

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Phil Murphy: no introduction, Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, State's Epidemiologist, another familiar face, Dr. Christina Tan, another guy who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel, and also joining today, Acting Commissioner of Education Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan. Great to have you all with us.

Today, the Department of Education is releasing to our schools, its health and safety recommendations for the upcoming 2021/2022 school year, and as we have discussed in prior briefings and elsewhere, all of our schools must prepare to open for full-time in-person instruction. The guidance being released today is to ensure that that happens. Angelica will speak to all the aspects of these recommendations in just a few moments including those for distancing within classrooms and other settings, for vaccinations, but I want to specifically address the one issue that's been top of mind for many, and that is masking.

We do anticipate updated guidance regarding the wearing of masks in school from the CDC, and this will be taken into consideration when it comes down, and the Department's recommendations will be updated accordingly. However, absent any – I got a reverb there. If we could work on that, that'd be great. However, absent any dramatic change in our situation before the beginning of the school year that would require a change in policy at the state level, masking by students while in their school buildings will not be mandatory unless their district decides to require masking as part of its own protocols. We strongly encourage school and local health officials, educators, parents and stakeholders to work collaboratively on a masking policy that works for their educational communities. Let me be perfectly clear as well that any student or educator or staff member who feels more comfortable wearing a mask will be allowed to without fear of bullying or intimidation.

After a school year where the majority of our students spent significant time learning remotely, the upcoming school year will see a return to normal. This upcoming school year will present its own challenges, especially in bringing back our students back to where we know they need to be and making up for the learning loss that we know has occurred in many areas. These recommendations are here so that the school year gets off to a smooth start and our educators and students can focus on the task at hand. Every district official is to do everything they can to make this happen. As I've said, Angelica and her team will remain at the ready to assist any district in any way possible to ensure that all of their students and educators and support staff are back in their familiar buildings when that first bell of the new school year rings. Remember, folks, one thing that was said several times. Last June we put guidance out as well, and we said we reserve the right to tweak that over the course of the summer, and indeed, we did. Remember the virus dictates the terms here, not us. Again, this is our best guess. I think it's an educated guess and it's one that will stay in place absent, please God, either a turn for the worse of the virus or something dramatic coming from the CDC. I think it's fair to say we don't want to see either of those and expect not to see them.

Let's move on to hit some of our numbers. Today, we're reporting 4,948,118 fully vaccinated individuals who live, work, or study in New Jersey. We have also reached another milestone as you can see as within this number we have now surpassed 4.7 million adults, those ages 18 and over, who live, work, or study in New Jersey who are now fully vaccinated. No matter how you slice it, we have unequivocally met our ambitious June 30th goal. We are today reporting an additional 105 positive PCR and 47 presumed positive antigen test results. The positivity for all tests recorded on

Thursday – and there were 22,343 of them – was 1.02%. Rate of transmission as you can see is .92%. Our hospitals have reported 230 COVID positive, another 74 awaiting their test results, 57 persons in ICU beds, 29 ventilators in use, and you can see yesterday's discharge and admissions details.

I cannot stress enough that all of these numbers are almost exclusively of unvaccinated residents. On Friday, the Associated Press reported on their analysis of national COVID hospitalization and death data, which drew the same conclusion that our own Department of Health has drawn from its analysis of our data. The vaccines are at least 99.9% effective in preventing hospitalization and even more so in preventing death. This also has absolutely nothing to do with anybody's politics. Yesterday morning on Sunday talk shows, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, a conservative Republican and a good man, spoke of the efforts he is undertaking to encourage more Arkansas – residents of Arkansas to get vaccinated. We're all in this. Governor Hutchinson is the incoming chair of the National Governors' Association. By the way, I'm honored that I'll serve alongside him as incoming vice-chair. I want to highlight this tweet from him last – but it can be prevented. That's unequivocally the case. This is absolutely true. Because of the vaccines in our toolbox, COVID is now largely a preventable illness. Nearly every number we count each day is one we didn't have to – we wouldn't have to do that if someone had gotten vaccinated, and that sadly includes this number too.

Today we're reporting an additional four confirmed COVID-related deaths, so as we do every day as we come together, let's take a few moments to honor the lives of three more of the New Jerseyans our statewide family has lost. These folks passed a while ago before they had a real shot at getting a vaccine, so God bless them. We'll start today by remembering that guy on the right, Frank Kadezabek, a nearly lifelong resident of Hunterdon County who was 91 years old when he passed on New Years' Eve. He grew up on his family's dairy farm in Ringoes and learned early on that he had a knack for being able to fix nearly anything and everything mechanical. It was a helpful skill on the farm, but it would serve him well later in life too as he spent more than 40 years as a maintenance mechanic for the Johanna Farms Dairy plant.

In his retirement, he took to puttering around his home on Barley Sheaf Road in Raritan Township, tending to his garden, cycling through Hunterdon County's rolling, beautiful hills, and taking walks with his wife Nancy. The two of them also found adventure far from home and would travel the world together. By the way, Frank was a big biker, and he biked up until last August, and only then because he had a bad accident did he stop biking. The medical folks who looked after him after his biking accident could not believe either his age or the fact that he was injured while biking.

Frank leaves behind his blessed Nancy after 64 years of marriage. Please keep her in your prayers. He's also survived by his children and his daughters Lauren, who I had the honor of speaking with last Thursday, and Susan as well as Susan's husband Aravind and son Ken and daughter-in-law Fran. He also left four grandsons Ryan, Wyatt, Sam, and Benjamin, and that's one of them, along with his sister Elizabeth and numerous nieces and nephews. May God bless Frank's memory. We thank him for his many years as a proud member of our New Jersey family.

Next, we're going to go down South to remember Vinelands Marjorie Luciano. Marjorie passed on January 18th after an exceptionally hard year in which she would lose not just her husband but also one of her sons. A lifelong resident of Cumberland County, Marjorie spent more than three decades as the office manager for the landscape company Turf Construction greeting clients and colleagues alike with a warm smile and cheerful hello, she worked right up until COVID kept her away. She's survived by her remaining son Rock, with whom I had the great honor of speaking last Wednesday, and his long-time girlfriend Kelly. She also left her four sisters Sandra, Merle, Donna, and Celest, and her brother Jerry along with their spouses and many nieces and nephews and great-nieces and great-nephews. I mention that 2020 was a hard year. In early March, Marjorie lost her husband of 41 years, Angelo, and then last July she lost her son Thatcher at just the age of 40. She's also predeceased by her brother Chuck. We trust that they have been reunited, and may God bless Marjorie and all in heaven and here on earth.

Finally for today, we'll stay in Vineland to remember a native son, Salvatore Giglio. He was known by all as Ed, and we lost him the day after Christmas. Ed grew up on his family's farm where he helped tend to the apple orchard and vegetables, and he would retain a love of gardening for his whole life. Following his graduation from Vineland High School, he enlisted in the Merchant Marines to serve in World War II and would later serve in the United States Army. Upon his return home, he attended Drexel University and began what would become a long and fruitful career in sales and purchasing from multiple firms. Always proud of his heritage, he was a founding member of Vineland's Sicilian American Club and was also an active member of the VFW and the Elks.

Ed had many hobbies, movies, reading, and golf among them, but he was passionate about ballroom dancing, and he and his wife Catherine were not only accomplished dancers who learned from international champions, but they also coached together. Catherine, sadly, passed away in 2014, and I am sure the two of them are now making up for seven years of lost time. After all, they were married for 63 years. Ed left his children, his son David, daughters Paula and Lynne, each of whom are a nurse – and I had the great honor of speaking with Lynne last Wednesday – and they carry on his

legacy, along with their spouses and extended family, which includes many nieces and nephews and other relatives. We thank Ed for his service to our nation and his years of service to his community, and may God bless and watch over his memory and his family.

Now let's switch gears, and we'll stay in south Jersey to give a shout-out to the guy on the left, Ryan Morrison. Ryan is the co-owner of the Nerd Mall in Woodbury. The Nerd Mall is the manifestation of Ryan's love for collecting and trading board games, action figures, RC cars, card games, toys, video games, comics, records, you name it. What started as a hobby relegated to his basement became a thriving small business on Woodbury's Broad Street. When COVID put the health of Woodbury's downtown in jeopardy, the Department of Community Affairs Neighborhood Preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant was there to help. Ryan received a direct grant that ensured he can pay his rent, keep the Nerd Mall's doors open and the local South Woodbury e-gift card program that further grants funds supported – further boosted his business.

That program – I've said this many times. Sustain and Serve from the EDA and this Neighborhood Preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant has been a game changer. It's both neighborhood investment but then specific firm or business investment, like the Nerd Mall. I must add that in addition to being a successful small businessman, Ryan is also an educator at Camden County College where he heads up the nation's longest-running accredited degree program in game design and development. I caught up last Wednesday with Ryan to thank him for adding a bit of nerdiness to downtown Woodbury and also for all he's doing to prepare his students for promising careers. Check them out, nerdmallshop.com. That's nerdmallshop.com.

Let's give huge shout-outs to two New Jersey women – two New Jersey athletes who set the track on fire this weekend, figuratively, at least, since the weather in Eugene, Oregon for the Olympic track and field trials was well over 100 degrees. First on the left there's Trenton's Athing Mu who set an Olympic trials record in the women's 800-meter final last night, easily outpacing the field, and you've heard us talk about Athing before here. Then on the right there's Dunellen's Sydney McLaughlin, who set a new world record in the women's 400-meter hurdles becoming the first woman ever to run under 52 seconds. They are both favorites in their events at the Olympics, so when team USA heads to Tokyo in just a few weeks, Athing and Sydney will be among a 13-member strong delegation of athletes from New Jersey who will be proudly representing our nation. We congratulate them and each and every New Jersey Olympian.

Finally, on a sad note, I want to note the passing on Friday of Nancy Wittenberg, the long-time executive director of the New Jersey Pinelands Commission. Nancy was a dedicated public servant who worked for the state for close to two decades across her career, including the last ten years in her role of the Pinelands Commission. Her passing is a tremendous loss to the Pinelands community and to our administration and several administrations that preceded ours. Our thoughts are with her husband Glen, with whom I had the great honor of speaking shortly after she passed, and her family, friends, and colleagues during this difficult time. With that, we're going to start up with the Department of Education. I'm going to turn things over to its acting commissioner, a great leader, the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Education Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan.

Department of Education Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan: Thank you, Governor Murphy, for the opportunity to join today's press conference, and thank you Commissioner Persichilli for your partnership over the last several months. The guidance we are announcing today for school operations during the 2021/2022 school year would not have been possible without the collaboration of our two agencies. Today the administration is proud to release three guidance documents to help school districts, educators, and families provide full-time in-person learning this fall and continue the path to recovery from the effects of COVID-19. Those three documents include first a health and safety document that identifies strategies to reduce risk to students and staff from COVID-19 while still prioritizing full-time in-person learning. The second is a self-assessment of district readiness to accelerate learning and provide supportive school climates, and third, a compilation of specific research-based learning acceleration practices. First and foremost, I would like to reiterate Governor Murphy's commitment that for the 2021/2022 school year, school districts will provide full-day, full-time in-person instruction and operations with all enrolled students and staff present as they did prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The first guidance document provides recommended health and safety strategies and considerations to guide the transition back to full-time in-person learning. The protocols of Executive Order 175 and the Department's Road Back document will expire on July 4th, and the recommendations described in today's guidance will replace those protocols. To be clear, these strategies are recommendations not mandatory standards. The absence of one or more of these strategies should not prevent school facilities from opening for full-day in-person operation. We encourage schools to implement as many layers as feasible while providing full-time in-person instruction. Key recommendations include implementing measures to maximize opportunities for space between students and staff including physical distancing to the greatest extent possible while still providing regular full-time in-person school operations. Strategic placement of desks and avoidance of group seating arrangements are also encouraged. Per order of CDC on school buses, masks

must be worn by all passengers regardless of vaccination status. For meal service, districts should implement physical distancing particularly for student populations who are not fully vaccinated, alternative dining spaces such as classrooms or outdoors, avoiding self-serve, and staggering mealtimes.

Schools should review and update procedures to identify and respond to a student or a staff member who becomes ill with COVID-19 symptoms. Regardless of vaccination status, if a student or a staff member experiences COVID-19 compatible symptoms, he or she should undergo COVID-19 testing. In the event of a localized outbreak or other emergency, school districts should be prepared to offer virtual or remote instruction to all quarantined students. Under state law, if a school district is required to close its school for more than three consecutive school days for public health reasons due to a directive or recommendation by the appropriate health agency, days of remote instruction commensurate with in-person instruction will count towards the district's 180-day requirement.

Long-standing statutory and regulatory procedures for providing accommodations for students with medical conditions including home or out-of-school instruction and special education procedures will remain in place as they were prior to the pandemic. Districts should actively promote vaccination for all eligible students and staff. Finally, school officials should maintain close communication with local health departments to exchange information and resources on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and control measures, and to establish procedures for notification of and response to illness. Schools should also maintain transparent and ongoing communication as appropriate with their staff, students, and caregivers regarding school operations and health and safety information.

The second guidance document is a self-assessment tool that school districts may use as they implement the academic climate and culturally responsive interventions needed to successfully transition to full-time in-person learning. The self-assessment provides resources on topics including learning acceleration, supporting the social and emotional needs of students and educators, attendance, discipline, support for student subgroups, and districts' financial obligations. The third guidance document will complement the self-assessment by providing specific research-based principles and strategies to accelerate learning. This resource is designed to help districts recover from COVID-19, and as a long-term comprehensive framework that anchors districts academic, social, and emotional interventions to the common purpose of promoting global competitiveness for all students. We anticipate continuously updating this resource as relevant research or data becomes available. These documents mark a significant milestone in our battle against COVID-19 and are an actionable blueprint for the return to full-time full-day in-person instruction. It is our road forward. Thank you to all the students, educators, parents, and caregivers whose resilience and ingenuity throughout the pandemic made this milestone attainable. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Angelica, thank you and your team. Excellent work, and I know a huge contribution from a lot of stakeholders including the Department of Health. I want to reiterate your thanks and underscore mine to kids, parents, educators, staff, administrators who have been – from day one of this pandemic have been incredible partners even in – even when things were really complicated and hard to figure out. I also want to reiterate something I mentioned a few minutes ago. This is our best sense of what back to school looks like. It's far more than an educated guess. I know you feel quite comfortable putting this out. Judy does, and others who have contributed to this, but with – it's still over two months until school opens. We reserve the right depending on what the virus does or what the CDC pronounces to revisit some of this, but we wanted to make sure we gave folks as long a runway as possible. Thank you for all your work. Please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. It is vital for full-day, full-time in-person instruction to resume this fall in k-12 classrooms. It is equally important that schools and health officials ensure a safe learning environment for students and staff by continuing to implement prevention strategies such as physical distancing, hand hygiene, cleaning, and maintaining airflow, contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, and when appropriate, masking. As no single strategy is perfect or can be perfectly applied, a layered approach to prevention strategies is essential. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. However, not all school-age children are currently eligible to be vaccinated. The guidance developed by the Departments of Health and Education recommends that schools develop this layered approach to protect the population who cannot yet be vaccinated and ensure safe and healthy school communities.

Parents and caregivers should continue monitoring their children for signs of illness every day, and as they are the frontline for assessing illness in their children, it is critical that students who are sick do not attend school. School should strictly enforce exclusion criteria for both students and staff. The guidance includes details on physical distancing, bus transportation, meals and dining areas, screening and testing, and procedures for responding to symptomatic students. The guidance also includes information on proper mask usage and federal orders on masking. It will be important for school districts to be aware of the level of COVID-19 activity in their community as it may impact the recommended preventative measures a school takes. The Department of Health tracks COVID-19 disease daily, and we work closely with local health departments, so schools should anticipate receiving updated guidance prior to the start of

the new school year. In fact, the CDC school guidance, which is expected to include specific information related to masking, is not expected to be released until next month. Since much can change between now and the fall and since CDC has not released updated guidance, it is likely that the Department's guidance will be updated prior to the start of the school year as well.

While this guidance will help schools plan for fall, the best way to keep schools open and safe is to get vaccinated. Now is the time for parents of children between the ages of 12 and 17 to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment to allow enough time for that second shot to take place, to take hold before school starts. The Department is reminding residents to ensure they receive their second dose of Moderna or Pfizer vaccine. By getting fully vaccinated, residents can help protect themselves and others, enjoy more activities with family and friends, and help us control this deadly pandemic. You must receive two doses of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine to get the best protection against COVID-19. We continue our work to bring vaccinations into communities making it more convenient for residents to get vaccinated. For example, two events were held in neighborhoods in Trenton this weekend sponsored by the Shiloh Baptist Church and the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral. Nearly 200 individuals were vaccinated at these events and another event sponsored by All Saints Episcopal in Lakewood administered 148 vaccines to local residents. Pop-up vaccination clinics like these are playing an important role in helping to get people vaccinated in our state.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 304 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation. Since our last briefing, there was one new report of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are now cumulatively 128 cases in our state, but none of these children are currently hospitalized. There are no new cases among residents at our vet homes and no new cases among patients in our psychiatric hospitals. The daily percent positivity as of June 24th, for New Jersey is 1.02%. The northern part of the state reports .88%, the central part of the state 1.31%, and the southern part of the state .94%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe, get vaccinated to protect yourselves, your family, and your friends. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you as always, and good to see you virtually, but nonetheless, good to see you. Thank you for that. Pat, welcome. Anything you've got on weather? It's hot as heck in Newark. Anything we've got on thunderstorms or other activity or any other items you've got. Good to see you.

Superintendent of State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Yes, I think the next three days have been classified as oppressive heat days. I'm actually in Atlantic City for a conference and spoke to the lifeguards this morning out there also. Just want to put the word out there, the red currents along the whole Jersey coast are substantial, so just a warning to those going in to – once you get above waist high to your chest, you can feel it pulling you out, so just – the lifeguards are certainly doing their due diligence, so it's going to be hot. I think it's going to be break – I think we're looking at some thunderstorms tomorrow afternoon, but I think by Wednesday night, it should be looking a little bit cooler. Just on a lighter note, I just appreciate you not gloating over the Red Sox sweeping the Yankees, Governor, over the past weekend in Fenway. I thought you would early on.

Governor Phil Murphy: One thing that struck me, how good is it to see a packed ballpark regardless of what city you're in, right? What a great sight to see.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Yeah, it was awesome.

Governor Phil Murphy: It really was. Give everyone our best in Atlantic City. We'll be back with you – the schedule this week is going to mimic the schedule we've been on for the past few months, so we'll be back with you on Wednesday at 1 o'clock, but I think we'll probably have some words of wisdom and advice for everybody for the holiday weekend coming up and I know we did it for Memorial Day. Get the balance right, folks, between having a blast and having a really good time but being responsible at the same time. I know we'll have some words of wisdom and advice then.

I think we started late today, so we'll take a few questions but we're going to – just because we got a late start, I think we'll keep this fairly crisp. Again, unless you hear otherwise, we'll be back with you at 1 o'clock at the War Memorial in Trenton on Wednesday. I think Michelle DeAngelo, you're going to run the questions. Is that right? Over to you.

Michelle DeAngelo: Yes, sir. We will start with Daniel Munoz.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Daniel.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hi, Governor. Thanks for doing this.

Governor Phil Murphy: My pleasure. Nice to hear you voice.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Likewise. So do you plan to sign the budget as-is? Given the large amount of what people are calling pork spending, do you think there is too much of that, too many, I guess you would say, Christmas tree items in the budget? How about the speed in the budget process, not give out this aura, I guess, of Trenton politics as usual and that there's something that might not stand up to public scrutiny if the public had more time to review the budget on your

desk? I know we saw something like that last year with language tucked into the budget that could've fast-tracked the Liberty State Park golf course expansion. Lastly, regarding the state of the pandemic, given the speculation we've seen about seasonal COVID similar to like what we've had with the flu and potential annual shots, outbreaks in vaccine-resistant communities, I'm wondering what the public health infrastructure needs to look like to handle that and how that would be different from what we've had up to now in the pandemic. Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Daniel. I'll hit the budget ones, and I'll give you a thought on the public health infrastructure, and turn it over to Judy. We got to make sure Tina gets her money's worth, so we'll ask her opinion as well. No news on the budget in terms of the signing other than it's going to be soon, and I'm really excited to get to that.

With all due respect to this notion of – this question of pork and whatnot, this budget – no budget is perfect, but it is filled with game-changing investments, big ones like all-time high investment in public education, in higher education, in pre-K, in infrastructure, in public health. Cover All Kids, every kid in the state will be covered by health insurance under this budget. I could go on, so with all due respect, I don't accept the premise of that question of so-called pork. Do we really think that investment in public education is pork? Listen, we made the first full pension payment and then some in 25 years, \$6.9 billion. If we had been making the full payment these past 25 years, that would've been an \$800 million payment. Not only are we making good investments, and I give my legislative partners a big shout-out for that, but we're fixing the mess that built up for decades. If you do the math, that means \$6.1 billion in this year's budget alone is making up for the delinquency of the past 25 years. I don't – I'm not a fan of the premise. I think it's a really good budget that does really good things. By the way, as they say with a pension payment with defeasance, which is a big word, which is basically over time, we're going to reduce our indebtedness with doing projects that otherwise we would've had to raise debt to do. We're doing it without a debt. We're putting an enormous amount of property tax relief, an enormous amount of middle class family relief. We're also doing it in, I think, a very responsible way.

Listen, I mentioned this last week, Daniel. I'm open-minded to this question of speed. I mean, listen, we presented our budget in February. Our Cabinet did dozens of hearings of both the Assembly and the Senate. I think New Jersey's process is, by and large, a very good one. If there are tweaks to the system – by the way, we updated folks on changing revenue numbers, which changed pretty dramatically over the past three or four months, but if there's an opportunity working with the legislative leadership to create inspection periods or open windows after bills are – or the budget is presented, I'm open-minded to that, no issue with that.

Judy, I'll turn it to you and Tina but on public health infrastructure, is there a potential for seasonal COVID? I would think yes, particularly when we go back indoors. What's the best thing we can do to prevent that? Get vaccinated. Folks, get vaccinated and thirdly, I assume the infrastructure – and Pat, you've been involved in this from day one. We've got those field medical stations. We've got a stockpile of PPE and ventilators, testing capacity, vaccines that we've proven we can distribute as well as any American state. It may not physically remain in place, a particular piece of that infrastructure, but it will at least be virtually in place in a place that we can activate it very, very quickly.

Judy, any comments you want to add to that?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I think one of the lessons we've learned is how important the local health departments' infrastructure is. We have through this pandemic continually built up particularly the resources locally to be able to respond quickly to outbreaks of COVID or any other disease, for that matter. I'm sure it puts a smile on Dr. Tan's face to see some of the infrastructure that we've invested in and continue to invest in both in her communicable disease service so that she can more effectively communicate quickly and resiliently to the local environment. I can turn it over to Dr. Tan for her comments as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, as part of that answer, do you think we'll see seasonal COVID as we move indoors and the weather gets colder?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: What we know about respiratory viruses in general is that there's definitely some level of seasonality with respiratory viruses. I think we're still learning a lot about COVID-19 itself, but if we look at history, if we take a look at our experience over the many decades with influenza and other respiratory viruses, wouldn't be surprised to see on some level of increase in activity. That's why we monitor COVID-19. That's why we continue to monitor respiratory viruses throughout the year. This is a good opportunity to also make a plug for vaccine-preventable diseases and recognizing that we have vaccines that can prevent these diseases. As we look forward to return to school, as we look forward to being back to normal, we have to remember that prior to COVID-19, prior to the pandemic, we always see from time to time vaccine-preventable diseases rear their heads in school settings or other settings such as influenza, such as varicella, such as measles. It's a good opportunity for people to look at the summer, get vaccinated not only for COVID but get up-to-date with all your vaccines for your kids as well as for your adults.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well said across the board. Thank you for that. Thank you, Daniel. Michelle, who do we have?

Michelle D'Angelo: David Matthau.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hello, Dave. Dave? David, can you unmute? Michelle, do we do that, or does David do that himself.

Michelle DeAngelo: He now needs to unmute himself.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, can you hear me now?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yes, you're good, Dave.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Oh, great. Thanks, Governor. You had mentioned at the beginning of the event here today that COVID basically has now become a preventable illness, and yet many people are not vaccinated and they apparently don't think it is a threat to them, especially, I think, because hospitalizations and deaths keep dropping in the Garden State. Is this concerning to you and what's your message to these folks? If you're not vaccinated, how much of a threat is COVID-19 right now? In other words, how much of a difference does it make when we have almost 5 million people in New Jersey that are vaccinated? If people are on the fence about getting vaccinated, Governor and Commissioner, who should they talk to? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dave, good questions. Is it concerning? Yes, it is concerning. There's no question, for instance, that we are – again, let's remember we're the densest state in America. All the variants are in New Jersey including Delta, probably Delta-plus. Judy, I'm not making news here, but that's probably in our midst or it will be. These are highly transmissible, and they make you sicker. For many reasons, it is concerning.

Now am I as concerned in New Jersey as I would be – as an unvaccinated person if I were to be unvaccinated as compared to other states in America? Probably less concerned because you are – if you're not vaccinated, to your question, a very good point, in New Jersey right now, you're surrounded by millions of people who are vaccinated. That's probably a good thing. I have to say it's also – frankly, if you can get vaccinated – listen, there are several groups we're talking about here. One group has got this anti-vaxx mentality. I saw some of them on Saturday night. We just don't agree with them. They're wrong, with all due respect.

There's another group that wants to get vaccinated but is working two or three jobs or for whatever reason, and then thirdly, there's a group I think as well who don't have an opinion but are persuadable, and their reasons are not overcome-able. We need to get as many of our folks vaccinated as possible. It's why we've got people as we speak today knocking on doors in a bunch of communities up and down our state. Who should they talk to? I will tell you, if someone knocks on your door – Judy, I defer to you on this. Someone knocks on your door, please answer the door. I hope they'd listen to medical and health experts like Judy and Tina. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to persuade them, or Pat, because we're not medical experts. I would hope that they believe that we have their best interests in mind. I think their doctor, their nurse, their parish priest, their faith leader, their rabbi, whoever it might be, someone who they would normally look up to and have respect for who's close to them I would think could have an impact. Judy, how about you? Any thoughts on that?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I think you hit upon it. The most important thing is for them to go to their healthcare provider and try to get their questions answered. They can call our call center, and our call center will put them in touch with individuals here that perhaps can help guide them through some of their questions as well. Always start with the healthcare provider and if you don't have a healthcare provider and you're in particularly one of our inner cities, please go to your federally qualified healthcare center. They're prepared to help you as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I'm doing this from memory, 855-568-0545. Does that sound right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: 855-568-0545, call up. You'll get trained people on the other end of the phone, to Judy's point. They'll answer your question right now. Dave, thank you. Michelle, let's take a couple more quickies if we can.

Michelle DeAngelo: Okay, we'll go to Mike Catalini.

Governor Phil Murphy: Who is it, Mike Catalini?

Michelle DeAngelo: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Mike.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Hey, Governor, how are you? Thanks for taking my question.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sure.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: According to public records that I received from the Office of Emergency Management, the state has spent about \$2.3 billion on COVID-related expenses. Can you say whether all of the costs of that will be defrayed by federal spending? Will you use CARES and ARP money to pay for that, or will that be coming out of state taxpayers' pockets? The second question I have, Governor, is about the smoking ban in Atlantic City casinos. Do you expect to lift that ahead of the July 4th holiday and if so, when? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Mike. I will get Mahen, who is running the show today, to follow up if he determines that I'm erroneous on this, or Parimal can correct the record. I think you can pretty much assume that the \$2.3 billion is going to be covered by federal funds. There was a period of time – and I was begging President Trump and ultimately President Biden made the decision that the FEMA cost-share, which was at 75 feds, 25 state – we wanted that to be 100/0 including retroactive. That has now happened, so I think you can assume – without having seen where that number – how you're calculating it and assuming that's the number, I think you can assume it's federal covered. Again, no news on the smoking ban, nothing new on that front. Thanks, Mike.

Michelle?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you.

Michelle DeAngelo: We will go to Carly Sitrin.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hi, Carly.

Carly Sitrin, Politico: Hi, Governor. Thank you so much. I've got two quick ones. On the education recommendations, these are recommendations you say should not prevent schools from reopening, but what about districts with heating and cooling challenges or ventilation and distancing issues? Are they expected to open regardless? How will the department support these districts? Second question is from Matt Friedman, do you have any reservations about the bill on your desk to allow police officers to view body camera footage before writing reports? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Carly. I'll let Angelica come in if she wants to add color on the first. First of all, on the second one, I've got no news on that other than I'm proud that New Jersey is leading the nation on transparency and body-worn cameras and that the old friction – Pat, you know what I mean in terms of why is this a good thing for me. I think we got a lot of that in our rear-view mirror. We had an extraordinary day in Camden a month ago and saw how those – that footage is used for training purposes but as a general matter comments, but nothing specific for Matt.

On education, we're going to continue to work with districts. I think both Angelica and I made it very clear that we need to know if folks need help. I think we have good sets of things but whether it's state support or federal money to things like ventilation systems, those are discussion that have been ongoing for quite some time and they'll continue. You mentioned, Carly, distancing as part of your answer, so there are recommendations on distancing, and that is absolutely one of the items on the list. If you can't meet the recommendation, we still need you to open. Angelica, anything you want to add to either of those?

Department of Education Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan: Yes, Governor. I'd like to take a moment to share that our county offices continue to monitor with the school districts the needs and the progress being made to date, and we're very pleased that the funds from the tranches of ESSR allocations have been used to address ventilation and heating as well as cooling needs across our state. We continue to receive updates as well as outreach. I'm very optimistic about the new school year.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, and ESSR money is federal money, so that's another piece of the federal pie. Carly, thank you for that. Michelle, let's do one more. Is that all right?

Michelle DeAngelo: Okay, we will go to Nikita.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Nikita.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: How are you, Governor?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm good. How are you?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: I'm well, thank you. I have a few for you today. You already touched on this but I'm wondering when you'll sign the budget and it seems from where I'm standing you're not really in a rush to sign it given that you have until the 30th. I'm wondering from your view, why was the legislature in such a rush to get it to your desk? Separately with the budget done and with a lot of the travel restrictions lifted, are you planning on taking a family – or taking a vacation before the general election? Next, do you expect the President or Vice-President to make any

governmental or political appearances in the state before November 2nd? Lastly, in your opinion as someone who's offered heavy commentary on the last three SCOTUS nominees, do you believe Justice Breyer should retire before republicans have a chance to regain a majority in the senate?

Governor Phil Murphy: I love your questions. The budget is soon; I'll leave it at that, somewhere between soon and very soon. Again, it's a budget. No budget is perfect, but it's one we can all be incredibly proud of that will make huge – will impact lives and God willing, save lives in our state. I thank our legislative partners, especially the Senate President, Speaker, and each of the respective budget chairs.

Nikita, I sure hope to take a vacation. No news on that yet, but I sure as heck hope to. I can't speak for the President or Vice-President but this is a state they both know well and I would welcome them with open arms, either or both, and no opinion on the Supreme Court. Justice Breyers has and continues to have had a terrific career on the Supreme Court. I wish him nothing but the very best.

Only because I got through those quickly, I lie. We'll do one more, Michelle, if that's all right.

Michelle DeAngelo: Okay, we will go to Alex Zdan.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Alex.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: You just said that no budget is perfect. Are you finally accepting the fact that in order to get the priorities that you want through the legislature, you have to deal in these pork barrel projects that were included in the add-ons to the budget including money for Cooper Hospital, \$10 million to purchase school buildings in North Bergen? Have you finally transformed from a progressive insurgent to a business-as-usual establishment figure in New Jersey politics? I'd like to ask Dr. Tan and Dr. McMillan to explain to us the science behind requiring students to mask on buses. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I love the premise of that first one. Why don't we go to Tina on the busing if it's okay with Angelica. I just want to make sure Tina gets her money's worth here. I think this is pretty simply a CDC national mandate that buses, trains, and planes, you got to wear masking, and we're simply, I think, reminding folks that this is not just an NJ Transit bus. This also includes a school bus. Tina, is that fair?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: That's absolutely right, CDC order and it relates to mass transit.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Alex, on your spirited first question, which I love, with all due respect when I say it's not perfect, I'll give you an example. We're making a \$6.9 billion pension payment. If I had all the money in the world, I'd throw another 3 or 4 billion on that because every dime you put in now incrementally saves an enormous amount of money. The payment we're making this year – in fact, I think, Parimal, by increasing it by the 500 and 5 million, by just doing that alone, we'll save \$1.5 billion over the next 30 years. That's what I mean by that, Alex. With all due respect, investing in public infrastructure, investing in schools – I don't know how you could possibly characterize that as pork. We have the number one education system in America. Our job, my job, is to keep it that way. We've had a pandemic unlike anything that's ever hit our state, and one of the big takeaways is that we had under-invested in public health and it's our job – I'm happy to say the legislative leadership saw it in exactly the same light. It's my job to invest in public health. These are good investments that we will reap benefits from for decades to come. At the same time, I'm proud of the fact that we've done it in a fiscally responsible manner, as I mentioned, huge increases in pension payments, debt reduction, debt avoidance, property tax relief like no other budget. That's the part of this that makes me proud.

On behalf, Judy and Tina, thank you. Pat, Parimal, the rest of the team, to each and every one of you, thanks for allowing us to do this. Angelica, thank you and thank you for coming on and doing such a great job to you and your team. Thank you, folks, for allowing us to do this virtually and in a later time than normal. Again, we'll be back with you at 1 o'clock on Wednesday from Trenton live. Please, God, if you've not been vaccinated, get vaccinated. The risk to your personal health is overwhelmingly higher by being unvaccinated than if you get vaccinated. Take care, everybody.

Governor Phil Murphy

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