

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: November 15th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everybody. Seated with me to my right the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, to her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Ed, great to have you back. Judy, as always. The guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Chief Counsel, Parimal Garg, Alex Altman, and a cast of thousands.

Before we get going, I want to acknowledge the tragic passing of this guy, a member of Pat's team, New Jersey State Police sergeant Juan Fajardo. Juan was killed last Thursday in a motor vehicle accident in Burlington County. He was off duty at the time, but that doesn't make it any easier. Sergeant Fajardo was a 16-year trooper, but he bookended his service to the state police with service to our nation. As a member of the New Jersey army national guard. He joined the State Police after his honorable discharge in 2003 and returned to active duty in 2019. He was just 41 years old, leaves behind his wife Adriana, who I had the great honor of speaking at the end of the week, and three young children. They are all in our prayers as are all the members of the New Jersey State Police and National Guard families. Pat, he sounds like he was quite a guy.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** He was Governor, thank you. He was, again, just a life of service to country and state. He will certainly be missed. He was a great example for all of us, so thank you for that, Governor.

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**Governor Phil Murphy:** God bless him, and God rest his soul and keep his wife and three kids and their family more broadly in your prayers. Next up, we have no special announcements today, so we're going to get right to the numbers. Here is the complete vaccination picture as of 9:30 this morning. We continue to see a slow but steady uptick in the number of booster shots delivered. We know that some of the hesitancy for folks to get a booster is because of confusion over whether they meet the CDC's eligibility limitations for age or job-based exposure risk, so here it is in simple terms, although you should expect we're going to make this even more simple in the days ahead.

If you're over 65 years or older and it's been six months since your last dose of either Pfizer or Moderna or two months, Judy, after your J&J shot, get a booster. If you're 18 years of age or over and you're at higher risk because of either a preexisting health condition or conditions in your workplace, and if you, too, are outside of those time windows, get a booster. That's it. By the way, I would just say this. If you're in doubt and you meet the waiting period, just get a booster. Choose the side of greater protection. I'm going to vote – and I hope that we'll get there sooner or later – that we make this even more simple and straightforward because that's, we think, is a big step we can take. With the holidays coming up, we need as many people boosted as possible. It's that simple.

Okay, with that, we also continue to see an increase in the number of children ages 5 to 11 getting their vaccinations. As you can see the number there is 47,390. Good news is that's more than five times what it was a week ago today. For parents, I would simply make the case that vaccinating your child is the surest way to help return them to their normal routines. The vaccines are safe and effective, and just to reiterate what I said last week as well, with each child who gets vaccinated and enters a classroom with an educator who was also vaccinated and sits among peers who are also vaccinated, the closer we get to being able to lift the masking requirement in our schools.

Moving on, speaking of schools, here's an update on the in-school transmission front. These numbers are – take us through last Monday, November 8th. For the week of November 1st, there were an additional 12 outbreaks linked back to in-school activities. Over the past three weeks, this number has been very stable. These outbreaks impacted 54 students as you can see and 12 staff members, and you've got the cumulative numbers there as well. All again based on in-school transmission. The last three weeks have been, Judy, number of outbreaks 12 this week and the two weeks before at 11 and 11, so it's staying pretty much in a range, and the number of individuals impacted, actually, is going down with each incident, which I assume has something to do with, I would hope, vaccinations getting more broadly proliferated. As always, a quick reminder that we know there are other cases among students and staff through general community spread, which are not part of these numbers as these track cases directly tied and confirmed to in-school and in-class activities.

Also, please keep in mind something we said a week ago today. There are more than 3,500 schools serving roughly 1.5 million students statewide, so while we do not and never will minimize any case of confirmed COVID-19, in-school transmission or otherwise, these numbers when measured against those overall totals provide important context and perspective into the overall success of our multilayered approach to classroom safety, including the current masking requirement. Again, brings us no joy to make everybody wear a mask in school. Please, God, the more people we can get vaccinated, the sooner we can get them vaccinated and boosted, the sooner we can lift that.

Let's switch up and take a quick look at the latest breakthrough case numbers. First, here are the preliminary weekly numbers for the final week of October and is now a long-standing trend, the new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths presenting to us each week are overwhelmingly of unvaccinated individuals. Let's just look at this for a second. You can see positive tests, how many breakthroughs. About 20%, Judy, of the total positives were fully vaccinated folks. A much, much smaller percentage, 8 out of 744 – that's a little over 1% – of the total hospitalizations are from fully vaccinated individuals, and please, God, thank God, none of these tragically lost – 113 losses of lives were fully vaccinated.

Now let's step back and look at the overall numbers again. This is from January 19th through November 1st, and this, again, proves the ability of the vaccines to help keep you safe. We're rapidly approaching one year since our first vaccinations were administered. While I think we all at that time would've held high hopes for the effectiveness of the vaccines, I don't think that any of us could say we were prepared for such robust numbers from the vaccines in real-world use. Next up, let's look at the latest newly reported cases. We

continue to see the rate of transmission, Judy, hover around that all important benchmark of 1, a little bit above that today, but as we just saw, the continued spread of the disease is overwhelmingly – it's hard to say anything otherwise – among those who are unvaccinated. Here is a compilation of yesterday's hospital numbers. Over the past week, the total number of folks, both COVID confirmed and PUIs, did increase, but they're staying still below 700 a day. At the same time, the numbers in our ICUs and our ventilator count both decreased. Let's hope it stays that way.

Just to make another point about the power of the vaccines, one year ago yesterday, the total number hospitalized was nearly three times what you see here. The number of those in our ICUs is nearly one third of what it was then, and ventilator use is down by more than half. Suffice it to say, the vaccines have helped our hospitals escape the worst of the Delta variant. This is in very real terms a pandemic of the unvaccinated, who are now a distinct minority. Here, with the heaviest of hearts, we present the number of confirmed COVID-related deaths including an update on the probable losses of life. Now as we always do, let's take a minute and remember three more of those we have lost.

We'll start by honoring this guy, Monroe Township's Robert Cavallo. A Brooklyn native, he was a pharmacist who stood on the front lines during the pandemic's early days. That was his job, but as you can see from this picture, his passion was music, and he was a skilled guitar and bass player. He left behind his wife Andrea, with whom I had the great honor of speaking a week ago, after 36 years together, along with his sons Jonathan and Michael. He also left a sister Elaine and his niece Gloria. Robert was 69 years old. Andrea reminded me of two things. Number one that she and both of their sons also were COVID victims – or patients early on. Thankfully, they did not end up going to the hospital, but he passed – Robert passed in April of 2020 – and we haven't said this in a while – there was no funeral. There was no ability to see him at the end or to see him off after he had passed. That was the case for literally thousands of families in our state. We thank Robert for the service he provided to all who came to him for help. May God bless and watch over him and his family.

Next up, we're going to travel up to Union City, which was the home of this woman, Liliana Reyes. She was 64 years old and a native of Argentina. She had called New Jersey home for more than 40 years. At first, Liliana worked in nearby Secaucus for the former Syms retail clothing company. She then went to work at her brother Raul's daycare center in Union City. She left behind her beloved husband Alex after 30 years of marriage as well as her daughter Nellie, which whom I had the great honor of speaking last week. Liliana's also survived by her brother Raul and his family, including several grand nieces and grandnephews in whom she took special pride. We are honored that Liliana chose to be a member of our New Jersey family, and we hope she found her American dream here, and may God bless her memory and watch over her family.

Finally for this memory – for this Monday, we pray for the Reverend Carmelo Roman, a founding member of Newark's Temple Rock of My Salvation Church. He was also only 64 years old. This cuts a little close to the bone because I'm 64 years old. These folks were in the prime of their lives. We lost the Reverend earlier this month. Reverend Carmelo found his calling in the ministry at the age of just 13 and never strayed from the path he knew he was meant to be on. After serving in pastoral roles in several churches, he established Temple Rock of My Salvation in 2002. He retired from the active ministry in 2019 and continued to speak the gospel until the end, but it is time – in his time with Temple Rock, he built a home that filled with more than 1200 worshipers every week.

He left behind his wife, another faith leader, Reverend Virginia Ortiz. I had the great honor of speaking with Reverend Virginia as well as my dear friend Pastor Pablo Pizarro, who told me about Reverend Carmelo's passing, and by the way, Reverend Carmelo passed on what would have been the 46th wedding anniversary of Virginia and he. He also left his children, daughter Heather and son Timothy, and seven siblings. We have faith that Reverend Carmelo has received his heavenly reward for a life spent in service, and may God bless and watch over him and the family he leaves behind and his faith family that he leaves behind. May God bless everyone we've lost.

Now before I close and hand things off to Judy, allow me to give a huge shoutout to one of our state's real small business gems, Lawrenceville's Gingered Peach Bakery and its owner Joanne Canady-Brown, that woman on the left. Folks from throughout central Jersey were already flocking to the Gingered Peach by the time it was – it and Joanne were featured on the *Today Show* and put in the James Beard Foundation's Chef's Spotlight. That just further grew their reputation. Like many of our food establishments, the pandemic slowed

traffic to a trickle, and Joanne needed a helping hand to keep her award-winning bakery open, so she partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, who came through with the emergency grant she needed to make it through some tough days, and today the Gingered Peach's ovens are turning out some of the Garden State's best products. Alex Altman, what was your favorite? The cinnamon rolls are Alex says otherworldly is the word she used with me earlier today. Check them out, by the way. They're at 2 Gordon Avenue in Lawrenceville or online at thegingeredpeach.com. I was able to catch up with Joanne last Monday while she was waiting for some treats to finish baking, and I know she's as optimistic about the days ahead for both the Gingered Peach and our great state.

I think we all share in that enthusiasm. We've come such a long way. We continue to pick up steam. Let's keep moving forward. Now it is my pleasure to hand things off to the woman on my right who needs no introduction. Please help me welcome the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Nearly four million New Jersey residents are eligible for boosters right now. However, only 24% of those who are eligible have actually received a booster. Those who haven't received a booster yet may not understand that their immunity has weakened since they received their primary vaccine series. We know there is confusion regarding whether you are eligible for a booster, so to be clear, if you are 65 years of age or older, get a booster. If you are 18 years of age and older and live or work in a high-risk setting like a school, healthcare, transit, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, restaurants, supermarkets, including any front-facing occupation, get a booster. If you are 18 years of age or older and live in a congregant setting or long-term care setting, get a booster.

If you are 18 years of age or older and have an underlying condition such as overweight or obesity – that's BMI over 25 or over 30 – or you are a current or former smoker, if you are pregnant or have had a recent pregnancy, or if you have any chronic lung disease or condition, if you are a diabetic, if you have mental health issues or a disability, if you're living with HIV or sickle cell disease, or you've had an organ transplant, or if you have a substance use disorder or asthma, hypertension, cardiovascular disease or a neurological disorder or maybe an immune disorder to name a few, get a booster. All of the vaccines are safe and effective, but all show the need for boosters over time. Lastly, to enjoy the holidays with loved ones and friends and avoid putting anyone you love including yourself at risk, get a booster.

It is essential that those who are eligible receive boosters because studies have shown immunity wanes over time increasing the risk of getting a breakthrough infection and spreading it to others. It's also important because of the approaching holidays when more people will be gathering inside this year and because of the high transmissibility of the Delta variant and the potential risk of new variants emerging. The CDC website has a full listing of underlying conditions that support your eligibility. I've shared some of them. If you are still in doubt, call our call center. If you have any difficulty or you have questions getting an appointment, call the call center, 855-568-0545. They will assist you. The call center has ongoing outreach efforts to remind residents to get a booster. The call center has a dedicated hotline for questions related to third doses or boosters.

*Science* magazine just recently released data showing declining immunity over time demonstrating the need to get boosted. The study found that vaccine effectiveness, for your primary series that is, against infection reduced for each vaccine brand as follows. For the J&J vaccine, effectiveness of 86.4% in February decreased to 13.1% in October. The Moderna effectiveness went from 89.2% in February to 58% in October. For the Pfizer effectiveness, that went from 86.9% in February to 43.3% in October. The article also showed the power of boosters to protect against this virus. Administration of booster doses for individuals 60 years and older resulted in 11.3 times reduction in confirmed infections and 19.5 times reduction in severe illness. We see while all three COVID-19 vaccines are extremely effective at preventing serious illness and death, but like some other vaccines, protection decreases over time and requires a boost in immunity. As Dr. Fauci has emphasized, boosters are not a bonus. They are absolutely essential to fighting the pandemic. We have seen that this is an unrelenting virus, so I strongly encourage all of those who are eligible to make an appointment for a booster today.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 690 hospitalizations with 134 individuals in the intensive care units. 63% of those individuals were on ventilators. There are five new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children since our last press conference. There are 141 cumulative

cases in our state. None of the children are currently hospitalized. At the state vet homes, there are no new cases among residents at the homes, and at the state psychiatric hospitals, no new cases among our patients. The daily percent positivity as of November 11th in New Jersey is 4.88%. The northern part of the state reports 3.89%; the central part of the state, 5.59%; and the southern part of the state, 6.18%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe, get vaccinated, get boosted to protect yourselves, your family, your friends, and your children. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you. One for you and one for Ed if I may. On the booster, what I'm hearing from Judy is don't overanalyze this, right? Don't overanalyze this. If you're six months beyond your Pfizer or Moderna second shot or two months beyond your J&J shot, you're 18 years and older and for all of those reasons Judy said but if you're in doubt, get the darn booster. Again, I'm of the opinion – I think we're all of the opinion, we want to make this as simple as possible. The key is with – now Thanksgiving is bearing down on us here. This is something that getting as many people boosted between now and the holidays is really important, so thank you for that. Well said. I wish nationally we were saying it as crisply as that, but thank God willing we will. Ed, the number of – nice to have you back. The number of children's inflammatory syndrome cases, that's the biggest jump, Judy, I think in a week that we've had in quite some time. Any concern that that's the beginning of a trend? Would you suggest that's related to school activity? Any color on that?

**Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** Not specifically. I think that we do get week to week variability just in terms of luck and other things. Certainly, we are seeing as a percentage of the population more cases in school-age children than we were before, but their overall case rates are still relatively low compared to where they were a year ago, so most likely this is just a random variability and some luck involved.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Got it. Good to have you back. Judy, thank you. Pat, again, God bless Sergeant Fajardo and his family. I know you had an Ida money disbursement update, and I also got this from you, "Stick it to COVID" wristband, which I think you got when you had your booster, which you said was an incredibly easy, straightforward, positive experience. Any more color on that? Great to have you.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** That's right. Thanks, Governor. I'll end with the Stick it to COVID bracelet. With regard to Ida, we have two months into the recovery with that, and so far, our federal funding tops \$500 million, 179 million of that is for individual assistance that so far has supported more than 35,000 homes. We have other needs assistance totaling more than 15 million, and I'm glad to announce that the Small Business Association has approved nearly 3900 long-term low-interest loans totaling 182 million for homeowners, renters, businesses, and our non-profits. Ongoing and a ways to go, but continue to have a phenomenal working relationship with FEMA.

I think it's important to note that last week the White House announced that the federal reimbursement will continue at 100% for eligible work for COVID. That's through April 1st of 2022. That's huge from a fiscal impact as well as that also included the extension of Title 32, which allows us to keep the National Guard staff at our [25:14] Nursing Homes as well as at our vaccine sites. To your point, the ease of that third shot or booster, I went on to the New Jersey vaccine finder and in minutes had my appointment up at the Rite Aid in Belvedere. They treated me like gold when I went in there, and I left there with a bottle of – a complimentary bottle of hand sanitizer as well as –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Bottle of what? Sorry. I thought you were going to say something else.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** No, that was it, but they gave also – not only for me but for the Governor and commissioner, the "Stick it to COVID". I wish I had thought of that slogan. Again, just a phenomenal experience. Again, just stressing the ease of it and more importantly the importance of it. Thank you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Pat, which one did you get?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** I got the Moderna.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Did you have any aftereffects?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** I didn't. I didn't. Other than a sore arm, I did not have any ill effects.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** God bless you, man. That's great, and I love this, the wristband. FEMA, the relationship with FEMA continues to be one of the – probably, unfortunately for all the wrong reasons, one of the most important relationships we have as a state with any entity and certainly within the federal government, so we know there's still whole lot of hurt recovering out there from that storm. Thank you for all of the above. Joey, is that you? We're going to start with you if that's alright. I should say one thing. Jamil's got the mic. Nice to see you. We'll be on the same rhythm unless you hear otherwise, and I don't expect you will, so we'll be here next Monday 1 o'clock and if we've got any news to report in the interim, and we may, we'll get to you some other – either through another event or through virtual communication.

#### Q&A Session

Joey, sorry.

**Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe:** Afternoon.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon.

**Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe:** The Globe reported this morning that about 80% of the state judiciary is white. In your second term now that you've got it, will you seek to change that number by appointing a more diverse set of people to the court? Another judicial question. There are 56 days until Rachel Wainer Apter's nomination expires. Do you have – do you anticipate she'll be confirmed in that time, and do you generally now that the lame duck session has started have any other updates on that? Finally, Jack Ciattarelli conceded last week, and in doing so specifically disavowed claims of voter fraud. Do you think it was enough? Was it in your opinion a suitable concession after a pretty long delay between election day and the concession? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yep, I'll start with the third. We had a very gracious private conversation, and I thank him – I thank Jack for that, and he and I have known each other now for probably seven years, and it's always been privately very gracious, and last week was no exception. I thought his public remarks were also gracious and on point, so I salute him. I wish him and his family nothing but the very best.

I'll jump to the first question. Listen, that's a reality that clearly is unacceptable in the most diverse state in America. I haven't read the article, but I saw the headline. It's not something that we just realized today. This is something that we are actively working on moving the needle on and working with our senate partners and we've got a very good constructive relationship there, but we need to clearly make a lot more progress, and I'm committed to that. I'm honored that the first black woman ever to serve on our state's supreme court was put forward by our administration and that is, I hope, one step of many, many to come, and I know our brothers and sisters in the broad, diverse communities that we have, the ones that I probably have spent the most amount of time in discussing judicial appointments are our AAPI community, our African American community, our Latino communities, our South Asian communities. Those are all either currently large, growing at a fast clip, or both communities in our state, and they deserve a stake in whatever room or chamber they walk into that reflects that diversity. We have the most diverse cabinet in the history of our state and in the entire United States. That I'm very proud of, but we need to continue to make more progress and we will.

Rachel Wainer Apter is an outstanding nominee to the Supreme Court, and I remain extremely confident working with our very good partners in the Senate that that will have a happy ending, and I could not be more proud to stand by her. Thank you for that. Sophie, is that you I'm told. Can you get a little bit closer there Jamil with the mic? Thank you. Good afternoon.

**Sophie:** Good afternoon. Election results are more or less final and Democrats are down to 24 seats in the Senate and 46 seats in the Assembly, which is going to be their smallest cohort in nearly two decades. Is this voters repudiating your policies, and are you concerned that the tighter margins will make it more difficult to pass progressive legislation in your second term? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. I'll probably just reiterate what I've said when I've been asked about the election to date, which is I think if we had not put the policies in place over the past four years, we would've been washed away as well, and so I don't view it as a repudiation. I view that we had by putting those policies in place and help make the state stronger and fairer were able to withstand what was if you look nationally a pretty overwhelming red wave a couple of weeks ago. That's how I view it, but I also would be remiss if I did not repeat the fact that while I'm proud of those policies there are clearly a lot of people out there who are hurting, for whatever reason, a frustrated job loss, a small business that went under, a family member who got sick or got – forbid, died, people who are sick of mandates and masks. By the way, I am as well. Who could not be? So we got to get – we got to connect more deeply into a lot more kitchen tables in this state on the issues that really animate families and animate their outlook for the future. We're committed to doing that. Thank you.

Sam, is that you?

**Sam Sutton, Politico:** Yep.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon.

**Sam Sutton, Politico:** Afternoon. First one on boosters, what's keeping you from saying the quiet part loud here? Given your comments today, would you like to match the steps taken by leaders in New York, California, Colorado, and just open up boosters to anyone who's two months out from J&J or six months out from their second Moderna and Pfizer shot? Second set of questions is a bit of a broken record for me, but do you have a timeline for when you're going to release data on what percentage of the state's workforce fully vaccinated against COVID-19?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I don't want to, on the first one, say I'm – we've been adherent to CDC guidance from moment one. We have been – I think we might be in a class of one in terms of American states that have been as adherent as we've been, Judy, but there's not much – I'll speak for myself – that's preventing us from just saying you know what? If you're six months out or two months out in the J&J case and you're 18 and up, go get them. You've probably read between the lines that's kind of what I'm saying today, but I – we want to make sure we get this right, obviously want to make sure the health and medical experts bless that. You've seen what California is – the direction they're headed, Colorado, New York City. I think you can assume that that's a direction we're going to be headed.

I don't have an update in terms of timing on the state workforce, so please bear with us on that. That's something obviously we're committed to.

I meant to say this, Sam. It's a related – you didn't ask this. The FEMA full reimbursement through the end of the first quarter is not an insignificant point. I think it's cost us \$12 million a month to test the state workforce that is not vaccinated. Now that gives you a sense of what that infrastructure costs because the overwhelming – I can't give you the exact number yet, and I promise you we're going to, but the state vaccination – state workforce vaccination level is at a very high rate. It gives you 12 million a month to have a testing regime in place for what is an overwhelming minority of our state workers, to give you a sense of how expensive this is to prosecute. Thank you.

You're back on the – you haven't asked a question in months; I just want the record to show. You're back in the lineup here. Did Alex leave you just by yourself?

**Reporter, News 12 New Jersey:** Yes, but these questions are from him.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** They are? I still reserve the right as to whether I'm going to answer them. Just tell him that. Thank you.

**Reporter, News 12 New Jersey:** Okay, yes, Governor, have you considered asking the legislature for the six-month extension to any of the pandemic emergency powers contained in the Public Health Emergency law you signed in June? If so, which powers? Also, what is your reaction to Jack Ciattarelli announcing he's running for Governor in 2025? For the Commissioner, will information on the number of 5 to 11 year olds who have received the vaccine be made available on the dashboard? Lastly, where are the five new cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children? Are the children related or is this a cluster? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, no discussions – we continue to have outstanding relations with the leadership in both the Senate and the Assembly, and we had a great leadership meeting last week, bittersweet for Senator Sweeney who'd just come from his press conference conceding his election. We've had no specific discussions on that front, but the relations continue to be really outstanding. I think both in the emergency health powers space but also on how we disburse things like the American Rescue Plan monies. We're doing all this as a team.

I have no further comment on Jack Ciattarelli's comments other than I thought they were both privately deeply felt and gracious, and I thought they were publicly, as well. I know one thing: I'm not running for Governor in 2025.

I assume the answer is yes on the 5 to 11s will go on the dashboard. It's just a question of time, so bear with us on that. Is any more color on where the geography or relations are on the multi-inflammatory syndrome, kids are?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, and I'll let Ed weigh in also. It's spread throughout the state; there's no specific cluster. Remember, it's seen in children that've either had COVID or are tested positive for antibodies suggesting that they had a prior infection with COVID. It's pretty much through most counties at this point. Ed, do you – I...

**Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** Right, and I wouldn't expect them to be connected. This isn't something you catch from somebody. You don't catch MISC from somebody else. You catch COVID, and then it's a question of how your body reacts to that infection. Luckily, it's a rare infection and largely unpredictable as to which child will come down with it, but you would not be expecting them to group in families or towns or areas like that.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** There's been cases in 16 counties: Bergen, Camden, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Mars, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** It must be said as much as there was an uptick, it's still 141 cases out of –

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, since the beginning.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Since the beginning. This is cumulative, right?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That's a vast, vast – thank God, vast, vast minority of even kids who've been infected, so thank you for those. Tell Alex we said thank you. Brent, you're going to take us home today. Good afternoon.

**Brent Johnson, NJ.com:** Good afternoon. When will the state provide actual school students and staff positive test data? The school months is now two months old. I mean the actual numbers. What is your reaction to President Biden signing the Infrastructure Bill today?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** On the latter, thrilled. I was invited to get down there. I could not do it today due to a number of commitments but thrilled. I've said it before but it bears repeating. First of all, it's bipartisan, and folks instead of threatening to kill people or whatever these people are doing, they should be thankful that there was common ground that was found here, including the entire New Jersey delegation. It's a game-changer for us. It's many billions of dollars over five years. We're the most densely populated state in America. It's a game-changer, I think disproportionately for New Jersey relative just – it's a game-changer for the country, but I think in particular for us, so thrilled. I wish I could've been there today, but we get down there a lot but today just was not – we're not able to work out.

School data, I don't have an – do you have an answer for that? I think we're going to come back to you on that unless Parimal corrects me, or Alex. Alex, can we follow up on the specifics? We're quite confident, Brent, in the gross numbers that we're reporting in terms of the vetting that goes into the amount of outbreaks, the amount of impact in both students and staff. Let me defer to Judy, who may want to add a word or two onto that.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, we're accumulating county data through our surveillance dashboard. That will probably be up and running before the school-specific data. We're looking at that every week. The last report I saw, about 40% of the schools were reporting. Is that right, Ed?

**Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** Number of schools reporting are increasing every day.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** They're increasing.

**Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** So I think we're closer to 60% but in that range, yes.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** We're building – like a lot of things, including reporting, we're building muscle memory with the schools and the districts that they never – in fairness to them, they didn't do it before because it wasn't needed, obviously. That's building and as always, we go out of our way and to Judy and Ed's credit in particular, every one of those cases, outbreaks, God knows, probable deaths, each one of them we – the team prides itself as getting it as right as possible.

Judy, Ed, thank you. Pat, thank you, Parimal, Alex, Jamil, the whole team. Again, we'll be back together a week from today in person and if there's anything to report between now and then, we will not hesitate, including on boosters or any other matter. Again, a big message I think Judy, and Ed, and Pat all join me, the booster process is very easy to do, every straightforward. It's pretty clear – listen, focused most importantly on are you six months past your second shot for Pfizer, Moderna? Are you two months past your second shot for J&J? Are you 18 and older? Those are the most important criteria. Don't over-analyze this, and let's get as many folks boosted before the holidays as we can. Thank you all, folks. God bless.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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