

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: June 7th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. I am 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, and a guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel, with us and a cast of thousands. First of all, I'm not up on the exact details, but just want to acknowledge the tragedy that occurred in Maplewood last evening where I believe an 18-year-old lost his life, and a 17-year-old was severely injured. It's another case of gun violence that is in our midst, and please keep them and their – his memory and their families in your prayers.

As we all know, switching gears, it is hot today, and above average temperatures and humid conditions are forecast for at least the next couple of days. Pat, I think you've got to talk a little bit about the potential for some severe thunderstorms later. As a reminder to all school officials, our current masking requirements do include exceptions for cases of extreme heat in outdoor settings and for situations indoors or outdoors where wearing a mask would inhibit the individual's health. School officials are empowered to relax masking among students and staff in their buildings given extreme weather conditions, and we hope they will make the right calls for their educational communities. On Friday, I was proud to sign legislation and an executive order that ended our public health emergency, another step to the relative position of normalcy. This legislation also ensures that we maintain the tools we need to continue our final assault on this virus and to end the pandemic.

Let's not kid ourselves. The public health emergency is over. The pandemic is not. We still have an aggressive vaccination program to oversee. We still must ensure that we have the capability to combat any hotspots that may arise in areas where vaccinations lag. I am extremely grateful to Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin and the members of their respective caucuses for their partnership on and support for this legislation. Their votes on Thursday and my action to enact this measure on Friday were and remain critical to our efforts to deliver the final decisive blows to this virus. However, as I've just noted, while we have ended the public health emergency, the hard work of ending the pandemic continues.



We still have a vaccination goal to reach, for example. As of this morning, we are reporting 4,203,397 individuals who live work or student in New Jersey as having been fully vaccinated at one of our in-state sites. Another roughly 169,000 as you can see have been vaccinated out of state. As we have mentioned many times, we have a long-stated goal of getting to 4.7 million fully vaccinated New Jerseyans by June 30th. By the way, we're not going to stop on June 30th, Judy, right? This is a myth that we also want to break. That's our goal for June 30th. We're not hanging up our spikes on June 30th. We're going to stay at this. We are well over that total in both our in-state count and the CDC's count in terms of the numbers of people who have reached at least their first dose, but even as we are pulling out all the stops to get as many first doses in arms as possible, we're also engaged in making sure that everyone who already had their first dose gets their second.

By the way, we're knocking on – Dan Bryan gave me the list. We're knocking this week on doors in 22 communities. If you live in any of these places, expect that you may get somebody in our Civic Corps knocking on your door asking if you've been vaccinated. If you haven't been giving you the advice as to where you can get vaccinated. They are in Jersey City, Bayonne, Hoboken, North Bergen, Union City, I think. On Wednesday, they start West New York, Paterson, Clifton, Newark on Wednesday, East Orange on Wednesday, Irvington, Bloomfield also on Wednesday, New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Howell, Monmouth, Atlantic City, Camden City, Vineland, Trenton, and Hamilton.

We've been doing all that we can to bring the vaccines into communities where we see a need, and we've done a lot to provide incentives for people to get out and get vaccinated. One of those is the Department of Environmental Protections Vax and Visit program, which is providing everyone with at least their first dose a season pass for free admission to any state park for the remainder of the calendar year. By the end of last week, Judy, DEP had emailed a state parks vax pass to 49,358 individuals, so this thing is working. Given the weather the past couple of days, I suspect that that number has gone only up, particularly for folks who are visiting at Island Beach State Park. If you have not yet claimed yours, go to [nj.gov/vaxandvisit](http://nj.gov/vaxandvisit) today. [Nj.gov/vaxandvisit](http://nj.gov/vaxandvisit) today.

Again, if you have yet to raise your sleeve to get your vaccine, there are roughly 1800 locations across the state for you to visit. We are working with our faith communities through our Grateful for the Shot program to turn our houses of worship into houses of health. I know, Judy, you were at several of those over the weekend. I know Tammy was. They're also really successful programs, and as I mentioned a few minutes ago, we have an army of community volunteers knocking on doors to deliver the facts and help residents learn where they can be vaccinated. Remember, as well, your vaccination is free and no one will ask your immigration status. There are no roadblocks preventing anyone who wants to get the vaccine from getting their shot. Together we are going to make COVID history.

Here is why we are so heavily engaged in this. We continue to see the tremendous impacts of our vaccination program in the decreasing numbers of new cases being reported. By the way, that website is where you go to get the location nearest you, [covid19.nj.gov/finder](http://covid19.nj.gov/finder). Today we are reporting 205 newly reported either positive test results, which include PCR results, as well as antigen rapid test results. For comparison, on this day one year ago when we had no vaccinations and we were relying solely on all of you to keep masking up and social distancing, we reported 426 positive PCR tests. Today, as you can see, that number is just 165. Yesterday we reported 180 positive PCR tests. A year ago yesterday it was 606. Our statewide rate of transmission is now at .71 and steadily decreasing. Positivity rate, Judy, for the whole state, 1.06%.

In our hospitals, last night's patient census counted 431 in total, and that included 368 confirmed COVID positive patients. 102 as you can see of them were in ICU, 61 ventilators in use. Compare that to a year ago. Hospitals were at 1781, over 4x what we have today with 503 of them in the ICU and 379 on ventilators. Here are the discharges and admissions for yesterday, and both of these are just a fraction of what we were reporting a year ago because the number of those in our hospitals is just a fraction of what it was on this day in 2020.

All of this is to say a couple of things. Number one, the vaccines work. They're safe, and they're effective. Secondly, masking up and social distancing has worked. It will still work both for those who are unvaccinated and for those who feel more comfortable in continuing to wear a mask and keep a social distance. I see around the state anecdotally over the weekend a lot of people still masking, and there's nothing wrong with that. You have every right to do that, and no one can tell you otherwise. Again, if you have not yet gotten vaccinated, please, now is your time to do so. There is a vaccination location near you. Again, go to that website, [covid19.nj.gov/finder](http://covid19.nj.gov/finder), and go play your part in ending the pandemic and moving our state forward.

Sadly, however, we continue to lose residents to this virus. Certainly, as a broad matter, we are gratified that the numbers of confirmed deaths has been in the single digit over the past several days as this fight has always been about saving every life we can, but we take no comfort in knowing that there are families who today, at this moment, are dealing with that raw emotion of having just lost a loved one to COVID. Today we're reporting another six confirmed losses of life from

our extraordinary New Jersey family. The total of lives now stands at 23,607, and the number of probable deaths remain at 2,678. Those we have lost will never be left to history as a mere number. They were our fellow New Jerseyans, and let's take a minute as we do every day to tell three more of their stories.

We'll start today by honoring the life of this woman, Donna Harmor of Clayton in Gloucester County. She was born in Philadelphia and spent part of her youth there, but Clayton was home for 65 of Donna's 71 years. Donna received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from what was then known as Glassboro State College, of course today Rowan University. She was an educator at the St. Catherine of Siena Catholic School in Clayton for eight years before spending many more years as a long-term substitute teacher at the Aura – A-U-R-A Elementary School, part of the Elk Township Public Schools. Together with her late husband Richard, Donna undertook travels that took her to unique destinations and restaurants around the world, but two of her favorite places were right here in the United States: Disney World and Clayton's own Liberty Diner. Being close to home also meant more time with the family and friends that she loved so dearly.

Donna is now reunited with Richard and their daughter Amanda, bless her heart, who died of cancer at the age of 21, who – each of whom predeceased her. She leaves her son Marcus, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday, and his wife Krista, along with her grandchildren Robin, Theresa, Thomas, and Elizabeth and great grandchildren Jonathan, Logan, Angelina, and Alaina. She also leaves her siblings Robin and Preston, along with numerous nieces and nephews and of course many friends. We thank Donna for her years of service in the classroom. May God bless and watch over her and her family.

Next, we travel to Hoboken to remember this guy, Frank Volpe. He was the man in front of the wood-fired oven at Napoli's Pizzeria, which opened its first Hoboken location in 2007 and a second in 2017. Dan Bryan claims it's the best pizzeria in the state. Listen to this folks. Frank was just 42 years old, and as you can see, he's a pretty darn healthy looking guy. He passed this spring, again, at the age of 42. Frank was a member of one of the nation's royal families of pizza, and he grew up learning to make pies at his family's world famous and historic restaurant, Lombardi's in Soho. That lineage and apprenticeship spelled success for Frank as he stuck out – struck out, rather, to make his own name in pizza. He was more than a restaurateur, and he gave back to the Hoboken community that welcomed Napoli's with open arms and mouths, and as the pandemic took hold last spring, Frank was there turning out pies to help feed our frontline healthcare workers and first responders. Unbelievable.

Frank leaves behind his wife Jocelyn, with whom I had the honor of speaking on Wednesday. As you can imagine, an emotional conversation. They were together for 18 years. He also leaves his three sons, Joey, Justin, and Jason. He's also survived by his sister Carolyn. The pizzeria was in Hoboken. They lived in West orange, and Jocelyn asked me because Frank had no health insurance, they have set up a GoFundMe page to help get them through this awful period in their lives. Please help them out, folks. New Jersey is the pizza capital of the world, and we hold that title because of the great work and vision of restaurateurs just like this guy, Frank Volpe, honest folks who turn the humble slice into a work of art. May God bless and watch over that guy and his beautiful family. He will not be forgotten.

Finally today, let's remember former Burlington resident, Dolores "Dee" Fluno. She was 79, and although she had left New Jersey to live closer to family in Wisconsin, she was still just as much a part of our family. In fact, she was laid to rest in her native Burlington. Delores and her late first husband Anthony "Drex" Lomma, whom she would always call the most handsome man she ever met, raised five children, who were the center of Dee's world, and even when life threw a challenge her way, her children were what kept her grounded and focused on the future and her trademarked optimism. Dee had enough to give back to others, and her community service created a strong legacy. After moving to Wisconsin, she began volunteering with the Association of All Handicapped Citizens, which gives individuals with disabilities greater social skills. Her work earned her their volunteer of the year honors in 2017.

She leaves behind her children, Natalie, with whom I had the great honor of speaking Wednesday, Mary Jo, Bernadette, Michele, and Anthony along with their spouses and her seven grandchildren, Amber, Aaron, Nicholas, Maxwell, Michael, Jackson, and Josephine, and along with her first husband Anthony, who she is buried alongside in Burlington, she was also predeceased by two other husbands, Melvin and Russel, as well as by two brothers and a grandson, Jacob. Dee represented the faith and values held by so many across our state. May God bless her and her memory here in New Jersey and beyond. Including today, we have honored more than 520 of our fellow New Jerseyans. Those whose names we have said and stories we have told are just a small percentage of those we have lost, but everyone who has been lost deserves to be remembered, and through the stories of those like Donna and Frank and Dee, we honor them all.

Now a quick announcement. Under Judy's leadership, the Department of Health is finalizing an update to their guidance for summer camps. These changes are being made pursuant to recent CDC updates. This guidance, I think, Judy, will be released on Wednesday, but we wanted to be up front in stating that under this guidance masking while outdoors will not be required for either campers or staff, though unvaccinated individuals are still strongly encouraged to mask up while

participating in activities, which include sustained contact with others or when in a crowded setting. While indoors, unvaccinated computers will be strongly encouraged to wear a mask, while any unvaccinated staffers will be required to mask up with only limited exceptions.

Switching gears, let's prepare as we wrap up today with another of our regular updates, and that's of the great organizations across the state that have stepped up in a big way to support their communities over the past year. Today we're in my home county, Monmouth County, which is the headquarters for the Fulfill Foodbank. Under the leadership of board chair Lauren Holman – that's Lauren on the left – and interim co-CEOs, Linda Kellner on the right and Jim Kroeze, Fulfill has gone into overdrive to meet his mission of alleviating hunger in Monmouth County by stocking pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens and providing after school and weekend meals for children.

Throughout the pandemic, demand for Fulfill's services has skyrocketed, going from 136,000 individuals including 50,000 children up to more than 215,000 residents and 70,000 kids. All total, over the past 15 months, Fulfill has delivered – you ready for this – more than 3.5 million additional meals. Working alongside the Economic Development Authority, Fulfill was able to receive grants totally more than \$1.3 million, which have allowed Linda, Jim, Lauren and their team and staff of volunteers to cover every expense and keep focused on the job ahead. I had the great opportunity to speak with Linda and Lauren last Wednesday and to thank them for everything Fulfill does in our communities. They are truly a gold standard organization. Please check them out, [fulfillnj.org](http://fulfillnj.org). [Fulfillnj.org](http://fulfillnj.org).

Finally, before I turn things over to Judy, a reminder that tomorrow is primary election day across our state. The polls will be open for in-person voting from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. I don't care if you're a registered Democrat or a Republican, but I hope in either case that you will vote tomorrow on the direction you think our state and your community needs, and if you are not affiliated with either party, I hope you will consider declaring yourself as one tomorrow so you can cast a ballot and select those who will be on our November general election ballots. To every candidate who has submitted petitions, I thank you for your faith in our democratic process and for taking that step to put your name on the ballot. Win or lose, our democracy is stronger because you did. To every poll worker who will be on the job tomorrow, I also thank you for playing a vital role in ensuring the sanctity of our election process. Again, the polls will be open tomorrow from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. On Friday, the CDC released a new morbidity and mortality week report, MMWR, that highlighted that in March and April, rates of hospitalizations increased for adolescents. They examined hospitalization rates among 12 to 17 years from January through March. Of those hospitalized, nearly one-third required intensive care, and 5% required mechanical ventilation. Thirty percent of these children had no underlying conditions that put them at greater risk of COVID-19, which demonstrated that healthy adolescents are also at risk for severe COVID-19-associated disease. The most common underlying conditions were obesity, asthma, and neurological disorders.

In addition, approximately two-thirds of adolescents hospitalized with COVID-19 were Hispanic or non-Hispanic black persons consistent with studies showing an increased incidence of COVID-19 among racial and ethnic minority population and signifying an urgent need to ensure equitable access to vaccine for these groups. It's important to note that when the CDC examined cumulative hospitalization rates for this age group, they were three times higher than the three most recent influenza seasons. Remember, we had containment measures such as school closures, wearing masks, physical distancing, none of which were enacted during past influenza seasons. Without these measures, the rates of COVID-19-associated hospitalizations might have been substantially higher.

In New Jersey, we examined our hospital data and since the beginning of the pandemic, among children ages 5 to 18, 856 have been hospitalized. Similar to the national data, we have also seen an increase in the rate of hospitalized children requiring intensive care. Since the beginning of 2021, while less than 1% of 15 to 18 year old have been hospitalized, of those who were hospitalized, 9% required intensive care. We know that hospitalization rates among adolescents were lower than those in adults. However, these statistics demonstrate that severe disease does occur including hospitalizations that require intensive care admissions and invasive mechanical ventilation. Now that the Pfizer vaccine is available for 12 to 15 year olds, getting this population vaccinated can protect them from severe impacts of COVID-19. Parents should talk to their children's health provider if they have questions about the vaccine.

As the Governor mentioned, the Department will be updating our camp guidance this week based on the CDC's latest guidance. As part of the guidance, wearing a mask outdoors will not be required for either campers or staff. We still do strongly encourage unvaccinated individuals to wear a mask when in crowds and during situations that include sustained contact with others. Masking and social distancing are still key ways to prevent spreading of COVID-19, but we know that vaccination is vital to fighting this virus and saving lives.

Some counties are leading the way in getting residents vaccinated. In Morrison, Somerset Counties, for example, 73% of their population 12 and over have received at least one dose. However, we do have some counties with lower percentages. Warren County has the lowest with 51% of those 12 and older with at least one dose, followed by Cumberland at 52%, and Salem County at 53%. We want to see these percentages increase to ensure our state has the fullest protection against this virus. The state is in an all-out effort to get more residents vaccinated through Operation Jersey Summer, hosting clinics at sports, sport games, community events, and houses of worship. We are doing all we can to get vaccines to where people are and we need everyone with us in this work to vaccinate our residents. Vaccines are a pathway to end this pandemic.

As to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 430 hospitalizations of positive patients and persons under investigation. This represents about 3% of the overall hospital census. Since our last briefing, there was one new report of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. Cumulatively, we are at 127 cumulative cases. The vet homes, there's no new cases among residents, and at our psych hospitals, no new cases among the patients.

The daily percent positivity overall in the state as of June 3rd, 1.06; the northern part of the state reports 1.15; central part of the state, 0.93%; southern part of the state, 1.02. That concludes my report. Please continue to stay safe. We continue to see the benefits of vaccination in our state, so now is the time. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, and our friends. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you. We haven't said this in a while. I can't believe someone is just tuning in at this point in the pandemic, but the positivity rate of plus or minus 1%, which it is up and down the state, that means 99% of the people who got tested on that day tested negative, which is extraordinary. By the way, the other remarkable thing on weekdays, at least, people are still getting tested. The day that we're basing this off of, 26,234 tests; yesterday, over 32,000; the day before, over 38,000, so people are still going out and getting tested. That's probably a good thing.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** That's a good thing.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** The more information you have at your disposal, the smarter you can be in terms of making decisions about your own personal health. Thank you for that and for everything.

Pat, as I mentioned, we got some – I guess we have less focus these days on compliance, although as you and I have discussed, I think one of the areas folks – and I myself am guilty of this. I'm walking into a particular setting where hey, it's got to be – I went to a church yesterday, and the church had a standing – at least through the next couple weeks, they still require masking. We had that on trains, planes, buses, healthcare settings, long-term care, correctional facilities. Having said that, there's – that does not exist. The biggest drumbeat that you've had over the past 15 months really have been in restaurants, bars, and businesses. That's really become what less of the focus – it's hot out, which is good I think for the most part. The shore was hopping this weekend, but we could have some severe weather as well with it. So for all of the above, thank you.

**Superintendent of State Police Col. Pat Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Yes, no compliance issues reported to the ROIC, but the heat – our emergency management staff alongside the National Weather Service and Board of Public Utilities certainly watching the next three days. This heat wave's supposed to last through Wednesday and with that some severe thunderstorms predicted. Just a reminder with regard to the winds that come along with them and any downed power lines to make sure they get reported and stay away from them. Since it's recreational boating season, I also remind those going out on the water, regardless of what type of lake, ocean, bay, river, to check the local marine forecast because it's – having experienced it personally, being out in the middle of a body of water during some of those thunderstorms is the last place you want to be. I just remind people to check that local forecast before you head out on your vessel. Thank you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Amen. I made a lot of smart decisions over the weekend, but I made one really stupid one, and that was I dragged out two of your colleagues for a run yesterday afternoon at 4:45. The temperature on the dashboard as I got out of the truck was 99 degrees. Be careful out there, folks.

With that, we'll start over here. Mike, that's you, right? Before Mike gets to bat, Ruth, is that you? Nice to meet you, Ruth. We've got – Ruth Hartnett is with us for her first visit along with Councilman Matt Stanisci. We will be, as we've been the past number of weeks, we'll be virtual tomorrow and then we'll be back at you live on Wednesday. With that, Mike, good to see you.

#### Q&A Section

**Mike Catalini, Associated Press:** Good to see you. Thanks, Governor. On the Boxer report that came out this morning about the Edna Mahan Women's Prison, why is it necessary to close the prison and not just implement the reforms that are outlined in the report? Does that decision to close it reflect a lack of confidence in the leadership of the Department of Corrections? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think, Michael, it is both. This facility has been obviously for this horrific incident that happened on January 11th and the more you read about it, the more horrific it becomes. That was not the first chapter in the long book of this facility. I've just made a decision enough; we're turning the page. That does not mean that that's the only thing we're going to do. In other words, it's and both. It's both closing it, and that'll take time, by the way. I appreciate in advance the cooperation that we'll need from our legislative partners. This is a multi-year process. You just can't flip a light switch I think New York City's in the middle of an eight-year process at Rikers Island. Please, God, we get this done a lot faster than that. It's not an overnight reality, but the reforms need to take place and I thank Matt Boxer. I think I was his last interview, and I think he did an outstanding job in the context of a horrific situation. The reforms are needed, and they're needed immediately, and it's and both. We'll leave it at that, but this is a very disturbing report and we continue – I continue to parse through it and work through what we're going to do to react to it. Thank you.

Brent? Good afternoon.

**Brent Johnson, NJ.com:** Good afternoon. What took you so long to take action on Edna Mahan? Problems have been known for years and today's report noted that the DOJ found reasonable cause in April 2020 to believe Corrections Department fails to keep prisoners safe from sexual abuse. Will Commissioner Hicks keep his job? Should he be fired? Are you aware of any long-term effects of COVID classroom air ozone cleaners? A few reports mentioned Newark schools and air reports on that.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** One more time on that one?

**Brent Johnson, NJ.com:** Are you aware of any long-term effects of COVID classroom air ozone cleaners? Last week, you said you'd release the Health Department COVID Call Center contracts. Why haven't you released them, and how close are you to releasing data about breakthrough COVID cases and what's the delay?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Bear with me. I'll hit the – your first couple on Edna Mahan and then pass it to Judy and Tina for any color. It's a – in an institution like this, you can't turn the cruise liner around in five minutes. It takes time, and this report – we had said after we got word of the awful incidents on January 11th that I had asked not only the Attorney General – and I thank him for his criminal investigation, but I asked Matt Boxer, who's one of the toughest guys I know, to lead an independent investigation on how – institutionally, how could this have happened and enough. The report screams out that this needs to – and to Mike's question, it needs to both be closed and reforms need to be implemented, and that process has to begin immediately. Again, the closure will take some time. The reforms we'll get to as fast as we can. No news to make on leadership, but I'm very disturbed by the report. I'll just leave it at that.

Judy, I got three, as far as I can tell here, you – for you and Tina. Anything – any evidence on long-term COVID impact in classroom from ozone filters? Is that the question? Brent, is that right?

**Brent Johnson, NJ.com:** Yeah, there were some reports from CNN and NBC had mentioned Newark schools.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, and then anything disclosure on contracts and data regarding COVID breakthrough cases? I think on contracts, I don't think I committed that they'd be available today, but we will get those. If Parimal and Dan can help me get those, that would be great. Please, Judy and Tina.

**State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** So regarding the ozone-generating air purifiers, we had become recently aware that some places were using these as well. We're actually in the process of developing – we actually have developed, but we're in the process of finalizing guidance for schools. In the meanwhile, we still do have our indoor air quality standards that are available, that have been available during this entire time, entire pandemic, that we encourage school districts to follow.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Anything on breakthrough case data, Judy or Tina?

**State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** Yeah. We're also in the process of finalizing reports that we're going to be publicly posting for consumption.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I take this, again – I'm a sports fan, so I take this through the sports anecdotes. I know the Yankees were in this position when they had some cases a couple weeks ago. There was a golfing situation this weekend where even folks who are getting it are – it is working as the manufacturers and we have professed it would, which is 100% effective against hospitalization or severe illness and, please God, fatality. I don't want folks to associate the names we memorialize with what I'm about to say because in some cases, these folks died a while ago, and so bless each and every one of them. Died a while ago. Most of them, if not all of them these days, are since we've had vaccinations, but it may well have been early on in that six-month period when they were not yet able to get access to it.

I think anecdotally at least – and again, the data, Tina, that you're referring to will underscore this or rebut it. You can assume that if somebody's going into a hospital today, overwhelmingly they're not vaccinated. That is the anecdotal evidence we have. If you're going into a hospital, you are overwhelmingly not vaccinated, and that's just – folks, it's

crystal clear. Getting vaccinated will keep you out of the hospital.

**State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** We still are seeing vaccine breakthrough cases that do require hospitalizations and might be fatal as well. That's why the current public health priority from the CDC level as well as for many states is to look at those more severe outcomes where we can better characterize those, but we are still monitoring all vaccine breakthrough cases that do come to us. There are challenges. We recognize that there is going to be under-reporting for vaccine breakthrough cases. That's why in terms of the actual – I don't want to say gold standard but the more accurate way of looking at how well vaccines are working in the real world is looking at the vaccine effectiveness studies that are done nationwide. They're at various centers with large numbers where you're actually doing a formal comparison of vaccinated versus unvaccinated individuals and you're following them through time and you're testing them along the way. That's why you're able to determine, for example, that it's less likely for people who are asymptomatic to – who are vaccinated to become carriers of COVID-19 virus. Over.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Really looking forward to getting the hospitalization data on vaccinations because I think we're – my money – I'll wager a small bet that they're overwhelmingly, as we said several times, folks who are not vaccinated. So folks, get vaccinated. Thank you for that. That took longer than we thought there.

Alex, good afternoon.

**Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey:** Good afternoon. Commissioner, not to nitpick, but can you tell me what the definition of excessive heat is in those masking requirements? Is it 80 degrees? Is it 90 degrees? Does each school or day camp have a different understanding of it? I imagine this will be addressed in the updated guidance for summer camps, Commissioner, but will you follow the lead of New York state, which is allowing schools and summer camps discretion on indoor and outdoor masking of children, heat or no heat? Is that going to be something that could come up on Wednesday? Governor, I'm trying to find out why we're going through this ongoing drama with Commissioner Hicks. Are you going to fire him or not? You say you're disturbed by the report. You say it cries out for action. Why not make a decisive move today and give Commissioner Hicks his walking papers? Are you showing loyalty? Do you not want to bend to criticism from your adversaries, or is it simply the people in your inner circle are protected from accountability?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think leaving out Commissioner Hicks for a second, worrying about criticism from my adversaries, I think you probably know by now, is not on the list of factors into decisions I take. I'll come back to that in a second. I'll have Judy or Tina address how they define excessive heat. I think we're going to wait til Wednesday to make the news on summer camps in terms of how we line up relative to New York or elsewhere. I'd just say on Commissioner Hicks to repeat what I said already. No news to make today, but I'm extremely disturbed by this report and I'll leave it at that. Judy, any color on excessive heat other than I know today would qualify?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Excessive heat. I think we're going to leave it up to the discretion of the school or the camp based on their own particular areas and what it looks like. We need to just trust that they'll do the right thing. If the kids are suffering from excessive heat, I think – I don't think there's a particular marker one way or another. The discretion is up to camps and schools.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. Sir, you got any?

**Reporter:** Yeah.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Alrighty. Good afternoon.

**Reporter:** Good afternoon. Alright, we're hearing from advocates that say women inside of Edna Mahan Prison do not want the prison closed; they just want change, repairs to the building, the leadership replaced. Why do you believe that the best solution is to shut down the facility? How does this address the administrative culture? Also, the state is paying the Moss Group more than a million dollars a year for two years to change the culture. How does this announcement impact that? Also, the report also notes that the problems with the correction ombudsman's office and the important role it should be playing. While Dan Debenedetti does not officially retire until August 1st, he has been on terminal leave since early April. Given that role has been empty for two months, when will you nominate a replacement? Also, how much did the state spend on the report? We have a pending OPRA request for invoices that has yet to be filled. Also, some questions about state employees: the state has widely reopened but state employees who work directly with the public have not gone back to work in person. Why and when will they? Do you think this sends a mixed message to New Jersey residents regarding safety? What do you tell New Jersey residents who are still unable to get unemployment?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Get what, sorry?

**Reporter:** What do you tell New Jersey residents who are still unable to get unemployment?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think I've answered the first question. It's both close and change, close and reform. Enough already. Turn the page. Get this facility, at long last, into our rear-view mirror and reform, and it's not an either/or choice.

Your question on the Moss Group, I didn't get what you were asking.

**Reporter:** The report notes that the problems with the correction ombudsman's office and the important role that it should be playing.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I got that one.

**Reporter:** Okay.

**Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah,** so no personnel news to make today. We just – we nominated two or three weeks ago four members of the oversight – I forget what it's called, a commission or oversight group for the ombudsman and we will – as soon as we can responsibly do it, we'll get somebody to fill that position.

I don't have a number for you in terms of what was spent on the report. I assume you mean the Boxer report. Dan or Parimal can follow up with that, but we can get you that.

I don't think it sends a mixed message in terms of the state employees. When it is the right time to responsibly and safely get everybody back, we will. We're still – it's a lot better than it was, but we're still in this pandemic. My guess is it's sooner than later, and that's a decision – I've got no date for you, but that's going to come sooner than later, and I don't think it's a mixed message. I mentioned I went into a church this weekend. I think we all, for a period of time here, are going to have to remind ourselves keep a mask in your pocket. Remember that we're in a period of transition here that is probably measured between weeks and months of certain places will have one reality; others will have a different.

I know folks – and I don't blame them – want to have an in-person interaction with a state official on something like motor vehicles, which by the way, are open, although they're doing a lot more of their business online or unemployment insurance claim and understandably. If Rob Asaro-Angelo were here, our Labor Commissioner, he would make the case that there are no less quick to the ready being on telephone and internet than if they're in person. I accept that, but I also understand the comfort that you get if I come in and I see hey, Pat's the guy I met with. I've got a face with a name. I got his phone number. There is some amount of comfort with that. whether it speeds up the claims or not, I don't know, but I do know that it probably gives people some sense of security. Again, we'll get back to that I would guess sooner than later. Thank you.

Judy, Tina, thank you all, as always, Pat, Parimal. Jared Maples, by the way, is no longer with us. He's – not in the bigger sense, thank God, but he's at the National Hockey League, and Lori Duran is somebody I had the honor of meeting when I was a US Ambassador in Germany is now Acting Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Lori's not here today, but I wanted to give her a shout-out. To each and every one of you, thank you. Please keep doing what you've been doing. You've been extraordinary. Stay cool in this heat. Stay safe. God bless. We'll see you on Wednesday.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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