

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: August 23rd, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon. Sorry to be a minute or two behind here. Lot of moving parts. First up before I jump into prepared remarks, Pat and I this morning were together in Monroe Township in Middlesex County, and Pat will have a lot more detail on the storm and the aftermath of that, but this was a – thank God a low-wind storm, which is great, but it was a drenching – I say was because I think we still have the tail end of this – a drenching rainstorm, and we saw with our own eyes some flooding and some folks who were – had to be evacuated from their homes in Monroe Township, places like – in that nexus of the state in Middlesex County, Spotswood, Jamesburg. Helmetta was on the cover of a lot of national newspapers this morning. Did you get nailed? You were okay?

This is, again, good news, low wind. Even better news, wasn't a direct hit. Because of the lack of wind, power outages were manageable. I think the end of the day yesterday I had 3700, and I'm sure that number's lower today. That's a fraction of our worst fears, but boy, the flooding was significant and the rain extremely, extremely heavy, so we will do as we always do, and Pat will get into some of those details. We will be following up and making sure that we're there at, again, the county level, local level, and the state as well as the feds if we can get the feds. You've already contacted FEMA with Dan Kelly, and that's a process. I was on with the president on Saturday, the FEMA administrator yesterday, so this is something we'll continue to take very seriously.

Second, again, completely unrelated, fast-moving developments in a lot of the details – forgive me because the details are TBD here, and so bear with me on that front, but spoke at the end of the day I think on Saturday with the NORTHCOM commander, so that's a big deal in the US military. That's a four-star US Air Force General Glen VanHerck, and topic of the discussion – and I just spoke with Colonel Wes Adams a short while ago which is partly why I'm a couple minutes late, who is the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst commander. We are going to be getting, I think imminently, Afghan refugees that'll be cycled through Dulles airport in northern Virginia and then up to the Joint Base.

We're honored to do our part. I wrote a letter to the president yesterday that whatever we could do, we want to be here and do the right thing. It's not just for these refugees, but I also think it's a statement about our blessed veterans who fought in this war. These folks fought alongside them in many cases or gave them intelligence and supported them in



many cases. To the blessed veterans who I know this past week or so has been gut wrenching and to these refugees who have been by our side, I want to say unequivocally that New Jersey will do its part. Again, forgive me, the details are going to be evolving. The feds are really running this. This is principally Department of Defense and State Department led, but again, we want to make sure we are here as a partner – a strong partner and doing our share.

With that, good afternoon. I'm honored to be joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, to her right another familiar face, the state's epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have you both. To my left another guy who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel, and a cast of thousands.

Before we begin with a very heavy heart I want to acknowledge this guy, the tragic passing this weekend of Norman Inferrera, III, a 16-year-old rookie lifeguard with the Cape May Beach Patrol. He was injured in a boating accident while patrolling the shoreline last Thursday. His fellow lifeguards were able to bring him back to shore and attend to him, but he passed away from his injuries on Saturday. Let's take a moment to remember that our lifeguards take on a special responsibility. Norman was literally living his dream and being part of the team that keeps everyone safe. I spoke with his family yesterday. In fact, this case with his uncle Dominic. His dad Norman, Jr., was too busted up, as you can imagine, to speak. I've also spoken several times with Zach Mullock, the mayor there. You may have seen they're going to name a beach after Norman, which is so fitting. I was back and forth this morning with the legislators in that part of the state, Mike Testa, Antwan McClellan, Erik Simonsen. Mike reminded me that he was a young lifeguard on that very beach as a kid, and I know we join them and the family, especially, and so many in the Cape May community in keeping this guy and his family and colleagues in the Cape May Beach Patrol in our thoughts and prayers. God bless you, Norman.

Switching gears, today I'm signing an executive order requiring all preschool through grade 12 personnel to be fully vaccinated by October 18th, and if they're not to submit to at a minimum one to two tests per week. This order applies to all public, private, and parochial preschool programs, elementary, and secondary schools, including charter and renaissance schools. To be clear, it also applies to all individuals employed by a school regardless of whether they work full-time or part-time. This includes administrators, educators and educational support professionals, individuals providing food, custodial, or administrative support services, substitute teachers whether employed directly by a school or otherwise contracted, and other school employees. As we move forward over the coming weeks to implement this order, we expect that district leaders will work collaboratively and directly with local union leadership on smoothing out operational or other logistical aspects, especially if there's a need for larger-scale testing of workers over the next couple of months.

Our schools all have access of multiple sources of funding to address costs associated with employee vaccination and testing, including three rounds of Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, otherwise known as ESSER, and emergency relief for non-public schools from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief funds, otherwise known as GEER. Back in June, the Department of Health under Judy's leadership issued guidance to school to help implement testing. The Department will also begin offering a free program through which districts can conduct testing. While schools have already been notified of this upcoming program, more details will be released soon. At the state level, we will continue to work closely with school officials on the implementation of this order. Now, we do not believe that meeting this order will be especially hard to do. We have received multiple local reports that point to an overwhelming majority of our educational and classroom leaders having already taken their personal responsibility to their families and students and colleagues seriously and gotten vaccinated. I thank them for continuing to be models for their communities.

As the school year rapidly approaches, we are continuing to do all we can to ensure as safe a start as possible. We know that strong masking and vaccination protocols in tandem with other safety measures are our best consolidated tool for keeping our schools open for full-time in-person instruction and our educational communities safe. You may have seen this, but nationwide, as the latest – as of the latest data, rather, from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, the number of kids in hospitals, sadly, across the country because of COVID last week hit a daily average, Judy, of 1,234, and I'm told by my team that number on one day last week got as high as 1900 pediatrics cases in our nation's hospitals, and that number of average daily pediatric hospitals has tripled in just four weeks. I think we've got 20 in our state right now, 13 confirmed, seven PUI.

Yet some continue to mistakenly and dangerously grasp at the lie that kids can't get COVID or that they can't spread COVID. Neither of that is true. In Hillsborough County, Florida, more than 13,000 students and staff are quarantining due to exposure to the coronavirus, and I remind you, by the way, in that state, their governor has gone so far as to threaten defunding schools if they tried to put masking requirement in place. Thankfully, more and more school leaders in that state are putting safety and common sense first. More than 20,000 students across Mississippi have been exposed. Ware County, Georgia closed all of its schools. In Texas, multiple districts have closed or delayed the start of their school years because of rising cases among students and staff. I made this point a couple of weeks ago. We're not going to sacrifice the health of our kids or staff, and masking and vaccinations of both students and staff along with a layered

approach to safety is our top priority for starting the year. Remember, if that weren't enough, that no kids, no students or anybody under the age of 12 are yet eligible to be vaccinated. Roughly only half of those older than 12 who are kids and students have been vaccinated. We will continue to educate students and parents on the importance of vaccination, especially for younger students, when the FDA grants its approval for them to receive a COVID vaccine.

Switching only a modest gear but somewhat related, additionally, I'm announcing the same vaccination policy for all state employees as well, including those at all state agencies, authorities, and public colleges and universities, whether they be full- or part-time or contract employees. Again, we will work with our public sector union partners to see its successful implementation. As a reminder, state employees in our healthcare and correctional facilities were already subject to the vaccination or test protocol under prior executive order, so this policy extends that scope to all workers at state agencies and authorities. The top line here is that all school personnel and members of the state workforce have until October 18th to be fully vaccinated or face a requirement of regular testing. Again, that'll be at least one or two times per week.

Now, moving forward, let's do a quick update of the analysis of breakthrough infections among the fully vaccinated. This latest data takes us through Sunday, August 8th. By that date, a total of 5,116,596 individuals were counted as fully vaccinated. Among all of these people, a total of 10,123 have since tested positive for the coronavirus. That's just one of every 500 vaccinated individuals or 0.2%. Yes, as the Delta variant continues its rampage, we are seeing an increase in the number of breakthrough cases. However, the percentage of positive test results from fully vaccinated individuals continues to be only a small part of the overall. For example, there were 1397 breakthrough positive PCR or presumed positive antigen tests during the period from August 2nd to August 8th, but during the same week, there were 7,611 total positive test results.

Look at it this way. Roughly 5.1 million fully vaccinated people accounted for a little bit more than 18% of the positive cases for the week, while the roughly 4.1 million unvaccinated or not yet fully vaccinated individuals accounted for about 82%. There is no doubt that the vaccines are helping to prevent infection. Let's also not forget that a good chunk of that 4.1 million are the kids I just referred to a minute ago, 11 and under, who just aren't eligible for vaccination and whose parents are desperately waiting for that FDA approval. Again, as powerful as the vaccines combined overall performance number is, even more powerful is the fact that they continue to perform even better at preventing COVID-related hospitalization or, please God, not death.

First on the hospitalization side, there have been a total of 270 hospitalizations of fully vaccinated individuals due to a case of COVID since mid-January when the first individuals to receive the vaccine reached their full vaccination status. For the entirety of the week of August 2nd to August 8th, we recorded 25 COVID-related hospitalizations of fully vaccinated folks. That's just 1.8% of the 1397 breakthrough cases. Separately, through the daily reports compiled by the New Jersey Hospital Association, we know there was a total of 608 hospitalizations of known COVID-positive patients along with others admitted as persons under investigation who have since tested positive.

Tina would want me to remind everyone that we should use caution in mixing the numbers from the Communicable Disease Service at the Department of Health on the one hand and the New Jersey Hospital Association numbers on the other hand because these are distinct data sets. Someone may test, for instance, positive one week and be hospitalized the next, as an example, or someone could be hospitalized as a person under investigation at the end of one reporting period and have a positive test turned – returned, rather, in another. Both of these could skew a case here and there. Looking at these numbers in the cumulative is currently our best metric. The NJHA is working with us on changing their hospital reporting metrics so we can capture the number of unvaccinated persons who are hospitalized in real time. We expect that the Communicable Disease Service's breakthrough numbers should closely match this NJHA data once CDS confirms and validates their breakthrough data, but regardless, we can extrapolate a simple fact.

Fully vaccinated individuals make up a very, very small minority of those entering our hospitals for COVID-related illness, and in this case the unvaccinated measure in at about 96% of all COVID-related hospitalizations, and on deaths, through August 8th, there have been 58 due to COVID among the 10,123 total breakthrough cases. That's 0.57%. For the week, just the week August 2nd to August 8th, the preliminary data reported zero deaths of fully vaccinated individuals due to COVID. On this we must recognize that the Communicable Disease Service and our local health officials are both continually reviewing deaths, as we've mentioned here many times. As such, these numbers for the week must be taken as preliminary. There is a possibility that a death from this week could upon further review be considered to be from COVID-related complications and added to the cumulative total in a coming week. Remember, it's very much like the numbers of deaths reported out each day. In many cases these deaths are not necessarily from the prior 24 hours or even from that current week, and that's the same reality here. Regardless, that current total number of 58 COVID-related deaths among the more than 10,000 breakthrough cases among the more than 5.1 million fully vaccinated individuals pales in comparison to the total number of deaths due to COVID from the 4.1 million who are unvaccinated or not yet fully vaccinated.

Now in accordance with the CDC's recommendations, we will be moving forward with a plan for a fully vaccinated folks to receive their booster shots, their third shot, and Judy will have some additional color to add to that in a few minutes, but what is most important right now is for everyone to get vaccinated. That number continues to grow, and as of this morning, we are now at that number 4,491,608 folks who live, work, or study in New Jersey who have received their full doses, and the majority are past the point where they are considered fully vaccinated. Another roughly – and this is an important one – 676,500 New Jerseyans have received their first dose of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, and we remind you New Jersey continues to be a national leader on second dose take-up. You've got to go out and do that, folks, so please go back for your second dose when you are scheduled to receive it. We also welcome the FDA's full approval of the Pfizer vaccine, and we hope this will spur more of you who have been in a wait and see mode to get vaccinated. Please, again, do your part. Get vaccinated.

Now let's look at the rest of the day's numbers. Here are today's newly reported positive cases. You can see on that screen. The important metrics to look at here are the positivity rate, which is multiple times higher than it was last month, and the rate of transmission, which has moderated a bit, which is good news over the past couple weeks, but still signifies a significant rate of spread. Looking at our hospitals, we're continuing to see a gradual increase in all of these numbers. Thankfully, we are not anywhere near where we were during the spring surge, but we do look at these constantly, and we are fully aware of the extreme toll this pandemic is taking on the doctors and nurses and other hospital staffers who have been at this thing since day one. We cannot thank them enough for their tremendous service, but if you really want to thank them, go out and get vaccinated, wear a mask, and keep out of the hospital to begin with. That's another way to say thank you to our extraordinary healthcare workers. Here's the latest report on COVID confirmed and probable deaths. Three more confirmed, probable adjusted to 2,722. You can see the unfathomable lost, and let's take a couple of minutes to remember several more of those we have lost during the pandemic.

We'll start with this long-time Audubon resident down in Camden County, Candida Palmieri, who passed away at the age of 71 on New Year's Day. In her younger days, she spent time living in both Tanzania and England, but she had called Audubon home since 1984. With degrees in geography and history from respectively Rowan University and Rutgers University Camden, she spent more than 20 years educating the children Camden, pushing her students and cheerleading them to fulfill their potential. For her efforts and because of the respect she earned, she was recognized as a teacher of the year and received a Fulbright-Hays fellowship. She left the classroom in 2015 but spent her retirement continuing to consult with the New Jersey Education Association with a focus on ensuring educational equity for marginalized students. Having lived abroad, she always harbored a love of travel and had a passport stamped with locales including Ireland, Italy, Poland, Russia, Turkey, China, South Korea, and Japan. She left behind her children, her daughter Phoebe, who I had the great honor of speaking with a couple weeks ago. She lives in Ithaca New York – her son Matthew, who lives in England, and her grandchildren Kayne, Macy, and Mica. We thank Candida for a career spent educating the children of Camden, and may God bless and watch over her memory and her family.

Next up, we're going to remember this guy Johnny Bezerra. He was 71 years old when COVID claimed him from his family on March 19th. A resident of Belleville, he was born in the Brazilian port city of Belem Para. At the age of 17 in 1968, he made his way to the United States and had also called Newark and Caldwell home prior to settling in Belleville.

Almost immediately, Pat, when he came to the United States, he served his new country in Vietnam, unbelievable, receiving a Bronze Star for valor as well as a Purple Heart in addition to other commendations. He was always proud of his service to our nation and to his nation, his new nation, and he was a long-time member of the American Legion Post 70 of Nutley, Post 105 of Belleville, VFW Post 493, and the Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 366. He spent a career working the railroads, mostly for Amtrak, but he loved also being with his fellow veterans and with other Brazil soccer fans, especially during World Cup time.

He is survived by his mother, and keep her in your prayers, Farrime, as well as by his wife of 48 years, Audrey, and their three children, Felicia, Megan, and Manoel. I had the honor of speaking with Audrey, Felicia, and Megan a couple weeks ago. He also leaves behind their families, including seven grandchildren, Gabriella, Isabella, John Rocco, Dominic, Giovanni, Luca, and Aiden. We thank Johnny for his service to his adopted nation. We are forever grateful that he chose to find his American Dream right here in New Jersey, and may God bless and watch over his memory and his family.

Finally today, let's honor another extraordinary veteran, a six-decade member of the Hamilton Township right down the block, Mercer County family, Joseph Mastromarino. Born in our nation's capital, Joe and his family moved to Hamilton when he was 12 years old, and he called it home for the next 60 years. An optician, he assisted countless patients at the practice in Princeton where he spent his career. Joe was also a decorated army veteran, having served in Vietnam when he was wounded at the Battle of Hamburger Hill on May 11, 1969.

Among his medals and awards were – again, this is extraordinary – the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Vietnam Service Medal, Air Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Meritorious Unit Citation, Valorous Unit Award, and not one, not two, but three Bronze Service Stars. On November 27th of last year, Joe left our New Jersey family. He left behind his wife, Lou

Ann, his sons, Joel and Jamie, and his daughter, Joia. I had the great honor of speaking with Joel a couple weeks ago, along with their spouses and his seven beloved grandchildren, Christopher, Jonathon, Elliott, Riley, Madison, Liliana, and Joey, and his great-grandchild, Lucas.

Tomorrow, August 24th would have been Joe's 73rd birthday, and his legacy of service is continued by his son, Joel, who works for our Department of Children and Families based in Cape May. May God bless Joe. We thank him for his extraordinary service to our nation, and we keep his memory and his family in our prayers.

I haven't said this in awhile, but the reason we remember people like Candida, Johnny, and Joe is because no one should ever forget that those we lose leave behind real families. This is not abstract to them, and it should not be to us either. These were real people who lived extraordinary lives, who have left us, and they leave behind families up and down our state and in some cases families scattered around the world. It is for them that we are all of us together, including the millions of you who wake up every day trying to do the right thing. Please continue to do the right thing to protect yourself and your families so we can end this thing with as many members of our New Jersey family with us alive. Get vaccinated, wear a mask, and take every precaution.

Finally, before I turn the show over, the car keys to Judy, for today I want to give a shout out to one of our state's cultural institutions, which has remained strong thanks to our partnership with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority; that is the Rhino Theatre Group of Pompton Lakes, a women owned and certified business based in Passaic County. Since its founding in 2001 by artistic director and executive producer Carmela Wolosz, and that's Carmela on the left, the Rhino has educated countless students and entertained thousands of patrons. Today it has two locations in Pompton Plains that are safe and inclusive spaces for both students and audiences.

When the pandemic hit and Rhino stages went dark and its reputation for quality and affordable community theater was cast in doubt, thanks to the partnership of the EDA, Carmela and her managing director, Jo Ann Ventor, on the right, were able to secure the grants necessary to meet their expenses. As they say, the show goes on. I'm especially proud of the supports that were put in place to keep our arts centers thriving at the Rhino Theatre Group and elsewhere up and down the state. We need the arts more than ever. With folks like Carmela and Jo Ann and their team, I know this is a need that will be fulfilled.

We had a great conversation a couple weeks ago. Check them out at [rhinotheatre.com](http://rhinotheatre.com). Make sure you spell theatre the way it is there, R-E at the end, [rhinotheatre.com](http://rhinotheatre.com). That's all I've got for this Monday. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, as Governor Murphy said, we hope today's news that the FDA has licensed the vaccine we know as Pfizer for those individuals 16 years of age and older will persuade those who have been hesitant to get vaccinated now. We know from our COVID community core volunteers who walk around neighborhoods and talk about the safety and effectiveness of vaccine, that lack of full FDA approval has been cited by some as the reason they have not received the vaccination. The fully licensed vaccine will now be marketed as Comirnaty. Pfizer will continue to be available under the emergency use authorization, the EUA, including for individuals 12 through 15 years of age, and for the administration of a third dose in certain immunocompromised individuals right now.

We are in a race against time, the highly transmissible Delta variant. The initial variants like Alpha could lead to infection in one to three other individuals. The Delta variant can lead to infection in seven to nine individuals if you are exposed. As the Governor said, the most important thing that everyone can do is get vaccinated, including pregnant women, those in communities with low vaccination rates, and children between the ages of 12 and 17.

In recent weeks the Department has worked with municipal health and school officials as well as community partners on a major back-to-school push to expand access for adolescents through a 120 popup sites and 20 static sites located in schools and/or expanding Pfizer to sites located in close proximity to schools. The following cities have already set up or are in the process of finalizing static sites in schools, Newark, Paterson, Passaic, Camden, Trenton, Vineland, Atlantic City, Hamilton, Plainfield, and Woodbridge. Currently, 53% of the 12 to 17-year-olds have received at least one dose. That represents a 3% increase in the last week, but we must do better. Schools open in 2 weeks and 323,000 12 to 17-year-olds remain unvaccinated.

As the CDC Director, Dr. Walensky, said last week, "It has never been more urgent to increase vaccinations among pregnant and breastfeeding women because of the Delta variant and the increased risk of severe illness for pregnant women." The CDC Director cited new safety data, showing no increased risk of miscarriage for those who received at least one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine have also recommended that all pregnant women get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Another population that is highly vulnerable to the virus are those with compromised immune systems. That's why on August 13th the FDA and the CDC authorized a third dose of either Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for those who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. This includes patients in active cancer treatment, those with uncontrolled HIV, organ or stem cell transplant recipients, those taking medications that weaken their immune system such as chemotherapy or anti-rejection medication after a transplant, and disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs such as infliximab. A full list of conditions can be found on the CDC's website.

A third dose of this population is intended to ensure that they have enough protection against COVID because they may not build up the same level of immunity as other people. Our vaccination sites were instructed to offer third doses to this population, and they were also informed that proof of condition or a doctor's note is not required. The additional dose of either Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should be the same vaccine as the initial series, if possible, and should be administered at least 4 weeks after the 2nd dose. Since the 3rd shot was authorized, 19,111 individuals have received a 3rd dose.

The Department is also going to be issuing guidance to popup clinics to schedule follow up events four weeks after the initial event so people can return to the same place with the same trusted partners for their second dose. The four-week period can apply to both Pfizer and Moderna at this time. For those who have received the Pfizer vaccine, it is perfectly safe to wait that extra week for the second dose if returning to the site of their first dose is more convenient than having to go elsewhere for the second dose. The important thing is that you get your second dose.

Last week, President Biden announced that booster shots will be available beginning on September 20th. We're working on plans to provide these booster shots. We will have a network of vaccination sites sufficient to provide booster shots to all previously vaccinated New Jerseyans. We are reaching out to our PODs, our points of dispensing, and expect to have adequate locations in each county that can offer Pfizer and Moderna. If we determine more sites are needed, we will be prepared to open them up as well.

We are planning for a range of scenarios while we await the FDA and CDC approval and recommendations on boosters. Part of the rationale for boosters are several new CDC studies showing waning immunity over time. One CDC study of adults in New York state overall effectiveness against COVID-19 infections declined from 92% to about 80%, but they were still very effective against severe disease and death.

Currently in New Jersey, 90.3% of our residents in long-term care and assisted living facilities are vaccinated and 74.2% of the staff in long-term care and assisted living facilities are vaccinated. We are seeing a continuing rise in the number of outbreaks in nursing homes, 113 active outbreaks today. That's very concerning because we know that our immune systems weaken with age. The Biden Administration also announced that nursing homes should require their staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or risk losing federal Medicare and Medicaid funding. Also, we will be working with nursing home industry leaders to develop a booster plan for all nursing homes.

I also want to talk about a safe and healthy return to school. Schools open in about two weeks. The Department of Health and the Department of Education have issued updated guidance that could be found on both the Department of Health and the Department of Education websites. Look for *The Road Forward: Health and Safety Guidance* for the 2021/2022 school year. The guidance makes clear that a layered approach of preventative measures is best to protect students and staff, and that includes masking, physical distancing, testing, and staying home when you're sick.

It reminds school districts to work with local health officials on testing strategies in K through 12 schools and when students or staff are ill and have potential COVID-19 exposures. Local health departments will guide them on steps to take if children or staff present with COVID-19 symptoms. Children and staff with COVID-19 symptoms should be separated from others until they can be sent home and referred to healthcare providers. I also want to remind parents to monitor their children for symptoms and please send them to school wearing a mask.

Moving onto my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 946 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive individuals and of those under investigation, 182 are in ICU and 84 are on ventilators. These numbers have been increasing steadily. Fortunately, there are no new reports or multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 130 cumulative cases in our state. None of the children are currently hospitalized. At the state veteran's homes there are no new cases among the residents of the homes; however, there are five new cases of positive employees. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there are four new cases among patients since our last briefing, three at the Trenton psychiatric hospital and one at the Ann Klein Forensic Center.

The daily percent positivity as of August 19th is 5.13% in the state. The northern part of the state reports 4.46, the central part of the state 5.28%, and the southern part of the state 6.61%. That concludes my daily report. Let's continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, our friends, and most importantly our children. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you for everything. There's a lot going on both within the pandemic and alongside the pandemic. Thank you for all that. In the interest of time we'll move along. I'd ask our folks from the press here to keep things fairly crisp because we've got a lot of balls in the air right now.

Pat, I'm sure you've got other stuff, but I think weather is – this is in the category life goes on, right, whether it's weather and tropical storm and heavy rain and flooding or other matters. What's your assessment, and where do we go from here? Thank you for your leadership.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As you stated, our relationship with FEMA not only in Region 2 but the fact that the administrative reached out to us yesterday to jump on a call, just very proactive. We stood ready to send resources to other states as well, which we actually did. We sent a 16-member water rescue team.

They're still up in Windsor, Connecticut right now. They have not been deployed yet. They're either going to be deployed or sent home. We did not leave ourselves vulnerable though. We still have an 80-member team to do swift water rescue here. Thankfully, they were not used.

FEMA sent their incident management assistance team here, and they also have a state liaison officer, Rob Hutchison, up at our EOC that's just phenomenal in keeping those lines of communication open. Governor, as you said, our biggest issue was the flooding, particularly Middlesex County, being there this morning and seeing that and that Rossmoor community. As you assured them, we will be there with them, whether that's with the insurance issues, SPA, public assistance, mitigation efforts. We will make sure that those damage assessments, which are getting underway today with FEMA, and that we have to wait in some spots for the water to recede in order to get those done. The water rescues and sheltering needs were handled all at the local level. They did not make any resource request of the state.

Our EOC will remain open until probably this evening just to make sure we meet any resource requests that come in. You said it earlier, right now we're hovering about 4,000 outages, and that will fluctuate throughout the day. At our peak there was 9,000, so really dodged a bullet with regards to our electricity. One thing I just want to highlight, the amount of planning and preplanning that went into this in advance of the storm with our federal, state, and county partners, the calls throughout the weekend, that allowed for us to take all the appropriate protective measures, not that those few folks that we saw today didn't get beat up there in Middlesex.

I'll just close with saying that the flooding may continue with the runoff and as the rivers drain over the next couple days. That risk of those flooded roadways remains a concern. If you have seen it not only here but in Tennessee and every place else, the line that we use is turn around, don't drown. That water has a power about it that sometimes doesn't seem until you're knee deep in it. We stand ready to assist, Gov, throughout the state and across the country, if need be.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Pat. Two quick follow ups; number one, we were in Middlesex. Again, that's Spotswood, Monroe, Helmetta, Jamesburg nexus got clobbered. I spoke to several mayors. We were with Mayor Dalina in person in Monroe. As Dan Bryan reminds me, in the usual places where it floods in a storm, we saw that as well, so Long Beach Island, Hoboken, Jersey City, Newark. I don't want anyone out there to think that we're not looking at other places in the state.

The second point is this; you and I heard this from not one, not two, but several residents there. They had moved there and in some cases they had moved there three months ago or double digit years ago. We heard several people say when I moved here I asked do I need flood insurance? It's nobody's fault. This is just the way the world is changing. The answer was we never get flooded here. That little creek you and I were standing beside today apparently was raging yesterday. The fact of the matter is the world, it is a-changing. These storms are more intense, they're more frequent, and they're in more places over time. This is not political; this is just fact.

Pat mentioned about the preparations that we all have put into this and the OEM emergency management function is under Pat's leadership. He does an extraordinary job with it, but it is pretty clear: as proactive as we think we are, we're going to have to continue. I think not just New Jersey but every state, every country at this point, is going to have to tune up the playbook because we're in – not to be too cute about this, we're in uncharted waters. It's not just flooding. It's all the stuff that goes with those intense storms and we're going to see more of this and not less of it. Thank you for your leadership and thank you for that.

Let's start over here. Again, we're going to be in the rhythm that we've been in. We're going to be on Mondays. My gut tells me we may go to a more frequent cadence in and around back-to-school. We'll come back to you on that. Dan Bryan is here, and we'll follow up with you. With that, we'll see you a week from today at 1 o'clock, and we'll be out and about I'm sure several days this week in the state.

## Q&A Session

Dave, good to see you. Fire away.

**Reporter:** Good afternoon. Thanks, Governor. I know you said the Defense Department was handling a lot of the transition of Afghan nationals to New Jersey. I'm just curious if you can say at all yet how many New Jersey will be getting and when? Where will they live and for how long? On the mandate that you signed today, the executive order, do you know what percentage of teachers and state workers are already vaccinated? I know you said there were reports of overwhelmingly teacher vaccinations I'm just curious if you have that detail. Do you plan on updates to – do you plan to update those figures to say the percentage has moved from this to that so people have an idea of where that stands? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Mike. On the latter, I don't have a specific number, but all evidence, unless you have it, Judy, is that teachers in particular are extremely well-vaccinated. The numbers are very high. I think adjunct staff is less so, but the teacher number is extremely high. If we can get a specific number for you and update that, we will. I'm not sure that that – I'm not sure the degree of difficulty.

On the refugees, how many, when, where, etc, I don't have a lot of specific answers, but let me give you the best I can give you. How many? I think a significant amount. I'm not – I don't have a precise number for you, but it's a significant amount. Secondly, when? Imminently, so this is very soon. Where? On base, and Colonel Adams was very clear that priority number one was safety and security of these folks, getting them cared for. We've obviously raised our hand and said any supplemental help you need, everything from, Judy, vaccinations, testings, all the way to working with nonprofits to get baby formula and diapers and everything in between. I mentioned that they appear to be doing this through a pivot point at Dulles International Airport in northern Virginia. To the best of our knowledge, all of the health screenings, testings, and vaccinations are taking place there before they get to New Jersey. That's a general sense.

This is a potentially significant population, and it's very soon. They'll be on base unless we otherwise say. I guess you also asked ultimately how long, and too early to tell. We are, in many respects, the most diverse state in America. When you have – if you look at the history of refugees and where they ultimately end up, they typically end up – the bulk of them typically end up where there's already relatives, family, friends living that have heretofore come to the United States. For all the diversity we have, we have a very small Afghani population. The big buckets are in northern Virginia and in California. If history is a guide – and again, I'm just saying history is a guide here. I don't have any inside knowledge – it would be probably in one or both of those pockets where you'd see the bulk of these folks end up. That's not to say we won't raise our hand and do our fair share if they want to stay in the great Garden State. We'll do everything we can to make that work for them and for us. Thank you.

Matt, good afternoon.

**Matt Arco, NJ.com:** Good afternoon. Commissioner, how will DOH implement the vaccine mandate for long-term care facilities? We're hearing from families that continue to complain that nursing homes disregard the rules for visitation. Will the Department issue any new guidance? What's the weekly positive test data for kids under 18 over the past month? Will you supply that weekly going forward? Governor, two things: have you been aware that some school districts, maybe one actually in your backyard, is effectively circumventing the mask mandate by saying parents can sign a letter saying it's a burden for their child to be wearing a mask? Are you planning to use some relief funds to extend unemployment benefits past September 5<sup>th</sup> as suggested by the President?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Matt. Judy, I'll let you, if you don't mind, jump in on the long-term care booster, how that'll be administered, visitation, anything there, as well as you said weekly testing data for under 18? No news on the – I'm jumping around here; I apologize. No news on the unemployment extension question and as it relates to districts – and Parimal, you should jump in here if you would like to add to this. I'm aware, including some – I notice in my own backyard. I will just say we will not look kindly upon that and we'll take the appropriate action in response. That fair? Would you add anything to that? You good with that?

Judy, any color on long-term care program for the – I assume you mean for the booster, as well as – remember, it's a very good question because a lot of this was done through the pharmacy channels, CVS, Walgreens, back in the early days. Anything on testing for kids under 18?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Sure, for long-term care, we'll be working with the owners and the managers to activate a portion of the federal program. There will be – according to our communication with the CDC, there will be a replication of the program but not as extensive as we initially had. There will be CMS-certified skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities under the federal program. We'll also activate their independent pharmacies that they are in relationship with right now to develop their booster program. Those communications will be – with the owners and managers will be started this week. We will be prepared on September 20<sup>th</sup> to activate long-term care as quickly as possible, if not before, given the fact that many individuals in long-term care could be considered immuno-compromised.

As far as testing, screening in individuals under 18, we're working with the Department of Education and the school districts to activate those programs. Many of the districts already have testing programs in place. For those that do not, we will have vendors, what we call end-to-end vendors, that have recently answered a request for quotes and have recently been identified by our selection group to be available to the school districts to activate their testing and screening programs

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. Sorry, thank you. Ma'am, are you Maryanne?

**Maryanne:** yes.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Nice to meet you.

**Maryanne:** Nice to meet you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** How are you?

**Maryanne:** Good, how are you?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'm well.

**Maryanne:** My first question, will New Jersey State Police also be included in the vaccine mandate for state employees? Second question, in a memo sent on August 11<sup>th</sup>, New Jersey Department of Education tells administrators to prepare to educate quarantining students saying that it understands there will be instances in which individual students, groups of students, or entire classes will meet the DOH's COVID-19 exclusion criteria and be excluded from schools. Given this memo and rising COVID metrics and today's announcements, is there a reason why you're not publicly announcing that schools in New Jersey must take into consideration the very real possibility that children may need to quarantine and schools need to be ready for that? What will it take to address that?

Third question, with the rising case numbers and vaccine holdouts, are you considering more restrictions? If not, what's your stance on large gatherings like weddings and funerals right now? I have just one more: can you explain the decision to raise taxes on businesses instead of using federal COVID relief funds to replenish the unemployment fund? Do you plan to put that burden on businesses for all three years? When will you let the public know how you plan to spend American Rescue Plan money? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Unless you hear otherwise, state police are included, but Pat and I are just comparing notes to make sure. Would you agree with that, Parimal? Yep, state police included. I think unless someone tells – suggests otherwise, gentlemen, it's been very clear to districts that they have to have a contingency plan if there is an outbreak. Judy, you've been very involved on that. Everybody understands that. The reason why we're taking the steps we're taking, I want to be very clear, not only is to keep kids and educators and staff healthy but we're taking these steps to make sure that overwhelmingly, absent, please God, any outbreak, which would require a quarantine, we're back in business in school, in-person Monday through Friday with masks. Again, that doesn't bring me any joy to say that, but it must be that way now with vaccinations required or a high frequency of testing.

No more restrictions that we're making news with, but we keep everything on the table. Judy, and I, and some colleagues were on a call on Saturday looking at modeling and where this is headed, and some of those scenarios aren't terribly pretty. In all scenarios, it gets worse before it gets better. We have to leave all options on the table, but there's no news other than what we've said today in terms of steps that we're taking. We remind folks that if you're indoors, particularly if you're close quarters and you're not certain of the vaccine status of the people you're with, we're strongly recommending that you wear a mask and secondly that you get vaccinated, period.

Listen, I would – I appreciate the question on small businesses. I think the premise I would've said a little bit differently but that's okay. I signed a law several months ago that would smooth this increase out. Secondly, no state in America per capita has put more money into small businesses than New Jersey. We're behind only California and New York, and they're a lot bigger than we are. Thirdly, folks should expect we will be doing more. Whether it's specific or not to the unemployment insurance question, you should know that we are constantly thinking through how we can continue to plus up help and aid to small businesses, and we will do that.

Thank you very much. Welcome, by the way. Kenny, is that you with the mask?

**Kenny Burns, WHY:** Of course, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** My favorite mask in the state. Nice to see you.

**Kenny Burns, WHY:** Likewise. Three questions for you. One, what is your opinion on vaccine mandates for students that are eligible? The second question, you have been sharing the data on breakthrough cases in the state for a while now. What do you hope this information will show to those who normally aren't as engaged in these briefings as we and

others are? The third question, New Jersey Parents for Virtual Choice said they are still waiting to meet with you about your unequivocal decision to not allow for any remote options or virtual options for the new school year. They have more than 18,000 signatures on a petition asking you to reconsider that decision. You said on News 12 in June that you would be "very happy to meet with them but not included to go there." Would you at least be happy to meet with them to discuss their concerns?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Kenny, can you repeat your breakthrough question? If someone is not paying as close attention as you and your colleagues are...

**Kenny:** Yes, so basically people who don't watch these briefings every day or one way or the other, they're not following the pandemic, what do you hope that the information will show them?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, I think I've got it. Listen, as groups become eligible either for the vaccine or the boosters, we are strongly, I'd say, begging them to get in line and get those boosters and get those vaccine shots. I think where we are today is where I'm comfortable and I think Judy is comfortable mandating every educator and staff member to either be vaccinated or get tested at a high rate of frequency. We think that's the right – that plus masking is the right mix right now. Do we leave options on the table for other steps we could take? Yes, but we think that's the right mix that gets us to that point I mentioned a minute ago to Maryanne. That both keeps people safe but also maximizes the ability to be in person Monday through Friday.

I think the message, Judy – I'll try and you or Tina – we got to make sure Tina – we get our money's worth – Tina gets her money's worth from being here today. I think the message is on the breakthrough case, my message would be even with this hellacious variant, if you are vaccinated fully, you have a high degree of protection. It doesn't mean you can't get COVID. In rare instances, you could get hospitalized but very rare and even rare instances, God forbid, you could lose your life. You are far, far more exposed, overwhelmingly more exposed, if you're not vaccinated. I think that's the big message for me, at least. I don't know how you feel. Tina, jump in and add or delete.

**Sate Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** Yeah, absolutely agree with the Governor that we know that no vaccine is 100% effective, but these vaccines are really, really good at protecting individuals from severe outcomes such as hospitalizations and deaths. We do recognize that vaccine breakthrough cases do occur, but they're really, really rare. So again, just to reiterate that message that this is one of the best things you can do to protect yourselves on top of other layered prevention measures.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Tina, thank you. Good to have you with us. On virtual options, I'm not just saying that to be polite in a setting. I'd be very happy – Parimal or Dan, if you could follow up with this organization. I'm not sure it's necessarily me, but we would be happy to sit with them. As we sit here on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, really two weeks from get-go date on back to school and in some cases, even shorter than that, we're in person. Thank you.

Carly, is that you?

**Carly Sitrin, Politico:** Yeah, thanks, Governor. If a teacher goes out today to get vaccinated, it's unlikely they'll receive two doses by the time school starts. Was there any desire or consideration to do this sooner? School districts have said much of their federal relief funds are going towards ventilation and facility upgrades in addition to standing up tutoring programs and other needs. Do you think the federal funding they've received will be enough to cover a rigorous testing regime? One from Daniel Munoz, are there requirements today a direct response to the FDA's full approval of the Pfizer vaccine? Do you expect more businesses will now require it for their staff and customers?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Nice to have you with us, Carly. Teachers, we – your question was on timing of teachers? Yeah, we're comfortable with – again, more time on the clock on our ability to see where this variant in particular is going – I think Judy, you said earlier the sequencing now suggests it's 94% of the cases of the virus in New Jersey. We think the steps we're taking today, both the step itself and the timing is the right mix based on what we're looking at in terms of modeling.

Federal funding, I suspect you're going to see more on top of what's already in there. There's a significant amount of the various acronym – ESSR, and GEAR, and other programs, and Judy's got a program that she's working on. I think we feel like we've got a significant amount of resources but if we need more, are we prepared to put more in? Absolutely.

The full approval, Carly, unless you see this differently, Judy, did not have any impact on our announcement today about vaccinating full state workers and educators and staff. Would I expect – unless you see that differently. I don't think it was connected to it. The full approval, taking the words emergency use out, if you believe what we're hearing, and we hear a fair amount of this, we hope that that bumps up – there's a certain part of the population that has been holding off. We hope that that bumps up folks stepping up and getting vaccinated. Do I think more businesses will be going toward – I think your question or Daniel's was more toward requirement and doing the sort of thing we're doing today. The answer is yes, almost certainly, and you're seeing it every day.

You're seeing two things right now real-time. You're seeing that you're seeing a whole lot of slowing down the back-to-work, back to the office reality, particularly with the big companies in New York City and certainly around out state as well. I think those are two trends you're seeing without question in the business community.

Thank you. Good to have you. Alex, good afternoon.

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

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Nice to be here.

**Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey:** Dr. Tan, the flip-side of what's being announced today is the possibility of tens of thousands of teachers and tens of thousands of state employees could be regularly tested multiple times a week for COVID. How will that work? Who will run it? Are you concerned that that could skew positivity rates one way or another, or could it be a benefit? Commissioner Persichilli, just a clarification on childcare centers. Are these all childcare centers, just ones that are run by the state, or ones that receive state funding? Colonel, being a state trooper's not your average state job. Things work a little bit differently when it comes to discipline. Will you be disciplining state troopers who don't get the vaccine in addition to testing them? Governor, how much did your allies in the NJEA have on this particular mandate for teachers? Is the reason it was announced later than the other mandates is because they were haggling for different kind of access? Finally, when you announced the first vaccine mandates, critics warned that it was a slippery slope. Aren't you today proving them right?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Pat, does your mother know that you kick your dog? Listen, on testing, seriously, it was directed at Tina, but I think it's Tina and Judy. On testing, we're working this through with the districts as we speak. I don't know if there's any you want to add, but we want to make sure we do this in a way that the system can withstand it, that we can make it as easy as possible and as painless as possible. I don't think we've ever feared about positivity rate. I know that was a big – President Trump was always saying that the more testing we do, the more we're highlighting the people who are sick. That's never been our point of view. We think most testing is good. The more testing we do, the more we understand the guts of this virus. Is that fair to say?

**Sate Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** Yeah, the more testing that we do and the positivity reflect – positivity is primarily used to help us understand whether we're doing enough testing in the first place. Positivity is a metric that shows us that – for example, if we have a larger denominator of individuals who are tested, it shows us sometimes that yeah, you know what? Actually we're not testing a small number and that it reflects a smaller number of people who are just getting tested because they're feeling ill. It actually represents a broader swath of individuals in showing that we are doing enough testing to show that we're doing enough in the community with regard to other aspects of controlling the illness. Testing is always looked at as another layer in our toolbox for preventing COVID spread.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Tina, thank you. Judy, childcare statewide.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, it's statewide. I'll confirm that, but it's statewide.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Parimal, will you help us follow up on that? I want to make sure we don't have any noise around that. Pat, troopers.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Yeah, I would say just like any other workplace policy that they either get vaccinated or get tested and comply with the policy and just like all other workplace policies, if there are violations, there are certainly consequences, Alex. Thanks, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. NJEA, obvious we care deeply. We've got a very good working relationship with NJEA, with AFT, but they're two of many stakeholders that you're working with on something like this. I would say we've had a very constructive – we have a very constructive relationship with them, period, but also as it relates to this, and I thank them for that.

Slippery slope, I'm not sure that I'm – we're just calling this as we see it. We feel pretty strongly this is the right mix. This is – and I say the mix, and I'll focus on schools specifically. That combination of masking, again, which brings us no joy, and now vaccination and/or high-frequency testing in addition to some of the other – many of the other steps that most schools have taken already – as someone had mentioned earlier, I think Carly did, on investing in HVAC systems or the simple stuff like one-way traffic in stairways or halls. We think that taken together is the right risk, again, is the right package.

I've said this several times, and I think you all would agree with me. This is a pretty humbling experience dealing with this virus. There's a big piece today in the *New York Times* on this. Every time you think you got this thing figured out, it takes a turn. I'd say eight out of ten of those turns are negative. A couple out of ten are positive. One of the positives we haven't spoken about today is Delta looks like it begins to peter out at a point where it's hit other places before it hit New Jersey, and it's not doing that yet here. We hope the heck it does do it here. It's humbling, and you do every – it's a little bit like

mother nature. It's very similar. You do everything you can to prepare, to be proactive to get out ahead of this thing, but you have to be willing to revisit the game plan, revisit the decisions you've made, revisit the package that you've put in place for a particular environment. We're no different than -

I was asked – I guess Daniel Munoz indirectly asked the question about businesses. You're seeing – we're all going through this together. I think you're going to continue to see that both humility but we're going to lead the very best way we can, call the balls and strikes as we see them, make decisions based on the science, the data, the facts at every step of the way. Thank you.

We'll go to the back, if you don't mind. Are you Joey?

**Joey Fox, NJ Globe:** Yes, I am Joey. Hello.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Nice to meet you, man.

**Joey Fox, NJ Globe:** Nice to meet you, too.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Welcome.

**Joey Fox, NJ Globe:** I got two things. One is is the state developing any kind of backup plan for election day and voting if COVID continues to be a factor that might disrupt how it would normally proceed? Another question is have you with Andrew Cuomo, Governor Andrew Cuomo leaving office today, have you personally spoken to him anytime recently and have you spoken with incoming governor Kathy Hochul?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yep, so in terms of a backup plan on elections, we had a conversation about this this morning. We feel confident that what we've got in place, the mix – again, this is a little bit back to Alex's good questions. The package, and that's the way I think about it and what's the package? You can get an absentee ballot if you ask for one and vote by mail. We now have early voting. We now have – so there's a number of different days you can vote physically in person. We think we've got the right protocols health-wise set up. We think we'll have the right amount of manpower, so that package, as best we could tell – and this again, back to my last soliloquy on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, to the best of our ability, right now we feel we've got the right package in place. Would you add anything or you good with that? Okay, Parimal is good with that.

I was on a audio Zoom on Saturday afternoon with President Biden and a handful of governors, and Governor Cuomo was on that call, so we were all interchanging in terms of what we were seeing. Lieutenant Governor Hochul, about to be Governor Hochul, and I spoke live probably ten days to two weeks ago. I think the day that Governor Cuomo announced that he was stepping down – it was either that day or the next day. Our chiefs have been in touch at the working level and we are trying to, as soon as we can, find an opportunity to sit face-to-face. Welcome aboard.

Dave, you get to bring us home here.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Thank you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Nice to see you.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Good to see you, too. Welcome back. We know the Delta variant is much more contagious than the previous versions of COVID. You talked a lot at the beginning of the update today about kids all over the country getting infected. A lot of these kids had already started school, thousands of them. Now they're closing the schools. They're getting infected; they have to go into quarantine. A lot of them are sick in the hospital. Parents, New Jersey parents, what would you say to them when they say to you why don't we set up some kind of a virtual – I understand you want to start the new school year fully everybody back in person, but if these patterns happen in New Jersey the same way they've happened all over the rest of the country, instead of scrambling to put together some kind of virtual plan, why don't we start to work on this now and make it more permanent? Their argument is it's cheaper, it's better organized; you're giving a better lesson plan to kids.

Commissioner, you had mentioned that with regard to the booster shots that you're working on the plan to get this up and running as soon as it's officially rolled out and given approval. Can you talk a little bit about – in the beginning of the pandemic, there was a mad scramble for everybody looking to get vaccinated. Governor, you should maybe comment on this as well. We're looking to have people get their booster shot eight months after their second shot. Will there be a process in place so that it will not be a mad scramble where people will be trying to get the booster and now they're going to have to wait six weeks because the lines are flooded and they can't make an appointment and whatever?

Finally, Governor, you had mentioned that all scenarios regarding COVID and the conditions are pointing that they're going to get worse before they get better. Could you just talk a little bit about what are you referring to here? What scenarios? Who did them? What do they show? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Dave. I'll give some quick ones and then Judy, you should jump in. Let me just say on virtual versus in-person, there are two realities that drive our thinking. Then I'll make a more mechanical point, Dave. Number one, we will do everything we can to keep our kids, educators, and staff as safe and healthy as possible. In an overwhelming amount of cases around the country that both I refer to and you referenced as well, those are in states that have strongly discouraged the very measures that we're pursuing like masking and vaccines and whatnot. Number one is health and safety.

Number two is acknowledgment that the learning loss between virtual on the one hand and in-person education on the other hand is overwhelming. Assuming that we have the confidence that we do, and we do as we sit here, that we can keep everybody safe, it is absolutely overwhelmingly as a pedagogical learning development matter, imperative for us to get everybody in school. The more operational answer I would give you is please, God, we don't have to, but we now know how to do this and do it very quickly. If it came to it, we know the playbook because we've already run it, unfortunately, for a long time.

Judy, you should jump in here on the boosters. A big reason we had a scramble is we had no supply. There was an enormous demand/supply imbalance, and we're just in a different place on that front. Having said that, the good news is for all the time we talk about people who don't want to wear a mask or don't want to get vaccinated, overwhelmingly people in this state understand they need to do both. Judy's working on – we don't have all the details of the plan ready to go today, but we will when it's go day, and you should add anything to that. I don't want to be too ominous on the it gets worse before it gets better, but there's no question. Any modeling you look at, hospital – cases and hospitalizations go up, and they particularly go up – and Judy, you should weight in or Tina should weigh in here – after moments – after periods where we know folks will be gathering, particularly indoors, for things like holidays. You see – any sort of modeling you see in ebbing and flowing depending on that.

What we're not factoring in, and this would be a positive surprise – I mentioned this a couple minutes ago – is that Delta appears at a certain point to lose steam in other places. You've seen that in Jakarta, India, UK. Please, God, we see it in New Jersey but the modeling that you and I were kicking back and forth on Saturday does not assume that. That will be a pleasant surprise. Anything on either, Judy or Tina, scrambling for the booster and avoiding that scrambling we had not just in New Jersey, everywhere in December as well as any comment on modeling?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** First, we will have supply to meet – adequate supply to meet the demand. Secondly, we do expect a scramble as we saw in the beginning. The difference is we have many more outlets for people to get vaccinated. We will put out guidelines and support people as best we can to receive that booster at the right time. On the other hand, depending on, like the Governor said, we learn every day how the Delta variant is being spread throughout New Jersey. If we need to get more people boosted, then perhaps exactly at the eight month, we'll do it. We'll be prepared.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, I apologize. We had – remember, in December 15<sup>th</sup>, we had our hospitals and not even all the hospitals, the critical care were there. We were developing the megasites. I mean, we had low double-digit locations. Last document I looked at, we had 1500 locations today. It's a dramatically – that's not to say – I think your point's a good one. People have done the right thing. They're going to step up, and we'll probably have a few days or maybe even a couple of weeks where there's a lot of activity. I think you feel confident and I feel confident we'll meet that.

Any comment on just a general terms, Tina, on modeling just as a general matter?

**Sate Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** Forecasting is certainly an art, and we definitely encourage you, if you haven't taken a look, CDC has a forecasting center where they basically rely on a whole network of different academics throughout the country, many different – they call it consensus modeling where it gives them a little bit more of an accurate guesstimate. Some of those models predict trajectories overall in the US to be very high before it actually burns out. Some of the models also really depend on what the conditions are in individual states. When you look at CDC's forecast modeling site, you'll see that there's a lot of variation among the different states and throughout the country as well. There's always an interval in their models. It could be worst case and best case scenarios. Again, it's an art, and we just hope that everyone stays the course with regard to ensuring that they get vaccinated, do the layered prevention to keep us all on track.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll leave you with one thought because I'll tie your last two questions together, Dave. When the boosters are ready to go for prime time, the most important thing we can do to impact the modeling is to get everybody up to bat and get the booster shot when they should get it as fast as possible That's probably the biggest impact we can have on the modeling going forward. We know one negative fact is going to occur. Florida right now, put aside leadership in Florida. The fact is it's so hot in Florida in this time of the year, they're indoors. Heat in New Jersey drives us outdoors for the few months we can do that. We're going to be going back indoors in the fall, and it's a more challenging reality inside. The faster we get folks boosted, the better off and the better the impact on the modeling.

Judy, Tina, Pat, Parimal, Dan, to everybody else, we kept you a little longer today; apologies for that. Folks, thank you for everything you're doing. Please get vaccinated. Wear masks indoors if you're not sure what the vaccination status is of folks with you. Bear with us. I know some of the stuff is not fun but we believe with all our hearts is the right thing to do. When those boosters – when you're eligible and you're up to bat, get that booster shot. That's the best thing we could do in addition to the folks who've not yet gotten vaccinated. Take care, everybody. God bless.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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