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**Governor Phil Murphy**

# TRANSCRIPT: July 13th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon. I'm joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right the Department of Health's Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz, another familiar face. Thank you both. Patrick Callahan is still not with us. Please keep Pat and his wife Linda and their family in your prayers. We were on the phone with them a short while ago but he's unable to be with us for this conference today, so again, please keep them in your prayers.

I wish to start today with two Executive Orders that I'm signing. First, we are lifting the 50% capacity limits currently enforced on NJ Transit and private carrier buses, trains light rail vehicles and access link vehicles effective 8:00 p.m. this Wednesday. As we have undertaken our restart and recovery, and as more New Jerseyans begin getting back to their jobs, we are seeing increases in ridership which are beginning to approach 50% of the stated maximum capacity of these vehicles, and we want to ensure that people are able to get to their jobs and that the system continues operating as efficiently as possible. To be sure, all other coronavirus mitigation efforts implemented by prior Executive Order, including the wearing of face coverings by both NJ Transit and private carrier employees and customers while in all vehicles, remain in effect.

And through this order, face coverings are now also required in all NJ Transit and private carrier indoor stations, as well as those outdoor stations where social distancing is not practicable. So please, do it for yourself and do it for your fellow riders. Do it for the women and men who are making your trip possible.

Make sure your mask covers both your nose and your mouth. No chin guards, by the way. And if a transit employee asks you to mask up, they're doing their jobs. Please be respectful to them and your fellow passengers.

I want to stay on this for a second. I don't want folks out there to think that that ridership in every bus and every rail car is blasting through the 50% capacity limits, but as we do get back to work, we anticipate that at least at rush hour, that's going to be a reality. In a perfect world, we'd have more tunnels under the Hudson, we could run more trains, and we could keep the capacities lower. That is not the world in which we are in, but it is another reason to shout out that we need the Gateway Project to be fast tracked. The Portal North Bridge we've got in that space, and that's a huge step. We'd love to see the rest of the project follow. But in the meantime, in anticipation of the fact at rush hour, we're going to be starting to bump up against that 50% capacity, we have to call it as it is and that's the purpose of this. I also want to welcome Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness with us today.

The second order that I'm signing today suspends the statutory requirement that businesses and county political parties hold their reorganizational meetings either tonight or tomorrow, and allows for them to be held after the certification of last week's primary election results. Given that some local elections have yet to be decided, this is a prudent, if not necessary, step. This order further postpones all upcoming scheduled elections, including any special elections which may result from a vacancy to the November 3<sup>rd</sup> general election. Given the public health challenges of in-person voting in a pandemic, and frankly, the cost and logistical challenges of all mail-in voting, this is also a prudent and necessary step.

Next, as a quick reminder, the state tax filing deadline is this Wednesday, July, July 15<sup>th</sup>, the same day as the postponed federal filing deadline, so everybody remember that?

Moving on, last Friday we had a discussion of testing to which I would like to return, and I suspect Judy will as well. What we're seeing across the nation with other states setting and resetting records for the numbers of positive cases is requiring us to stay vigilant here at home. We cannot forget that it was only a few short months ago that we were being slammed full force by new coronavirus cases. This is just one reason why we are requiring everyone to wear face masks at all times while indoors and when outdoors and social distancing isn't possible. Just because it is now some other states that are in the news, and by the way, we pray for them and we hope fervently for their speedy resolution of these waves and surges. Just because it's there and not New Jersey doesn't mean the testing is any less important. In fact, as we look both to protect our state against a resurgence of COVID-19 because of the national spike, and continue moving forward in our road back, getting tested is perhaps even more important than ever.

And as we noted here Friday, testing is our best early warning tool for knowing where coronavirus is lurking so our community contact tracing corps can get to work to stop a flare up before it happens. And I had at least one, if not a couple of folks come to me this weekend. One of the results, Judy, that you and I have talked about, one of the outcomes of the flare ups in so many other states, I mean, my God, Florida yesterday printed over 15,000 positive tests, is that the reagent raw materials are now going all across the country to places where they were not going several months ago. And that has, admittedly, slowed down the return in the labs of testing results. That's something that I know you and the team are focused on.

But it's important to say that there are still approximately 245 locations across our state where you can get tested. And to find the ones nearest to you, simply go to that website [covid19.nj.gov/testing](https://www.nj.gov/covid19/testing). We have the capacity to meet demand and as you can see here, we are conducting over 20,000 tests per day on average. And on Friday, Judy, we recorded nearly twice that amount. That may be our number one day, I think, ever. And according to this analysis by the New York Times, we are one of only 12 states currently meeting its testing targets.

Testing remains prioritized and we promised you at the end of the week we would bring this up. Again, these are the sort of the three buckets as we look left to right, remains prioritized for asymptomatic healthcare workers and first responders, personnel and residents in congregate living settings, and New Jersey residents who have been in large crowds, where social distancing has been hard to maintain, or have had close contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, especially those who have been reached out by a contact tracer.

But regardless of your situation, we have the capacity. Testing is important for the protection of your family and community, and each test is important for all of us by providing the vital data that we need to make the decisions that impact our entire state. So again, take a moment to go online to [covid19.nj.gov/testing](https://covid19.nj.gov/testing) to learn more and find a testing location nearest to you.

And because of our testing program, we can announce today 231 new positive coronavirus test results, bringing the statewide cumulative total to 175,522. As we were not with you over the weekend, Judy, the past couple of days were higher than that: 438 on Saturday, 349 on Sunday. The daily positivity rates recorded on July 9<sup>th</sup> was 1.51%. That's the lowest it's been over the past week plus, and the statewide rate of transmission or RT currently remains below one, and it's 0.91. And this number continues to decline from last week and means, please God, we can keep it there. A slowing spread. That's up a hair over the past couple of days, but meaningfully from a week ago. We have to keep it that way, folks.

On Friday, the independent health researchers at COVIDActNow.org rated New Jersey as one of only three states that is now on track to contain COVID-19. This rating change was fueled because we were able to bring our RT back down. Let's keep ourselves in the green. We fell out of green there for a week or so, let's keep us on that list. And right now, as you can see, with only New Hampshire and Vermont.

In our hospitals as of last night's reporting, there were 892 patients being treated for COVID-19, 166 of whom were in critical care, 81 ventilators were in use, our fourth consecutive day of usage under 100. Judy, you talk to these guys all the time. I had exchanges this morning with Shereef Elnahal who runs University Hospital but also coordinated the North for us, Mike Marin at Holy Name and Kevin O'Dodd at Cooper, who also double hats coordinating the South. There's no question that the reality, just getting the real-time feedback which you get every day is we're in a dramatically different place than we were a few months ago. I think Holy Name had literally a couple of days ago zero COVID, and they went up a couple overnight, but let's please God, folks, let's keep it that way. You see what's happening in the rest of the country right now, and it's awful and it is eerily reminiscent of what we and New York and others had gone through.

As for the long-term trends in our hospitals, we show you this almost every day, we continue to move in the right direction. But while this is all good news for our healthcare system, it's only part of the COVID-19 response. I keep hearing the voices of those who look only at our hospital numbers, which indeed are meaningfully better, to say that we need to reopen everything right now. There was a protest at our house on Saturday, burn your mask. Not sure what the thinking was behind that. But I would remind the folks who think we should open everything right now that we just reported an additional 231 positive cases, and we still ranked in the top 20 nationally in terms of the number of residents per capita in the hospital, and we're still in the top three for the number of people who are passing. So I'm not so sure about them, but I'm not going to willfully trade away the life and I know Judy and Ed won't either, of even one New Jerseyan.

Our rate of transmission is in a good place today but only a week ago, as I mentioned, it was above one and if we change course too soon, it's going to not only rise, but so will the number of positive test results, so will the number of hospitalizations and so will the number, sadly, of residents who pass. And we want to save every single life we can have. By the way, this does not come without an enormous cost in our economy. But remember, we know this is true. We know looking at other states, this is true. Public health creates economic health, not the other way around. And if that weren't enough, we can't jump the gun. I had a conversation yesterday morning with a young guy who was pleading with me on indoor dining on behalf of his mom who owns a diner. And I said, listen, first of all, we can't risk losing more lives. We've already lost, my God, so many. But secondly, it's another reason why that ability to borrow is going to allow us to do things with small businesses, particularly the restaurant sector that's been crushed. It's why we need the federal cash, direct assistance to help those diners and restaurants out. It's why we need to consider revenues going forward here in state. Again, all with the objective to try to help the folks out who have been crushed by this. But we can't – one solution is to not jump the gun. One solution is to not put economic health ahead of public health. It's got to be in the order, public health creates economic health.

And that's painful, we understand on the economic health side of this. We get it, we have nothing but sympathy. We'll do everything we can to find the money to stand with you but we can't do that at the expense of losing lives. And so with that, today, we are reporting the loss of another 22 blessed residents and in just

four months, 13,613 residents have been confirmed lost to COVID-19 complications with another Ed, we're still holding at 1,947 probable deaths from COVID-19. Judy will give a little bit of color on the 22 lives that we're announcing today who we've lost.

So one of those lives that we have lost was Arthur Tolbert of Atlantic City. Arthur was 67 years old. He was an all-around storied athlete at Atlantic City High School, finding his passion in running, and lettering in both cross-country and track and field. His running set him apart, and his brother Timothy gave him the nickname Trotter. Arthur was awarded a full scholarship to attend Mount Saint Mary College. Atlantic City was always home, and Arthur eventually came home to work at the casinos dealing both blackjack and craps throughout the 1980s and '90s. I'm sure he and I met at some point, and after retiring from the casino industry, he continued to work as a security guard for the Atlantic City Housing Authority. Arthur's love of sports remained with him, but he was also just as fond of a game of chess, playing the drums, solving crossword puzzles or just spending time with his family. He was also a devoted member of the New York Avenue Church of God, an usher, and to the surprise of no one, a member of the church basketball team.

Arthur, remember I said he was 67 years old. He leaves behind, Judy, both of his parents, his dad Londsey and his mom, Reverend Leonora Tolbert, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, along with his siblings, Steven, Timothy, Anthony, Joy, Sheila, Kenneth, Shelby and Londsey, as well as numerous nieces, nephews, cousins and relatives, and many special friends, some he had been close to since his childhood. May God bless you, Arthur and watch over you.

Two others, and this is another crushing story, who have been lost were sisters. Elena in Aurora Alvarez of Hackensack. Both came to the United States from their native Peru as young children. They both had careers as cosmetologists and both would be lost to COVID-19. Elena is being remembered for her pleasant smile, her ability to make everyone laugh and a zest for life that helped her make friends wherever she went. She loved reading and music, a good game of cards or bingo, and being with her friends and family. To her nieces and nephews, Tia Elena couldn't get enough news of their endeavors and successes.

Two weeks after Elena passed, the Alvarez family lost Aurora. Aurora was a creative spirit, a woman of deep faith and a fighter having bravely fought kidney disease for 25 years, yet never letting the challenges she faced with her health impact her ability to have fun and enjoy life. She is survived by her son Leonel and daughter Brenda, and her granddaughters. Leanna and Serena.

Elena and Aurora leave behind their brother Willy and sisters Teresa and Rosa, and the nieces and nephews they shared, Alison, Claudia, Gabriella, Diego and Fiorella with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, among many other family members and friends. They came to this country as children and found their American Dream right here in New Jersey. May God bless them both and watch over them and their families.

Over the course of the past several months, it's hard to believe Judy, we have remembered more than 230 of those by name who have passed due to COVID-19. We do this out of compassion with families who had been unable to properly say goodbye, and we did it out of a sense of duty to recall as many of those precious souls as possible. We also do it because we do not want to lose any more lives. We know we will, sadly, we just don't know how many. But we can take steps to protect ourselves, our families and our communities. We have it in our power, folks, all 9 million of us, to defeat this virus and you have been, by the way, extraordinary. We need to keep it up.

We must wear the face coverings and maintain our social distances, especially when we know there are those among us who are carrying this virus, even though we feel perfectly fine. Don't be a spreader. We must take precautions and get tested, and we must listen to the contact tracers whose job it is to reach out to those who have been exposed before a flare up happens. If we do all these steps, we can defeat this virus. But it can't be just a few of us here and there. It has to be all of us together. We have to keep wearing our face coverings even when these muggy, July days make it uncomfortable. Frankly, I don't like it any more than you do. But we have to. The only people who do not need to be masked are children under two years old, and those for whom an underlying medical condition means wearing a mask would pose a threat to their immediate health and wellbeing. That's it.

Your political affiliation by the way, is not an underlying condition. COVID-19 does not care one bit how you vote. It does care if you're not masked, it does care if you don't get yourself tested. It does care if you don't social distance. On the boardwalk this weekend I saw many, many people taking this to heart and wearing their masks. And to all of you, I thank you for being good role models for your friends and family and for your fellow New Jerseyans. There's no question, compliance is meaningfully up over even two weeks ago, never mind a month ago, but there were still too many people who were not doing that. If we are to defeat this virus, we need everyone to pull together. We've done a tremendous job over the past four months to flatten and lower the curve of new cases. We've done a tremendous job of preventing what we feared would be an overloading of our entire healthcare system. And we've saved together, you and we, countless lives, but our work is not done. Right now we are paused in stage two of our restart. I want us to be able to reopen more businesses and get to stage three and beyond, by the way. I know many of you do too. But we cannot do this unless we keep this up.

Now one of the businesses that has reopened is A-List Hair Studio. Is that a cool sign or what? They're in North Brunswick. This two-year-old small business got its name from its founders, Anna Klahausky and April Celsa. I had the honor of speaking with both Anna and April yesterday, but more than that, they took their name from the quality of service they sought to provide their clients. What started as a three-woman operation in July of 2018, so exactly two years ago, grew to become a 15-member team. But then the public health emergency hit and A-List had to close its doors. However, Anna and April were able to reopen on June 22, thanks to a small business grant received from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. Not only did this help ensure A-List's ability to return to service, but it's allowed them to keep their employees on the payroll and to protect everyone who walks through their doors with needed personal protective equipment. A-List is just one of many small businesses across our state that the EDA has been able to help with a variety of financial assistance tools throughout this pandemic. And they, by the way, walked me through. They're now open seven days a week. They used to be open five. They've got it in shifts, so they've got capacity restrictions, social distancing, I mentioned PPE. Really, really impressive as they describe how they're going about it. So to Anna, April and the entire A-List team, I thank you for not giving up and I thank you for continuing to be a leader in North Brunswick's and Middlesex County's small business community.

And likewise, I thank all of you who continue to practice social distancing and wearing your face masks for being leaders in your communities. Let's all keep working together to defeat this virus. 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 and good afternoon. Well, COVID-19 infections are rising rapidly in our country, reminding us all that this is not the time to let our guard down. Today I want to especially emphasize to our young people that they are not invincible or immune to COVID-19. In fact, young adults in New Jersey are the fastest-growing group of individuals who are testing positive for the virus. In other states as well as New Jersey, parties held among young people are leading to an uptick in cases. Last week, the Mayor of Westfield shared her concerns about cases that were connected to graduation and Fourth of July parties. As a reminder, in our state, we have seen an increase in the percentage of cases between the ages of 18 and 29. In April, this age group represented 12% of the cases. That has risen dramatically to 22% of the cases in June. Nearly 24,000 COVID-19 cases in the state are between the ages of 18 and 29. More than 730 residents between the ages of 18 and 29 have been hospitalized because of complications from the virus. And sadly, there have been 53 deaths among this age group.

People at any age can get severe illness from COVID-19. We need all residents to continue to take precautions and not to just protect themselves but to protect all of us. Social distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands, getting tested, these are lifesaving measures. We all have a responsibility to our families, our loved ones and our community to keep up these efforts to protect our health and theirs. It is vital that young people understand that they are part of the solution to the slowing of the transmission of COVID-19.

Next week, we will launch a COVID-19 testing and contact tracing public awareness campaign, and the young adult population will be among our targeted audience. Of course, we will also be targeting vulnerable populations that the Governor mentioned, because of their risk level. Additionally, we will focus on minority and multicultural populations who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. The campaign will

underscore that to help contain the spread of the virus, we need residents to get tested and to take the call from contact tracers in our state. Given the rapid rise of cases in other parts of the country, as the Governor shared, the testing capacity infrastructure is being stressed. Turnaround of test results is taking longer because of the current unprecedented demand. Big chains like CVS are telling individuals that results could take between five and seven days, and Walmart has said results could take between four and six days to return.

In New Jersey, testing turnaround time has been steadily increasing for three weeks, due to a national demand and a national supply shortage. Our average turnaround time is now more than five days, when previously it had been two to four. While you are awaiting results, please take steps to limit your contact with others so you don't potentially spread the virus to friends and family. To help mitigate risk, wear a mask or a face covering, frequently wash your hands and please practice social distancing.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 892 hospitalizations of COVID-19 and persons under investigation, with 166 in critical care, but only 48% of those individuals are on ventilators. The hospitals reported a total of 20 mortalities from COVID-19 over the weekend. There were five on Friday, 11 on Saturday, and only four on Sunday.

There are two new reports over the weekend of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children for a total of 53 in the state. The children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19 infection or had antibody tests that were positive. Fortunately, in New Jersey, there are no deaths reported at this time. The ages of the children range from 1 to 18 and two children are currently hospitalized.

At the state veterans homes, the numbers remain the same, as they do at our state psychiatric hospitals. As of July 9<sup>th</sup>, the overall New Jersey positivity rate is 1.51%. The Northern part of the state is 1.25%, the Central part of the state 1.12%, the Southern part of the state remains the highest at 3.5%. That concludes my daily update. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, get tested, and wear a mask. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, well said. So, a couple of things can we hit, if that's okay? So, folks who have, let's zero in on the category, not just who should get tested, but someone who has gotten tested for a reason. I think I'm hearing you say loud and clear, use your head, and frankly stay away from other people until you get your results back.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Absolutely.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Right? And so on that list would be, you came in from a hotspot state. I'm going to add to this, particularly if you're a young person, but if you are inside without face covering in a graduation party or something, right?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Get tested.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Obviously if you knowingly, if you find out you came into contact with someone who had COVID, or even indirectly with someone who had COVID, clearly if you're symptomatic, for all those categories, I'm sure more, stay away from people. Basically self-isolate. And even when you're going out to get tested, put these on with great vigilance. Is that fair to say? I'm sure there are other --and I'm leaving aside obviously the vulnerable populations, the essential workers, the healthcare workers, etc. Particularly with now a lag in getting, you know, this is a national surge of cases which has really eaten into the reagents, supply, etc. I know you and the whole team are on how do we break the back of that, but my gut tells me it's going to be like this for a little bit so we're going to have a wider window between testing and feedback.

You mentioned Westfield, I thought Shelly Rendell the mayor has been really good in her leadership. Maybe preempting a question, I also reached out this morning to some officials in my county Tom Arnone, who's a terrific leader in Monmouth County. Mayor of Long Branch John Pallone, Mayor of Point Pleasant Beach, Neptune City where we had big, we saw big crowds on the shore at the beaches, particularly on Sunday when the weather got to be probably the nicest day of the summer. And we've just got to make sure where capacity, the ability to social distance is somewhat related to how many bodies there are in a given plot of real estate. So, again, we continue to work with the county leadership and the community leadership up and down the shore to make sure that we're getting this as right as we can.

But again, outdoors, we can't let our hair down completely outdoors. We want folks to be wearing these, we're mandating that but particularly that Westfield case, I think really got to you and me because it was an indoor, it feels like an intense, graduation related. Thank you for all the above.

We'll start over here. Before we do have, I've lost Dan. Dan, we're still going to be in our Monday, Wednesday, Friday mode this week so we'll be with you virtually tomorrow as if it were a weekend day. We'll be back live at one o'clock on Wednesday, virtual on Thursday, and then back with you live on Friday unless you hear otherwise. If there's something that we think leads us to feel like we need to be with you back in person or on the phone, we will do that. So with that, thank you, sir.

#### Q&A Session

**Phil Andrews, NJ News Network:** Good afternoon, Governor. Phil Andrews, New Jersey News Network. Listen, since this whole thing has started, you've had to make some tough decisions, and I'm sure there's times you've even questioned some of those decisions. But as you watch what's happening across the country in some of these states that decided to open up earlier, do you feel any solace at all in that you've made the right decisions up to this point?

And as you look at the calendar, we're really only six, a little over six-and-a-half weeks away from school starting, end of August. We're hearing that a lot of teachers still not sure about going back, some may be retiring early. So may just not go back. How do you assure those teachers that to get things going that they can feel comfortable about that?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That's two good questions. The first one, I don't take solace in the sense that, and I've said this before, Judy, Ed, myself, the whole team, we pray for those states. We wish them speedy resolution for their own sake but also because it could be just a matter of time till we get something coming in through the back door. Solace may not be the right word, although I appreciate the spirit of your question.

But I think we're pretty convinced that as painful as it is, and I've mentioned this, that the strain on the economic health of the state on individuals, on small businesses, particularly in hospitality, cannot be overstated. It's overwhelming. But I do believe with all my heart, I know Judy and Ed join me in this respect, there's one order of events here, and that's crack the back of the public health crisis. And only then can you crack the back of the economic reality and open back up again. I'm completely convinced, as painful as it is. In other words, we want to get to inside dining as much as anybody. But just we're seeing real-time proof that we can't get there yet.

We have a strong bias toward getting back to school. We put out, I thought the Commissioner of Education with Judy's input and her team's put out as good a set of guidelines as any state in America. But we will do it only if it can be done responsibly. And no two districts are alike. I can almost say that with conviction in this state, and we have as many districts probably as any state in America. The districts are working on their plans and they'll be coming back to both Judy's team as well as the Department of Education. We're not going to be beaten or bludgeoned into doing this. We're going to do this. We're going to do it right, responsibly, and only if we can be convinced that we can protect all lives here, the kids, the teachers, the administrators, the parents and grandparents to whom these kids will go home to. And we're trying to solve things still.

Even if we magically found out tomorrow morning the pandemic had disappeared, the digital divide is still something that we're trying to crack the back of. We have to continue to acknowledge that there's a lot of kids in our state with a hot meal, the one reliable meal, maybe two reliable meals are through school, so getting all of the above right is incredibly important.

I'll give a short form of what was said many times, the passing of the virus from an asymptomatic healthy young kid to an older adult or someone with comorbidities is probably the toughest nut to crack in this whole process. Thank you. Anything for you, sir? Okay. Give us one sec.

**Reporter:** Governor, what is the current state of New Jersey's PPE stockpile and testing materials? Hospitals say there are kinks in the supply chain and that there are shortages. And on the back of today's announcement about NJ Transit, some riders told us at NJTV News that they did not feel safe even as the

agency attempted to maintain social distancing, especially on buses. Mask wearing has been difficult, if not impossible to enforce. How do you expect commuters to feel safe taking mass transit now if there are no measures to keep riders apart?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. I didn't say good afternoon at the beginning, so good afternoon. We're still, listen, I've said this. I haven't said it in a couple of weeks. But without Pat Callahan here, I'll go out on a limb and hope that he won't see it differently. We still don't have the PPE we need as a state or as a country. And that's just a fact. Judy and our teams are working together to sort of lay out the protocols of what we expect going forward, how many days' supplies, whether you're a long-term care facility or a hospital, or some other essential place of work. But I would describe this, and again, we've scrapped it together, I think better than any American state. But I don't want to pat ourselves on the back because even though we've done that, as a country or as a state, we're still not where we need to be. I would be lying if I said otherwise. Again, we have an expectation and aspiration and plans to get us to the point we can look at a stockpile and say we've got 30 days or 60 days or 90 days, whatever it may be, but we're not there yet.

Well on NJ Transit, if you've got, I've said this to you before, but if you've got a specific case of a particular person or a bus route or a rail route, Dan Bryan is going to raise his hand over there. We want to know that because, you know, there are exceptions, folks medically, with medical conditions, kids under two. And we have left this at the discretion of the bus drivers and the rail operators. But we expect social distancing and face coverings inside of buses and rail cars, period. And if there is non-compliance, we would love to know about that. I just have to stress that.

Again, I'm not suggesting, by the way, our ridership on NJ Transit, particularly on the rail side, is still down like 80-something percent. So by raising the capacities today, I don't want folks to think that we are snapping back to business as usual. But we anticipate there will be, at least during rush hours, you'll get cases where you're bumping up against or maybe exceeding the 50%. But whether it's below or above 50%, face coverings, social distancing as best we can is mandated. Thank you, Brent, let's go to you and then we'll come down to Dave.

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** Good afternoon. People were burning masks outside your house? And which house was this? Is this Middletown or Long Beach or –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Which house is this?

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** Like, what the hell? Will the state take any action to prevent beach overcrowding after this weekend? How much does what we saw in Long Branch concern you? How should towns deal with beach overcrowding as the summer heats up? What are their options?

New York is requiring travelers to provide contact info when they come into the state and if not, they get a \$2,000 fine, Cuomo just announced that. Why isn't New Jersey doing this? Is there still no evidence that beaches reopening and protests have led to a rise in cases?

And then two more. Many readers wondered why New Jersey's death rate continues to be so high compared to other states, even as they see cases arise. And this one's from Tom Davis. The NJEA sent out a set of rules for returning to in-person classes that are pretty strict? Have you seen it and what do you think of it?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah, that was the title of -- our private home -- the title of a demonstration, about 50 people showed up. I actually didn't see any masks being burned, though, I have to say.

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** People were outside your --

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yes, but that's happened with some amount of regularity.

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** Has it really? Huh.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I haven't seen you out there, though. I don't think so. Maybe you were masked up and I didn't recognize you. Overcrowding on the beaches, all seriousness, both specific to this weekend and as a general matter, we've had a, I think, largely really good working relationship with the counties, the shore counties and the shore municipalities, and I might say happily, overwhelmingly and across the aisle. So

politics has literally not come up in this. We've put out sort of broad guidelines and we've said many times here, asking the counties and the municipalities to execute on those guidelines. I think they've done a really good job.

I would be remiss if I didn't say something I don't think we've said here before. Needless to say, there's not a lot of out-of-state travel happening right now. So if you said, okay, we were going to spend a week on the Outer Banks or on Cape Cod or something, that's just not happening. Some of it, but very little of it. So we have, particularly when the weather is good, we have a lot more folks staying at home and going to the shore or going to our lakes, so we've got a demand unlike any time that we've ever had.

And again, we've got one of the great American jewels in terms of summer vacation locations. On our list of general guidelines is capacity management, and we've left it up to, and it depends on what you look like right? So Island Beach State Park does that with the amount of spaces that you can park a car in. Other communities that don't have a parking lot reality are going to do it by putting some limitation on the amount of day tags or season or monthly passes. It's some of what we saw for all the above reasons over this weekend concerned us.

You know Long Beach, Long Beach is the one that was in the news a lot and the police ultimately turned that down. I reached out, I can't remember if I this already, but I reached out to Tom Arnone and he and I had been exchanging, he's the Freeholder Director of Monmouth County. He's been a great partner. I've reached out to the Mayor of Long Branch, to the Mayor of Neptune City, Point Pleasant Beach, just to sort of get a sense of what they're seeing and what they're doing. So this is going to continue to be the same as it's been, which is we are working with the local municipalities and Shore counties and lake communities and asking them to execute on the broad parameters. And so far, it's been good.

I've not seen the New York, the Governor Cuomo announcement so I don't have any reaction to it. But what you could do in New York versus what you could do in New Jersey are not necessarily the same thing. So I just want to repeat, we expect folks to do the right thing if they've been in a hotspot state. To come back in, self-quarantine, get tested, probably get tested again, and particularly with a longer lag on the results getting back from the labs, there's just no other way around that.

I'm going to come back to Judy on the death rate because this is something she's spending a lot of time on and we are.

NJEA, I've not seen it. I don't begrudge the educators for wanting to feel, have the confidence they need to come back in and do their craft, their life passion, but also do it without putting their personal health at risk. So I've not seen it. I'm sure our team has seen it because we work very closely with them. Judy, a little bit of color, if you wouldn't mind, on the death rate.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I'm going to ask Ed to jump in here as well, he looks at this daily and he's explained it a number of times. The death rate that we report are lab-confirmed cases that have matched with the death certificate, verified with a death certificate. Some of them could be from March. We know that there are some from March, April, May and June in those numbers. That's why today I gave you what was occurring at our hospitals, so you could compare the mortalities at our hospitals, which over the weekend were 20. You may recall at the height of the surge, we reported in one day over 400 deaths in our hospitals. As you watch this every day, and you give a very good explanation of it.

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** I think there are a number of reasons why, when we look at the numbers overall in the country, you're seeing a huge increase in the number of cases but the total number of deaths are not increasing as rapidly as they were earlier in the epidemic in places such as New York and New Jersey at that time. And some of it is what the Commissioner just said, which means first off, there is some backfilling there. So the number of deaths that they're reporting today is not the total number of deaths that have happened. It's the number of deaths that they know about as of now that have happened, and every place will have some changes as far as that goes.

I know how hard New Jersey has worked to try to get the data as quickly and as accurately as possible. I know how difficult that is, even in the best circumstances. I can't speak to how some of those other states are collecting that data as well. I do think that we are seeing a couple other things happening as well. You know, we know that deaths are going to lag the total number of cases and we are beginning unfortunately, to

see an uptick in the national death rates as well. Hopefully, they won't have the same dramatic upswing as New Jersey, New York did. And hopefully and likely that would be for a couple of reasons. First off, there is somewhat of a switch towards the younger population, you are across the country seeing more younger people get ill, who luckily tend not to get as sick or as to die. And overall, there has been a learning in the hospitals as far as the best way to treat some of the most seriously ill patients. So I do think that if you're hospitalized today, you're less likely to die than similarly you would have been two months ago, and that's true anywhere across the country.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Again, practicing without a license, the percentage of ICU patients on ventilators today, dramatically lower than it was three months ago. Put aside the number of patients, the percentage, clearly that's an example, Ed, of lessons that are being learned in the medical profession in terms of how to treat this. I believe we are as accurate, but also as conservative as any state that we know of in reporting fatalities. And I think Judy's begun lately, and I think we'll probably continue that, to give folks the exact number of fatalities reported by our hospitals, which is, I think, an extra added dimension that helps. You good? Thank you. Dave, how are you?

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Hi, Governor. One of the topics that you really touched on today was the fact that there was such a spike in many parts of the country. And you made sort of a plea to get tested and you spoke with the Commissioner who needs no introduction about the people who should be thinking about this, but based on your question, are you nervous and/or concerned about this whole situation, and how it's going to possibly affect us? Should people get tested, do you think, if they don't have symptoms, but just want to try to do the right thing? Or, you know, are curious about what's going on? Should people get tested twice? Could you explain why it is important for the state to get this data?

And then second and last question, the RT, rate of transmission has dropped below 1%. At the end of last week, it's 0.91 today, which is quite low. The positivity rate extremely low, 1.51. What metrics, at what levels, will determine a start for indoor dining? Will the decision be based on what's happening in other states, including Arizona, Texas, California, Louisiana, where it's going crazy? Or is it just going to be us? How much of a concern about what's going on in other parts of the country will play into your decision? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Very good questions. Does this spike elsewhere make me nervous, make us nervous? Yes, you betcha. It does for a number of reasons. I'll speak for myself. I'll say a couple of things and then maybe turn it to you all for anything you want to add. We are the United States of America. We can't stop people at our borders. We can plead to personal responsibility. Judy and team developing some technology that is not easy to do, but they're working on that, getting information, appealing to personal responsibility, self-quarantine but there's only so much we can do. And so it does make us nervous.

We also, it has allowed us, I don't say with any joy, but the evidence is overwhelmingly that not all of the spike, but the overwhelming amount of the spike is from indoor activity. So that informed, without question, our decision on indoor dining, indoor bar, etc.

Brent, I realized I didn't answer one of your questions. I still don't think we have any evidence, I defer to you all, that either beach or protest activity has led to an increase in cases. We do believe that indoor graduation parties or folks coming in from out of state have. Is that fair, Ed?

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** I think that is fair. We certainly have evidence that indoor parties associated with beach towns and other places have occurred. We have anecdotal information of the occasional person who said that they were at a protest but that is in no way an outbreak or suggestive of anything going on, or even telling us that's where they got it from. So no, I would say that we do not have any evidence related to protests or the beaches themselves.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Having said that, if we don't manage capacity at beaches and we can't get social distancing, we're probably playing with fire. Now back to yours, Dave, should folks test even if they don't have symptoms? If they've come in from a hotspot state, yes. Period. I think you update the hotspots on Tuesdays, is that right? It will be up later today or Tuesday. Period. Should they get tested again? I think the answer is also yes. Whether or not you could do both of those and get the results back within a 14-day suggested self-quarantine period, I'm not sure right now, given the backlog at the labs but the answer is yes. If you've been in, to pick Florida, and you've come back into New Jersey, we expect you to self-quarantine and get tested, even if you feel well.

And what data and again, I'm going to hand this over, what data we look at? RT staying low, spot positivity staying low, new hospitalizations staying low, but forming a real trend. So yes, you're right, spot positive is at 0.91 today. Yesterday, it was 0.87, the day before 0.88, but then the three or four days before that 0.98, 1.04, 1.1, 1.05, I think you all would say you need a seven-day rolling average trend at a minimum. And I think the out-of-state reality has also got to continue to weigh on us. And so that's somewhat reflected in the here and now data that we have. But if we see it raging like it's raging in some of these places, and knowing you can't legally stop people at the border, that's also going to be a factor. I can't tell you exactly how much of a factor, but that's got to weigh in. Thoughts?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, I'd like Ed to talk about the EPI curves that they look at from the emergency rooms. They're monitoring every day influenza-like illness, COVID-like illness, so maybe you could speak to that.

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** Right. So as the Governor said, you know, the thing that we're looking most closely at are things like hospitals, the CRT and the spot positivity. But we're also looking at some of the things that go into that. So for example, before you get admitted to the hospital, you tend to visit a hospital, to an emergency department. So we watch very closely every day, the number of visits to emergency departments for symptoms that are suggestive that it could be related to COVID. We, like I said, we watch that every single day. We watch for patterns over time. We pay attention to, you know, as Governor also said, hotspots outside the state concern us, but so do hotspots within the state. So we listen to what our local health departments know and what they're doing. They're the boots on the ground, they're hearing what's happening in their little area, and they're going to know if there's something bubbling up in that spot.

So we look very much at the hard numbers, as I mentioned here, but we also look at the sense of what goes into those hard numbers as well as something that is a little bit harder to quantitate, which is some of the things I just mentioned.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** A couple of other quick things before we break. I had a call Friday afternoon comparing notes with Governor Tom Wolf in Pennsylvania and Governor Andrew Cuomo in New York, just sort of looking at our respective realities and steps we were taking etc. If you think about hotspots, as a general matter, I believe this is correct, the states that you'd be most concerned about us if you had explosions in your neighborhood. So we had some of that in the shore communities of Delaware. Pennsylvania has got it in Allegheny County and greater Pittsburgh, so not next door to us, Philly and surrounding suburbs still feel like they're good, New York City in New York feels as we are, in a wholly different, better place.

And I would say of all the other hotspot states out there, if they're not the ones in our neighborhood, Florida would be the one where if you look at the relations, familial travel, etc., Florida is the one that jumps out. That's not to say we don't look at Texas and Arizona, Louisiana and California, but that's the one that has the most amount of roots with New Jersey.

With that, I'm going to mask up and we ask all of you to do that. Again, thank you, Judy and Ed, thank you as always, Jared and Matt Platkin who joined us as well, Dan, we'll be back Wednesday at 1:00. Keep Pat Callahan and Linda Callahan in your prayers. Folks, keep it up. Keep vigilant. Please, really, really watch what you're doing indoors and just think that through and again, a plea today from Judy I want to reiterate, younger people. You're not immune. For your own health, please God, we pray for that but also, more likely your asymptomatic passing of the virus, even if you're symptomatic, passing of the virus to somebody who may be more at risk.

So keep up the great, extraordinary work. We're all in this together. Let's keep up the fight. We'll be with you virtually tomorrow and we'll be with you live unless you hear otherwise Wednesday at one o'clock. God bless.

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