

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 12th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. I've got the woman to 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 with us. To my left, the guy who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. We got Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel, and a cast of thousands.

Before we get to the numbers, a couple of quick updates, if we could. First, we are awaiting, Judy, I think today's meeting of the advisory committee on immunization practices and then the CDC's likely final decision on Pfizer's emergency use authorization for its vaccine in adolescents ages 12 to 15. Should this be approved, every New Jersey resident within this age group will be eligible to receive Pfizer's vaccine wherever it is being administered. As we noted on Monday, this will be a big step forward for public health and in particular for the health of our school communities and given that many vaccine sites across the state, from our megasites to our local pharmacies are accepting folks for no appointment walk-up vaccinations. We could quickly expand the number of those being vaccinated against COVID.

We also have noted time and again that even though our youngest residents have among the lowest rates of hospitalizations and deaths, they have had among the greatest rates of transmission. We encourage all parents to talk now with their adolescent children about getting vaccinated and when the CDC approval is given to go out and to do so. This'll be a big step that will allow for students and educators to feel more confident in being in their classrooms for the remainder of this year. It will set us up for every school to be fully back for in-person instruction in September. It will also be a big part of the overall picture for reopening more fully and more quickly.

To that end, as a reminder, one week from today, May 19th, we will be making our most aggressive reopening play as many of the capacity and gathering restrictions that have been in place for the past year will be lifted and replaced with requirements for social distancing. Our business community and especially our restaurants have been preparing for this since we announced these plans nine days ago. Since all the current metrics are continuing to point in the right direction, today I will be signing an executive order that will effectuate all of the steps outlined for next Wednesday, May 19th.

With that, let's turn our attention to the current numbers. We'll start with the latest from our vaccination efforts. As of this morning, the total of those who are now fully vaccinated is 3,701,759. You can see the breakdown between those vaccinated in-state and out-of-state. The single most important thing I can urge is to keep this number climbing is that if you haven't yet gotten your first dose to go do so and in most places, you can just walk in without an appointment. If you have received your first dose, go back and get your second shot when you are supposed to. Make sure that you are fully vaccinated. This is a key for our overall recovery.

Today we're also moving into a new phase of our door-to-door canvassing campaign. Today we kicked off an \$8 million effort to put even more boots on the ground in the communities where we need more people to go out and get vaccinated. This is in addition to the hundreds of incredible local volunteers already working hard in their neighborhoods. We will leave no stone unturned to ensure as many New Jerseyans as possible are vaccinated as quickly as possible.

I want to give a particular shout-out to Newark Mayor Ras Baraka who I saw yesterday and his team who are today opening walk-up vaccination sites in every ward across the city. These sites are open to all Newarkers age 18 and older. We know our community-based efforts are among our most successful in reaching those who may not otherwise get vaccinated. We are grateful for Mayor Baraka's leadership and for his continued partnership.

Continuing with numbers, reporting an additional 1,167 combined PCR presumed positive antigen tests. Calculated over a seven-day trailing average, the rate of average is now exactly at 1 and as we have mentioned several times now, there are a couple of reasons why we're seeing – we saw that little increase. The first is that our drop and added cases was so rapid and significant that fluctuations will have an out-sized effect on RT. If you remember, it was one week ago that the department cleared out roughly 1700 previously unreported antigen tests, and those are also impacting our current number. I think, Judy, your expectation – don't want to put words in your mouth – is that that'll settle into maybe .6 to .8 as a relatively consistent range over the next period of time. God willing it stays there.

I think on Monday, Mahen, can we show these graphs over the – from March 4th of 2020 at some point? We haven't shown those in a while, but you look at RT. We forget that it was over 5 in March of last year, 5.31 or 5.37, which is extraordinary. The positivity rate, again, we'd love to show you this over the long haul. For Saturday, 16,506 PCR tests was 4.7%. This is a good sign because it's a weekend and as you – as we've said many times, for a long while given our out-sized results, seeing the weekend numbers drop below 5% is a strong sign that we're continuing to head in the right direction. You may recall the past number of weekdays had three handles on them. To see this below 5% is a nice data point as well.

Our hospitals continue to go in the right direction, 1,041 is the total census, 944 of whom were confirmed positive. The ICU count is 247; ventilators in use, 162 A total of 139 live patients were discharged yesterday; 99 went in and not yet confirmed but the hospitals confirmed 23 deaths. However, this is confirmed and we are, with a heavy heart, reporting 33 newly confirmed COVID-19 related deaths. The number of probable deaths has also been updated today as we do on Wednesdays to 2,648. That's an increase of eight since last week. If you combined the confirmed and probables, the death toll is a staggering 25,882. As we always do, let's take a couple of minutes to remember and honor the lives of three more who we have recently lost.

Let's start in River Vale in Bergen County, which was home for the past 57 years to the guy on the left, John LaMarca. A native of Cliffside Park, he was 90 years old at his passing. John was a standout student athlete at Cliffside Park High School earning a full basketball scholarship to play and study at St. John's University. During the Korean Conflict, John would proudly serve our nation, earning the Korean Service Medal and a UN Service Medal to complement his two Bronze Stars. After returning home, he earned a master's degree in education at Montclair State College in those days and embarked on a career as an educator and counselor at Fort Lee High School. He was just as active outside the school community with the Elk's Club, the American Legion, and the Knights of Columbus in addition to being a regular parishioner of Our Lady of Mercy Church in River Vale.

John leaves behind his wife, that woman, Georganne, and his children, John, Mary, Virginia, and George and their spouses, and his seven grandchildren, Jessie, Kelly, Gianna, Ryan, Christopher, Dane, and Christy along with numerous nieces and nephews. I had the great honor to speak with both his wife, Georganne, and his daughter, Mary, on Monday. Georganne was also, Judy, COVID-positive but did not get terribly sick, thank God. She reminded me John had – or she told me, rather, John had – you remember he was 90 when he died. He had his first, not only, his first heart attack at the age of 30. She said – I don't want to put words in her mouth, but this is incredibly hard, obviously, but he got 60 more years after that first heart attack. God love him. We thank John for his service to our nation, to the students in Fort Lee that he helped along the way, for being a great Jersey guy. May God bless him, watch over him, his memory, and his family.

Next up, we're going to come to Mercer County to remember the woman in the middle there, Joan Tinsman. Born in Princeton and a resident of Hopewell, she spent every one of her 85 years between those two communities. Joan was also – as John was, Joan was also a standout athlete. As a young woman, she won over her future husband, Harry, in part because of her abilities as he'd watch her play the hot corner, third base, for her Princeton softball team where she also had a .400 batting average, so the Ted Williams of Princeton in those days. Throughout her life, Joan would be a Princeton University sports booster, attending many basketball games at Jadwin Gym, but she was even more dedicated to her family, to her 65 years of marriage to her beloved Harry and the family they raised. She was strong but emanated kindness to everyone she encountered. She loved a good book or a competitive game of Uno. When her sons were younger, she'd cook them and their friends breakfast during hunting season, making sure they set out well fed.

Joan now leaves behind her Harry, and Harry is to our left and her right. Please keep him in your prayers. He's had some health issues. She leaves as well her three sons, Harry, Jr., Jeffrey, and Russell, and her daughters Kimberly and Melissa. I had the great honor of speaking with Melissa on Monday. She also leaves their families, which include her grandchildren, Jeffrey, Jr., Jacqueline, Kyle, Kelly, McKenzie, and Layla, and great grand-children Emma and Leo. She's also survived by four brothers. May God bless and watch over Joan and her family She was a Jersey original.

Finally today, we remember Jeanne Gordon. Born in Bellville, she grew up in West Orange and lived in Flanders in Morris County. Jeanne was just 59 years old. Jeanne leaves her husband of 27 years, Anthony, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and her son Anthony, Jr. By the way, both dad and son were also COVID-positive. She was to each of them a rock. She's also survived by her step-father Thomas, her brothers Robert and Joseph, and sisters Lisa, Theresa, and Bridget, and their spouses and many nieces and nephews.

Like so many, Jeanne strived to make her home a place where everyone was welcome and everyone felt like family. From speaking to family and friends, you'd quickly learn that she succeeded. Anthony, her husband – that's her son Anthony with her, but Anthony her husband had reached out to my office to ask for our prayers while Jeanne was battling COVID. By the way, he reminded me on Monday that Jeanne was also a cancer survivor. We are heartbroken, literally, to have to honor her memory today, but we hope that God blesses her memory and her family. She will indeed be missed.

We've been honoring the lives of those lost for more than a year now. They are just a sampling from among the nearly 26,000 we have lost but each story deserves to be told, and each life deserves to be honored. We know that even as many of the metrics we are tracking continue to improve, there will still be lives lost, and we will continue to remember them because they are all family. For the past 14 months, we've rallied to protect our family, not just from the pandemic but from the other impacts it has had including food insecurity for many families.

That's a good segue to say that's why we need to support and shout out organizations like this, the Coalition for Food and Health Equity run by that woman, Dr. Leeja Carter which focuses on providing supports that bridge the twin goals of neighborhood revitalization on the one hand and better health through food equity on the other. Most of Coalition Equity's clients live in marginalized communities and food deserts both in Hudson Counties and Newark's urban landscape. Through its multitude of programs, Coalition Equity aims to reach outside a neighborhood's rigid structural limitations to demonstrate how communities can create sustainable long-term models for addressing hunger and nutritional health through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's Sustain and Serve New Jersey Program. By the way, I was very happy to announce another \$10 million towards that on Friday.

Coalition Equity has found a great partner in helping to provide access to fresh, healthy, and nutritious foods for the families they serve. This partnership is more than tackling hunger and supporting local restaurants, although it is that. It's allowed Coalition Equity to highlight the innovative meal solutions and the power of food to reinforce dignity and respect. It's really a simple premise that guides Coalition Equity: no person should be limited when it comes to access to healthy, hearty meals.

I caught up with Leeja on Monday, had a great conversation. I thanked her and the team at Coalition Equity for their great work tackling hunger and food insecurity in our state's densest, most urbanized, and most diverse counties. We are proud to be their partner. Check them out, by the way, coalitionequity.org.

As a general matter, partnership and cooperation are what will see us through. Whether it's partnerships with county and local officials to support their vaccine efforts, partnerships with our small businesses and small business community to provide the financial supports they need, partnerships with our schools to get our students and educators back into the classroom, or partnerships with the millions of you to get vaccinated and defeat this virus. It's taken all of us together to come this far and together, we are going to finish the job. On that note, 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. Good afternoon. Well, as the Governor mentioned, the advisory committee on immunization practices is likely to update its recommendation for who should receive the Pfizer vaccine. We expect that they will recommend the use of the Pfizer vaccine in adolescents ages 12 to 15 and when that decision comes, this population will be immediately eligible for vaccination. As with all vaccinations, consent from a parent or guardian will be required.

You know, these press conferences give me an opportunity to increase awareness, information, and education. I feel that it's one of my most important roles as a commissioner. Today, I want to send a message to parents of children who will be eligible to vaccinated perhaps as soon as tomorrow. New Jersey is moving in the right direction with case numbers declining, and having this age group vaccinated will help us fight this virus even further. Adolescents want to get back to seeing their friends. They want to get back to going on trips. The best way to do that safely is to

get vaccinated. The Pfizer vaccine is safe. Parents who have questions should talk to their pediatricians or their healthcare providers. It's important for adolescents to get vaccinated because we have seen in rare cases children can get very ill with this virus. As we have seen in our state, 116 children were diagnosed with multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children, and all of these children required hospitalization.

MISC is a rare condition where different parts of the body can become inflamed including the heart, lungs, kidney, brain, skin, eyes, or the gastrointestinal organs. Many children with MISC had the virus that causes COVID-19 or had been around someone with COVID-19. It can be a serious, even deadly syndrome, but most children who were diagnosed with this condition have gotten better with medical care. Thankfully in New Jersey, there have not been any deaths associated with this syndrome.

Among COVID-19 deaths in the state, there have been 7 deaths among those under 18. While many do not think this virus can be serious for children, the data shows that it can be. We encourage parents to take their children to get vaccinated to protect their health. With cases in New Jersey on the decline, vaccinations increasing, and a reduction in outbreaks at long-term care facilities, the department is taking steps to lessen restrictions for vaccinated residents and expand services to residents in these facilities. Today, the department is releasing an updated directive to long-term care facilities to accommodate more visitation, group activities, and the provision of services for residents after vaccination, which aligns with updated guidance from the CDC and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid.

During visitation if both the visitor and resident are fully vaccinated, residents and their visitors may choose to have close contact including touching or hugging and removing their face masks if they are alone in the resident's room. Fully vaccinated residents may choose to have close contact including touching with their unvaccinated visitor. However, they both must wear a well-fitting face mask.

The department has also updated guidance on communal activities and dining for residents who are fully vaccinated. If all residents participating in the group activity or communal dining are fully vaccinated, they can participate without physical distancing and without wearing a mask during the activity. The department has required routine testing of residents and staff to prevent COVID-19 from entering and spreading within these facilities. Under this updated directive, fully vaccinated staff do not have to be routinely tested. However, unvaccinated staff must still be tested based on the regional CALI score. If it is high, twice a week. If it is moderate or low, testing will still be required once a week. However, facilities, given their own particular circumstances, may elect to continue routine testing of staff.

Staff will need to undergo testing if there is an outbreak investigation at the facility or if they are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. The department urges staff and residents to get vaccinated by taking advantage of the current pharmacy partnerships that we have in place that deliver vaccines to nursing homes. Nonessential personnel such as barbers and hairstylists are permitted to enter if they are screened by the facility and if the facility has protocol for services to be delivered safely, which must include infection prevention and control precautions, physical distancing, hand hygiene cleaning between clients, and use of well-fitting face masks. Staff testing requirements apply to these individuals as well.

I also now want to share some good news. CDC has released updated life expectancy. New Jersey has one of the highest life expectancies in the nation, 79.8 years as of 2018. Now, this may have changed during the pandemic, but according to the new data released by the CDC, New Jersey ranks tenth in the United States. However, it is noted there are disparities within the state.

When you look at the county and community levels, disparities become apparent. Wealthy communities, Hunterdon, Bergen, and Somerset ranked in the top three, with life expectancies of 84, 83.3 years, and 82.6 years respectively. In comparison, Cumberland and Salem Counties have life expectancies of slightly more than 75 years. This reflects that health is influenced by many factors; education attainment and access to care. We have more work to do to bridge these gaps across the state.

Moving onto my daily report, our hospitals reported 1,041 hospitalizations. These numbers are down again today. There are 3,855 reports of CDC variants of concern. Three thousand five hundred and sixty-six of these variants are the UK B.1.1.7. Additionally, we have 123 reports of the Brazilian variant, 11 reports of the South African, and 155 reports of the California variants.

Thankfully, there are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. As stated, we currently have 116 cases cumulatively. The state Veterans homes, there's no new cases among their residents. At the state psychiatric hospitals, no new cases among their patients.

The percent positivity as of May 8th in the state is 4.7%. The northern part of the state is 4.99, the central part of the state 4.05, and the southern part of the state 4.93. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe, mask up, physically distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested, and to everyone, let's get vaccinated New Jersey. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. Pardon me. I'm getting choked up over your report here. Four quick things; one is, notwithstanding some folks who are on record saying otherwise, these press conferences happen for a reason, and that is to deliver as best we can and as accurately as we can the information that we think is relevant for folks to hear to hopefully keep them safe, healthy, and alive. This is not some other reason other than that, period.

Secondly, let's repeat something we've said a lot lately. If you're a resident in a long-term care facility or you've got a family member in a long-term care facility, go to management and ask them two questions. What percentage of staff are vaccinated, and what's the plan to get that number to the right levels? By the way, the staff, I don't want to be vilifying the staff. The staff of these places have done heroic Lord's work. The fact of the matter is that is a weakness right now in our long-term care.

I've only got four points here. Thirdly, your comment about – I read the same data you did, Judy, about life expectancy by county; just another reminder that equity runs through all of the health realities that we're dealing with, including the vaccination rollout, which overall has been extraordinarily successful, but is very much still a work in progress as it relates to equity, which is why Mayor Baraka's initiative, for instance, in each of the five wards in Newark is so important. Then Tina, I'm going to put you on the spot; no new multi-system inflammatory syndrome cases for the past week. That's the first time, I think, in quite some time we've had literally no new cases. Can we read anything into that or is that a trend or is that a data coincidence?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Well, you know, we saw the increases in MISC during the times when we saw peaks in our cases overall. Certainly when you have more disease out there, there's more of a likelihood that the kids are going to get infected. Unfortunately, a small subset are susceptible to developing these consequences. As long as we keep these case counts down, I'm not saying that we're never going to see another case again, but it does align.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's the important point. It's correlated with whether or not we're rising or dropping. Right now, thank God, we're dropping. Thank you for that. Judy, thank you for yours.

Pat, again, I haven't had a ton of compliance violations lately. I think it continues to be the case. Thank you for the good weather. You've got other weather preparedness on your mind, I know, so thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. To the Governor's point, no executive order violations were reported to the ROIC since we last met. To the Governor's point about preparedness, I'll take this opportunity to announce it is hurricane preparedness week. The pandemic has not stopped us from meeting with our federal, state, county, and local emergency management partners.

Those relationships are phenomenal, including updating our hurricane decision support tool that we've updated for our 2021 hurricane season. As always, I know the – usually we're at a winter storm, but always directs people to www.ready.nj.gov (<http://www.ready.nj.gov/>) where our survival guide has been updated as well as how COVID-19 has impacted your go-bags and those kits, those grab-and-go kits with regards to PPE, hand sanitizer. As always our www.ready.nj.gov (<http://www.ready.nj.gov/>), our social media platforms will continue to keep an eye on hurricane season. COVID-19 hasn't allowed us to just take our eye off of that preparedness ball either. We're just, as always, as a state that's felt its impact from hurricanes, we still have a close eye on that. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, it's another reminder that life goes on. Mother Nature doesn't decide just because we're going through a pandemic to take the winter off or the summer off in this case. Thank you for that, Pat. The weather this week looks pretty good. We're in good shape. I'll think we'll be in the same mode that we've been in.

We'll be virtually with you in the next couple of days. I think, Judy, we're together somewhere up north on Friday. Hopefully, we'll have some COVID numbers. It will be late enough that we'll have some COVID numbers and be able to relay them to you. We'll be virtual tomorrow and then over the weekend. I think we'll start over here. Dante has got the mic. Elise, how are you? Nice to see you.

Q&A Session:

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good to see you as well. In regards to the Colonial Pipeline, at least three Pennsylvania terminals have run dry and lines are forming at some of New Jersey's. Have you had any dialogue with fellow governors on the supply situation? Are you considering rationing? Have there been any reports of gouging, and should motorists consider limiting their gasoline use in the short term? A question from Nikita, do you support a proposal by Representative Gottheimer and Senator Lagana to impose a sales tax for non New Jersey residents on Hudson River crossing if New York imposes congestion pricing?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Good to see you. Gasoline prices have crept up. Maybe you could even say more than crept up in New Jersey. I think the average price is now something like 3.04 a gallon, and that's up.

It's not clear that there is a direct impact of the Colonial Pipeline issues with either gas for your car or the other thing that's on our mind is jet fuel at Newark Liberty. We've been in touch with the federal team on this. One point of pride and important data point is that Congressman Donald Payne is the chair of the subcommittee that oversees jurisdiction for something like this in the Homeland Security side. He's been very valuable and continues to do a terrific job. There is some amount of human nature behavior.

I had two data points yesterday where this is real. That one data point from Virginia where my daughter is in school and one from an acquaintance in North Carolina of the family of one of my sons, they have real supply reality shortages in those states. The long lines you see are because of a supply issue. I'm knocking on wood here. Outside a general challenge of getting drivers to drive fuel trucks, it's like a lot of other employment challenges these days. There's a shortage there, but that's not specific to the pipeline. We don't, knock on wood, have a supply issue as we speak. If this goes on a long time, that may well change. You do have human nature, Elise. I don't blame people for that.

You saw early on in the pandemic people hoarding toilet paper. Anybody who has a memory of 1973, '74, Dave, oil embargoes and gas crises reflectively, you go out and you want to get gas and get ahead of the pack, as it were. There's some amount of natural behavior like that. We're monitoring this very closely. We don't like seeing the prices go up for whatever reason.

At the moment, at least, we don't have a supply issue. That could change if this is extended for a long period of time. Listen, I love the fact we've been fighting for the rights of New Jersey commuters. I love the fact that Josh Gottheimer and Joe Lagana and Chris Tulley was also part of that. We've said right from the get-go we want fair treatment.

No double taxation. No unexplainable anomalies where you've got the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels included and George Washington not included. Lisa Swain, I think, was also part of that. I want to give her a shout out. We want to be at the table. We want to make sure that we're not getting double taxed or double tolled. Frankly, if there's revenue that's generated, we want a piece of that in New Jersey because that would be part of the deal.

We have enjoyed very good relations with New York forever and always. I'm still optimistic that this lands in a good and fair place. I love the fact that we're fighting it. I'm fighting it. I love the fact that Josh and the team from the legislative district are standing up and we're going to continue to do that until we get a resolution here that is fair.

I can't come in on a legal matter. Parimal won't let me, but we're also not taking it lying down on wages that are taxed in New York, which makes sense, I guess, if you're going into New York every day, but doesn't make a whole lot of sense if you're working from home in New Jersey. We're going to fight that one as well. We'll continue on all fronts. Good to see you. Let's come down and hit Matt. Then we'll go back up to Dustin and Alex. Hey, Matt.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM (<http://nj.com/>): Good afternoon, Governor. With the news of Pfizer vaccines will be available to children as young as 12, will the State require students of eligible age to be vaccinated before returning to school in the fall? If not, why? Beyond saying that everything is on the table, could you provide any more details about how the \$8 million is being spent on vaccine hesitancy efforts?

Also, actually just today I heard from a reader who received a bill from Virtua for a vaccine shot that they got at one of the State's mega sites, what are folks' recourse if they get a erroneously billed at a state site? Do they deal with the state or do they have to fight it out with their insurer? Finally, what's your reaction to the allegations that have come at BAPS Temple in Robbinsville?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Bear with me. Given it's May – what is today, the 12th, I guess. We put out our guidance, Judy, in mid June, as I recall, last year for school reopening the Department of Ed and Department of Health and all relevant parties worked on. Accepting that, that we're still probably a good month before that we would do something equivalent this year, I continue to be in the place that I've been, which is I hope that we get there of their own free will to get vaccinated as opposed to mandating it.

I will say this; we were having a discussion earlier. It's just a reality. I don't know how it will evidence itself, but Judy mentioned this in the context of long-term care staff. It's going to be a lot more convenient to be vaccinated and a lot more inconvenient to not be vaccinated. That's just going to be a fact over time. For instance, if you're vaccinated, you don't need to get tested twice a week or whatever it might be. I think that's going to be a reality. I don't mean that just for kids, but we'll come back to you on that.

I think I would also like to come back to how the \$8 million is going to be spent because I don't want to give you a generalization. Mahen, maybe Monday latest let's go through exactly what that looks like, if that's okay. I'm going to be a little flippant. If you get a bill for a vaccine, my first piece of advice is don't pay it. Recourse, Parimal, that shouldn't be happening. Should they come to us? Where do you want them to go?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, I think it might depend on the specific situation. We're happy to follow up with that individual directly.

Governor Phil Murphy: That should not be happening. I think the violations at the BAPS Temple are horrific, unfathomable that if all of these allegations turn out to be true, that this is happening in the year 2021 in New Jersey. The wages, the living conditions, the false premises, awful. By the way, I've visited – this is an extraordinary – this will be their largest temple, assuming it gets completed, in the world. I've visited their, I don't know what you would call it, the mother temple. In fact, you were with me, Matt, in India.

This is nothing about disrespecting the religion or the houses of worship, but nobody can live in the conditions that are being alleged here and being paid what they are being paid all on false premises. It's awful. I want to give Judy and your predecessor, Shereef Elnahal a big shout out because without getting into the details, there's been a big effort to make sure that the literal health, including COVID exposure and otherwise, is being looked after by you and your team and Shereef and his team at University Hospital. Thank for that. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. I've just got a few questions on unemployment and this apparent labor shortage we're going through. President Biden said the Federal Labor Department plans to work with states to ensure they have work search requirements for unemployment benefits. Can you clarify whether New Jersey does have requirements for job seekers to certify? Does your administration plan to put other requirements in place? If so, what details on that can you share? If not, why not?

Another impediment to people getting back to work has been a lack of childcare. When can people expect you to lift capacities at daycare facilities? Same question for the One-Stop Labor Department offices where people can get help in person for training and job help. On the unemployment insurance fund, do you plan to use federal stimulus money to replenish that instead of leaving that on employers who are trying to rebound this year? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I went to Rob Asaro-Angelo. He and I were back and forth this morning on this work search requirement, which a lot was made of when the President said that. Rob reminded me that each week, and I'm going to read the note I got from Rob. "Each week claimants certify that they have not refused suitable work. That was never turned off." If they are doing that, they are committing fraud. That has been in place, and it will continue to be in place.

I think, Dustin, and I'm glad you asked about childcare because I think my answer is broadly where I was on Monday. Why is there a labor shortage? I mentioned to Elise's question in another category, apparently our fuel drivers, my gut tells me in everything I've read since then it is a combination of reasons. There's one body that would blame all this on extended benefits. I think that may be partly to blame.

Apparently when you look at lower wage states where you would expect that impact to be more significant, in other words the gap between the benefit received and the wage they could have earned if they were working, you would have expected to see anomalies in those labor markets, which were different than higher wage states like ours. Apparently, that was not true in the data from last week. My gut tells me it might be part of it, but I think a big part of it is probably childcare, kids not entirely in school Monday through Friday regular hours. People are afraid, frankly, to go back into the water, as it were.

Judy, I've got no news on childcare capacity, although we have put a ton of money into childcare. In fact, we announced some of the money on Friday was for childcare facilities. My guess is as we review the eligibility and the parameters around the American Rescue Plan money, you'll see more of that. I assume those capacities, you'll continue to review and expand as we feel like we can do it safely and responsibly. I'm getting nods from my right.

The One-Stop shops, I think the basis upon which my interactions with the Commissioner have been, if they can more efficiently and more quickly process claims by being in those locations, that will happen. If they do not believe they can, then they will probably continue to be in the mode they're in; not forever and for always. This virus is clearly headed down right now, and at a certain point – I don't know when – we're all going to be back largely to work in one form or another, even beyond the folks that have had to be in their positions of work. That would be my guess in terms of the decision point for them. I don't have a good answer for you yet on the unemployment fund, Dustin, because we're still reviewing.

We got the preliminary guidance from U.S. Treasury. Parimal, I believe it's 150 pages. It is a work in progress. There's actually a comment period, which is in the here and now. We're digesting this and we're ourselves going to go back with reactions to that, including things that are not included that we think should be included. If you could bear with us on that one, I would appreciate it. We will have answer on that at some point. Thank you. Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon. For the Commissioner, if Pfizer approves vaccination for 12 to 15-year-olds, will those who are vaccinated be counted as part of the 70% goal that the state is working towards or will that be separate? Additionally, I wanted to ask you about the guidance for people who are fully vaccinated not having to mask in indoor dining. Are you concerned that some restaurants will effectively set up vaccinated and not vaccinated sections to get more business? Do you discourage them doing that?

Governor, for you, why do you think there is vaccine hesitancy? Why do you think the people are reluctant to get the vaccine? Does anything have to do with your messaging? Was there anything about your message that you would change to try and get more people vaccinated?

Also, on the BAPS Temple, you had at least two campaign events there in 2017. Did you disavow their support, and will you return any campaign donations you received? Finally, how will the \$40 million for undocumented workers, how will that fund be administered, and how will the determination be made if someone deserves money from that or not?

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. One of the things that Judy addressed yesterday, we want to always present the data as best and accurately as we can. Again, I'm looking at 7.75 million shots in arms. I think we're number seven in the nation both in first shots as well as using supply that we get. There's no state above us that's remotely as big as we are. As a general matter, it's been a big, overwhelming, very complex, but so far, knock on wood, successful program.

We're not satisfied as the equity piece of this. It's a work in progress. We're getting there, Judy. The numbers you went over earlier are getting better all the time, but they're not there yet. Mayor Baraka's initiative is a good example of one area where we're working with Newark to pump those numbers up. We want to make sure we're presenting this as accurately as we can.

We're right now aggressively massaging data. These are not big numbers one way or the other. We think there are numbers through federal or other program that we're not counting. We want to make sure that we're giving you an accurate count of anybody that we've vaccinated in New Jersey who is not a New Jersey resident.

Having said that, Judy, the 12 to 15, we have to add that to – the objective is 4.7 million initial, 70% of our adults. We define adults as 16 and up. We would add that to that. I don't think we've got a target number for you yet. We're not going to use that as a way to leg into the objective.

Vac versus non-vac, we were having a conversation earlier. There's a lot riding, I think, on the six-foot CDC guidance, I believe, in terms of the capacities. As of the 19th, they're gone because they don't matter. You can only fit so many tables if you've got that basis. I think we wait and see how that looks. I personally don't like the feel of vaccinated over here and non vaccinated over there. I'd like to think we can come up with a better answer than that.

Why hesitancy? I think it's a combination of reasons. Judy, you should weigh in here. I think it's some amount of folks – although this is not the crowd that we ever thought was going to be the nut that we could crack is there's some amount of anti-vax block of folks that we knew from day one. I don't think we've ever thought that's a big enough block that prevents us from getting there. I think it's a combination of some very different things. Hey, the numbers are getting better. I haven't been sick. The weather's better. Frankly, I think I can let my hair down. I work hours that are inconsistent with when you're open. It's less that I'm not convenient to a location because we've got so many darn locations. We're within – I think 99 point something percent of our population is within five miles of a site, so I don't think it's that. I think there is still some amount of knowledge gap, and lastly, the big one, I think, are hard to reach people, homebound, homeless, dense communities, overwhelmingly in communities of color. I don't think it's any one reason. How do you feel about that?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Perischilli: Yeah, I'm not convinced that the bigger issue is hesitancy. I think it's more making sure that it's convenient, making sure they're going to a familiar place where it's safe. I'm not quite there on the hesitancy yet because I see the numbers when we get deep into a community and we're in a local church and we have local faith leaders and elective leaders calling out to people to get vaccinated, the numbers particularly the equity numbers go up substantially. I think I have a little bit more time before I say it's hesitancy.

I do want to give one message, though. Only 46% of the people getting vaccinated right now are male. Women are lining up in much greater numbers. Now, we've always said in healthcare that women make the majority of the healthcare decisions for their families, for their loved ones, for their fathers and brothers and husbands and partners. I'm going to say to the women, use your power. Convince your male friends to get vaccinated. I want to say to the men, nobody is stronger than this virus. No one is stronger than this virus.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Perischilli: Get moving. Roll up your sleeve. It's one shot.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat and I take this personally. Amen. That's a great message. This is not quibbling with the question, which is a great one, and I'm glad you asked it. I think hesitancy is a word that covers a lot of different things, some of which hesitancy. I will come back to you if the answer is differently. I promise you. I don't think I did any campaign events with this organization. I visited it when I was either running or before I was running. If it's different than that, I'll come back to you. Again, this is not – based on what I know, this is not about the religion or the faith side of this, this is clearly the horrific – assuming if these allegations are proven to be true – horrific administrative behavior of humans in a way that is unfathomable. Can we come back to you on the 40 million because I don't have a crisp answer for you exactly how that will work? If you could help me out, Mahen, either to follow up with Alex or hit that when we're back together on Monday. Thank you.

You, good sir? Okay. How are you?

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Afternoon.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: I have a variety from NJ Spotlight. What is your response to the hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers who are still left out of the 40-million-dollar fund for excluded workers? They have been calling for \$600 a week in unemployment payments. Are you considering that? Do you plan to give 2000-dollar checks to more impacted residents with funding for New Jersey from the American Rescue Plan? For the commissioner, again on vaccine hesitancy, what demographics does the state need to reach to immunize 4.7 million people? You shared geographic target areas, but are there certain populations or age groups that you're finding particularly hesitant? Likewise, how is the vaccine outreach going for homebound residents? When are you planning on making an announcement about reopening public pools, and then finally on non-COVID, in what ways is Atlantic City better off having had state intervention over the past five years and what remains undone that would necessitate a four-year extension of the takeover?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think that was a change of subject. Listen, on the excluded fund which Alex asked about and what we will give folks more detail on – and help me on wherever Mahen has gone to follow up with both of these guys on it – my principle continues to be we'll do everything we can. This is federal money that CRF or Coronavirus Relief Funds from before that is both a public health and economic health matter. We will not get to where we need to get to unless we all get there, so we want to try to touch everybody in our state in some way, whether it's vaccinations, whether it's help in some form or fashion, which this program does, and we'll continue at that. This is something that is not just you make an announcement and you walk away. We're going to do whatever we can.

Demographics and homebound folks, Judy, I'll defer to you on both of that, although I think you hit the big one today for me. 46% of the vaccinated folks are male, and that number's got to get up. School announcement, I alluded to this. I don't have a specific date for you, but last year we gave guidance in the month of June, and my guess is that that's what we will shoot for. I don't want to speak for Angelica Allen-McMillion, but my gut tells me working with the Department of Health, that feels about right, and remember that we refined it over the course of the summer because as we always remind folks and we remind ourselves, the vaccine dictates this war, not us. Can't hear you. Oh, pools. I thought you said schools. As Roseanne Roseannadanna would say, never mind. I apologize. Parimal, please help me out. Parimal's going to get in his swimming trunks and answer this question.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: The pools guidance just went live yesterday. It's on the Department of Health website.

Governor Phil Murphy: Could've saved – I apologize. Could've saved a few minutes in the press conference. The past five years I was critical of the nature of the relationship between the state government and Atlantic City before we got here, and I'm not patting ourselves on the back because there's still work to be done, but it was a takeover, and that's the way it ran it from the top. It was big-footing the community, and I am proud led by Sheila Oliver, Jim Johnson, who's no longer in our administration, did great work early on. This has been a true partnership, and I think everybody has benefited from that, especially and most importantly Atlantic City, but I personally think in the spirit of partnership, we can't walk away from each other, and there's a lot of unfinished business, including exciting new economic opportunity.

There needs to be a whole lot more help in that partnership from us I would say as it relates to getting neighborhoods and getting that extraordinary community to punch at its weight because it is an extraordinary community. I've said this many times. There's a handful of communities, as they go, the state goes, and Atlantic City is on that handful, and it's a partnership, again, on behalf of Sheila Oliver and her team, I say, and Mayor Marty Small on the other hand and his team. I think it's a well-functioning and good working partnership but one which still has a lot of work still to do. Judy, any other commentary on demographics, particularly where if you had a magic wand would like to punch up our vaccine rates and any update on homebound folks, right, which I know has been a big push over the past couple of weeks?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Perischilli: Let me start with the demographics. You know we continually look at the equity statistics. The Latinos are now – they now account for 13.3% of the vaccines that we've given, which is going up more quickly than the Black/African American, which is about 6.9% right now. Not representative of our – of their presence in our population, so we really want to work diligently and hard on that. Have to go back to the men. 46% of the vaccines that are given have been given to men, but they account for 54.5% of our deaths. 54.5% of the individuals that have died in New Jersey are men, and only 46% of them have lined up to get vaccinated.

Again, I call out to that. I think that's the broad demographic. If we get deeper, it's young Hispanic men we need to pay attention to. They're three times more likely to die from COVID than their white counterparts, and African American/Black male and females are two times as likely. Our goal in the Department of Health is to prevent morbidity and mortality, and we will never forget that mission, so they're the demographics we need to go after.

Governor Phil Murphy: How about any comment on homebound?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Perischilli: I don't have the numbers on homebound. I can get them, but they're increasing with our homebound plan through the local health departments and the VNA, and ARP has sent us a message that they're willing to help, and we will be calling them in.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, again, operation Jersey Summer, but it's another example. The two phrases, Judy, I've been using when folks say how would you describe your vaccination energies right now, offensive – in other words, we're past the day where folks are coming to the vaccine. The vaccine has to go to them, and that includes certainly homebound people, but more generally, and secondly, localized, getting deeply local with this, which is why we've used the hub and spoke analogy with the megasites. Although for the 12 to 15 years old, I think we're going to see a bump up on that pretty clearly when that goes live, but it's going to be much more the mega-site coordinates the spoke activities into the communities. With that, Dave, take us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5 Thank you, Governor. If the CDC as expected does approve the Pfizer vaccine for kids between 12 and 15, Governor, what would your advice be for parents? We heard from the commissioner. Why do you think, and I'm assuming you do, that parental conversations with their kids are important? Commissioner, you just mentioned that the business about more women getting vaccinated than men, and you said women, use your power. Please explain what you mean.

Despite your explanations about the RT over the last couple of weeks, Governor, some people are actually saying uh-oh, we may have a problem here, which is odd, but it's true. Could you in simple terms – as simple as possible – explain what happened, why did it drop so much, and now it all of the sudden it came back, now it seems to finally be leveling off, and are the other COVID metrics – could you remind us, are they telling us good things? Are we seeing a good trend here? Finally, question from Mike Simons in our statehouse bureau. The State Department of Health's COVID dashboard show that more than 250 doses of the J&J vaccine were administered in New Jersey during the 11-day period when it had been halted. Where did that happen, and were there any repercussions for that? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Judy, I'll start, please come on – and Tina jump in. I'm going to deliberately try to answer the RT question because I think – and then you all will correct it because I think what you're looking for is a non-medical, non-scientific just commonsense – and that's not to say the two women to my right are as good as anywhere to explain complex stuff, but I'm going to give it a shot. My advice to parents of the 12- to 15-year-olds, that's a little bit younger than our four, but I will tell you if they had been in that range, it would've been saying listen, this is safe, it's smart, it'll keep you healthy, and it'll allow you to do a lot more stuff, so go out and get it. Again, this is Pfizer. Judy, have you heard any word on other of the manufacturers? It's too early. They're all doing trials, but it's too early on kids. My gut tells me it'll be Pfizer for a while.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Perischilli: Moderna maybe.

Governor Phil Murphy: Moderna maybe. I don't want to predict as to when. I'd just say listen, go get them. It's safe, it's easy. It doesn't hurt, very few side effects. Again, most importantly, I think, in a kid's mind that age, you can do a lot more stuff in life. I'm going to use – defer to Judy in a second on the use your own power. I don't have any insight on the 250 J&Js during that window. I'll ask Judy or Tina if they do, but my guess is we'll probably want to get back to you on that would be my guess.

The RT encompasses a seven-day look-back, and we had a couple of days depending on when you were looking at this number where we either caught up and added cases in a particular day that had been a catch-up or another day where we took cases down and adjusted the number down. Just because of the nature of the statistic itself, when you have a big bump up on one of those days or a bump down, it skews the number, and it skews the curve of how it moves from one day to the next. You saw it pop up over – I think it was 107 yesterday if I'm not mistaken. 107 yesterday down to one – I was putting words in Judy's mouth or Tina's. I think they think it's going to settle without any data anomalies either up or down into the .6, .8 range, and it's below one, and that's the key thing, meaning, again, folks, if we haven't said this in a while, if it's below one, less than one person is getting infected for every person that is.

Other health metrics, how do we feel about them? I defer all of this to you all. I think we feel really good right now. Even weekend positivity has got a handle on it. That was consistently not three or four weeks ago 11, 12, 13% on weekends. It's down by two thirds if not three quarters. Hospitalizations are down, ICU vents down. As we said earlier, Tina's going to answer the children's inflammatory syndrome consistent with generally good numbers is flat and therefore as a result down. I assume you'd say that we're watching the variants. We have the Indian variants, which is – there's some wild cards still out there, and the vaccine rollout and the numbers keep going up by the day. We want them to go up faster. Tina or Judy – Judy, you've got to come in. Women, use your power. What's that mean? Any corrections you want to make on either my RT explanation or any color on the J&J or other metrics or any color on the J&J doses that look like they may have been administered in that window?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Perischilli: I'll talk about the J&J first. We immediately instructed all of the points of dispensing to take J&J off the shelf and to label them appropriately that they should not be given, so I would have to get more information. To the best of our knowledge, J&J was not given during the 11-day pause. On women's power, historically, women have been known to make most of the medical decisions, again, for their families, their loved ones, whether it's making appointments, encouraging people to get screenings. Using their knowledge and their power of persuasion and encouragement has gone a long way historically to meet certain screening criteria for instance, and we expect that that power still endures today.

Governor Phil Murphy: Any color, Tina, on RT or other metrics that you're looking at? I assume you generally feel good about where the numbers are headed?

State Epidemiologist Christina Tan: Our Communicable Disease Service puts out a weekly CALI report that's the COVID activity level index, and we look at – again, those three metrics that we look at are cases per hundred thousand, percent positivity, and COVID-like illness syndromic surveillance at healthcare facilities. For the last week, we've seen a decrease in the CALI activities, and we remain cautiously optimistic that these trends will continue because we're solidly within the moderate activity range when you look at those three particular metrics. We like monitoring them over time because for us at least in the Communicable Disease Service, the CALI report is based on looking at the historical data over time as well. That's how we came up with the different cutoffs that we did, so we continue to monitor that. We might potentially tweak some of those thresholds in the future, but the good news is that our weekly CALI reports are trending the right way.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. Thank you all. Judy, Pat just leaned over and said he and his wife Linda are celebrating their 31st anniversary tomorrow, so happy anniversary to you, and the reason is he listens and does what he's told to do by Linda. He's taken your advice including he got vaccinated. With that, we'll mask up here. Judy, I'm going to a single mask on Friday because it'll be two weeks after my second dose, so I think you and Tina will allow me to do that because I'll be fully vaccinated, and we're going to go – unless we're in a pack – we're doing a 5k in a few weeks together, so it may be different then. Unless we're in a pack, we're going to have them on us but not wear them while we're running because Tammy and I are in the same bubble, same household. Want to make sure I have your blessing on that front.

Thank you everybody. Thank you, Judy and Tina. Pat, thank you. Happy anniversary. Parimal, I know Jared was with us by remote today, Mahen. Everybody else, thank you, folks. Keep doing what you're doing because you're doing an extraordinary job. Please get vaccinated. If you've been vaccinated, thank you, but then please think of somebody in your family, a friend, a neighbor, a coworker and remind them for their own personal health – forget even for a minute public health. It's also true for that. For their own personal health, they are taking far more risk by not getting vaccinated than if they do. It's a disproportionate risk. The risks associated with this vaccine are very, very minimal. The risks associated with getting COVID are not, so that's my one message. God bless, y'all. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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