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Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: August 3rd, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. With me to my right is the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the state's epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, another familiar face. Great to have you. The guy to my left needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We're joined by the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples. Good afternoon, everyone. Let's get right into it.

We are preparing for tomorrow's arrival of tropical storm Isaias, which will impact the entire state in one way or another. The entire state is currently under a tropical storm warning and a flash flood watch. Pat, you'll add some more color to this, I know. Leading up to the storm, there will be rip currents along our beaches. Please take extra precaution if you're on the beach today. Heed all the warnings and directions from lifeguards.

Depending on where you are in inland New Jersey, you should expect drenching rains through tomorrow from three to six inches and winds across many parts that will be gusting in the 40 to 50 mile an hour range. Along the coastline, your biggest threat will be the winds with gusts up to 75 miles per hour possible, which may also mean some storm surge flooding. Obviously, there is the possibility for some trees to come down and for power outages.

I was back and forth with the leadership of the big public utilities yesterday, just getting a sense of their preparedness. We remind everyone that if you do experience a power outage, to call it in immediately to your electric utility. Don't assume someone else is doing that for you. While it will be a bad day to be out if you are out, do not attempt to drive into any flood waters. Turn around and don't drown. Stay alert for fallen power



lines. Do not attempt to go over or around them. Call them in immediately. By tomorrow night, this storm should be away from us, and the coming days will help us dry out after tomorrow. Again, for tomorrow, plan to just stay in and stay safe. Again, Pat will come with more details on this.

Next, over the weekend, the statewide rate of transmission continued its upward climb as we had expected in response to the increasing numbers of positive test results, which we have been receiving. Remember, this is a seven-day rolling average, Judy, and a trailing average as you point out all the time. Today, our rate of transmission stands at 1.48. By contrast, one month ago it was 0.87.

As we had discussed on Friday, we believe that some of this increase is attributable to indoor house parties and other events, which we have been seeing across the state. Again, I refer to the parties among other places in Middletown, which has led to nearly 60 cases among teens, as well as those on Long Beach Island, which led to nearly three dozen cases among lifeguards in Harvey Cedars and Surf City. There have been others. With the hot and humid weather we've been experiencing, we know that there have been many more such indoor parties taking place, which have not made the news.

We cannot be any clearer that indoor gatherings, especially large, crowded ones where social distancing isn't practiced, and face masks aren't worn. They just are not safe. As I warn, and we warned on Friday, we would not hesitate to take direction to further clamp down on indoor gatherings. Today, I am exercising this option, not with joy but out of necessity, which I hoped not to have to take in pulling back on such gatherings.

Today, we are retightening the restriction on indoor gatherings, which until further notice are now limited to 25% of a room's capacity but with a maximum of 25 persons. That's down from 100. This change, importantly, will not apply to weddings, funerals and memorial services, and religious and political activities protected under the First Amendment, which may continue under the current rules. They are also, by the way, limited to 25% of a room's capacity, but they can continue to have a maximum of 100 persons.

To be clear, this tightening caps indoor house parties at 25 people, period. Additionally, we welcome the proactive action by Airbnb to suspend and remove the listings of some 35 problem properties, which had received complaints from becoming merely party houses, including that of a Jackson Township property, which last week was the site of a party that raged with an estimated 700 people. This is a welcome step to not only restore some sanity and peace to neighborhoods, but to help us curtail the dangerous actions of a few that may put many people and entire communities at risk.

We know, by the way, and we need to repeat this. We know that there are many more of you who have been responsible in your actions, and who have taken your civic duties to help us defeat this virus seriously. Unfortunately, however, the actions of a few knuckleheads leave us no other course. We have to go back and tighten these restrictions once again until we begin to see the numbers of cases decrease not just for a day or two but over at least a seven-day trend, and our rate of transmission drop appreciably over a sustained period of time, these restrictions will remain in place.

We expect local police, and I know Pat knows this, to strictly enforce them. Additionally, as a point of both clarification and warning, we are seeing some restaurants which are attempting to serve patrons indoors by merely opening their street front windows. To be clear, this is not allowed. Unless your restaurant has open sides that amount to at least two of your four outer walls, you cannot seat and serve diners inside your premises. You can only serve diners outdoors. As with outdoor gatherings, we will look to local officials to enforce this restriction.

Look folks, it all comes down to this. The only way we can get to where we want to be with indoor activities, be it dining or anything else, is if everyone plays by the rules and no one tries to make and runs around them. This is not a game. This is about public health and safety. I fully understand the hardships that our restaurant industry faces among other industries, but we cannot move forward if a few knuckleheads think the rules don't apply to them, or they think they can be cute and skate by with a wink and a nod. Let me reiterate. We remain in a public health emergency. Over the past week, we saw numbers of cases that we had not seen in eight weeks. Our rate of transmission is now more than double where it was a few weeks ago. Everyone needs to get it together folks, and fast. This is not yet past us.

Next, and switching gears but only a bit to the issue of the preparations currently underway by school districts across the state for the upcoming academic year, which is only about five weeks away. Today, we are announcing and frankly clarifying that face coverings will be required for all students at all times while inside a school building regardless of social distancing unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health. The updated guidance from DOE will also include several exceptions to the standard including an exception for certain students with disabilities. This tightens the requirement we have previously put in place, which made at that point a strong recommendation for face coverings by students but would have only required them in crowded places like hallways.

The existing requirement for educators, staff, and visitors to wear face coverings at all times unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health remains in place. We know that face coverings work, and we will now ensure that everyone in a school building will wear one. Let's keep in mind, Judy, the Department of Education with your strong input came out with that strong recommendation about face coverings five weeks ago. If you look at our numbers from five weeks ago, they were a lot better than they are today. Not only is the science around face coverings becoming more and more clear in terms of the prophylactic value that it has, but our numbers have deteriorated. A school is not immune to the environment around it.

Additionally, the Department of Education is sharing its checklist of specific items that its county offices of education will use to ensure the District plans meet our guidelines. The Department of Education is also currently finalizing a frequently asked questions, or FAQ document, which outlines answers to some of the thornier questions that schools have been asking about their reopening plans. We hope the checklist and FAQ document will not only provide answers to questions that have been put to the department, but will also make it clear to district leaders and their reopening committees the expectations that are being placed upon them. And all plans will also be required to carry a direct attestation by educational leaders that district plans meet the expectations of the department guidelines.

Also, on Friday afternoon, I had the great pleasure of speaking with Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, a nationally recognized expert on educational policy who also serves as President of the California State Board of Education, which by the way oversees the country's largest public school system with roughly 6.3 million students. Linda has written extensively on international school reopening practices, and we spoke about the means and best practices through which other countries have approached school reopening. It was a thoughtful and constructive conversation, and we agreed to remain in touch as we continue to flesh out our plan for the fall. We have much to think about over the coming weeks, and we will continue to work with everyone across our educational committees with district leaders, educators, parents, and beyond.

And finally, for today, I am signing an executive order that will allow any public employee eligible for enrollment into the state health benefits plan to immediately enroll upon hire instead of waiting 60 days. Previously, the 60-day waiting period was waived only for public employees hired specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's order waives the 60-day waiting period for all public employees who are hired or are returning to work, because we must ensure that our workforce has access to healthcare during this once-in-a-century pandemic.

And with that, let's switch gears again and look at the overnight numbers. Yesterday, we received an additional 264 positive test results. That's the total cumulative, 182,614. It's nice to see that number, Judy, come down over the past couple of days. It's still 264, but it is down from some of the numbers we saw last week. Let's hope that keeps up. The daily positivity rate for test taken on July 30th is 1.88. That's also come down over the past five days each day. Let's hope it continue to come down. As previously mentioned, the rate of transmission has climbed to 1.48. In our hospitals yesterday, there were 356 confirmed COVID-19 patients, another 382 patients listed as persons under investigation. You add those two together, you get 738, 144 of whom were in intensive care, and 49 ventilators were in use. Overall, the metrics within the system remain strongly positive and we see separately that our national rankings continue to decrease.

Today, we're reporting another ten losses of life. Of these, three occurred over the past five days since Wednesday, July 29. There were five in-hospital deaths, Judy reported over the 24-hour period ending at 10:30 PM last night. However, as you have pointed out, they are not yet lab-confirmed and they are not part of today's count. The total number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths currently stands at 13,971 and the count of probable deaths also remains at 1,875.

As we do every day, let's recall a few more of these blessed lives we've lost. We start today by remembering Winston Pettway, Junior, of Teaneck, and he was 76 years old. Winston was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama and moved to New York after high school and met his future wife, Lois Ann. By the way, this October would've marked their 50th wedding anniversary. The couple moved to Teaneck to start their family, and they also started a business, LPH Packaging, which they ran together for more than 19 years. Even though he lived in the Bergen County suburbs, Winston was an outdoorsman, as you can see, enjoying trips to go hunting in south Jersey and fishing off the Jersey shore, and he also loved to cook, especially the Southern specialties that stayed with him from his childhood. His family will remember the love and compassion he showed to everyone he came in contact with. He often struck up long conversations with strangers, and how he could make everyone laugh. But he saved his longest conversations for his family and friends, whether it be in person, around a table, or over a text. Winston leaves behind his wife, Lois Ann, and daughter, Hope. I spoke with Hope, had that honor of speaking with Hope on Friday. She lives in Oakland, California, and her mom is visiting with her. He is also remembered by his sisters, Hattie and Phyllis, his sisters, brother-in-law, and many nieces and nephews, in addition to countless friends. May God bless him, watch over you, Winston, and your family.

Next, we move to the Jersey shore to remember Joseph Milon of Seaside Park. Joe was born in Passaic and returned to his hometown after graduating from college in Montana to begin what would ultimately be a distinguished 35-year career as a World History teacher at Passaic High School. While his school years were spent at Passaic High, Joe and his wife Carol, also an educator, by the way, and their family would spend their summers in Seaside Park where I was yesterday, where Joe also served as a seasonal police officer throughout the 1970s and into the early '80s. When his boardwalk patrol days ended, he took over as the kitchen and inventory manager at the Top of the Mast Restaurant in South Seaside Park. Being near the water was a lifetime love and after their respective retirements, Joe and Carol would split their time, wintering in Key West and aboard cruises around the world and then Joe would spend his summer updating his family and friends on their adventures. Joe had a big heart, which he shared with his beloved Carol. They were married for 54 years and with their children, Mary Ellen, Joe, John, and James, and their spouses, and his grandchildren, Maris, Emily, John, Gabrielle, and Juliette, Katie and Michael. He was especially proud of his kids and grandkids. I had the great honor on Friday speaking with his son, Joe and his wife, Carol, and Carol made an explicit invitation for me to swing by and see them the next time I was in Seaside Park, which I hope one of these days I can do. Joe also leaves behind his twin sister Patricia and her husband as well as his nieces and nephews. We thank Joe for a career spent inspiring young minds to love our common history. May God bless him and watch over him and his family.

And finally today, we remember Marlboro's Hedda Scheck. She was 89 years old. Get this story, folks. Hedda was born in Hotz Appel, Germany. When the Nazis rose to power, Hedda's father was taken to the Buchenwald concentration camp while she and her mother and two brothers were imprisoned. Her other three siblings had already left Germany for the United States and in December of 1938, after her mother bribed German officials to win her father's freedom from Buchenwald, the remaining family was able to escape to the United States. Hedda would ironically – and I think this is an incredible irony – would go on to have a long career working for the US Immigration and Naturalization Services. Hedda and her husband William moved to New Jersey from Brooklyn in 1991 and after his passing in 2001 – and by the way, wanting to remain an independent woman, as if I had to tell you that with that photo – Hedda got her driver's license at the age of 71. That fierce independent streak is one aspect of her that her family will never forget, nor will they forget her generosity, especially for charitable endeavors to benefit children or to combat hunger. Hedda is survived by her sons Andrew, and I had the great honor of speaking with Andrew on Friday, and Larry and their wives, Jackie and Lauren, respectively, who Hedda treated as her own daughters. She also leaves her three grandsons, Wayne, Jake, and Josh, who she took great joy in watching grow up and her granddaughter, Jenna, upon whom she doted and with whom she shared a special relationship. Aug wiedersehen, Hedda, [19:03 Foreign language], a tremendous life. May Hedda's memory be a blessing.

Winston, Joe, and Hedda never knew each other, but they all belonged to one family, our New Jersey family, just as did every single one of the nearly 14,000 residents who have lost – we have lost over the past four months. We remember them all and we honor them all.

Unrelated to COVID-19, I'd also like to quickly acknowledge the passing of long-time *Star-Ledger* reporter Sue Epstein, who passed away on Saturday due to complications from a brain tumor. For 42 years, she was an award-winning investigative journalist and court reporter and shared in a 2005 Pulitzer Prize. She mentored many throughout her years, and her innate knowledge of process and sources made her a newsroom go-to for many. We send our thoughts and prayers to her family, her former colleagues, and all who knew her.

Finally for today, I want to recognize another of the small businesses who the New Jersey economic development authority has partnered with to help them get through these unprecedented times. Newark-based and woman owned PABCO Industries supplies maintenance and cleaning supplies to a host of commercial and educational customers. It is also one of the nation's largest suppliers of paper lawn and leaf bags to governments and municipalities. PABCO was founded in 1998 by Linda Sherman on the left, who runs the business along with her husband, Richard, in the middle and son Todd.

With expenses piling up, and many commercial customers closed, PABCO looked to the EDA for assistance to cover some of their operating expenses, and to pay for their employees, and receive small business-focused grants and loans. I had the pleasure of speaking with Todd on Friday afternoon. Now, not only is PABCO open for business as it has been for the past 32 years, but they're ready to help us come out of this pandemic stronger and more resilient for the years to come. Again, everyone, we're going to get through this together. We're going to come out stronger and more resilient as a state.

First, we have immediate work to do to lower the rate of transmission and reverse the spread. Coronavirus is putting all of our hard work over the past four months at risk of being undone. We all need to be pulling together. There's no excuses anymore. The millions of you who have done extraordinary work, please keep it up. For those of you who are still trying to see the light as to what this is about, please see that light and join the rest of us. Together, we will get through this, as I said before, not without a toll being paid. The loss of life is overwhelming already. We'll get through this together as one family stronger than ever before. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. As the Governor has shared repeatedly, New Jersey residents worked hard to flatten the curve in our state. We asked for your help, and you did an incredible job. You stayed home. You social distanced. You masked up driving cases down tremendously. In order to keep the virus contained in our state, we need residents to continue to adhere to preventive measures. I know we all want life to return to normal, but COVID-19 is still circulating.

Now is not the time to be complacent. We need residents to be cautious and careful. Remember, the more people an individual interacts with, and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of becoming infected with COVID-19. COVID-19 can be spread by those who do not have any symptoms and don't know that they are infected. That's why it's important to everyone to take steps to protect the health of our families, our friends, our loved ones, and our neighbors. Stay at least six feet, about two arm's length apart from one another, especially those who are not from your household, in both indoor and outdoor spaces. Choose outdoor activities over any indoor activity. We know the risk of transmission is higher in indoor settings. We should all wear face coverings to protect each other because even if you don't feel sick, germs can spread to others through respiratory droplets produced by breathing, talking, coughing, and of course sneezing.

When wearing face covering, both your nose and mouth should be covered. Practice healthy habits, wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Don't touch your face. This is the easiest way for germs to get into your body. Keep hand sanitizer close. Use sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, that's isopropyl alcohol. Use it often and tell children and people around you to do the same. Cover coughs and sneezes. This keeps your germs away from others and off your hands. It is vital that we take these steps to lessen the spread of the disease in our communities.

Moving onto my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 738 hospitalizations of COVID-19 and persons under investigation, 144 of those individuals are in intensive care, and 34% are on ventilators. That is the lowest number to date. We are reporting no new cases of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in children. There are 55 cases in our state. The children infected, as I've shared in the past, have either tested positive for active COVID-19 or have had antibody tests that were positive. The ages of the children still range

from 1 to 18. One of those children are currently hospitalized. The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths in terms of race and ethnicity. The breakdown is as follows: white 54.1%, Black 18.3, Hispanic 20.2, Asian 5.5, and other 1.8.

I hope you have taken the opportunity to look at the new website that our communicable disease service has set up, which we'll have a breakdown of race and ethnicity to a finer degree. As the Governor mentioned, three of the ten deaths we are reporting today occurred over the past five days. One of those deaths reports back to May, and three occurred from June. The rest are from July. The state veteran's homes and the state psychiatric hospital's numbers remain the same. The daily percent positivity as of July 30th for the state is 1.8%, northern part of the state is 1.38, central 1.43, and the south 3.46. That concludes my daily report.

For residents that have questions about COVID-19, our call centers are still up and running. The New Jersey Poison Control Center and 211 have partnered with the state to provide information to the public on COVID-19. Call 211 for general information 24/7, or 1-800-962-1253 for medical information 24/7. The medical experts at New Jersey Poison Control Center have spoken to more than 45,300 people since the hotline was established at the end of January. You can also visit covid19.nj.gov for more information. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, get tested, and mask up, thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for the report. Thank you for your leadership every day. I want to give a plug for something, a law that I signed. We say this many times. You have been extraordinarily consistent in making sure everybody out there realizes the racial inequities of this virus including the children's inflammatory but the virus in its totality. We signed this bill last week, which essentially plus or minus replaces a federal premium that was being phased out, the Affordable Care Act, with one that is a state premium. A big slug of that will go directly into families that heretofore could not afford healthcare. They are overwhelmingly families of color. The words matter, and to your enormous credit there are actions that back those words up. That's one example of something that we hope – access to healthcare, social determinants of health, disproportionate presence in the essential workforce are three of the consistent underlying causes of these racial disparities. Access to healthcare, we've taken a – I believe a major step collectively to address that. Thank you for reminding us and for the actions that back up those very good words. Pat, compliance, storms, you're wearing multiple hats. You'll maybe give us a sports update, but over to you, thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Did they Yankees beat the Red Sox?

Governor Phil Murphy: They did beat the Red Sox, thanks for reminding me, I believe three times in a row.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Good afternoon, everybody. With regards to compliance over the weekend, there was two restaurants that were cited, one in North Arlington. Tejo's Restaurant was cited for the second time to the Governor's opening remarks. That owner thought that it was okay to have patrons inside as long as they were sitting by the windows. He was cited for his second time. In Edison, the owner of Akbar restaurant, police responded to a large gathering. There was in excess of 100 patrons in there, no face coverings, no social distancing. On top of that, there was a self-serve buffet. That owner was cited.

With regards to the storm, we spent a good part of the weekend on with our federal partners, National Hurricane Center, FEMA, Region II. We'll be on with them again this afternoon. We are concerned. It's going to be a statewide event. Although two to four inches of rain expected throughout most of the state, there are some bands that may produce five to eight with the highest winds being probably tomorrow afternoon around 1 to 8 o'clock. As the Governor said, we do hope that by late Tuesday night into Wednesday that it is out and has moved on.

I know the Governor also mentioned rip currents. When storms come up the coast like this, I know there's – people are in awe of mother nature. There's that natural tendency to be drawn to the shore. Rip currents can be deadly. Just a word of advice about never swimming alone and heeding those posted warnings. If you're going to go, I wouldn't even recommend it. Whenever possible, certainly swim on a lifeguard protected beach. As far as hurricane preparedness, I always remind folks of www.ready.nj.gov (<http://www.ready.nj.gov>) where Emergency Go Kits, which now include facial coverings, hand sanitizer, and we're ready for it, Gov, thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Pat. Again, folks, heed the warnings, rip currents. If your power goes out, don't assume your neighbor's calling it in. In fact, the more calls – honestly, the more calls the power company gets the more they can search to where they're getting those notifications. Please, God, don't go near a downed power line. In our time in office, you'll remember, folks, that we've had at least two fatalities of folks who ignored that advice. We can't afford to do that.

Dante, I think we'll start over here with Elise. We're going to be virtual with you tomorrow, and then we're going to be a little bit earlier on Wednesday. I think we're going to be at noon on Wednesday. Thank you and bear with us. We have a White House call later today. If there's anything important that comes out of that, we will get that to you in some form or fashion by Wednesday, obviously, at latest. Thank you for that. Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi, good afternoon, what's the PPE situation? Are we still acquiring ventilators for New Jersey's stockpile? Are we still sending out whatever PPE that arrives, that is not building supplies yet for a second wave? Is this the start of the second wave? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think you're going to hear that we're in a it comes in and it goes out mode still. Pat or Judy may want to correct me on that. I don't think we've ever graduated out of the first wave. I don't know whether or not since the last – I can't remember when last we spoke about ventilators. I know we have bulked up our capacity. We could give you a number. I don't have it off the top of my head today. You may have it Judy. I can't remember when last you asked about this, whether or not there's been any incremental purchases since then. Do you have color, either of you, on that? Judy, do you want to jump in?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I can give you some numbers. In our hospitals right now, we have about 2,452 ventilators. We have an additional 1,917. In use right now, totally, are 535. We believe right now we have enough ventilators. If we see that ventilator use starts increasing, we obviously will be looking for more. I think the use of alternate ventilators is increasing. They're finding different ways to care for people with COVID in respiratory distress. We have about 1,880 alternate ventilators in use.

Governor Phil Murphy: You've also got a ratio of ventilators to ICU patients, which has come down dramatically over time, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pronating has become a much more common step. What about non-ventilator PPE? Is it too harsh to say it's coming in and it's going out?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: You're got it right, Gov, it's still coming in and going out. I still point back to our first resource request of FEMA in the first week in March. That's still a steady flow that when it comes in it does go back out.

Governor Phil Murphy: You all, I know, have plan underway when we get to somewhat of a steady state here to require a minimum number of days supplies, etcetera. Tina, I was very quick to say I feel like we're still in the first wave, but you're the expert.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: I think we don't know what our true baseline is for COVID-19. I would actually say that we're probably on the opposite end of the first wave. I think only time will tell where our numbers go. Again, until we actually understand and go through another respiratory virus season, it's hard for us to really estimate what a true baseline is.

Governor Phil Murphy: Someone described this precisely three, four, maybe four plus months ago as an undulating – just a series of pulses up and down. That feels like that's what we're living. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon, now that you have this alarming uptick in infections, just using your words, in the likelihood of a second wave, the possibility of another round of shutdowns looms. Isn't this time to consider establishing some clear benchmarks like a level positivity rate or hospitalizations for each region so that companies, workers, and families can begin making adequate protections? Why is it okay to accept specific benchmarks for quarantining travelers from other states but not a useful approach for possible closings and reopenings including schools?

On the rate of transmission, as far as I understand it, it's sensitive to testing as some built in assumptions that lag by several days. If you had issues with testing at labs for several days recently, how confident are you that the rising rate of transmission the past week is accurate and not simply baring out that glitch?

Are temperature checks being done at airports? If not, why not? How do you know if every traveler coming into the airports is filling out the electronic survey?

Last, the Restaurant and Hospitality Association said at a press conference today that dining in restaurants is safer than other activities now permitted including riding buses and going shopping. The uptick in cases isn't linked to them because they aren't open. Do you have any response to that?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll take a shot, and then if you all could jump in here. These are somewhat in many cases in and around – at least your first three questions are in and around a similar series of questions. Another round of shutdowns, again, I think we've probably – we still have the pregnant question of what school looks like. I'm going to put that to the side for a second. We gave some more color on that today. Limiting indoor gatherings to the lessor of 25% or 25 people is a pretty meaningful step. I think we sit with that for the time being, and we monitor it. We also have outdoor gatherings at 500, and Judy – that's something Judy, I know has talked about as to whether or not that continues to make sense.

I think it's fair to say without putting words in your mouth, our big focus is on the inside. This somewhat gets to the RT question. We knew that when we had the big testing numbers last week that this number would go up. We knew as we said now for a month, that as we reopened, incrementally, the number would go up. It's gone up a little bit more uncomfortably than we had hoped. That's somewhat due to the activity we've described, indoor parties. It's also somewhat due to hotspots around the country, which are raging and the exposure we have to them. I'm going to say the following, and you all can correct me. I'm not sure if we know based on your question about the labs. The lab turnaround time has come down slightly, not sufficiently, but slightly, and that's a step in the right direction. I think it's fair to say that we're not sure if it's 1.48 relative to those tests, that you'd hang your hat on that, but we are absolutely comfortable that it is up meaningfully and it is over 1.

And then on benchmarks if you've got them for quarantining, why not have them for regular day-in, day-out decisions? I think we do. I mean, I think we need to – we've said we need low single-digit spot positivity, which we have and we need radio transmission under one, which we don't have. And I think that's where we are. I'll come back to temperature checks and electronic surveys. Judy can address that.

Dining and restaurants, here's the thing: you have to take your mask off, so I did not see the press conference, so I can't speak to exactly what they said. And for the most part, folks are being incredibly responsible in that industry, notwithstanding the enormous hurt that they're under, and we have nothing but extreme sympathy for that hurt. The fact is you can't eat or drink and have your mask on, and that isn't the case on a bus or a train or some other indoor activity. And I'll repeat something we've said many times. I can see – I think we all can see table service with drinks brought to the table a lot sooner and more clearly than we can see congregating around a bar.

Judy, anything on the electronics survey or temperature checks, or Tina?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: The electronics survey, I did not – I don't have my report. Our uptake last week was not as high as we wanted it to be, somewhere between 5 and 10%, pretty low comparatively to Connecticut, I must say. So we're working more on the public awareness aspects of that. On temperature checks and screening, temperature checks come under some controversy because of what the exact number is. Elderly individuals, their temperature control system is not as accurate. In children, it's much more – much higher. I don't know whether – I'm going to defer to the doctor.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: With temperature checks, that's always one possible metric that you can use for screening in addition to asking about different possible symptoms. As the Commissioner's alluding, there's a lot of different variation that comes into play when you do temperature checks. It's how well you take the temperature in the first place. As the Commissioner mentioned, with older individuals, they might not be able to mount a fever. So again, we look at that as one of many tools that could be used for screening.

Governor Phil Murphy: As for the basic question, I actually haven't flown, so I don't know. We'll come back to you and answer whether or not we're – yeah, that's right. And by the way, as you know, it may – the other piece, whether – regardless of if you're old or young, you could be asymptomatic which is why getting tested matters and why that turnaround time, getting as low as possible, also matters. Thank you.

Sam, is that you? I can't see. How are you?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Yeah, [inaudible 13:28]. Three and a half questions from me. You mentioned your sympathy with problems facing restaurants. Do you support allocating a portion of CARES Act funding to restaurants? You mentioned some of the larger outbreaks have been linked to short-term rentals and you applauded Airbnb's recent move. At this stage, are you encouraging county or local officials to restrict short-term rentals in any way? And last one, New Jersey implemented one of the strictest lockdowns in the US, and your administration was more conservative than most with its reopening plan. Given the outbreaks we're seeing and the time it's taking to get test results, was this inevitable, and is New Jersey proof positive that there's no safe way to reopen absent a vaccine?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is New Jersey – the last part?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Proof positive that there's no safe way to reopen absent a vaccine.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start with the last one, if I can. To some extent, as I mentioned, when we – so if you roll the clock back to when we opened up parks and I think golf at the same time with the first sort of steps that we took, and that's now back probably two and a half months ago, we signaled that we would do it incrementally, deliberately so we could assess versus taking ten steps at the same time. If you did only one or two steps, then you waited a beat or two, you could get a sense of the impact of that. And so we've gone through that process and we knew that as we opened up, we'd take on some more risk. I think three factors have evolved since we began that process. And I don't think any of them are insurmountable, which means I remain an optimist that we can have some sense of normalcy even pre-vaccine. I'm saying this as a non-medical expert here.

One is the flair-up that we've seen that's raging in the rest of the country. Dr. Birx yesterday spoke, Judy, to the point it isn't just urban communities. It's urban, suburban; it's rural. It's all over the place. That's really had two impacts. One is we've learned the hard way by looking at their examples that indoor stuff was the cause, particularly bars and close congregation. But the other less obvious piece at first and now painfully obvious is it put an enormous strain on national testing supplies. And that has extended the turnaround time to get a test back, which has in turn undermined our ability to contact trace and to isolate and quarantine. And then the third sort of wrench that's been thrown in the system, which I think we all should've probably expected, there's this mad as hell, not going to take it anymore people. It's 95 degrees out. Young people, in particular – it's human nature, so as the clock has gone on, folks have begun to a little bit fall off the wagon. For the most part, people are doing the right things but we've seen non-compliant indoor behavior.

And so can we recover from all of those as a nation and as a state? I believe we can. Do we need to take steps that help us recover more quickly? Pausing on indoor dining or bars, rolling the indoor capacities back to the lesser of 25% or 25 people are steps that we hope accelerate getting back to a better place. We want to see a better take-up on information that folks give us when they've been out of state in a hotspot state. The self-quarantining has to be that personal responsibility. That has to be paramount if you've traveled out of state. If you think you're sick and you haven't got your test back yet, we need you to do the right thing, which is basically stay away from folks, wearing face coverings, which we've beaten into the mindset, so I'm not a pessimist. As challenging as this is, as enormous as the toll is, we can recapture that. With the help of a federal response that's robust, we can recapture the testing capacity, hopefully sooner than later. God willing, these fires that are raging in other states, they do the right things in terms of leadership and policy and personal behavior, and they get them under control and that the behavior of folks inside of our state, the folks realize you know what? When they turn back the clock or they turn the number down to what we can gather at indoors, that's a signal that we mean business. So that's a longer answer than you probably wanted.

Short-term rentals, I haven't had a whole lot of interaction with the county level. I applaud what Airbnb did, and we're going to – and I know through law enforcement if nothing else in the local county health authorities are going to keep an eye on any out of compliance behavior. And the answer is if we have the money, if we have the federal money, absolutely. The problem is we still don't – I mean, really discouraging, the lack of

progress in getting more federal money. So forget about how we allocate the CARES Act money; we need ten times that. And with that, we can meaningfully address the folks who are hurting the most, extending the unemployment benefits, keeping people on the payroll like firefighters and police and educators and healthcare workers, helping out our small businesses. As we've said, we've been – we've touched over 10,000 of them already with cash on the street. We've got commitments for another almost 10,000, and that certainly has to include the restaurant industry. But the bigger point is we need more federal cash. Thank you.

Sir, anything for you? Nothing today, okay. Sir? Okay. Alex, over to you.

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

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: So quickly on the storm, I know that both you and Colonel Callahan said that it's a statewide event. Are there areas of the state that will be affected more or less than others? And Colonel, you had also said you expect around this time tomorrow. Is that when the worst of the storm is going to hit? That's when we're going to have those kinds of effects? Governor, you talked generally about Airbnb. I wanted to see if you're aware of a large house party in Alpine that was broken up by the police NBC-4 is reporting and they're also asking Governor Cuomo about this, that buses filled with people from New York City were brought by promoters to this house for that party, which was then broken up by police. And finally, Dr. Tan talked about maybe this being the end of the first wave. Do you expect a second wave of COVID? When could that happen, and could New Jersey experience it before other parts of the country because we experienced the first wave before most of the country did?

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, on the storm, I think we think it's a statewide phenomenon, but the winds are higher on the shore. Is that –

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's correct, and just based upon the band, if you've seen the models, they run pretty much right over the top, but a few miles either way could be the difference between that 2 to 4 inches, Alex, or that 5 to 8 inches. There is a flash flood watch issued for all 21 counties, which speaks to the intensity of it. Tomorrow at this time is when the winds are expected to be the most, from 1 o'clock to 8 o'clock, but starting late tonight, 24-plus hours, it's going to be a lot of rain, and we're obviously watching that as well as the coastal flooding with – the cycle of the moon right now doesn't help us much, either. So we do expect coastal and localized flooding as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: I thought I was going to get more credit from you, Pat, on pronouncing Isaias properly than I got. I'm aware only generally of the party in Alpine and have not liked what I've heard. I understand it was more outside than inside, but based on the description, there was close congregation and not a lot of face coverings, if any. If in fact people were bused in and it was a promoted party, that's not going to end well either for the sponsors of the party, although we need to follow up on that, or I hope I'm wrong about this, the health of the people who were there. I'll defer to Dr. Tan, but I think you already answered the fact that the list of what we don't know is a lot longer than the list of what we do know on this thing, right? Any of us, including Tony Fauci, Debbie Birx, Tina Tan, and any of the other experts.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: And this is where I would differ a little bit, Governor, that I think there actually is a lot that we do know about what we can do to control COVID spread.

Governor Phil Murphy: If this is an agreement, we're not going to disagree on anything.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: I think we are in agreement. We are aligned in the regard that we know a lot about what we can do right now, absent a vaccine, about how to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 at this point. It comes back to the social distancing. It comes back to using masks. We haven't had the opportunity to give you some of the evidence, for example, but I did want to cite a CDC report recently of – that cited how there were two stylists at a salon who were COVID-positive. There were exposures of over a hundred individuals at this particular salon. None of those individuals got ill because the salon had a face covering policy. There were household contacts of those two cases, the two stylists who were ill – that got ill, but none of those individuals got ill. So we have tools right now that will help mitigate against increases in COVID-19 spread. It's hard to predict whether or not we're going to see a second wave of COVID-19. I think all of us would hope that there won't be because we know what we should be doing and the fact that we have to

have reminders all the time to try to mitigate against some of those upticks that we have been seeing associated with some of the indoor house parties. I mean, it's an awakening to us and a reminder to us about how we just have to continue to heed all that advice.

Governor Phil Murphy: All kidding aside, we do know some very important things. We know there's no therapeutic. We hope there'll be one. We know there's no vaccine, and we hope there'll be one. Therefore, that leaves us very basic stuff: social distancing, face covering, wash your hands with soap and water, stay away from people who don't feel well, get tested when in doubt, don't congregate indoors. That we do know, and that's all we got right now. The other side of this is how does this transmit, asymptomatic versus symptomatic? All those questions, my guess is, will be debated for a long time, thank you. Good afternoon.

Reporter: Hi, Governor, good afternoon. This is for you and Superintendent Callahan. Since house parties are at least partly to blame for the recent spike, do you worry about people holding these so-called hurricane parties over the next couple days and how that could cause more spread. When was the last time that rate of transmission was this high? Do you know?

Governor Phil Murphy: Last time, what, sorry?

Reporter: Rate of transmission.

Governor Phil Murphy: Was this high?

Reporter: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you happen to know last time the rate of transmission was 1.48? Can you put the chart back up, please, flat? You could see you're talking just eyeballing this, it looks to me like it's early April. We can get you a date. Will you follow up, Mahen with a date? By the way, early April, that's not a fun period for us. Easter was the 12th. Plus or minus those days, we had 3 or 400 people dying every day in the hospitals, waiting to be confirmed at that point.

I'm not a fan of hurricane parties. I've not been invited to one. I assume that we're not going to take too kindly. If this means gathering, I assume by definition if it's a hurricane party you're inside. It just doesn't – it doesn't make sense folks. It doesn't end well. We know that. Back to Tina's point, that's another thing that we know. We don't have to speculate. If you're gathering closely in doors on top of each other without face coverings, that doesn't end well. Thank you. Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon, Governor, so you've indicated that you don't want to speculate on what other restrictions could come if the RT continues to go up. I'm curious, is there a benchmark for the RT that if it hits a certain rate that that would raise further alarm bells for you, a specific number. Many schools have worked into their reopening plans. Students would get "mask breaks" during the school day to remove their mask. Would that still be allowed indoors under the new guidelines announced today? Just assuming here that students will be able to take off their masks for lunch and snacks, just clarification on that. Regarding the weather, are you planning to close MVC offices around the state tomorrow maybe to prevent people from camping outside the offices while the storm moves in? That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, thank you, Matt. I think if the – and Judy and Tina, again, are the health experts. If the RT – if the rate of transmission remains in this neighborhood for a prolonged period of time, my guess is that leads us to take more action. I can't tell you today what that action would be. I would have to come back to you. I think, frankly, it becomes at that point more enforcement than policy. I mentioned the outdoor gathering number, potentially, but we don't have a lot of evidence. Although, that party in Alpine, I'm told, was largely outside. That is a bad data point for outdoor gathering capacity. I think the answer is I'll come back to you if this is – we will come back to you if it's otherwise. This would not allow for mask breaks indoors. Yes, you have to be able to take your mask off to eat or drink. MVC offices, I've had no discussions about that. Have you about tomorrow?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I have not, but I would just imagine with the forecast that that probably alone is going to be enough a deterrent to keep people from going. I've not talked to Sue Fulton about that either, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: If we get a harder read on that, we'll come back to you. With that, let's mask up. Again, tomorrow, virtual Wednesday, we will be a little bit earlier. I think we'll point toward noon if that's okay. I want to thank Judy and Tina, Pat, Jared, Matt, Mahan, and the rest of the team. Again, more of the same, folks. I mentioned to Sam's question we had some curve balls thrown at us. Some of those are within our control. Some of them are outside of our control. We have to pray and hope for the right leadership and policies in other states around the country.

We have to keep working at recovering our – what had become – we still have the top per capita capacity testing, top handful in the country. The reagent and other raw materials that have extended that turnaround time, we need the federal government first and foremost, and we will continue to work and find other solutions such as Rutgers to decrease that turnaround time. We need folks to continue to behave responsibly whether that's returning from a hotspot state, Judy, and giving us the information we need, or whether it's not hosting or going to indoor parties. We do that. That's all within our power. That's all recoverable.

I would just say to folks, don't lose your optimism here. Keep your personal responsibility high. We can see our way through this without question. As I say, in some cases it's up to others. In many cases it's up to us. Let's keep doing the right thing. We cannot thank you enough for the millions of you who have done that and continue to do that. Thank you all, God bless.

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