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Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: November 1st, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

11/1/2021

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll give you a minute there, so we'll wait one more minute. Good afternoon, everyone. Alongside of me is 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. Great to have you all here. To my far left, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, a guy who needs no introduction, and to my immediate left we welcome back Secretary of State Tahesha Way. We have Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands here.

As tomorrow is election day, I've asked Tahesha to be with us to provide a final update on our efforts to ensure a smooth, secure, and successful election process. She and her team have been working alongside our county clerks and county superintendents and boards of election to protect the rights of every voter, the sanctity of every ballot, and the accuracy of the results. Everyone involved in our elections process from Secretary Way on down to the precinct level poll workers takes the importance of protecting our democracy with the utmost seriousness, and everyone who has been playing a role in this throughout the past nine days of in-person early voting to tomorrow's main event has my deep thanks and deepest respect. Tahesha, to you through – through you to them, thank you. We'll be handing things off to you shortly.

Next, today is November 1st, which means it is also the first day of open enrollment to get covered New Jersey – or for Get Covered New Jersey, our state's health insurance marketplace under the Affordable Care Act. The enrollment period for the 2022 plan year will expire on January 31, 2022, but don't let a moment go to waste and start your journey to affordable health coverage today on day one of the enrollment period, All Saint's Day, I might add. As a reminder, the special enrollment period for those who need coverage now can still take advantage of the COVID-19 special enrollment period, which is running concurrently through the end of the year. Individuals and families looking for affordable and high-quality healthcare coverage are strongly encouraged to visit getcovered.nj.gov. Right there, getcovered.nj.gov to begin reviewing the plans that are available.

This year, not only are there more options available, but records level of financial help remain available from the American Rescue Plan and state subsidies. Roughly 90% of residents will find they will qualify for financial support that can bring the cost of coverage down. In fact, the majority of people receiving financial help can access a plan for \$10 or less per month. Whether you are looking to renew your current coverage through Get Covered New Jersey or are a first-time buyer through our exchange, everything you need again is at one website – and it's that one right there – getcovered.nj.gov.

Now let's move on to today's numbers. We'll start as we do – as we normally do with the latest vaccination numbers as of this morning. You can see at the bottom that the number of individuals stepping forward to get their booster shots continues to increase, and we encourage everyone to get that additional protection. We are also awaiting the final support and guidance from the CDC regarding the eligibility of the Pfizer vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. As we noted a couple of weeks ago, the Biden administration has pledged its partnership with states to ensure the rollout of the supply necessary to vaccinate our kids, and we look forward to this plan moving forward. We have the distribution network in place, and we will be ready to hit

Back
to top

start the moment we are given the green light, and Judy will give a little bit more color on that. As I've said before, opening up eligibility for our younger kids can be an absolute game changer in our fight against COVID, especially in making our schools safer places and beyond that enhancing protection for our families and communities.

With that, let's take a look at the latest breakthrough case data provided by the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service. I'm honestly not going to dwell very long here because it's really just going to make me start sounding like a broken record, but the vaccines work. Period. The report card, if we were to give one, based on real world experience bears this out. 99% is an A+ any way you look at it, and the vaccines are cumulatively showing this and better across the board. Both in the overall and then preliminary weekly numbers, we continue to see a far greater percentage of new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from among the unvaccinated than we do from the vaccinated, even though the unvaccinated make up a smaller and smaller minority of residents. You can see it there. This is the week of October 11th through the 17th. 2,199 cases out of 11,500. Hospitalizations, 24 out of 725, and sadly two losses of life out of a total of 123 blessed souls lost. I know there's really nothing we can say from this table that will lead most of those who remain unvaccinated to change their minds, but these numbers just hammer home the point that the vaccines are safe and that they work.

Moving forward, here are the newly reported positive PCR and presumed positive antigen tests for today. The rate of transmission has shown a bit of an increase over the past several days. As you can see it's at .96 today. When we were together last Wednesday it was .83. Importantly, it stays below one, but – meaning the spread of the virus continues to slow, but Judy, it's up. When you get up to bat – you or Ed – any color as to how you're reading that would be great. Looking at our hospitals, we continue to be on the trend line we've been seeing over the past several weeks of steadily decreasing numbers of patients overall. The ICU and ventilator numbers are both also down from last week. With the heaviest of hearts, here are today's newly reported confirmed deaths. The number of probable deaths has been revised to 2,816, and as Alex Altman, who's with us today, reminded me, the world crossed I believe it was today five million losses of life from this pandemic. Unbelievable.

Now as we always do let's remember there of those we have lost from our blessed New Jersey family. First of all, today we honor Dr. Jill Stoller from Upper Saddle River who died after fighting long-haul COVID complications for many months. She was just 59 years old. Born and raised in New York and a graduate of Cornell University, Dr. Staller was a pediatrician who joined Woodcliff Lake's Chestnut Ridge Pediatric Practice in 1996, and 15 years later became the CEO and president of BCD Health Partners in Saddle Brook. She was an active member and leader within the American Academy of Pediatrics focusing on issues related to medical practice administration and management.

Although she loved working with her patients and her families, she found a second calling in dog training and was a frequent competitor in competitions leading her own rescue dog Tia, which I believe explains the setting of that photograph. Jill left behind her husband of 37 years Tim along with her son Travis, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday, her daughter Jenna, Jenna's husband Sean, and her grandson Bryce. She was also survived by her mom Jane. We thank Dr. Stoller for her years of dedication to the health and well-being of children from throughout Bergen County. May God bless and watch over her memory and her family.

Next up, let's remember Toms River's Christian "Chris" Smith. Born and raised in Somerville, where his dad, by the way, served as mayor, Chris earned a degree in industrial management from Rider University and then had a successful career in business. A true family man, he also gave back to his community, coaching basketball for the St. Mary's CYO team from Stafford Township, and when he wasn't on the basketball court, you could usually find Chris boating somewhere in the Barnegat Bay. He left behind his children Chris, jr., Kelly, Melissa, Matt, Erin, and Lindsey, and I had the great honor of speaking with Erin last Wednesday. He's also survived by his sister Kate and brother Drew. For all that he did for those around him, we are certain that God has blessed him, and we thank him for living our values of family and community.

Finally today, let's remember this woman Hilda Jacomino, one of the many tens of thousands of Cuban refugees who fled communism in the 1960s and came to call New Jersey home. She was 92 years old and lived in North Bergen, where I'm going to be in a few hours. Born in Havana, she fled her homeland in 1962 coming to New Jersey. She found work in a factory in Guttenberg that manufactured fuses. Hilda retired to

take care of her husband Segundo, prior to his passing in 1991. His loss was a horrible blow, but Hilda leaned on her remaining family to carry on and enjoy a new life. She is survived by her children Hilda and Ramon. Hilda is living in Denver, Colorado, and I had the great honor of speaking with her last Wednesday, and Ramon has remained in North Bergen. She's also survived by her granddaughters Lindsay and Lauren and her great-grandchildren Isabel and William. Like so many, Hilda came to New Jersey to find a new life. In the process and through her family, we hope she found her American dream too. May God bless and watch over her memory and the family she leaves behind.

Now switching gears and ending today by highlighting another small business that has been put on a more secure path forward because of the partnership and support of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, Felicia Mo'Nique on the right is the owner of Hairitage Beauty Salon in Phillipsburg in Warren County. When Felicia opened her doors in 2014, Heritage filled a void by being not only the first black owned salon in town but by also being the only salon in Phillipsburg catering to the needs of African American residents. Through Felicia's leadership and vision providing medical benefits, a 401k, and educational benefits, the stylists she hires are finding a full-fledged career. Like many salons across the state, the pandemic's early days hit Hairitage hard. Thankfully, through the EDA she was able to receive several grants that allowed her to pay expenses and support her staff. Today, the doors of Hairitage remain open. Phillipsburg is a historic town that's seen some tough days over the years, but which today is on the rise, and it's because in many respects of small businesspeople like Felicia. When I spoke with Felicia last Wednesday, I thanked her for her role in bringing Phillipsburg back. Check her out and check them out. They're at 499 South Main Street in Phillipsburg, 499 South Main Street, and her website is thehairitagebeautysalon.com, spelled Hairitage. Thehairitagebeautysalon.com.

That is all from me. This first day of November and the first day of open enrollment for Get Covered NJ. Again, if you need affordable healthcare coverage for 2022, go to getcovered.nj.gov. You've got it right there, getcovered.nj.gov and started checking out the options available to you. It is now my pleasure and honor to hand things over to our fantastic Secretary of State. Please help me welcome Tahesha Way.

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon and happy election eve. I want to begin by thanking all of the voters who have already cast their ballots in this election. Now these are just unofficial results, of course, but as of yesterday, 495,336 voters have cast vote by mail ballots and 207,863 cast ballots at 139 early voting locations across nine days. As we all know, this year was the first time New Jersey held in-person early voting, and we're glad that New Jersey voters have more options than ever to participate in our democracy, but tomorrow is the big day, election day. Here's what you need to know if you still need to vote.

First, let's talk about voting in person. You can vote in person on a machine at your local polling place just like you probably have done before. Before you head out to vote, we recommend verifying your polling location using our website, vote.nj.gov. Polls are open from 6 a.m. until 8 p.m. Accommodations will be available on site for voters with disabilities. Now, I have different guidance for you if you requested and received a vote by mail ballot but haven't returned it yet. In that case, you should plan to vote and return that ballot before the polls close tomorrow at 8 p.m. While you can return your vote by mail ballot through the mail at this point, we recommend returning it to one of your county's secure drop boxes or at your county board of elections office. You can also find these locations listed at vote.nj.gov. You cannot, however, return your ballot to your local polling place tomorrow. Poll workers there will not be able to accept your completed ballot and cannot be responsible for it, so again, if you are voting a vote by mail ballot, make sure you return your ballot via drop box or at your local county board of elections office.

Finally, if you requested a vote by mail ballot and have not received it or received it and misplaced or damaged it in some way, you can still vote. Go to your local polling location and you will be able to vote via a provisional ballot. No matter what method you choose to vote, we want to make sure everyone who is eligible to vote is able to vote tomorrow. If you have any concerns or need assistance, you should reach out to our hotline, 1-877-658-6837. Finally, today is Election Hero Day, so I want to wrap things up with a big thank you to our election heroes: my team at the Division of Elections, our county boards of elections, superintendents of elections, and county clerks who work every day to make sure we have free and fair elections. I also want

to thank our municipal clerks as well as the thousands of New Jerseyans who step up and serve as poll workers and make sure our democracy works. Thank you for protecting our elections and putting the voters first.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tahesha, thank you. Great work on the early voting. As I had mentioned I think from this table, it was the best voting experience I've ever had in my life, so thanks for the great leadership and to all the county clerks and boards of elections and superintendents, poll workers, just fantastic job, and we're getting ready for a big successful day tomorrow. Please help me welcome – thank you, Tahesha – the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. The FDA's action Friday in authorizing emergency use of the Pfizer vaccine for children 5 to 11 years of age is certainly welcome news. There are approximately 760,000 5 to 11-year-olds in New Jersey, so protecting them through vaccination helps us to further protect everyone. The FDA said its authorization was based on its thorough evaluation of the data that included input from its independent advisory experts. The clinical data they examined showed the vaccine is safe and 90.7% effective in preventing COVID in children between the ages 5 and 11. The strong immune response was comparable to those individuals 16 to 25 years of age according to the FDA. The safety of the vaccine was studied in clinical trials of over 3,100 children between the ages of 5 and 11 who received the vaccine, and no serious side effects were detected. Side effects that did occur were generally mild and occurred within two days after vaccination and went away within one or two days. More children reported side effects after their second dose. Commonly reported side effects in the clinical trial included a sore arm with redness and swelling, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pains, chills, fever, swollen lymph nodes, nausea, and decreased appetite.

The pediatric Pfizer vaccine is administered in a two-dose primary series three weeks apart, but it is a lower dose, 10 micrograms, a lower dose than that used for individuals 12 years of age and older, which is 30 micrograms. Acting FDA commissioner, Dr. Janet Woodcock, said the FDA's comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the data pertaining to the vaccine's safety and effectiveness should help assure parents that this vaccine meets the FDA's high standards. Tomorrow, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will meet to review the data for expanding the Pfizer vaccine for children 5 to 11 with final approval by the CDC expected to follow. We know that parents have concerns and want to do what's best for their children. We also know that COVID does affect children. While case rates are declining across the state and the nation, younger children are now the predominant positive cases, not only in our nation but in New Jersey as well. We want to protect as many children as possible, and parents should discuss any questions they have with their pediatrician, their family physician, or their healthcare providers who they have trust in and visit the Department of Health's COVID-19 vaccination page and the CDC website for information.

We want children to remain in their classrooms this year, learning, sharing, and socializing with their friends but doing it safely. The best way to ensure that that continues is to have as many individuals as possible vaccinated including those 5 years of age and older. The Department is actively working with the Department of Education to solicit and support school-endorsed vaccination events by leveraging relationships with schools, local health departments, federally qualified health centers, acute care hospitals, and other vaccine providers in the state. The Department of Health and the Department of Education held a call with the executive county superintendents on October 21st to encourage all districts to hold school-endorsed events. Since that call, the Department has received an additional 51 requests for school-endorsed vaccine events across 14 counties. This includes 28 planning to hold events this month.

The state has planned for pre-positioning the following pediatric doses in the state. We have ordered 203,800 doses and more than 230 sites will be receiving those doses. The Department has been in daily communication with vaccination providers helping them to prepare for this next step. The breakdown vaccination sites receiving pediatric Pfizer doses includes 65 primary care practices, including pediatric practices, 40 independent pharmacies, 37 county and local sites, 35 acute care hospitals, 27 federally qualified health centers, 18 chain pharmacies, six other sites including urgent care and university sites, and the Gloucester County megasites. At this point, all 21 counties will have sites where peds Pfizer vaccine will be available.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 712 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and those under investigation. There is one new report of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. Currently there are 135 cumulative cases in our state. At the veterans' homes, there are no new cases among the residents, and at the state psychiatric hospitals, no new cases among patients at those hospitals. When we look at the daily percent positivity in New Jersey as of October 28th, in New Jersey it is 3.61%. The northern part of the state is 2.99%, the central part of the state 3.97%, and the southern part of the state 4.53%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe and let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, friends, and our children. I'll pass this over to Colonel Pat Callahan.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: I was fairly certain the Governor was going to kick it to me, but thank you, Commissioner. Just a couple quick points. The FEMA vaccination canvassers that I had reported on last week that we had requested, they were provided training this weekend by the Department of Health. They are positioning for deployment tomorrow throughout the state regionally. They'll be conducting community outreach at the direction of New Jersey Department of Health. These areas initially include Atlantic City, Camden, Trenton, New Brunswick, Paterson, Elizabeth, Newark, and Jersey City. Also, with regards to a little bit of a postmortem on the storm, we did see some localized flooding in Atlantic, Camden, and Salem Counties. Outages, although not horrible, at their peak of the storm were at 22,136 and as of right before this press conference they were down to 184. We did see a spike down in Berkeley Township in Ocean County due to a motor vehicle accident on Route 9, which saw more than 1400 customers without power.

I'll close with regards to election day. As we do on every election day, our emergency operations center will be activating tomorrow at 6 o'clock in the morning. We will also have our cybersecurity and communications integration cell up and running to monitor any type of cyber threats to the election. Myself, the attorney general, and the director of the office of homeland security Laurie Doran will be stopping by the EOC just to thank those workers for coming in and working on the election. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thanks for pitch hitting for me there. I apologize. Good to see you. Good to have you. With that, we'll take a few questions. We'll start with Sam. That's you, right? Before we do, two quickies. One is there's a lot of moving parts this week, so we will be somewhere on Wednesday. We're not sure yet whether it's here or somewhere else, but we will definitely have some kind of a update and obviously on COVID, but we'll also obviously be doing social and whatnot as it relates to that. Secondly, I think particularly given the Secretary of State is here, I think we're very happy to field political questions, but I'd rather not do them in this forum if that's okay with you all given our proximity to the election.

Q&A Session

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With that, Sam, take it away.

Sam: A few of the pandemic era executive orders that were left intact by the public health emergency bill in May will expire in a few weeks. Are you planning on requesting that those orders be extended? If so, which ones? Then tomorrow in addition to election day is the start of lame duck. What are some of your priorities in the final months of the current legislative session?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for both. I've got no color on the executive orders. Parimal, anything you want to add to that?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, so no news to break here. The bill that the Governor signed in June lays out a process for some of those executive orders to be extended, so if we need to utilize that process we will, but we don't have anything to report as of yet.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think, again, lame duck is upon us win, lose, or draw, right, so I think you'll going to see us – without getting into a lot of detail, you're going to see us with a pretty robust agenda. There's still work to be done, still unfinished business. I probably won't get into any details today, but expect us to begin that process on Wednesday, again, win, lose, or draw. Thanks for coming and for the questions.

Joey, is that you? How are you?

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

Governor Phil Murphy: Good.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: So Secretary Way, two questions for you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Could you get that closer to Joey's mouth? There you go.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Sorry. Secretary Way, two questions for you. One, are there any technology concerns regarding the counting of votes, the uploading of votes, anything to do with election day counting tomorrow? Then can you give the current number of CURE letters that have been sent out to CURE absentee ballots? Then a follow-up question for you, Governor; I was also going to ask about lame duck. Are your plans for lame duck contingent at all on what happens in the election tomorrow given that things might change? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Joey. To the best of my knowledge – Tahesha, you should answer these. I do not know the answers on the CURE letters. You should address that as well, but technology so far, we've been – we had a great meeting with you and Laurie Doran last week. I think, I don't want to put words in your mouth, you feel – you've been feeling quite good about this, right?

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Yes, thank you, Governor. We do feel good about the technology and the security. Colonel had mentioned the level of law enforcement coordination and participation at the ROIC tomorrow, and of course all of the monitoring that goes on. I, too, will be visiting the ROIC because this is a team effort in making sure that everything is secure in the integrity of the election's infrastructure throughout. Regarding the CURE letters, I know it's our understanding various CURE letters have gone out to voters but at this time, we have to still await the counties to provide those specific numbers. Once we do, we will definitely provide to whoever would like to receive those, so thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Joey, the answer is no from my perspective in terms of does the lame duck look different whether you win or you lose. We're going to go at it and work our tail off right through the tape, whenever that comes. Thank you.

Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon. First, Governor, it's unusual for you to step out while the woman who needs no introduction is talking. I'm just curious as to if there's been some situation the public needs to be aware of.

Governor Phil Murphy: There is not. I was going to say I felt badly that I came back and didn't say nothing. We're all clear. Thank you for asking that.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: For Secretary Way, the Governor has said that he thinks these low numbers in early voting are due to the fact that it's new, that people need to develop a practice of going to the polls early. I'm wondering if you agree and if you feel that the expenditure of \$60-plus million to get this up and running was worth it with so few people taking advantage. For you, Governor, since this is a coronavirus briefing, not a political question, but it's your last chance before Tuesday. Can you point to a single mistake that you made during the coronavirus pandemic, and can you point to a single person or entity that you would like to apologize for for a mistake you have made prior to election day?

Governor Phil Murphy: There's no situation, so I'm glad you asked that question because also when I pulled Pat out, you probably thought we were having another Orsen Wells moment here in New Jersey and West Windsor but no, there's nothing there. Before – Tahesha's welcome to add to this. If you said to me ten days ago – remember, this is – we have no muscle memory in the state doing this. We've never done this before, so we always knew this was going to be the beginning of a journey. This is absolutely the right step to take, and I'm incredibly happy we've taken it. Most of the money, as Tahesha knows, is sunk money. The technology is sunk. That's going to – we'll be able to amortize that over time, but if you said to me 207,000 early in-person votes in 9 days, I think that's a terrific result. That's alongside just under 500,000 votes by mail. You've got basically 700,000 votes that've been cast. I think that's a really – that's a big step in the right direction in terms of democracy. Tahesha can add anything she wish.

The only thing I'd say, Alex, is – I've said this before but I haven't said it in a while. The thing that got me angry – and again, we found – even though we didn't agree on a whole lot, we found a lot of common ground, particularly in the emergency moments with the Trump team. The thing that really angered me was when it came out many months later, I think last fall, in taps of an interview between the President and Bob Woodward, I believe, that they knew more about this earlier than they let on, that they didn't want to “scare” the American people. My reaction to that was we really could've used that information, all of us. I don't think it would've led to different decisions, but it would've led to decisions taken sooner. There's no question that we would've taken steps sooner and probably the same steps, but that's really – that's the one thing that really continues to bother me.

I'm good with that, but thank you. You good on early voting?

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Relative to your expectations?

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Relative. I agree with that assessment, Governor. I also just would want to underscore that success is really affording voters all options to participate in democracy. Of course, to modernize our election infrastructure, you look at vote by mail when it first arrived in New Jersey, and you look at how it has increased throughout the years. That may, of course, be true in terms of how early voting it also going to be. Then just think about last year. If there was not an alternative option to election day, let's say, to vote by mail in place, it would've made it more difficult for voters to actually cast their ballot and make sure they were safe in doing so. It's always good to have these viable options on the table.

Governor Phil Murphy: I used to have the numbers at my fingertips, Alex. I don't have them with me today, but Tahesha makes a very good point. We think of vote by mail as something that's been here forever and for always at this level, and the fact of the matter is it isn't. It hasn't been. The numbers that I'm referring to are the uptake in vote by mail, even putting the COVID pandemic craziness of 2020 aside. It's muscle memory that we built over time and the same thing is true of early in-person voting. It's a home run as far as I'm concerned.

Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon. Just one for you. Can you name your top three priorities for a second term, if you get a second term?

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, I'm – because it gets into how tomorrow turns out. I think you're going to see us doing a lot more of the journeys that we've started and continuing on those journeys. We want to make sure we have a state that is growing in the economy and that is fairer for a lot of folks where we haven't been fair in our state's history. I think we made significant progress, and I would hope we could continue to make more. Given what's going on tomorrow, I'd rather get into that, win, lose, or draw, after tomorrow, but thank you for asking.

Katie, is that you?

Katie: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: How are you?

Katie: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: How you doing?

Katie: Good, how are you?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm good.

Katie: Once the green light is given for vaccinations for younger children, what kind of a lag time, if any at all, are you anticipating before administration starts? Do you have any updates on how many state workers and separately, teachers, are choosing weekly COVID testing in lieu of getting vaccinated? You've started to gather information about COVID cases for students and staff in schools regardless of whether or not they're in-school transmissions. When can we expect to see that reported on the state dashboard? My last question,

New York state continues to refuse to agree to a federal formula used by 47 other states to allocate federal COVID-19 aid to transit. Will you consider using the so-called nuclear option of vetoing port authority board minutes to force New York to agree to use the federal formula so funds can be released and used by NJ Transit?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me go through these, and Judy, you should weigh in here. In terms of green light, once we get the green light for the kids, we're ready to rock, right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we'll probably – we're hoping to get it now that we finally saw the schedule from ASIP today, and they're meeting tomorrow and the next day, but tomorrow's agenda is when they're going to consider pediatric vaccine. There's a good possibility that CDC, what we've seen lately, will turn that around and we could know by tomorrow evening that we can start. If that's the case, we're ready to start first thing Wednesday morning.

Governor Phil Murphy: I've got no update on either the state worker or teacher number. I know we're gathering that data, and your question, Katie, on students and staff was to have both a combination of in-school transmission and out-of-school transmission that impacted those communities?

Katie: Yeah, and when would we see those numbers reported on the state dashboard?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think we – can we get back to you on that one?

Katie: Sure.

Governor Phil Murphy: So Alex, can you follow up on both the numbers as well as when you can – when that might be – unless you've got something on that, Judy.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: A lot – the in-school transmission is on the dashboard.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep, and Katie's wondering whether we'll then add the other –

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: The flip-side, the out-of-school transmission.

Governor Phil Murphy: I was going to pull Ed in, actually, to comment on the CRRSSA negotiations with New York state, but perhaps this is a more ripe area.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: If you think so. Yes, and let me start by saying as I mentioned yes, on our dashboard we do have in-school transmissions, the number of outbreaks in schools, the number of reported transmissions. We know a few things about those numbers. We know that they tend to be under-reported because schools don't necessarily know about every single case and every single transmission that happens in there. We know that they don't always get reported. We do also on our dashboard currently separately list all cases of COVID broken down by age groups. You can go ahead and basically look at those two different things, see the total number of cases, and subtract from that the number of known reported cases in school outbreaks and come to a number. Now is that number the number of cases absolutely not happening in schools. No, because again, we know the numbers aren't perfect, but they will give you a pretty good idea.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, now that we've got you, rate of transmission crept up and I had to run out and take a quick phone call. I'm not sure if Judy addressed it or not, but how are you – how concerned are you about that, and how should we be feeling about it?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I am preternaturally worried about things, and I tend to worry about these things all the time, but overall no, I think we're still in good shape. The overall trendings are trending down. The numbers over the last couple of days are looking better compared to where they were a week ago. We are seeing improvements across essentially all parts of the state and all age groups to some extent. The overall trends in our surrounding areas are also following the same general trajectory down. I think that we have, as we like to say, flattened the curve and we are going down. I do think we're going to continue to go down at a gradual pace.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, the big concern I think we've heard expressed from this table by all of us is colder weather, holidays, want to make sure we're doing the right thing. Again, having the kids vaccine up and running will be a big weapon for the positive.

I've got no news on the New York deliberations, but we're going to make sure we get our fair share, as we always do, whether it's for a commuter or for the state's budget and the resources that are rightfully due to us. We enjoy overwhelmingly good relations with our neighbors, and that includes New York. Governor Hochul and I were exchanging messages over the weekend not related to this, but we're going to see each other in a couple of weeks and I hope I'm optimistic we still get to a good result, but we're going to stand our ground in terms of getting our fair share. Thank you.

Nikita, welcome back. Let's go to you, if we could.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Monitor: Thank you, Governor. Just two today; so at the moment, there are 86 bills on your desk that have been there since June or perhaps even earlier, and about half of them, 46, will become law on Thursday when the Senate meets for a quorum. The remaining 40 will see the same fate on Monday. I'm just wondering if we should expect to see a flurry of bill signings or vetoes over the next few days. Separately, the Department of Labor has said that its One Stop Career Centers might offer unemployment services down the line. I'm wondering how that will impact residents who've been unable to get unemployment throughout the pandemic, and whether you think that that change should happen sooner.

Governor Phil Murphy: So good to see you. We will – we got a lot of bills sent our way in June, and so it – we want to make sure we always deliberate, analyze, and make an informed decisions on all these. They were literally measured in the hundreds. I'm very confident we'll meet our deadlines both for the Senate re-adjournment and for the Assembly next month, a re-adjournment, so no color beyond that.

Then secondly, I think there's a comfort, Nikita, in I'm looking at you; you're looking at me, and you've got an unemployment issue, and it's weighing heavily on you and you're frustrated to have an in-person engagement, and I can understand that part, which is why I think that's a smart move by the Department of Labor under Rob's leadership to do that. I think in fairness, if he were here, he would, I think, make the point that it won't necessarily speed a result that otherwise would've occurred, but it may well give comfort to the person that they were actually – they've got a name and a face, but I don't know that there's any evidence that it would have speeded up the claim. As we've said many times, I'll put our record up against any other American state in this pandemic, but that doesn't mean that if you're out there and you're frustrated right now that your claim has not been resolved that I don't have sympathy with that. Therefore, I'm frustrated as well. I understand that, but I also said many times these are, in many cases, if not most, if not overwhelmingly most, hand-tailored suits. These are very specific to the individuals. As it relates to when, I don't have a timetable, but I think sooner is better than later. Obviously want to do it right, but sooner's better than later. Good to see you.

Dave, please, take us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Thanks, Governor. First question, Governor, is for you, Commissioner Persichilli, and Dr. Lifshitz. That's alright.

Governor Phil Murphy: In that order?

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Not necessarily, but as Dr. Lifshitz mentioned, the COVID metrics are basically in pretty good shape in recent weeks. They're trending in the right direction. We're hearing from a lot of parents that they're a little reluctant at this point to get a shot for the 5 to 11 year old because of that fact and because of the fact that the clinical trials were significantly quicker than normal. Is that a concern? Is this vaccine any riskier than any other vaccines that are traditionally given to children in New Jersey? If you had a younger child in this age group, what would you do?

Then secondly for Colonel Callahan and Secretary Way, have there been any election cyber threats or any other kind of threat that we're aware of in any way, shape, or form to this point? Some people are concerned about the possibility, they think, of hacking a voting machine. Is this a concern? Is there any way somebody could hack it, or would you have to literally break into it and change configurations of the mechanics of it? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dave, I will start, if I may, on both, and we'll turn to Judy and Ed, more importantly, for the first, and to Pat and Tahesha for the second. I'd just say two things that I know to be true and I'll leave the rest of it to the experts. Number one, this pandemic – every time you think you got this thing licked, it comes back at you. I'm hoping that those days are over, but just because the numbers are getting better, I would plead with people, don't use that as the excuse not to get vaccinated, including for your children. We do not know the future here. I wish I could say otherwise. I hope I'm wrong when I say we run the risk that the numbers go back up again when we get inside and celebrate holidays, but specifically just because the numbers right not are getting better is no reason to get – to not get vaccinated.

Secondly, I will say definitively, because Tammy and I have spoken about it, if our kids were still in that age range, we would absolutely get them vaccinated, unquestionably. Why don't we – I'll hold off on cyber and go to Judy and Ed for any more – how risky – is this riskier, Ed, than other vaccines? Should we be concerned that the trials were on a shorter time frame? What can you say to allay some questions and fears out there?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Yes, the vaccine was developed quickly, and that's a total attribute to both the scientists working on the vaccine, the years of research that went into mRNA and other techniques leading up to this, as well as the thousands of people who volunteered to take part of trials to show that they are safe. Yes, the trials did include thousands of children in order go get to the point we can say that yes, while nothing is 100% without risk, these are clearly safe vaccines. There's nothing to suggest that they're any riskier in this age group than any other age group. One of the great silver linings of this pandemic has been that children are relatively spared compared to adults and older people when it comes to illness and so forth. That relative is a relative term, meaning COVID-19 is still in the top ten causes of pediatric death; has been for the last year. It is still a significant cause of children dying. We do know that children get sick. We do know that children sometimes develop long-term COVID and other symptoms – other syndromes that can persist for months or years, causing them real serious problems. Any risk from the vaccine is clearly lower than the risk of the illness itself

We also know that one of the things we've been talking about is getting together with families. We're talking about families getting together for Thanksgiving, for Christmas. What happens in those environments? Well, you tend to get together with your grandparents, your uncles, your aunts, your other older people, and certainly if I still had children that age, I would want the whole gathering to be as safe as possible. How do you have that happen? You get those kids vaccinated so they can't possibly become infected so they can't possibly infect the other older people who are a whole lot more vulnerable. If I wanted to protect my entire extended family, I would start by trying to get the kids vaccinated, similar to what we do, by the way, every year with flu. We vaccinate kids for the flu largely because they can transmit it to older people, particularly in their family, or it's a whole lot deadly.

Last, there's a real practical reason why I'd want to get my kids vaccinated. Because you know what? We know that schools are somewhat of a mess. As hard as people are trying, we know that people are out on quarantine on a regular basis. We do what we can to try to protect against that, and one of the best things you can do is you get your kid vaccinated. If your kid is vaccinated and they're exposed to somebody else in school, they don't have to stay home and be quarantined. You don't have to worry about them not going to school or arranging for childcare or yourself taking off from work to take care of them, so there's a real practical reason there as well. So that's my long answer to your short question. Yes, they're safe, and the very last thing I would say is you know what? Go talk to your pediatrician. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly supports vaccination for children. They're the experts in taking care of your kids. If you have any questions, talk to them.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great answer. In a funny way, this vaccine is – to the point on holidays, it's coming at exactly the right time. Getting our kids under the age of 12 fully vaxxed up before Thanksgiving and Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's, etc., is good timing.

Laurie Doran and you and I met – Laurie's the Acting Director for the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Pat, you've been part of these conversations. Either Tahesha or Pat are welcome to weigh in here. Feeling very good about – knocking on wood, by the way – about the cyber reality so far, but please, add anything you all would wish to.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: You go first.

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: No. Okay. Thank you, Governor. It's highly unlikely – I'm going to speak towards the machines – that there could be any potential hacking. There's the security protocols that are in place, the seals, our counties. Folk have been trained and also have provided their security plans to OHSP. Unfortunately, I can't get into any specifics. It's like at a football game. You look at the coaches. You see how they have, as they're calling the plays, the play card over their mouths, so you know they are prepared for the play but at the same time, unfortunately, no specifics can be given. To my understanding, there has not been any cyber threats made at this time.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's my understanding as well. Good luck to your Giants tonight, by the way. Pat, anything you want to add?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: I would just add that we have an entire unit, the Cyber Threat Intelligence Unit, dedicated to monitoring that, David. The last intelligence dissemination report that I received today indicated absolutely no threats uncovered. Again, we also have that cybersecurity and communications integration cell that understand – that watch every single potential breach to our – not only our Garden State network but certainly to these systems. Again, 24/7 operation, keeping an eye on that cyber threat but none to date.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you both. Thank you, Judy. Thank you, Ed. Tahesha, great to have you back. Pat, Parimal, Alex, everybody else out there. In this case, I literally mean this. I don't care who you vote for but vote. Tomorrow's election day if you haven't voted already, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., your regular polling location. I don't care who you vote for, but I do care that you vote. With that, we'll be back to you in terms of where we're going to convene and how we're going to convene on Wednesday. In the meantime, stay safe, everybody. Take care. God bless.

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[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](#)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](#)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](#)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)

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