

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: January 4th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone and Happy New Year. I'm joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, another familiar face, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, great to have you with us, both of you. The guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. We also have the Director of the Office Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

Since it is the New Year, let's get right at it. Today we are proud to note that as of this moment, and this is a little bit from earlier today, we have exceeded 100,000 vaccinations statewide with a current total of 101,417 when all of our frontline medical workers and residents and staff at our long-term care facilities are factored in. This morning, as you can see, Judy and I were at University Hospital in Newark where Judy, by the way, is the former Chief Executive, and we saw the workers there who received their first shots of the Pfizer Biotech vaccine on December 15th get their second doses, making them the first New Jerseyans to be fully vaccinated. That was a pretty cool moment.

Every day our vaccine program continues to make progress. This Wednesday, and each Wednesday to come until further notice we'll be joined at the table by Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, the state's former state epidemiologist and current COVID-19 response medical advisor, who is playing a central role in our vaccine program. Judy and I both think that his insights and expertise will clearly show our path forward and provide an extra measure of confidence in the vaccines that we have.

of
Back
to top

As we noted last week, we have set up a page dedicated solely to our vaccine efforts on our COVID-19 information hub. You can find that by going to that address right there, covid19.nj.gov/vaccine. You'll be able to get answers to many questions about the COVID vaccines and we will also use that page as your registration portal to help you sign up to make your appointment to get vaccinated when your turn comes to roll up your sleeve.

Next today, switching gears, our students and educators for the most part, if not overwhelmingly, are getting back to school after what we hope was a restful winter break. Across the state, 77 schools or districts are welcoming their students and staffs back to full, in-person instruction. 348 are starting the new year with a hybrid of an in-person and remote instruction that has some students in the school building at some point in the day, each and every day, Monday through Friday. When we last reported these numbers on December 21st, there were 82 schools offering in-person and 362 offering hybrid. Another 339 districts, as you can see, are choosing to start the 2021 second half of the school year in an all-remote fashion, an increase of 18 since our last report. 47 districts you can see at the bottom are using some combination of in-person, hybrid or all remote across multiple buildings. That number is up one, I believe, since our last pre-Christmas report.

Importantly for those students learning remotely, I want to re-emphasize the progress we have made in closing the digital divide. As of our December 21st report, 94% of the initial identified digital divide from the summer had been bridged, and we should be receiving the latest numbers later today, in fact, which we will report to you on Wednesday. Most of the remaining gap has been due to shipping delays and we hope with the passage of Christmas, that those lags are being mitigated. So to our students back today, whether in-person or remote, I wish you a terrific second half of the school year. And to all of our extraordinary educators, school officials, moms and dads, I send the same to you and thank you for all that you are doing day in and day out to keep our kids learning in the best and safest possible environment in the context of what we can say is the understatement of the year, not a normal school year. A school year filled with stress and people are doing heroic work out there. To each and every one of you we say thank you.

Now I want to get something off my chest before we turn to the overnight numbers. I have to address in the words I will use, shameful, dangerous, undemocratic and unpatriotic display of a number of Congressional Republicans who are openly and unabashedly working to undermine our constitutional norms, and there is no other word for it, and to overthrow a free and fair election decided by the American people, an American president sitting in the Oval Office, working the phones to subvert American democracy for his personal benefit. Let that sink in for a minute.

Congress meets this Wednesday, January 6th, to accept the vote of the Electoral College, and thankfully, there are enough Republicans in Congress to prevent the fever dreams of a small band of right-wing conspiracy theorists and their pathetic minions, like Senators Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley, Representative Louie Gohmert and Mo Brooks from succeeding. The voters have spoken. Our election officials have spoken. The courts have spoken and the Electoral College has spoken. And yet, that seemingly isn't enough for those willing to overturn an election because they just can't accept that their guy lost decisively.

It pains me in particular to see one of our own representatives, Congressman Jeff Van Drew, cynically siding with conspiracy theorists and throwing his fate in with the far right's disproven and crackpot theories. If that's the legacy Jeff wants, then I guess it is what it is. The tiny number of senior New Jersey Republicans who have done the right thing by acknowledging the true outcome of the election is shocking. I know there are many more who privately share their misgivings about the rabbit hole their colleagues are preparing to drag our nation and the constitution down, and their silence is equal to acquiescence. I commend the Republicans who have shown the courage of their convictions to say what's right and I would put up two stellar examples: One of my predecessors Governor Christine Todd Whitman, and Assembly Republican Minority Leader Jon Bramnick.

But we've lost something greater when simply acknowledging the will of the people after an election is considered courageous. Shame on those who have not found any semblance of courage. Hopefully, tomorrow will just be a day of noise and our constitution will emerge intact, but this cowardly and reckless effort weakens our republic here at home, and undermines America's efforts to promote democracy around the world.

With that said, let's turn to the overnight numbers. Today we're reporting an additional 2,292 positive PCR tests, bringing the total since March 4th cumulatively to 494,317 confirmed cases. Today is 10 months to the day since we had our first confirmed positive case. Today, we begin releasing the antigen test results which have been reported to Judy and her team at the Department of Health. Today, we are reporting 822 new – and I think the word we're going to use, Judy, is probable positive antigen results, and a cumulative total of 50,838. I know Judy and Ed will be able to speak more to this process and these numbers.

The positivity rate for the 28,669 PCR tests recorded on New Year's Eve was 11.22%. As we have noted over the past week, we have seen lower than average testing numbers over the past week, and we attribute at least a good part of that to the fact that those choosing to get tested during the holiday season are those who are more than likely showing symptoms. Please God that is a contributing factor to the high positivity rate that we have. We had been averaging, by the way, about 58,000 tests a day.

The statewide rate of transmission currently sits at 0.92. That is a good sign, as it suggests that the spread of the virus is slowing. However, with 2,292 new PCR cases today, that slowing is coming from still a very large top number.

Across our health systems as of last night there were 3,633 total patients being treated, 3,438 confirmed COVID positive and 195 who were awaiting their test results. There were 664 patients requiring intensive care and 476 ventilators that were in use.

Throughout Sunday, yesterday, 295 live patients were discharged, but 395 went in. While these are not yet confirmed, so we're comparing apples to oranges, hospitals reported 60 deaths.

We begin the New Year much where we ended the old, so we must begin the New Year in the same war footing and taking the same precautions as we did the old. This remains a fight we must engage in together to save every life we can to push these numbers down and to gain the upper hand against this virus.

Today, we must also report the loss of another 38 blessed brothers and sisters from our New Jersey family from COVID-related complications. In 10 months, we have lost 19,244 residents, 17,223 whose deaths are confirmed to have been from COVID, and ironically, 2,021 probable deaths. Now we begin the year by remembering, as we do every day, three more of those we have lost. We want to start up in Bayonne. I want to thank Mayor Jimmy Davis for bringing this one to our attention. Bayonne's own Franco Amato. He passed on Christmas Eve. Franco was born in Tripoli and raised in Catania, Sicily. He lived in the United States for 60 of his 74 years. From 1966 through 1969, he served in the United States Army, a period in which he also saw a tour of duty in Vietnam. After returning home, he spent more than four decades in Computer Engineering, first for Hewlett Packard and then for one of its successor companies Agilent Technologies. Always proud of his roots and heritage, Franco was an active parishioner at Our Lady of Assumption Church, served as the President of the Bayonne Sicilian Citizens club and the Sicilian Federation of New Jersey. He was a member of the Bayonne Columbus Committee and marched as their Columbus Day Parade Grand Marshal in 2011.

Franco leaves his life partner Francis, who was a nurse, as well as his former wife, Carolyn – Judy, you guessed it, also a nurse – and his children, Joseph, Franco and Eric. I had the honor of speaking with Eric last week. He is a Captain, Pat, in the Bayonne Police Department, and he and his brothers have each chosen a life of public service. I believe it's Franco, his brother, who was also COVID positive. Franco also leaves behind their spouses as well as Francis' daughter Elizabeth, as well as his grandchildren, Ryan, Dominic and Madeline and his aunt and uncle Nancy and Sal. He also leaves many family members back in Italy, including his sister Lina, brother-in-law Carmelo, niece Molina and nephew Sergio. We thank Franco for his service to his adopted homeland and to his contributions to the culture of Bayonne and may God bless and watch over him and his family.

Next up, we remember Brian Phelan. The former mayor of Mendham Township in Morris County, Mayor Phelan passed on December 19th at the age of 78. Brian gave 60 years total to Mendham and its people. He spent a total of 20 years on the Township Committee and holds the record for the longest continuous service on that body. And he gave 35 years in active duty to the Brookside Engine Company, to which he served at one point or another as Chief and President.

When he wasn't busy working for his community, Brian worked in the engineering field as Director of Marketing Services in the Florham Park offices of ASCO Power Engineering. He was a graduate of the Newark College of Engineering, what we now know is New Jersey Institute of Technology, and he spent a total of 42 years with ASCO, retiring in 2010. Brian leaves behind his wife Lynn and daughter Melissa. I had the great honor of speaking with them last week as well. He also leaves behind a grateful community in Mendham. We thank Brian for his commitment to the people of Mendham. May God bless him and watch over him and his family.

Finally for this day, we honor the life of Frederick Makin II, of not far from you, Jared, Lynncroft. Rick passed away one week ago yesterday. For 38 years, Rick was an editorial entertainment editor at the Asbury Park Press. That the Point Pleasant High and Bowden College grad would hold that title wasn't a surprise, as Rick moonlighted as an actor and singer, performing in more than 50 musicals and plays at Red Oak Music Theatre in Lakewood with Asbury Park's Premier Theatre Company, and at the First Avenue Playhouse in Highlands, among many other venues. Even in his retirement, music was central to his life as he directed the Keyport Senior Center Chorus and sang in the Tower Hill Church Choir in Red Bank.

Rick leaves behind his beloved wife Carine, that's her on the left, and I had the great honor of speaking with her last week. He also leaves behind his children Bob, Melissa, Lisa, and Linnea, and their spouses as well as his 10 cherished grandchildren and one great granddaughter. Rick spent his life bringing enjoyment to audiences. Those he performed in front of and those he informed through the Asbury Park press. May God bless and watch over him, and may he be singing a show tune in heaven.

So Franco, Brian and Rick are the first three members of our New Jersey family we remember in the year 2021. We know there will be more in the days and weeks to come. Our job is to protect every life we can, in any way that we can, be it through maintaining our practices of social distancing, wearing our face masks, getting vaccinated when the time comes. We can do this, and we must do this together.

Now switching gears, as we often do at this time to recognize another tremendous small business working hard to keep our communities and our economy strong. Today we're going to Asbury Park, with Kimmy Massey and her rock and roll themed cake shop, Confections of a Rock\$tar, where everything is made from scratch and everything has a bit of rock-and-roll attitude. Confections of a Rock\$tar opened in 2012 when Kimmy and her partner Lisa combine their two passions, music and baking. For the past eight years their shop has been a must-do on Cookman Avenue and has also been the scene of numerous wedding proposals, with Kimmy baking the cakes for many of those subsequent weddings.

To help stay strong as the pandemic impacted business, Kimmy and Lisa worked with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to receive a grant that has allowed them to pay their bills and stay in business. Kimmy has also been an ambassador for Asbury Park's small businesses generally, using her social media presence, 18,000 followers by the way, and counting, to promote other places in Asbury Park over the past months. I had the opportunity to check in with Kimmy last week to thank her for her strength and advocacy. Asbury Park is lucky to have her. Kimmy's shop will be closed this month as she reinvents her menu for 2021. By the way, when they reopen they are at 550 Cookman Avenue, but visit them online at confectionsofrockstar.com. You can see it there at the bottom. But the next time you're in Asbury and the lights are on, 550 Cookman Avenue, I hope you'll make a stop by to say hello.

Next, yesterday was not a good day for the football teams that most New Jerseyans root for. However, we would be remiss if we did not recognize that guy, Assemblyman and dear friend Benji Wimberly, who I call coach, who doubles as the head football coach for the Hackensack High Comets and was named as the recipient of the 2020 Lou Rettino High School Coach of the Year Award by the New York Football Giants and Gatorade. I exchanged notes with Benji this morning, one of the all-time greats in the state.

I have, as I said, the honor and privilege of calling Coach Benjie Wimberly a dear friend and partner. Together, we worked hard, alongside many of his colleagues, notably State Senator Paul Sarlo I want to give a shout out, to ensure that our high school sports seasons could continue even in the face of the pandemic. As a coach and as a native Patersonian, Benji recognizes the importance of sports in helping our young people achieve their goals. So to you coach and Assemblyman and friend, congratulations and richly deserved.

Finally for today, I must acknowledge the passing on New Year's Eve of a dear friend, Monroe Township's own Mayor Gerry Tamburro. He was a dear friend, but more importantly, he was a great mayor and a great man. Gerry was retired when he and his late wife Carol, he lost Carol in 2019, moved to the township in 1997 but he quickly made public services vocation. He won a seat on the Township Council in 2001 and was elected mayor in 2015 and again in 2019. I met Gerry through his predecessor, another great mayor and great friend, Rich Pucci, who at this point was 67 years old and said, Phil, it's time for me to pass the torch to the next generation. Rich was 67 at the time, Gerry was 79 at the time. He was an exemplary servant who worked tirelessly to protect Monroe's taxpayers and their quality of life. He was a US Army Reserve veteran, and we salute his service to our nation as well. He leaves his and Carol's six children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren and nieces and nephews. One of his nephews is a colleague of Pat's and runs the Executive Protection Unit for the State Police, another great leader, Major Matt Lubertozzi.

According to Gerry's family, Gerry had a line he used to use a lot, and he used it on me. Quote, "Let me tell you a story." But it's our time to tell our stories about Gerry Tamburro. They are all of a kind friend and fierce community advocate who gave his golden years to the community he loved. I went through, I've never done this before, a drive-through visitation yesterday at the Monroe Senior Center. When I say that he leaves behind a big family, I saw it with my own eyes. I had the honor to step out of the car and say a prayer for him. May God bless you, Gerry. You will be missed by so many of your family and so many others.

That is a good place as any to end this first briefing on my side for 2021, by the way our 145th overall since this pandemic began. It is now my pleasure to introduce the woman who needs no introduction, please help me welcome the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. COVID-19 vaccinations continue to progress in our state, as the Governor and I saw at University Hospital in Newark. We have now reached three weeks since the first Pfizer doses were administered, and our healthcare workforce is now lining up for that second shot. As of this morning, 101,417 doses have been administered in the state. 120,000 doses have been set aside for long-term care facilities.

More sites for vaccinations continue to expand. As a reminder, New Jersey is currently vaccinating the 1A population, healthcare personnel. Those include paid and unpaid persons serving in healthcare settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials. There are currently more than 200 sites for the healthcare workers to get vaccinated. This includes all individuals, whether you work in a facility or in the community. You may work at a dentist's office or Urgent Care Center, or you may be in community nursing or visitation. You can get vaccinated at one of the 200 sites currently available. Two mega sites will open this Friday, one in Morris County and one in Gloucester County. Each of those sites will have 1,000 doses a week for the 1A population. Vaccination sites will continue to be updated at COVID19.nj.gov/vaccine.

The pharmacy partnership for long-term care program continues to vaccinate this vulnerable population. To date, 69 vaccination clinics have been held at long-term care facilities. 4,285 long-term care residents and more than 3,800 staff have been vaccinated. 193 facilities have vaccination clinics scheduled this week, and another 615 have been scheduled through the end of January.

Outbreaks among these vulnerable populations continues to be a challenge, both nationally and in New Jersey. As I've said previously, despite testing, sufficient PPE and staff, the virus is still circulating in these facilities because it is still circulating at high levels in our communities. New Jersey currently has 428 active outbreaks in our long-term care facilities. Extra vigilance is essential in these facilities and other congregate settings, such as psychiatric hospitals, centers for the intellectual or developmental disability population, in prisons, because of the increased risk of infection. An example of the impact can also be seen at our psychiatric facilities, where since the beginning of the pandemic 303 patients have tested positive. Because of the higher risk of COVID-19 in these settings, we have included this group in the 1A category. 1,239 vaccinations have been completed in our psychiatric hospitals. 30% of the patients and 18% of the staff have been vaccinated.

As the Governor stated today, we will begin reporting probable cases diagnosed through antigen testing. Previously, we included only lab-confirmed results of molecular tests, which use a technique known as polymerase chain reaction, PCR. These tests work by rapidly making millions of copies, millions to billions of

copies of the viral-related DNA. If there are even small amounts of this genetic material in the sample, it will be detected. Thus, the PCR tests are highly sensitive and very specific. However, since molecular tests are almost always performed in specialized labs, it is relatively a slow process with a longer turnaround time. The antigen test, on the other hand, is much simpler and can be done in many doctor's offices using a nasal or throat swab. However, it is somewhat less sensitive than the molecular test. There needs to be more virus present before the test will turn positive. But because of its ease of use, antigen tests are available in many settings, some of which are not accustomed to reporting data to the department. We continue to connect these entities to our reporting database to get a fuller picture of the tests conducted, and those coming back positive, to enhance our knowledge of disease spread in the state.

Moving on to my daily report, the Governor shared our hospitals reported 3,633 hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients and patients under investigation last evening. That number has stayed fairly stable over the last several weeks. There are 664 individuals in critical care, and 71% are on ventilators. There are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are a total of 72 cases in our state.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 54.9%, Black 17.2%, Hispanic 19.8%, Asian 5.3%, other 2.8%. Of the deaths in our state, 47% have been among those of 80 years or older, 47%; 33% are among those 65 years of age to 79; 16% 50 to 64; and 4% 30 to 49. Clearly, almost 80% of our deaths are in those 65 years or older.

At the state veteran homes since December 31st, there have been two additional deaths among residents at the Vineland home. One resident was a recovered patient who had tested positive for COVID and was in hospice.

The daily percent positivity as of December 31st in New Jersey is 11.22%. The Northern part of the state 9.69, the Central part of the state 11.66, and the Southern part of the state 14.48. That concludes my daily report. Stay safe, be vigilant and for the new year avoid gatherings, mask up, continue socially distancing. Wash your hands frequently. Stay home. If you're sick, call your provider, get tested. Together we can do this, as the vaccine gives us hope for a future better than the present we live in. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you, as always. A question, 428 active outbreaks in long-term care, just for everyone's benefit, you define active outbreaks of two or more, so there could be as little as two or there could be, unfortunately multiples of that.

Secondly, thank you for always reminding us of the disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities of this virus. As we say many times, it didn't invent them, but it has laid them bare. On your age analysis, it's overwhelmingly striking. 79.8% are 65 or older and at the other end of the spectrum, thank God I'm knocking on every bit of wood I can, only four persons under the age of 18 we've lost and a total of 67, including those four, under the age of 30. But the impact on seniors is overwhelming.

Pat, good afternoon. Good to have you. Compliance, weather I think we're clean for the next few days. Could you also enlighten us on the increasingly warm relationships between the Philadelphia Eagles and the New York football Giants? Any of the above, please?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks, Governor. Good afternoon. Since we last met, there's been five Executive Order compliance citations reported to the ROIC. One was Gabohamo's Pork in Newark cited for workers not wearing their masks. Star Divas Plus, also in Newark, operating after authorized hours, employees not wearing masks. In Newark also, Lucky Nails and Spa Studio, operating after hours as well. In Kenilworth, police responded to Ava's Kitchen and Bar where there was a large private party going on. The owner was cited for an EO violation. And in Harrison on Saturday, police responded to an indoor soccer facility where approximately 400 people were in an indoor league, food and drinks being served, no social distancing, no masks, and the organizer was cited for that.

Although I don't have much color on the Giants and the Eagles, I do note that 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the New Jersey State Police. Colonel Schwarzkopf, unfortunately, didn't leave us a playbook on the Spanish Flu because that was in 1918, but the men and women of the State Police are honored and humbled for the century of service that we've given to New Jersey. We look forward to kicking off our 100th anniversary in similar fashion with the service to the citizens of this great state. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Pat. I would think that maybe when this gets behind us and the weather's warmer, celebrating that 100th anniversary outside somewhere, not inside of a soccer facility in Harrison with no masks and no social distancing with 399 of our friends, which is hard for me to fathom that. I mean, I don't know -- where are you if you're doing that? You've been under a rock for 10 months. It just takes my breath away. Thank you for that, as always.

We'll start over here with Mike, nice to see you, Happy New Year. Before we do, we'll be on the rhythm that we've started a few weeks ago, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, unless you hear otherwise. We'll be with you at one o'clock on Wednesday. I'm not sure about any White House VTCs, they are obviously focused on other matters at the moment so I wouldn't want to get in their way. It's only a pandemic, folks. But right now we have none scheduled, unless you were aware of one, if either of you are aware. So with that, tentatively tomorrow electronically, Wednesday at 1:00, Mike, good to see you. Happy New Year.

Q&A Session

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Thanks, Governor. Happy New Year. Just to clarify on the 101,417 vaccines that you announced today. Can you clarify, is that people who have just gotten the first dose or is it first and second doses?

Governor Phil Murphy: There's only a very few number of people who have got second, they only started today, so it's overwhelmingly first.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: And then Commissioner, you said last week that the state had gotten 400,000 vaccines through December, yet we're at this 101,000 vaccinations point. What accounts for the gap there? Is that just a reporting delay? I know you had mentioned logistical problems last week. Can you say anything else about whether they're being resolved? And if not, why not?

And then Governor, just one final follow up on a question from last month about purchase orders that the state has put out there for PPE. Do you have any idea when those public records could be released? Any more insight as to why they haven't been released yet? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start with the end and then migrate to Judy. I have no date for you. I don't have a good answer in terms of why not? But as I said, we stand for transparency period, full stop. At the end of this, there's going to be a full accounting for every move that we made, including PPE. I think there's without question a reporting gap as part of this and in fact, as we sit here now, I suspect that the number is many thousands more than the number that Judy and I are using, which was as of this morning. Judy, do you want to add more color to that, if you could?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: 400,000 doses had been delivered, just general numbers, 100,000 were administered; 120,000 put aside for long-term care, of which 1,000 of them have been administered. I shared that by the end of January we expect most of long-term care to be taken care of. We have 180,000 dose gap. Some of it is reporting. For example, I know that the psych hospitals are behind in their reporting. The numbers I gave you were sent to me this morning directly from the psych hospitals. Getting into the system has proven to be logistically part of the problem. But other than that, I think it's people, after the holidays, will be lining up. We did get anecdotal information that people did not want to get vaccinated during the holidays in case they didn't feel well. So hopefully, by the end of this week, we'll have much better reporting.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think our reality is very typical right now in America. we also see that. By the way, to Judy or Ed, have you heard any amount? Because I've not, any incidences of so-called allergic or other reactions? We're not aware of that, which is something I wanted, I meant to say at our virtual on Wednesday, and with the passage of a number of more days, it's even more relevant to say that. I hope I'm knocking on wood on that one too, I hope it stays that way. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. When is the health department going to spell out who's in group 1B? Will that be done by a vote of the Professional Advisory Committee? What kind of pressure is being applied to include certain workers? Is the health department considering spacing out the doses by more than the recommended three or four weeks? Some states have included people over 65 before essential workers. Is there any thought in New Jersey to doing that?

And non-vaccination, there were more issues last week leading to unplanned downtime at the Labor Department, leaving people unable to get their benefits. People are frustrated that nine months into the pandemic, there are still technical problems and it's difficult to get answers from the department. What will you do to fix these systems? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me start with the last one. I can't give you any insight on unplanned downtime. But if you're going to have downtime, last week's probably the one week of the year that you would have it. If you're still waiting for your benefits and you're frustrated, I don't blame you. You will get if you're eligible, you'll get every penny you deserve. And this should not make you feel any better. So this is not meant to make you feel better. I would put our record up against any American state in terms of ploughing through a tsunami of a backlog. But in terms of, Dan, will you follow up if there's a specific reason on the downtime?

Judy, you'll jump in on the 1B. There is quote-unquote pressure, it is a lot of folks who are raising, rightfully, you know, I've got cancer, I'm old, I work in this particular community, I live in this particular community, whether they are essential, frontline, vulnerable. That's understood. I've not been a party to any discussion of spacing this any more than the manufacturers have wanted to but Judy, you should weigh in there. Some states have sort of turned their back on the 1A CDC protocols. Florida, I know, is one of them where I believe the Governor has said there's no need to vaccinate a young, healthy healthcare worker. Let's put an older person up at the head of the line. I'd like our supplies to have the answer and/both. We see enormous value to having our healthcare workers, that's who Judy and I witnessed this morning, getting their second dose because it basically gives that essential -- remember the one thing we can't let get overrun here are our hospital systems. Judy said this many times, I have begun to amplify it many times as well. If you look at our capacities, we feel really good about every capacity except healthcare workers. And the vaccine, and now the second wave, the booster shot, the second shot will allow us to create that capacity, if you will, that we have here too for not been able to have. Judy any more color on spacing, 1B or any other matters?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. The Professional Advisory Committee, as I've shared in the past, meets twice a week. They'll be meeting tonight to discuss the 1B categorization and the prioritization. As far as the timing of when we move 1B in, we're balancing the number of healthcare workers remaining to be vaccinated based by surveys of people that are telling us that they desire to be vaccinated, versus vaccine availability. Those numbers don't match yet. When they get closer, we'll open up 1B, probably by segments, and start moving in the most essential workers with, again, health and safety being at the front of the list.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, you or Ed, there's no discussion that Pfizer is a 21-day and Moderna is a 28-day, we're sticking by the book, right? Okay, thank you for that. You good? We've got one in the back, here we go, and then Brent, we will come down to you after this. Please.

Reporter: If you live in New York, but work in New Jersey, can you get a vaccine?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, if you're a healthcare worker, or if you are in a long-term care facility, right? Thank you. Brent, and thank you for asking one.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Some states, notably Ohio over the weekend, are reporting widespread resistance among long-term care workers to receive the vaccine. Is New Jersey seeing similar resistance? Should it be mandatory for long-term care workers to get the vaccine?

Is the state intentionally holding back a reserve at all to make sure the second doses are available? When will appointments be available on the state's website? You keep reminding people that the virus doesn't take off holidays and weekends, but it seems that it does take off for vaccination efforts. Why is that?

And then the last one from Brian Thompson of NBC. Governor Cuomo just said that vaccine providers have seven days in New York to administer the vaccine or lose it and could face fines. What are your thoughts on that? Seven days to administer the vaccine or they get their supply taken away or get fined.

Governor Phil Murphy: I have not heard of long-term care resistance, I don't know if Judy or Ed have. I've not heard. I read the same Ohio story I think you did. Judy should weigh in on second doses hold back and appointments. The vaccines on weekends, it's simple. This is why this is, with all due respect to the federal government that deserves a good amount of credit for the development of the vaccine. You're basically

shipping these out and asking the very people who are at the frontline fighting a pandemic to be the same people to not just get the vaccine, but to administer it. I would think that part of the reason on the weekend is you've got staff issues.

Then lastly, seven days or you lose it, the first I'm hearing it. I would hope that we can be as coordinated as possible. I've got no insight on the New York situation. But Judy, anything on second doses, hold back, appointments, weekends, etc.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, on second doses, the federal government has held back the second doses. We do have availability and they will be released starting now because Pfizer is ready for the second dose. In seven more days, we'll be getting the second doses of Moderna, so we feel pretty comfortable on that availability. As far as supply being taken away, we have not discussed that but we are in contact with all of our vaccine sites to determine whether they need more doses or whether we hold back and give that to places that are vaccinating at a higher rate. So no takeaways, but it will affect going forward because we want to make sure that within 24-48 hours that no vaccines are left on the shelf, that every vaccine is given.

The last thing if you don't mind, could I talk about the Medical Reserve Corps? In every county we have a Medical Reserve Corps where we have put out an alert NVax Matters, for individuals that can serve as vaccinators; physicians, nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, anyone who is certified to inoculate to sign up with their County Medical Reserve Corps, because we do need vaccinators particularly when we bring up all the mega sites. I encourage particularly recently retired individuals to sign up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I think one other question Brent had was appointments. When would you expect appointments will be available on the website?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: When we open up 1B we should have appointments available, so the system should come up about a week before that. I would expect in a couple of weeks, we will see something.

Governor Phil Murphy: God willing, that's assuming the feds continue to deliver the goods. Thank you. Sir, have you got anything? Yep.

Reporter: On the vaccine rollout, as the state sets up its own large vaccine sites, what steps are being taken to ensure there is sufficient staff to administer the shots? Like once again calling up volunteers or military personnel?

Also, is there any timeline on those six mega sites? Some educators have raised worries about this weekend's clearance to open youth indoor sports like hockey and basketball at a time of elevated COVID counts and the possibility they could go even higher after the holidays, potentially imperiling the restart of schools. Can you explain your decision and timing and respond to those worries?

On other topics, immigration advocates say there are now hunger strikes at both Essex and Hudson County jails, where ICE detainees are demanding the release so they can fight their deportation cases from home. Have you heard about these actions and what is your response?

And a question for Health Commissioner Persichilli. As of today, how many vaccine doses does New Jersey have on hand that had been received, specifically received, from the federal government?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think we just answered your first question a minute ago. That is that Judy just said that she's looking to surge, especially recent retired healthcare workers. You need a healthcare training and/or background here. People have said, well, gosh, what about the National Guard? There are members of the National Guard who have a healthcare background or profession, in which case we need them, but they're going to be deployed and I would guess, State Police in OEM is in the same category, Pat, on doing things like structurally building the mega sites, by example. That's that.

Listen, the indoor sports, it's a very difficult decision. We didn't come to it lightly. We're balancing physical and mental health here. We are going to specifically call out the knuckleheads who gathered by the hundreds in Harrison at an indoor soccer tournament, it sounds like, which is completely unacceptable. But we believe

that if you stick to the books, which is 10 people or fewer, or only more than that if you need that number of people to play the sport itself. So coach, players, referees, and you do not have any spectators and you do it responsibly, we believe we are able to take the steps we have been taking.

I'd say two things on hunger strikes. There's no good reason for a hunger strike. So please, God, this gets resolved. Secondly and specifically, if my math is right, we have 16 days of this administration left in Washington. I believe we will turn a very meaningful page in our whole immigration mindset with President Joe Biden.

Have we addressed the last question already, how many doses received?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, as of last week, the state received 405,000 doses. We do not stockpile. We put the order in Tiberius, and then the federal government sends the doses directly to the sites. There is no stockpiling by the state. We do not have storage of the vaccines at the state level. It all goes directly to the vaccine sites.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Thank you, Governor. Happy New Year. This first question was kind of touched on but I believe, Governor, that you said you weren't aware of any situation here. Several reports have come out recently regarding the frontline healthcare workers and nursing home workers that are nervous about getting vaccinated. Most notably, a national Kaiser Family Foundation survey found a third of the workers have not taken the shot. Do we have healthcare workers either in the nursing homes or in hospitals that we are aware of that are still not comfortable getting vaccinated? We've heard through the grapevine about a third of them still are nervous or wary about doing it. Do we have any specific numbers on this? Could you please comment on this?

Maybe also, Dr. Ed, if you could also give us some insight into whether or not we still believe these vaccines are extremely safe and tested.

Final question, now that the holidays are over, are we expecting to see an increase in the volume of vaccine coming into Jersey? The Commissioner, I believe, just said 405,000 were in December. What is the target that we're expecting in January? Do we expect to make this projection, this target? And what about beyond January, even looking into February? Do we have a sense about what kind of an increase we're expecting? Do you think it's still reasonable that 70% of New Jersey adults can get vaccinated within six months? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dave, I will give you my thoughts on both of those, and then turn it to Judy and Ed. Listen, I'm not suggesting that there aren't people out there who are aren't nervous about this. I'm just not aware of any big wave of folks in that category. I think with the passage of time, and the lack of horror stories associated with vaccinations, and that's where we are now, we're now beginning week four. Again, very little anecdotal or other evidence that people have been having bad reactions, etc., to it. So God willing, and by the way, I think those numbers, I have seen the same numbers. For the general population they have either come down or gone up, depending on which way you look at it but they've gotten better over the past month or two relative to speculation that was out there saying September.

Listen, if we were sitting here on December 4th, and Judy will correct me if I'm wrong here, and I'll just make two comments on the vaccine volume and what we expect, we would have told you what the feds were telling us and it turns out that would have been wrong. They under delivered. I don't have a specific number for January or February, Judy may, but those numbers are going up.

The second observation I'd make is I don't think we can underestimate on either good or bad the transition of a federal administration in what will be 16 days. I think, overwhelmingly, this is a good development but the actual handoff itself, given how complex this is, I don't think we can underestimate. That's a big wildcard when you look at what January numbers are going to look like or February numbers. Judy or Ed. Ed, we've got to get you in from the bullpen here. I would think with the passage of time, the increase in the number of folks getting vaccinated, the Lesser or absence of horror stories, that that that builds a confidence, especially for healthcare professional, Judy's got a piece of paper, hold up here.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We did a poll survey from December 20th to the 26th. We surveyed 1,084 individuals in New Jersey. This was compared to the poll survey of 1,113 from the 13th to the 19th. From the 13th to the 19th, 44% of the population that were surveyed said they would definitely get the vaccine, 28% said unsure, and 27% said no. From the 20th to the 26th, 53% said they would definitely get the vaccine. So it went from 44% up to 53%, 23% unsure, so that was 28% down to 23%, and 24% said no, 27% down to 24%. Those 70-plus age group, 83% definitely would get the vaccine, 60 to 69 67%, 50 to 59 58%, 40 to 49 50%, 30 to 39 47%. Pretty high percentages increase in one week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, do we have a January expectation from the feds in terms of numbers?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, the logistics of this is a little bit more complicated, because now it's based on we put the order in, and then they tell us what we're getting back and then it is shipped directly to the site. And then the site has to claim it and verify the numbers. So it's a process.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, any wisdom on passage of time, lack of horror stories giving more confidence to take this?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Yes, I mean, let me put it relatively simply. In New Jersey, we've had about half a million cases of COVID with almost 20,000 deaths. In the United States, we've given almost 10 times that number of doses or over 4 million doses with zero deaths from the vaccine. I certainly would take my odds with the vaccine over the virus any day of the week.

Governor Phil Murphy: That is well put. By the way, the survey that you announced, last week's finding, they actually surveyed the people at that indoor soccer gathering and they said vaccine for what? Thank you, Dave. Nikita will take us home.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: So I know you're familiar with Nikki Tierney. She's one of your neighbors in Middletown who is seeking a pardon after pleading guilty to a non-violent offence, a non-violent felony some 12 years ago. As you're aware, with discussions from legislators and others over the last several months, she's seeking to become a licensed drug and alcohol counsellor. Do you have a timeline on evaluating her pardon application? And, more broadly, what steps are you taking to implement the legislation you signed as part of your second chance agenda?

Separately, I know the early voting bill is up in an Assembly Committee on Thursday. I'm wondering, is there an agreement with the Legislature to implement that sometime this year? And if so, is that agreement for the spring or for the fall?

And you touched on this at the start of the conference but I wanted to ask specifically about it. Did you listen to the recording of President Trump and the Georgia Secretary of State? And if so, what was your response?

And then I have one question from Dan Munoz, who asks, why not just sign the marijuana bill on January 1st and then do a cleanup bill later? He says there's now effectively a constitutional crisis because the state constitution says weed is legal but the law says otherwise.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start with the end. We say unequivocally three things. It's not legal. We did not miss a window and we're having very constructive engagement as we have from the get go on this with legislative leadership. That's for Daniel.

I listened, I don't think I listened to the entirety of this call, because I'm told it was one hour long, which is hard to believe and it sounds like was fairly one sided. But I listened to enough of it that I was appalled. Literally appalled. It just takes your breath away. Now we know why the President left Florida and went to the White House on New Year's Eve day.

Early voting, without commenting on the specifics of the bill, I'm all in and I think if we move quickly enough, I believe it can be in effect for primaries, Parimal, I am looking at you, what's your guess? Potentially?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Potentially, but definitely for the general in November.

Governor Phil Murphy: But we're all in for that, without commenting on the specifics of the bill. I've got no update on Nikki Tierney, the woman you asked about. That is a case that's been raised by a number of folks with us, but no update on that. And on the second chance agenda, no specific update, but we'll come back to you with maybe more color on that because it's something we're committed to. I want to be the state that gives folks, if they if they deserve it, a second chance. Thank you.

With that, thank you, everybody. Again, tomorrow we'll be electronic Wednesday at one o'clock unless Dan Bryan or someone on his team tells us otherwise. Judy, you mentioned this, and maybe as we close, even through our masks, we've had a remarkable consistency in hospitalizations. It's been bouncing, if you look at it over the past, really now three weeks, it's been in that range of sort of 3,400 to 3,800. Today, it is again. This is more an observation than a question, just to repeat what we've said many times. That's the one thing that we cannot allow to be overrun. And remember, if you're in the 3,600 and something COVID beds, our peak was 8,270. If you've got 600 and something in ICU, our peak was 2,080. Remember, we had no elective surgery when both of those peaks were achieved. Judy and Ed and the team are leading the charge here, all levers remain on the table. But if you want to sort of look at something in terms of quote-unquote how we're doing, you compare us right now to Los Angeles County, or some of the other states in the nation, and we do nothing but pray for better times there as well, where you've got literally people in beds in waiting rooms in the emergency room, and being treated in that forum. Thank God that is not happening here. But that's the one thing people ask us all the time, are you reconsidering this or reconsidering that? Those are the numbers that we cannot allow ourselves to get overrun by.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: If I'm anxious about anything, it's the 14-day incubation period post-holiday, post New Year's Eve. So we work with the collaborators, we're on the phone with them weekly to prepare for a surge starting mid-January. We will be as prepared as we can be and we're hoping that it doesn't happen.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't want to go too long here. Ed, let me ask you this. It's too early to say on Christmas, right? So Christmas is 10 days ago, too early to declare victory or defeat, right?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: It's too early, particularly since you had a second holiday right after that kind of skewed the numbers, so it's tough to tell. You know, it's reassuring that we're not seeing any big jumps but I absolutely agree with the Commissioner that, you know, ask me 10 days or so from now, I'll feel a lot more comfortable with the answers.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, too early to declare victory or defeat. And importantly, one of the models that we discussed now several weeks ago, as I recall, peaked on January 14th or January 15th and this is number of cases, not hospitalizations, in fairness, but not surprisingly, that's two weeks after New Year's Eve. Those are the numbers that we're watching. We're watching all these numbers, but those are the ones that we cannot allow ourselves to be on the wrong side of.

Again, Judy and Ed, thank you as always. Happy New Year. Pat, likewise to you, to Jared, Parimal, Dan, the rest of the team. Stay at it, folks. This is not forever and for always. The vaccines are here. Slowly but surely, they will be broadening out to the population through the steps that we've discussed. Hopefully this epidemiological modelling curve will peak. It's not going to be tomorrow, for sure but the weather one of these days, maybe 60 or 90 from now, will get warmer and better. This is all within our reach, folks. God bless you all. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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