

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: September 22nd, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Alongside me to my right the woman 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 here. To my far left another person who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, and we are also joined and thrilled to have her back, the Acting Department of Education Commissioner, Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan. With Angelica here today we'll spend some time discussing the first couple of weeks of the new school year.

First up, though, at 10 a.m. this Friday morning, we will be hosting a virtual information and resource town hall for anyone impacted by the recent floods from Tropical Storm Ida or recent damage period, flooding or otherwise. Please, again, 10 o'clock Friday morning joining pat and me for this town hall will be representatives from FEMA, along with several member of the cabinet including the Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn LaTourette, Banking and Insurance Commissioner Marlene Caride, and Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman. We'll also be joined by Dan Kelly who heads the Governor's Disaster Recovery Office. We'll be taking questions and helping those who weren't sure of where to turn to navigate the programs available to them during what is certainly a challenging time to put it lightly or mildly for them and our state.

To register, enter in that Bitly URL that you see there at the bottom of the screen, [bitly/recoverytownhall](https://bitly.com/recoverytownhall). Once you register, you'll get the Zoom login information emailed to you. Before we move on, we are anticipating some potentially severe weather tomorrow into Friday. A flash flood watch has already been posted for

Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren counties, so everybody, please be safe and please pay attention to further weather alerts. Pat, I think you're going to have some more on that when we hear from you.

Now, moving on, I want to give a quick breakdown of the most recent reports on school-related COVID outbreaks that are being tracked by the Department of Health. Currently, there are a total of 23 outbreaks that have been identified. Among students, there are 82 reported cases of COVID across 22 school districts with 16 cases among staff in 10 of those districts, and there is one district where an outbreak has been identified solely among four staff members. I'll ask Judy to give a little bit more color on these outbreaks in her report, and I know that Angelica will have more to add as well. As the new academic year unfolds, we are continuing to work with our educational communities and local health partners to ensure that our schools remain safe spaces for learning. We have previously discussed the screening testing program that we're engaged in with the majority of our school districts. We are updating the existing Schools tabs on our COVID dashboard with this new data. As the k-12 screening testing program we had previously discussed gets more fully underway, we do anticipate having more robust data to share.

Okay, let's move on. First up the latest vaccination numbers as of this morning. You can see the numbers of there, and here are the updated numbers of positive PCR and presumed positive antigen tests. Looking to our healthcare networks, here is the on the ground reality lived by the doctors and nurses and associated medical staffs at our 71 hospitals yesterday. We continue to see a leveling of the number across each category, which is a bit of a double edge sword. It is good to not see these numbers increasing as they had been a few weeks ago, but it is not so good to not yet see a meaningful decrease. Here is the newly confirmed COVID-related deaths, and bless these souls, losses of life. Judy, I've got eight are from this week, while 16 occurred in prior weeks of that 24 confirmed losses of life. Now let's take a couple of minutes as we always do to honor the lives of several more of those who have been lost to this pandemic.

First up, let's honor this woman, Marietta Jean Jazikoff, who passed away on January 2nd at the age of 84. She was a long-time resident of the Waretown section of Ocean Township in Ocean County. Marietta was a CPA having earned her degree at Georgian Court University to which she remained an active and giving alumna. With her skills, she served as an auditor for the state of New Jersey, and she was an outstanding one. Away from work, Marietta had a deep love of travel, and her passport was stamped in more than 50 countries over the years, including a trip to Antarctica. Back home in Waretown, she enjoyed a slower pace, feeding the shorebirds that would visit her. Marietta is survived by a long-time friend Wolfgang, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday. He was born in Germany, so some of our conversation was in German, and she is also survived by her family in state government. We thank her for her service, and we know she's on another journey, and may God bless and watch over her.

Next up, we recall a native and lifelong resident of Lakewood, John Franklin. He was 91 years old when we lost him to COVID on January 12th. John was a mason by trade having gotten his start at the age of 12, and right out of high school, he started his own contracting business, but the Korean conflict soon intervened, and John closed his business to enlist in the United States Marine Corps. He served a year on the battlefield as a member of Baker Company in the 1st Engineer Battalion and then one more year back home at Camp Lejeune with the 8th Engineer Battalion. He returned to Lakewood in 1954 and became a partner in a new masonry business and continued into the construction industry before joining in the Lakewood Public Works Department in 1972. He retired from the township in 2010 at the age of 80.

John was an active and respected member of the community service two years on the schoolboard and another 28 as a member of the township committee, including five years as Lakewood's mayor. Even after his retirement, he spent another 10 years as member of the Lakewood Planning Board. When Lakewood built its new Public Works building, it was named in John's honor. John was also a founder of Lakewood's Pop Warner football league and a member of the both the American Legion and VFW, the Elks, and fittingly, perhaps, the Masonic Lodge among many other community organizations. Just three months after John's passing, his beloved wife Lorraine also passed not from COVID. They were married for 67 years. They had four children, Kathy, Jay, and Jim who survive them – and I had a great honor of speaking with Jim on Monday – and a third son Doug who predeceased them and was killed in a car accident. John was also

predeceased by a granddaughter Jaelyn, bless her, but his seven other grandchildren, Brian, Kyle, Andrew, Stephanie, Taylor, Jimmy, and Victoria, and seven great grandchildren all survive him to carry on his tremendous legacy of service.

We thank John for all that he did across his years for our nation and the township and people of Lakewood. May God bless and watch over him. His son Jim wanted me to say the following, and I quote his son Jim. Pretty powerful. People who refuse to get vaccinated have never seen a family member die on Facetime. It's awful. Again, that's John's son Jim. I quote him again. People who refuse to get vaccinated have never seen a family member die on Facetime. It's awful. God bless you, John.

Finally for this Wednesday let's honor Asbury Park's Elvira Lutz. Vera, as she was known by many, was 85 years old when she passed on January 9th. As a youth, Vera was a model and locally was a recognizable presence every year at Asbury Park's Easter Day parade on its iconic boardwalk, she wearing one of those great Easter bonnets. Professionally, she served in the secretarial pool at Fort Monmouth for many years. Throughout her life, Vera always maintained a keen sense of humor and always showed kindness to those around her. She's survived by her two sons Mark and Kenneth – and I had the great honor of speaking with Mark on Monday – and her daughter Alison, along with Mark's wife Lee, six grandchildren, Joseph, Shannon, Shannan – sorry – Joseph, Shannon, Shannan, Kenneth, jr., Cassidy, and Olivia and great grandson Carter. She also left behind her brother and sister-in-law Carmen and Christine along with her nieces and nephews and dear friends. May God bless Vera and watch over her memory and her family. We honor and remember everyone who has been lost over the past 18 months, and our thoughts are with all those who they have left behind.

Now let's switch gears as we do to recognize another of the terrific small businesses and the people behind them helping us move our state forward. Today we're in historic Princeton, not too far from where we are as we speak, where you can find the home furnishing store Homestead Princeton on Witherspoon Street in a repurposed building that once housed the Princeton Packet Newspaper. Homestead is owned and operated by the husband and wife duo right there on the screen, Kristin and Ron Menapace. I think you know this store, Judy, right? Ron and Kirstin are no strangers to challenges. They opened Homestead just two days before Superstorm Sandy upended our state. Unbowed, they charged on, establishing Homestead as a leading source for home furnishings, including their own line of sustainable custom furniture built from reclaimed vintage barn wood, and in good part because of this Homestead Princeton is the only furniture store recognized by the New Jersey Sustainable Business Initiative.

When the pandemic put their nine years of effort to the test, Ron and Kristin partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority securing the grant funding they needed to expand their warehouse and staging area into a recently purchased schoolhouse and to maintain their operations and also support the jobs they've created. If you've ever been at Drumthwacket you may have noticed the handmade sign noting the history of the original Olden House on the state, a sign that Ron made. I thanked Ron and Kristen when I spoke with them on Monday for all they are doing to support not just Princeton's economy but for their leadership in our growing sustainable economy as well. Check them out, homesteadprinceton.com, homesteadprinceton.com. It is well worth it.

Finally for today, let's end on a positive note. I must give a huge shoutout to this guy, Jersey City police officer Eduardo Matute. Last Saturday, Officer Matute was among the members of the Jersey City Police responding to a call that led to a standoff with a resident. That resident dangled a one-month-old infant over the second story of an apartment and then dropped the baby. Springing into action, Officer Matute caught the child who was unharmed and checked out at Jersey City Medical Center as a precaution. The man who dropped the baby, by the way, was immediately arrested on multiple charges, so thank you to all the officers who responded, but a special kudos is do to Officer Matute for his quick and sure hands that saved the life of that precious little child. That's a good place to end today. Again, as a reminder that on Friday, we will be holding a townhall specifically on our recovery efforts from the recent floods, and I encourage everyone who has been impacted to join. Again, there's the information on screen, and we'll have links to register on all of our social media platforms. When in doubt simply go to nj.gov/ida, nj.gov/ida. With that, Angelica, are you ready to go?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Please help me welcome the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Education, Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan: Thank you. Good afternoon. It is an honor as always to join you, Governor Murphy. The progress I am sharing today on the start of the 2021-2022 school year would not have been possible without the collaboration of our agencies. Thank you for your continued partnership, Commissioner Persichilli and Colonel Callahan. This fall marks our state's return to full-time in-person learning. I want to acknowledge the difficulty of the transition for some. However, students and educators continue to demonstrate tremendous resolve in developing new tools and skills to adapt school environments that the public health emergency continues to demand of us. To all New Jersey students and all my fellow educators, I wish you an enriching school year.

While our school systems rode forward out of the pandemic prioritize the return to full-time in-person learning for all school districts and charter and renaissance schools, we must recognize that COVID-19 continues to impact how students learn and educators teach. For example, students, staff, and visitors are required to wear a mask regardless of vaccination status in the indoor premises of school buildings with limited exceptions. With the support of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, we were able to offer six million KN95 and surgical masks to support this necessity. Additionally, by October 18th, all local educational agencies, non-public schools and parochial schools must maintain a policy that requires all covered workers to either provide proof of full vaccination or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum of one to two times weekly.

In instances where individual students, groups of students, or entire classes are excluded from school as a result of meeting COVID-19 exclusion criteria, local educational agencies are strongly encouraged to immediately provide virtual or remote instruction to those students commensurate with in-person instruction. As announced in June, the administration released and continues to update health and safety guidance detailing recommendations designed to provide a healthy and safe environment for students and staff during the 2021-2022 school year. The Department has taken several steps to support school communities as well.

Next week, local educational agencies can begin applying for the first installment of their American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds, also known as ARP ESSER funds. New Jersey received a total of over \$2.76 billion of these funds. The grants supplement the funds made available previously and provide targeted support for learning acceleration, summer enrichment, learning supports taking place outside traditional school hours, and mental health supports. We continue to work closely with Commissioner Persichilli and the Department of Health to support the k-12 screening testing program. This is a 267-million-dollar program designed to assist participating local educational agencies and non-public schools with screening testing plans. We released the Learning Acceleration Guide, which provides specific, research-based principles and strategies to accelerate learning. This guide aims to help anchor districts' academic, social, and emotional interventions to the common purpose of promoting global competitiveness for all students.

As students return to in-person learning after many challenging months, it is critical to address the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. To help support our school communities, the Department published a reopening self-assessment that provides guidance and resources for building safe and inclusive learning environments supporting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and educators and developing specific strategies to address the unique needs of vulnerable student populations. The Department has earmarked \$48 million of New Jersey state set aside of ARP ESSER funds the New Jersey tiered system of supports mental health support staffing grant that will lay the development of programs to support the mental health of students and staff.

Districts are strongly encouraged to use their additional federal funds to supplement these efforts, and crucially, in the event of an emergency, school districts must be prepared to transition to school- or district-wide virtual or remote instruction. To that end, the Department released guidance for local educational agencies to develop emergency virtual or remote instruction plans as required by legislation signed by the Governor in April of last year. The importance of this emergency provision for virtual or remote instruction is evident as today flood damage from Hurricane Ida is preventing 13 schools in eight districts from serving

students in person. The virtual and remote learning techniques districts have refined in the last 18 months and the planning this administration has put in place have enabled these schools to temporarily shift instruction ensuring continuity of educational services for students.

We also understand that districts must continue working with their local health departments to make operational decisions based on local COVID-19 transmission data. The Department receives regular notifications of schools implementing virtual or remote instruction due to local COVID-19 incidences. As of today, the Department is aware of a total of seven schools that have implemented school-wide virtual or remote instruction due to COVID-19 since the start of the school year. Three of those schools currently remain all virtual or remote. The 2021-2022 school year in New Jersey is off to a strong start. We stand ready to continue providing supports needed to make this a safe, successful, and fulfilling school year. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Angelic, thank you. Great summary. Again, this is not going to be a straight line. We never promised that it would be, but considering the broader picture as you suggested, up and down the state, off to a strong start. Thanks for your leadership to you and your team. Please help me welcome the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. We continue to encourage all those eligible for COVID-19 vaccines to get vaccinated. Not only to reduce the risk for severe disease for themselves but also others with whom they may come in contact with. Currently 59% of individuals 12 to 17 years of age have received at least one dose of vaccine. The percentage is higher among those 16 and 17 years of age at 68%. Among those 12 to 15 of age, 55% have received at least one dose of the vaccine. We'd like to see that number higher, particularly for this age group, especially because they come in contact with children who are currently too young, not eligible to be vaccinated.

Vaccination is a vital tool that has been used to keep our schools safe for many years. Right now, for children to attend elementary school, they need to be vaccinated against chicken pox, polio, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella, whooping cough, diphtheria, and tetanus, and as they get older, they need also to be vaccinated against meningitis to protect their health. Thankfully, the COVID-19 vaccination is available to those 12 years and older to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission to their loved ones, their neighbors, and their schoolmates. High vaccination rates along with testing and a layered prevention approach that includes masking, frequent handwashing, physical distancing, and staying home when you're sick is important to protecting students and staff from COVID-19.

As I've shared in the past, 267 million in federal grant funds are available to assist local educational agencies and non-public schools with implementing COVID-19 screening testing for students and staff in k-12. We are pleased that 758 public school districts and non-public schools have signed up for the screening testing program. This covers 552 public local education agencies, 206 non-public schools, representing a little over 1.4 million students and staff. This large number demonstrates the commitment of schools to keep their students and staff safe. School districts are encouraged to report weekly to the Department on student and staff case counts as well as information on vaccination rates for students and staff.

As the Governor shared, currently there are 23 total outbreaks linked to in-school transmission in the following counties: Atlantic, four outbreaks; Bergen, one; Cape May, one; Cumberland, two; Gloucester, one; Hudson, two; Mercer, six; Monmouth, one; Morris, one; Sussex, one; and Union, one. The definition of an outbreak is three or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff with onsets within a 14-day period who are epidemiologically linked within the school setting, do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting. School officials and local health departments should maintain close communications with each other to provide information and share resources on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and control measures. Local education agencies should work closely with the local health as they make decision regarding which mitigation strategies to implement and when based on the data.

As COVID-19 is still circulating in our state, we know strong infection prevention efforts will be vital in reducing transmission of the virus. To support infection prevention and control education among healthcare personnel, the Department is awarding 800,000 in funding to the New Jersey Hospital Association, the

Healthcare Association of New Jersey, Rutgers' Project ECHO, and the New Jersey Association of County and City Health Officials. Using evidence-based protocols, the grantees' work will address immediate infection prevention training needs to a diverse set of healthcare providers in a variety of settings throughout the state. Each grantee is tasked with offering a targeted focus on their organization's area of expertise servicing long-term care and nursing home professionals, acute care providers, and local health departments. Building a strong foundation for infection prevention at every level of healthcare remains a priority for New Jersey. We are pleased to help support these organizations to ensure that infection prevention basics are taught in a variety of healthcare settings to a wide range of personnel.

Onto my daily report, the Governor shared our hospitals reported 1,152 hospitalizations of COVID-19 persons and persons under investigation. Thankfully, no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. No children are currently hospitalized with MIS. At the state veteran's homes, there's one new positive resident case among residents in the Vineland home, and at the state psychiatric hospitals, no new cases among our patients. The percent positivity as of September 18th for the state, 6.52%. The northern part of the state reports 5.52%, central, 7.62%, and the southern part of the state 7.65%. That concludes my report. Please continue to stay safe. Get vaccinated to protect yourselves, our family, friends, and our children. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. Two quickies. The positivity rate, obviously, is higher than we want it to be, but importantly, this is also a day where it's from a weekend, which is Saturday the 18th, so it's even higher than the – it's been bouncing around 5%. It's up closer to 6.5 today. Secondly, I mentioned in my remarks good news is numbers don't feel like they're going up at the rate they were, but the bad news is they've not yet started to come down, but if you just look over the past week at three different numbers to prove that point, total hospitalizations a week ago 1,155, today 1,152. ICU beds occupied 275 a week ago. Today, 267, so a little bit of an improvement. Ventilators going a little bit the wrong way, 136 a week ago, 144 today, but in a range. Let's hope they start to not just be in a range but that they start to come off. Thank you as always for everything.

Pat, good to have you. We've got some nasty weather coming. Any more color on potential flooding? I mentioned the counties. You may want to hit that again. We've got the town hall Friday morning. We had a crazy big fire in a junk heap it looks like in Port Newark. Today I checked in with a bunch of folks up there. Any update you got on that? Over to you, sir.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. With regards to the weather, the highest risk is going to be tomorrow in the northern part of the state. We're looking at heavy rains, damaging winds, localized flooding probably starting around noon tomorrow, and then around maybe 2 or 3 in the afternoon for the southern part of the state. That will include thunderstorms, and I will echo the seven counties that are currently under a flood watch: Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren. The fire, yes, that was a scrapyard fire up there in Port Newark on Calcutta Street. No injuries, which I'm glad to report, was a one-alarm fire in Newark. OEM has not requested anything from us but has certainly kept us aware, and we're monitoring that.

On an unrelated note but I think one worth mentioning was a very productive meeting I had this morning with the new Director of the ATF who came up from Washington, DC, Marvin Richardson. We already have a phenomenal relationship with the ATF and what our crime gun strategies are. Out of his mouth, he says the rest of the nation looks to New Jersey as the gold store and a model to be replicated with regards to our strategies, which are obviously ongoing. I was honored to meet with him and comforted to know we'll be shoulder-to-shoulder with them moving forward in everything we do to combat illegal guns and gun violence in New Jersey. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. They've been terrific partners from day one. That fire, by the way, was at one point, given the way the wind was blowing and the fact that they hadn't gotten their arms around it – the visibility potential or lack of visibility on the turnpike was at risk there. Thankfully it – at least as of when I walked in here, that was not the case. Again, keep tuned to the weather. We're in this spin cycle right now. We know the ground has been moistened. There's probably more instability than normal. These things are coming more frequently with more intensity. We don't want to cry wolf here, but make sure you're taking the warnings seriously, everybody.

We're going to be in the two-a-week cadence again next week unless you hear otherwise, so we're Monday and Wednesday at 1 o'clock right here, so we will see you then. We're under a little bit of time pressure today, so let's spin through some questions real quick.

Q&A Session

Mike, we're going to start with you. Good afternoon.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon, Governor. Thank you. I just wanted to return to the notion of a postmortem on the handling of the pandemic. You said Monday that one reason not to do it now is because we're still in the middle of it. I wanted to follow up and ask isn't it the case that the pandemic is – there's not necessarily going to be a finish line. Why not give voters a look at what went right and what went wrong ahead of the election? Just a detail question, who will be conducting that for the Administration? Is that going to be the health department? Will that be the Office of Disaster Recovery under your office? Thanks. That's all I got.

Governor Phil Murphy: Not a lot to add to what you and I talked about on Monday. When you have – even though the hospitalizations, as Judy and I were just talking about, 1,152, we know where we were three months ago. That is where we hope to be again. Clearly, we've said this countless times. Unless my medical colleagues disagree with me, this thing's going to be with us perhaps for the rest of our lives. I personally think of this as a bad flu season reality, perhaps at a minimum. There's clearly going to be a point – I want to be unequivocal about this – that we're going to feel like we can finally say you know what? We're not in hand-to-hand combat as we remain, unfortunately, today. Mike, no decision on who would be involved in leading it but if I had my druthers, it'd be a third party. It wouldn't be anybody associated with our team. I think that gives folks the best sense that somebody was calling balls and strikes. Most importantly, forget about what – the most important thing here is to learn from this for all of us to figure out what we need to do better or differently in the future. Thank you.

Let's come across to Matt. Matt, how are you?

Matt Arco, NJ.com: Good afternoon. Does the state plan to release a total number of students and staff who have been tested positive in schools, not just the outbreak totals? Do you think it's possible that the increased transparency about students and staff cases, not just the outbreaks, could inform people who have not yet decided to get vaccinated? On a second subject, New Jersey, like much of the nation, has a shortage of school bus drivers. However, the process here to get a trainee license takes an average of 60 days. Is there anything MVC can do to expedite the testing process and the appointments needed to take them? Any other incentives? Lastly on this, would you consider calling in the National Guard to drive buses like they did in Massachusetts?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I'll defer to Judy and/or Angelica on is it possible to get positive tests on the dashboard I assume is what your perfect world would be. I think the more broader question you asked is do you think if we were able to do that, it would be a weapon we could use to convince more people to get vaccinated. I think any amount of transparency on what's actually happening is a positive toward that objective. As a general matter, the answer's got to be yes. Judy or Tina, any ability to actually get that up and accurately on the dashboard?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yes, actually we're hoping that those data can be publicly available fairly soon and certainly the utility of having these data about the trends in COVID activity among the students and staff is going to be very helpful not only to the students and the staff and the schools but also to the general public to have a sense of what is going on. A lot of times, the school transmission information outside of outbreak activity also helps to reflect what's going on in the community as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think as it relates to – and Parimal, you should disagree if you see this differently. I think all options are on the table including anything we could do with the MVC. I don't think we, at this moment, feel like we need to do what Massachusetts did with the National Guard, but that's an option that we certainly could look at. I was with some educators last night that the challenge is real; there's no question about that. I hear from educators and Angelica, you must hear it a lot from moms and dads. I'd say anything that we think we can do that preserves safety – I mean, early on in my time as Governor, we had a horrific

accident with a Paramus school. It wasn't in Paramus; I think it was in Morris County, but kids at a middle school in Paramus – we just got to make sure in our striving to get full capacity we don't cut any corners in terms of safety.

Let's go back to Joey. Joey, how are you?

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Doing good. How are you?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm well.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: So a few things: one, I asked an identical question last week but wanted to check back in. Any further chance of any more major disaster declarations that hasn't been –

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't think the book is shut yet, Pat. Is that fair to say? It's still technically open but probably at this point, unlikely.

State Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Unlikely, I would say, but we still are doing those assessments to see if we hit either public assistance or individual assistance thresholds like we just did in Warren County. Ongoing but I think the likelihood of additional counties is getting less and less as the days go by.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I think more time on the clock lessens the likelihood, but we got Warren a couple days ago, so that was a very good step in the right direction.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Cool. You provided some details on which schools had outbreaks. Do you have any details on specifically which schools or school districts had schools go virtual? Will there be, as you now see it, any restrictions on poll workers or voters this November for COVID-related reasons like mask mandates or vaccine mandates for poll workers, anything of that sort? Then finally, this is a grim question, so I apologize.

Governor Phil Murphy: A what question?

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: I said a grim question, I apologize. Have you or will you – have you done or will you do COVID tributes to those who are willfully unvaccinated the way that you've been doing for all the victims of COVID?

Governor Phil Murphy: That is grim. Data on which districts are virtual, is that your first question? Do we disclose that? At this point, we don't. I think we do this by county and we'll continue to do that. That's what we did last school year. I don't think the change is – unless my colleagues correct me in the back, that's the same approach.

I don't know that we've laid out the parameters for poll workers, but I'll be very surprised if we're not requiring them to wear masks. Would you agree with that, Counselor?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yes, we'll work with the boards of elections on safety protocols for poll workers, but we don't anticipate any restrictions placed on voters.

Governor Phil Murphy: On your last question, I think I'm going to say things that are at odds with each other, but I think they're both true. Number one, folks need to get vaccinated. There's just no question that that's our best weapon, and we got to get over this and get vaccinated. Again, we're among, if not the most vaccinated states in America. Certainly among the big states, we are. That's great, but we're not yet where we need to be.

At the same time, these lives are lost. They are gone, and they lived lives and I don't think vaccine status disclose is going to be in the cards, forgetting the HIPAA question where I'm not sure we'd even be allowed to. These lives are lost, whether we agree with how they approached this or not. It happens, I believe, each of the individuals, unless my memory is failing me, that I spoke to today died early on in January I think all three of them did, but I think that's where we'll leave it. thank you.

Sam, is that you?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Yep.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, fire away.

Sam Sutton, Politico: First couple of following up on Matt's questions here. Would you like to see districts standardize how they present their COVID-19 case data? Is there any directive or EO in the works to do that? Then a separate question, your EO's requiring vaccination or regular testing can hit violators with disorderly persons charges.

Governor Phil Murphy: Who did, sorry?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Your executive orders requiring vaccination or testing can hit violators with disorderly persons charges. Only one in effect right now is the one applying to healthcare workers, correctional workers, et cetera. Have there been any enforcement actions taken to date to enforce that order?

Governor Phil Murphy: To the best of my knowledge, no, but I'm going to defer again to Parimal or Pat.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: We'll circle back with you, but you are correct that violation of the executive orders would be a disorderly persons offense.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you if there's any that I'm not aware of. In terms of standardizing the data that we get out of districts, and I assume this is anything related to COVID, right?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Yeah, [inaudible 0:41:34].

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, cases, et cetera, any thoughts on either side of me here? Tina, we got to make sure you get your money's worth out of this today.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yeah, the answer's always yes because any time we present our data, whether it's on outbreaks or in our cases, they follow general criteria for how we define an outbreak. For example, the Commissioner went over how we defined in-school transmission. Similarly for our data collection from the schools moving forward, particularly as the school screening testing program gets on board, there's standardized ways that we are asking schools to present that information. It's not just for the school screening; it's also for that individual reporting of the students and staff data that we're in the process of collecting.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Tina. I got this on school buses from Sue Fulton, as usual, watching us. "We schedule school bus driver appointments within a day or two. All school administrators should have our direct contact information by now. School bus driver permits and testing are managed on a concierge basis outside the online appointment system." Hope that helps and we can follow up. Matt, you asked that, right? We can follow up with you and Sue if need be.

Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor. Dr. Tan, can you tell us how many children under five have contracted COVID-19 since the pandemic began, if you have those numbers? Several months ago, Commissioner Persichilli said that children were not the vectors of the virus that you expected. Is she correct and if so, why the masking order for children in daycare over the age of two? Commissioner, we heard the Governor talk about some trends that are going in a positive direction. Can you elaborate a little bit? Can you explain how a difference of eight people on ventilators or not on ventilators is significant or is it not? We hear about these magic moments where the pall will be lifted and we'll be free of the virus. We've been waiting for that since May of last year. Will that even happen? Governor, on the questions on a postmortem, in your words, of looking into the origins of COVID-19, where is the progress of the Attorney General's review into the nursing homes that you ordered last week under then-Attorney General Grewal? Will you commit to releasing the results of that review before election day? I'd also like to ask you what you think about the criticism of your masking order for children in daycare? Do you think parents are overreacting? Is it more an argument about unworkability, or is it an ineffectiveness argument that you think rings true for you if the numbers of children that have contracted COVID-19 are relatively low? For Dr. Allen-McMillan from my colleague, Walt Kane – sorry, have to read this off the phone. I don't memorize it. "Statistics show continued inequalities in New Jersey's education system. For example, black students are more than five times more likely to be suspended than white students, and black and Latino students are underrepresented in AP classes. What is the New Jersey Department of Education doing to make the system more equal?"

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me start on a bunch of these, and Tina, I'm going to ask you to weigh in here and perhaps Judy, as well. I'm going to skip to the trend question first. I'm going to go out on a limb and say just because ventilators are down or ventilators are up a couple and ICU beds are down a couple, I do not – I think the trend is right now – as we've said, we're in a range bumping along. That would be my guess. I don't think there's any break – I don't want to use the word breakthrough but in this case, there's no breakthrough yet, although it's encouraging. As I say, good news/bad news, good news is it's not going down.

I've been waiting for the same time you're waiting for. We all want that. We actually thought I think as a nation probably as a world, but as a nation that we were there around in that window between Memorial Day and July 4th, and I believe that we'll get back to that. We were talking about this a couple minutes ago, but we're not there yet. We're still in the fight and again, this thing is humbling. Anybody's associated with this, every time you think you've got it figured out, it takes a turn and eight out of ten of them are negative.

Nothing new to report unless Parimal does on the AG's report on long-term care. I'd be shocked if it weren't made public, and I have no idea on the timing. I've got no insight into that. Would you agree with that?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: That's correct, Governor. The Attorney General's investigation into long-term care facilities is an independent investigation We [inaudible 0:46:18].

Governor Phil Murphy: We having nothing – no insight on that one. You've got a bunch here that were not in the exact order but they come back to the same thing: what's the cumulative total of infections or positive tests for kids under five. Can kids get sick? Can they infect others? How do we feel about the masking of daycare, particularly for young kids? Just repeat on daycare and then I'll turn it to Judy and Tina to fill in here. We're doing nothing different than the CDC guidance and all of our neighbors, we're all doing the same thing. Now does that make it mean it's easy that someone else has found a magic weapon to get a two year old to keep a mask on? No, we recognize that the daycare providers and staff have to work uniquely with that challenge, and we can totally appreciate that. We're doing, at this point, what the CDC recommends, what our neighboring states are doing as well.

Anything you want to add to – I'm not sure we know cumulative cases sitting here for folks under five. Do you we have that, Tina, and any other comments on kids getting infected or infecting others?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yeah, I have the data from Monday but it's basically about a little bit over 2% of our cases overall occur among those who are aged as zero to four years of age. The specific number I don't want to give only because I know that they're updated every single day, and we can certainly get back to you on that. As far as the risk to individuals in the community and children, anybody who is unvaccinated always potentially poses a risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to the entire community. That's why we always are encouraging individuals to – who are unvaccinated to continue to wear masks and to also take the appropriate precautions to try to minimize spread, inadvertent spread, in particular to others in the community, particularly those who might be more vulnerable to serious illness.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, thank you. Judy, anything you want to add?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I think we have to keep in mind that we monitor multi-inflammatory syndrome in children. Every single one of those children have had COVID, and we had 133 cases with the majority of them in the hospital at some point in time. We have had seven deaths of individuals 18 years and younger from COVID in the state. That's something we look at every day. Any death, as the Governor said repeatedly, is awful, but it's certainly more alarming when it's a child.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen to all. Angelica, I'll just make the observation that there continues to be – we've said this many times. I say it almost every single day, that the pandemic did not create the inequities in our state but it's laid them bare. Among the inequities are in education. It's the animating reason why we plow the resources that we do into under-served communities and continue to try to move that needle in the right direction. We're digging out of depending on what you blame, and it's probably a combination of things. In the criminal justice system at least, it's the war on drugs over the past several decades. It's early years of the fifth century since slavery came to our shores in North America. There's no question the inequities exist, and there's also no question that we throw an enormous amount of resources, financial and otherwise, at trying to shrink those inequalities as much and as fast as we can. Angelica, anything you want to add, please.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan: Thank you, Governor. I'd like to also add our work on creating clearinghouses that allow school districts to learn from one another. It is critical in the public health emergency era that we're living in that districts are able to share, to partner, and to join together to address some of the inequities that you have mentioned. We stand with districts moving forward, and we believe that these tranches of funding from the federal government, along with the increases provided by Governor Murphy over the years will continue to help us make inroads.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that Sir, you're up to bat.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor

Governor Phil Murphy: I thought you were going to say that you didn't have any today.

Reporter: No, unfortunately, I don't get the 20. From Brenda Flanagan, the childcare industry is facing backlash over your mask and vaccine mandate while also experiencing staffing shortages. Meanwhile, New Jersey has yet to distribute roughly \$700 million in federal American Rescue Plan funds intending to help their companies. When will that money be made available? A question from Lai Michkin, Passaic County is considering closing its jail and potentially consolidating with Bergen County. What do you think are the pros and cons of county jails merging? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks. Listen, I think on the first one, we've addressed this, that we get it. We know it's not – brings us no joy. I want to make sure I say that with great emphasis to be mandating masks, particularly on little kids. I mean, that's not something that we're doing happily, but we are doing it consistent with the CDC, with our neighbors, and we're doing it based on the fact. We're doing it, by the way, not forever, please God.

In terms of distribution of resources, we're getting money on the street. We put a ton of on the street already, and we're getting it on the street as fast as we can. There's no holding back assuming we can do that and we continue to do that. My guess is folks should expect more of that and not less.

I haven't been asked the question before about consolidation. I mean, you want to make sure you do something like that the right way, that you do it with respect to the folks who are incarcerated in those facilities as well as to the staff and members of law enforcement and correction officers who serve them and protect those facilities. I don't have any visceral yay or nay, but if there's a good positive reason to do it and it can be done safely and smartly from a budget standpoint and is not taken out on the backs of public sector employees, which too often happens when you have mergers, then that may be a good thing to pursue, but I don't have any specifics on the details. Thank you.

Dave, you're bringing us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Thank you, Governor. First for Commissioner Allen-McMillan, you mentioned emergency relief funds can be applied for next week and you pointed out this includes the mental health for students and educators as well. Could you give us a little insight? What does that mean? Is it going to be one-on-one therapy? Would it be group therapy? Would it take place in school, after school, on weekends? Would the students go somewhere for this? Would they bring them into the schools and so forth? You a couple times mentioned if a school has to be remote or virtual. What's the difference? You also mentioned when the question came up initially that you do not disclose which districts are now all virtual because of COVID. Could you explain why not, why you don't give this information? I'm sorry, with regard to the emergency funding, besides the mental health assistance that will be made available, could you explain just in simple terms what else – what other kinds of services schools will be able to offer and how they'll be able to use this money, for what specific kinds of things?

Governor, there are literally no MVC appointments for teen drivers right now to get their licenses. This is causing hysteria in the teen community, I understand. Your reaction? Not to belabor the point, but if a parent, for instance, or a daycare worker goes in and sees a kid not wearing a mask or they put the mask on the two year old; the kid is running around, rips off the mask immediately. Is there going to be a warning given? Will there be a penalty? I mean, I understand you're not – this is not a gotcha kind of a thing that you're trying to do here. I think you explained why you're trying to make sure this is incorporated, but is there going to be any teeth to the EO? Will there be any kind of follow-up at all? How can this be enforced? What would you say to a

parent or a daycare instructor who gets a kid and the kid just won't wear a mask and runs like a wild monkey? I don't think that's going to be – I mean, some kids are obedient and follow the rules when they're 2 and as you and I were talking about on Monday, some don't, and some 20 year olds don't. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Correct, thank you. I'm going to be – on the last one, I've literally got nothing more to add on this. I mean, we know that this is not easy. We know these kids are two in some cases. These providers are overwhelmingly trying to do the right thing. Si there teeth? Yes, if there's willful ignoring of the protocols, there has to be some consequence, but probably not for the two year old. We just want to make sure the environment there is the right environment that gets to the point that we're trying to get to, which is we keep folks as safe as possible and keep them as healthy as possible.

I knew if I answered that first that Sue Fulton from the Motor Vehicles Commission – I want to thank her publicly – would have – would come to me while I was answering that. Sue says the following: “We are always –” This is for the historical teen question you asked. “We are always adding appointments though we are currently in a crunch for first permit appointments and knowledge tests. We are piloting a new program of off-site testing on Saturday in Wanaque in partnership with the Passaic Community College and using one of our mobile units for support. If successful, we will be able to add hundreds of test appointments over the next months.” We may want to follow up. Alejana Post is running the show today with Dave and Sue.

Then the rest of the questions, Angelica, are largely in your bailiwick I would just say this, that for now many months, I'm proud of the fact that really unlike any other state, we had been directing federal resources toward mental health challenges, toward learning loss challenges, so this is not a new impulse; it's a continuation of what we've been doing. Angelica, you heard the questions. Any color you want to add?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan: Yes, thank you, Governor. So first and foremost, the three tranches of funding from the federal government starting with CARES, then CRRSAA, and now the ARP funding allow school districts to have flexibilities within 15 broad categories. What is great for the school districts is that they are able to target the funds to meet their needs. Ninety percent of each tranche is directed to the school district based on a formula established by the federal government. Where we have flexibility is with the set-aside, the remaining 10% of the allocation.

What we have done is listened to what is needed, and we decided it was best to follow the research and let the science help us structure supports for school districts to address learning acceleration. We've heard a lot about learning loss, but our approach is to provide remedies, to help with solutions, so learning acceleration, which focused on instruction throughout the traditional school day, as well as opportunities to have learning take place outside of that, which is learning which will be considered after school, before school care, and any other type of creative entity or outgrowth of that that a school district may want to embrace.

Then we have summer enrichment. There are opportunities that districts have seized successfully, and we're collecting data to understand how they leveraged these funds to enrich those opportunities for students. Finally, with the mental health supports – and you asked at the beginning of your questions how are we ensuring that –

Governor Phil Murphy: Your litany of questions.

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan: Yes, how are we ensuring that we are helping with the mental health of our students and staff? In the first two tranches of funding, we had more of a holistic approach where we wanted to focus on universal supports that goes to everyone, but when you look at our New Jersey tiered system of supports, there are three levels. We start with universal for everyone, and that would be simply, say, implementing a meditation program in a school where everyone can benefit. Then you move to a targeted support system, which is often referred to as tier two. In that system, we take small groups of students who may need similar supports. Then the third is what we call the intensive system, where we support students who may have individual needs. Suicidal ideation may be an example. In this latest tranche of funding, the ARP ESSR, we focus primarily on tier two and tier three knowing that school districts may need the additional targeted funds to help those most in need. That is the framework within which we operate to ensure that we are giving districts the greatest level of flexibility with the supports that we are able to walk with them hand-in-hand as we continue through 2024 with the expending of these funds.

Governor Phil Murphy: We got to shut down, but you had one other question in there. Are you making a distinction between remote and virtual?

Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan: Yes, so with virtual, that refers to the digital platforms that are available. Remote encompasses everything else, which refers to if we had an instance where a student was unable to access a device. We would have paper and pencil.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for all that. I want to thank Judy, Tina; Angelica, great to have you back. Pat, Alejana, Parimal, the whole team, thank you all. We'll be with you again Monday at 1 o'clock unless you hear otherwise. Thank you, everybody, for overwhelmingly doing the right thing, but I am going to leave you repeating a quote from Jim Franklin, who's lost his dad John who was a giant in Lakewood. Folks, make sure you hear this. "People who refuse to get vaccinated have never seen a family member die on Facetime. It's awful." Thank you all. God bless.

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