

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: November 9th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Honored to be joined, as always, by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. Judy, great job on 60 Minutes last night, we're all incredibly proud of you.

To her right, another familiar face, the Department of Health Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Ed, good to have you back. To my far left, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Jared Maples, in the house. The First Lady of this Great State of New Jersey, Tammy Murphy, is with us, and it's a particular treat to be joined today by US Senator, the guy to my left. Cory Booker. Not a political event, but I have First Amendment rights to be able to congratulate you on your recent reelection. And the senator is here for the front part of our day and will provide us with an update from his vantage point on things in Washington in a few minutes, as it relates to COVID and other matters. It's a real treat to have you, Senator.

Suffice it to say, however, that we are both anxious to begin working with President-Elect Biden on issues which are not only important to our nation as a whole, but to New Jersey specifically. First and foremost, we stand ready to work with the President-Elect on matters directly related to the ongoing pandemic, whether that be in broad-based mitigation efforts or further federal coronavirus relief, especially direct assistance to states, and a resumption of the extended unemployment benefits for our residents.

I'm heartened by the President-Elect's decision to make his first official announcement the creation of his Coronavirus Task Force. We must restore a central focus on science and medicine as we fight this pandemic. We need to take our fight against this virus out of the political arena and put it back in the scientific one, where it belongs and where it should have never left.

But moreover, I look forward to working with President-Elect Biden, Senator Booker, and our entire federal delegation on other matters that are incredibly important to our state, and I'll name just two: getting the federal funding in line for the new Gateway Project Rail Tunnel under the Hudson River; and secondly, restoring the state local tax deduction for our taxpayers.

New Jersey's voters spoke in historic fashion last Tuesday, in addition to the specific matter of Senator Booker winning overwhelmingly re-election. While ballots are still being counted, we know at this point that well more than 4.3 million New Jerseyans voted, shattering the record for most votes ever cast in an election in New Jersey, and that number is going to increase. We count all the mail-in ballots through tomorrow and then only on Wednesday, once they're counted, do we then begin the process of counting the provisional ballots, so that number is only going to go up.

Now shifting gears for our reaction to other numbers that of late have continued to increase, unfortunately, and that is the number of new coronavirus cases being recorded and the numbers of New Jerseyans needing hospitalization. On Thursday I said that our administration was working through new restrictions and today we have that announcement.

To be clear, the last thing I want to do, or any of us want to do is to shut our economy back down and thankfully, we are not at that point. Looking at the data, we are taking surgical steps that we hope will help mitigate the current increasing rate of spread. No one up here wants to take the type of broad and all-encompassing actions like those we had to take in March; we are acting with more precision-based actions based on what we're seeing on the ground. However, with these actions, we need to change our mindsets. We have to shake off the pandemic fatigue that I know we all feel. I feel it, by the way, as well. And we have to get back into the mindset that saw us crushed the curve in the spring.

So with that, effective this Thursday, November 12th, all restaurants, bars, clubs and lounges that serve food and drink must close their indoor premises for business by 10:00 p.m. each day and cannot open again until 5:00 a.m. the following day. Outdoor dining may continue past 10:00 p.m. as can takeout or delivery services. This time restriction for indoor dining also includes our casinos. However, their gaming operations may continue around the clock. But after 10:00 p.m., no food or drink will be available to anyone inside the casino.

Additionally, as we have found evidence suggesting an increase of spread to patrons seated at bars and among bartenders, effective Thursday, all bar-side seating will be prohibited at all hours for the immediate future. Now because we know some restaurants have relied upon bar seating to allow themselves to reach the 25% capacity limit, we will allow restaurants to now meet that limit by placing tables closer than six feet,

but only if they are separated by barriers. The Department of Health, under Judy's leadership, will issue amended indoor guidance that addresses the requirements for those dividers. And, we are also going to allow individual, fully enclosed dining bubbles to be set up for outside use. These tents, which may be heated, must be limited to only one group of diners each and must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized between uses. These measures are being taken to help provide our restaurants with greater flexibility as the weather trends colder.

Now while we have also seen coronavirus spread associated specifically, with indoor youth hockey, we know that all indoor sports create a greater risk of team-wide transmission, and that risk is even greater when teams from multiple states come together for tournaments or other youth league functions. Therefore, again starting on Thursday, all interstate games and tournaments for indoor youth sports, up to and including high school, are prohibited for the time being. It simply is not safe for teams to be crossing state lines to participate in indoor competitions where there is a serious risk of spreading the virus.

These are the measures we are taking now, and they do not preclude us from taking further action in other areas, or placing further restrictions on these in the near future. But if we do, we anticipate they will be actions, again, that are surgical in their approach. The essential thing is that we have to change our mindset. We remain in the midst of a global pandemic and in case you missed it, our country is now recording more than 100,000 cases per day, Judy, every day, and New Jersey is back at levels we thought we left behind months ago. We have to snap back into reality. This virus has not gone away and it is posing its greatest threat to us in many months.

I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Tony Fauci on Saturday. The good news is, and he previewed the specific good news that we got today, that a vaccine is on the horizon and you all, no doubt, we've been in touch with senior folks at Pfizer this morning. That is a big deal, I assume Judy and Ed, in the right direction. Dr. Fauci previewed, as a general matter, that broad distribution is within reach in the sort of April to May timeframe. That would be huge. Should that timeframe hold, as we discussed two weeks ago, we have the plan, thanks to Judy and Ed and their colleagues, ready to move quickly to vaccinating residents.

Let's focus, folks, on these upcoming six months. This is not forever and always. We basically have a six-month window to beat the fatigue back and beat the virus into the ground. Let's get through the remainder of the fall and the winter together. Let's work harder knowing that if we can beat back this pandemic today, we can ultimately defeat it for good in the spring.

Next, and I apologize for switching gears all over the place. Cory, I appreciate your patience. A couple of other announcements before we get to the daily numbers. The New Jersey State Police, under the leadership of the guy two to my left, has begun the distribution of 2.4 million masks provided by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services to students, educators and staff at schools statewide. The allocation of these masks is being prioritized for those in low income or high needs populations within the school community. More than 800 school entities, including public school districts, charter schools, renaissance school projects, non-public schools, and approved private schools for students with disabilities will be receiving an allotment of masks. The State Police and the Department of Education are coordinating directly with school leaders to confirm their allotment of masks and the date, the time and location for pickup. We expect pickups to occur at least through November 20.

Again, we thank Secretary Alex Azar for the federal government's partnership in providing these masks, and I thank again the guy two to my left, Colonel Pat Callahan, and Acting Education Commissioner Angelica Ellen Macmillan for their work in getting these masks to our educational communities through a smart and coordinated approach.

While we're on the topic of personal protective equipment, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority has opened the window on phase two of its program to allow businesses and nonprofit organizations to receive direct discounts on the PPE they purchase to help protect their employees and customers. Currently, all New Jersey based businesses and nonprofits, regardless of size, can receive a 10% discount on PPE purchased through our partnership with Staples and Office Depot by shopping through the program's website, covid19.nj.gov/ppeaccess, you can see that on the screen. Beginning tomorrow, businesses and nonprofits with 100 or fewer employees will be able to apply through the EDA to receive an additional 25% off through

these same stores. The application is online. Again, it's covid19.nj.gov/ppeaccess. It takes no more literally than five minutes to complete and once approved, the discount will automatically apply to your online order. In other words, no need to keep receipts or to submit paperwork.

I thank the entire team at the EDA, starting with Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan and his team, for all the work they have done to create this vital partnership. We are not aware of any other state that is undertaking a program like this, and I again want to thank our corporate partners specifically at Office Depot and Staples.

As we have been in many ways throughout this pandemic, New Jersey is creating models for others across this nation. That should be a true point of Jersey pride. Now let's take a look, Judy, at the overnight numbers. Today we are reporting an additional 2,075 positive cases, bringing the statewide cumulative total since March 4th to 256,653. Since we last met on Thursday, Judy, and you went through this in our call earlier, we have recorded 9,524 additional cases. Folks, that's an average of 2,381 a day each for the past four days.

The positivity for all tests recorded, this is as of November 5th, is an unacceptable high of 7.52%. Rate of transmission has stayed in a range that sits today at 1.24 and that's about where it's been.

In our hospitals, a total of 1,537 patients were being treated yesterday, 1,313 of whom were known COVID positive. The shift, Judy, in the ratio of known versus PUI, we only have 224 patients awaiting confirmation of their status, the shift has been dramatic over the past week. This is the first day, by the way, since June 9th – that's exactly five months to the day – that the total hospitalizations has topped 1,500. Of these, 309 required intensive care and similarly, we have not had 300 folks in ICU since June 17th, and 94 ventilators were in use.

I went back and forth with five CEOs of some of the biggest hospital systems in the state today. I went back and forth with a handful of the healthcare union leaders. We're all seeing the same thing. The good news is we're more prepared, we know a lot more. The numbers are not like they were in the spring. Judy, there's clearly less ventilator use, as you've been pointing out, you and Ed and Tina, but there's no question the numbers are going up and in the wrong direction.

So in addition to those hospitalizations, and again, we run the risk of comparing apples to oranges, 10 patients, Judy, I show passed in our hospitals yesterday, and those are being investigated and not yet confirmed. However, today we are, with the heaviest of hearts, reporting 11 additional losses of lives confirmed due to COVID-19. That brings our statewide total to an unfathomable 14,640 confirmed and another 1,800 probable causes from COVID-19.

As we do every day, let's take a couple of minutes to remember three more of the New Jerseyans we lost to this pandemic. We're going to open up today in Patterson, and there she is, Olivia Stewart, known by many as Liv. Liv was a commander at the Passaic County Juvenile Detention Center for more than 30 years. She was an avid reader and huge music fan and when time allowed, she never turned down a shopping trip. She leaves behind her son, Eugene Evans Jr., and I had the honor to speak with Eugene at the end of the week, and she leaves her brothers Oswald, Victor and Jerry, along with three sisters-in-law and numerous others, nieces and nephews, among a large extended family, and of course, many dear friends.

Cory, you can't make this up. We remembered her late brother Randy on Thursday, as he passed from COVID-19. It's extraordinary how this has ravaged certain families. Liv was only 70 years old. We thank her for her career of service to the youth of Passaic County and may God bless and watch over her and her family, which is mourning the loss now of two cherished members.

Next up, we recall, Pastor Joseph Atilas of Jackson. Pastor Atilas was just 61 years old. He spent his days working in IT for Hackensack Meridian Health, but it was in the pulpit where he had his greatest impact. He moved to Jackson 20 years ago with his wife Tina, to raise their children and to begin his own ministry in nearby Lakewood. He grew that storefront ministry, Agape Bible Church, into a cornerstone of service within Lakewood's Spanish-speaking community, including by the way an Arts Center and the first American Heritage Girls Scouting Troop in New Jersey.

From Lakewood, Pastor Atilas moved his ministry to the First Baptist Church of Asbury Park. By the way, there's an incredible front page story in today's Asbury Park Press, quite fittingly, about the pastor and his family and his extraordinary life. He was also, by the way, the team chaplain to the Lakewood Blueclaws

Baseball Team, serving to the spiritual needs of players through services held both in English and Spanish. He was a huge baseball fan and coached his own son's little league teams.

He leaves behind his beloved Tina with whom I had the great honor of speaking toward the end of the week, and their seven children, five daughters, two sons ages nine to 22, Elena, Daniel, Joshua, Kayla Leora, Miranda and Sophia. He also leaves behind the lives of the many thousands of people he touched throughout his time with us. His daughter Elena said of her father, and I quote her, "My father showed us how to have a heart for people." At this time in our state and in our nation, that is an example we can all follow. So may God bless you, pastor, and watch over you and thank you for all that you did for your family, for your communities, and for our state.

And finally, today we remember Edison restaurateur Dilip Mehta, right there in the middle of that picture. He came to the United States from his native India, he was a Bombay Mumbai native, in the 1980s and became a cornerstone of Edison's Indian American community. In India, he was a professor of mechanical engineering who continued to counsel his former students long after they left his classroom, and many, by the way, became lifelong friends. In New Jersey, he could be found at any of his Bombay Talk restaurants throughout Edison and Woodbridge, which he founded in 1988. The restaurants became an extension of what he loved most about teaching: interacting with others and helping those who could use a hand and a good meal.

Even at the age of 76, Dilip would say and I quote him, "God has blessed me with an eternally young heart." That sentiment would usually be followed by a good joke, by the way. That is the man his family knew best and his love for them was what powered him through his days. He is survived by his wife, Rupa. She was also COVID positive, please keep her in your prayers. Their daughter Pielle, and son Jignesh, otherwise known by everybody as Jig, and daughter-in-law Jahnavy, that's Jig's wife, along with his three grandchildren Ishan, Isha, and Ansh. He also leaves a broad extended family including many in India and of course, he leaves many friends and all those customers he treated as his own family.

I spoke with Jig on Thursday. I asked him how he was holding up. Obviously, it's been tough and he reminded me that they were the proprietors of Bombay Talk. So Tammy and I, on Saturday night, with other family members showed up and had a delightful dinner. Look them up, BombayTalkUSA.com. We were incredibly honored to be with Jig and his family. We thank Dilip for bringing a little more joy to everyone he served. May he be remembered fondly and God bless him watch over him and his family. And may He continue to bless everyone who has lost someone close, whether they be a family or friend, throughout this pandemic.

Switching gears, earlier I noted the continued efforts of the Economic Development Authority to provide essential PPE to our small businesses. Now for a minute I'd like to highlight the EDA's continued efforts to also provide direct grant and loan assistance that is allowing many small businesses to keep their doors open. Today I'd like to introduce Karen West, who has owned and operated Perennial Home, a home decor shop in Hightstown since 2002. Karen has specialized in local arts and crafts and locally produced furniture, since local artists turned to her to help them sell their works during the Great Recession. Today, Perennial Home remains a strong promoter of the local arts scene.

In addition to a direct grant from the EDA to help cover expenses, Perennial Home was also a participant in the EDA's pilot e-Commerce Technical Assistance Program, which is helping numerous businesses like Karen's on the transition from in-person retail to e-commerce. We all wish Karen the very best at Perennial Homes and as they continue forward, and I specifically thank Karen for promoting the work of Hightstown's tremendous arts community. I had a great conversation with her at week's end, check them out, by the way, perennialhome.com. You're going to really like what you see. Cory's making a note of that right now. Maybe you and Tommy on the way out of town can swing by Hightstown.

That's where we're going to leave things today. Again, the numbers are proving that the second wave is here. This is our reality. We must redouble our efforts and recommit to the practices that have gotten us this far: social distancing, washing our hands with soap and water, wearing our face masks. If we can get through these next, I'm going to say five to six months, we will be in a strong position to finally beat this virus with a vaccine on the horizon.

Okay, before I turn things over to Senator Booker, three people we lost over the past number of days, and not related to COVID but I want to give them a shout out. The answer to the first question is who was Alex Trebek? 80 years old, Canadian by birth, an institution for the past 37 years on Jeopardy, a giant. He is gone.

Secondly, this one is personal, a very good friend of mine, Mark Beedran who died of ALS, by the way, on Friday. He's a former president of the New Jersey State Board of Education. He was a good friend. He was a great guy. His wife Christie reached out to me and asked if I could speak with him. We had our last conversation on July 29th of this year. I reached out and left a message for Christie this morning. Mark was a giant.

Lastly, I we have to acknowledge the passing of Bloomingdale Mayor Jonathan Dunleavy who we lost this weekend suddenly. He was just 56 years old and has served as mayor since 2011. He's being remembered by his constituents as patient, attentive and thorough. For any small town, that's what you want in a leader. It's a lot less about politics and a lot more about making the trains run on time. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his wife, Janet, who I left a message for earlier today and their children Katie, Ryan, Emily and Sean. You can't make this up. He and Janet celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary just last Thursday. Thanks to each one of them, for what Alex did for viewing pleasure, Mark for his service to our state and Mayor Dunleavy to his community, and God bless each and every one of them.

With that it is my great honor. I don't know where we would be as a state without him. If we got everything right within the four walls of New Jersey, and we don't necessarily always get them right, but even if we batted 1,000, I don't know where we would be without our fierce, passionate federal delegation and it begins with two extraordinary senators. It is a great honor to introduce a dear friend for many, many, many years and the United States Senator who just won reelection last week, and a hero to many, please help me welcome US Senator Cory Booker.

Senator Cory Booker: Governor, as I put these glasses on that I did not have to wear some year or two ago, you added one to many many's on those many years that we've known each other. It is an honor to sit at this table with people who are unequivocally heroes in our state and I'm just so grateful for their sound leadership. Governor, I'm really grateful for you inviting me here today to share a few words.

As you spoke to the grief of our state and the numbers you put up with 11 people passing just in the last 24 hours or so, I just want you to know you have been a healing force in our state. You have met this challenge with what I believe is inadequate support from the vacuum at the national level, but you have risen and your team has risen, I think, to make New Jersey proud so I'm grateful to sit next to you and I'm really grateful to be sitting more so, sir, I'm sorry to say that – more so grateful to be sitting in front of the First Lady who has been an extraordinary partner, wing woman, the great First Lady of our state, it's good to see you as well.

You know, this has been a time where you've seen heroism across our state from the local level to the county level, professionals of all backgrounds, our teachers, our essential workers, and so many other fellow New Jerseyans have been stepping up in this crisis. I am proud of that, for New Jersey's guts and grit and toughness, perseverance and their love for one another, their willingness to put themselves and their families sometimes at risk in service of the larger cause of our country and the larger challenges facing our state.

Political season is now over. We had an epic election, a level of turnout that we have not seen and we should all recognize that there were passions on both sides of the political aisle. As I was driving down here I saw Biden-Harris bumper stickers, I saw incredible Trump-Pence bumper stickers. I even saw one erratic driver that had a Murphy 2017 bumper sticker I think. But the reality –

Governor Phil Murphy: We may update that.

Senator Cory Booker: Yeah. But the reality is, we should all recognize that we have, in our state, amongst New Jerseyans, we have more in common than that which divides us. We in New Jersey have a lot of common ground and common cause. In this crisis, we have a common conviction to see our state through, to be who we've been in the past, from 9/11 to Superstorm Sandy, to be Jersey Strong. At this time that we see still a lot of division in our country, we must unite around that common ground. There are things that we all need to see our federal government work in partnership with our state, whether it's the common ground we have of wanting our state and local tax deductions returned. Whether it's the common ground we have, as the Governor mentioned, to get new tunnels under the Hudson River. Whether it's the common ground we have to make sure that those New Jerseyans who are struggling, whether it's small towns not knowing how they will keep their police officers employed, whether it is nonprofits not knowing how they're going to meet the increased demand, all of us in New Jersey, regardless of partisanship, we have common ground and common cause.

Now that this election begins to fade in our rearview mirror, we have to double down on that common ground. We have to understand that we need each other, that we are dependent upon each other, and that we're stronger when we stand and work together.

Here in New Jersey cases, as the Governor has said, on the rise. This past week, we saw the highest numbers of cases yet. We have to show that commitment to work through the fatigue of this virus, to make sure that we keep each other safe. We have to listen to our health experts. We have to continue to use extreme caution. We have to wear our masks and practice social distancing where we can. We have to understand that the greatest acts of grace we can give is wearing a mask or just staying home. We are in this crisis and we're going to need each other to get through it. But none of us alone can do it ourselves. We have to rely on each other.

I'm heading down to DC in just a few minutes to begin to work on what I believe, and working with the Governor, is really urgently needed relief back here in our state. This crisis is growing. It is the largest crisis we have seen in our lifetimes. It is the fourth-largest mass casualty event in American history. It demands a big response. We cannot play it small. The House of Representatives, six months ago, passed the HEROS Act to get this virus under control. In that act, supported by our Congressional delegation in the House, were things like extending unemployment relief, extending eviction protections, providing support to small businesses, getting more funding to states and municipalities, making sure that we have the resources we need from our hospitals to our nonprofits to our individual families to meet this crisis.

And so I want to say unequivocally, it is my hope that this is not going to be held up in the Senate by Mitch McConnell. It is my hope that we now put politics aside and work for the people. What is so clear to me and to many Americans is that this is urgent. COVID relief to our communities cannot be a partisan issue. We cannot yield to partisan gridlock. We must focus on getting something significant done, and done now. Waiting until January means literally lives could be lost because of our inaction.

It should not be a partisan issue to say that with one in three American families with kids not getting enough to eat that we need another round of the successful direct cash payments that I originally proposed in the Senate, that provided help from the federal government to 80% of New Jersey families. It should not be a partisan issue to say that with over 100,000 small businesses across the country already having closed prematurely, that our small businesses need relief in our state.

I wrote a bipartisan bill that passed in the House of Representatives and is ready for a vote in the Senate that will provide \$15 billion of relief to small businesses here in New Jersey and across our country. It cannot be a matter of partisanship. It also cannot be a matter of partisanship.

It should be an issue of moral urgency that when Americans are still unemployed, that we need to extend the \$600 per week of unemployment benefits. It is a moral urgency that with less than two months from the end of the year, when 40 million people are at risk of losing their homes, when eviction protections are about to expire, that we need to extend those critical protections in the depth of winter for our renters and our homeowners. At time when state and localities are facing a public health and fiscal crisis all around New Jersey, municipalities are in crisis, financial crisis, and they urgently need flexible funding so that teachers and firefighters and all of our essential workers are not at risk. We need to act, and we need to do it with a sense of urgency. We cannot wait, we must do something now.

And so it's not a matter right now of can we; what's really at stake here is will we get it done? I'm proud to have written provisions, bipartisan provisions with partners on both sides of the aisle. We've already been focusing on getting things done, including a bill that makes sure families of New Jersey first responders who died in the line of duty from COVID are getting federal death benefits they deserve. That's something we did together, a bill that I wrote with Chuck Grassley. We've shown we can do it. We've shown we can rise, but now is the time and the urgency to rise to the challenges before us.

So far, we have gotten \$6.5 billion in federal assistance here to New Jersey. We've done it before. We need to do it now. We need to do more. We can get to work to get this crisis under control, to get the communities the relief they need, the relief that Governors on both sides of the aisle across the nation are asking for, relief that county leaders on both sides of the aisle are asking for, that towns and mayors on both sides of the aisle here in New Jersey are asking for, to get that flexible state and local funding to our communities. We need to get a bipartisan bill done and I will not stop until we do it.

We are going to be in a difficult time for a while now. The pain and the hurt is not over. We have challenges. We are still in that proverbial valley of the shadow of death. With this crisis before us, it is going to not just take the best of us individually, but it's going to take the best of us that is made manifest when we come together, stand together, work together and revive those ideals of grace, those ideals of a beloved community, that are really necessary for New Jersey and America now.

Again, I want to thank everybody in every town and municipality. I want to remind you that my office is working around the clock with a team here in New Jersey. If there's any Mayor or city councilperson in New Jersey, any county leader that needs support from the federal government, please reach out to my office. We are putting points on the board every day for New Jerseyans, with an array of different challenges and problems, and we will not yield in that service to all of our state.

I want to again thank someone who has become a national figure because of his leadership, who has shown in dark times that all of us have within us an inextinguishable light. I want to thank my Governor for his grace under difficult times, and how he shows that you can't lead the people if you don't love the people, and your love of New Jersey, Mr. Governor, is shining clearly through, so thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Senator. That means more than you know, and I don't know where we'd be without you. I know you've got to head off to Washington. Good luck down there. Can I ask you one question before you go? How would you handicap the likelihood of a significant stimulus bill in the lame duck?

Senator Cory Booker: I think it's sincerely going to be challenged because of one person and that is Mitch McConnell.

Governor Phil Murphy: Not the President? The President is likely to?

Senator Cory Booker: Well, I'm hopeful. They've called Mnuchin the most eager person in Washington during negotiations, so I think there is some desire, at least there was along the White House. I think the big obstacle has been Mitch McConnell, and he's even signaling today that he does not want to do something big. Now whether that will last, what his members of his state – remember, we now are seeing the largest numbers of cases in a lot of what Donald Trump would call red states . I would call them our states. I'm hoping that the pressure builds and I'm hoping New Jerseyans, again, the more we can speak with one voice, Democrats and Republicans, the more we can all be advocates not just for our state, but for North Dakota, South Dakota, for places really being hit, the better we're going to be.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, that includes Georgia, where there are still going to be two run-offs in January.

Senator Cory Booker: Yeah, very much so.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless you, man. Thank you so much, safe travels.

Senator Cory Booker: Thank you, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great to have you. With that, Pat, you're going to fold into the right here a little bit, right? Thank you, Senator. Please help me welcome again, extraordinary job on 60 Minutes last night but that's not a surprise, because you're doing an extraordinary job all the time. Please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, this morning Pfizer announced that based on early data, the coronavirus vaccine they have in development may be more than 90% effective. As part of their announcement, Pfizer said they plan to seek emergency use authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration soon. With vaccine development moving forward, the important work of boosting confidence in this vaccine among healthcare workforce is vital.

We need our healthcare heroes, who have been identified as the priority population, to get vaccinated to protect their patients, their families, and to help contain the spread of the virus in our state. Based on a survey of the healthcare professionals we undertook in October, we know there are significant concerns

about receiving the vaccination. The survey was developed by the Department of Health's educators and shared with the Medical Society of New Jersey, the New Jersey Hospital Association, and the State Nurses Association.

When asked if they would take the vaccine once it is available, 66% of the doctors would definitely or probably take the COVID-19 vaccine; 47% of nurses answered that they would take the vaccine. Science and vaccine safety were the top concerns among these professionals. Some did not want to be in the first round, so they could wait and see if there are potential side effects. Of those who said they would not take the vaccine, many said they would be more than willing to get the vaccine at a later date when more data is available on the effectiveness and the safety of the vaccine. They noted that their preferred sources of information about vaccines were the CDC, the New Jersey Department of Health and peer-reviewed journals.

Given the level of vaccine hesitancy, the department knows that an important part of our job is to share the science and the data with healthcare professionals. We want them to feel more comfortable with getting the vaccine and also recommending the vaccine to their patients once it is generally available. Physicians and nurses are trusted voices and we know they will play an important role in the public's understanding of why this vaccination is so important. The department looks forward to partnering with our healthcare leaders to build public confidence in COVID-19 vaccines, and get vital priority groups vaccinated to fight the spread of the virus in our state.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported a high of 1,537 hospitalizations of COVID-positive patients and persons under investigation, with 309 individuals in critical care. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. Our cases remain at 61.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. In terms of race and ethnicity, 54.1% are White, 18.1% Black, 20.2% Hispanic, Asian 5.5% and other 2.1%.

At the state veteran homes, the total of 399 cases and 146 deaths among residents across the 300 homes is cumulative. At our state psychiatric hospitals, the cumulative numbers are 247 cases among patients and 13 patient deaths.

The New Jersey daily report on positivity as of November 5th, New Jersey totally is at 7.52%. The Northern part of the state is 8.47%. The Central part of the state 5.96%, and the Southern part of the state 8.01%. That concludes my daily report. Mask up, socially distance, wash your hands frequently, stay home if you're sick, and remember: for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. So the big counties today are the same ones we've been seeing over the past couple of weeks. The triple digit cases are in Bergen. Burlington is a new add to this list, unfortunately; Camden, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Passaic, Union and then you've also got Morrison in triple digits today as well.

I'm going to choose to be glass half-full here on something. I had a really positive conversation with Tony Fauci on Saturday, it was not specific to Pfizer. But I said, "Listen, you know, we're going to take some public square steps, as we've announced." We still have a lot of private home, private gathering transmissions. When is a realistic -- forget about when a vaccine is given a green light? When's a realistic timeframe when it's actually broadly distributed? How can we use that date?

He was unequivocal, April/May. Unequivocal. Didn't say specific to Pfizer, obviously, but the Pfizer development and we've been on with the senior Pfizer folks, as I know you have this morning. But he made a very important point, which gets to a lot of this. One is, it won't be broadly distributed if all the tires have not been kicked and all of the hoops that it has to go through had been gone through. We say that with a high degree of confidence. You won't let us do it. And folks have to hear that. They have to hear that loud and clear.

And he secondly made the point on pandemic fatigue. He said literally, we're in a six-month race here to the finish line. As we've said, a vaccine doesn't mean we're entirely back to where we were but it's a hugely different environment. I'll choose to use the glass is half full on that, but we've got to use that, folks. We're in a sprint for the next six months. Do the right thing. Right. Is that fair?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Absolutely.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. And again, great job last night, as always. With that, Pat, welcome. Good to have you. A little bit closer than you were five minutes ago, good to have you here on the wing. What do you have on compliance? Great work on distributing the masks to our educational communities. And I know you've got a one particular federal partner who we're going to miss and I joined you in giving him a shout out. With that, over to you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. With regards to COVID compliance. In Morristown, the Horseshoe Tavern, police responded there. It was well over the 25% capacity and patrons were not wearing masks so that the establishment was cited. In Atlantic City, two police officers were processing a subject for a disorderly persons offense when that subject coughed on both of the officers, indicating that he had COVID. I know we hadn't heard that in a while but here it happened in Atlantic City.

And to your point with regards to our federal partner, Tom von Essen, who served as the FEMA Region 2 administrator announced his retirement, and just a phenomenal partner through storms and snow and certainly this pandemic with, if you think about from field medical stations, ventilators, PPE, the Department of Defense staff, Tom von Essen and in his Region 2 team were at the heart of that partnership. It's also noteworthy to note that Tom was the Commissioner of FDNY during the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and he lost 343 firefighters in one day, and just was a phenomenal leader through one of the darkest times of our country, and certainly of New York City's history. So I just, I certainly thank him for his service to the City of New York and to our nation. He will certainly be missed. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: All I could say that last point is Amen. Tammy and I were with him and had extensive – as we do every 9/11 in New York City – we were hanging out with him this year and he previewed that he was going to hang in spikes up, but he's one of the one of the all-time greats. We salute him, we're going to miss him. He's done extraordinary work not just for the City of New York, and led through all of that loss, but he's been an incredible partner to us over the past eight months. I know you know that better than anybody, so thank you.

I mentioned the first lady was here. Cory also mentioned it. The Pandemic Relief Fund is still out there. It's now needed more than ever before. Folks, go to njprf.org and contribute, NJ PRF as in pandemic relief fund.org and contribute. They need the money. Folks who are getting the money in our state still need it, whether they're unemployed, whether they've got health challenges, folks with no food security. They're doing extraordinary work, so thank you for your continued work

We will start over here. We will likely, Mahen, be on a Monday-Thursday routine. Veterans Day is on Wednesday so we won't have a chance to be with you again before Veterans Day and we want to take our hat off to our extraordinary veterans up and down our state, hundreds of thousands of them. This year, we're doing the Veterans Day normal commemoration service, it's virtual. I had the honor of filming my piece over at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial which you know well. I want to thank a whole series of legislators and certainly our Dematha leadership and every one of our veterans, I want to take our hat off to them. But we'll be with you electronically in the next couple of days and Thursday at one o'clock unless you hear otherwise from us.

With that, Catherine, welcome. Can you all be economical just because there are a lot of you here today? Thanks, Catherine.

Q&A Session

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Catherine Carrera, Newsday Media Group: Thanks. So first for the Health Commissioner, can you speak a little bit more about how you expect to prioritize who will be among the first set of workers to get this vaccine?

And a few questions for the Governor. One, do these restrictions being announced supersede more restrictive orders that are imposed currently in Newark, like the 8:00 pm curfew?

Two, when will the rest of the CARES Act money be allocated and why are you still waiting to release some of that money?

Three, on Friday, we got the news that the state has gotten another credit rating downgrade. Do you have any regrets about borrowing that \$4 billion?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, do you want to hit the vaccine and I'll hit the other ones? Does that work?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. We have a professional advisory committee that includes our health equity subcommittee, and they meet twice a week. They're actually looking at the prioritization according to the definition that was put forth by the CDC. In Phase 1, the definition of 1(a) are healthcare workers, paid and unpaid healthcare workers who are at the greatest risk for contracting or coming in contact with the infectious disease. We are identifying those as priority. We're looking at two scenarios, limited doses to begin with, or there's a possibility that we'll get more doses to begin with. Those two scenarios are up for discussion this Thursday, so I'll have more to tell you probably next week on the specificity of how we're prioritizing. But it is an inverted pyramid, which starts at the top with our 500,000 healthcare workers who fit into that category and then looks at many determinants of prioritization those most at risk, etc. until we reached the bottom where we have a smaller group that will hopefully line up to be vaccinated. That's all determined by who wants to be vaccinated.

Governor Phil Murphy: I've not been authorized to say what I'm about to say, so the two people to my right, I won't even ask them to come in and agree or dispute. But based on the vibrations from the folks that we trust, the private sector players, the Tony Fauci's of the world, I'm going to say the following and history will prove whether I'm right or wrong.

Not only do we applaud Pfizer, but the breakthrough and just the vibrations around the conversations with the people we rely on, my guess is they're not going to be alone in having an efficacious, scalable, safe vaccine. They're the first, it looks like, that have gotten to the point they're at, but my guess is they're going to have company, and that's a good thing.

They are a two-jab deep freeze, right? Pfizer? Yeah. So Catherine on restrictions, no. I think as a general matter, our executive orders are the ones that take precedence, but if someone is more restrictive, we're going to almost certainly allow that to happen.

The CARES Act money, it's all been allocated, I want to make sure that I've got this right and my colleagues are telling me it's all been allocated. It hasn't necessarily all been expended because getting the pace of investment, etc. we were looking for guidance on this for a long time. I think we've got the guidance at this point but Parimal, you should weigh in if you see that differently.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: So we'll circle back on that. Just one point on the local restrictions piece. So as we said in the past, any local restrictions that are inconsistent with the statewide response will be invalidated. On the Newark restrictions specifically, I believe they're supposed to sunset tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. So four rating agencies last week opined on our credit ratings, three of them held and S&P lowered. I don't agree with their decision. The specific question you asked, am I – and by the way, we're in a U shape. We always knew that. We're in a U shape reality. I wish it were a V but it is not and we inherited a state with extraordinary overwhelming structural deficits.

But unlike the reaction the state had to the Great Recession, am I comfortable with all the investments in services, especially public education, investment in infrastructure, keeping folks employed who are at the frontlines taking care of our citizens? Am I comfortable with being all in for the middle class, even in this extraordinary time, comparable only to the 1930s in the 1860s?

I am completely at comfort and at ease with that. I don't agree with their decision but I'm extremely confident and comfortable with the steps we've taken. Thank you. Mike, is that you? We're going to go to Mike and then Matt, we will get to you but hold on one sec.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon, Governor, thanks. Can you talk a little bit more specifically about the basis for the decision to change the indoor dining rules that you announced today? The figures that you looked at that led you to make the decisions you made?

And just on the election, it looks like something like 83% of the ballots have been cast. Do you have any insight as to why there's a bit of a delay in getting to 100% there? Were there problems? Were there any issues with counting ballots because of the change in this year's method of election? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sure. I'm not sure I've seen the 83% number but the way this works is all mail-in ballots get counted first and they have to be counted by tomorrow. And then, and only then, do we start counting the provisionals. Again, I love the way this has worked with one exception, and that is I'd love in-person early voting, which we don't have a New Jersey. We need to make an investment. I think it's plus or minus \$25 million, which is a one-off and you then get to benefit from that forever and always. That would allow us to have a robust mail-in, in-person early machine voting and day-of machine voting. We don't have the technology for that. But I'm not surprised. This is the sequencing that we previewed and I believe we have to certify by November 20th. Tomorrow's the last day, November 10th, the mail-ins count. You start counting provisionals on the 11th and you have to certify by November 20th.

The basis upon which and again, we've said this before. There are transmissions happening in a number of different arenas. We knew when we opened up indoor activities we were taking on some amount of risk, but at the time, we felt that that was a responsible step to take and we still do, by the way. But I've said this several times, Judy's commented on this. If you look at national surveys of your behavior versus my behavior, if my behavior has disproportionately more inside activity, the chances that I've been exposed or in fact have gotten COVID are higher than yours, as it were.

But it's gone beyond that. So that's the level of risk that we knew we were okay with. It is quite clear, unequivocally, that indoor sports, especially indoor hockey, has been a source, whether it's the actual playing of hockey -- I think not -- or adjacent activities more likely, but we know for sure that we were taking on more risks than we should, particularly with interstate competitions and tournaments. Judy's been tracking cases that have come explicitly from those, so that's quite clear that that is a step.

And separately, we also know that people started to let their hair down at clubs, lounges, restaurants -- especially restaurants with bars as the night wore on. Judy, I think we've spoken to this publicly, you and I have spoken privately. We see unequivocal cases of bartenders over the past couple of weeks coming down with COVID infections. We know that people are getting sloppy in and around bars as the night wears on. I can guess why that's the case, and it's unequivocal. We're going to put a line in the sand on that.

But by the same token, our empathy and sympathies are with the restaurant community that's been crushed. We need more federal money for them. We just say that, but also, Judy and team are going to allow them to have closer tables as long as there are barriers, be more creative on the outdoor side, not shut off outdoor dining or takeout or delivery services. That continues as is. We think that's the right combination. Thank you.

Alex, back to you. Again, my kids have now put you on their heroes list. I won't say why.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. First a question for Commissioner Persichilli, if you could just go a little bit more into these bartenders that are getting COVID? What specifically is happening? I know the Governor mentioned the idea of the cut off, maybe people getting a little sloppy as the night goes on. But seriously, why 10:00 p.m.? Why not 8:00 p.m.? Why not 6:00 p.m. Why not close indoor dining at all if that's a concern.

For the Governor, I'd like to ask you to see how Shermanesque you can be. Has the Biden administration offered you a cabinet position or ambassadorship? Would you consider it or not? Are you staying in New Jersey?

And lastly for the Governor, there was a hearing, I think it's still going on, in the Senate Judiciary Committee on the weed legalization bill, and some of your progressive allies have spoken out against it. Reverend Charles Boyer calls it despicable. Brandon McCoy from NJ Policy Perspective says the lack of a robust tax structure in the legalization bill is galling and disappointing. What's your opinion of what's being proposed so far and what do you want to see in the fine details of cannabis legalization?

Governor Phil Murphy: May I just, Judy, on the first one, I know you'll want to comment on this. We see no reason why you'd shut down if you're sitting at your table, indoor dining. That's not where we believe this is coming from. So the steps we're taking, again remember other states got to 50% of capacity; Connecticut, I

think to 75% of capacity. Thanks to Judy and Ed and team we were very incremental and gradual and got only up to 25% of capacity. It's not by any evidence coming from you and your family at one table having dinner beside you and your family. It's coming in the bilateral airflow between a bartender and customers, as well as the lateral, at the same level. Anything you want to add to that, or Ed?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I wish we could tell you specifically why bartenders seem to be more at risk. We don't know whether it's the activity behind the bar, mixing drinks, talking to one another. We can't say specifically, but we can tell you that we've had a lot of outbreaks. Ed watches this like a hawk every day.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's not to imply Ed is a bartender, but let's get Ed's...

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Or that I hang out at bars. The hard data are difficult. We have seen outbreaks associated with bartenders. I don't have the numbers exactly in front of me, but in the high single digits with a single bar related, in any event. You can go and you can look at these places and you can get a good sense of why that might happen.

I mean, physically, if you're sitting at a bar if I'm sitting here, the bartender is coming back and forth regularly here, people next to me, masks almost never on, people continuously drinking. Yes, there's supposed to be space between the groups. That's not always being observed. The bartender, it is very difficult, they are working in very tight spaces often with each other back there. It is a very difficult environment to maintain the type of separation and space such that you would like. So, I mean, that's basically it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Ed. I've not been offered any position. Someone asked me earlier today, what if they offered you your dream job? And my answer was very simply, I have my dream job. I'm not going anywhere, period.

I won't comment on specific legislation and I hadn't heard of those comments by Reverend Boyer or Brandon, both of whom are friends and allies. But I was encouraged to see the Speaker's comments about an excise tax, which we've supported from day one.

And secondly, unequivocally, that we believe that as much of the proceeds from this addressing the injustices that the war on drugs caused, we are all in for, whatever the legislation -- again, I'm not trying to influence that discussion, as much as to say, if it is directionally in that it allows us to really address some of these awful injustices that have resulted from this, count me as an ally to that. Thank you.

We're going to go all the way back to Nikita, and then come back down front.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. So the Attorney General last week, your Attorney General, I should note, opposed the curing of naked ballots. I'm wondering if you agree with that?

Separately, when will Democrats name members of the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Committees?

Have you considered the possibility that President Trump might seek to certify the state's census numbers before he leaves office? Do you have a contingency plan for that?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't have an answer on the third but I would hope that that does not happen. I don't have a contingency plan unless Parimal tells me he's got one.

Listen, I don't want to speak for the Attorney General but we stand for opening up democracy and wherever we can, as long as it's a legitimate reason to do that, whether it's what we've done in online registration, folks on probation or parole, if you're 17 before the primary and you turn 18 by the general, I want to get in-person early voting, the vote by mail worked really well. One guy's opinion, I'm not trying to be argumentative certainly, the Attorney General is doing a great job. I think if it's a legitimate cure, a legitimate mistake and there's a legitimate cure, I lean on counting.

There's a date by which we have to name the members of the commission, you probably know the date better than I do. It's like November 16th, or something like that. Does that sound right? We'll make it by then. Thank you.

We'll come down to Daniel and then come around the back there if you could, Aswin, there we go.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hi, Governor. I did want to ask some of the questions that had been basically asked already, but --

Governor Phil Murphy: No problem. If it's been already asked I'd love you to skip it and we go to break some new ground.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: This additional tax, is that sort of an additional tax on top of the excise and the sales tax, or is that the excise tax?

Governor Phil Murphy: Excise.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: So no additional tax?

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, the referendum has a limit as to what the tax could be, right? It can't exceed the sales tax and then there's an option for the local municipality to top that up a little bit. This would be back up the food chain, at cultivation stage.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: I guess what date did you reach the conclusion that there was this link between indoor dining increases, and was it before you had made public statements that you weren't seeing a link between indoor dining and increases in outbreaks in new cases?

Considering Connecticut said last week it's limiting private gatherings to no more than 10 people and discouraging non-essential travel between 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m., why not do those restrictions instead of these that are being traced back to a private indoor gatherings?

Can you explain the jump to, I think it was about 3,200 cases on Saturday? That's it. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not trying to be glib about this so don't take it that way because these are all good questions. A year ago today I'd never heard of COVID-19. Facts change. We knew we took on more risk when we open up, as I mentioned earlier to Mike's question, when you open up indoors, but you heard Judy and Ed talk about there is a developing fact pattern here.

Secondly, we will take steps. I mean, we have capacities as it relates to indoors but we've said this many times before as it relates to other steps. We want to draw lines in the sand that Pat and his colleagues can actually, realistically enforce. You know, we could not be stronger in our plea in private settings to be in your own bubble, do the smart things, have small scale Thanksgivings and we will continue to, but it's very hard to get inside of somebody's house. I guess if they have a huge -- we had a couple of examples a couple of weeks ago, a big football party, I guess in New Brunswick. Folks were able to get at that.

Judy, the jump in cases, in fact, I don't know if you said this in your remarks. You sent it to me privately, if anything, our number today you think may be understated. The jump is really not so much the exception today maybe more than we would otherwise, you've got a little bit of a data question that you are raising.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we have a reporting issue today. A hospital IT system that a number of the hospitals have seems to be under-reporting today. We expect the 2,000 to jump up tomorrow. I think our reality is that we will have between 2,000 and 3,000 cases a day going forward.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is unfortunately not as much of an exception as it appears to be. Thank you for that. Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon, Governor. On the way the virus is spreading, is the fact that the statewide positivity rate of 7.52% on Thursday, a day of the week the state typically conducts the most tests, is that setting off alarm bells about the surge in community spread? And maybe that's a question for Judy, the Commissioner.

And similarly, again on rapid testing, even as new cases are climbing, doesn't the lack of rapid test report mean that we're getting a significant undercount? Any sense of what percentage that undercount could represent? Is it 10%, 20%, 25%?

Governor, Mayor Philip has been somewhat critical on Twitter, but he said that he'd like to see stricter penalties for bars and restaurants that violate the rules that are on the book, rather than making them close earlier. He cited the strain on small businesses, more may close, and also the likelihood that that could drive

more people to gather inside in private homes, which is obviously something that you've said has led to more spikes. What do you think about stricter enforcement rather than just imposing these curfews?

Governor Phil Murphy: Could you, and to add to Matt's question on positivity rate, Judy and Ed, it is a fact also that the rate of transmission has stayed in a very tight range over the past week, as spot positivity -- I'm just looking at my numbers -- has been not only consistently high, but it's gotten higher. Anything on that front and any sense of how many of the rapid tests are actually occurring? I know Pat and team are moving these out as we get them. But both good questions. Do you want to jump in on either of those?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: We don't know for sure exactly how many rapid tests are being done or that are out there. We are getting reports from some rapid tests. We don't report those results out because they're just a fraction of what is actually being done. Exactly what that fraction is, like I said, I don't know. My best guess is that we'd be raising our case counts by somewhere between about 10% to 20% if we were including all the rapid tests, but that's just an educated guess.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, that's not just New Jersey, the Abbott Binax, the ability to connect it data-wise into our health system is an issue around the country. Ed, now that you're on stage, how can -- I get this question a lot. Explain if you could the fact that the rate of transmission has actually stayed in a fairly tight band; spot positivity has not. It's jumped up and it stayed up. How do you square those two realities?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Well, a few general things when we talk about cases, when we compare cases where we were back in March and April. We're having 2,000 to 3,000 cases now and we peaked out at 4,000 to 5,000 cases back in March or April. We're not quite really comparing apples to apples, because back in March and April, we weren't doing anywhere the amount of testing that we're doing now. We peaked out at close to 60% positivity back then, and that is a sign that we weren't testing enough, so that we were missing cases. Back in March and April there were almost for sure more cases than were being counted. It's not a direct apples-to-apples comparison.

The RT remaining flat is saying pretty much what we've been saying. Again, compared to March and April when we took the escalator right up, you know, the elevator where we kind of shot up dramatically quickly, the RT staying at about 1.2 to 1.3 is showing us that we're taking a more gradual staircase up. It's not rising as fast but it is rising steadily and regularly and that is concerning.

The positivity is going up because the total number of cases are going up and the total number of tests being done are not going up as fast as the total number of cases are going up. So if you have more cases, and not much more testing being done, your positivity is going to rise.

Governor Phil Murphy: And again, I'm going to talk fast because the clock is running against us. I think it's and/both. I think it's aggressive compliance. In fact, Pat, when we talk about Judy plussing up resources into a community, it's testing, tracing, compliance, bullhorn are the other four principal elements of that. I think it's and/both, it's not either/or.

Secondly, he's completely right about the risks that we have with any step we take, that folks will go indoors into private settings, and we just have to plead with folks not to do that. But that doesn't mean that we should therefore turn our backs on what we know is non-compliant behavior, particularly late at night and around indoor bars. Thank you for that.

Sir, anything?

Reporter: Governor, do you have an update on election numbers, specifically total mail-in ballots to date?

Governor Phil Murphy: It's just over 4.3 million as of about an hour-and-a-half ago.

Reporter: Also counted provisional ballots and how many cure letters have gone out or have been received?

Governor Phil Murphy: Provisionals we don't start counting until Wednesday, so I don't have a number there and I don't have a number on cures but we can follow up, Mahen, if that's okay.

Reporter: Wait, I've got two more. Last night, Commissioner Persichilli on 60 Minutes raised concerns about the limited supply of vaccines that New Jersey is likely to get initially to protect the state's 500,000 priority frontline workers. What steps is the administration taking to address what could be a significant capacity gap

at the start?

And second, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick says there's no transparency in the decision to issue these new restrictions. Why can't the state take testimony from doctors, hospitals and restaurant owners before making this decision?

Governor Phil Murphy: Who said that?

Reporter: Assemblyman Bramnick.

Governor Phil Murphy: We talk to those people all the time. I have no idea where that comment comes from. I just was back and forth this morning with not one, two, three, four, but five CEOs of hospital systems, three labor leaders. We talk to people who are at the frontlines literally all the time. The notion that we make these decisions in a vacuum is ludicrous.

Judy, having said that, 60 Minutes from last night, any reaction to that question?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Before I give a reaction to that, I want to give a reaction to the hospital leaders. We're on phone calls with them and I just had one on Friday where all the hospital leaders join in and they have the ability to ask questions, we talk about the situation. I mean, it's every two weeks we're on call with the hospital leaders. I just want to clarify that.

As far as the limited capacity, today at 3:30 I'll be on a call with General Perna. I'll get an update on what that capacity might look like. Our understanding is that it may be greater than the original 100,000 doses that we had considered, so I'll have more to come on that and I think it'll be more positive, actually.

Governor Phil Murphy: By the way, if you want to be impressed by a Jersey product, General Perna should be high on your list. Four Star, full General, US Army, right, Pat? Literally, it's like John Wayne walking in the room when we have these VTCs. This is a good example, notwithstanding all the political noise and all of the stuff swirling around us, we're on constantly, the end of last week with Admiral Brett Giroir. I'm on with Tony Fauci on Saturday, Judy's on with General Perna today. We continue to find, as long as it's doing the right thing based on the facts and the needs that we have in New Jersey, we continue to find common ground literally every single day. Hats off to you on that one. Thank you. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. It just sounds like from the responses that we've gotten so far that you don't actually have hard data on outbreaks linked to bars or restaurants. Correct me if I'm wrong, or even better, provide a little bit more detail, please?

Do these restrictions apply to banquet halls? Will there be any relief for couples who will have to cancel weddings this weekend and in the weeks ahead?

I just have a couple questions on pardons. Governor, why haven't you issued any, especially when you said the state's marijuana laws are broken? There are advocates for one particular inmate, [Sundiya Acoley], who I understand were told by you to request his release, but you have not done so and your office has ignored their requests. Why is that? Does he have any chance of being released by you? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Dustin. I think we've said what we're going to say about data and the basis upon which we're making decisions on restaurants and bars. Does this impact us on banquet halls?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Banquet halls would have to close their indoor premises at 10:00 p.m. the same way that that restaurants and bars do.

Governor Phil Murphy: That doesn't mean necessarily you have to cancel your wedding, but you've got to maybe move it up a couple hours, is that fair to say?

I've got nothing specific on pardons, Dustin. I won't talk about any one individual's case but we take this stuff seriously. You know, just because at this moment in time, November 9th, 2020, we haven't taken action doesn't mean that that's not something that we would consider or that we are considering. I assume Counsel would agree with that. Judy, do you want to come back to the first question?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I do. You know, we get reports every day and we'll have a report of, you know, an outbreak amongst restaurant workers at a particular restaurant. Maybe it'll be two or three cases. But actually, we had at least nine bartenders and servers got COVID in this setting, and we had to put out an alert. And I'll just read it to you. The New Jersey Department of Health would like to notify the public of a potential COVID-19 exposure at a Monmouth County Bar and Grill due to multiple cases linked to the establishment. And then we went on to identify anyone who visited Leggett Sandbar located at, and the address, between the dates of October 17th and October 22nd may have been exposed to COVID-19. The Monmouth County Health Department is actively investigating these cases and exposures. They conducted a site visit on October 23rd and the restaurant is cooperating.

This is just one example. We really don't put them out every day, because they have to be investigated, but it is happening.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, if it were just one example, you'd have a way of dealing with that but you wouldn't necessarily make a broader policy decision. But this is broad enough that we're making the moves we're making. Thank you for that. Dave, take us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Thank you, Governor. With all due respect, because this is I think really important, the details of this indoor dining business. You had said that the increase in the problem or the concern with indoor dining, even at 25% capacity, it's not so much with the people sitting and eating, but it's from this bilateral airflow, as you described, coming from the bar area. So if we're shutting down people sitting at the bar, presumably you're not going to have that problem. Then what specifically is the reason to make them close at 10:00 p.m. if you're not going to have that increased risk? If you'd just be kind enough to explain the thinking there because it seems -- I mean, maybe I'm dumb, but I don't get it.

And then the second and final question, perhaps Judy and Ed could talk a little bit about this business with the vaccine information that we're getting, that it's going to be more than 90% effective, they're saying. Can you put that in perspective for us in terms of how important that is? How it would compare, for instance, with influenza vaccines, it sometimes is below 50% effectiveness? Would we also think we would see a benefit if somebody gets the COVID vaccine, even if they get COVID, similar to influenza, it can lessen the severity of the symptoms, would we think the same sort of thing would happen here? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: On the first one, Dave, you're not dumb, it's a fair question but it's important that we're taking both of these steps. Again, this does not impact takeout or delivery, again, or it also does not impact outdoor dining. You've made the case, I think, on the bar rationale. It is both bilateral and then multilateral. So bilateral between bartender and me at the bar, although I've never been at one, or multilateral, we're all at the bar and we're sending it back and forth. And as Ed said, bartenders going up and down the line, there's that.

But secondly, there is more than anecdotal evidence that as the night wears on, for probably reasons that are obvious, people let their hair down and they are gathering. We've seen this in Newark, for instance, and the mayor and I talked about it, and in the East Ward as an example. Folks are just sort of not distancing as they should, even when they're seated. There just isn't the same level of compliance and care. It's really both of those steps. In other words, you've still got the overwhelming sense that if you're seated at a table, as long as the capacity is within limits, you're compliant and you're probably doing the safe thing.

I glossed over this briefly in my remarks, but I want to underscore this and Judy is the one who will put the Holy Water on this. We are allowing closer distancing among tables, as long as there are Department of Health acceptable, certified barriers between those tables.

You know, the vaccination question, I did an interview this morning and as I was about to answer it, I think they had influenza on average at 60% to 70% effectiveness. The others were all in the 90s, some MMR and others that were up in the 90s. Is that right, and any other color you want to give to Dave's question?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: The news that we got this morning about the vaccine, if it holds at 90%, would be tremendous news. As you've mentioned, virus vaccines for things like influenza, 40% to 60% is where it's typically estimated its efficacy is. The FDA has said that they would approve any COVID vaccine that was above 50% effectiveness, so 90% would exceed expectations. Vaccines almost never are 100% effective.

And as you mentioned, even with not 100% effective, they very commonly protect people so they tend not to get as serious a disease if they do get it. There's an awful lot we don't know yet. We don't yet know what the real numbers will be. We don't yet know whether that's 90% across all age groups or whether it will be equally effective in the elderly, infirm and people with worse immune systems. We don't know how long immunity might last, whether it might need to be given regularly. We don't know whether just because they're not getting symptoms, because they only tested people who got symptoms to see if they got the disease, whether it might be possible to still get asymptomatic infections when you've had this vaccine, and you might still be possible to spread it.

There's an awful lot that we don't know yet. We definitely will learn more in the next coming months and we'll have a lot more to say on it. I'll just start by saying it's extremely positive, but extremely early to give a real answer to.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, I assume we also don't know one of Dave's questions was, again, I assume this is also not known is if you have the vaccine and you still get it, do you have lesser symptoms than you otherwise would have? To be determined, right?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Correct, absolutely. The answer is probably but --

Governor Phil Murphy: To be determined but this is really good news, I have to say. I mentioned this to someone recently, I think it was an interview. If we roll the clock back to September, I think we were all -- I'm going to pick August, September -- we were all concerned about the potential for politics creeping into this process. I don't have that concern today, I have to say. I feel like the folks that we're dealing with at the federal level, private sector, medical research, science, it feels to me like this is all, the progress is legitimate, it's safe, it's efficacious and we have to make sure we say that to folks, because if indeed this is at the point of attack in April or May, we need as many of us as possible to step up.

Judy and Ed, thank you, as always. Pat, likewise. Jared, Parimal, Mahen, the whole team, Aswin, thank you for taking us through. Again, we'll be with you Thursday at one o'clock; electronically tomorrow and Wednesday. God bless our veterans every day but especially this Wednesday, folks, and keep up the great work. God bless.

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