

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 19th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. With me, to my right, is the woman who needs... actually she's not here. But another familiar face, to my right, the State's Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan; Tina, great to have you with us. To my left, the Superintendent of the State Police, another guy who needs no introduction, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Jared Maples of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel and a cast of thousands.

Today is a big day for our vaccination efforts. Today, everyone who lives, works or studies in New Jersey ages 16 and over is now eligible to be vaccinated. And a reminder that at this time – this may change but at this time – those ages 16 and 17 can only receive the Pfizer vaccine, which has emergency use authorization for these individuals. And, by the way, if you're 16 or 17, you must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian to be vaccinated.

Across the state there are hundreds of locations where you can be vaccinated, from our six mega sites to the federally operated community-based vaccination Centre at NJIT, to hundreds of doctor's offices and local health care centers and pharmacies. My last check, my numbers were now well over 800 different locations.

And as we have noted before 98.7% of all New Jersey residents live within five miles of where they can get vaccinated. We encourage you to visit COVID-19.nj.gov/finder to locate a vaccination center near you. And since its launch a few weeks ago, the vaccine finder has been accessed more than 1 million times. The vaccine finder updates multiple times an hour, with information from multiple sites, and lists appointment openings as they become known and available. Earlier this morning, the vaccine finder was showing 68 locations with availability representing thousands of open appointments.

Everyone who had registered online through the NJ Vaccine Scheduling System is now receiving their email notification about today's eligibility expansion. A total of 2.8 million email reminders were delivered as of noon, and my family got several of them. More than 700,000 appointments have been booked directly through the NJVSS portal on our COVID-19 information hub.

Now, we know the appointments listed as open this morning will likely fill up fast and it may take a little time to find a slot as the vaccine supply continues to not quite stay up with the demand, especially in light of the continued pause in the administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. But I assure you, your patience will pay off.

Even with today's final expansion, millions of residents who had previously been made eligible have already received at least their first shots. We know that's now over 6 million shots in the arms, by the way, so we know that we are ready to keep pushing forward. With a total this morning of 2,507,736 fully vaccinated individuals, we are now well more than halfway to our initial goal of 4.7 million folks by the end of June.

Over the past week, we continue to move the doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines we received from the federal government to our vaccine centers to be delivered directly into the arms of New Jerseyans. Again, we're not spiking in any footfalls here. We are on a journey and there are many of you still trying to get your appointments. But we continue to rank among the very top in the nation in the four key metrics for evaluating our vaccination program: the percent of doses received getting into the arms of residents, the number of doses we are administering daily, the percentage of residents who have received at least a first dose, and the percentage of our total population who are now fully vaccinated.

And as I've noted before, many of the states ahead of us, and there's no disrespect to them, don't have populations that in some cases can compare with places like Bergen County or Essex County. So we are truly setting a national example here in New Jersey.

I'll get to all the other numbers in a minute. But first, I do want to acknowledge that this is National Volunteer Week. So with that, I want to give a shout-out en masse to all of the volunteer advocates from the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, who have been a lifeline throughout this crisis for residents in our nursing homes. These are selfless volunteers who, prior to the pandemic, visited assigned nursing homes for at least four hours every week, sitting and speaking with residents, listening to their concerns, and working with the nursing staff to resolve problems for the resident. Once the pandemic took hold, these essential volunteers continued to maintain their connections with residents and families, even though they may not have been able to physically be with them.

And in particular, I want to highlight two of these volunteers who are making a difference in the lives of residents in our nursing homes. First up on the left, Lahkeisha Leach is an Air Force veteran and a volunteer with Jefferson Health Care Center in Washington Township in Gloucester County. Over the past year, she has held weekly Zoom meetings with the residents she works with, keeping open, vital lines of communication to ensure she knew what was happening at the facilities where she dedicated her time. For many residents, the weekly check-ins with Lahkeisha was a chance to hear from a friendly face, to talk about memories, and hopes for the future.

Another volunteer on the right, Laura Redmond, who is assigned to Avista Care Cherry Hill in Camden County. In the depth of winter, Laura personally crafted cards and notes for her residents and delivered them to the nursing home where they were gratefully and enthusiastically received by the residents she has gotten to know and advocate for. One resident in particular as a 92-year-old Holocaust survivor with a deep love of reading. Knowing this, Laura delivers books to her friend and they chat on the phone about books and about life in weekly phone calls.

Laura's and Lahkeisha's passion and ingenuity are inspiring and they are representative of the passion and ingenuity of every volunteer ombudsman. State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Laurie Brewer is always looking for volunteers. And if you are interested in serving as a lifeline to the residents in our nursing homes, I encourage you to call, not Laurie necessarily directly, but call the Ombudsman's Office. And that's the number 1-877-582-6995. Again, to Laurie Brewer and her entire team, staff, volunteers, Laura, Lahkeisha and many like them, thank you.

And to every New Jerseyan who has given their time over the past year to support their community, I also thank you. You've heard me say it many, many times. We are a family; a large, diverse, sometimes boisterous, but always close-knit family. It has been the efforts of so many of you, in the many ways you have volunteered, who have made our family stronger and more resilient. So to each and every one of you, I say thank you.

Now let's review the rest of today's numbers. First, I want to take a quick look at the latest from our schools. As the school week opens, we've got 186 districts, and you can read this in front of you, that are all in-person, that's 170,000 students. That's moving in the right direction. Another 887,000 students are on a hybrid schedule. Again, that's an increase of 77,000 since last week. The numbers on all-remote is 69, with roughly 219,000 students; that's down a bunch of districts and more than 100,000 students from a week ago. And finally, 78,000 students are in 30 districts or schools which have a mix of all of the above. And this is a decrease of a couple from last week. I should note the pre-K through grade two students in Camden started on a hybrid schedule today, and I join their educators in welcoming them back.

Switching to tests, we are reporting an additional 2,323 positive either PCR or presumed positive antigen rapid test results. With these numbers, the statewide rate of transmission today is 0.92. The one-day positivity is 8.18. That's based on 42,217 PCR tests recorded last Thursday. Our census in our hospitals last night, 2,062; 1,948 of whom were confirmed COVID positive. Of that universe, 435 patients were in our ICUs, and 250 of them required a ventilator.

Across the day yesterday, 208 live patients were discharged statewide; 233 patients were admitted in our hospitals. These are not confirmed, reported 24 in-hospital deaths. And with the heaviest of hearts, today we must report an additional 18 deaths that are in fact confirmed to be from complications of COVID-19. We have lost more than 25,000 New Jerseyans over the past 13 months. That's a combination of 22,569 confirmed and 2,592 probable losses of life due to COVID. And to ensure that these blessed souls never just become a number, let's take a minute, as we do every day, to honor the lives of three who we have lost recently.

I want to begin today by remembering Newark's Kenneth Richardson. Kenneth was 72 years old. He was a Brick City native, born and raised. A graduate of Barringer High School and a standout athlete who would be enshrined in the Newark Athletic Hall of Fame in the year 2010. He had a varied career, starting in high school, when he would make sandwiches at a catering company. He drove trailers, he worked for the City of Newark, but for the past nearly 16 years he had been a field compliance inspector in the Grants Administration Department for the School's Development Authority.

Kenneth leaves behind his wife Gerline with whom he had celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary this past February. He's also survived by two of his and Gerline's children, Kenneth and Nicole, and I had the great honor of speaking with Gerline, Kenneth and Nicole last Wednesday. He was sadly predeceased by his daughter Kim. He also leaves behind his grandkids, Kayla, Kyla, Canyah, Demaya, Gregory and Elijah, and a great granddaughter, Kennedy. And of course, he leaves behind the members of his SDA family who will remember him fondly. And I want to thank Joy Johnson and Manny de Silva for bringing Kenneth's life and loss to our attention. For everything, across a lifetime of commitment to Newark and our state, we simply say thank you, Kenneth. May God bless him watch over you, the family you leave behind, and your many friends.

Next, this one's tough as nails. We remember Piscataway's Billy Burke on the right, and his father Bill Burke of Hillsborough on the left. They were both longtime Staten Islanders who had made Jersey their home over the past several years. Billy Burke was a retired member of the New York City Fire Department. It was a long, lifelong dream of his to be a firefighter. And he spent significant time as a member of the FDNY team that worked at the site of the World Trade Center following the September 11th attacks. Following his retirement from the department, he started his own trucking company, William Joseph Trucking, which while keeping him busy, also allowed him to spend more time with his family to coach youth basketball and baseball and attend dance recitals.

Billy had only moved to Piscataway three years ago. He leaves behind his children Haley, Sarah and William, his mother Patricia, among countless friends and members of the FDNY family. God bless that guy.

But three weeks after losing Billy – again, Billy's on the right - the Burke family lost its patriarch on the left, Bill, at the age of 83. Also born and raised in Staten Island, after a stint as a cook in the US Army, Bill earned a degree in accounting and embarked on a career in business that would see him spend the majority of his time at the investment firm Salomon Brothers, where he was a Vice President.

Bill was a dyed in the wool sports fan – Pat, make sure you're paying attention here, because this one moves around a bit. He grew up a Brooklyn Dodgers fan who never got over Bobby Thompson's "shot heard 'round the world". Not many people did. And he was forced to switch allegiances after the Dodgers left Brooklyn for Los Angeles. And those allegiances were split between the Mets and the Red Sox. Think about that for a second. And when it came to football, there was only one team, the New York Football Giants.

Bill leaves behind his daughter and Billy's sister Laura, and I had the great honor of speaking with Laura on Wednesday. And in addition to Billy's children, he also was survived by another grandson Connor, as well as by his brother and Billy's uncle, David. Both father and son, were especially proud of their Irish heritage. And as Billy would often remind his children, the pot of gold can be found at the center of the heart and not always at the end of the rainbow. We hope those words and their true meaning provide comfort. We are honored that the Burkes would come to call New Jersey home, and that they joined our family. And we will remember them both and we pray that God blesses each of them in the families they leave behind, just as we pray He blesses every family who has lost a loved one to this virus.

As I noted a few minutes ago, we remember Kenneth, Billy and Bill and every one of the hundreds of others we have honored from this table from among the more than 25,000 lost, to ensure that we always remember that these are real people, real faces, with real families left behind. We don't want anyone ever, ever, ever to just be a number; we honor them all.

Let's switch gears and end the day, on this side, at least, with some good news. This guy is Jesus Calderon, known as Jay by many, he is a Cuban immigrant who has called New Jersey, and specifically Perth Amboy home for the past 40 years. Jesus owns Your Cuban Café, located next door to Perth Amboy's NJ Transit Rail Station. Prior to the pandemic, Your Cuban Café was the place to grab a cup of coffee and a quick breakfast before grabbing a train to work or school, or to pick up a plate of traditional rice and beans on the way home.

When the pandemic took hold, however, the crowds that kept Jesus' dream going disappeared, and the future of Your Cuban Café was put in doubt. Thankfully, Perth Amboy has been working with the Department of Community Affairs to receive direct grant funding through its neighborhood preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant Program. And Jesus was also able to get vital assistance through that. Not only has the DCA funding allowed him to catch up on his expenses, but he was able to set the restaurant up to take online orders for the first time.

Today Jesus and Your Cuban Café continue to serve the Perth Amboy community. I had the opportunity to catch up with him last Wednesday, and I know he is ready to welcome back all – not just some but all – of his old regulars and then some. Check him out, 225 Smith Street in Perth Amboy. It is worth checking them out, I promise you. Jesus' spirit and optimism for the future is something we all share.

And with everyone who lives, works or studies in New Jersey now eligible for vaccination, it is up to us to move us even more quickly to the stronger, fairer and more resilient future that we know awaits us. So again, start checking now for available appointments and get vaccinated as soon as you can. Together, we are going to continue to be a national leader.

With that it is now my pleasure to turn things over to the woman on my right, the State's Epidemiologist, stepping in for Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli, please help me welcome Dr. Christina Tan.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Throughout the pandemic, the department has been partnering with the New Jersey Poison Information Center to answer questions about the COVID-19 health emergency. Trained healthcare professionals at the call center have been available to the public since January of last year, and they've answered more than 100,000 calls. They continue to answer COVID-19 health-related questions, many of which lately are about the vaccine. The call center is there for residents of our state when they have concerns, and you can reach them 24 hours, seven days a week, at 1-800-962-1253.

So moving on to the department's daily report, there are 1,936 reports of CDC variants of concern in New Jersey; 1,815 of these reports are the B-117 variant, the variant that had emerged from the UK. Additionally, there are 36 reports of P-1 variant, the variant emerging from Brazil; three reports of the B-1351 variant from South Africa, and 82 reports of B-147 and B-1429, the variants that had emerged out of California.

The increase in the number of variant cases reported today is due to previously unreported sequencing results from commercial laboratories.

Since the last briefing, there has been one new report of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 115 cumulative cases in the state, and one of these children is hospitalized.

At the state's veteran homes, there are no new cases among residents. At the state's psychiatric hospitals, there are two new cases among patients, one at the Trenton Hospital and the other one at Ann Klein Hospital.

Regarding daily percent positivity as of Thursday, April 15th, for the entire state, the percent positivity is 8.18%; in the Northern Region, 8.17%; Central Region 7.81%; and the Southern Region, 8.91%.

And that concludes the daily report. Please continue to mask up, social distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested and get vaccinated.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, great to have you with us, as always, and thank you for stepping in for the Commissioner, who by the way is in great form, just could not be with us today. Again, thank you for everything. Pat, great to have you. Compliance feels like it remains on the low side, which you can verify or challenge that. Weather's decent. Tomorrow I think it's going to be the nicest day of the week, it looks like, but again, we need to get ourselves more living outdoors than indoors. And we still need more troopers to sign up – or applicants rather to sign up to become troopers. So for all the above, great to have you here.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon, since we last met, just one EO compliance that was reported to the ROIC, that was Melbourne police had responded to a domestic incident at a residence. That subject resisted arrest, ultimately spit on the arresting officer and was COVID positive. So Essex County Prosecutor's Office is reviewing additional charges that are pending against that individual, in addition to the EO complaint.

To your point, Gov, weather is pretty decent. Might be a little windy Wednesday and Thursday, but we're keeping an eye on that. And yes, as of this morning, we had just over 2,200 candidates apply. Again, a reminder, NJtrooper.com, that remains open until Friday at midnight. So we only have really four-and-a-half more days. It's been a full court press between the Governor, myself, the Attorney General, a lot of calls, radio shows, just really trying to get the word out there and hope that the women and men sign up, again, to join us for our next century of service to the Great State of New Jersey. NJtrooper.com. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: And Pat, we've got a meeting, you and Jared and the Attorney General and I are actually going to meet right after this and that's going to be a topic on our list. You were on WBL on Sunday Morning Open Line?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yeah, it was great.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think one of the singular great American call-in programs, just incredible with a lot of reach, by the way. So God willing, that will bear some fruit. That was just yesterday morning?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yes, it was eight o'clock.

Governor Phil Murphy: When does the deadline end again?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: This Friday, the 23rd, at 11:59. So, again, this group, pool of candidates, will probably make up the classes starting in January of next year.

Governor Phil Murphy: Of next year. Got it. Thank you. I think we'll start over here, Charlie, with you. Before we do, we're going to be, I think, on the regular rhythm this week. We'll be virtual tomorrow and we will be back here unless you hear otherwise at one o'clock on Wednesday, and to be determined how the balance of the week looks, but we'll be out and about. And with that, Charlie, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Actually, Charlie, before you ask, I have to get something off my chest. I mentioned the Mets, Red Sox, Dodgers, New York Football Giants. One guy's opinion, as a huge soccer fan, this Super League idea in Europe is total trash. It is against the fans' interests. It is all about greed. And I hope cooler heads prevail and put it right in the wastebasket where it belongs. Charlie, nothing personal. Over to you, because I know you were going to ask about that.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Thanks, Governor. I have three items I want to ask about. The first, tomorrow, Highland Park is holding an election that was actually supposed to be held in November. What went wrong and who's to blame for the delay?

I wanted to ask if you have any comment on the Middlesex County Democratic Organization's decision to overrule the decision of the Edison Democratic Organization and award the coveted party line to a different set of local candidates.

And then I have to ask about the Lincoln Annex School on August –

Governor Phil Murphy: I'd be surprised if you didn't.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: So on August 28th you spoke to two New Brunswick residents concerned about the plans to close and demolish the school. They tell me you promised to arrange a meeting with your Acting Education Commissioner; on September 11th, your team told me DOE is going to bring those community members in for a meeting. It's my understanding that meeting never happened.

On October 16th, the DOE told me they're working to reach out to parents of school-aged students in the community to listen to their concerns. I met your Acting Education Commissioner here in December and I emailed her to ask if these promises were going to be honored, and she has not responded to my emails. The school is currently being demolished and its 700-plus students are now being bused to a warehouse building in a dangerous part of town.

What is your message to the families who have lost their school? And what has your administration done to listen to them or hear them out, since these meetings didn't happen, or didn't seem to happen?

Governor Phil Murphy: On the last one, I'll get Dan Bryan to follow up, because it's not our intention to not follow up, I promise you that. And as I've said this many times before, and I'll leave out all the editorializing, the fact of the matter is we should be able to, and I'm highly optimistic we can, have it both ways. In other words, build a new school that is 21st century in the right location for kids of the next generation to attend. I can't turn to Judy today because she's, as you know, an alum of the school, she's not with us. But Tina, I will get the message to her, but also have a world-class Cancer Center. And we should be able to walk and chew gum and I'm confident that we can and will. And I'll get Dan to follow up.

Having said that, it's not our intention to not follow up. I'm going in reverse order. I've got no insights on the process but I'm honored to endorse Sam Joshi, who is a guy I've known for a lot of years. I think he'll be an outstanding mayor, and I'm very excited to stand with him and the slate in Edison and the slate in Middlesex County where I think Chairman Kevin McCabe does an extraordinary job.

I've literally got no insight on Highland Park, so can we come back to that? I've got no insight as to why – I think your question is why it went from November to today. I've got to come back to you on that. Good to see you. Matt.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon, Governor. With declining cases and hospitalizations, is it safe to say that any fears of a possible third wave in the state is over?

Governor Phil Murphy: Matt, I apologize, I missed the beginning of that.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: What with the declines of new cases and hospitalizations, is it safe to say that any fears of a possible third wave in the state are over?

Last week you said you owed residents guidance on proms and graduations. Some of those events are already starting to happen, and college graduations are less than a month away. What sort of changes can people expect?

And tomorrow will mark two weeks since more than two dozen undocumented immigrants and allies began their hunger strikes. Is your office planning to continue conversations with advocacy groups, who say that the \$40 million isn't enough? And is there any plans for talks with the Legislature about bumping up that amount of funding?

Governor Phil Murphy: Matt, I'll answer and then maybe ask Tina to come back on the first one to weigh in. She's far more qualified than I. I do like – it's baby steps, but I do like and I think we like the fact that numbers are slowly beginning to go in a better direction. The RT slipped a little bit today, but when I say a little bit, a little bit. But if you look at hospitalizations over the past number of days, ICU, ventilator use, it's slowly but surely beginning to go in the right direction.

For my tastes, at least, it's too early to declare victory. And we still have this nagging, naggingly high positivity rate. On weekends, it's low double-digits and weekdays it's high single-digits. But again, slowly but surely. And when you have over 6 million shots in the arms over half the 4.7 million adults we want to get vaccinated, having been vaccinated, the weather getting a little bit better to allow us to live more of our lives outside, that's all cause for quiet, cautious optimism.

Guidance, I would hope soon. I'm not sure it'll be this week. But we actually have a meeting on this very topic this afternoon, but too early to give you an answer on proms, graduations, and other summer stuff. I think on our list are day camps, for instance. So we want to hit several things.

And conversations absolutely continue. I was on this morning with a labor leader whose ranks include a disproportionate amount of members of undocumented brothers and sisters. I was on over the weekend with a leader back and forth with notes of a leader in the Latino community. Our teams have been doing the same. Again, we want to try to get to a good place here, but I've got no news is specific specifically to break.

Tina, how do you feel about the numbers of late? And where do you think we are right now?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: I would agree with you, Governor, that it might be a little too early to predict what our trajectory is right now. But I think we can be cautiously optimistic. For example, when we look at our weekly CALI activity levels, we're starting to see the activities kind of dip a little bit, which is good to hear, good to see in our Central West area. But right now, New Jersey, as well as the rest of the country, we kind of remain in this really delicate balance between trying to balance, we've got a context of widely circulating virus that's still out in the community. We always hear about the New Jersey numbers, but we have to remember that nationally we're seeing about, you know, 67,000 cases, new cases a day, rolling average, seven-day rolling average. So that's a lot of disease activity.

But at the same time, you know, there's a delicate balance with the number of vaccines increasing over time as well. But we have to remember that that's why we have to still continue to keep up our guard. That even though we're getting our vaccination rates, our vaccination coverage up, that doesn't help with the immediate issue, that we've got a lot of virus still circulating in the community. That, you know, whatever we do right now for vaccination, the great coverage that we're doing, that will have an impact a couple weeks out, versus what we have to do now with our – again, sounding like a broken record – the social distancing, the masking, the washing your hands, the staying home when you're sick, just continuing those efforts until we reach a better spot with all of our different metrics and with our vaccine coverage.

Governor Phil Murphy: You know, I also, Tina, saw implication at least from Tony Fauci yesterday – in fact, I think he was explicit about it – that he was hoping that J&J would come back online as of Friday, in some form. And we've talked about this here, that form, an obvious form might be – I'm saying might be because we don't have any insights – but okay for everybody except for childbearing-age women who are in that range. So we shall see. We still need J&J, assuming it's safe and it checks all the boxes. We still need it as it relates, especially to equity, to get to hard-to-reach places and communities and persons that a two-dose vaccine regime makes it really hard to do. Thank you. Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon. For Dr. Tan, since you're sitting in for the Commissioner today, do you have numbers on our weekly supply of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for this week? And if it's going to be higher or lower than we've seen in previous weeks?

For you, Governor Murphy, New York State has passed a law repealing blanket immunity for nursing homes and healthcare providers. You signed a Bill that was similar but not identical a year ago, extending immunity to health care professionals. Do you think the Legislature should revisit the immunity issue? And the wording in the Bill is a little bit vague. Could that immunity Bill apply to nursing homes if they're bad actors like the ones you've talked about?

Israel has removed its outdoor mask mandate. Are you considering something similar? Because it's been shown that there's very little outdoor transmission of coronavirus? Similarly, the CDC said that there's a 1 in 10,000 chance of getting COVID from a surface. Are these cleaning efforts that folks, including your office are doing, like cleaning pens after a Bill signing, hygiene theater at this point? And, should they end?

And lastly for the Colonel, do you have any concerns or preparations for the aftermath of the Derek Chauvin verdict? And have you watched the Dante Wright video, and what do you think of it?

Governor Phil Murphy: I've never heard the phrase hygiene theater, I have to just say there's a first for everything, and that was the first. No particular – can we come back to you on doses? They have stayed though, Pfizer and Moderna have been steady, either flat or modestly up, and they've stayed that way for a couple of months, at least. And so we'll come back to you. Dan, will you help me with that?

I've got no insight in the immediate in terms of any steps we might take, but also, I'm not read into the New York law. So if you can bear with us on that. I'm not sure we're going to have a whole lot to say.

Israel's done an extraordinary job, period. I mean, if you look at every metric, they've done an extraordinary job, particularly most recently in vaccinating. But we're not there yet on changing our mask mandates. I hope we will be. But it's, you know, first of all, it's a much warmer weather country than we are a state right now. So they can live – I've been there a bunch of times, I can tell you right now in mid-to-late April, they are outdoors in a big way, and we're not quite there yet. And we also have a rate of transmission that is much higher than in Israel right now. But I would hope we'd get there. I just can't tell you when.

Surfaces, Tina, I'm going to continue to be in the category better to be safe than sorry. We don't do it for theater, I promise you that. There is a fair amount of mounting evidence that surfaces are not our challenge. You'll remember a year ago, we had in the spring pitched discussions and debates about playgrounds, in particular. I think we're beyond the point where we think that's a prime source of infection, but I think we're still going to be better to be safe than sorry. Are you good with that? All right, I want to make sure.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yeah, CDC has recently updated its cleaning and disinfection guidance on that. It's absolutely correct that there is mounting evidence that surfaces, fomites, aren't really the main mode of transmission. But that said, you still have to clean, you still have to follow routine efforts, particularly for high-touch areas. But, you know, some of the processes can be somewhat modified.

Governor Phil Murphy: And again, I think that's one that's going to get better, probably faster, in terms of what our mindset looks like. Pat, Alex had a question about the Chauvin. trial in Minnesota, which feels like it's coming to a head. Any comments you want to have there?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We've been in, in last few weeks, constant communication. I think this is a case where we can't over-communicate, and that includes from the Governor's Office, urban city mayors. This morning we were on three separate phone calls, law enforcement, county prosecutors. I've been in touch with the Colonel of the Minnesota State Police, US Attorney's Office, FBI, all of our national intelligence partners, certainly Director Maples' shop.

So like last summer, we just want to be prepared. And we saw a lot of mass gatherings, very peaceful ones, and we hope that that remains true. So we are certainly monitoring that and we'll be watching as that verdict comes out.

And I have watched the Dante Wright video. It was tragic. I don't know if it was a training issue, but when that resulted in the loss of his life, just hard to watch, and certainly a tragedy.

Governor Phil Murphy: As we've said many times, every loss of life is a tragedy, period, full stop. I think one of the things that, Pat, I think you and the Attorney General, and Jared, faith leaders, how many members, Jared, of your Faith Counsel these days?

Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples: 3,500.

Governor Phil Murphy: 3,500 members that are on a regular rotation of conversations and the deepening of engagement between law enforcement and the communities they serve has – listen, you never take literally anything for granted. I know you guys don't. But that has served us well to date and God willing, it will continue to. You're good, sir? I assume you are. Have you got anything? You're still looking for the 20? Okay, I will maybe try to find a beer or something like that, something in kind. Thank you. Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor, with the recent talk about booster shots being developed that may be needed annually, there is increasing chatter, we have noticed, about this whole pandemic being exaggerated to control people and quote-unquote, train them to follow directives by having people wear masks and follow social distance protocols. Could you and Dr. Tan, the Colonel and perhaps Jared Maples comment?

From your own personal experience, have you ever seen a health emergency as serious as the COVID-19 pandemic?

Has there been any word, I know we just mentioned that Pfizer and Moderna supplies have been basically steady. Is there any discussion or word about supplies being possibly increased?

And with the percentage of minority members getting vaccinated, Judy was saying last week, I believe it was 8% Blacks, I think Hispanics were 15% –

Governor Phil Murphy: 19% I believe.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Okay, 19%. Shockingly low, still, compared to Whites 56 –

Governor Phil Murphy: No, that's not what she meant. She meant, 8% I believe. And she's not here so I want to make sure. 8% as it relates to 13% representation in our state. And the 19% was 19% as it relates to 20% or 21% of the Latino population.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Okay, so then not as bad –

Governor Phil Murphy: Correct. I want to make sure that – I believe that's correct. We'll confirm that with you.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Okay, if that is correct, still though, there is a lag in the minority –

Governor Phil Murphy: There's no question, yep.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: So what kind of efforts, if any, you know, have you guys discussed or are there plans in the works to try to increase this?

And finally, on the metrics slowly improving, and you just said, Governor, that it's too early to really talk about specific expansion reopening efforts, but they are coming? What's the message? What do you say to people who say, this is way too slow? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Your first question and your last one, Dave, are sort of two sides of a different coin. I was tempted to say that we have been possessed by aliens, trying to control the humans in New Jersey. But all kidding aside, I don't know. I don't know how anyone – and this is not directed at you – I don't know how anyone could look at over 25,000 deaths in this state in 13 months and not conclude that this was an incredibly serious health crisis.

And look at the amount of deaths, Tina, that we even reported today. Another 18 confirmed losses of life today, and another couple of dozen in our hospitals unconfirmed. This is, by any measure, a once-in-a-century, at least, if not bigger than that, whatever that would be, health crisis and pandemic. And we're not out of the woods. And that gets to the question of the slowness. I would love to be a less dense state that has warmer weather more often in the

year, as it relates to a pandemic. I love how we're situated in normal times: our density, our location are two of our great attributes when you're talking about most of what New Jersey's about, away from a pandemic. But in a pandemic, our density, our proximity to New York City, it's not just the densest state in the nation, the densest region, we've been indoors for most of our lives the past now going on four to six months. We just don't have the latitude that other states that don't have that density and don't have that weather reality have.

Again, I love our location. I love our weather patterns for everything, frankly, except the pandemic. So though -- and the other thing is this: we pride ourselves in not lurching. In other words, opening up a capacity and then going back. We haven't done it once. We came close on indoor dining, leading up to the Fourth of July, which sadly had to get postponed for health reasons until Labor Day, but we haven't done that once. And I think that should be a badge of honor for New Jersey; not just for us, but for all of us, the folks, the proprietors.

And that's not to say there may not be people who are getting away with stuff when we're not looking, but enforcement is high. And most people, if you measure by the compliances, remember, like six months ago, you would have like 13, 15 in one press conference. And we were doing more press conferences a week.

So I would just say it's to everyone's credit that we've been able to do this as incrementally and again, I want to get out of this as much as anybody. And I continue to believe, Dave, that Memorial Day brings us to a dramatically different place.

I don't have any sense that the supply of Moderna and Pfizer is going up meaningfully. Having said that, assuming Dr. Fauci is right, and we get J&J back, at least to some degree, and Pfizer and Moderna stay steady, I reiterate what we've been saying now, Tina, for a couple of weeks. I have complete confidence, we'll be able to get to our goal of 4.7 million adult New Jerseyans vaccinated by the end of June. I would hope even before.

In the Black and Brown community is an incredibly important question and I'm glad you raised it. Again, J&J, it's not just the total supply that is impacted when one of these vaccines come off. It's that is the vaccine that allows us to pursue equity most aggressively. That's not to say we can't do it with Pfizer and Moderna. And obviously, the facts show that we are doing it with them, but not at the pace we would like. Remember only 4%, and I think Tina, that number is now even lower. That was as of the end of the week. Less than 4% of our total vaccines administered are J&J.

So that that's the good news, we haven't had an over-reliance on it. The challenging news is it's the single dose, it's the regular refrigeration. You point and shoot. It's the one Judy wants to put in the back of the mobile vans and just drive deep into neighborhoods. So I think it's going to be a combination. And by the way, if it has to be Moderna and Pfizer, we will figure it out. It will be more complicated. But I think it's going to be a combination in terms of equity. God willing, we'll get J&J back online. It'll be mobile, it'll be faith, it'll be community centers, federally qualified health care centers, it'll be a combination of a lot of things.

We're up over 800 locations. I mentioned this earlier today, and I mentioned that 98.7% of folks live within five miles of a vaccine site. We're up to 814 locations. Our goal is to get sites so dispersed that you're within 15 minutes of a walk to a site, and we believe that's achievable.

So for all the above, it remains a journey, and we will do what it takes, even if we don't get J&J back online. Thank you. Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. So Assemblyman Nicholas Chiaravalloti is no longer seeking reelection. I'm wondering if you have comment on the loss of someone who has been a legislative ally of yours, and also whether you share his frustration over party leaders in Hudson essentially designating Legislators without any sort of process.

On similar note, have you met the Assemblyman's replacement, William Sampson?

Separately, you are now unopposed in the primary. Congratulations. I'm wondering how much time you plan to spend campaigning between now and June 8th?

And then finally, I wanted to see if you agreed with Secretary Way's referral of Lisa McCormick's petitions to law enforcement. And whether or not you believe the state should actively investigate allegations of voter fraud like these?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me start from the top. Nick and I had a very private but yet soulful exchange this morning. He's a friend. I think he's been an outstanding Assemblyman. But I have to say Jimmy Davis is a friend, and I think he's been an outstanding mayor. And sometimes these things happen. And you've got two folks you have a high regard for and you just wish and hope that they can find common ground and they were not able to. But I think he's been an outstanding Assemblyman. And I said to him, no matter what walks of life he or I may stumble through in the years ahead, I hope that we can stay close and I thank him for his service.

I have not met his designated successor. I say, successor -- obviously he has to win some elections, but I've not yet met him and I look forward to.

Listen, I think we'll take it as we have from moment one. We're going to -- you know, Frank Lautenberg had that great line, there's only two ways to run, scared or unopposed. Whether we're opposed or not, we run scared. And this is not a venue for politics, but I will say that we run like we're 10 behind. How that actually, what that looks like, given we're in a pandemic, you know, it won't be my guesses. It won't be the traditional big rallies that you would associate in a normal time with a political campaign, but we're taking it very seriously.

Real quick only because I'm being incredibly gracious today we're going to give you --

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: And I appreciate it --

Governor Phil Murphy: And you won't forget this moment ever.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: In terms of like, days or hours in a given week, I'm wondering how much time you plan to spend campaigning?

Governor Phil Murphy: No designated. We're good, Aswan. This is Aswan's last week, by the way, with us. This is -- will you be with us on Wednesday? You will.

Aswan Carbonell, Advance Aide: No, I'll be with you maybe Friday.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, maybe Friday. Thank you for your service, and good luck in your next chapters. I don't have a budgeted time. What we've been doing is a lot of Zooms. And, you know, we basically -- and I have to obviously be careful, I can't be in a government building doing any political, so I end up pulling up stakes and go somewhere else, and that will continue to be the case. A lot of it's virtual.

I have no comment on the specifics of Lisa McCormick's referral by the Secretary of State. I'll leave that process to its own resolution. But I would say this: our voting laws are exactly what they are. They're laws. They have to be respected, including by us and anyone else who runs. They have to be taken seriously. They have to be adhered to. You can't get too close to any lines. And again, no comment on her specific situation. But the fact of the matter is, we have to take this stuff seriously and I'm glad we are.

So with that, Tina, I'm going to mask up, if it's okay with you. By the way, for you soccer fans while I'm up here, UEFA has just thrown Manchester City, Real Madrid and who else was in this thing? PSG out of the Champions' League and have awarded it to Chelsea, Pat. So there. Who the heck knows? Thank you all. Tina, thank you. Pat, thank you.

NJtrooper.com. You have until the end of the week. Please, folks, line up. Jared, Parimal, Dan, Aswan, everybody, keep doing what you're doing. Please get vaccinated.

This vaccine finder, can we pull that slide up one more time, Dan? Can we pull the vaccine finder slide up one more time. Is that possible? That thing's been a godsend. There we go. That website's incredibly important and very valuable. And it's been accessed by tons of people and it gets refreshed multiple times an hour. So it addresses the issue which we rightfully had early on, depending on when you logged on dictated whether or not, just by happenstance, by pure luck, whether or not you get an appointment. This attempts to solve that riddle.

Folks keep doing what you've been doing, by the millions in proprietors, restaurants, small businesses, bars, whatever it might be, by the tens of thousands, we are getting there. There's no question about it. Keep up the great work. God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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