

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: March 24th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Giving New Jerseyans an update on COVID-19. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Again, sorry to be a few minutes late. We have a lot of moving parts here. I want to say good afternoon to everybody.

Again, our thanks to Rutgers Newark for allowing us to use their space for today's briefing. So, to Nancy Cantor and to her whole team, a big shoutout and a big thanks. Tomorrow, Mahen, we will be in Trenton at 2:00 PM at the War Memorial. And so, we will be trying to give you at least one day's advanced notice as to where you will find us.

As is now routine, I am joined by the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, the woman to my right Judy Persichilli; the guy to my left, another guy who increasingly needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan. And we are also joined again and I welcome him back, to Pat's left, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz. So Doc, good to have you back with us.

Before we get to the latest testing results I've got a few announcements and updates on what we've been up to. Before I do that I want to give Sheila Oliver a shoutout who's running the DCA as fast and furiously as ever before. The Lieutenant Governor and I made a decision some number of days ago that we would divide and conquer. I was just on the phone with her, with a group of us a short while ago and they are doing great work, so to give them a huge shoutout.

So, if for no one else other than John Mooney at a minimum – where are you John? After careful discussion and consideration with the Department of Education and the Attorney General's Office, we have applied for the available federal waiver to cancel all student standardized testing scheduled for April. We fully expect this waiver to be granted and Counsel's Office is already at

work on a subsequent order to address the impacts of this decision on other areas of state law and that will be forthcoming.

With students at home and not in their regular classrooms, it is simply not feasible for us to be able to move forward with testing in any feasible way. This decision will not impact the graduation requirements of any student. I want to repeat this. This decision will not impact the graduation requirements of any student. The number one priority must be for our students to work on the lessons before them and to use the time as best as possible to keep up with their current studies. Many parents have moved into a dual role as classroom educator, and it would also not be fair for them to also now have to pick up the title of test proctor as well.

John, before you ask it, I've got no other update in terms of how much longer school will be out but it is still until further notice. We've not made any more definitive assessment as to at least until when.

Secondly, as was announced last night by State Treasurer Liz Muoio, and she and her team as usual are doing a great job, more than \$900 million in discretionary budget spending for the current fiscal year has been placed into reserve. We did not make this decision lightly, but right now, given the impact that this emergency is having on our economy it is the right decision to protect our state's fiscal stability.

I will be going through a series of other offline meetings and engagements that we have had since we last were together with you, but among others on that list I'll just move that up to right now. I had a good meeting with the Senate President and Speaker yesterday afternoon. We kept our distance but we met yesterday afternoon for about an hour in our offices and we began a process of discussing how we see the budget process unfolding. I've got no news for you right now. It so depends on how our federal colleagues turn out today, hopefully today. That's going to tell us a lot about the road forward.

And speaking of which, I do remain hopeful from the ongoing conversations that I've been having with our Congressional Delegation – most recently, just got off a call with Senator Bob Menendez; Corey Booker just reached out a moment ago with our Delegation, with Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and his team, Speaker Pelosi and the White House directly, that a direct cash infusion from Washington to states will soon happen. I'm knocking on wood as I say that. I fully intend to keep burning up the phone lines to Washington to see this through. More on that in a couple of minutes.

I cannot stress this enough, that New Jersey and our residents need the assistance not just to see us through the current emergency, but to ensure that the vital state programs that will help us emerge on the other end of this will not be compromised. And I know the same goes for my fellow Governors and their residents. Before I go on, I want to acknowledge to my right, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples is with us. Jared, great to have you.

Thirdly, following on a very productive conversation with President Trump from yesterday – and again, in a minute I'll go through some other conversations we've been having – we will soon receive a second shipment of sorely-needed personal protective equipment or PPE from the national stockpile for our frontline medical personnel. Judy, correct me if I'm wrong or Pat, an additional 200,000 plus N95 masks and more than 84,000 respirators among other gear.

As I welcome this development, and believe me I welcome it, I'm for it, I am extremely grateful. We are still in need of more equipment for our hospitals and responders. I am extraordinarily grateful to the many private sector partners and general players in our state, including some of New Jersey's legacy companies who have emerged over the last several days with generous PPE equipment donations and other sorely-needed meaningful steps. I mean, this redefines the phrase 'it takes a village.' As good as we might be up here, as good as our legislators might be in Trenton or in Washington, even if we bat 1000 we need help and we're getting it.

We're not there yet by any means. I'll give you a recent example, a today example. We've been informed by PSE&G that it will be making a donation of 50,000 N95 masks. I thank President and CEO Ralph Izzo and his whole team and the entire PSG&E family for pitching in to help our New Jersey family. Just to make some other interactions, I was touched an hour or so ago by Tim Cook and Lisa Jackson of Apple. As we all know, New Jersey's own Lisa Jackson. They've offered to send us some gear. Glaxo, Walgreen's have stepped up. We mentioned Prudential yesterday or the day before. Pat, I think that donation has already come our way but the gear has been distributed as far as I know to St. Barnabas, Holy Name, Hackensack UMC and Morristown. Did I get that right?

Goldman Sachs I mentioned yesterday; Verizon continues to stand tall; Comcast, Home Depot. Hard Rock – not necessarily equipment. Allowing their employees to have more administrative leave. Wawa upping staff wages during this. The Pipefitters Local 24, Jim McManus and his team contributing masks. Sherwin-Williams contributing mightily masks and gloves. It's a list that grows by the day. It is deeply felt, deeply appreciated by all of us especially our healthcare workers and first responders.

And as I mentioned yesterday, Col. Callahan of the State Police are actively engaged in furthering this and working with the private sector to meet our emergent PPE needs. And anyone with supplies to donate at this time, they should email to the New Jersey State Police at ppedonations@njsp.org (mailto:ppedonations@njsp.org). That's ppedonations@njsp.org (mailto:ppedonations@njsp.org). Pat, I think you told me you've already received over 350 emails. Again, a great example of the spirit in which this state lives every single day and certainly at a time of crisis.

Next step – the Departments of Environmental Protection and Community Affairs along with the Board of Public Utilities sent a letter to all municipal water utilities, calling them to voluntarily suspend all water shutoffs during this emergency. Our private utility providers have already voluntarily suspended shutoffs and we need all water providers to follow suit.

I hope I don't need to say this but I will say it – I want to be perfectly clear to these utilities. If you do not voluntarily suspend shutoffs I will order you to suspend shutoffs. No New Jerseyan should fear for losing their access to water throughout this emergency. Water utilities have until tomorrow to confirm with the DEP that they are taking this step. God willing they all will, and for that we are thankful and appreciative; and if they don't, we will make them.

Next, yesterday I announced the launch of our new jobs portal within our www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>) site. So, this is again within the one central repository of information www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). It's a site where residents who have lost their jobs due to this emergency can find and apply for a new job at one of our essential workplaces. And I am proud to say that we are the first state in the United States to do this. The response has been nothing less than overwhelming. In the first 24 hours, the page was visited by more than 88,000 job seekers and as we continue to be contacted by more and more essential employers, the number of available jobs is increasing.

Since yesterday, the number of open jobs – I think I said yesterday there were about 8000. That's gone up to more than 12,000 from more than 100 employers across a variety of essential areas. Again, I urge every resident willing to step up to be part of our frontline workforce to visit www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>) and apply for a job. I also encourage essential employers looking for workers to connect with us through the site to have your openings posted there.

Certainly our Unemployment Insurance system is an important safety net for the many thousands of families being impacted by this public health emergency, but this is an opportunity for frontline work – and to be part of seeing us emerge from this stronger than ever, which we unequivocally will; and for our state's economy to rebound faster. Again, to find a job or to post a job it's a one-stop www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>).

Before we get into test results and sadly lives lost, I want to just briefly as I mentioned a minute ago – and I apologize, Judy, to go on for another minute here – just to touch upon a number of other developments, engagements, conversations, follow-ups that we've had since we last gathered.

First of all, on the enforcement front, just to prove that there are both knuckleheads out there on the one hand, and on the other hand we see them and we're enforcing behavior – charges are being brought against a defendant who got into a dispute with an employee of Wegman's, coughed on the woman and told her after doing so that he had coronavirus. He then refused to cooperate with the police, to either give them his name or his driver's license for more than 40 minutes. A summons is being issued for terroristic threats, harassment and obstruction.

This is not an EO violation per se, but it demonstrates active law enforcement and the steps that we are taking. I want to give Manalapan Police Department a shoutout and the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office a shoutout, and as Pat knows better than anybody, as Jared knows better than anybody, we are up and down this state and we will not take any noncompliant behavior – never mind egregious behavior like this. So, thank you and again, a shoutout to not only our healthcare workers who are heroes but also our first responders who are enforcing this unique environment in which we're living.

In addition, I mentioned I had spoken to President Trump yesterday morning and that was a very productive call. We then had a, shortly after our press gathering we had a VTC, a video conference call with the Vice President. We then last evening had a productive conference call with the Administrator of FEMA Pete Gaynor as well as FEMA Region 2 had Tom Von Essen, and those conversations – as was the one with the President – continued to go very well.

We mentioned yesterday that the President gave his support personally. FEMA reiterated their support for our four field hospitals. Pat, tell us where you expect those locations to be please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: They're enroute now. We were going to get into this tomorrow but since the Gov asked and he's my boss, one is going to be at the Meadowlands Exposition, the second one's going to be at the Convention Center in Edison, the third one will be set up at Atlantic City's Convention Center and the fourth one will be housed periodically at our urban search and rescue facility with that location to be determined at a later time once we are able to analyze the best and most effective place to set that up, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Just to preview tomorrow's gathering, you'll be speaking as well as we would expect Col. Parke who's based in Philadelphia, who's one of the senior members of the Army Corps of Engineers, who's camping in at the ROIC right now. So, thank you for that.

So, field hospitals were in all of these conversations. PPE – I've already referred to. Obviously our support of the direct cash assistance for states was on the list of all of these conversations or at least with the President and Vice President. And then, we also raised that we had applied, I believe as of yesterday for a Major Disaster Declaration under the Stafford Act and that is under consideration.

I want to give a shoutout to our delegation who have stood tall in support of that, just today alone Senator Menendez, Congressman Gottheimer and I exchanging both live conversations and notes on that respect; as well as our outstanding 502F designation under Title XXXII as it relates to federal support for the National Guard activities. Those are both pending we raised on all of the calls that I mentioned.

Again, thirdly I mentioned already a very good, productive early-stage discussion with the Senate President and Speaker, and again, I want to give a big shoutout to the leadership from both sides of the aisle. The Minority Leader Bramnick and I had an exchange today. I just sent Minority Leader Thom Keane a note on something and again, a very productive meeting yesterday late afternoon with Mr. Sweeny and Mr. Coughlin. I want to give the legislative colleagues as a group a big shoutout of thanks and we're trying to find our way through this together.

In real time in Washington right now, having just gotten off the phone with Senator Menendez and having exchanged notes with Senator Booker, the markets are up today I suspect because there is the potential for real progress in Washington. And it's too early to say where this turns out and where it ends and where it lands, but as we sit here now there are bit elements in what is being negotiated consistent with what we have believed all along have been elements of what we believe needs to be a federal assistance program, a big direct stabilization fund among other elements as we understand it that are currently on the table – a big direct stabilization fund, big support for mass transit, unemployment insurance big support, community development block grants; a big chunk for hospital help both generally and specific to COVID-19, a big help toward small businesses.

So, fingers crossed. If those elements in particular in large scale remain parts of what is ultimately agreed upon, voted on and signed by the President, that's good news in the midst of an incredibly challenging world right now. That would be really good news. And I want to give our entire Delegation a big shoutout – Bill Pascrell who was on with me yesterday on this. I want to give each and every one of them a shoutout but a particular shoutout to Senator Bob Menendez who had been a particular bulldog.

It's not final yet, I don't think, that the Motor Vehicles Commission has the word officially. I know President Trump mentioned this last night but I want to give ourselves a modest pat on the back because I think we were one of the first states if not the first state in America to suggest and ask that the Real ID timeframe be pushed back. And it looks like it may be headed that way. If that's the case, that would be a good result. It's not that we don't think we need it, we do; but to do this in an orderly fashion given what we're dealing with I think we'd all agree makes sense.

It's not part of government, so I want to make sure everyone knows and hears me saying that. It's a 501(c3) but I want to give a shoutout to the First Lady and everybody, both the Board of Directors as well as the New Jersey icons who have stepped up and launched the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund. It was kicked off this morning with the likes of Jon Bon Jovi, Bruce Springsteen, Jon Stewart, Charlie Puth, Danny DeVito, Stephen Colbert, Whoopi Goldberg, and others. That's pretty good company. New Jersey pound for pound, I'll put our talent and iconic figures up against any other American state.

Again, it's not part of government so I can't promote it but I will acknowledge it just as I've acknowledged so many of the other private sector players and unions. No other state could pull that group together as I just mentioned on a moment's notice. The Board of Directors, again with the likes of Ray Chambers and Nina Wells and others who have consistently been there for the state of New Jersey across both sides of the aisle, putting America and New Jersey first. There's no other state in America that can come close. So, bless them and bless everybody in the broader village who are helping us out at this time of great need.

Now, to test results. This is a sobering report generally from me, and Judy will give you the details. We are reporting today an additional 846 residents testing positive, bringing the statewide total to 3675. Again, 846 new, Judy, I believe that's right, to a total of 3675. I believe that means New Jersey is the number two state in the nation but I would also remind everybody that we have been aggressive and particularly of late in our testing regime. But that is a fact.

We have also learned with a heavy, heavy heart of an additional 17 COVID-19 related deaths. God rest each one of their souls. We join their families in mourning these extraordinary lives. This is by far our largest single-day report of new deaths, so it is with a particularly heavy heart that we report this today. We have now lost 44 fellow New Jerseyans. And if anyone is looking to me for a reason to justify the steps that I and we have ordered, I can now give you 44 of those reasons.

Again, as we have been saying for the past many days, we have been fully expecting the number of positive cases to increase dramatically as our specimen collection capabilities increase, and in particular as the private sector lab companies have increased their scale and ability to process these tests. These numbers are vital. While they are sobering on the one hand, these positive test case results they are also vital data that we need to make the best decisions to flatten the curve and stay out ahead as best we can of this outbreak.

Our FEMA-partnered testing sites remain open daily, and more county sites are opening up. So again, the FEMA-partnered test sites are the two – one at Bergen Community College which opened on Friday; the second at PNC Bank Arts Center which opened yesterday. I would like to note that Passaic County will be opening a testing site tomorrow for county residents – so this is similar to what Union County has done – at Patterson University in Wayne. This site is only open to Passaic County residents and you must have a doctor's referral for testing. So, if you believe you may require a test, please call your healthcare practitioner.

And again, please only seek a test if you have symptoms. We just do not have the capacity or capability to test the so-called worried well. We understand why folks might be worried – the anxiety, we've talked about it almost every time we've been together. We get that, we understand it. But if you don't have symptoms, please allow the folks who do have symptoms to get into these testing opportunities first.

As this new site in Passaic and other new sites come online, and more specimens are tested and then processed, again we fully expect that the number of positive tests, total tests in fact will go up dramatically into the many, many thousands as we've been predicting. Judy has a little bit of a window today on the non-positive tests and I will let her go through that. But that's something that folks have been rightfully asking for. I get the positives but what's the universe look like? And we have an imperfect, I think it's fair to say, an imperfect first window into at least what that may look like.

Let me also say this: we can't flip a light switch here. If we could we would and we would have done it a long time ago. It takes time for us to see the impacts of social distancing. So, while we cannot wait to see the numbers plateau and eventually decrease, we do not know when that will be. And we continue to take every step possible to ensure social distancing. We're having a meeting after this session later today, our first real deep discussion about modeling and where this is headed.

I urge everybody again to not be alarmed by the numbers of positive tests. The more we have the facts, the more we can make fully-informed decisions as opposed to just educated guesses. And again, yes, the number of positives is big. It's getting bigger. It will continue to do so over the coming days, but again, they are critical. Knowing that data, and again, we've got our first window into the broader non-positive data – getting our arms around that is going to be critical to winning this public health battle.

Again, I urge everybody and I know there's impatience. If I could ask you for several things, one – some patience. We get it. We understand your anxiety. We understand what it's like being cooped up at home but we need you to continue to stay at home and do the basic stuff. Wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds. If you do go out of your home practice both safe respiratory hygiene and social distancing. Frankly, if you're in your home exercise social distancing. I cannot stress to you enough the need for social distancing.

By the way, just think about this – we know that it takes up to two weeks for people to show signs of the illness. So, new cases today could still mean new cases two weeks from now and so on and so on unless – and this is the important point – unless we all act today to slow its spread. We're doing everything we can. We have the chart today? We do. Again, I want to remind everybody, we're doing everything we can to lessen the amount of sick people and fatalities. Literally we're spending 24 hours, seven days a week on that.

But even if we have the same number of people who get infected and we fail in our efforts to lower the number – and we will not fail by the way. But even if we do, I'll remind everybody the volume under each of those curves is the same. But the red curve wreaks havoc. The blue curve allows the healthcare system to be able to digest the same amount of cases under a more manageable period of time.

Again, from day one we've had two choices, two stark choices and we have clearly gone all-in on choice number two. Choice number one is to let the virus run its course along that red curve with enormous amounts of infections and a meaningfully larger amount of fatalities and economic havoc; or, on the other hand, rip the economic band-aid off, take the pain upfront, shut the place down to leaving only essential activity up and running and by doing so, meaningfully lower the amount of fatalities and folks who are sick.

As you can see from the numbers we're reporting today, we sadly cannot bring that fatality number to zero. We're already 44 precious lives lost in our state. We'll do everything we can to keep ahold of that but that number sadly will go up. The positive test results again will go up. It is partly because of community spread and a big dose because we're testing a lot more folks. Again, the silver lining is the more we understand the data the better we will be equipped to deal with that data and get out ahead of this.

Before I turn it over to Judy, and by the way, I think in terms of formal remarks it's just Judy and me today. Pat and Dr. Lifshitz will weigh in as needed and as appropriate. I hope that's okay, but you won't be bashful if there's something you want to get off your chest I know.

Unrelated to this, we are hearing too many reports of some nonretail businesses which are violating both in fact and in spirit the order requiring 100% work from home with limited exceptions. Some businesses have gone so far as to deem all of their employees essential to force them to report to work. Others are simply refusing flat out to follow the order.

Let me be clear if I could. My executive order is not a polite suggestion. It is an order. No one, and I mean no one who can do their job from home should be going to work in an office. We must have 100% compliance. This is about public health and it's about people's lives, your employees' lives, their families' lives, and your life.

Inquiries about failures to comply should be directed to the following phone number. Again, if you're working, and we've gotten a few of these. I've gotten a couple directly to me where the firm is not complying with what we're asking them to do. So, here's the number you call: 609-963-6817. 609-963-6817.

Again, before I turn things over to Judy I want to thank again to the overwhelming amount of New Jerseyans who are helping out by using common sense and by being a role model for others. We know it's not easy on you, it's not easy on your families. And frankly, I can assure you it's not easy on any of us or any of our families. This is truly and in every sense of the word an unprecedented time for our state, but we are unequivocally going to get through this and we're going to get through this together as one New Jersey family stronger than ever before.

With that, please help me welcome the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, good afternoon.

Well, as the Governor stated, the number of cases of COVID-19 in our state continues to rise, and they continue to rise quickly. As of 8:00 AM this morning, New Jersey now has the second highest number of cases in the nation.

With the ongoing spread of COVID-19 I am once again emphasizing that social distancing is vital to slow this process. We've seen in other countries such as China and South Korea that taking aggressive actions can flatten the curve and decrease the number of new cases. Strict enforcement of these initiatives have led to dramatic decreases in these countries. In South Korea, they viewed social distancing as the main effort of mass protection. Their residents stayed home because they recognized it was the right thing to do to protect their communities.

Due to the relatively high transmissibility of the virus, the impact of social distancing on the peak of the epidemic and the potential delay of the peak is likely to depend on the early measures that the Governor has put in place. According to the study by the European Center for Disease Control and Prevention, it's exactly what you must do.

This reinforces our stance that these types of aggressive social distancing initiatives can have similar effects in New Jersey. We don't expect to prevent every single case, but we are trying to limit or to spread out the number of new cases. Similar to what has been seen across the US, we are seeing a significant amount of cases under the age of 65. About 35% of our cases are between the ages of 30 and 49, and approximately 24% of those individuals have been hospitalized. This is just a reminder to younger individuals that they are not immune from COVID-19. They also need to take steps to reduce their risk of exposure.

As always, and as I've stated previously, we continue to remain concerned about our most vulnerable populations and we're working regularly with our partners in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities to try to minimize the impact that this virus can have on our elderly. As of this morning, we have had at least one confirmed case in 19 of our long-term care facilities. This causes us concern.

Many of the nursing homes with confirmed cases are in the same counties where we have large numbers of cases generally, such as Essex, Monmouth, Bergen, Middlesex and Morris. We know that as cases continue to rise our hospitals will be caring for patients with COVID-19. The Department is modeling for this anticipated need in order to have the bed capacity required to give these patients the care they deserve. We expect to have more to say on this model later in this week.

As the Governor said, we are sad to report that we've had 17 new deaths for a total of 44 deaths in our state. There were five new deaths in Bergen County alone, three in Morris County, three in Essex County, two in Hudson and one each in Monmouth, Camden, Passaic, and Union Counties. Nine of our total deaths were associated with long-term care facilities.

We continue to monitor patients with positive results in all of our long-term care facilities. These are our most vulnerable population. Today, we are working with the leadership of the St. Joe's facility in Woodbridge to assist them in the movement of their residents to another facility. This may result unfortunately ultimately in the closure of that facility, a facility that has cared for the most vulnerable population in Woodbridge and the surrounding area for decades. This is the result of some of their employees home, ill with influenza-like illnesses and they have a number of residents who have tested positive for COVID-19. Unfortunately, we've been monitoring the organization since Friday evening, and we are working with the sisters that own and take care of the residents for an orderly transition.

Today, we are also announcing 846 new cases for a total of cases over 3600. The county breakdown of the new cases is as follows: Bergen 61, Burlington 7, Camden 16, Cape May 1, Cumberland 1, Essex 63, Gloucester 6, Hudson 38, Hunterdon 7, Mercer 8, Middlesex 62, Monmouth 53, Morris 28, Ocean 36, Passaic 63, Somerset 31, Sussex 3, Union 43, Warren 3. And we are still gathering more details on these cases and 316 additional cases.

We've been asked questions about a more detailed analysis of test results particularly regarding the positivity rate of the tests, meaning the percentage of lab results that are positive compared to the total number of lab tests performed. According to the data that we've collected this morning of seven laboratories that are sending us COVID-19 results, there were more than 12,000 tests performed on residents of New Jersey, of which approximately 3600 have tested positive.

The overall positivity rate is 27%. That's a really important rate. It tells us how many tests we've performed and how many have tested positive. That will help us in our predictive modeling of the type of care that these individuals require. It also means that the majority of the results have been negative, but we remind people who test negative and have symptoms that it's important for them to still stay at home while you are sick because it might mean that you've been infected with another respiratory virus.

So, we're working around the clock and our Public Health and Emergency Preparedness Response Teams are coordinated throughout government as well as the healthcare sector and other public health partners to respond to the needs of the residents of New Jersey. We will get through this but we have to work together. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. May I ask you or just come in behind you with a couple of questions. We've had positives in 19 long-term care facilities in the state. Just for the folks watching, I believe the denominator in terms of the number of long-term care facilities in the state is 375. Does that sound right? Okay, so that's about 5% of the total.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Secondly, is it fair to say – and Dr. Lifshitz, I'd love you to disagree with me here – getting the negatives for the first time, a window to the negatives, in addition to the pure math, by definition – thanks to the holy pulpit that we have all exercised in the rules of the road – the overwhelming amount of folks who have been tested have been symptomatic, right? Because that's what we've been preaching.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, because that's what we've been following, they're mostly symptomatic.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, I guess if there's good news associated with that, a further piece of good news is the asymptomatic folks are not even a part of that. And then, to repeat the health warning, which I want to make sure everybody who is symptomatic and tested negative, you're not Superman. You still have to make sure you're not being contagious regardless of what it is you have. You know, be smart, is that fair to say? Alright.

Just and then one last comment I had before we throw it open... Unless, Dr. Lifshitz, would you disagree with that or are you...

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Agree. Two people I should never disagree with are my wife and my boss and my boss' boss. So no, I wouldn't disagree with that – that's absolutely accurate. And certainly we're discouraging people without symptoms to be testing, and we know that a lot of people out there have very mild symptoms and are concerned. We know that we're in allergy season amongst other things and it can be difficult to tell. If you sneeze twice people get nervous and go ahead and get tested as well. But yes, we're trying to reserve testing for people with symptoms.

Governor Phil Murphy: And then, the only other thing I wanted to say, so counties' total cases so far, Bergen continues to be the highest. This is of the total 3675. Bergen has 701, second is Essex – 342. By the way, they are the two most populous counties in New Jersey so it's not shocking although the Bergen number continues to be 2x the second place county which is Essex. Monmouth is next at 288, Middlesex at 277, and Union now is the fifth-highest at 246.

The other county observation, I wanted to make you all aware of the overnight numbers. This is the first overnight report that I can recall, I believe it is the first where the number of new cases was not led by Bergen. And so, you've got Bergen at 61 but you had Essex at 63, Middlesex at 62, Passaic at 63. So, that's both good and bad news, so that's probably some element of community spread and also some reality, as we've said already, that a lot more people are getting tested.

I don't want to pound the same, so thank you, Judy, for everything and most importantly for your tireless, exemplary leadership. I don't want to beat the same drum.

We're at war. There's just no question about it and I've said this before, but let's remember what the ingredients were to win WWII. It wasn't that we panicked. We were smart. We worked our tails off. We were proactive, we were aggressive. We had courage. Those are the elements that are going to likewise get us through this, and we will unequivocally get through this as one family, united and stronger than ever before.

Q&A Session:

James Dombrowski, Post Eagle: Colonel, have you seen a significant reduction in crime across the state? What's going on?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: A significant reduction in crime? We've actually year-to-date seen a 25% reduction in crime as compared to last year and an 18% decrease in shootings.

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: A list of questions. One, I know there was talk about hotels being used for quarantine, and do we know what that would look like or if that's going to happen? Two, based on what the President said in recent days about the economy versus, you know, reopening the economy, can he do anything to lift what's going on with the state? Could he pause businesses to be reopened here with federal authority? Three, there's also been discussions about people dying before getting positive tests back about COVID-19. How is that being handled? Are you concerned about numbers being off a little bit because of that?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to have Pat address hotels, Judy will address folks who are passing before they get their tests. I will just say the President's got the biggest bully pulpit in the world, and if the President of the United States says X it has a huge impact. To the best of my knowledge, other than exercising the federal purse strings, that is not necessarily translated into direct action. But there's a moral suasion associated with the presidency of the United States what is unlike any other office in the world. I would think, and I spoke to him yesterday, he made this point to me that he's made in public now the past couple of days – he doesn't want the cure to be worse than the disease. I don't think any of us do but I do think there's a responsible way to go about that.

And one of the huge levers available to get that done responsibly is the action, God willing, that Congress is taking today. That is as robust... If it stays in the neighborhood that I was read into by Senators Menendez and Booker coming in here, if it stays in that neighborhood it is a huge jolt to the economy that will allow us to fund both the aggressive healthcare steps that we need – the PPE, the healthcare workers, the hospital support – as well as the huge dose of... Mark, that was good to see you going to your arm there; we're making progress. As well as the huge dose of small business, unemployment insurance, state aid, transit aid directly into the economy.

Pat, any comments on hotels in your deliberation? By the way, the Army Corps, the National Guard; I believe more than the Army Corps – I believe the Navy is also with us at the ROIC. We've got folks embedded literally in the ROIC morning, noon and night. Please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: To follow up on that, the fact that FEMA designated a Federal Coordinating Officer today – I met him this morning at the ROIC. That's a good sign for us, that designation of that type is made. We trust that that will surely lead to that declaration that you spoke of, Governor. With regard to hotels, and everything is really on the table. At this juncture, they're in the bullpen phase quite frankly as well as with college dorms. And if I can just touch upon the question with regard to somebody who has passed away – and this is not from the health world. I'll kick that to Judy. But even this afternoon, when we're trying to make sure that we're able to allow families to adhere to their religious ceremonies and have that done in a timely fashion – in this particular instance it's a Jewish victim – that we're really struggling to make sure that those tests get done and we can offer those families the type of support, and allow them to send their loved one off as they should according to their religious observances.

Governor Phil Murphy: Faith leaders have been overwhelmingly extraordinary of all faiths. I had a conversation last night, a good friend of mine, one of the most sort of consequential preachers in this state who reached out to me and said, "Listen, I just need you to... Can we sort of work through this together?" He had a dilemma with somebody who had passed and the responsible behavior was overwhelming. And I say likewise on the part of Pat and the rest of the folks who come into contact, returning that, meeting that with the same level of responsibility and care and sensitivity. I take my hat off to you.

Judy, the sad reality of folks who may pass before they get tests back; any comment on hotels or dorm rooms as well?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We do have them in reserve as the Colonel said. They would be for symptomatic individuals who have tested positive with moderate symptoms that are living at close quarters at home and should isolate but perhaps cannot because of their living situation. So, they would be housed in a hotel or a dormitory. It would also be for our vulnerable populations, those that are living in our shelters – primarily the homeless population – who need also to isolate and do not have a residence to go to. Or it could be a person who gets admitted to the hospital and is under observation, tests positive and needs to isolate for a short period of time after their hospital stay. And it would be deemed a safer environment, not only for that individual but for their family and their partners and loved ones. So, the hotels are in reserve. We have gotten a great response from a number of chain hotels offering up their residences.

On those that have passed that could be COVID-19, because it is disproportionately hitting our vulnerable and elderly population, we expect that there are individuals who are in the late stage of their life that have passed, where their primary diagnosis is not COVID-19. Their primary diagnosis could be congestive heart failure, you know, chronic obstructive lung disease, natural causes. And they could be COVID-19. They would not be tested for it. We don't believe it'll disproportionately have any impact on our statistics. It's de minimis at this point.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll add onto what Pastor John Taylor from Trenton reached out to me last night and reminded me that that hotel that has changed names and logos over the years in Trenton is another example of something we're talking about potentially for homeless, for low-symptomatic. Secondly, I think in fairness to the Woodbridge reality you mentioned, Judy, earlier in your remarks, in many cases those are end-of-life patients to begin with, so to your point you just raised, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Absolutely right. They take care of a lot of hospice patients.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is a renowned... The sisters, bless their hearts, over the decades have been extraordinary in taking people home for their final journey. Pat, I meant to ask you, troopers testing positive – what's that look like?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Right before I walked in another trooper came back positive. That's four as well as two recruits that are out of the 196 that are training.

Brian Thompson, NBC: Governor, for you, can you say either the town or the county that the Wegmans is in?

Governor Phil Murphy: Manalapan in Monmouth County.

Brian Thompson, NBC: Manalapan? Thank you. For the Commissioner, can you tell us more about St. Joe's? I think it was St. Joe's you said was the nursing home. It's not a hospice though, correct?

Governor Phil Murphy: Long-term care.

Brian Thompson, NBC: Can you tell us more about why you would close it down at this point? And then, for both of the experts, the cure worse than the disease – when do you think that, as experts in this field, we should be allowing people to go back to regular jobs as opposed to nonessential jobs? Two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, two months, when it's all gone? Can you address that please?

Governor Phil Murphy: I assume when you said 'experts in this field' you weren't referring to Callahan and Murphy in that respect. Okay, just checking. More color on St. Joe's, Judy, if you don't mind.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The sisters told us on Friday that twelve of their employees were home, feeling ill with respiratory symptoms. Additionally, they have about 89 residents between their long-term care section and their assisted living section, and I don't have the exact numbers but a number of them were not feeling well and exhibiting

respiratory symptoms. And I think three of the residents had been admitted to the hospital and had tested COVID-19. Because of the individuals, the employees that did not come into work the sisters were working around the clock to take care of almost 90 residents. I don't know how many were there, but when they called us, I can tell you that it was an extremely situation.

So, we reached out to other long-term care facilities in the region, and I can tell you that the collaboration was extraordinary. They were able to get nurses and aides to go in over the weekend but it was really the sisters that called us and said, "We don't think we can continue this with the employees that are ill, and if they're in quarantine now for 15 days, and the ability to get the adequate staff to give the residents the care that they require and deserve. Would you help us find places for the residents to be placed?" So, that's why I said the ultimate result may be closure. It is not something we're mandating but we will work with the sisters for an orderly transition and then continue to work with them on perhaps closure.

Governor Phil Murphy: Brian asked the question of how much...

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm going to let Dr. Lifshitz answer.

Governor Phil Murphy: Just remember one thing Judy had said earlier and I think I referenced, but we're having really our first intensive modeling discussion after this. So, we'll have more on this over the coming days. But Dr. Lifshitz?

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Let me start by saying that reasonable people can certainly disagree on counterbalancing the economic impact and the social disruption versus the potential saving of human life. And certainly, as a physician I'm going to come down more on the saving human life being the more important part of that aspect. So, people can... We're well aware, I'm certainly well aware of the tremendous amounts of disruption, economic, social and otherwise that's going on in the state right now. And I am grateful that the state is going ahead and doing those sorts of things because I do think it's important to try to save as many human lives as we can in this situation.

As to how long, well, as the Commissioner said we are undergoing some modeling which may help give us a better idea, but my real answer is this. Since we don't know for sure exactly how effective the measures we're taking now are, we really have to wait and see. We have to see the data coming in. We have to see what's happening with the hospitals. We have to see whether they're getting overwhelmed or maintaining the flow. And at this point unfortunately I really can't say any better than that besides we have to wait and see. And we are too early because as has been mentioned at this point, what we're seeing now in these numbers is not what's happening now. It's what was happening about ten days ago. So, we're seeing people now in the numbers who were infected roughly ten days ago or so. So, we're really too early to know exactly what we can expect to see with the response that we've already taken.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Doctor. I'll remind everyone that we went to the most aggressive social distancing posture on Saturday. So, here we are on Tuesday. I think if you do the math and you just sort of plug 10 to 14 days out from Saturday, I don't know that it makes a whole lot of sense trying to interpret the data between now and then because we just don't know. As a non-expert I'd say that.

May I, point of personal privilege, Commissioner, give a shoutout in particular to Care One. I spoke to Lizzie Strauss yesterday who's terrific, and Care One in particular with this challenge. St. Joe's, Judy mentioned this – this started to unfold on Friday night and it was a battle over the whole weekend. We discussed it privately yesterday. It's come to a boil clearly now and the certain facilities – as usual, it's New Jersey. When in doubt we pull together and I want to give Care One a shoutout if that's okay with you. Okay.

Reporter: Just a couple questions if I could. One is on the federally-run hospitals that are coming to New Jersey right now. Can you give us any more color on exactly how those will work? Who's going to staff them considering the limited staffing levels that are existing in hospitals, the supplies for those and how would somebody get admitted to a field hospital versus a typical... Like how would somebody end up there versus one of the hospitals we already have? We're telling the story of 25-year-old Jack Allard, a kid from Ridgewood. He's on a ventilator and he was just airlifted out of state. His mom has been speaking to the media and she is expressing roadblocks she's hitting with trying to get her son treatment, specifically Remdesivir which is an antiviral. The demand for this drug is overwhelming right now. I'm wondering what the state is doing behind the scenes. I know you've been talking a ton about access to testing, getting more tests, getting more supplies and ventilators. But has the state turned any attention, is there anything you can do in terms of speeding up production of this or other treatment?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, let me do the hospitals but the experts need to weigh in. Again, these are four hospitals. I believe they're 250 beds each and this will be a big story of displacement from what are currently occupied critical care and other beds into these field hospitals. The speed at which this is happening apparently is unprecedented, so again, I want to give the President and FEMA a huge shoutout. And I'll leave the details beyond that to the experts.

I don't want to get into the details of any particular person's situation but my family became aware of this over the past couple of days with this particular person. I got involved personally last evening and I'll just leave it there, that God willing, we're just praying for this guy. Apparently a great guy, an incredible athlete – who could blame his mom for screaming out on behalf of her son? But beyond that I'm going to leave it there.

I'm not smart enough. I never will be smart enough to know if that drug is efficacious with this current virus. That's not what I'm saying. I just meant in that particular case I'll leave that to the experts. But Judy and Pat, can you comment on the field hospitals? Judy, do you mind jumping in?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Each hospital will be 250 beds. We've already identified the supplies we need for the hospital, we've identified the number of staff, the number of RNs, the number of aides, the number of pharmacists. We've separated the state into three sections – north, central and south. And we've invited the Level I Trauma Centers to be the coordinating entities of north, central and south. That does not mean that they will be personally running those hospitals. That's yet to be determined because as you mentioned, staffing is difficult right now.

So, we are, along with the individuals at the ROIC and nursing agencies that we currently have contracts with, and nurses that are calling up every day volunteering – we're keeping lists of names. And we will be putting together a centralized, coordinated staffing agency for the lack of a better term, and we are getting approvals through Higher Ed to call up student nurses that are in their last semesters. This will fulfill their clinical requirements for graduation. So, staffing yet to be determined but we have a plan. We have a plan for what we need to do to stand up these four field hospitals. We have a plan to promote collaboration regionally throughout the state through the Level I Trauma Centers, who also have transport.

And last evening I was on the phone with the Hospital Association and all the CEOs, and we have a plan to move and increase the critical care complement in every hospital and so in the continuum of care it's critical care, stepdown. The stepdown units will become critical care units. Med/surg units will more than likely be very full and other patients then would go to the field hospital. So, we've looked at the whole continuum and the hospitals are right now aggressively opening up every single bed that they have. And we have a number of hospitals that have come forth and said, "I will clear out my hospital totally and be available to treat patients that have COVID-19." We hope by the beginning of next week we'll have a complete plan that we'll be able to share with all of you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. And again, to repeat the location of the three will be the Meadowlands, Edison, Atlantic City; and the fourth, to be determined, will live in Wall Township until it's explicitly deployed.

Reporter: Essentially it's about childcare. Daycares at hospitals and healthcare centers seem to have a problem with staff calling out. They have no one to take care of their kids. Do you think as part of the attempt to overall flatten the curve New Jersey should shut the overall New Jersey Childcare programs, including all their education? States such as Massachusetts and Ohio have already done this. Should funding be provided for the childcare subsidies through this situation and should the children of these essential personal involved in these childcare centers also have equal access to care? There's been some hinting I think both through you, Governor, and the Commissioner that you were going to take measures in this regard. Meanwhile, part two of that question, the DHS seems to be ramping up support for daycare. Senator Vitale's calling for the shutdown of all centers. Again, should these centers be shut down? Who's essentially right in terms of this potential policy debate?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll give you my view on this and Judy, you should weigh in here as usually. Senator Vitale, by the way, has been very good about this. He and I spoke Saturday night. He's been working, he and his team have been working with our team. I've been asked this question a number of times. When you put in place the steps that we've put in place, which are as aggressive as any state in America, you have to be mindful of the fact that we're trying not to tilt the machine so much that it falls off the tracks. And in particular, when you've got first responders and healthcare workers who now have their kids at home for an extended period of time, you're proverbially in between a rock and a hard place.

I have to say that over the past number of days, assuming that I can – and I'll speak for myself and this is not official. But assuming that I can be satisfied and we can be satisfied that first responders, healthcare workers can have their daycare needs satisfied in an equitable way, I'm migrating toward making a decision about daycare more broadly. Somebody told me 85% of daycare was already shut in the state. I don't know if that's true or not; I don't know if you've heard that number. I have no basis upon which to validate that or not but it's pretty clear this is becoming something that is, I wouldn't say a hole in our strategy because we went into this with our eyes open. We knew that we couldn't do all of this at once. But I am personally migrating toward a decision that will, assuming first responders and healthcare workers are taken care of, that we are going to find a way to bring this down on the other side for the foreseeable future.

Anything, Judy, you want to add?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We know that nationwide, I think you've heard me say this before, 40% of nurses are the primary caregivers or single parents. And we need the nurses on the frontlines. So, good childcare is an imperative. We're working with the hospitals, we're doing a survey – and in fact I got it on my phone this morning but I haven't been able to pay attention to it – what percentage of their workforce cannot go to work because of childcare. And we're doing it by county, so that we might be able to consolidate and bring up safe, good, responsible childcare close to the hospitals so that the nurses and first responders know that their kids are safe and secure and they can come to work. It's a huge issue, something we haven't – I think I heard the Governor say we haven't quite gotten there yet. But we will figure this out.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, we're getting there. We're closer by the day.

Reporter: Three parts really – homeless people, the post office, and then why are we keeping liquor stores open? Why are they considered essential? On the homeless issue, Jersey City came out this morning, started finding hotels for their population. Any concerns about COVID-19 getting into that population and what it would mean? Post office people called me up last night saying they don't have any protective gear, that they're still taking mail from people that come to the post office. They don't know where they've been, if they have anything. And then, like I said, liquor stores being considered essential businesses to keep open.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, I'll give some general comments and ask my colleagues to come in here. Thank you for that. I appreciate everyone bunching your questions together as much as you have.

We had Carole Johnson here, our Commissioner of Human Services here the other day talking about some of the programs that we're putting in place for the homeless. I won't repeat what she said but there's a huge exposure. As usual, when something goes wrong in society, the folks who need government the most, the folks who are already left behind are left further behind. And so, we spent a lot of time talking to Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman about this the other day, and Judy may want to add in some color on that.

The post office, the first time I've been asked the question but it seems to me it's a similar reality to our retail workers in many respects at the frontlines at a supermarket. And I don't have... Obviously there's a federal component to that. I would just repeat what I said with our labor leaders the other day on the phone, that we're going to have to... Until we have the amount of gear that we're going to need – gloves, masks, etc. in a mass fashion – I think the FEMA Director, the administrator if I'm not mistaken said today, earlier today that they were pursuing to manufacture 500 million masks. Until we get to that point, we're going to have to be in an aggressive hygiene distancing mode. And I want to thank the folks who are at the front lines who are living that every day.

I think it through when I come home at night and open the mail. I think about this, and by the way, I open the mail, I go over and wash my hands with soap for 20 seconds when I finish opening the mail. So, I assume if you're in that position you're in that in a hyper way.

I had a very interesting shoutout yesterday from a woman who had filmed a video for us around my State of the State address, and she's a recovery coach. She and her daughter did a particular video; we did a bunch of videos that highlighted different elements of our administration. And she was on her knees profusely thanking me for keeping the liquor stores open as it relates to just the whole addiction front. She said that that was, the alternative would have been crushing for a lot of people.

The concern we got, the particular concern – I know we had this in Patterson – is that it wasn't just whether liquor stores were essential or not. It was that they were becoming social gathering places, or maybe even traditionally had been social gathering places in the so-called back room. So, we've sort of said two different things here which may seem at odds with each other but are actually quite consistent. One is we're okay with the liquor stores staying open but we're not okay with any social gatherings. We went from infinity to 250 to 50; we're now down to zero. Nobody can gather, and Pat and colleagues in law enforcement up and down the state will enforce that aggressively.

Anything you want to add in particular, Judy, about the homeless?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I've repeatedly told you the vulnerable populations and the homeless are in that category. Right before I got in the car to come here we were on a conference call with Commissioner Johnson and Deputy Commissioner Sarah Adelman on sheltering for particularly the homeless population. And I commend them for their attention to that. It's high on their list. I know Carole had, when she appeared before you, had suggested some of the things that she was looking at. I don't have the line listing but I can assure you that Department of Human Services is very aware and working with Department of Health to make sure that A.) they're protected, that if they show respiratory symptoms they get appropriately tested and taken care of.

Governor Phil Murphy: The only thing I can maybe suggest, and Carole Johnson was here with us a few days ago. But Mahen, can you help me just connect and get Carole to go through offline? We'll give you some of the things she said. Pat, any comments on the homelessness in particular?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I've been on the phone every day with Commissioner Johnson and as Commissioner Persichilli said, just incredible passion. Yesterday we were on with her, the Attorney General and Commissioner Beyer from Children and Families. Really, yesterday's call was about the release of the 1000 inmates, you know, that difficult decision about are they better out if they don't have anywhere to go? So, we were really trying to identify those inmates being released and did we have the wraparound services? Because what we didn't want to do is have somebody walk out of a county jail, find themselves in Patterson buying heroin laced with fentanyl, and having them pass away and accidentally overdose. That's how down into the weeds we are about every single decision that's being made, up to and including the use of hotels and college dormitories. And we're very thankful that the weather has been pretty cooperative, because if it was 5 degrees out there we'd be certainly... I think we'd be facing some even more serious challenges. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I also said the other day that we put a big chunk... I mean in Newark, Mayor Ras Baraka is as strong an advocate about doing comprehensive policy work around reducing our homeless population, both here in Newark and up and down the state. And we had gone into this with our state budget in already a good place and it's gotten even more challenging over time. Thank you.

Reporter: So, I have two questions on data collection and hospitals; and then Mahen asked me to ask a question for Katherine Landergan and I have one from Elise Young if that's okay. So, first on the data collection, with the new order that Jared Maples signed yesterday and DOH started collecting those numbers, how did that work out? What did you guys learn? If I heard correctly, you had mentioned the results came from seven or so labs when there are 60 from what I understand that Dr. Tan said yesterday. So, were you able to get all of the data that you needed from those labs? Hospitals – how full are the hospitals and can you repeat how many of the cases were involved with hospitalizations? Katherine's question: does the federal bailout package in its current form do enough to address your concerns about the state's ability to cover unemployment claims in New Jersey? Does our state unemployment funds have the resources to handle that demand? If not, what should Congress be doing? And then Elise Young's: if Trump urges everything to go back to normal, will the New Jersey regulations stay in place? And I can repeat any of those for you.

Governor Phil Murphy: This may be a window on the future of our press conferences. We'll end up with one member of the media in front of us saying, "On behalf of Brent, on behalf of..." So, thank you for that. I'm just going to give a couple comments and then throw it over to you all. Please jump in as usual.

On data collection, I don't think we would have had the negatives a few days ago that we have today. So, it is beginning to make a difference but I think it's beginning to make a difference. I used the word an 'imperfect window' into the broader data universe. I think you didn't disagree with that, the adjective imperfect. But it is a step, and if other states that have done it – not many have done this. We know Connecticut has done this and their experience suggests that it takes some time for the gaps of information and data to close.

I'll leave hospitals to Judy. I think for Katherine, the answer is yes but assuming the federal number is as big as it looks like it's going to be. I don't have the numbers in front of me and again, this was again, being negotiated so this is not a final bill. Senator Menendez I believe told me that the unemployed insurance fund was \$200 billion and something. Without having done to the fifth decimal place math for New Jersey, that feels to me... For Katherine's question, if it's at that scale federally between what the states fund and the federal money, that should be enough.

And for Elise, I understand. It's not just the President; Tom Friedman wrote about this yesterday which surprised me a little bit. I understand given the enormity of the impact on the economy, I can understand folks who'd want to find as fast and as short a road back to normalcy as possible. So, I get that completely. But we've got to do it responsibly and I don't think anyone is suggesting otherwise. But we're not there yet, and we're going to stay the course because we believe we're basing our actions on the fact and science associated with the spread of this virus.

And as I mentioned a couple of minutes ago, you can't flip a switch. So, we had begun to aggressively for many weeks get out ahead of this, but we really took our most draconian steps on Saturday. That's only three days ago. We need a longer runway, I think it's fair to say, to get a handle on this. Judy, on any of these questions but especially the one that I didn't answer at all related to hospitals?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: On the testing, we think at this point we're getting 92% of all of the test results. The other 8% are from... One is a hospital lab that doesn't have a direct link into our data system and then some smaller labs that are approved to do the testing and don't have a direct link. But 92% as of this morning is pretty high. And the hospital question was...

Reporter: How full are the hospitals and can you tell me how many cases have involved hospitalizations again?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: How full are the hospitals? I don't have the percent on occupancy. I can tell you that the north Jersey hospitals are pretty packed with all types of things, but certainly impacted by patients with COVID-19.

Reporter: With this 27% attack rate, is that good, bad? What should we think of that number?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's a 27% positivity rate so what that tells us is that of all the people we're testing, 27% of them are testing positive. I think you heard the Governor say that these are mostly symptomatic patients, which means that the symptoms and respiratory disease are something other than COVID-19. So, I guess you could look at that as the glass is half-full because the majority do not have COVID-19. If it hangs around 25%, 27%, that helps us with our predictions on what percentage of them would then require hospitalization, and what percent of the hospitalized patients would require critical care. And that brings us to how many additional beds do we need? So, it's a vitally important percentage, so I'm glad we have it and we'll use that in our model.

Governor Phil Murphy: My big ah-hah here was the more data the better. I'm gratified that we're getting a better picture and we've got a ways to go. Don't anybody expect that we're going to be in a different posture the next few days.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: A couple questions around schools but also health. In terms of, you said to be determined on deciding whether schools would be closed for the rest of the year. Can you talk a little bit about your thought process and what factors you're looking at to make that decision? As you know, a few states have made that decision. Second question is you said graduation requirements would stay the same. About half of the kids need that test to graduate and there's still a long process to go, and there's no schools to go to, to go through that process. Can you speak to any worries about whether that's going to make it more difficult for students? And the last is a health question. I guess it's a follow-up on the previous one, in terms of data to hospitalizations specifically. I think yesterday you gave some numbers on that, something like 600 or so. If you could update those.

Governor Phil Murphy: So John, on schools, that's just a decision we haven't taken yet. I don't have any more color on that. What are we going to look to? We're probably going to be looking at a lot of the things we've talked about today. I think folks should expect that schools are going to be closed for a meaningful period of time here. I'm hardly making news I recognize by saying that, but that's the case. And when we have a more specific sense I promise you we'll give it to you. And I believe, I'm trying to find my actual wording here, but I think I said graduation requirements will not be impacted if I'm not mistaken. So, that is where I will hang my hat. Here we go, sorry – this decision will not impact the graduation requirements of any student.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: Some of those requirements are going through a portfolio process, they're taking alternative tests that may or may not be happening at this point.

Governor Phil Murphy: Correct. We're not going to prevent... My point is that we're not going to prevent kids from graduating from high school because of either the decisions that we're making about standardized testing or how long school will be closed. I missed the health question but I think, Judy, you've got it, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: As of Friday evening there were in our hospitals 600 PUIs and 100 positive, and that's a rolling number. The Hospital Association I'm sure has it. We don't look at that on a day-to-day basis.

Governor Phil Murphy: In regards to both of the sets of questions here, there are certain places that are definitely hotspots in terms of the hospital community. Holy Name has been one that's been on the cover of the paper, it's been in the press. Our prayers continue to go to Mike Marin who is himself battling this and their whole team there, because they've been really at ground zero.

Reporter: A municipality took it upon itself to map out clusters of positive cases in its neighborhoods and order all residents, both well or sick, to stock up on food and supplies for two months and forbade them from leaving their properties unless there was some kind of emergency or they're an essential worker. And an elected official said he would expand that order to the entire city if necessary. Given Executive Order 108, do you support municipalities taking measures such as this and from a government standpoint and a public health standpoint, are independent orders like this one helpful or harmful?

Governor Phil Murphy: What was the community? I missed the community.

Reporter: It was Newark.

Governor Phil Murphy: Newark, yeah. We've answered this before already as it relates to Newark. As it relates to executive orders, there's one that supersedes all others and it's ours. So, it's the state, there's no question about that. And Pat literally has the ability, with my consultation and others, to either add to that order or take away from that order. And so, that's it. It's hard to say anything beyond that. What I also said is that Mayor Baraka had said – I think it was more of a press release. I don't know that we've ever actually seen an order. But most of, if not all of what he said was consistent with what we've said was that folks should go out only... The name of our order is the Stay at Home Order, so we think folks should be staying at home and I think he agrees with that. And why should you go out? You should go out only to get essentials, only to get stuff that you need for your family. You should be going to work only if you're essential – otherwise either you're closed or you're working from home. That's a fairly simple reality. I think I did say the other day, we need restaurants to continue to stay open for takeout and I think the Mayor understands that. But it's consistent with, overwhelmingly consistent with what we have said.

But there's no question in terms of the executive order that we have. We have to run this as one state. We can't run the risk of different rules and regulations from one community to another. And I think the Mayor understands that. He's as good a leader as there is anywhere in the state, anywhere I know in the country. And I think we ultimately are in a good place with that.

Reporter: Do you have any statistics on the number of charges or people that you've arrested in the past day or so?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We've actually tasked our Regional Operations Intelligence Center that, and we're getting that information as per our request with the 21 County Prosecutors. So, it hasn't been that high. I've heard of specific cases, the one the Governor spoke of particularly, and we will in relatively short order be able to get a sense of what's been charged.

Reporter: Is that just something you can tell us every press conference from now on?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: We're now on the hook. I will say this – Pat confirmed to me that traffic violations and traffic accidents are down meaningfully, not surprisingly given there are a lot fewer cars on the road.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: A quick one: you took some action yesterday on freezing some spending. We've heard some questions from school districts. Is this going to affect the release of state aid numbers for them going forward? Should they be ready to be making changes in their budgets? This is, as you know, they're building budgets now for the next school year.

Governor Phil Murphy: John, I can say one thing – you're on the education beat. The answer is to be clarified further by the Treasurer. So, I'll just tell everyone this, that we spoke to the Senate President and the Speaker last night. This is something that shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody. We're trying to trim our sails at a very challenging time but more details to come.

Reporter: Just a quick one. I just got an email that I think it was a 30-year-old man who is a Mexican national, ICE said that he tested positive. He was in the Bergen County Jail. So, the Supreme Court order that was discussed yesterday, does that apply to ICE detainees? My guess is no. And what's going to be done with them in terms of the release?

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you have an answer to that? I'm not sure I know the answer to that.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I would defer to the Attorney General.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, Mahen, can we follow up with either Matt or the Attorney General's office? Is that okay? Thank you.

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Real quick, do you plan at all to name and shame people and businesses that have been price gouging? And two, have there been any reports of hospitals or healthcare facilities unwittingly buying fake respirator masks?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll tell you one thing. On the first, I said this yesterday: anybody who is trying to take advantage of this crisis should expect what's coming at them because they deserve it. And so, I don't know if that's naming or shaming or throwing the book at them versus half the book. But we will have no tolerance at all for people who use this crisis to somehow advance their own interests and to justify bad behavior.

Secondly, I get 15 or 20 emails a day from people who claim they've got some big warehouse somewhere. If only we could fork over \$1 million in cash upfront they'll be happy to sell us – Jared knows this – some N95 masks. I don't know, have any hospitals wittingly or unwittingly been sucked into that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Under the pressure of trying to get PPE for their employees and keeping their employees safe to continue care, I know some of the hospitals have responded to those calls. And I also know that they've spent an awful lot of money, more than they normally would, for those products. I can tell you that when they do that, I usually get a call asking for forgiveness rather than permission. I have great empathy for what they're trying to do and I just ask that we keep our coordinated approach that we've put in to keep that together, because I think it will spread donations and procurement to the people that need it the most evenly across the state.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll just say two things very briefly. You can't argue with why folks are as desperate as they are given the heroism of the healthcare workers and first responders who are at the point of attack, in many cases not with the proper supply – not just in New Jersey, around the country – of the equipment that they need to protect themselves. So, I echo that completely. And secondly, to repeat something that I said yesterday, we've gone from a whole series of parallel inputs on PPE and then a whole series of parallel outputs into an hourglass on its side, where everything is coming into one funnel on the intake and then coming out in an organized fashion on the distribution side. And that's making the difference.

So, thank you all. I want to thank Commissioner Persichilli, Dr. Lifshitz and the entire Health team. Col. Callahan, to you and yours, Director Maples, to all the folks. My colleague Martel who has been here at every single press conference we have had, so thank you for always being there.

Again, we will get to you with anything in the interim, but if you don't hear from us beforehand we'll be gathering at 2:00 PM at the War Memorial in Trenton. At a minimum, in addition to Judy and myself we'll have Col. Callahan and Col. Parke from the United States Army Corps of Engineers to talk a little bit more about the bed capacity, field hospitals, etc. Thank you all.

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