

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: January 19th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. I am joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, COVID-19 Response Medical Advisor and former state epidemiologist, another familiar face, Dr. Eddy Bresnitz. Great to have you both. Eddy, you're normally here on Wednesday, but we're going to take you on a Tuesday this week, if that's all right. The guy to my left, another one who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Patrick Callahan. We have Jared Maples with us, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands. Also, we have the First Lady with us. Tammy Murphy is in the house and it gives me a chance to underscore again the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, which is continuing to do extraordinary work, and boy do they need your help more than ever, njprf.org.

A quick note to start that I signed an Executive Order extending the public health emergency for another 30 days. As we have noted many times before, unless we do extend it, these emergencies expire after 30 days and given where we are currently, we must remain in a proper footing where Judy and Pat and others can have the authority to continue responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Next, let's get to some numbers right away. Our dashboard is showing a total of 388,160 vaccinations as of mid-morning today, Judy, I believe. Additionally, we have significantly improved our overall posture, including relative to other states, in both total vaccinations and vaccinations per capita. As we discussed last week, we have built the capacity for an aggressive vaccination push, and all healthcare workers and first responders who live or work in New Jersey, all residents over the age of 65, as well as those between the ages of 16 and 64 with medical conditions that increase their risks of severe illness from the virus are currently eligible for vaccination.

Four of our six vaccine mega sites in Burlington, Gloucester, Middlesex and Morris Counties are open; so too are numerous county-run and community-based sites, 130 of which can be found on our vaccine information hub at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine. If you have not yet read it, check out an article in today's Wall Street Journal about Essex County and specifically about County Executive Joe DiVincenzo who is approaching this with a passion. I think he calls it in the article the Super Bowl of public health emergencies, and boy has he taken it that way. Check it out. Two more mega sites at the Meadowlands and in Atlantic City, and more than 100 community-based sites have raised their hands to join our efforts. All that we are currently missing are the doses of vaccines necessary for us to put this machinery into high gear. We know that there is pent-up demand and that getting an appointment may be proving challenging. However, with the incoming Biden administration taking office tomorrow, and a new federal focus on pushing vaccines out at a greater pace, we are hopeful that we'll be able to start ramping up our in-state capabilities to meet what we know is a tremendous demand.

Meanwhile, we continue to push forward with the approximately 100,000 doses we're receiving on a weekly basis, and our pharmacy partners in the federal vaccination program -- remember that's CVS and Walgreens, that's a federal program -- continue to move through the state, providing vaccinations to some of our highest-risk populations, including those in our nursing homes and developmental centers, among other long-term and congregate living facilities. They're working through their appointments, Judy, but I have to say they need to punch at a higher weight, especially Walgreens.

We were discussing this on the phone earlier, we have the highest density of long-term care facilities, of patients. We have the biggest number of facilities in this program so when they're not performing, this is the federal piece in our state, that is impacting the sense of our overall posture and we're not getting to people fast enough. Now that again comes back largely to lack of the federal doses that we need of this vaccine. But they need to do better, especially Walgreens.

And we're getting out there. Yesterday, for example, this was where Judy and I were. We returned to the Roosevelt Care Center in Old Bridge. We were there with several elected officials, including the Mayor Owen Henry, we were with Senator Sam Thompson, County Commissioner Kenny Armwood, among others. We looked on as our old friend I should say at this point, Judy, 103-year-old resident Mildred Clements on the left and Nurse Esther Moody, another friend on the right, each received their second vaccination, as did 200 other residents and staff. By the end of last week, nearly 90% of our nursing homes had been scheduled for a vaccination clinic. Additionally, 90% of centers and homes for residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the federal partnership program -- again, federal partnership program -- had been scheduled, as have roughly three-quarters of residential care facilities in group homes and two-thirds of assisted care facilities. We will continue to work directly with CVS and Walgreens to ensure we get every facility and home eligible under the federal pharmacy program scheduled, and that we can get healthcare workers in to deliver these vaccinations.

Elsewhere in our numbers, today we're reporting 3,761 new positive PCR tests, 1,039 presumed positive antigen rapid tests, for a cumulative statewide total of 4,800 today of both types of tests, and 635,701 since last March 4th. The positivity rate for the 45,065 PCR tests recorded this past Friday, January 19th, was 10.12%. It's not a range, Judy, that we like but for the past five days the positivity has settled into a very tight range of just over 10%. We want that number to be down less than 1%, preferably at zero but there was a period there not too long ago when it was spiking up and down. At least for now, it is not doing that.

The statewide rate of transmission is 1.11. That's also been in a range for a week or so and it's about where you had predicted it a couple of weeks ago. As of 10:00 p.m. last night, our hospitals were treating 3,287 known COVID-positive patients, another 219 patients were awaiting their confirmatory test results. The total in our hospitals of 3,506. Of these, 643 were in intensive care, 429 were requiring a ventilator. And throughout the day yesterday, 240 live patients were discharged statewide while 347 new COVID-positive patients were admitted and our hospitals, at the risk of comparing apples to oranges because these are not confirmed, our hospitals reported 45 deaths.

Overall, we are seeing a decent measure of stability across our hospital systems. I know you were on with your regional coordinators this morning. While we continue to hold our breath a little bit, this stability is a good sign. Especially considering that we are now outside the two-week window from the holidays when one of the models prepared by Judy's team at the Department of Health predicted our second wave peak. Of course, we are still not anywhere near in the clear yet. The sobering part remains that there are still 3,506 New Jerseyans hospitalized and of them, 643 are in intensive care. Almost every day we're seeing hundreds of new known COVID-positive admissions. Those remain big numbers that we need to see start moving steadily downward before we can really exhale.

But, if we can continue on this track in terms of our hospitalizations, if we can begin to push our RT back below one and keep it there, then we're going to find ourselves in an ever-improving condition as our vaccination program continues to roll out. We still need to remain vigilant and we still need to wear our masks and keep our social distances.

And lest we lose sight, we continue to lose friends and neighbors to this virus. Today we must announce with a heavy heart an additional 54 confirmed COVID-related deaths, bringing our cumulative total of confirmed dead to 18,421 lost souls; the number of probable deaths remains 2,091 for today. Let's turn our attention to remembering three of those who we have lost, and I have to say I just told Pat, a couple of these calls were among the toughest -- they're all tough calls, forget about me, for these families but these were a couple of the toughest.

Today we begin by celebrating the life of Ronald Hubert, 53 years old by the way, of Waretown in Ocean County. He was, by the way, a Monmouth County native, a graduate of Middletown North, in our town. Following his graduation from high school, he found his calling as a volunteer first responder. He was a corporal in the Middletown Police Auxiliary, Pat, and emergency medical technician for the Port Monmouth First Aid Squad and a driver for the Waretown First Aid Squad. During the days, he worked maintaining public utilities for Ocean Township.

He leaves behind his wife of 26 years Teresa and their two daughters, Madeline 22 and Jennifer who turns 21 today. He's also survived by his parents, Frank and Linda, and multiple siblings and nieces and nephews. I had the incredible honor of speaking with Teresa, Madeline and Jennifer and as you can imagine, they're all emotional. This is an incredible loss and a recent one. Jennifer in particular, burst out the fact that she's turning 21 today and her dad would not be with her.

In 1986, at the age of 18, Ronald underwent a successful kidney transplant, naming his new kidney Butch. He was a fighter in every sense. We thank him for his years of service to his community. May God bless him, his parents, his family, and the three precious women he leaves behind and again, Jennifer, God bless you and Happy 21st Birthday.

Next we remember Willy Emanuele, who came to Jersey City from his native Peru in 1983 in search of his American dream. He was 66 years old. For the past 15 years, Willy could be found behind the wheel of the school bus that he drove for the Jersey City Public Schools, bringing thousands of students over the years to school and safely home again. It was a job he loved. When he wasn't at the wheel. He was usually at the hardware store picking up materials for any number of projects around his house or the home of anyone who asked for his help. That was his nature.

Willy leaves his son Willy and his daughter Carla, and I had the honor of speaking with each of them. He also leaves his son-in-law Justin. He also leaves his sisters-in-law Lucila and Alicia, as well as numerous nieces, nephews and great-nieces and great-nephews. One year ago, he lost his beloved, that gal right there Margarita, to cancer after 35 years of marriage, and if there is any solace to be found today it is in the knowledge that the two of them are now back together. Carla summed up her father this way and I quote her, "A kind, generous man who loved life. His laughter could fill a room and his energy could make you feel so loved." May God bless you, Willy, and may his energy continued to envelop everyone who loved him.

And finally today we honor this guy, retired New Jersey State Police Lieutenant James Bryan. He was just 53 years old when he passed away on New Year's Eve and Pat, God bless him and I thank you for bringing this one to our attention. He was a Burlington County product and a member of the Rancocas Valley Regional High School Class of 1985. Jim joined the New Jersey State Police just two years later in 1987 and moved up the ranks before becoming lieutenant. He managed the private detective unit and created the certification program for private security officers that became the statewide standard. And even among his duties, he found time to further his own education, earning a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Fairleigh Dickinson University. He retired from the State Police in 2012, and that just meant more time to focus on his other passion, arm wrestling. He was a coach and a tournament referee. He was also a champ get this, folks, winning two World Championship matches in 2005, one with each hand, and was the American Arm Sport Association Arm Wrestler of the Year in 2006. And get this, just three weeks before his passing he achieved another personal best, bench pressing 500 pounds. Three weeks before his death.

Jim leaves behind his wife of 27 years Brenda, his beloved daughters, Caitlin who is 24, Casey, who's 20 and I had the honor of speaking with all three of them. You can imagine how busted up they are. He is also survived by his parents, Joan and Jim, please keep them in your prayers, his brother Michael, sister Lorraine and their families. He also leaves countless friends and of course, he leaves his New Jersey State Police family. So on behalf of Pat and the entire leadership of the New Jersey State Police, I want to thank Jim for his 25 years of service to the people of our state and for living up to the highest ideals of our troopers, honor, duty, fidelity.

In an interview, I can't believe Brenda was able to give an interview but she gave an interview after Jim's passing. She spoke to everyone, noting this disease is not just happening to the elderly. It's happening to the fittest of the fit. And she said to me, I want you to say please, that Jim had no health issues. Judy, how many times have we heard that? It's clear, if you've got comorbidities, you're more at risk but this thing is killing healthy people. Can you think of someone healthier than this?

I also want to say this, that Caitlin is getting married in November, I believe it's November 24th. Caitlin, I'm assuming you've got guys in your family, your grandfather and others who will walk you down the aisle, but put me on the list. God bless you. May God bless you, Lieutenant Jim Bryan, we have the watch from here.

So let's all remember, we have to remember Ronald and Willy and Jim all lost way too soon. We have to remain vigilant. We have to use our common sense. Please, everybody.

Next up, switching gears, I want to give a quick update from our schools and a breakdown of how our students and educators are attending to their classes. Across our state, the majority of our schools remain open for in-person instruction in some capacity. When we last reported on January 4th, as a reminder, 77 schools were open for full in-person instruction. That is now 80. 348 were offering a hybrid of in-person and remote, that number is now 360. 339 had gone all remote, that number is now 325. And then a couple of weeks ago, there were 47 districts that have had a combination of all the above. That number is now 46.

The Department of Education and our Executive County Superintendents continue to work closely with local district leaders and stakeholders to ensure the flexibility and communication needed to protect our educational communities from this virus, while maintaining a full slate of instruction. We remain mindful that this pandemic is a very challenging and fluid situation, and we remain grateful in this extraordinary time of stress, in this most unusual school year, where we remain grateful to everyone: our families, our kids, our extraordinary educators, our school leaders who continue to rise to meet this challenge.

And speaking of rising to meet the challenge, so too are countless small businesses up and down our state. They are backbones of our Main Streets and the engines of our communities. One such business is Camden's Corrine's Place, a family-owned soul food restaurant and catering business that has spent the past 30 years feeding its neighbors and providing good jobs for the city's residents. It is in every sense a staple of the community, at the Nexus of the Parkside Gateway and Whitman Park neighborhoods. I have to say, I had the great honor of eating at Corrine's on July 4th of 2019, one of the best meals I've had in New Jersey.

When the pandemic hit Camden, Corrine's Place kicked into high gear with its own local delivery service. The restaurant team, led by co-owners Trevor Vaughn, I believe that's Trevor on the right, and Craig Sawyer on the left, both longtime champions for Camden's revitalization, took a nearby abandoned lot, turned it into an outdoor dining space and christened it Corrine's Oasis to keep the restaurant going. And through it all, Corrine's has remained true to Camden, providing meals to frontline workers battling the pandemic. To ensure Corrine's Place, Trevor and Craig worked with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to receive a grant that allowed them to meet some of the expenses of staying open, taking some of the pressure off during this challenging time. I checked in with Craig and Corrine at the end of last week, and I know he and Trevor and Corrine and everyone on their team is committed to seeing Corrine's Place remain strong through the days ahead so it can help strengthen the community for the long run. I thank everyone at Corrine's Place and I cannot wait to get back there next time I'm in Camden. Check them out, CorrinesPlace.com.

And speaking of feeding a community, I want to give one more shout out to the tremendous team at CUMAC in Paterson, which opened its doors to Tammy and me yesterday. Tammy, that was not your first time there, not even your second or third, as we helped out as part of a National Day of Service in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In so many of our communities, our food banks and community pantries are experiencing an extraordinary demand for their services. If you have the means, please consider making a donation to your local food pantry to help ensure that no family goes hungry. And if you have a few hours to give, I hope you'll consider volunteering some of your time. This is an extraordinary place. They're up and down the state but there are very few that are really a hybrid food bank and when you hear food bank think wholesale. In other words, it feeds into other food pantries and other distribution points, and a food pantry which is retail. These guys do both. They had folks lined up in the front coming in. Tammy and I were filling some of those orders. But they also had sort of a more of a bulk connection to the various points that they touch in Passaic County. We're all in this together, by the way, whether it be fighting this pandemic or keeping our communities fed and healthy. That's the spirit of New Jersey. We watch out for our whole family.

One final note before I close, we will be with you remotely tomorrow as Tammy and I will have the tremendous honor of attending the inauguration of President-Elect Joe Biden and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris. Tomorrow begins a new day in our nation's history. I'm excited about the new opportunities of true federal cooperation that exist on the critical challenges that we face, from a real focus on fighting and defeating the pandemic, to investing meaningfully in our impacted families, to building a stronger economic future.

I'm reminded of a speech before the American Legion in the midst of McCarthyism, that the late Statesman Adlai Stevenson and two-time presidential nominee, called upon us to embrace and I will quote Adlai, "A patriotism that puts country ahead of self; a patriotism which is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime." That says it all.

In that sense, President-Elect Biden is a patriot of the highest level. We must all aspire to a truer sense of patriotism. Whether you voted for him or not, at noon tomorrow he becomes our president. Note the word "our". This is how our democracy works. This is the example we have set and must reset for all across our nation and around the world. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As the Governor mentioned, yesterday we had the opportunity to return to the Roosevelt Care Center in Old Bridge to see nursing home residents and staff received their second dose of vaccine. The second and final dose ensures the maximum protection against the virus. They also reported that 200 of their residents have been vaccinated and close to 90% of their regular staff have also been vaccinated. Vaccinating these vulnerable residents is a significant undertaking. As of this morning, more than 50,000 doses of the 214,000 initial doses reserved for these facilities have been administered. As the Governor stated, CVS and Walgreens are making progress in scheduling facilities for vaccinations. Approximately 1,262 facilities have been scheduled for their vaccination clinics in the federal partnership program.

The state is working hard to vaccinate as many eligible people as possible with the available doses that we have. So far, 388,160 doses have been administered in our state. We are working to provide stable allocations to our points of dispensing whenever possible, given the changes in the federal allocations. If sites have an expectation of the supply coming weekly...

[Break in audio stream]

...151,400 initial doses sent out four weeks ago. The federal government says they feel confident that they can provide the supply of our residents' second doses. Vaccination sites should be scheduling the second dose appointment when residents receive their initial vaccination. If an individual hasn't been scheduled for a second appointment, they should contact the site where they were first vaccinated. It is recommended individuals return to the same site where they received their first dose. Individuals must receive the same type of vaccine for both doses. We have been notified that individuals are travelling sometimes quite a distance for their first dose. Returning to that same site is imperative, since your second dose will be delivered to that site. Individuals may register with the New Jersey vaccine scheduling system, NJ VSS, available at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine and be notified when appointments are available. Individuals will receive an invitation to schedule an appointment when more slots open up. We are asking the public to be patient because supply of vaccine is limited. It may be some time before you receive an invitation to make an appointment, even if you are currently eligible.

Some vaccination sites, on the other hand, only take appointments when individuals use their system. However, such sites, such as those affiliated with hospitals, have their own registration system. You can find a link to those sites on covid19.nj.gov/vaccine.

With the expansion of eligibility into more categories, there are now many more people who are eligible to get vaccinated but our vaccine supply is still very limited and will be for some time. The department is in the final steps of setting up our vaccine call center and expects to have live agents to guide residents available early next week. In the interim, the call center available at 855-568-0545 has an interactive voice response platform in both English and Spanish that provides key information to New Jersey residents on how to register, as well as how to schedule vaccine appointments as people become eligible.

On another topic, last week I shared information on the value of administration of monoclonal antibodies as a first line of defense if you test positive for COVID-19. Administration is an outpatient infusion. In New Jersey, to date 3,105 individuals have received the infusion in our hospitals and an additional 232 individuals have received those

infusions at their pharmacies, so a total of 3,337 individuals have received monoclonal antibodies and perhaps have avoided a hospitalization.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 3,506 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and PUIs. There are 643 individuals in critical care, and 67% of them are on ventilators.

There is one new report of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are a total of 76 cases in the state.

At the state veteran homes, there has been one new positive case among residents at the Vineland home. And sadly, one additional death of an individual at the Vineland home. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there's been one new case among residents at Anne Klein.

The daily percent positivity as of January 15th for the state is 10.12%. The Northern part of the state 9.67, the Central part of the state 10.37, and the southern part of the state 10.79. That concludes my daily report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, socially distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ App.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything. Again, the monoclonal antibody, and Eddy I know has already weighed in on this. If you test positive, you're either asymptomatic or light symptoms and you act quickly, this has been known and proven out to be a game changer. And I think you've said before, the larger organizations have a higher take up of this as a habit than the smaller ones, just to reiterate that point.

Second, I want to make sure everybody knows this, but on the on the child inflammatory syndrome, the total of 76 cases, just to make sure everyone listening knows that's cumulative since we first got it. No way of really knowing how many are currently active, of the 76. It's very difficult to know. We know who's in the hospital, I guess, other than that, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: There's none in the hospital right now.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank God. Let's hope it stays that way. And still no fatalities, thank God. Thank you, Judy. I'm sure we'll be back on more in a few minutes Pat, God bless Jim Bryan. What a guy. We obviously were in the prepare for the worst, hope for the best over the weekend and we got about as good as you get in terms of the best score and any color on that, any color on what tomorrow looks like. I know that troopers are in DC, but you've also got another element here that's been activated, which I think is a point of pride for the state police. Any other compliance or other matters, please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Starting with compliance, since we last met there's been four EO violations. Police responded to a large warehouse party in Camden where the subject was cited, had no business license and was cited for EO violation. In Harrison, two days in a row the owner of an indoor soccer facility was cited, more than 250 people participating or watching, a lot of out-of-state license plates. The owner of that facility was cited two days in a row. In West Orange, at the Wilshire Grand Hotel, a subject was cited, it was a large wedding vow renewal ceremony unfortunately for West Orange, had to write that subject.

As you mentioned, we sent 45 troopers to an EMAC request to support the inauguration. They will be stationed along the parade route and very visible. They will be wearing their Class A uniforms, which they should stand out beyond just their uniforms. I had the chance to send them off. We were supposed to send more and we had a handful of them come back COVID positive, which pulled them off of our detail, but I'm sure they'll be able to handle it with the 45. Also, what we usually support in person is the National Capital Region Threat Intelligence Consortium it's known as with analysts, because as COVID-19 cannot support that in person. But given the realities of COVID and the ability to work virtually, we will be supporting that with analysts from our ROIC, Governor.

Yes, with regard to the planned protests Sunday it went off without incident. We were certainly prepared with all of our partners around the state and was glad to report that that did end without incident. Again tomorrow, given some of the -- although no credible threat -- just some of the things we've seen in the past few weeks, we will be ready with a contingency of troopers here as well.

And just on a final note with regard to Lieutenant Jim Bryan, I worked with him for years, Governor. A phenomenal trooper, a passionate man. It's not a well-known fact, but I did beat him once arm wrestling and that was using both hands and one of those Belgian draft horses that you saw when you pulled up out there. Thank you for memorializing a phenomenal man who lived a phenomenal life. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: God love him, God love him. Just the heartache, as I mentioned, particularly poignant around his daughter is getting married in November. We've got a lot of guys out there, including you and me, who will be very willing and able to take her down the aisle. The fact that you're supporting the EMAC, the emergency situation in Washington remotely, is a badge of honor. Not every state is doing that, right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I think there was a handful in Washington DC's Homeland Security and Emergency Management. We've supported it before. I think that we are one of 12 around the country that's supporting that remotely, so another point of pride for New Jersey State.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, a badge of honor. I clearly grew up and missed the warehouse party generation. So I don't know, I'm sure in normal times, those are fun things. Aswan is here, he can tell. He's now a dad, he's got no time for the warehouse parties but folks, those are super spreader events. And this knucklehead in Harrison, is this the same guy we talked about a couple weeks ago? Third time? I mean, 250 people indoors, out-of-state plates? That's not on. That's just not on. We cannot have that. It's unfathomable that people are still doing that. It just cannot happen.

Again, we're going to be remote for the next couple of days. I think unless you hear otherwise, Mahen, we're going to be together back here at one o'clock on Friday. We have a new administration tomorrow at the federal level. That's a Captain Obvious point. However, what we don't know is how often they will be doing what Judy and Pat and I have done 140-something times, I think, that's the amount we've done, I think 40 or 50 times with the White House. My guess is that we will get into a pretty regular pattern. That will be, my guess is sooner than later. I say that because that could impact our schedule over the next few days.

I meant to say, by the way, either tonight or tomorrow, not only are the troopers down there and working their tails off, as our National Guardsmen and women, we hope to visit with each of those groups. But they're not down with their feet up. We found out, we said hey, can we come by and say hi? They're on the graveyard shift, at least some of them are, 2:00 a.m. We don't want to get in the midst of getting their rightful rest and getting ready for that. So with that, we're going to start over here, sir. Nice to see you. I haven't seen you in a while. Have you got anything?

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: I have an off-topic question. Is that all right?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah. We haven't seen you in a while.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah, well, I had a really bad accident.

Governor Phil Murphy: Are you okay?

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah. Motorcycle accident, deer hit me, it jumped on the highway and I hit it going probably 70 miles an hour, so.

Governor Phil Murphy: Holy mackerel.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah, I had a bad brain injury.

Governor Phil Murphy: When did it happen?

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: May 30th.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless you, man. I didn't know that.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: The troopers were amazing. They did a great job.

Governor Phil Murphy: Are you okay now? You look well.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah, it's been eight months now. It's been an incredible journey learning about how your brain heals and your body heals. The state troopers were amazing, but they said they called the morgue when they got the call because nobody would survive hitting a deer head on with a motorcycle going highway speeds.

Governor Phil Murphy: Where were you?

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Morristown.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless you, man.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah, I was in Greenwood Lake and we were on the boat all day, I was driving back home from my brother's house and I don't remember anything. I had memory issues for about two or three months.

Governor Phil Murphy: We're going to put you on the retroactive prayer list.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: I've heard that you missed me, I'm sorry to let you down. And you missed my birthday again this year, it was January 5th.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm sorry about that.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah, you remembered all the other reporters birthdays, but not mine.

Governor Phil Murphy: I won't let that happen again. What have you got?

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: It's good to see you again, Governor. I'm Alexander Roubian. As you mentioned, we just honored Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King was a great man, and also an avid gun owner and supporter of the Second Amendment. His life, family and home were always threatened. However, when he applied for a concealed carry permit to carry a gun for self-defense, he did not demonstrate justifiable need and the local authorities denied his application, stating that he had no good reason to protect himself. This is the same exact process that specifically targets and discriminates against Blacks in New Jersey. The FBI has a background check system called NICS. It is free, does the same background check New Jersey does in less than 30 minutes. And when I interviewed many Blacks in Camden, Trenton, Newark and inner cities, many of them cannot afford to apply, take days off of work, or wait six months for their simple background check to be completed. This is a scheme that you endorse and have wanted to make more expensive.

Alabama fixed their racist gun laws. Why do you support gun control laws that have been historically endorsed by white supremacists and the KKK to disarm Blacks and prevent them from acquiring firearms for self-defense?

Governor Phil Murphy: So it still is good to see you. Let me just say that. But yeah, I don't have a whole lot to say to that because that's obviously not the way we see this. I'm happy to look, and Parimal can help me look at other states or other means that we can do things that we endorse and support more easily and more affordably. I think we mentioned last week you weren't here, but last week, at least on two occasions either in interviews or a press conference, we said we have no issue with the Second Amendment and we don't. I said that because this protest on Sunday was at least wrapped around the notion of the Second Amendment, even though it didn't materialize.

But listen, we again on the one hand, I think we can say both of these statements. We support the Second Amendment and on the other hand, we want to have the safest gun safety laws in America. If there's best practices that we can find that still respects both of those realities, I'm happy to look at those. Real quick.

Alexander Roubian, NJ2AS: The system that we have today was adopted in 1966. It was actually in response to the protests that were occurring in Newark. I looked at the transcripts and in the transcripts, you have a lot of people saying, Oh, look what the Blacks are doing in the inner city, that's spreading into the suburban neighborhoods. We need to pass these gun control laws. So they're singlehandedly admitting that they're passing these laws to make sure that Blacks don't get guns.

Governor Phil Murphy: I will say perhaps as the understatement of the year that is not our driving principles. We reject that obviously, completely, but I promise you, Parimal, you guys can exchange notes and it's good to have you back. Thank you. Dave.

David Mathau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. You mentioned with the Commissioner the fact that we're seeing limited doses of vaccine coming in at 100,000 a week for the next several weeks. And yet we've opened things up to everybody over 65, smokers and so forth, millions of people trying to get vaccines, it's impossible now. Do you think this is sending somewhat of a mixed message? People are so frustrated that there's anger boiling over. Might it have been better to hold off? And also, how concerned are you about this whole issue of the second dose? If we're going to get enough to start giving people the first dose, is it possible we may wind up being shortchanged by the feds and then we're not going to be able to give people the recommended dosage that they need?

With regard to schools, I know you mentioned this Governor, I believe that it was 325 are all-remote still, although many have a hybrid situation. You made a point of saying in the beginning of the school year that schools had a limited amount of time to get things together and then they really would have to open up some sort of an opportunity to give in-person instruction. Is this happening? How do you think President-Elect Biden's plan to putting billions of dollars towards getting kids back in school as a top priority will help us, if it will, in New Jersey? In other words, is it a matter of money that these schools somehow can't figure out how to get open? I know that Hillside I believe is already announced that they're going to stay remote for the rest of the year. Newark schools, I believe, are going to be remote at least until April.

Final question for you and perhaps Eddy Bresnitz, we now have more than one COVID variant that's spreading in the United States. Do we know how many of these different variants are around? Is this concerning that we have these different types of the virus starting to appear? We know that one variant is able to infect people more easily but what about these other additional variants? How is this going to affect our hospitalizations? And more importantly, perhaps, how will it impact if we keep seeing these types of new types of the virus, how is this going to impact the ability of the vaccine to do what it's supposed to do, protect people? Dr. Bresnitz, maybe you can touch on, would we expect that this virus will mutate to the point where the COVID vaccines we have now will not be effective any longer? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me jump in and then ask Eddy and/or Judy to comment on any of these. We're going to probably pick up the pace because Tammy and I have to get on the road here in a few minutes. I don't regret at all opening up but I will say this, remind everybody, when you go back to look at the tape and the interchanges between the Trump administration and our teams in late November into early December, the expectations explicitly were for significantly more doses of vaccines to come to New Jersey. People have to remember, we said this right at the beginning that there's a supply-demand imbalance here, period and it's gotten only worse and not better.

Having said that, I think signaling to people to give them a sense of this is how we're approaching this. It's healthcare workers, first responders and everybody who we deem and most importantly, the CDC and public health officials have deemed to be most exposed to this virus. I think we want to signal explicitly. We've said, you know, I hope sooner than later educators on deck, etc. This cannot be at the expense of the second dose. We are relying on our partnership with the feds to make sure that that is not the case. That by vaccinating more folks sooner that you aren't cutting yourself off on the back end. And again, Judy may want to weigh in on this.

On schools, let me say this. I just looked it up, on September 1st we had 365 cases that day. Today, we've got over 10 times that. The answer is yes on your question about, do we still expect school districts to have a rationale and a plan? The answer is yes. I don't want to speak for Hillside or Newark or any other district but I would bet you magically if by the end of March, I'm just picking a date, our supplies and our ability to distribute those supplies were in a dramatically different and better place, I would guess that they would reconsider that. I can't speak for them, but they would certainly I think be rightful to reconsider it. We completely endorse the President-Elect's program to get 100 million vaccinations, get schools back open. Tony Fauci over the weekend said he thought it was still plausible. We said this last week and I'm going to still hang my hat on this, with only one footnote. If you had a six-month window in which you wanted to aspire to get 4.7 million vaccinated, this is going to be more middle and back field than front field, sadly, because of the doses out of the feds. I still think that remains a reasonable timeframe.

Having said that, the footnote on it is, we're set up for distribution I think as well as any state right now. There's only so many you can do a day and so that's the thing that we also have to just remind folks. If they all landed in our lap tomorrow, that's also a reality that's going to be logistically very challenging.

Last comment and then Judy, you and Eddy should take it. We have assumed now for several weeks that the variant is in the state. We're operating that way based on what we know, it is more easily transmissible, but not more lethal. That continues to be the incomplete science and data that these folks have. We're just going to continue to behave that way. Clearly the faster we can get folks vaccinated, the better this reality is whether it's with a variant or whether it's with the main or prime virus. But Judy, on vaccines or variants? Or Eddy.

Dr. Eddy Bresnitz: The Governor actually covered a fair amount of the answer. You know, on a daily basis, there are innumerable mutations that are produced around the world and in the country. Every time a virus replicates, there's a chance for a mutation. Most of these mutations don't do anything. But from time to time, it has an advantage, a competitive advantage and it becomes more easily transmissible. It can also become resistant to antibodies or immunity. We can expect, since all viruses replicate, that there'll be changes as time goes on.

You asked about the number of variants that are occurring. To my knowledge, there's only about a handful that have been reported throughout the world. And in the US, it's only one variant, the B117 variant that's been reported. It's now been reported in at least 20 states in the country, but less than 100 cases, as of last week, at least reported by the CDC. I can't say that every state that surrounds New Jersey, but Delaware has had at least one case. It's just a matter of time before New Jersey, you know, will report a case. We send samples down to the CDC on a regular basis for testing and our own laboratory is actually developing its own capabilities for doing that testing as well.

As the Governor mentioned, there's no evidence to date that it causes more severe disease but because it's more easily transmissible, we can expect that it will have an impact on the incidence of disease, the number of cases that will be reported in New Jersey. However, that has to be tempered by how much vaccination that we can get done before it becomes more predominant in New Jersey. So it's kind of a race between getting as many people vaccinated versus the virus itself replicating and becoming the dominant strain.

The CDC did some modelling, it was published last week. And even when they vary the reproductive number, the RT, or with or without vaccinations, I would expect that within the US this B117 strain would become more dominant. That's in the US. That doesn't mean it will be so in New Jersey. It all depends on these other factors.

Governor Phil Murphy: Eddy, thank you. Judy, real quick. Do you have the numbers for vaccine doses for next week? I think you just got them in today, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: For the first two weeks in January, we got about 53,000 Pfizer and 53,000 Moderna. We just got notice this morning that we will be getting 55,575 Pfizer and 56,100 Moderna. So a little bit more than expected and what we've been getting since the first of the year, December we ended with 18% less than what we expected. The first two weeks of January, 1.5% less than what we expected, so now we're up a little bit.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Real quick, Dave, literally 10 seconds.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Is it possible to get vaccine doses directly from the pharmaceutical companies? I know New York has said they're looking into that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, to be determined. At the moment, I think we're going to go through – we will try everything. Needless to say, Moderna and Pfizer are folks we speak to as well, a whole lot. I'm personally skeptical but that doesn't mean we wouldn't try. Sir.

Reporter: Thank you for your time. Governor. I'll keep it as quick as I can. Do you know how many vaccine doses Johnson & Johnson would be able to offer if they get an emergency use authorization from the FDA? And what difference could adding that vaccine make in New Jersey's efforts to inoculate 70% of its residents within six months?

And on that note, there's been some confusion around the state's timeline to immunize 70% of the eligible population within six months. What month or months this year do we expect to reach that 70% goal? And based on the vaccine supplies we've received to date, are we on track to meet that target? And how many vaccines has New Jersey now received total from the federal government?

And on the topic of schools, as schools reopen, pressure is mounting to include teachers as a priority group for vaccinations. What is your latest thinking on that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, I'm going to be real quick. We will get you the numbers offline, if that's okay with you. Listen, if Johnson & Johnson comes through, that's a game changer, period. I don't think we have any sense of the numbers. First of all, either the timing, how efficacious it is, or what scale, but without question any other vaccines that are proven to be safe and efficacious are game changers, and they only are additive to any amount of optimism. Is that fair to say?

Where are we in the timeframe? Listen, I still believe we're in a dramatically different place on Memorial Day. I've said that now a number of times. I can't guarantee you that we've gotten 4.7 million people with shots in their arms but we're in a dramatically different and better place.

You asked me about educators. We hope, assuming the supplies can come in right now and if the supplies begin to amp up, as I've said for now some number of days, educators are on deck and that will only help us get schools open. Right now, frontline healthcare workers, fire, police, EMS and then the folks that the health professionals have deemed to be the most vulnerable to this virus. Alex, we'll go to you and we'll come down front. Thank you.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor, you just expressed partial frustration with Walgreens over the speed that they've been vaccinating. Can you go into a little bit more specifics? Do you think they're failing? And is that part of the reason why vaccine distribution in New Jersey is lagging behind that of other states?

For Commissioner Persichilli, can you tell us, there's a statewide 855 hotline that people can call to get set up for a vaccine appointment. Why is it not going to be staffed with people behind that desk until the week of January 25th? Why aren't there people there now?

And just in general, for anyone up there, there's a political back and forth about why the vaccines aren't coming to New Jersey as quickly as they could but there seems to be agreement that there's a supply chain issue. What is that and how do we fix it?

Governor Phil Murphy: On Walgreens, yes, we are frustrated. I think CVS and Walgreens, CVS are the ones who were administering with us yesterday at Roosevelt. We met some of their team members. They seem to be extremely competent, passionate about the mission. But there's no question the federal program is meaningfully lagging what we have control over in the state. There's no question about that. Judy's got numbers that back that up.

I'll give you another data point. There's one state in the country, and I wouldn't reconsider this, by the way. I think what we have done will be proven to have been the right route. There's one state in the country apparently that did not take the federal partnership with CVS and Walgreens. It's West Virginia. And if you look at the how well states are doing, they're number one in the country. Because all they're worrying about is what's within their control. If you look at us in terms of what we control, the distributions that are controlled outside of CVS and Walgreens, you know, it is a very meaningful improvement relative to the federal program. I believe it gets better.

First of all, there aren't many choices. It's not like they picked two of the biggest national chains and there were another 10 to choose from. CVS and Walgreens have a reach that is unmatched by any other organization.

Listen, Judy can come to this. We are getting people on the phones as fast as they can. They've got to be trained. They've got to be professionals and know what the heck they're doing. And you say the week of the 25th like it's three months from now. That's Monday, so that's six days from now and Judy had said early week. I missed your last on the vaccine supply. What was the last one?

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: There's plenty of political back and forth about what's going on in Washington, but there seems to be universal agreement there's a problem with the supply chain. What part of the supply chain and how do you fix it?

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, some of this is still not transparent or visible. I hope that tomorrow we get to a different and better place. If you listen to the companies, they will describe, Pfizer and Moderna will describe a different reality than the one that we've gotten from the feds. My hope, is I don't think it'll be tomorrow, unfortunately but our collective hope is that gets to a different and better place very quickly. It's also possible by the way, again, this is now rumors and speculation. But it is possible that other drug companies can manufacture vaccines that are not developed by themselves so that this can be farmed into other folks who are used to manufacturing vaccines. Anything you want to add, Judy? You're good. Okay, thank you. Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. I think for probably about a year, maybe a little bit more, I've been asking whether or not you would seek reelection on organizational lines. We're getting to the point where those are going to be handed out in a matter of weeks so I figured I'd ask you again.

Then on marijuana, things publicly at least seem to have stalled on that. Have you sent a proposal to the Legislature to bridge the impasse that you've all reached?

And then on early voting, I've heard different things from clerks and other election officials about the runway that they need to get this established. When do you think that an early voting bill must be signed into law for them to have enough time to prepare to administer it for the general election? And it's not possible in this year, I'm told, but should the early voting bill apply for primary elections? Neither version that I've seen currently does.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nothing to report on organizational lines, but I appreciate your asking. No update there. I would say on marijuana, my answer as well would be consistent with where we've been over the past couple of weeks, which is there are two driving principles that must both be respected. Number one, the last thing we want is for our kids, particularly kids of color, to get sucked into the criminal justice system. That continues to be a passion that we will not waver from. At the same time, the voters voted on legalizing adult use, explicitly 21 and up. The other principle that we're going to stick to is this is not going to be legal for kids. Those are the two principles. We're trying to thread a needle. The conversations have been very constructive. I don't have a final answer as I sit here, but we're going to continue to stick to that.

My team believes I've been showing too much optimism about the ability to get early voting for this primary. I think that's going to be really hard. I don't want to sugarcoat that. I don't have an exact date for when we'd need to get it done by for the general election. We could come back to you with estimates from the folks on the team who are more expert on it than I but going forward, I would hope it applies to primary and general elections. I see no reason why it wouldn't. Thank you. Matt, you're going to take us home. Good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Commissioner, on the call center that you mentioned earlier, is the Department of Health contracting with an outside contractor for their call center or is it going to be handled internally?

We're hearing from a lot of folks that are basically concerned about getting that second vaccine. Governor, I think you touched on this a little bit, but I just want to be clear. What's being done to make sure that those second doses will be available to people who've already gotten their first won't wrongly be given to people who are getting their first dose?

On the sites, will the state asked these sites to schedule the second dose appointment, or is it just up to the person to handle it?

Lastly, from Karen Yi, have vaccinations started at any county jails? And if so, have any ICE detainees been vaccinated?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't have a specific answer on the ICE detainees. I believe that they have, without question, started in county jails. We had a PBA 105 member last week, I think we memorialized Pat who works at South Woods who died from COVID. I believe I referenced at that point that they had started but we'll come back to you on details.

Judy, the call center, contractor or not, how can we be guaranteed that the dose will be there for the second, the booster shots, so to speak? And lastly, on the sites, will they reach out to folks? What's the method of somebody getting the word that it's time to step up to bat again?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, let's start with the sites. When you register and you show up for your administration, you fill out a postcard that is left at the site. It's in a Dropbox. That postcard then is turned around and sent to you to remind you of the second dose. Before you leave the site, you should make your appointment for the second dose. We do believe that all second doses have been set aside at the federal government and will be sent on a regular cadence to the points of dispensing, based on the number of first doses that have been administered and entered into the immunization system.

The call center is an outside contractor but the individuals on the other side of the phone will all be residents of New Jersey.

Governor Phil Murphy: Any idea, do you have an updated number, I do not, on how many people have pre-registered on the website?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have over a million individuals pre-registered.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think it may be a million-and-a-half. We'll get it to you. Eddy, I know it's a Tuesday, but it was good having you. I'm going to mask up. Judy and Eddy, thank you very much as always, for being here and for your leadership. Pat, likewise. Jared, Parimal, Mahen, the whole team, Tammy, again, NJPRF.org is a great place to go to help out others of your fellow residents of the state. Good to have you back in good health in our retroactive prayer program back to May 30th. Again, we'll be virtual with you for the next couple of days and subject to anything that might be scheduled, which is a possibility by the White House, we'll be back together at one o'clock on Friday.

Folks keep it up. You know, we're getting to a range of time here, Judy and Eddy, that the models, the variety of models we look at, we're sort of in the zone right now in terms of what they're suggesting in terms of peaking and between now and early February is that sort of period. You combine hopefully a peak with more vaccine supplies, we have the distribution. We have adopted completely the attitude if you build it, they will come. It is either completely built or in some cases, in the process of being built. We could take a lot of federal doses right now. We just need more out of the feds. God willing, we'll turn the page tomorrow with a new administration, get some of this extraordinary unrest in the rearview mirror and get on with tackling and bringing this pandemic, driving the virus to the ground. Thank you all folks. God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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