

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 4th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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ASL TRANSLATION: Governor holds coronavirus briefing o...



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody.

Just to remind folks what our plan is for the next couple of days. Obviously, we're together right now and as I mentioned, unless there's a very meaningful, material development, in which case we'll change plans, tomorrow will be an email paper release in terms of the overnight numbers and any other news that we have to report. Because of the White House VTC on Monday, we'll do the press conference at 2:00 instead of our usual 1:00 timeframe here.

I'm honored to be joined today as I am every day by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, another name that is well-known to most folks in the state, State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have the two of you here with us. To my far left, another familiar face, State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan. And to my immediate left, representing the Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Rob Asaro-Angelo.

I had mentioned, I think yesterday, that I had asked Rob to give us an update on the Department of Labor's efforts to ensure that every New Jerseyan in need of unemployment insurance relief is able to file their claim and receive their benefits. The folks in Rob's department are dealing with an unprecedented crush of people trying to reach them.

We understand that it can get frustrating, we do, when the UI website gets bogged down or if you're stuck on hold on the telephone. But also know that these people are working harder than ever while also worrying about their own families. So, I've asked Rob, and I thank you, Rob, for doing it, to help us understand a little bit better his team's efforts and where we go from here. So, thank you.

And so, as we have been doing of late, let's get to the numbers early in our discussion, and they're particularly sobering today. Since yesterday, we have been notified that another 4331 residents have tested positive for the coronavirus. That brings our statewide total to 34,124. Again, 4331 overnight positive tests for a total of 34,124. As usual, Judy will give you more color.

In addition, with the heaviest of hearts, we are today reporting that another 200 residents have passed due to COVID-19-related complications. Our state total now sits at 846 precious lives lost. Let me put this in a proper yet very sobering context. We have now lost nearly 100 more of our fellow New Jerseyans to COVID-19 than we did on the September 11th attacks. Please let that sink in for a moment.

This pandemic is writing one of the greatest tragedies in our state's history, and just as we have committed to never forgetting those lost on 9/11, we must commit to never forgetting those we are losing to this pandemic. We won't do this every day and we certainly won't do it often, even those numbers will continue to climb, but I'm going to pause right now for a moment of silence.

[silence]

Allow me to mention some of those, very few, sadly, of the many we've lost, the precious lives we've lost. Retired Colonel Samuel Fuoco of Eatontown in my home county, and there's Samuel at one of our recent Memorial Days with me admiring one of the wreaths that were placed in honor of our fallen veterans. And Sam has now fallen himself. From Eatontown he served our nation in the Army and Army Reserves for more than 37 years. He was awarded the bronze medal for his service in Iraq in 2006 and 2007, and he also received the New Jersey distinguished service medal with oakleaf cluster. He also led the Monmouth Chapter of the Association of the United States Army.

Our state lost him yesterday. We thank him for his life of service as we do every single one of our proud veterans. His memory and his family are in our prayers. I want to thank my friend Vin Gopal for making sure that I knew sadly the minute he knew that we had lost Sam.

Another one: Jesus Villaluz was a patient transport worker at Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck where he had worked for 27 years. His coworkers remembered the time that he won the 50/50 raffle and instead of keeping it for himself, he shared it with his colleagues. He was 75 years old and we join his family and everyone he touched in mourning his passing.

Teaneck, which has been particularly hard hit lost another great member of its community – Perry Rosenstein. Perry was the uncle, there's Perry – I love the hat. Perry was the uncle of CWA New Jersey Director Hetty Rosenstein, who so many of us here in Trenton know so very well. Perry founded both the Puffin Foundation in Teaneck to support the arts and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives to chronicle the American fighters who stood against Spanish fascism during the Franco regime among so much more. All of us send our condolences to Hetty and the entire Rosenstein family, and the friends and fellow Teaneckers who Perry touched.

And I learned last night that a dear friend in Morris County, my dear friend Scott Carlson lost his dad Gerald who was going to turn 88 in two weeks. He was a lifelong New Jerseyan. He was a lifelong design draftsman. He worked on both the Shuttles Columbia and Challenger. We're keeping Scott and his family and his dad's memory in our prayers this weekend. He was the proud grandfather of Haley and Evan. So, to each and every one of them and the many, many more who we are not mentioning by name today, God rest their souls.

Today, as I mentioned yesterday, our flags are flying at half-staff in their memories and in the memory of all who have been lost. And for all the families who have been impacted by COVID-19 and are not – we have to remind everyone – are not able to fully gather properly for a funeral or a memorial. And the flags will continue to fly at half-staff throughout the duration of this pandemic. No family, whether in New Jersey or anywhere will be forgotten.

I know that staying apart is really hard, whether it be for a funeral or a religious rite that we long to attend. But right now we have no choice. It is what we need to do. It is what we must do.

I spoke yesterday by telephone with a great leader in our state, Cardinal Joe Tobin. The Cardinal made it clear that everyone needs to stay home, including – and I say this and I know he says this with profound gravity – including not taking Communion, whether it's tomorrow for Palm Sunday or any day. And I know it's not easy for him or Catholics around the state as this especially is the beginning of Holy Week. So, to all our Christian brothers and sisters we acknowledge the beginning of the week tomorrow but we plead with you to stay home and stay away from each other.

Cardinal Tobin then spoke as he volunteered to do with each of the Archbishops in the state. And while I'm mentioning him and that was the conversation I had, I know he speaks for all. I know he spoke with and I want to give a particular shoutout to my Bishop from the Archdiocese of Trenton right here, Bishop O'Connell.

I thank not just the Catholic leadership but leaders across all of our faith communities who are coming together to help meet the spiritual needs of their congregations while also ensuring the social distancing that is so critical to flattening the curve and getting us through this emergency. Especially in this season, when you've got as I mentioned Holy Week leading up to Easter. You've got Passover starting on Wednesday and not too far behind Ramadan, to pick three big religious holidays among so many other celebrations and festivals that are fast approaching.

Our desire clearly is to come together; that's only natural. We are humans. But our need and our mandate is to find a way to observe and celebrate separately. I know it's a challenge but it's a challenge that we are more than up to meeting.

Keep practicing your social distancing. As we note in this map, and I'll come to it in a second, consider as Father Jim would say social solidarity. By being apart, we're actually working together, and this graphic from the New York Times shows the impact. It shows how vital social distancing is to slow the spread. Let's stay with this just for a second, Mahen.

This is color-coded for all 21 counties, and by the way, there's no amount of football spiking that we should attach to this graph. But this gives you some sense, and this has changed meaningfully over the past several days and on the margin, that's a good thing. The darker colors are where the amount of folks who are infected is doubling at a faster rate. And so, while the cases in Salem and Cape May County, to pick two in the south, are quite low – I think, Judy, total positives in Cape May are 50 and in Salem County 25, so between them only 25 positive cases that have been tested by the way. Again, that's just folks who have been tested so it's a very low number but the curve is steep, so the folks there need to get out ahead of this as fast as they can.

The orange color is where cases are doubling at a much slower rate, and the yellow color – and that actually happens to be my home county of Monmouth – where they are doubling at yet again an even slower rate. There's another color that's better than yellow which basically means you've broken the back of it. I don't know what that color is but I look forward to seeing it up there sooner than later, and then we can show you a national map which we remind you that we showed yesterday. And the deeper the red, the more travelling there is going on and the grayer the gray, the more social distancing and less travel that's going on.

And we showed this to you yesterday. I don't think it's changed meaningfully in any way since yesterday, in fact probably not at all, but the point is, the good news is you see New Jersey among a cohort of very gray states which means, folks, thank you. What you are doing is making a difference and that ultimately will give us the best weapon we have to deal with this and break the back of that curve and flatten it. We still have a ways to go, by the way. I wish that this would be an overnight, next week, two weeks from now phenomenon. It isn't.

But you also can see why we are concerned about other places that are still travelling and have gotten to that stay at home status much more slowly than we have in New Jersey and our neighboring states. We're going to have to be very, very careful when we slowly, whenever it is to begin responsibly reopening our economy and our state and our society – we've got to be very careful, particularly, Judy and your team will remind me

of contact tracing and being aggressive in quarantining and isolating anybody down the road once we've... Listen, as I've said many times, we're going through hell together. I'll be darned if we're going to do that more than once.

We've got to make sure... This is going to be longer than any of us want, but we've got to make sure that we not only crack the back of the reality here but as we begin to open things up again, we don't inadvertently put gasoline back on the fire.

And to get back to our communities of faith, regardless of your faith we need you to remember that we are all in this together and that we must find ways to stay at home. We mandate stay at home and exercise your faith, practice your faith. Social distance even from your fellow family members but at home. So, I thank you for that.

There are a number of different other points which I'll make as quickly as I can before I turn things over to Judy. We've had a number of conversations at the most senior levels of the administration. Literally this morning I had a good conversation with Vice President Mike Pence across a whole range of critical asks on our behalf. You won't be surprised, ventilators was at the top of that conversation as it is in almost every conversation we have. We have an outstanding remaining ask of 1650 from the feds.

We spoke about, in these conversations also with Jared Kushner, with Admiral Giroir, we spoke about FEMA activities in the state. We spoke about PPE, as I mentioned ventilators. I re-expressed to the Vice President how extraordinarily important it is that the Treasury Department be as flexible as they can be and as flexible as possible when they take the money from the CARES Act that was signed last week and apply it to states.

We're in a world of hurt. Not only are our expenses exploding – our revenues have fallen off the table and that's in addition to what you all are going through as individuals, whether it's filing for unemployment or small businesses, nonprofits. We hear from the arts community. We're all in a world of hurt and I wanted to make sure the Vice President heard yet again that the more flexibility we apply to that the better off we'll be – again, themes again repeated with Jared as it relates to ventilators and PPE in particular.

We also went back and forth to make sure we had the flexibility that we needed for those field medical stations, field hospitals as I call them that are beginning to populate themselves. Judy can give you an update on Secaucus. So, a whole range of conversations.

Long-term care facilities is something Judy's going to hit, and that's been a topic of other conversations that I know we've been having as a team. I was on with the Senate President last night and again this morning on some particular concerns that he had. I just got off the phone as I was coming here with Jon Dolan who heads the Association. John reminds me, we talk about 375 long-term care facilities; there's another about 230 assisted living properties so there's really over 600 in the broader community.

And I reiterated not only our thanks for their help but also a couple of things Judy's going to go over – the fact that we need all of the workers in these facilities who inadvertently may be bringing in the virus to be fully masked in their work as Judy has articulated already; that if there's any positive testing in a facility is the obligation, mandated obligation of the operators of that facility to let next-of-kin know that that's happened. Judy, and I know you've stressed that. So, that'll give you some sense of some of the conversations.

I was on with President Clinton this morning, talking about supply chain and just getting his advice, and just brainstorming about other ways we may be able to get at shortages that we continue to have. Again, we continue to be short ventilators, PPE, beds, healthcare workers which I know Judy will talk about – our heroes at the frontlines. We're trying everything we can to stay out ahead of all of the above but, I don't have to say this, when you lose 200 people, not necessarily overnight... I say that, Judy, but this is another day where that 200 includes a lot of folks that did pass yesterday and this morning but also folks that cumulatively have passed recently. So, God rest their souls. We're doing everything we can to keep the amount of folks' lives we lose as low as possible; and separately, to keep the number of folks who get this virus as low as possible.

As cases continue to surge, as we expect them to do, we are adding hospital capacity as I mentioned, as quickly as we can. And under Judy's leadership and under Pat's leadership and alongside the US Army Corps of Engineers we're working with all of our hospitals to rapidly and significantly increase bed capacity. We are

building out new wings and bringing vacated buildings back online, and we're building out our field medical stations as I mentioned a minute ago; and expect to have our second location in Edison ready, I believe early next week, Pat, right? The 14th, okay.

We're also working to expand capacity by utilizing hotels and dormitories, particularly those located in hotspot areas or in close proximity to hospitals which are nearing capacity. This is an enormous effort to bring thousands of new beds online which also requires us to plan for medical and administrative staffing, providing wraparound services and meeting, as I mentioned, our equipment and supply needs.

At every level, this is a data-driven money ball process. We know where we expect our numbers to go in the coming weeks and we have to do the difficult things to prepare for that. I will speak, I've sort of previewed this already the past couple of days – I and we will speak to this in more detail on Monday.

Switching gears again, earlier this week federal authorities broke up a significant PPE hoarding situation in Brooklyn and seized hundreds of thousands of pieces of PPE, precisely the equipment that is in short supply. Yesterday, we learned from the FBI and the US Attorney's Office that New Jersey will be one of the beneficiaries of the distribution of those hoarded supplies.

We'll be receiving more than 70,000 N95 masks as you can see and 5000 gloves among other PPE from this seizure. I'd like to thank especially US Attorney Craig Carpenito and New York FBI Special Agent in Charge Greg Ehrie for their efforts in seeing that our frontline workers get this gear. And it gives me an opportunity to give a shoutout to Jared Maples who's with us, the Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Good to have you with us, Jared, as always.

Today, Col. Callahan will be signing an administrative order giving municipalities or counties the ability to prohibit all rentals to transient guests or seasonal tenants for the duration of this emergency, including at hotels and motels. We have heard too many stories especially from our shore communities of people trying to relocate for the time being into their towns from impacted areas. This is not how social distancing works. No one should be leaving their primary residences, and especially for the shore communities that do not have the infrastructure, especially the health and first responder infrastructure in place particularly off-season to accommodate an influx of residents.

Meanwhile, we are still seeing individuals and members of our business community stepping up to help our entire family get through this. Yesterday, by example, we were contacted by Uber Eats, the food delivery service, which is donating 14,000 meals totaling \$350,000 to frontline workers at four hospital systems across the state. We are incredibly grateful to them, and of course we are incredibly grateful to the heroic workers who will be receiving these meals.

And of course, we are still looking for many more people to join the thousands of retired or student healthcare workers and others with previous medical experience who have already signed up to volunteer to help us on the frontlines. Please visit www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer>). Again, www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer>) to add your name and to have your experience matched with our emergent needs.

Judy will likely address this, but it's fair to say with all the challenges we have on ventilators where we're short, PPE where we're short, beds where we're short, in fact in some cases the gating factor is healthcare workers, right? Because of folks who are not surprisingly out sick, social distancing, self-quarantining. We need all the help we can get. So, please keep raising your hand and add your name to the many thousands who have come forward and say that you're willing to help.

If I may switch gears again to the topic of testing, tomorrow, Sunday April 5th, the Bergen Community College testing site – we will be operating again, in partnership with FEMA, we'll be open at 8:00 AM. And that will remain open until it reaches its 500-test capacity. To be tested, you must be a New Jersey resident and you must be showing symptoms of a respiratory illness. Please, asymptomatic folks, I don't blame you for being worried. We understand that, but you've got to step aside and let the folks who are symptomatic step forward and get tested.

The PNC Bank Arts Center site, which today I'll remind you is serving only healthcare workers and first responders, will be closed to the general public tomorrow. And please remember, these are only two sites which are being operated directly through the Department of Health. There are many, many other county-run and other testing sites across the state. You can find one near you by visiting www.covid19.nj.gov/testing (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/testing>), www.covid19.nj.gov/testing (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/testing>).

By last count we had at least 45 separate testing sites across the state, and by the way, the number of tests that have been completed in the state has New Jersey, with the 11th-largest population in America ranked number 4 in America, only behind New York, Florida, which have many more people than we do; and the state of Washington where this all first evidenced itself.

And if you believe you are showing symptoms you can also take a self-assessment at www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>) and go on the symptoms page. In any case, if you feel sick call your primary care practitioner to see if you meet the requirements for testing.

Before I close, I'd like to take a moment to once again highlight and applaud some of the folks around our state who are truly living our Jersey values by helping their community. One of them is somebody I know, Gwen Love, the Executive Director of Lunch Break in Redbank in my county, Monmouth County. Gwen is keeping the doors there open to continue distributing meals and serving the needs of those across Monmouth County who need a helping hand, especially at this time. So, to Gwen and her team I say thank you.

And how about this guy? This is Jim Hoffman. He's a science and technology educator at Newton High School in Sussex County, where he coaches, by the way, the Robotics Team. His son Justin is a resident doctor at University Hospital in Newark. He used to work for you, Judy. Jim, the dad, is using both his personal 3D printer and the two at Newton High School to produce protective face shields for the doctors and nurses who need them. So, to Jim, we cannot thank you enough.

Gwen and Jim are just two of what we know are thousands of ordinary New Jerseyans who are doing extraordinary things to help us pull through this emergency, whether it's by keeping a community fed or making sure our frontline healthcare workers have the gear they need to stay safe on the job; or, I should note, the work of the many community pharmacists, another group I want to give a big shoutout to, who have kept their doors open to preserve their communities' health and wellness.

We have heroes up and down the state, beginning with our healthcare workers, our first responders, the community pharmacists I just mentioned, the folks who are working in essential retail, the NJ Transit, bus and rail folks, the supply chain folks in warehouses, the longshoremen I mentioned yesterday. The list is incredibly impressive and they are collectively our heroes and many more. We want to hear more stories like theirs, so please keep tweeting and using the hashtag #njthanksyou, and we'll keep sharing them.

And please, everybody, please keep doing what you're doing to slow the spread and flatten the curve. That's also heroism. That's everyday heroism. And 100 years from now, when they write the memorials about what you did, that will be prominent among your life achievements – that you were there when you were needed the most.

Keep up with your social distancing and keep staying indoors at home unless you absolutely need to go out, or unless you are part of our frontline response in whichever way you are serving because we need you. Keep doing the little things – washing your hands with soap and water. Keep smart. Keep remembering that we'll get through this and we'll get through this faster and stronger if we all do our parts.

And before I introduce Judy, let's just all remember again – this is war. We are in a war. How do you win wars? You don't panic and you don't go business as usual. You win it by being smart, aggressive, proactive, shooting straight with each other, being honest about the toll that is both before us and will continue to grow. Let's not kid each other. You win wars by not turning on each other, but to the contrary, coming together – this extraordinary, diverse state coming together as one family.

You win a war because you work harder than the next folks. You win it because you show courage as we're seeing every single day up and down this state. From our frontline healthcare workers to every single one of the 9 million of us including folks right now at home by themselves doing exactly what we need them to do. Every single one of us is a hero right now. Every single one of us must do our part if we are to flatten the curve of this virus, allow our healthcare system to be able to deal with it properly and then be able to emerge on the other side.

And unequivocally, may I say if we all do our part there is no question in my mind we will win this war and we will emerge from this stronger as one New Jersey family, more together than ever before. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon.

Yesterday, the CDC recommended the use of cloth face coverings in community settings to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. There is a growing body of evidence that asymptomatic or what they call pre-symptomatic individuals can actually spread the virus, so the CDC is recommending using a simple cloth face covering that covers the nose and the mouth.

Cloth face coverings can be made at home from common materials like scarves and bandanas, and remember, a face covering though lowering your chance of spreading the virus to others is not a failsafe measure to prevent you from getting sick. Everyone can do their part to slow the spread of this virus. If you wear a mask you are protecting others, and if others wear masks they are protecting you.

The cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks; they are not medical-grade N95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other first responders who are caring for the sick.

As the Governor said yesterday, social distancing is by far our best preventative measure. Wearing a simple cloth face covering when you are out is not in any way a replacement for social distancing to flatten the curve. You must continue to keep at least a six-foot distance apart from others. Keep regularly washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Practice safe respiratory hygiene, and if you feel under the weather, even if you're convinced it's just your allergies acting up, stay indoors and away from others.

I also want to return to another concern we talked about yesterday, the growing distress and fear of family members who have loved ones in long-term care settings. Family members have expressed growing concern about the lack of communication in some facilities when there is a resident who is confirmed with COVID-19. Families are frustrated that they believe they can't get someone on the phone in these facilities, and they want to know if there is an outbreak in the facility in which their loved one has residence.

On March 6th, our Deputy Commissioner Marcela Maziarz sent a letter to all nursing homes, assisted living residences, comprehensive personal care homes, residential healthcare facilities, and dementia care homes reminding them of their responsibility under the law to have an outbreak response plan including clear policies for the notification of residents, residents' families, visitors and staff when at least one COVID-19 case has been confirmed in a resident or a staff member at the facility.

Today, I will be sending a follow-up notification to all our long-term care facilities with specific guidance as to how to notify people. It must be in-person and in writing to all residents; in-person and in writing to all staff members. Notification via telephone, email or other method of communication the facility is using to notify the residents' family member, guardian or designated person during this time of restricted visitation must be followed up in writing within three days.

This morning, I also spoke as the governor did to the CEO of the Long-Term Care Association to inform him that if we are not notified by the close of business on Monday that these directives are taking place, we will release the names of the long-term care facilities with at least one COVID-19 case.

Regarding our hospitals in the northern part of the state, we predicted that we would see a surge beginning mid-second week of April going through the end of April and into May. However, we believe that part of that surge is just starting. Last night we had nine hospitals on divert primarily due to staffing issues and critical

care bed capacity. Three hospitals were on divert for critical care, six on full divert primarily due to staff issues.

We need volunteers. We need volunteers to assist us in this effort. If you can volunteer, please visit www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer>) to sign up. We are sending out today a crisis alert for more volunteers. If you can volunteer, again, please visit www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer>) to sign up. We need you.

Our hospitals are reporting over 4000 confirmed positive COVID patients in our hospitals as of last evening, and an additional over 2000 PUIs or persons under investigation awaiting test results. 1494 of those patients of confirmed positive are in critical care and over 85% or 1263 are on ventilators.

Also, our first field medical station in Secaucus will open on Monday. This morning, as we speak there is a training session being held for individuals who are volunteering to staff that site. As the Governor mentioned, we are reporting 4331 new cases for a total of 34,124 cases in the state. That will continue to grow. We need the volunteers. We need the field operation to be up and running.

Again, sadly, 200 new deaths have been reported. Of the new deaths reported, 47 were from Bergen County; 37 from Essex; 21 from Ocean; 8 each from Mercer and Morris; 6 from Monmouth; 4 from Passaic; 3 from Warren; and 1 each from Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Hunterdon, Somerset and Sussex. Nine of these new deaths were residents of long-term care facilities.

So, we now have 846 fatalities in our state. We join with the Governor and offer condolences to the families who have lost loved ones.

The county breakdown of new cases is as follows: Atlantic 28, Bergen 607, Burlington 98, Camden 74, Cape May 7, Cumberland 5, Essex 409, Gloucester 31, Hudson 494, Hunterdon 23, Mercer 89, Middlesex 400, Monmouth 301, Morris 214, Ocean 268, Passaic 489, none in Salem, Somerset 108, Sussex 21, Union 287, and Warren 30. And we are still gathering more details on 348 of these new cases.

At this point, 148 long-term care facilities in the state are reporting at least one COVID-19 case. And as the Governor shared, we have 375 long-term care nursing facilities and approximately 200 assisted living facilities and other settings such as residential memory care housing.

I do want to share the breakdown of the 846 reported fatalities. 61% are male; 39% are female. As far as the age range, there are six cases or 1% under the age of 30; 47 or 6% between 30 and 49; 16% or 136 between the ages of 50 and 64; 32% or 268 individuals between the ages of 65 and 79; and 46%, 389 over the age of 80. We have documented underlying health conditions for 300 of our cases at this point or 35%. We have four cases identified as not having an underlying health condition, only four. Otherwise, we have 542 still under investigation so we expect those with underlying health conditions to increase. And again, about 9% associated with long-term care.

So, you may not feel sick but it is possible that you may transmit COVID-19 to someone more vulnerable. We ask you to be careful. We ask you to follow the CDC guidelines when you leave your residence. For more information I encourage you to call NJ211 or visit www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). They're great resources for the public to get information. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy, for that and for all. A couple points if I may follow up, Judy, with you. Again, top five counties are staying about the same in terms of positive cases – I'll just read them in order. Bergen continuing at number one, Essex number two, Hudson three, Union four, Passaic five. So, it's that same cluster of the northeast counties.

Again, Judy, cloth face covering is the recommendation from the CDC and to dovetail that with... And by the way, that's something, and I'll speak for all of us, that we'll all take seriously. It's hard to do a press conference with a face mask or a face covering, and we're staying six feet apart and we will make sure of that. But that's advice that we're not only giving to people via the CDC but we'll take their advice ourselves.

But importantly, a cloth face covering is not a face mask necessarily, and certainly it isn't a surgical or an N95. And I would just beg people do not, I'm begging you, don't go out and have a run on the very masks that our healthcare workers, first responders – and by the way, they don't even have enough, never mind

expanding it out to the other categories of folks that we want to expand it to: essential retail, NJ Transit, etc., etc. Did I get that right? So, again, don't, please don't compound a challenge that we already have.

Bear with me... The notification on long-term care facilities, I just want to repeat, we mean business on that, right? If the facilities don't do the proper communication by Monday we will communicate directly to you in this forum or in some other forum ourselves. Is that fair to say? So, we mean business on that front.

Cannot say that enough on volunteers. Please go to the main website www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/volunteer>) because goodness knows we need you. And I saw a great picture of the very group of volunteers today in Secaucus going through their training and it was really heartening to see. That's going to be really up, modest at first but it's going to be up and open for business on Monday. It's an extraordinary feat in terms of getting it up and running and now getting it staffed, and very soon within a couple of days being able to handle patients. So, hats off, and obviously Edison and Atlantic City not too far behind.

Before we hear from Rob, thank you, Judy, for everything. Before we hear from Rob, anything, Pat, on the compliance, PPE, bed, construction or other topics?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Just one correction. I had Atlantic City and Edison confused. The Edison field medical station is about 75% complete. That should be ready by April 8th, not the 14th. It is the Atlantic City Convention Center that the target date is April 14th. I just wanted to clarify that.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, that's Secaucus open for patients on Monday, again, slowly but surely. On Wednesday, Edison likely to be in the shape that you and I saw Secaucus in last Thursday.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yes, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: And then, it would be a week from Tuesday for Atlantic City.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That is correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: Perfect.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: As far as the overnight, really generally quiet. There was a subject charged with an executive order violation for facilitating and pulling together a youth basketball game with six juveniles. He was cited.

There was a subject arrested for domestic violence and brought to the Monmouth County Jail in Freehold where during his processing he claimed to have the coronavirus and spit on the officers trying to process him.

And once again, Newark last night issued 122 summonses and closed seven businesses. I did speak with Director Ambrose this morning to thank him for his continued efforts and to offer our condolences on the loss of Officer Tolbert Furr who did pass away as a result of COVID-19. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: God rest his soul and all the others whose lives are lost.

The knucklehead hall of shame, it just astounds me that somebody would do what that guy did in Monmouth. Again, folks, the great news is overwhelmingly everybody in New Jersey is doing exactly what we need you to do. But we need everybody to do that. And so, please, no gatherings. No stupid behavior certainly. Please, everybody stay at home.

So, clearly this is a time of hurt for so many. Look at the lives lost, the precious souls, their families and friends and communities; the folks who are dealing with COVID-19 right now as we speak. But let's also remember at the top of the list is a historic amount of people who have lost their jobs in this state and in this country at levels that are literally, Rob, I said yesterday tens of fold, tens of times more than any normal period and even relative to other spikes in our past.

And I know there's a lot of folks out there who are clamoring, and who can blame you, of having that security of the connection being made whether it's online, whether it's on the telephone, that you know you're going to get the unemployment insurance. And the great news coming out of the bill that was signed by the President

a week ago yesterday, there's now more federal help and that's a big deal.

And I've said before and I'll say it again as I introduce Rob, everybody please bear with us. We've got some extraordinary folks led by this guy and his team who are doing everything they can to answer your calls and to respond, and to make sure you get that comfort that you need. Just know that it's an unprecedented level and you won't lose one penny of support if it takes a little bit longer. I promise you that.

So, with that, the leader of an extraordinary group of folks who are doing everything they can, please help me welcome the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo.

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo: Thank you, Governor, for having me this afternoon, and thank you to the shoutout to James Hoffman of the Newton Robotics Team. I've seen Aperture perform a couple times and they are no joke.

Judy, Pat, thank you so much for your strong and stable leadership during these times. I really appreciate it as your colleague and New Jersey resident.

Over the prior two weeks, we saw more than 362,000 people apply for unemployment as a result of this public health emergency. The crush of layoffs and furloughs have overwhelmed state unemployment agencies nationwide and New Jersey is no exception. We are seeing volume of claims to our website and calls to our customer service centers exponentially higher than at any time in history. I don't like correcting the boss who said we had a ten times increase in claims, but the first week of the crisis we saw a 1600% increase in volume – 1600% in a single week.

But I'm not here to talk about the strain our system has been under. I'm here to talk about what's really important – our action plan to serve the public at this difficult time. There's nothing I want more than to put your hard-earned benefits into your family budget sooner. We've made no secret about the inflexibilities of our legacy technology and our desperate desire to receive and act on more of your phone calls. We hear your frustration and we are with you.

We're currently working to bring into our systems more of your calls and emails. This is our number one priority. We hear it from our own family members, friends, friends of friends, all making similar pleas for help as this pandemic has impacted everyone. As one New Jersey family we've been affected together and I'm confident we will get through this together.

I want to thank my colleague Chris Ryan at the Office of Information Technology and our own IT staff led by Sharon Pagano who've been working nonstop to make our 40-year-old mainframe systems continue to perform under such atypical circumstances; and all of our UI Division led by Greg Castellani who have become economic first responders for much of our state.

We are moving aggressively. Here's what we have done and what we are doing to better serve our customers. We're increasing capacity to ensure more calls and more applications get through at one time. In recent years, we've incorporated pocket solutions and changes to our unemployment systems that have allowed 92% of claims to come in online, taking stress off our phone lines. By comparison, after Superstorm Sandy, peak of online filing was just 70%. When you're talking about the numbers we're talking about, that's a big difference.

We're pinpointing places where claims are getting stuck and using all the Department's resources to reroute those claims so that we can get them paid as soon as possible. We're adding phone lines and have trained employees from other divisions to help us field calls. We have procured hundreds of additional laptops so more staff can work remotely. We're continuously updating our website, adding information in easy, plain language to walk our customers through the application process.

We know this is new for a lot of people, so we're trying to make our funky, old applications as user-friendly as possible. www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>) and www.myunemployment.nj.gov (<http://www.myunemployment.nj.gov>) provide great resources for first-time filers including FAQs. We have put out helpful guides so that our customers can feel secure they're applying for the right program, which also speeds their processing. We're working to make sure our customers have the information they need from us to understand what is happening every step of the way, so they won't have to worry about their benefit application, their benefit amount, or waste time trying to get through on the phone.

We have our staff working overtime, late hours and on weekends to move claims along that need an agent's review. The number of new unemployment claims moving through without issue is about 50%, which is no different than before the pandemic. That means half the residents who file for unemployment begin receiving benefits within two or three weeks.

When filing online, there are reasons why a claim might not be processed immediately and need one of our claims examiners to review it. A person may be filing for the first time and did not provide all the required information or already had an old account in the system. A person may be temporarily furloughed. They may feel confused about the federally-mandated work search questions on the application or they're independent contractors who've been told to apply while we await federal guidelines on how to administer benefits to this unique population.

These are not uncommon issues for our staff but they do require verifying important information and walking through the process with claimants one at a time. Imagine a stadium with 10,000 seats but there are 1 million people waiting to get in. There are only so many who can get through the gates at one time. To reduce the number of claims that do need agent intervention, just last night, maybe it was early this morning, we posted a brand-new FAQ with 45 additional COVID-specific filing questions.

I can't stress enough how much we empathize with the frustration, fear and economic uncertainty that comes with suddenly being unemployed. Due to the high volume of claims being filed, there may be a delay in processing the backdate but they will be paid for each week they're eligible for benefits no matter when the claim gets processed. We also suggest applying online during off hours such as first thing in the morning or later in the evening when traffic is lightest.

We recognize this is small consolation when the bills are due today but we are working on getting you help as fast as we can. This is why we are also grateful for the additional support that the federal government and the NJEDA are providing to businesses in the forms of grants, loans, and payroll tax credits for keeping employees on the payroll that my colleague Tim Sullivan talked about here yesterday.

The Federal CARES Act, as the Governor mentioned, signed last Friday night will bring direct relief to our workers by expanding unemployment eligibility and providing an additional \$600 per week for four months on top of what state programs pay. It will also open up benefits to those who are not conditionally eligible, such as the self-employed and independent contractors. However, we still have to wait for federal guidance before this can begin, but relief is coming.

This week that ends today is the first week claimants are eligible for this additional \$600 benefit, and New Jersey residents will receive this just a few days after they receive their regular unemployment check next week. They do not have to do anything else to get this additional funding. We are awaiting guidance on the US Department of Labor on how and when to administer the 13-week extension of unemployment benefits known as Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, but we will share this information far and wide as soon as we have it.

In closing, I want everybody watching to know that our Department is working harder than ever before to address the hardships many of you are facing due to this pandemic. Our staff is in our office or at home working remotely right now because this is the biggest emergency our Department has ever and hopefully will ever face.

I join in the Governor's sentiment that together, we'll not only beat this unprecedented threat to our health and welfare but we will emerge on the other side a stronger and more united New Jersey. Our workers and businesses have paid into the system precisely for this moment and now it's here for you. We will get every one of you, our fellow New Jerseyans, the help they deserve. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, thank you, and thank you for your leadership every day but certainly these days. Rob has got deep... First of all, he's an organized labor family guy. Secondly, he has deep state experience – clearly he's leading our efforts – but also had federal experience under Secretary Perez in the Obama Administration. And for all those reasons we're incredibly honored and glad to have you at the helm, particularly during this crisis.

This will be of no solace to somebody who's trying to get through and I'm not intending it to be any solace, but as we look at other states and compare notes, which we do all the time, I'd say we're meaningfully – again, it's not going to make you feel any better. We're in a better position than most of the folks that we're talking to. So, we're all in this together. The numbers are ginormous relative to anything we've ever dealt with historically and certainly relative to any norm.

And secondly, in our list of volunteers, Judy, not only do we need healthcare workers but given the legacy systems we should add a page for COBOL computer skills because that's what we're dealing with in these legacies. Chris Rein's doing a heck of a job. But literally, we have systems that are 40 years-plus old, and there'll be lots of postmortems. And one of them on our list will be how did we get here where we literally needed COBOL programmers? So, thank you, Rob, and thanks to each and every one of you.

We're going to start over here. We're going to try to go at a pretty good pace today. Brent, we'll start with you. Good afternoon.

Q&A Session:

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Yes, good afternoon.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Brendan's got the microphone. That's Brendan who's with you.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: No problem, hi Brendan. So, Colonel, do you have any more information on where that basketball game was? It was six juveniles?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I'm sorry, yeah, that was in Raritan Township. It was yes, and it was just, again, a gentleman organizing a game of six juveniles.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Okay. And then, more presently some corrections officers don't believe they're being offered enough protection behind bars and they've raised concerns about a lack of PPE and flagged reports that inmates are still being transferred between facilities in the northern and southern parts of the state. Some unions have asked you, the Governor, to lockdown state prisons and all transfers. Are you open to either of those requests? Then two more from Dan Munoz of NJ Biz, can I ask which dorms and hotels are being used for patients? And this is another question, this transient order, does that mean all hotels and motels across the state are being asked not to accept people anymore and they're now going to be used for hospital space? And then, last one, this is from my colleague Sue Livio, you issued guidance this week that described when a sick healthcare worker is allowed back to work. The guidance is based on CDC guidance but it doesn't include one important aspect the CDC included, which allows the guidance to be set aside if there is a staffing shortage.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm sorry, what?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Set aside at a staffing shortage – it allows guidance to be set aside if there is a staffing shortage. Are your hospitals following the CDC language and bringing sick workers back before they recover or did you leave this loophole out intentionally? And what do you want the hospitals to do?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, a number of things. Is Daniel well, by the way?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Yeah, I think he's fine.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, tell everyone who's given you these and I know some others have fielded their questions – tell them we said hey and we're thinking of them.

So, we've got corrections officers who don't have enough PPE. I don't think there's any category in this state that has enough PPE I can say definitively. So, that doesn't mean we're not taking it seriously but that is a fact. Judy can comment on Corrections in a minute because you, in fact, have been back and forth a lot with Marcus Hicks, our Commissioner.

Dorms and hotels are the priority, Pat, near hospitals, am I right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's correct. And it's a daily discussion. We're trying, at this juncture those dorms and hotels are for the medical staffing. We're trying to have them closed to not only the Secaucus field medical station; I think we were talking about Rutgers in New Brunswick as well as

Rutgers in Newark that's right in close proximity to St. Michael's. So, to try to get those hotels/dorms at first glance to house the medical staff so we have them in close proximity to where we need them.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: So, your administrative order, I just want a little more detail on that. What exactly does that do?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I think it is a combination. I think the Governor made the point, we don't want people travelling own there. I don't think at this juncture that those smaller hotels, but I certainly would defer to Matt Platkin who's standing in the back there with regards to that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Bear with us, bear with us. Let me let Judy hit Corrections and then we're going come back and ask Matt to talk about both the staffing shortage question you asked, vis-à-vis CDC guidelines as well as the order on hotels and transit. Is that good, Pat? Judy, please.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Commissioner Hicks and I have been back and forth actually over the last 24 hours. We also touched in with Dr. Tan and we are starting at all of the state correctional institutions the same guidance that we gave to long-term care institutions, that employees should be screened on their way in. They should be wearing protective masks to protect actually the inmates from the employees, 'cause we've had a number of employees testing positive.

Additionally, to the degree possible, all communal dining is stopped – I don't want to say will be stopped; is stopped. If that is an impossibility they are arranging their dining facilities so everyone is six feet apart. I know that Dr. Tan reviewed that guidance, I don't know whether it was last evening or this morning because we've been going back and forth on Corrections – it was both. So, I don't know if you have anything to add on Corrections?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Nothing more to add about Corrections but regarding the comments about the alignment with CDC guidance about healthcare workers. I'm going to actually read specifically from our guidance which is completely aligned with CDC guidance.

We actually have on our website guidance for COVID-19-diagnosed and or -exposed healthcare personnel, and regarding the particular question, "Symptomatic healthcare workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 may return to work," and this is, again, what we've been saying before, they, "...may return to work seven days after symptoms first developed and 72 hours after fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medications with a significant improvement in symptoms," which over a period is longer; and in recognition of you know, possible staffing issues, "Healthcare providers who have tested positive for COVID-19 shall be masked at work until symptoms have completely resolved or until 14 days after illness onset or positive test, whichever is longer."

And they should be restricted, and this is actually good common sense measures, too, "...restricted from caring for severely immunocompromised patients," which include, for example, patients who have just been recently transplanted or are cancer patients, "until 14 days after illness onset or positive test." And again, this is completely aligned with the CDC guidance.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dr. Tan. Matt, could you add some color on the executive order regarding hotels and transit?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Sure. The administrative order that the Colonel will issue today is actually an addendum to Executive Order 108, which as we've talked about before, gives a few limited exceptions to the broader executive order on mitigation that allows towns and other jurisdictions to make their own policies. This will give them, if they choose – it's not mandatory, it won't be a statewide policy. But some towns may want to close short-term rentals, hotels, motels within their jurisdiction. They cannot interfere with... Even if they do that, they cannot interfere with statewide housing plans with respect to the COVID outbreak. They can't restrict healthcare workers and they can't restrict temporary housing or other housing assistance. And we'll put the order out later and that will lay all that out.

Governor Phil Murphy: You also asked about moving prisoners around, Brent, and the answer is we haven't made any decision on that but that's on a long list of considerations that we'd always reserve the right to get back to. Fair to say? Sir, come on down front, here. Right here.

Darren Katz: My name is [Darren Katz]. I'm actually retired from CBS, actually claiming unemployment right now. I have a question for Robert Asaro-Angelo. What should a person do who's filling unemployment and they get a bad request and they can't get through online or on the phone and/or maybe the account's unable to be created?

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo: That's a really good question.

Darren Katz: I'm asking for myself.

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo: Okay, that's fine. I'll take your stuff on the way out. You know, part of the problem with this is it's hard to answer questions about specific cases either here at a press conference or online or anywhere else. But one thing I do want to let folks know that are getting messages like that online or are told to call, which is the normal course of business with our systems, we have a team of folks who are going through manually afterwards and basically hand-fixing most of these claims.

So, a good way to put it is that folks who were complaining and freaking out at the beginning of last week, most of those folks now have already been updated in the system and they're going to be getting their benefit payments. I know that's small solace now because you want to know that for sure that your claim is secured essentially. That's all I can say right now is that generally folks who are getting those kinds of messages, that we have a team of folks on the backend who are going through manually and fixing those claims. And if they need information from you they'll reach out to you.

Where in the past we had the ability to just call those folks or them get through easily and they would do it over the phone or online we're just doing it ourselves in as many large batches as possible. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good luck. Obviously we're with you. Charlie?

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Yes, Governor, can you hear me?

Governor Phil Murphy: I can hear you.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Okay, so I do want to ask the Commissioner of Health how prepared was our healthcare system for this type of thing and what lessons have we learned to maybe become more prepared in case something like this happens again? And I know it was a long time ago but I'm curious if anybody's looked into the 1918 pandemic and what lessons New Jersey can take from that. And finally, I want to ask, Governor, how you view your prohibition on gatherings in terms of public protests. There's a number of controversial things that are still moving forward, I know the toll hikes for instance. And what would you say to people who want to make their voices heard and do it in a responsible way? What do you think is the best way for them to do that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, good questions. If [Joe Fedor] or Lisa were here I would say something wise guy-ish like "Joe was here for the 1918 pandemic and he'll give his comments on it," but Joe's not here so I won't.

Judy, I'm going to start and throw it to you, is that alright? I mentioned the particularly relevant period in WWII, particularly for the Brits with the United States not yet in the war, with the Germans having basically conquered the entirety of the continent including France; and the challenges that Churchill and his team and the citizens had to both prepare for something awful unknown as well as keep an optimism that this was winnable. And that's, in so many respects, what we're dealing with, right?

So, this is something that none of us have ever dealt with before at all levels, including yours truly and every one of us, and at the same time we have to remind ourselves that somehow, some way we're going to win this thing and we're going to get through it.

So, I'm not being short on this but I don't think Churchill was doing a lot of, in May of 1940 a lot of "How did we get into this position?" post-mortems yet. I'm going to be all for a post-mortem as to how we got to where we are now, I think particularly at the federal level, particularly based on these conversations which are all constructive, by the way, with the White House and with others. But the facts are what they are.

And we're going to do our own post-mortem in terms of where were we prepared, where were we not prepared? And we're going to be, I don't know how that's going to take shape but I promise you that we can do that. And Judy can add any color in a second here.

I would just say one of the big lessons from the 1918 pandemic is it's quite clear that communities that aggressively shut down first or most were communities that had less of a toll. There's just no question about it. Now, that's more complicated at one level and less complicated at another today, because we have a lot more travel than we did 102 years ago – that's the bad news. The good news is we've got technology that we didn't have 102 years ago that allows us to virtually travel.

So, that to me is the one big, and Judy can jump in and add her two cents on this – the one big one. I forget the communities but it's pretty stark, the ones that shut down first and shut down hardest were the ones that had less of a toll.

And I would say on gatherings, protests or otherwise including the toll hearings, we have to... Democracy has to continue but we have to do it in a smarter way. And I think in particular it's going to be things like virtual participation. I don't see any way around that.

I was on a board meeting this morning, a board on which I sit ex-officio – it was all done on Zoom and telephone. As I mentioned, on the toll hearings it's going to have to be or I can't condone them, unless they're done virtually, on the telephone. There's an 1-800 number for somebody to call, there's an extended comment period but we cannot be gathering right now.

And the most tragic, for obvious reasons but the one that really hurts the most is funerals and wakes and memorial services where we've gotten now hundreds of precious lives and families and friends that spider network out from there. You've got many, many thousands of people right now who are mourning deeply and who want to come together, and who can't come together. So, it's not just the protests, it's not just the hearings; it's gatherings of any type. And as I mentioned earlier, particularly on the cusp of three of the biggest faith seasons, celebrations of any time of the year.

Judy, any comments on how prepared were we and any lessons from Spanish Flu or other pandemics?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. Well, the fact that we're sitting here and all of the departments within the state government not only had plans that they dusted off from the shelf and updated. But people are getting fed; the shelters so far are continuing not take care of the most vulnerable people. WIC is still up and running, and mothers and children are getting if not differently the same level of service that they got before the complete shutdown. To me, being new in this position, it's an extraordinary testament to how prepared – once the Coronavirus Taskforce was put in place – how prepared people were.

On the other hand, it's kind of interesting to me. My grandmother died in the 1918 flu epidemic and the same thing that would have saved her life is what we're asking everyone to do today, is social distancing – non-technology interventions that can save lives. To me, that's an amazing comparison and a lesson learned. As the Governor said, that's what stopped that pandemic from claiming more lives than it actually did. So, we've done some things extraordinary well-done. On the other hand, we've asked every department to have an after-action plan to write down every single day what could be better.

I have a whole list in front of me, I do and at the end of every day I add to it. And there's a lot of things that I think we can address to be even more prepared going into the future. It's a little too early to reveal all of that now, not because it's a secret but because of the comparisons between and amongst departments should take place. But we will have an after-action plan.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, where did your grandmother live?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Governor Phil Murphy: New Brunswick, New Jersey. God rest her soul.

Yeah, let there be no doubt, and we're going to keep it moving here but let there be no doubt – we will do a rigorous and it will be fully transparent, the results of which at least post-mortem. We have no choice and we will make sure of that. You have my commitment. And I please God ask that we do one nationally as well,

again, no politics, bipartisan, just the facts like the 9/11 Commission that one of my mentors, Governor Tom Keane Chaired and Lee Hamilton was the Vice Chair for which. That's what we need as a country and we'll have I'm sure some version of that for our state.

Please, you good? Okay. Anybody in the back. Sir? Who are you with again?

Carlos Ramirez, New Brunswick Today: Carlos Ramirez, New Brunswick Today.

Governor Phil Murphy: You guys are with the same operation? Okay, so we do have one... You have to help us out here. I thought, Mahen, we were limiting to one per org so just please help us out going forward. Go ahead.

Carlos Ramirez, New Brunswick Today: I just wanted to ask what type of aid is being offered to low-income families, especially immigrant families that have been left out of work and their kids are at home? And also, in the jails that are quarantined, why haven't they been tested?

Governor Phil Murphy: Brendan, we'll come down front here after this. Matt can talk about the former but we have a whole series of things through the Department of Human Services largely that are directed at communities that are typically, in a normal time are being left behind, never mind at a time of crisis. And I don't want to go through and list the whole set of programs for you, in fact I don't know that I have it off the top of my head. But you know, we are an immigrant nation and this state is the immigrant state, and we wear that as a badge of honor.

I think like any community, Judy, we're testing symptomatic folks regardless of where you are in the state. So, we're not sort of hiving off one particular category. The only time I think we've done that either A) certain counties have asked that just their residents be tested at their testing sites. And we, with the FEMA partners have designated days like today where we've said healthcare workers and first responders. Am I right in terms of the Corrections population as well?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Exactly.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah. Matt, anything you want to add in terms of immigrant communities? We can, Mahen, let's get back from Carole Johnson. We'll give you a more specific rundown of some of the programs that we have up and running for our immigrant brothers and sisters. Thank you. Come on down, please. Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon.

Governor Phil Murphy: Welcome back.

Reporter: Oh, thank you. So, I'll ask four questions, I'll just rattle them off. The focus so far has been largely on North Jersey and the surge that's happening there. I remember from an earlier press conference there being a lot of concerns about bed capacity in the south as well. You mentioned Woodbury, you mentioned the AC popup but I'm curious how you're going to manage other supplies when the south sees its surge while the north is probably still at peak or coming down off its peak. So, that's the first one. The second one, a lot of reports in the national media the last couple weeks, or last week rather, about problems with testing results – false negatives coming back. I think the suggestion is something like 30% of COVID patients are testing negative. Do you have any thoughts about just that generally and how that might affect the use of PPE? I've heard some complaints from hospital executives about it's important to figure out who's negative, that way you're not using, burning supplies on those patients. The third one's a block grant question. You've mentioned the importance of getting flexibility from the federal government. Based on your conversations with Administration officials, do you believe they'll actually provide you with that flexibility? I know that that's what you hope for but I'm asking if you think that's going to happen. And then, the last one is a little bit of an easier one. You mentioned sourcing PPE and other materials from outside the US. I just wanted to see how those efforts are going, if there's any news to report there. Thank you so much.

Governor Phil Murphy: My pleasure, thanks for coming. I'm going to give a couple of general comments, Madame Commissioner, and then over to you, is that alright? And by the way, Pat, you shouldn't hesitate to come in here as well. So, a couple things. On the regional pieces, the south, while there were certain counties that I showed on that heat map that are hotter but lower numbers, there are other counties that have

meaningful numbers – Camden’s got just under 500 positives, they’ve lost 8 lives; Burlington’s got just under 500 positives, they’ve lost 10 lives, etc. Gloucester, I was on with Steve Sweeny earlier, 215 positives, 3 lost lives. So, it is in every county.

Judy, to her great credit has regionalized the response to this, and that’s going to allow us to be much broader in the way that we deal with a particular part of the state. Clearly, we’re in a world of hurt up north. We’re in a pretty close world of hurt in the central part. It isn’t at that level yet in the south. Kevin O’Dowd, the CEO of Cooper is our point person in the south, working with Virtua, obviously working with Pat and folks in terms of the pop up in Atlantic City which is due to be ready to go on the 14th.

And you rightfully point out that we go into this with a smaller population clearly in the south but with a still less than, probably on the post-mortem list still a less-than-adequate healthcare infrastructure in the south, even for that population. I’ll let Judy add to that.

Testing results, in terms of – this is largely how long it takes to get back, or positives that turn out to be negatives or negatives that were positives?

Reporter: It had to do with false negatives. So, there’s worries about testing, the accuracy of the tests themselves.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. I’ll let the experts answer that. I haven’t heard a whole lot of that but I will say this – just because you’re, I think it’s fair to say just ‘cause you tested negative a week ago Monday doesn’t mean you’re going to stay negative forever. And that’s not a false negative, that’s just the fact that this is a movie, not a snapshot.

Block grants, too early to tell. Frankly, it’s too early to tell. We had some strong assurances at very senior levels of the Administration. I’ll leave the details to themselves. We let our concerns be known as this bill was being hatched to the highest levels in both chambers in Congress as well as to the Administration. It’s too early to tell. We need maximum flexibility or we can’t continue to do the job that we’re doing. And so, that is to be determined.

Listen, a big chunk of my conversation with President Clinton today was on this very question of how are you thinking about sourcing, in particular not just around the country but around the world? If we were fishing I’d say we’ve got a lot of lines in the water right now. We’ve purchased now 10 million items costing tens and tens and tens of millions of dollars as the State of New Jersey. This is a line of business we weren’t in six weeks ago and we’re now a huge player. But we’re talking morning, noon and night.

I was exchanging notes this morning with folks in Taiwan as I mentioned, the past 48 hours the PRC as well as Germany. I’d say China feels to me, outside the United States, the deepest pond – to use the fishing analogy – in which we’re fishing. And we’re getting hits here and there but we’re going to stay at it, and I would say if we’ve got really big news on that front we’ll let you know.

Judy, any comments you want to add, and then Pat, anything you want to add?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, first you know, we’ve tested over 72,000 people. Our positivity rate is about 42%. I don’t know what the false negative or the false positive rate is, Dr. Tan, so I’m going to send it over to you.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: So, these tests, the PCR tests are really good at picking up disease if you have disease. So, the way that the tests work is that they pick up small amounts of genetic material from the virus. And because there’s been a focus on testing individuals who have been symptomatic, there’s definitely a much greater chance then that you’re going to be picking up individuals with disease. That’s why we’ve had a really high positivity rate in general. And again, getting back to the issue of the sensitivity the ability to pick up infection when it’s there – it is considered to be very high in this particular test.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: And in terms of how we’re organizing the state, the Governor hit upon some of this – we’ve separated the state into the north, central and south regions, and the Level I’s are what we call the collaborating agencies.

The reason for that is to have the capacity to transport not only equipment and supplies in a very expedient manner but also to be able to transport patients so they get to the appropriate level of care. The Level I's not only have ground transport, as you know, they also have air transportation – because it may be that we may have to transport someone from the north part of the state who is in critical condition, who has to go to an appropriate bed in the southern part of the state.

So far, we've moved a few things around, ventilators being the one that comes to top of mind because we've had to do that. It's too early to tell how much movement we're going to have because every hospital, and we're confirming all of this, has increased their actual bed capacity – putting beds and stretchers in areas that have never been used before but have the appropriate ability to take care of patients.

So, for example, PACUs, post-anesthesia recovery rooms are being used as patient care areas because we're not doing elective surgeries. We know that one hospital has set up a portion of their cafeteria with beds to be able to take care of patients. We also know that almost every hospital and particularly in the north right now is increasing their critical care capacity because they have to. We had projected two and a half weeks ago that the critical care capacity had to increase by 100% from 2000 licensed beds to 4000.

So, every hospital is doing what they have to do. The surge, I think we're in the beginning of it in the north and we may have to move a lot, have a lot of movement of patients, supplies and equipment so that people get taken care of. We monitor that every eight hours. Does that help?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. Anything on PPE, Pat?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I would just add to remind – the universe that we are trying to address is healthcare, it's first responders, Corrections, Juvenile Justice Commission, the retail workers, Human Services, Children and Families. And this morning I spoke to a funeral director because they're at the tail end of this, and whether they're cremating or embalming we're even talking about burn rates for funeral directors – which is a discussion that is a sobering reality.

So, when we talk about that and the procurement efforts that are underway, we are trying to do that all with all hands on deck with regards to whoever picks up the phone or goes onto www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>) – whether it's a donation, whether it's a manufacturer, whether it's somebody, a distributor who says, "I've got it." We are tracking down every one of those, and I think I mentioned it yesterday. We've spent \$27 million so far and I anticipate we'll be spending a lot more, and hopefully that we're able to get it in our warehouses and out to those who need it as soon as possible.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think actually, and you said this yesterday – the \$27 million is actually for the stuff we've gotten, and it's another tens and tens and tens beyond it. This is not cheap stuff. Jared Maples is with us. I just want to say, a friend just sent – just checking my phone, that this is a flyer that's on Facebook before we get to you, John, and I apologize.

"Homeland Security..." by the way, this is what's out here. We have no evidence whatsoever that any of this is true, and if we had evidence otherwise we would tell you. "Homeland Security is preparing to mobilize the National Guard, preparing to dispatch them across the US along with military. Everyone home, etc., they'll announce at the end of the weekend. Stock up on whatever you need to make sure you have a two-week supply of everything. Please forward to your family and friends."

This is complete BS, right? So, I'm sure it's a non-US, I won't name them by name but I suspect somebody, a foreign actor is involved in something like this. We know of no... A friend of mine has just sent this to me. We have no evidence that anything like that is being considered but that is intended to get people to panic. And that's the last thing we need.

As I said, you win wars not because you panic. It's also equally true it's not business as usual but you're deliberate, you're smart. You make your decisions based on facts and you reach deep for that well of great courage and worth ethic that all of us need. So, I want to make sure in Jared's presence, because he'd want me to say this, none of what I just read a minute ago to the best of my knowledge or any of our knowledge is true. Those are actors trying to make folks panic. That's the last thing we need right now. John, please.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: A couple of quick questions on unemployment and then long-term care. People who are having problems filing the claims and they need to call in, can you give them any guidance to prevent the need for them to call in? Anything they should do in terms of making sure the application is right the first time? Have you hired new staff to help handle this volume; particularly, have you found new Cobalt programmers? And again, any details – people are clamoring for how they get the added federal benefit, the \$600. I know you mentioned that but just anything, more clarity on that? And the long-term care, do you have a sense of how many providers are being noncompliant in terms of notification? We're getting a lot of anecdotal calls from families – is it widespread, is it a handful? And why not just name them now so that people can know where their loved ones are or not, if they're having those problems now?

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, do you mind tackling John's first three on unemployment?

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo: I think I got them all. The \$600, there's nothing anybody has to do. Once they're eligible in claiming they will be able to get that \$600 additional. As of right now, it's going out as a separate payment. There's nothing they need to do. It'll come a few days after their regular unemployment payment.

I just need to say one thing, though, that this is still a federally-administered program and a week plus now we're still waiting for guidance. I'm saying we're good to go, we're good to make the payment but until the feds say, "Okay, go ahead," we can't make that payment. But I'm hopeful that we're going to be the first state to have that in people's pockets. So, our systems are ready to go.

Secondly, how to keep from getting on the phone. I mentioned there's a new FAQ which sounds boring, but if you go to our website right now it was just posted last night. And a lot of it was to address a lot of those questions. Like I said earlier, it's hard to talk about specific issues for claimants, but a lot of the things in the new FAQ that was posted last night, those 45 new questions answered on there are specifically about trying to help people with the mistakes – not mistakes, the things that might popup, that would make something become an agent intervention. So, trying to really mitigate and flatten our curve, because I think right now we're at the peak for our curve as far as unemployment filings.

Governor Phil Murphy: Please God, I hope.

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo: Yes. As far as hiring new staff, we are just trying to push staff up from other divisions. Sadly, it's not... I can't hire somebody, I can't hire my friend here and say, "Come be a UI claims examiner." The training and knowledge you need for that is extensive. I've been Commissioner for two plus years now and I couldn't even come close to trying to be a claims examiner for the ins and outs of federal law that you need to know.

So, we're trying to do, not trying – we are doing – is following the lead of some of the states who are ahead of us, like Washington State who had this first. They have a great program that I think they're just instituting now to have short trainings of other Department of Labor staff to be able to at least answer basic, generic questions first and then filter them out, the ones that still need specific guidance on a specific claim – then filter them down through the folks who are trained UI examiners.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, are those FAQs do you happen to know on the www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>)?

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo: I do not know but there's definitely a link to our unemployment site.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, so Mahen, can we just make sure that working with Rob and his team we get them? And secondly, again, we need the federal help in a big way. So, you've heard us say that individuals need it, small businesses need it, New Jersey needs it. Hospitals need it, transit systems need it, etc. This is a little bit of a common theme. The guidance and the actual operating instructions on how these programs are dispensed are a little bit slower to come to pass here than we would otherwise like. And I think that hurts – most importantly individuals, small businesses; it works its way through all the industries that are impacted – healthcare obviously, transit, two big ones. But it also impacts the guidance that you asked about block grants as well earlier.

Judy, long-term care?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I do not have specific numbers. It's mostly anecdotal. I have gotten two complaints directly to my email and I've not been notified of any complaints on our hotline. However, because of the incidents of disease and the spread that we're seeing, we are encouraging long-term care, assisted living, all residences to carry out their obligation and develop a more open and trustful and transparent relationship with their residents and their families. We're giving them a chance to do that.

Governor Phil Murphy: And not much of a window. We will take action. Anybody else in the room, any quickies? Real quick, sir, please. Hold on one second.

Darren Katz: Again, my name is Darren Katz. I just want to praise Seabrook in Tinton Falls which my parents are residents of, two residents of 3219 residents – not one resident came out of their residence, not one COVID patient's been sick and not one person ill. So, by doing the protocol, which you said – lock yourself indoors, spray your clothes, spray any packages that come in, it's actually working. And the next two weeks are going to be hell but I love my mom and dad and hopefully they'll be back and I can see them in three or four weeks.

Governor Phil Murphy: How old are they?

Darren Katz: 91 and 87.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless them.

Darren Katz: My dad's a former speechwriter for Ford, Reagan, Dole unfortunately, I'm sorry.

Governor Phil Murphy: He worked for Reagan?

Darren Katz: He worked for Ronald Reagan.

Governor Phil Murphy: He must have been a hell of a speechwriter.

Darren Katz: Yeah, very tight with Michelle Macon and he used to write for Bill Buckley as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: Wow, those are some serious orators so God bless them both.

Darren Katz: Yes, sir. You're doing a great job, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, sir. Everybody, thank you. I want to thank the Commissioner of the Department of Health, again the woman who needs no introduction Judy Persichilli to my right and Dr. Christina Tan, State's Epidemiologist to her right. Thank you both and all of your teams, extraordinary leadership. Rob Asaro-Angelo, the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to my left – thank you, Rob, in this hour of need. Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan, to you and your teams. Jared Maples.

A couple of reminders. Again, tomorrow will be on paper unless there's a meaningful, material reason to gather even by telephone, in which case we will reserve that right and let you know. Monday we'll be back here and we'll be doing it at 2:00 unless you hear otherwise because of the White House VTC.

This is as somber a day as we have had and every one of them has been somber. But to think that New Jersey's toll has passed the toll that we suffered on 9/11 takes your breath away. So, to each and every single one of the lives we lost on 9/11, and to each and every single one of the lives which we've lost so far and will lose, sadly, is in or prayers. God rest their souls.

We will do everything we can. There is no price too high for us to try to save every single life we can. This is again, a war. We are in a war. We win these wars not by panicking and not by business as usual but doing the stuff that New Jerseyans do naturally and better than anybody else in this country or anywhere in this world.

Most importantly, we row the boat together and right now that means stay at home. Keep social distance. Do the big things and the small things. And remember, as diverse as we are, we're an extraordinary family that comes together like no other state or no other place in the world at a time of crisis.

This is a time of crisis. We're one New Jersey family. We rise and fall and rise again as one family and we will do that in this case and in every case. God bless you all and thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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