

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: March 3rd, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon. I'm sorry to be a couple of minutes behind. I am joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To my left, the COVID-19 Response Medical Advisor and former state epidemiologist Dr. Eddy Bresnitz. Eddy is normally here with us on Wednesday, great to have you back Eddy and Judy, as always. Please keep Pat Callahan and his family in your prayers.

Tomorrow, March 4th, will mark the one-year anniversary since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in New Jersey. And that was the tweet that we put out. I for one will not easily forget that date. I had only recently come out of the recovery room following surgery earlier that day to have a tumor removed when I read the first text I read informing me of this news.

At that time, I don't think any of us sitting here today were necessarily surprised that the coronavirus had found its way to New Jersey. In fact, the knowledge that our state could be vulnerable, especially given our location, our proximity to New York City and our importance as an international travel and trading hub had set us into action weeks before.

Our preparations begin in mid-January 2020 when international concerns about the coronavirus were growing and beginning to make news. The first US cases, as you may recall, were first reported on the West Coast. After those cases were reported we held what could be considered our first coronavirus press conference, Judy, on January 29th at the EDA offices in Newark. You and I were together, Jared Maples was there. I don't see Jared, please send out an all-points bulletin for him today. We were also joined by Port Authority Head of Security John Bilich that day. We formed our government-wide task force a few days later, on Super Bowl Sunday, February 2nd, which is still in effect and you and Pat are still overseeing that.

Including today, and Pat's not with us today, but Judy, Pat and I have now been with you for 169 more of these. We've always leveled with you, even when the news was not promising. We've remained optimistic even when we knew we were going through some very, very dark times. And moreover, we've tried to hold our New Jersey family together with facts and faith and decisions guided solely by the science, by the data, and by the facts.

More than a year ago, we knew that we would have to prepare our state and each of you for the worst, and hope for the best. None of us could even imagine what it was we ultimately would be up against. On March 9th, I would be forced to declare a public health emergency for the first time, to ensure we had the resources to confront this pandemic. And that emergency, which is renewed monthly, remains in effect. And among other things, it allows us to do what we're doing to get the vaccines to as many people as we possibly can do.

Over the past 12 months, just under 800,000 if you add the top two lines -- so the 710 and the 89 -- of our fellow New Jerseyans have tested positive for coronavirus. That total includes today, if you add both the new positive confirmed and the presumed positive antigen tests, 3,857. We are grateful that the overwhelming number of those who tested positive have survived. Many we know are now back home and back to their lives. Even today. We celebrate up and down the state when COVID patients are released. But that relief is tempered by the fact that there's always someone waiting to take their hospital bed and there are more, sadly, who are dying. And there are still others, we also know, who were safely discharged yet have continued to live with long haul effects of this virus and are still on the road to recovery.

We also know that there are likely many more who had contracted this virus but have never known it, especially in the spring, in the early days of the pandemic, when testing supplies in New Jersey and in the country, indeed, were so scarce.

And that wasn't all that was scarce. Masks, hospital gowns, gloves, ventilators, we have worked with our federal partners, with our sister states all across the country, with private sector leaders, philanthropists and many others to get vital personal protective equipment and ventilators that our healthcare heroes and patients needed, amongst so much more.

But today, we have built a state stockpile of PPE and ventilators necessary to hold off the shortages we saw a year ago, and which drew us into competition with our sister states for whatever was available, not just in this country, but we were all scouring the entire globe.

And we were also lifted by the response of nurses from across the nation, and in some cases from outside our nation, who flew to us to offer their help and to take some of the burden off our own when exhaustion took hold.

Because of our actions last March and the sacrifices of all of our residents, the crippling worst-case scenarios we feared for our hospitals, numbers that would have essentially broken our healthcare system, did not come to pass.

But our numbers reached uneasy heights. Judy, I still show 8,270 on one day in mid-April. And even today, 1,921 of our fellow residents are in a hospital. Hundreds of our family, friends and neighbors still need intensive care, as you can see 403, or on a ventilator 243 in use. Many will make it home, others will not, and their families will be added to the ranks of those who know all too well the ultimate toll of this pandemic. We are exactly one week away from the commemoration of our first COVID-19 related death, and we have now lost a total of confirmed and probable deaths of 23,449.

And every time we've come together for one of these briefings we've taken time to remember and honor a few of those this virus has taken away. We've honored, as of today, 470 of our fellow New Jerseyans so far, and please bear with me while we remember three more.

One of those we recently lost, and this was just incredibly hard to accept, Cara Marie Bluth. Cara was just 45 years old, and she lived in Ventnor with her husband Scott and their two beloved pets Leroy, an English bulldog, and Ely, a mischievous cat. Cara was a vice-principal at the George Hess Educational Complex, part of the Hamilton Township Public Schools. That's Hamilton Township, in this case in Atlantic County, where her love of working with students and her fellow staff were on full display.

She had to return to the field of education after a decade spent in the hospitality industry in our nation's capital following her graduation from George Washington University. But a master's degree in educational administration from Stockton University, after returning to her home state, put her on a new trajectory.

Even more than the students and her colleagues, Cara loved her family. Her mom and dad, Joetta and John, please keep them in your prayers. Her siblings Erica and JC, her nieces and nephews Frankie, Leah, Lucy, JC and Lexi and her in-laws Doris and Mark. I spoke with Scott on Monday, one of the more difficult conversations I've had. They were married for seven years, they were together for 10. And the folks she leaves behind will not be alone in remembering Cara. We all will.

We also remember David Venella, Runnemedes's Mr. Mayor. He passed away one week ago at the age of 91, and I want to thank my friend, Assemblyman Bill Moen for passing along Dave's life and sadly, his passing. Dave and his wife Mary Lou were married for 66 years, and he now leaves behind her and their children David, Mary Lee who goes by Lee, Maureen, Dennis, Melissa, Marcy, Melinda and Douglas and their respective spouses, along with his 10 grandchildren Alison, Casey, Gregory, Jason, Caitlin, Courtney, Carly, Daniel, Paige, Gavin and four great grandchildren Harper, Addy, Penelope and Nave.

I had the great honor on Monday of speaking with Mary Lou, his wife, and two of their kids, David and Lee. Dave served our nation during the Korean conflict as a Tank Sergeant and upon returning home to Runnemedes embarked on a three-decade long stint of service to his community, including 10 years on Town Council, and 20 as Mayor. His belief in public service was simple. People are only Democrats or Republicans in the voting booth, he would say, but once they walked out, they were all constituents.

Dave was also a 30-year employee of the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and a past president of the Camden County Parks Commission. We thank Dave for his service to our nation and to his community for many decades. And that community, the entire community of Runnemedes will remember Dave Venella, and as his family carries on his tremendous legacy, we'll in turn carry them in our prayers.

And finally, today, we also remember Theodore Szigethy, a longtime resident of Atlantic County's Weymouth Township. A proud Army veteran, Ted as he was known, did a number of things across his 93 years. He flipped burgers at a White Castle, worked at a clothing factory, carried 100-pound feed bags on his shoulders at a feed mill, owned and operated his own chicken farm, and served as a board member and CEO of the Vine Co. Ag Auction. He drove a school bus, and he was even a bartender. He also served Weymouth Township as the Public Works Supervisor, Code Enforcement Officer and Housing Inspector. He was a Scoutmaster for local Boy Scouts and dressed as Santa for his school children. And, he was President of the Weymouth Township Civic Association, and even became a certified pyrotechnic technician so he could set up the Township's annual Fourth of July celebrations.

Ted's wife, Jeanette, certainly has many more stories to tell from their 73 years of marriage. So surely do his five children, sons Michael and Timothy, and daughters Bonnie with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, Amy and Anne. They'll have a rapt audience among Ted's six grandchildren, Michael, Rebecca, Emily, Alex, Jacob and Ben, and seven great-grandchildren, Joseph, Adriana, Douglas, Arden, Theo, Lillian, and Nicholas. We'd like to hear those stories too, I have to say. Ted was a treasured part of our New Jersey family and we cannot and must not ever forget him.

Whenever we have lost a member of our tremendous and proud New Jersey family, we have mourned each and every single one as if they were our own flesh and blood. And in many ways, they are. For 12 months, we have had to take extraordinary and painful steps in our effort to beat back this virus and save lives. We have asked a lot of you. We had to implement a statewide stay-at-home directive and prohibit residents from gathering together in large groups, even for funerals for those we lost to this virus.

In the many hundreds of calls made to families, especially those who lost a loved one. In the spring into the summer, you had that triple reality of losing a loved one, you couldn't see them in the hospital at the end of their life, and then you couldn't give them a proper farewell and send off.

We have worked to protect against evictions for as long as this emergency remains in effect, and then for a period after, and we will continue to work with our Legislative partners to protect our renters. We instituted mortgage forbearance programs to help families stay in their home. And we halted gas, water and electric utility shutoffs as well as internet shutoffs in households with children using the internet for educational purposes.

Today, I will sign an Executive Order to extend this prohibition until at least June 30, and we will continue to work on easing the burden for residents with arrearages, especially as Congress works on a new round of COVID relief.

We mandated the wearing of masks in all indoor settings and have continually urged you to take all the proper precautions to protect yourself, your family, your friends, and your neighbors. And overwhelmingly, folks, you have delivered and the kindness and generosity of so many millions of New Jerseyans have been on full display in those raising money and volunteering to feed frontline workers and impacted families, to the sewing circles who churned out thousands of masks, amongst so many others.

We celebrated many of these New Jerseyans here at this table and I suspect we're not done celebrating. We also had time to celebrate last summer at an open Jersey Shore and as we expect to be in a much better place this summer, we can announce that another New Jersey tradition, sleepaway camps, will be able to safely resume their operations after they were suspended last year.

We've also meaningfully begun the work to correct the inequities in healthcare that this pandemic only further exposed, and to shore up the weaknesses in vital systems, like unemployment that millions of New Jerseyans have relied upon at one point or another. That work continues and it will continue.

We also had to close our public schools and watch has more than 1.3 million students and hundreds of thousands of educators, support staff and school officials had to make the transition to remote learning. Over last summer, we worked directly with our school communities to give them the flexibility they needed to make the right decisions for reopening their schools last fall.

However, by last summer, we knew that there were as many as 231,000 students who had fallen into the digital divide without either proper laptops or reliable internet connections for remote learning, or both, by the way, let alone for a 21st Century education. And we set to work to lift these students up and out of this divide. And we have. Today, the statewide student need is down from an initial estimate of 231,000 to a known total of just 39 – not 39,000 but 39 kids, and we will not rest until that 39 gets to zero.

And relatedly, more and more of our schools are reopening their doors. Today, more than 900,000 of our students are back in their familiar classrooms either for all-day in-person instruction, or on a hybrid schedule, with more returning nearly every day. We know this has been an incredibly rough and challenging road for our students, our educators, our support staff, parents, school leaders, educational communities, and we thank them for their incredible work.

We have also been boosted by the tremendous spirit of our business sector, especially our small businesses who are the backbones of their communities. We've put hundreds of millions of dollars in federal coronavirus relief funds to work to support our communities, especially the countless small businesses whose existence was put in doubt because of this pandemic.

Through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority, and the Department of Community Affairs, these funds had been put to work through grants and loans and other supports to help our Main Street businesses stay open.

One example, and this is a cool one, is the partnership of the Department of Community Affairs, under the great leadership of Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, struck with the town of Hammonton in Atlantic County. That is, by the way for those of you watching at home, Dr. Jill Biden territory, Through its neighborhood preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant Program, the DCA awarded Hammonton a grant that has supported the downtown and the pandemic-impacted small businesses in Hammonton's Neighborhood Preservation Program District.

Because of this support, Hammonton was able to create two new parklets to provide more outdoor dining space and purchase patio heaters for restaurants to extend the outdoor dining season. And with support from the Division of Travel and Tourism, Hammonton embarked on its own ad campaign to bring diners to its streets. And, Hammonton also sent grant funding directly to its small businesses, including this one, Fiesta Mexicana, which has been a cornerstone of the town's dining scene since Noe Castenada first envisioned Hammonton as the place where he wanted to realize his American Dream back in 1998.

Because of this support, Fiesta Mexicana is open and Noe hasn't fallen behind on the mortgage. He's ready for the future. So that's Noe, I believe with his wife Carmen. I spoke to Carmen and daughter Diane on Monday. Check them out. This is a really good, you can see the address, 327 12th Street Route 54 in Hammonton, their website is FiestaMexicana-NJ.com. And please check them out. Judy, I can see you on one of our road trips swinging by and grabbing some great Mexican food.

Through it all, our fight has been about one thing and one thing only, and that is to save every life we possibly can. No member of our New Jersey family is disposable. We have always known this in word but you all have proven it through your actions.

And we're not just New Jerseyans in name only. We are a family, a tightknit and caring family 9 million members strong. Our state was one of the first epicenters of COVID-19, and this winter the second wave we feared came back, just as ferocious as the first. But just as we crushed the curve last spring and summer, we are crushing it a second time and we're doing this together. And because we have, today our restaurants are allowing more indoor diners. Our sports teams can welcome back some of their diehard fans, and other aspects of life are beginning to feel a little bit more normal.

And today I will be signing an Executive Order allowing wedding receptions to proceed at 35% of a venues indoor capacity, up to 150 persons, and up to 150 people by the way outdoors. Indoor receptions must abide by our indoor dining guidance, which requires that people eat and drink while they're seated and wear face coverings at all other times. However, because we know these events take time to plan and we see things slowly moving in the right direction, we can safely take this step as we slowly recover. We want people to be able to celebrate the good things.

Before we move off of this, this takes effect this Friday at 6:00 a.m. And when you look at summer camps and wedding receptions, they have one thing very much in common. They take months to plan. So I would say on behalf of Judy and Eddy, we're not declaring victory here as it relates to coronavirus. Our numbers have come down but they're sort of in a zone right now. But we do believe we're going to get there, particularly when you add the proliferation of the vaccine distribution beginning, really, more so next month than this month. We'll come back to that in a minute. But for things like this, you need a long runway. And for summer camp, you need a long runway. And that's why we're making these decisions and announcements to go. But again, we still have a ways to go.

Now, our recovery efforts are being aided by the arrival in record time of not one, not two, but three proven and highly effective vaccines, the latest coming from one of the most historic of New Jersey's names, Johnson & Johnson. And yesterday, J&J announced it will be partnering with another New Jersey icon Merck, to ensure the vaccine supply we will need to reach our benchmark goal of vaccinating 4.7 million New Jersey adults.

I thanked directly both CEO Alex Gorsky of Johnson & Johnson and CEO Ken Frazier of Merck, two outstanding companies and outstanding corporate citizens in our state. And we know you're ready for these vaccines as well.

To aid this distribution, you've heard us say this before, we purpose-built a vaccination infrastructure to handle the task. At our six mega sites and across the nearly 300 other points of distribution statewide, tens of thousands of New Jerseyans are being served every single day. And as of today, you can see the number, we have administered 2,190,179 doses of those vaccines, with many millions more to come once they get the supply. We know we need to put our effort into high gear.

More than 1.4 million of you have already gotten your first dose, and about 740,000 your second. These are real numbers and the numbers I want to leave you with today. The number of vaccines we have now delivered up and down our state. I would just say this, Judy, and you're on these calls as well. I think, folks, we can expect in the month of March, at least for the next couple of weeks, an incremental improvement. It's pretty clear that Johnson & Johnson supply coming in this week, we will not see that for a week or two beyond this. But then I think if you get to the last week of March, the first week of April, so your inflection point folks is either side of Easter, which is on April 4th. I believe the supplies, both not just J&J but Pfizer and Moderna are going to, I'm going to use the word explode. We will be in a dramatically, quantum different place.

So please, please, please have patience as more of you are eligible to sign up over the next number of weeks. We want you to be able to do that. We want you, as do you want, to have some certainty as to where this is headed. You're going to have breakout supplies in April and May, and you heard President Biden yesterday say that every adult American who wants a vaccine, his commitment is to be able to get them that by the end of May, and we've been pointing to Memorial Day. I think since the first day we spoke about vaccines.

So each shot is another ray of light in that new dawn. Each one comes with a little extra hope for the post-COVID days that await. One year in, we can finally see the light of a new day beginning to break on the horizon. We cannot yet bask in that light, but make no mistake, we will. And we will do so as the strong New Jersey family that stuck together and got us all through.

So to every New Jersey who has joined our fight over the past year, I say on our behalf, simply thank you. Thank you for being models for your families and communities. Thank you for showing that when we fight COVID together, we can beat it together. Thank you for being real patriots, simply doing what's needed to be done in these most unprecedented circumstances. Thank you.

With that, please help me welcome the woman to my right, 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 we've discussed before, the department continues to closely monitor COVID-19 activity in our state. So I would be remiss if I did not share with you that we are seeing a slight uptick in cases. Tomorrow's surveillance, what we call the CALL report, will show that case rates have increased in the Northwest region of the state, which will put that part of the state back into high activity.

We are also seeing some increases in case rates in the Northeast and in the Central regions. This is just a reminder that we must stay vigilant in adhering to public health measures, masking up, physically distancing, washing hands frequently, avoiding large gatherings, in order to control the spread of the virus in our state. This virus is still with us.

The department also continues to monitor for new variants of COVID-19. I think I've explained in the past that viruses mutate pretty frequently. They constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. Multiple variant strains are circulating globally, and have different combinations of mutations. The variants of concern are ones that have mutations that might contribute to easier transmission, result in more severe illness, and may have some resistance to vaccination or treatment therapies; or, may cause reinfection.

Right now, in the United States, the CDC is particularly concerned about three variants. You've heard me speak of these before. One is the B-117 variant, otherwise known as the UK variant. The second one is the B-1.351, or the South African variant. And lastly, a new one, the P-1 variant, which is the variant that started in Brazil. These variants seem to spread more easily, which may lead to more cases of COVID.

The New York variant, B-1.526 is of concern, particularly given the number of detections in New York. But whether this variant is more contagious or has other concerning features is yet unknown. Additionally, the geographic spread of this variant appears to be limited.

We are reporting today a total of the B-117, or the UK variant, cases have been identified in 16 of our counties. This is the most common variant in the United States, with 2,506 cases reported across the country.

We are also reporting the first two P-1 or Brazilian variant in New Jersey. It's up in Hudson County. The two cases are linked and the travel history is currently unknown but is under investigation. Of the three variants of concern. The P-1 is relatively uncommon in the United States, with only 10 cases thus far identified in five states and territories.

And lastly, we are reporting 34 of the New York strain. Most of these are concentrated in the Northeastern part of the state.

While we are concerned about the increase in variant strains, the public health prevention measures that we've all been using, again, physical distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands frequently, getting vaccinated when it's your turn are important tools to prevent the spread of this virus.

We continue to make progress in vaccinating eligible groups in our state. The six mega sites in the state are administering about 20,000 doses daily and all are working toward a goal of 4,000 doses a day at each of the six sites. As of yesterday, the mega sites have administered more than 405,000 doses.

The community-based vaccination program that is working to provide equitable access of COVID-19, particularly in underserved communities, is also making progress in vaccinating residents, with more than 8,000 doses having been administered at the active sites that are currently administering vaccine, and we expect the City of Camden and Jersey City sites to open this weekend.

Also today, the department is announcing a new long-term care web page. The webpage features a user-friendly portal to identify the reopening status of facilities, information on current outbreaks and frequently asked questions. The page will provide key updates to families, loved ones and advocates to help to strengthen our emergency response capacity and increase transparency and accountability. It's an interactive page. It'll show the phased reopening map that allows users to view detailed information on each individual facility in the state and link to summaries of their inspections, making it easier for consumers to view critical information about the performance of each facility on key health and safety metrics.

This is a new resource. It was among one of the recommendations that implemented as a part of that nursing home review conducted by Manatt Health. I urge you to visit [nj.gov/health](http://nj.gov/health) to find the new site.

Well, for some encouraging news, we continue to track outbreaks and cases at long-term care facilities in the state. We have seen a marked decrease in the number of newly reported cases from the fall peak, the week of January 3rd, to the present, the week of February 28th. Between this period of time, there was a decline of 96.4% in the weekly number of newly reported resident cases and a 95.9% decline in the weekly number of newly reported resident deaths.

Between the same two weeks, the number of reported positive PCR test results in the state declined by 37%. So the significant decline in cases and deaths in long-term care facilities is likely due to a combination of factors including vaccination, also, a decrease in community transmission, improved infection prevention and control measures, and residual immunity or natural immunity from prior COVID-19 infections in this population.

In other infectious disease news, the CDC is closely following the outbreaks of Ebola virus disease in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the DRC, and Guinea. And, out of an abundance of caution, they have decided to direct all travelers to six airports, what we call funneled airports. It's familiar to you, I think, from the very early days of this pandemic. One of which is Newark Liberty Airport. Information will be collected on a very small number of expected travelers arriving from the DRC and Guinea. We are collaborating with the CDC and the Division of Global Migration and Quarantine for these activities. The risk of Ebola in the United States is extremely low. The outbreaks in the DRC and Guinea are centered in very remote areas of these countries. The situation is very different from the widespread outbreak that we experienced in Africa in 2014, but we appreciate the vigilance of the CDC, and we are in continued conversations with the CDC about this initiative.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 1,921 hospitalizations of COVID-19 and PUIs last evening; 403 individuals in critical care, 60% of those in critical care on ventilators. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 105 cumulative cases in the state. Three of these children are currently hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. In terms of race and ethnicity, our deaths are White 55.6%, Black 16.5, Hispanic 18.8, Asian 5.1, other 4%. 46.7% of our deaths are still occurring in individuals 80 years and above 33.4% in the age group of 65 to 79, and 15.6% in the age group of 50 to 64.

In all of our state veterans homes there are no new cases among residents, and no new cases among patients in our psych hospitals.

On Saturday, February 27th, the positivity in the state was 10.68, the Northern part of the state reported 11.36, Central 10.55, and the Southern part of the state 8.94.

So that concludes my daily report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, socially distance. Stay home when you're sick, get tested. And remember, for each other and for us all, please take the call and let's get vaccinated. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you. Using the word funneling, which we have not used in almost a year and in fact, that January 29th press conference that you and I did with Jared -- Jared, we sent an APB out, good to have you with us -- and John Bilich at the Port Authority was on that very topic.

Secondly, positivity rate, I should have said this earlier. Sure as we're sitting here, it did exactly what we expected it to do, because it's test taken on a Saturday. And we've said many times on the margin, you're probably on a Saturday, first of all, there are a lot fewer tests and you're probably getting tested for a reason, you've been exposed or you don't feel well.

Again, let me take the other side of that coin. If you're frustrated you can't get a testing appointment, although that frustration has come way down, note to file, weekend capacity is much better than weekdays, right?

I want to channel, Eddy, given the power outages but I'm going to channel Pat Callahan, Eddy, on our behalf and say with the high winds yesterday, listen, I'm knocking on wood. Our electric service providers have had a very good winter so far. I'll probably say that and the roof will fall in tomorrow, nit they've done a great job. The BPU, the resiliency has been very strong this winter. So I want to knock on wood, but also acknowledge that.

So with these high winds that we had yesterday, peak outages, 2,700 in the entire state as of this morning at 9:00; that got down to 1,200. And as I was coming over here, it's down to 250. Obviously 250 too many, but still pretty incredible that those numbers over these past number of storms and high wind events did not go higher. I hope that's a permanent condition.

Before we start with Matt down front, I'm gonna say this. We will be with you virtually tomorrow. I think this week, we're going to be on the road on Friday, so we will not be here at one o'clock on Friday. We will be on the road. I think you were on the road this morning, weren't you? Were you in Elizabeth today with Tammy, right? Yep. And you and I are going to be together, I think, up in Hudson County on Friday. I'm not sure, given the time of day, whether or not we'll have the full COVID readout. We will endeavor to give that at that point. We'll take any questions you've got. But again, it'll be on the road on Friday. And then unless you hear otherwise, we'll be virtual for the weekend and back here at one o'clock on Monday.

I also want to say this, that I had the great honor -- and Judy is going to join me right after this so we're going to spin through this fairly quickly -- I think next door, am I right? Next door to sign a really important Bill to protect our LGBTQ-plus brothers and sisters when they are in a nursing home or long-term care setting. There's been enormous, whether it's outright discrimination or just ignorance or mistreatment, for far too long of our LGBTQ-plus community, particularly as they migrate from one place and space in their life into a nursing home, into some other long-term care setting. And we're going to sign a bill, Judy and I and some other friends are going to sign a Bill shortly that will correct that. And I think frankly, make New Jersey first in the nation in terms of the respect and treatment that they richly deserve. So with that, Matt, Good afternoon.

#### Q&A Session

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Good afternoon, Governor. First of all, how do you respond to states that are going as far as to do away with mask mandates?

Commissioner, you said Monday there would be outreach to older folks who have not been able to get an appointment. How are you doing that? How can people get a call and is the call center making appointments yet?

An estimated 64% of New Jersey residents are considered overweight or obese according to the CDC. That group is eligible for vaccinations according to DOH guidelines, along with 10 other medical conditions. What is the percent of the population currently eligible, and what is the percent that will be eligible on the 15th and the 29th? I mean, is it possible that some 6 million people by the end of the month will be eligible for vaccines?

And from NJ Spotlight, residents with disabilities who don't live in group homes say they've been left out of the state's vaccine eligibility list. What's your response and how does the state plan to prioritize vaccines for them?

And lastly, Governor, how do you react to the NAACP's criticism of the Cannabis Regulatory Committee and whether it violates state's laws and also the lack of a Black representative on the committee?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** From the top, Matt, I'm stunned. I don't know what these states are looking at. It just takes my breath away. No capacity restrictions and no masking, particularly indoors. I think I could get it if you were socially distanced, if states in warmer climates lifted, potentially, outdoor masking, but to lift it completely indoors just takes my breath away. I just can't -- I can't fathom it.

And also other states that are lifting capacities, sort of to 100%, I mentioned earlier, I don't want to go off on too much of a tangent here. But we're doing weddings and summer camps because those are long runway things. We'd like to be doing, I don't want to put words in Judy or Eddy's mouth, we would like to be doing more on restaurants right now. But with these variants that Judy just went through and the transmissibility that looks like it's ticked up a bit, we just don't think that's the responsible step to take.

But even if we did take it -- and we will take it, I just don't know, I can't tell you when -- I just can't conceive of lifting a mask mandate inside, right? Just inconceivable. So I don't -- maybe it's politics. I just don't know. Judy can come back to you on the 75. Again, we went right to 65 and plus, and then below 65 if you've got chronic conditions and we still think that's the right move. But there's no question that the 75-plus community is more likely to be homebound, less able to get on the internet, less, frankly, maybe even able to navigate the call center. So we mentioned on Monday, we're going to start sort of trying to get to them and Judy can give you more color.

I don't know what percentage is -- I'm stunned that you said 64% of the state is considered obese. That takes my breath away in and of itself, so I'm having trouble getting over that. But I'm not sure what the exact percentage is, and some of that's due to HIPAA reasons, right, so not everybody is going to be disclosing what their private health conditions might be. But I think between March 15th and March 29th, we've signaled that that is several 100,000-plus in each of those tranches. I don't know the number that gets you to but it's not 6 million. Judy may have an answer with that.

Part of the objective of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is to get to folks exactly as you've described. So residents with disabilities who are not in group homes, who we have to go get, and not just the J&J vaccine, but that's a particular -- and in fact, when we went over in great detail on Monday how the 73,600 doses we're going to break down, sort of the implicit arrangement with the counties is that that's the sort of person that we want them to go to. And again, Judy can come back on that, or Eddy.

Listen, Richard Smith is a friend. He and I had an exchange on text just as I was coming over here. I'm confident we'll be able to figure this out as it relates to the Cannabis Commission. And it's a great group that have been put forward, including an African American woman as its Chair, and I know her well because she's a former colleague, and she's a star in the group. All five of them are stars, but I'm confident we'll be able to work something out.

Judy, any thoughts on what percentage when you add up all the folks who are CDC eligible we might be getting to, and any more comment on getting to older folks or folks who are homebound with disabilities?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** So I think it's about 3.7 million, all in. But of that 3.7 million, there's a percentage of them who will choose not to get vaccinated. There's a percentage of them who, for whatever underlying chronic condition they may have, it might be recommended that they not get vaccinated. And there's a percentage of them that have already been vaccinated for the groups that are being brought up. Many of them for the reasons you shared about BMI over 25 and smoking have already been eligible and already been vaccinated.

Obviously, we've given over 2 million doses, so a lot of them are in that category. 70% of the adult eligible population in New Jersey, 70% is about 4.7 million. So, you can just kind of back into some of that math.

Outreach to the elderly, we're trying all different ways we've identified through NJ VSS, those that are 75 and they will go first in the queue. This is a two-week outreach. There's a reason for it. About 30% of our individuals in that age group have been vaccinated. That's too low. And the reason it's too low is 50% in that age group are the ones that are dying from this disease. So we need to, our primary goal from the beginning of this pandemic is to prevent mortality and morbidity. That's our primary goal and we really need to focus on that.

As a result, we're doing that and also the FEMA sites and outreach into the local health departments, the FQHCs because we know young Hispanic men and African American males and females are dying at a rate greater than their white counterparts. So that's our focus in both areas. Prevent first and foremost mortality and morbidity.

For residents with disability, we are bringing up a community corps. In fact, the first group are in training this week. We will be available to go door to door to help people get registered, to find out if they need transportation, or if we need to bring the vaccine to them. Obviously, the J&J vaccine is the one that travels the best, the Moderna and Pfizer, it's recommended not to use that as a traveling vaccine. But we will have accommodations, because we will vaccinate 70% of the adult eligible population in six months. We will do that. We will make sure we find them.

**Phil Murphy:** Well said. I was just going to make a simple observation that when you – I'm just going to pick educators, and had a great conversation with the NJEA leadership this morning, also heard from the AFT leadership on more of a private matter. You can't just say, okay, how many teachers are there in the state and say that that's the group that's coming online. Because you'll remember, there aren't a whole lot of teachers who are 65 and up in whatever setting; there are some, but there are a lot of teachers like there are a lot of all of us who have some chronic condition who have already been eligible and in many cases have been vaccinated. Real quick.

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** With the newly eligible people, I've heard personally from a lot of readers that were previously eligible who are upset because, you know, there's not enough supply there. So with the newly eligible, are they fighting for the same amount of vaccines, or the same appointments that everybody that previously registered? Or did the previously registered folk, are they in the queue first, and they should be prioritized?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** The previously registered that fit into the eligible category, they will stay in their queue, they will be first. The newly eligible individuals will hopefully register either through NJVSS or directly into county sites. And they will be put in the line for when vaccines are available. And yes, some individuals will be frustrated, we understand that, we have that now. But we are really trying to get everything in order for April and May when we expect the supply to increase. We want to be able to jump on that pretty quickly.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** There's real value, we've made this decision and we stand by it and believe in it. There's real value for folks in a particular community to know when they can register, even if there's still supply-demand imbalance, and so that's number one.

And number two, there's real value in knowing what ultimately that looks like. I would just repeat something I mentioned earlier, the supply-demand imbalance, I'm going to say, I'm going to go out on a limb, Judy, will be greatest in the month of March. And then we're going to see a quantum change, assuming the feds deliver what they are saying they'll deliver, we will see a quantum shift in this.

And folks, the good news is they'll already know that they could have registered and if they can have patience for that number of week period of time, it ultimately sorts through. Fair to say? Thank you. Dustin.

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** Good afternoon. So my short-term memory is failing me already so I apologize for this question. But you mentioned in your opening remarks that you had implemented this moratorium on utility shutoffs. Did you say you're extending that? And if you didn't, are you planning to extend that?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yes, we are. No worries on the short-term memory, we're extending it. It was to have expired at the end of this month and we are in March, it's been extended to June 30th, that I know. It was to have expired on the 15th of March. It's now extended until the end of June, June 30th.

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** All right, thanks. And then going back to a question I asked recently about vaccinations at long-term care facilities, is there going to be a fourth round by the pharmacy chains there? And if so, what specifics can you provide? If not, what's the state's plan to get residents of those homes vaccinated?

Now that we have the Johnson & Johnson vaccine coming and as you just said, you were going to have a quantum leap in the supply around April or so, do you think that would be a good time for you to get vaccinated, seeing how you've already been quarantined twice in the last few months?

And finally, on Friday, Republicans plan to start hearings into the various ways that you've handled the pandemic, beginning with long-term care. What's your general response to that? But also, as I understand it, your administration hasn't cooperated with their request to have people such as the Health Commissioner appear, and I'm just curious why that is. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, tell me if I'm right, the CVS/Walgreens federal program committed to a minimum of three clinics, but they have willingly embraced fourth clinics for reasons that were valid, and I'll give you two: one bad weather, and a second one would have been an outbreak at the long-term care facility at the time they were scheduled to go. Is that fair to say? Yeah. So that remains the case.

As it relates to me, yes, I think when I'm up to bat, I will take it. And I wanted to say this earlier and Eddy, I'd love you to weigh in on this. We have three potent vaccines here. There's just no other way around this. Johnson & Johnson, added to Pfizer and Moderna. And there's been some comparing of numbers and I think we've said emphatically that's an apples to oranges comparison. And in the Johnson & Johnson case, the timing was different, they were in the teeth of the raging virus. And thirdly, they were in places that were global. So a meaningful part of their trials were in South America, including Brazil, where we know as Judy said earlier, there's a variant; a meaningful chunk in South Africa.

And so I'll be sooner than later, would be my guess. Not quite yet, but I'll get there. But Eddy, anything else you want to add to the folks should be thinking about, these are three potent weapons and in particular, in particular, against hospitalizations and fatality?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Yes, all three are comparable when you're looking at an outcome of preventing severe disease as measured by various physiologic parameters, or hospitalization, or death. And that's really the key is to prevent severe disease. And as you pointed out, it's apples and oranges if you're comparing the methodology of the studies, because they were done in different time periods, with the J&J vaccine trials being done when there was already variants circulating in various countries that were involved in a trial.

And so, I mean, really the public health message is people should get vaccinated when they have the vaccine available to them. Now, there may be some people who just want to have one shot, they don't want to come back for a second. There's an advantage to getting one shot, it's only one shot, you don't have to schedule a second visit. And when you look at the expected side effects, local injection site reactions, or even some systemic reactions like headache or that, it appears that the J&J vaccine actually has less of those side effects than the two mRNA vaccines, which tend to have more, and even more so with the second. So there are attributes of the Johnson vaccine that make it desirable for a lot of people.

And of course, as our Professional Advisory Committee has said, it's important to be bringing the vaccine to people in the community who have a hard time getting out to vaccination centers. And so the Johnson vaccine is actually ideal to bring that vaccine, or any vaccine to those individuals, because you don't have to come back to vaccinate them with a second dose.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Really powerful for folks who are hard to get to. Matt asked questions about folks who may be disabled or 75, or seniors who are homebound, not in a group home. Really powerful.

Dustin, last question, listen, we don't begrudge anyone's right to assess what's gone on. I mean, we have committed and I would reiterate that commitment that we will have full accounting of everything. I hope the country does this as well, and we will do it in New Jersey.

I think you said they're starting with long-term care. And I would just say, listen, we got clobbered in long-term care. I think every American state got clobbered, but we really got clobbered because we're in that metro, particularly in that metro, New York reality. So God bless every single loss of life. We weren't unique, but God knows we didn't escape it either.

But I was looking up just recently, you know, we're talking about March 4th when we had our first case. I looked up, Judy, I looked up what you said on April 2nd at this table about cohorting and separating residents. You mentioned, they're going back to their home. But we need to make sure they're separated, different wings, different hospitals, floors, different buildings, that staff is separated. And by the way, if you can't do that in a directive, I think you put out an April 13th, if you can't do that, come to you all and we will do it for you. And in fact, that happened.

I think about the Manatt Report, hiring an independent firm who had no ties to any of us and held up a mirror, and they were unsparing in terms of where deficiencies were, that Executive Orders, that laws, in fact, you just referred to the website today that was one of their recommendations. That was in early May. Their report, I think, came back something like a month later. We started to report on not just confirmed fatalities, but probable deaths eight months ago. You know, again, early on, clobbered like every American state, particularly where the fires raged the hardest, overwhelmed at first.

I wished we had known earlier what was known by others, it sounds like, in the federal administration at the time. But we have been completely, at every step of the way transparent, and Judy and we have been explicit in our instructions to the long-term care facilities. Were there are bad actors who didn't follow them? I fear there may have been but they deserve to pay a price for that if that's the case. In any event, thank you. Alex, is that you?

**Alex Zdan, News 12 NJ:** Good afternoon, Governor. For the Commissioner, can you tell us a little bit more about the potential Legionnaires outbreak in Union County? We received a release from your office that there were 14 cases and one death? Have you traced the source? And can you tell us a little bit more about how those 14 people may be connected?

I also wanted to ask you about what exactly went wrong with the call center? You said on Friday that there were 80 people working, the initial plan was 250. I think you said on Monday there was about 100? Did some of these people have to be retrained? And what was the issue? Were they not getting it? Was the technical facet of it not working? Can you get into a little bit more detail with that?

Governor, when do you expect the first J&J vaccine shot to be going into an arm? And I know that you said on Monday that a lot of this supply of J&J is going to be sent to Black and Brown minority communities, but there's a growing perception of those communities, potentially some people are warning, that this could be seen as a second-class vaccine because it is less effective than Moderna and Pfizer. Will you yourself get that vaccine to allay any fears?

And lastly, you sort of started talking about it but I just wanted to ask you if you've had an opportunity to go over some of your decision-making over the past year, and if you could speak on what you feel would be maybe a success or maybe a failure or a failing that you had in dealing with this virus.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I have no qualifications to answer anything about Legionnaires disease, so I'm gonna leave that to Judy and Eddie. What went wrong with the call center? The call center that didn't exist two months ago? You talk about it like it was the Super Bowl, the game's over, this is all well and good. This thing is from whole cloth from nothing to something in 10 languages. With all due respect, we're still in the game, and Judy can add anything more to that.

J&J, I think Friday is the answer and I think Eddy and I have been quite clear, and more importantly, Eddie has. This is no second-class vaccine. And in some cases, as Eddy pointed out, it may have attributes that are even more attractive than the Pfizer or Moderna.

I think the big one for me is, and who would not have wished this? That we all had known earlier the depth of the existence of this virus, in particularly the metro New York counties that got hit, the big six that got hit the hardest early on. Dan Bryant and I were having this conversation earlier, what really stuck in my – you know, we found a lot of common ground with the Trump administration. We bemoan the fact they had no national strategy, but we still were able to find common ground.

But what really galled me was in these Bob Woodward book tapes, when it was quite clear the federal administration knew stuff that we did not know, that they were not disclosing to either us as Governors or to the public, and that cost lives. So that's the big one for me. Getting a better sense of the information and the scope of this earlier, and it sounds like there was some of that in the federal government. That's the one that I look back on.

Judy, anything on Legionnaires or call center?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I don't have the full report on Legionnaires, so I don't want to misstate but I can get that to you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Dan, will you make sure we follow up on that?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** On the call center, right now we have a total of 2,058 trained staff. Of the 2,058, 1,029 are currently New Jersey residents, 403 are bilingual. Total calls to the call center since it started is a little over 1 million; total calls that were answered by a live agent, it's a quarter of a million. And of the quarter of a million, 5,000 individuals had their appointments scheduled through the call center, and appointment scheduling is up and running as we speak. Is there anything more that you want to know?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That's good, I think. Sir, do you have anything behind the camera?

So I should say this because the scheduling point reminded me of this. Without getting into the actual numbers, it's pretty clear we're getting our supply, 70-plus thousands of J&J this week. I think the first shots will be in the arms on Friday. But there is a sense, at least, that we will get no – when I say we it's not just New Jersey – there will be no J&J distribution next week, the week after, maybe into the third week. Pfizer and Moderna, Judy, are continuing sort of their pace, incremental improvement, then that's all good and those are big numbers, so those will continue to go.

But when you add together the expected moment, plus or minus Easter in our book, when J&J gets back on the boards with meaningful numbers, and then you add to that the commitments that Pfizer and Moderna have made to meaningfully increase their supplies, that all comes together in that timeframe. And you go not just up incrementally, you go up at some quantum level, to be determined. We don't have that information yet. We've not gotten it from the feds but the impression that we've gotten is crystal clear that plus or minus Easter, which is on April 4th, this is going to go up in a meaningful way.

And so again, folks, between now and then preregister. God willing, the call center can schedule you but have patience, because we're going to be in a sort of, I wouldn't say baby step but incremental mode over the next number of weeks, and then it's going to pop in a big way. Dave, good afternoon.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Hi, Governor, I don't know if you've heard this yet. We got this from Politico and then also Fox News reporting the CDC will put out draft guidelines as early as tomorrow, that people who have been vaccinated can gather in small groups indoors without masks. What is your reaction to that?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I hope they're right.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Would that be okay for New Jersey residents to do, assuming that that's what the CDC says?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I don't want to speak on behalf of Eddy or Judy but I think we need to look at that, because this is news to me, Eddy had heard it coming in. I think we want to, I'll let these folks answer but I would want to at least understand that in as much detail as we can.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** The quarantine in Pennsylvania, for people coming in from other states, has been dropped. Will New Jersey consider doing the same thing and really, the quarantine requirement that we have, is it really doing anything, do we think? Is anybody really following it at this point?

Governor, you've talked a lot today about the year that's passed since the first confirmed case of the of COVID. Can you guys talk a little bit about, you know, how much in the dark were we in the beginning? I remember going into the elevator with you, Judy, at that meeting in Newark, and I said, "Excuse me, are you Judy Persichilli?" I believe I called

you at the time. And so, we were all together squished in a elevator. A lot has happened over a year. But how much in the dark were we and how much have we learned in a year?

And then finally, maybe Dr. Eddy, you can talk about if you get vaccinated, can you get an accurate antibody test? There appears to be conflicting information about this. It may have to do with what kind of an antibody test you get. And that's it. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Dave. I'll say a couple of things and then turn it to folks on either side of me. The quarantine, I don't anticipate dropping in anytime soon. And there are people I know, one example in particular, but I know many people are following it. Now, does that mean everybody's following it? No.

Our advice, I think, has continued to be travel only if you have to. And if you do have to travel, then do the right thing on either end of that trip. I had a meeting that I'm going to do this weekend with someone who had to travel to Florida on business, and he asked if we could push it from last Sunday to this coming Sunday for that very reason, because he was quarantining. So I had not seen that Pennsylvania dropped it, but I don't I don't anticipate, unless Judy tells me otherwise, that we're going to do that. At some point, we will, clearly. At some point, we're going to be doing a lot of this.

Again, on the CDC guidance, all I'd say is I would love to see it myself. But again, I'll defer to Eddy and Judy.

I think as a nation, perhaps as a world, we were in the dark, I mean, there's kind of no other way to put it. And that's not just us. It's not just America. This thing clobbered, came in and clobbered the world and it still is not done with us. Again, when people ask me what do you bemoan? I bemoan not knowing what we ultimately knew sooner.

I mentioned that, I think this is probably the press conference, January 29th we weren't wearing face masks, as an example. And folks can't see on TV, but Dave faithfully has worn these for the many months since. Eddy or Judy, any comments on CDC guidance, dropping quarantining? How much in the dark or the one I have not addressed, if you have been vaccinated, can you get an accurate antibody test? Do you want to jump in, Eddy?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Sure. Well, firstly, early on, I can say that we all knew this was coming but didn't really expect how bad it would be. I can personally tell you that the first weekend in March I was in Minnesota at a squash tournament and there were lots of people there and no one was wearing a mask. And I went to the last Flyers/Boston game on March 10th before they shut down – Jared, Boston won. And you know, no mask, we didn't really think of it. The place was crowded.

And early on, I think I attended meetings here a few times, press conferences, and no one was wearing a mask early on. I don't think we really appreciated at that point. So that's the answer to that. And of course, with time we understood the risk of not wearing a mask. And even then it took a while for everybody to really pay attention, given the mixed messages we were getting. Not from New Jersey, but from the federal government.

The second thing was the quarantine. I actually asked that question last week of our communicable disease staff. It turns out that as of last week, about 136,000, people who were coming into New Jersey airports were actually registering, there is a registration form that they can fill out, so that they can be contacted by local health departments, if necessary. And so that to me was a surprising number, because I too felt, I wasn't sure how this quarantine requirement was being followed.

And then finally, on the antibody test, I mean, there's no recommendation from anybody to get an antibody test after you've had known COVID infection. One has to assume that you're going to have some antibody level. And what are you going to do with that information anyway? There's no what we call a correlative protection. There's no level of antibody above which we know you're protected and below which we think that you're still at risk. We'd like to have that at some point in time for a variety of reasons, but we just don't have that yet, so we don't recommend getting an antibody test after you've been infected.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** I'm sorry, what if you get vaccinated? Can you still get an accurate antibody test?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Well, you can't do the regular, you know, spike protein antibody tests because it's going to be positive either way. There's another type of antibody that's called an N antibody and or an N antigen. And there you can determine whether the individual has had natural infection versus an increase in antibody due to the vaccine. So there is a distinguishing test, but you have to specifically request that.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Dave. Nikita, we're going to wrap up with you.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** All right, I'm all politics today.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** So I'm wondering if you plan on vetting any candidates on whom you'll run, or, how should I phrase? I'm wondering if you'll vet candidates before agreeing to run with them on a line. And on that, are you bothered by Alexandra Soriano-Taveras, who's an Assembly candidate in the 37th District, who has faced fire for calling for boycotts of some Jewish businesses in Teaneck last July, and who appears a favorite for the Bergen County line, which you will also run on.

And then now that you've endorsed Senator candidates in District 16, 2 and 20, are you willing to make an endorsement in the 37th District where you'll run on the line with Assemblyman Gordon Johnson?

And then over in Assemblyman Chiaravallotti's District, he's facing some headwinds from Mayor Jimmy Davis who's invoking a longstanding deal in Hudson County that lets mayors pick people to fill some Legislative seats. I'm aware that you made a call on the Assemblyman behalf to attempt to change the mayor's mind. I'm wondering if you're okay with the Mayor of Bayonne essentially appointing a Legislator.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** It sounds like Judy and Eddy can take the next couple minutes off. I'm not going to, again, don't be mad at me, because I've got a lot of respect for you. But I'm not going to have a whole lot to say on most of this. Vetting candidates is typically done at the county level. Obviously, if there's some piece of information that I'm aware of, or Parimal or the team is aware of, that's something that we're not bashful to share.

I don't know the candidate in the 37th. I read the headline of the remarks, I don't have a specific reaction to it. But I would just say this: this is not a time to be dividing ourselves in the us versus them mode. We just came out of a four-year federal administration that did that for a living. The last thing we need in the most diverse state in the union is for us to be pitting one community against another, and that includes anti-Semitism or whatever else is implied in this.

No news for you on the 37th, as I mentioned to you already. I know deeply both Gordon and Valerie and I'm a huge fan of each of them. They're both stars, and they're trying to each succeed one of the all-time greats in Loretta.

I spoke, I won't get into the contents of the details of a private conversation but I had good conversation with both Nick but also with the mayor and a couple of other folks in Hudson County. I don't have a specific reaction. That has been a tradition. Jimmy is a terrific mayor and Nick is a terrific Assemblyman, and where this ends up, I don't know. But they're each stars as well in that respect.

So with that, Judy, you and I get to do something pretty historic here in the next couple of minutes. A chance to get our papers organized and mask up. I want to thank Judy to my right and I haven't said this ever before, Eddy to my left. And thank you both for being here. Everybody, please keep, as I mentioned, Pat Callahan and his family in your prayers.

Again, logistically virtual tomorrow, on the road on Friday, and then electronically Saturday and Sunday, and then back here Monday, unless we get to you otherwise. I thank Jared and Parimal and Dan and the rest of the team. Again, I think we're in sort of, I think the month of March is an inflection period. So we've come down off the peaks without question. That's great news. It feels a little bit, Judy and Eddy, like we're going sideways on transmissibility in cases. Hospitalizations still, numbers still very good, but still just under a couple of thousand. But you combine, hopefully still doing the right things with masks, social distancing, and whatnot, with better weather, God willing, like today, and we'll get some of that next week where it's going to be meaningfully warmer. And most importantly, after the next few weeks, a quantum leap up and vaccines, we're in a whole different place.

And we've said Memorial Day from day one, and we're going to continue to hang our hat, plus or minus, on Memorial Day. And it's now quite clear that the federal government and the private manufacturers of these vaccines are also on record as saying that that is a timeframe that they believe in as well.

Keep the faith folks, it's been one hell of a year. There's no other way to put it. You've done by the millions extraordinary things. For those we have lost and the families they've left behind, the folks who have been unemployed, the small businesses that have been crushed, the restaurants, we are with you, we will do everything we can. We really need our federal government to step up in terms of the help and support that we need. We are optimistic they will, everything from vaccines to cold hard dollars on the barrel, and everything in between. God bless you all.

## Governor Phil Murphy

## Statewide

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Office of Health Care	Transportation	<b>Contact Us</b>	<a href="http://www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html">(/www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html)</a>
Affordability and	<a href="/governor/initiatives/#Transportation">(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)</a>	Scheduling Requests	<b>Legal Statement &amp;</b>
Transparency	<b>News &amp; Events</b>	<a href="/governor/contact/scheduling/">(/governor/contact/scheduling/)</a>	<b>Disclaimers</b>
<a href="/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml">(/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)</a>	Press Releases	Contact Us	<a href="http://www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html">(/www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html)</a>
Boards, Commissions &	<a href="/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contacted/">(/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contacted/)</a>	<a href="http://www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html">(/www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html)</a>	<b>Accessibility Statement</b>
Authorities	Photos		
<a href="/governor/admin/bca/">(/governor/admin/bca/)</a>	<a href="https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy">(/https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy)</a>		
Internship Opportunities	Public Addresses		
<a href="/governor/admin/internship.shtml">(/governor/admin/internship.shtml)</a>	<a href="/governor/news/addresses">(/governor/news/addresses)</a>		
Governor's Residence -	Executive Orders		
Drumthwacket	<a href="http://infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html">(/http://infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)</a>		
<a href="http://drumthwacket.org/">(http://drumthwacket.org/)</a>	Administrative Orders		
	<a href="/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml">(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)</a>		
	Direct Appointments		
	<a href="/governor/news/appointments">(/governor/news/appointments)</a>		
	Advice and Consent		
	Appointments		
	<a href="/governor/news/acappointments">(/governor/news/acappointments)</a>		
	Statements on		
	Legislation		
	<a href="/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml">(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)</a>		
	Administration Reports		
	<a href="/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml">(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)</a>		
	Transition Reports		
	<a href="/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml">(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)</a>		
	Press Kits		
	<a href="/governor/news/press">(/governor/news/press)</a>		

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Office of Governor PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000

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