. Traveling into New York and then coming back to New Jersey, to my way of thinking, is not a quarantine event. But we're just asking folks to be smart. The numbers are up, they're up, up and down the state. Yes, there have been some hotspots, but the number of hotspots is now broadening. Judy, you mentioned earlier that you're putting hotspot teams into another set of counties. This is what we're living with right now in our state and in

our country. I would just plead with people to be smart, use common sense. I would prefer they didn't travel. I don't mean commuting into work in back, although there's a lot less of that than there was eight months ago. But I mean, just as a general matter. Thank you. Sir.

Reporter: I have several for you. On Friday, the Department of Health said it submitted a draft of New Jersey's COVID-19 vaccination distribution plan to the CDC. What can you share about that plan to date? And will the state have enough funds to carry it out if there's no federal aid?

One for the Commissioner. Can you provide some specifics on what the state has done to help hospitals prepare for a rising COVID caseload this fall? In particular, is there any additional funding the state is making available for this potential?

For you, Governor, are you concerned about voter intimidation, especially with the President calling on his supporters to be vigilant at the polls? What safeguards are in place to protect anyone who goes to the polls on Election Day?

You've touched on this a little bit, but what are the metrics you will base a decision on to rollback reopenings, and what would be the first sectors to close? The Dean of the Rutgers School of Public Health says the state should consider targeted shutdowns in hotspot areas, similar to what's been adopted in New York. You said today that option is on the table, but why won't you commit to targeted shutdowns here?

And then lastly, you said earlier this month that this year's bear hunt would be the last under your administration, but couldn't the Fish and Game council reinstate the hunt after the current policy sunsets? What authority do you have to instate a non-lethal policy? Do you have any assurance from the Council that they'll adopt those methods? Do you have the authority to unilaterally end the bear hunt?

Governor Phil Murphy: We will go quickly through these. In fact, we did submit our vaccination plan, vaccine plan on Friday, as was required by every American state to the CDC. Judy oversaw a process which included extensive vetting and review. My guess is at one of the next upcoming press conferences, I can't promise it's Thursday but at some point soon, I know you're going to go through that, so bear with us on that one.

Judy, hospital preparedness, that's something that you were talking about earlier today. Do you want to give a little bit of a sense of what that looks like?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: There's a couple of items. We've never stopped working with the hospitals. We never considered the wave to be over and every day at 10:00 a.m. we review again their stockpiling, particularly for PPE. We review their bed utilization. We know every day, how many available beds we have and how many available Intensive Care Unit beds we have. Additionally, we have maintained all of our waivers to allow them to expand their bed complement, particularly their critical care bed complement, at a moment's notice. We additionally are working with them on staffing plans to build up to contingency or crisis staffing, if they need it. It's an everyday event we're working with the hospitals and preparing with them every step of the way. They report every night at 10:00 p.m. so we know every morning at 10:00 a.m. exactly where they are.

Governor Phil Murphy: You make a fair point. It's not like we're getting reacquainted. We've been all over these people, even when our spot positivity was down one something and our daily positives were 200 or something a month or so ago, both you and your team and me personally and all of us.

Not a whole lot more to say on quote-unquote metrics and rollbacks that we have not already said. Things are on the table but again, we're looking at community spread right now in a lot of different places in the state. I will say it again, that's going to be up to all of us individually to do the right things, particularly when you're in a private setting that we can't regulate and that we can't reasonably enforce.

This is for the President, this is for anybody in a position of responsibility, words matter so please, as we're coming up 15 days from election, regardless of what side of the aisle you're on, we've got to be responsible. We cannot be inflaming tensions which are already high. We had a very good pre-election meeting with Director Maples and Secretary Way, I guess on Thursday or Friday, I thought that was a good discussion about making sure that the election process is safe and secure, and we don't have things like intimidation occurring.

We wouldn't have made the announcement on the bear hunt if we didn't mean it. Obviously, the council is important here. There's some myth out there that I could, with the stroke of a pen, end this. I can't. I think our Chief Counsel Parimal Garg would agree with me that that is not an option, otherwise we would have done it a long time ago. I'm not thrilled to see the carcasses pile up last week, but the next one in December, we have complete confidence with the Council's cooperation, that that will be the last one in the state. Anything else you'd add to that or are you all right?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: I would just say that the Fish and Game Council has the authority to institute a black bear management policy every five years, but it has to be approved by the Commissioner of Environmental Protection. That five year plan expires next year, and our administration has made it clear that going forward, there won't be a bear hunt.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi. So Governor, you touched on this in a couple of different ways through different questions, but indoor dining and also indoor gyms. No evidence that this is causing any problem. Can you give us any more color, any more understanding of -- you said you're wargaming some different ideas about possibly expanding this. I mean, it seems like it would make sense to try it and then you can always pull back if there is a problem. It would also seem to make sense that you would want to limit social parties, you know, college kids, religious gatherings perhaps, limit the capacity for those because we have clear evidence and indications that that has caused a problem and continues to in Ocean County.

Then the other question is regarding the RT and the whole pattern that we're seeing with this pandemic? I know Tina touched on this a little bit, but I don't really think it got to the question that was asked. We have this big uptick in the number of cases we're seeing and there is an increase in the spot positivity. At the same time, deaths have remained fairly low. I know every life is precious, but the numbers are low and the RT is pretty low, and it's staying pretty low. Can you maybe, Governor and the health folks, can refocus our look at this pandemic and what seems to be happening here? I know there's been a lot of talk about younger people getting more cases. They are not winding up in the hospital, ICU and so forth. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good questions. On the indoor dining and indoor gyms, we're trying to do everything we can whether it's literally cash on the barrel from coronavirus relief funds distributed through the EDA, extending the ABCs for another six months to allow them to serve liquor not on their premises. Whether it's indoor or outdoor dining, we are trying to do everything we can. We could still, may I just use this as an opportunity to get my commercial -- we need more federal money, and that industry would be an obvious beneficiary from it.

But I have to say the reason I said, so there's a lot of things we're trying to figure out whether it's indoors or outdoors right now, and try to really shake the trees on what else we could be doing for the industry, particularly as the weather gets colder. I alluded to this earlier, though. The numbers of late are sobering. One concern I think that we are coming to, all of us who are trying to get this as right as we can is we also don't want to send mixed messages in terms of what we need folks to do right now. I have to say I'm even more sobered today than I was on Thursday or at any point last week.

What I don't want to do and I want to avoid and we want to avoid it as best we can is to -- I know it sounds good on paper but I don't want to take a step and then have to lurch backward, just because there's too much investment, too much planning involved. We came close, as you know, leading up to July 2nd and it quite clearly wasn't the right time.

Limiting capacity is on the list. I mean, we've said that before. We already have, on the indoor side, among the lowest limits around. Is that something that's on the table? Yes. But again, the capacities that we believe right now are contributing to the bulk of the cases are those gatherings that are beyond our ability to regulate and/or properly enforce.

I will turn the last question over to the people who are qualified on my right. Again, although we had I don't know how many I said, 13 I think in our hospitals overnight, Judy? Sadly, there's still folks who are passing. I know you made the very fair caveat that every life is a precious one and our job is to save as many of them, keep as many people healthy and save as many lives as possible. I know you share that in the premise of

your question. But you do have the reality that the number of fatalities, thank God, have come down over time. Cases are going up at the same time although there is lagging, as you know. RT is in a range. It's stuck in a range without question. Spot positivity is up.

I will just posit that number one, and correct the record, please, our medical knowledge and scientific knowledge of this virus is light years different than it was in March. Secondly, it's pretty clear we've been saying nationally but also in New Jersey, cases have gotten younger. There's no question about the demographics associated with that. And thirdly, we're testing a lot of people in our state. Per capita, we're testing a ton of folks, so part of this is community spread and part of this is the denominator per capita is about as big as it is in New Jersey as it is anywhere. Can you critique any of those points, either of you, or add? Okay. We stay at it. Thank you, Dave.

So thank you, folks. Give us a second here to get ourselves organized. Again, unless you hear otherwise from Dan or me, we will be virtual tomorrow and Wednesday, and live with you on Thursday at one o'clock unless you hear otherwise. Judy and Tina, thank you as always. Pat, likewise, Jared, Parimal, again, welcome aboard. So far, so good. Dan and team.

As I always do, I thank everybody for overwhelmingly in our state doing the right thing. No state can make that claim as New Jersey can. Even with numbers going up, we've gotten to where we are based on the energies of millions of folks in our state. We've just got to stay at it here. I mean, the big headline right now is yeah, we've got hot spots here and there but even compared to a week ago, a given hotspot as a percentage of where we're seeing cases has gone down. There's no question about that. This is in our midst. And it is, I don't know overwhelmingly, but it certainly errs on the side of indoor private activity. People are fatigued and frankly, who could blame you for being fatigued? Who isn't right now?

But we need you to stay strong right now, particularly as we go indoors. We'll do everything we can to make the right decisions to help the industries that have been crushed like the restaurant industry, as we've talked about. Indoor, physical, entertainment, gyms, etc. But folks, thank you for everything you've done and please, please, please stay at it. And if you're out in the roads, watch out for Sophia Covalito today, because she's our special Trooper for the Day. God bless you. Bye-bye.

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