

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 27th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I'm honored to be joined by the woman to my right, who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan. Thank you both for being here. The guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Patrick Callahan, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, First Lady Tammy Murphy, Chief Counsel Matt Platkin will join us shortly. Marthelle, your batting average for being here is as high as anyone's, so thank you for being here.

I want to spend a few minutes upfront today talking about testing and giving some color on where we are and where we see ourselves going in the days ahead. We're now roughly one month onto our road back, and as we've said many times before, our ability to stay on this road is guided by eight words: public health creates economic health and data determines dates. Public health creates economic health means that every step of our restart and recovery must flow in a specific order, so residents know, first and foremost, that their health will be safeguarded from COVID-19. Without this trust, there can be no restart and recovery. No one is going to want to go to a restaurant or a store or a gym, or frankly to the beach or a graduation if they don't have confidence that they can safely do.

Data determines dates means that we don't, and frankly can't, consider specific timetables until we meet our benchmarks on key factors. These concepts work together, and in our hospitals, we've seen the numbers that we've needed to see to begin our restart. All the key metrics, as you can see, new and total hospitalizations

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the numbers in our ICUs and on ventilators, have all shown tremendous progress and improvement over the past month. We are now well past the peak.

These numbers continue to go down, practically every day. As you can see, a green ball is a good day, meaning it was lower than the day before; a red ball is a spike. And importantly, they also continue to go down across regions, meaning that we can move forward as one state. New hospitalizations continue to be the one that we watch most closely, but I also want to remind folks that we don't look at one-day spikes – go back if you could, Dan – we don't look at one-day spikes when we look at trend lines. Judy and Christina and the rest of the team want to remind us that you may get some distortion in reporting from one day to the next, but if you look at three or seven-day rolling averages, you get a much clearer picture.

But, as you can see now, we also know that we're not done yet. There are still many, many people in our hospitals with COVID-19. While we're beginning to fall back to the pack among our neighbors, in peer states we are still more an outlier than an average, so we need to keep working. And we need to get more data. Our hospitals are a tremendous source of the benchmark data that we need, but more data means we get a fuller picture. More data means we get a better sense of where COVID-19 still exists, and where hotspots could become flare-ups, so we can take quick, corrective measures to stamp them out.

And that data must come, first and foremost, from a rigorous testing program. Our goal has been to ramp up our testing by the end of this month to where we were conducting 20,000 tests a day, and I noted that that number would not be our ceiling, but rather a floor. In mid-March, we were running a few hundred tests a day and we ramped up to 6,000 tests by the end of that month, and in April, we doubled it to 12,000 a day. I heard a few scoffs in this room and in other rooms when we said we'd be at 20,000 per day by the end of May, but look at how we've done over the past couple of weeks. These are, by the way, in thousands.

By the end of last week, we had already far exceeded our 20,000 per-day goal and only a long holiday weekend seemingly interfered with our upward trajectory. But even so, that one on the right, the 25th, of 16,000 tests, those were recorded on Monday which was, I remind you, a national holiday. And here's how we compare with the rest of the country. We are ahead of 46 other states per capita, and we are still climbing. We know that our goals are well within reach, and that's a very good place for us to be, given where we were just two months ago. And the data that we get from these tests is invaluable. Look, we know that the coronavirus is out there and will continue to be out there. But look at the number of tests that are coming back with positive results, and we can flip over to the next one.

Among the 30,000 tests recorded on May 23rd, only 7% showed a positive result. Judy can give you a little bit of color in a couple of minutes by region. And that is very encouraging data, indeed. The more people who do get tested, the stronger our data becomes; and the stronger our data becomes, the stronger our confidence will become that we can take the next steps in responsibly restarting our economy and getting our recovery underway.

The reason we've been able to get to this point is because we have made building out our testing capacity a key priority. As of today, there are now 164 sites, both publicly and privately operated, up and running across the state. We have worked with our federal partners to not only keep our sites open at Bergen Community College and the PNC Bank Art Center, but to also expand them at a time when they were leaving other states. We've also expanded relationships with our private sector partners, the likes of Rite Aid, CVS, and Walmart, each of whom are now offering testing at numerous locations across the state.

Additionally, and I can't say this strongly enough, county executives and mayors have worked feverishly to expand testing in their communities, and we continue to talk with others in the private sector to keep this number rising, and to keep making accessibility easier for more New Jerseyans. But this is where we are today, and we fully intend to keep growing this number. Growing our capacity to meet our testing goal is only half the battle. You getting tested, by the way, is the other half. So if you need to be tested, go out and get one. Every resident in every community has a role to play in our restart and recovery. And every resident who gets tested sends a strong message to their neighbors that they are ready to be a part of a bright future for our state. Tammy and I got tested this morning, in fact.

From the very beginning, New Jerseyans have understood that the only way through this crisis is together. Now, as we begin to emerge from this challenge, we will need as much data as possible, especially from our communities of color, who have been particularly ravaged and hit hard. This is how we can best measure our

public health, and how we can get the data we need to take the steps into stage two of our restart and recovery and beyond.

Before I go to the overnight data, just a couple of conversations that I wanted to update folks on. I spoke with three Governors since we were together yesterday, Governor Mike DeWine in Ohio, Governor Steve Bullock in Montana, and Governor Jared Polis, an hour or so ago, from Colorado. All good conversations with the very explicit intent of both comparing notes and best practices, as well as explicitly talking about and liaising as it relates to direct federal cash assistance. Governor DeWine in Ohio has done an outstanding job. Interestingly enough, in each of these states, there's one US Senator who's a Democrat and one who's a Republican, and so we spoke, in Ohio's case, about that as well as Montana, as well as in Colorado's case this morning. Good conversations. Again, the need for federal direct cash assistance to states is clear. It's not a red or a blue state matter, it's not a legacy matter. It's an American matter, and those conversations will continue.

I also had the honor last night to be on, invited by President Randi Weingarten, to be on with the American Federation of Teachers Weekly Town Hall, and in the category of you're known by the company you keep, the other guest speaker was Speaker Nancy Pelosi. And again, we made the case, Speaker Pelosi, for the HEROES Act, which includes exactly what the doctor ordered in terms of direct cash assistance. And I made the case, not abstractly, but I reiterated some of the high points or low points, as it were, from the stub budget that we announced on Friday, and talked very graphically about the consequences for our frontline educators, police, fire, EMS, healthcare workers if we don't get that federal cash assistance.

So with that, let's turn our attention to the overnight numbers. Yesterday we received an additional 970 positive test results for a current statewide total of 156,628. I didn't get that right yesterday. That's all since March 4. Here's a trend line of the new cases. You can see that. Here's the daily positivity, as I mentioned, previously 7% for specimens collected on May 23rd. Here's the heat map that shows how far we have cooled down.

Looking to our long-term care facilities, cases continue to be down from the peak. You can see 31,099 positive cases. The numbers of lab-confirmed fatalities of blessed souls in those long-term care facilities also continues to decrease from the peak, but it's 4,871 blessed lives lost. As has been noted before, our National Guard and the clinical staff from the federal Veterans Administration remain on hand to help us protect residents and staff, and push these numbers even lower.

In our hospitals, the number of patients currently being treated for COVID-19 ticked up slightly yesterday to 2,761. Field medical stations reported just 16 patients. This is the breakdown of hospitalizations across region. The number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care decreased again to 768. Ventilator use held practically steady at 583. New hospitalizations yesterday were 241, while 164 live residents were reported to have left or hospitals. Again, we've made an enormous amount of progress but folks, 241 folks went into a hospital yesterday with COVID-19-related complications.

Here are these numbers charted across our regions. And while we know there are daily spikes and drops in these numbers, and may have been impacted, frankly, by the weekend, I think we're almost expecting -- I don't want to put words in your mouth --, an uptick in the fatalities today and probably the listing of new hospitalizations, because we're still digging out of the holiday weekend. We're going to watch these very carefully over the coming days.

However, despite the daily fluctuations in these and other metrics, it is clear that our overall trajectory remains positive. And yet today, with the heaviest of hearts, we must announce that another 148 of our fellow New Jerseyans have passed due to COVID-19 complications. Our statewide toll now stands at 11,339 blessed lives lost. Let's recall a few of them.

We begin by remembering Edna Mae Griscom of Pennsville in Salem County. She was known as Edie, and she passed at the age of 92 years young. A graduate of Camden's Woodrow Wilson High School Class of 1945, she was working as a receptionist in Philadelphia when she met her future husband, Bill. Bless him, there he is on the right, part of one of Salem County's historic families. They would spend the next 74 years together, 73 of them married. Together, they raised a family and managed a successful farm. Their daughter Kim, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, said Edie would do whatever was needed.

Whether it was driving tractors, baling hay, or carting tomatoes to Del Monte in Swedesboro or to Heinz in Salem. They would leave the farm only to move into their dream home in Pennsville, and Edie would keep working, eventually ending her career with the Salem County Clerk's Office in 1996.

Edie and Bill were longtime members of the Lutheran Church of St. Ambrose in Pennsville. Bill passed away unrelated to COVID-19 last December, so five months ago, and Edie passed just five days before what would have been her and Bill's 73rd wedding anniversary. And by the way, they had never spent an anniversary apart. They loved to dance together, and we can imagine that they are doing so as we speak. Edie is survived by her and Bill's children, as I mentioned, Wayne and Kim, five grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and many nieces, nephews, neighbors and friends. God bless them both.

Next up, this is Carolyn Wilcox Coleman from Ewing in Mercer County. Born in Wisconsin, her family moved to New Jersey when she was a child, and Carolyn would graduate from Princeton High School, and it was there that she met the love of her life, Louis, when they both played in the high school orchestra. Carolyn remained a tremendous musician, able to play both the violin and the piano. She and Lou would marry. She stayed home to raise their three children while Lou became successful in the car business. She is remembered as a devoted mother, wife, and later as mom-mom to her grandkids, as well as a fabulous ballroom dancer, tennis player and swimmer who was at home in the water well into her 70s. She loved to travel, and she loved the company of family and friends. She leaves behind her sons Gary and Bruce, and I had the great honor of speaking with Bruce yesterday, and a daughter Lynn, along with an extended family that includes many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. God bless you and God rest your soul, Carolyn.

And finally, we recall Charles Weidanz. There's Charles on the right, Weidanz Sr., the former owner and operator of Durabuilt Motors in North Arlington. Born in Paterson and raised in Franklin Lakes, Chuck as he was known would eventually move to Parsippany where he would live for 63 years. A pilot, Chuck met his wife of 66 years, that's Carol on the left, and I had the great honor of speaking with her yesterday, when he was flying out of the East Hanover Airport. She just happened to live across the street. Together, they would have two sons, Charles Jr. and Doug, and I also had the honor of speaking with Doug and Doug works for us in OIT. I had, again, the great honor of speaking with both him and his mom.

Chuck loved to bowl and to sail on the Barnegat Bay. He loved to tinker in his 1947 Pontiac, and he and Carol shared a love of travel, whether it be touring the country in their RV or taking their family on a cruise to Bermuda. He was also a Giants season ticket holder, and his family would say that there was no bigger fan. Chuck was 92 years old and again, he leaves his wife, his sons and their families, and he leaves many, many friends. God rest your soul, Chuck.

So may God bless Edie, Carolyn, and Chuck, and all who knew and loved them. They, along with every member of our New Jersey family whom we have lost remain in our thoughts and prayers, and they are remembered as our flags remain at half-staff. But as I've said before, only you all have the power to save lives, and you have done that. Judy and Tina and Pat and I can only ask you to keep up with your social distancing and to do the smart things that are making a real difference, like wearing a face covering when you're out and about, or getting tested to protect your family and community, and you've been extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. No state has done what we've done.

It's up to the 9 million of you to turn our words into action and you've done so. And for the past two months, not just here and there you've done so, the overwhelming majority of you have done so, day in and day out and the falling numbers we have seen over the past several weeks are the result of that, so let's keep at it.

Before I turn on, I also wanted to give a shout out to a loss of life that had nothing whatsoever to do with COVID-19. And you may have read about this, Lori-Ann Beck, who was the Chief Financial Officer of the Township of Little Ferry died in an ATV accident over the weekend. She was 47 years old, was going to be married this summer. She was an extraordinary woman by all accounts. She had two children, Tommy, and Crystal. Tommy is 25, Crystal, his sister is 19. I spoke to Tommy this morning, as tough a conversation as I've had with anybody over the past couple of months. She was an extraordinary individual by all accounts and a great mom. I also reached out to Mauro Raguseo, who is the mayor and a good friend, and that is a community that is bleeding over Lori-Ann's loss, so please keep Tommy and Crystal, Little Ferry and Lori-Ann's memory in your prayers.

Now, having said that with such sadness, we know there are countless people across our state who are going above and beyond to help their communities and to help the frontline workers whose efforts have defined heroism. So today, I'd like to recognize a group from Bridgewater in Somerset County that calls themselves The Mask Squad. Throughout this emergency, they've been churning out reusable cloth face coverings and other PPE materials that they have then been distributing to healthcare workers and first responders and vulnerable residents. Last week, their tremendous efforts were recognized by the company Brother, which donated 10 new sewing machines to The Mask Squad, helping to replace some that had become burned out, literally, from use or to help bring more volunteers into the fold. If you have a chance, give them a visit at themasksquad.com, whether it is to join their efforts or to simply say thank you. To its founder, Jennifer Loughlin, and all the members of The Mask Squad, keep it up. We're incredibly proud of each and every one of you.

So let me finish, if I may, where I began. We want more New Jerseyans to get tested and specifically to get a PCR test, which is our best point of data. Do you have coronavirus, COVID-19, at that moment in time? Anyone who wants to be tested can get tested, but we especially want you to get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19, or if you've had recent contact with someone else who did test positive. We had the capacity. We have the partnerships, we have 164 different locations where you can get tested. Let's do just what we've been doing over the past several months, let's do this together.

With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, as the Governor mentioned, testing of residents is a priority as we work to contain the spread of COVID-19. Testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine is the end-to-end process needed to contain this virus. I shared previously, we have segmented our population into three main categories: vulnerable populations, priority and essential populations, and the general population. Testing has begun in all of our vulnerable population groups.

Earlier this month, the Department issued a state directive for mandatory testing in our long-term care facilities. That needs to be completed by the end of the month. We have received 100% of the long-term care facilities attestations that they are implementing their testing plans. In total, 86% of facilities have started reporting data on baseline testing. Overall, about 67% of residents who need baseline testing have been tested, with a positivity rate of 8% to 9%; 27% of staff who need baseline testing have been tested, with a 3% to 4% positivity rate. To help long-term care facilities execute testing, last week the state distributed 97,000 test kits. The majority of them were dedicated to long-term care facilities, and we will be sending an additional 85,000 to these facilities this week.

At our psych hospitals, universal testing of 1,238 patients has been completed, with 211 returning positive, and 792 staff members have been tested so far; 453 have returned positive. Universal testing has also been completed at all of our state's veteran homes, with 1,600 individuals tested at three facilities: Paramus, Menlo Park and Vineland.

The Department of Corrections has started universal baseline testing of staff and inmates, with 8,700 tests completed to date, 19% of which returned positive. We are currently working with Rutgers University to support their continued testing.

We've partnered with local federally qualified health centers to ensure that migrant workers, our seasonal farmworkers, and persons who experience homelessness, and those who live in densely populated cities are tested for COVID-19. The FQHC partners are going to farms throughout the state and have tested 1,000 migrant workers with a 10% positivity rate. FQHCs have also tested more than 19,000 individuals in our urban centers, including at least 700 individuals who experience homelessness. In addition, plans are underway with a vendor to take testing to where the people are, using mobile units to underserved areas in our cities, focusing on Trenton, Atlantic City, Camden, Elizabeth, Newark and Paterson to start.

The department also issued a standing order to reduce barriers to testing by individuals to undergo testing without a prescription. Additionally, we expanded eligibility to enable testing of a wider range of symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals. We've been in communications with leaders of county testing sites, and we are working to get them the supplies they need to increase their capacity locally.

Along with the expansion of testing, we are working to increase contact tracing to identify those who have been exposed to a positive case so immediate public health actions can be taken. We are assembling a contact tracing taskforce to guide this effort. Yesterday, I held virtual meetings with the regional health hubs in the state, and I want to thank them for offering to support our contact tracing efforts. These hubs operate the regional health information exchanges to gather health data, to improve health locally, so they are well-equipped to help us with this effort.

There are currently 900 contact tracers and local health departments in our state, which have been ramping up all of this work. The spread of COVID-19 will dictate the total number of contact tracing staff that will be required, as well as the need to scale up or scale down staffing levels on a given timeframe. We anticipate 20 to 30 contact tracers per 100,000 population. We are contracting with a technology firm, Dimagi, to bring their CommCare platform to New Jersey. We expect that to be available before the end of June.

We're in the process of soliciting vendors for staffing agencies to support our local health departments. We've received more than 100 expressions of interest to help the locals with the staffing. We hope to have formal requests for quotes posted this week. We are also partnering with Rutgers University School of Public Health and several other universities to train public health graduate students and alumni to engage in contact tracing activities in their home communities. We hope to begin supplying local health departments with additional trained contact tracers by mid-June. Our goal is to recruit culturally competent and multilingual individuals from communities across the state. Training will include cultural sensitivity, cultural bias, and historic cultural context training, to ensure that when contact tracers are connecting with exposed individuals from diverse communities, they have cultural awareness and aptitude.

For my daily report, as the Governor reported, our hospitals reported 2,761 hospitalizations, with 768 individuals in critical care, and 76% of those on ventilators. Today, I am reporting three additional cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, for a total of 26 cases. There are no deaths reported. The ages of the children range from 1 to 18; 18 out of 26 have tested positive for COVID-19. Six individuals are currently still hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of deaths, the race ethnicity breakdown is similar to what I have reported in the past: White 53.3%, Black 18.5%, Hispanic 19.4%, Asian 5.4%, and other 3.4%. At the state veterans homes, among a census of 654 residents, there have been 384 residents that tested positive and a total of 144 deaths. Our state psychiatric hospitals are reporting 13 patient deaths. The positivity rate in New Jersey overall is 7%. The North is reporting 5%, Central Jersey 6%, and we've seen a jump up in South Jersey to 13% as a result of lower testing volume. That concludes my daily statistical report. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. And I just got in, hot off the press, that there were 24,400 tests yesterday, so we rebounded back up from the slightly lower number that we saw on Memorial Day. Thank you for that, and thank you for everything. Pat, over to you for compliance and other matters. Again, thank you for your leadership.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. I'm glad to report, really just one incident although egregious, just one incident on the overnight. A Ramapo Police had asked for assistance in locating a suspected shoplifter from a pharmacy. Montvale Police Department located the subject who was found in possession of stolen items as well as prescription drugs and during that arrest, subsequently coughed on the officers, claiming to have COVID-19. Other than that incident, an extremely mellow night we'd say, Governor. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: May it always be that way. Thank you for that. Marthelle, we're going to start over here if we could. We are likely together, I've lost Dan. We're likely together at one o'clock tomorrow. We don't think there's a White House VTC, at least there isn't one at the moment. And given that the First Lady is here, I just want to give another shout out to the Pandemic Relief Fund, and the website is njprf.org. They're doing extraordinary work across the whole spectrum of needs in our state right now, and they could still use all the support that you can send their way, so a shout out to keep supporting the extraordinary efforts of that organization, and thank you for your leadership. Nikita, we're going to start down with you here. Hold on one sec. If you folks could keep it to a limit here, that'd be great. Thank you.

Q&A Session

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Sure. Hi, Governor, I just have questions on one topic today and that's vote by mail. We've reported that thousands of returned ballots have come in after the two-day waiting period, and in some cases, after a seven-day waiting period. That's 2,000 late ballots in Essex County, another 1,500 in Bergen. So, I mean, based on that data from the May 12 elections, do you think that seven days will be enough for USPS to deliver ballots for the primaries? And also, do you have confidence in postmarks as the tool to decide whether or not a ballot is counted? Because we've also seen hundreds of ballots arrive without postmarks. What do you say to voters who cast ballots and then later find out that their vote isn't going to be counted? Do you have any plans to tinker with your Executive Order on the primaries?

And the very last one is, when will new ballot applications be ready? I know that clerks didn't have them, the new ballot applications for unaffiliated voters and the like for the primary. I know that the clerks didn't have them yesterday, and the military members were supposed to, or ballots for military members were supposed to be sent out yesterday. I don't believe that happened either.

Governor Phil Murphy: So I don't have any plans to tinker with the Executive Order. I do think both the postmark date and seven days are sufficient. Those are adequate. Having said that, I want Matt to come back, or some combination of us will come back to you on the specific instances that you're referring to. And separately, when we think the applications will be ready, which I don't have a ready answer for you. But if you could bear with us, we'll come back to you. Keep me honest, Dan and get back to Nikita on those. Thank you. Let's go back, Dustin, Elise, and then we'll come back down front to Dave.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Do you have any comment on the turnpike/Garden State Parkway toll increases? Multiple speakers during the meeting said that the plan to widen the highways conflicts with your pledge to reduce emissions. Maybe I'm mistaken, I thought yesterday you said that there would be guidance issued today on graduations.

On Monmouth Park, do you envision allowing fans to attend its summer meet? If no fans, can Monmouth Park at least begin its scheduled meet on July 3 without fans? Can the park open its stable area for the horses on Monday?

Governor Phil Murphy: So there is going to be guidance on graduation, but it's not coming from me. It's going to come from the Secretary of Higher Education and the Commissioner of the Department of Ed. I assume it's sometime later, by the end of the day, Dan? Is that right? So, can you bear with us on that?

Secondly, I'm going in no particular order here. Too early to tell on the fans. I was on with Moose and Maggie and got asked this question. I think the order will be, I hope that we can have racing without fans sooner than later, and then we're going to assess the question of fans, not just for racing, but I was asked about Jets, Giants, which is a little bit further down the road, but not a lot further down the road if they kept their scheduled exhibition games, would be a month after that. So it's too early to tell on fans.

Yeah, I don't see that, I don't agree with the premise. It's not your premise, but the premise that this is inconsistent with our objectives. First of all, I talk all the time about the fact that we're known for, you know, the key attributes of our economy are innovation and infrastructure. And then I also talk about sort of what are the other ways you could describe it? Talent and location, and we've got to dominate those spaces. We can't get an A-minus on that. We're a corridor state. I think when people really understand the specifics of it, they will appreciate, whether it's bridges that are way old in the Parkway or Turnpike, whether it's the two-lane reality in the southern part of the state in the Turnpike, which can now be widened, whether it's the Newark-Hudson – Matt, we needed you a minute ago, by the way – the Newark – Hudson Turnpike extension. You know, when folks see the specifics of what this means, I think they will understand, this is not abstract. This is a real impact.

This also, I think, takes the politics out of it. We've lurched too long. I said from the get-go we weren't going to kick the can down the road anymore on infrastructure. This is what it is, and it sort of extracts politics. Now, there's going to be a plan and it's, I believe, the right plan.

I'd say two things on the environment, Dustin. Number one, there's a whole lot of idling that goes on right now of cars and over time, once this plan is executed, that will go down dramatically. There's untold emissions that are coming out as a result of that idling and congestion. Secondly, the Turnpike Authority, and this is not by accident, they're going to put a lot of electric vehicle charging infrastructure into their rest areas. So, you

know, I think this is right, we had this extraordinary reality in New Jersey. This is pre-COVID, so we all have to go back to that moment in time. I think we're the seventh state in the nation on electric vehicle sales, and the 49th in the infrastructure that underpins those vehicles. And so I want to stay seven or even get higher, but the 49 has got to come up and the Turnpike Authority putting infrastructure, real infrastructure, into rest areas up and down the state is going to be a big difference. So, that's where I would be on that. Let's go back to Elise. Elise, I can barely see you today.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi, hello out there. Do you have any timetable to file a notice of interest to the Federal Reserve about the municipal liquidity facility? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I appreciate your economy of questions. No, but sooner than later. You know, I don't think there's an unending supply at the Fed, even though theoretically there is, and I don't want to miss our window. You know, you look at what corporations are doing. I read a piece today that a whole range of big corporates have basically gone out and borrowed, I think they listed a group that had borrowed collectively a trillion dollars of debt, because these are historically low interest rates. We've got to take advantage of that. We have no choice but to get both bonding approved by the Legislature in our own state, and then federal cash assistance coming our way as a result of action by Congress and a bill that the President, God willing, will sign. But the answer is sooner than later.

I believe the Assembly – Matt, am I right? The Assembly has put this up for a vote for June 4? Is that correct? That is on the calendar for the Assembly. I hope the Senate can follow soon thereafter. Again, I want to make sure we're at the front of the queue and not the back of the queue. Thank you. Let's actually go back to front and then we'll come back to Dave, give us a second. We'll be with you in a sec. Ian?

Ian Elliott, NJTV News: Governor, you've said the reopening of some non-essential businesses and parks and beaches hasn't given you concern. Folks are, by and large, acting responsibly. But at what point would we see a spike in the infection rate if there were to be one caused by the reopening? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, I salute your economy. I think you'd see, Christina, I'm not going to practice epidemiology without a license. Turn it over to you. If we had a reality that hit today, we saw this, there's a lot of concern about the Lake of the Ozarks and the gathering outside of St. Louis over the weekend. The pictures were concerning, to say the least. How soon do you know after something that might have happened today?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Well, we have to take into account the incubation period for SARS-CoV-2, the time it takes from the point of exposure to the outer limit of when you're going to potentially show symptoms. So we would, if God forbid we actually had some sort of situation, we'd probably start seeing some sort of spike up to 14 days from now. But again, we have to take into account that there have been some gradual reopening efforts. We would monitor that along the way, and we would probably see a lot of, you know, we could potentially start to see issues about five or six days afterwards, because it's usually the median from which people, from the point of exposure to when they get symptoms, up to 14 days.

Governor Phil Murphy: two quick things if I may add, again, practicing without a license. It's part of the reason I mentioned this earlier. I think you folks, in fact, you've drilled this into me, a one-day movement is something that we have to sort of put into context up or down, so both good news and bad news. This is something that I think Christina and her team, and Judy and her team overall at DOH monitor rolling three-day averages, seven-day averages, etc.

Secondly, I forgot to say something. We had a very interesting, I thought, video conference which Judy, Pat and I have been doing now for months with the White House yesterday. Tony Fauci, I don't think I'm speaking out of school, was asked about, it was a discussion that we were a part of as well about the second wave. He gave the most optimistic assessment of a second wave that I've heard from his mouth, from his lips at least. And it wasn't any different assessment as to the probability of a second wave. It was through testing, infrastructure and contact tracing infrastructure and isolation capacity, that we were far better equipped to deal with a second wave than we either were for the first wave as a country, or than we had been prepared in the past for second waves of things like H1N1.

And again, I don't want anyone out there to think we can lay our arms down. We think, I think collectively, even if we bat 1,000 on reopening the state responsibly, we're going to have flare-ups, period, and so we're preparing for that. That's part of the reason why, not only in my remarks but in Judy's, in both testing and contact tracing, we are putting so much energy and effort and investment into that. So that if, not when, there's a flare up, we can quickly be through testing, tracing and isolation, contain that as best we can. That's something I meant to mention earlier. Dave, good to have you back.

Dave Schatz, New Brunswick Today: Thanks, Governor, good to be back. On the increased testing, could you flesh out this whole issue for us in terms of how this data with more people getting tested is going to help us move into stage two? You know, specifically what you're going to look at, how it's going to be digested? And then what that's going to mean for New Jersey moving forward?

And the second and final question is with regard to the Turnpike Authority plan that was approved today. I understand you have made it clear that you're very pro-union. You said today that this is important to move infrastructure and to repair it and so forth. But you have hundreds of thousands of people in the state that are hurting financially, some are struggling to put food on the table, and now in the midst of the worst pandemic in the history of modern recorded history, we were forcing through a toll increase hearing that nobody could attend. That was sort of brushed aside, and now all of a sudden the plan is voted on today and people were bemoaning the fact, I was listening to it, that they're hurting so badly financially. What do you say to those people?

Governor Phil Murphy: So I'll give a comment on the first, but Judy and Christina can answer the first one with more authority, certainly than I can. Listen, the data, it's not just what data we will get. It's the data that we are getting and have gotten that is allowing us, when you look at a spot positivity rate that's in the single digits and variations really, I don't know if you said this Judy or not, but the number in the South, I think you felt was due to a denominator issue as opposed to some flare-up, and we're going to obviously monitor that. Boy, that gives you a lot of confidence. And again, you take out the serology tests and you're just now looking at, do you have it at this moment in time? That's hugely valuable. So the more data we have in that respect, the more confidence we have.

Dave, I would say this. I don't know when the last time tolls were raised on any of these Parkway or Turnpike or the Atlantic City Expressway, but it's been a long time. And as I said, I'm not doing this because it's necessarily popular, and I appreciate enormously the strain that folks are under right now. That's not in question and never has been in question. But we need a state that's standing here a year from now, five years from now, 10 years from now. Yes, we're a proud union state and we wear that as a badge of honor. But this is also about maximizing the hand that we have been dealt, and we have so underplayed that hand as a state for so long, and it has hurt us in so many ways in our economy. In exactly the part of the economy that's hurting right now, the middle class and those, as I was growing up, dreaming someday of getting into that middle class.

So yes, you do have a lot of folks who are going to get great, good-paying jobs to support their families out of this, but this maybe not directly today, but indirectly is a huge boost underpinning our economic prospects going forward. We are a corridor state, we're the densest state in the nation. To be able to maximize that hand and, at the same time, do it in a responsible way, and I believe it is in a responsible way. That gives us a huge asset that we have heretofore not had, for far too long. Judy, anything else on testing?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. The most important containment activity that we have is isolation and quarantine. But in order to do that, you need to test people, find the positives, isolate the positives, and find their contacts and isolate or quarantine, depending on their symptoms. That's the best tool we have in our toolkit to stop the spread.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. Thank you. Sir, do you have anything? You good? Ma'am, how are you? I also can barely see you. But I know you're back there.

Reporter: I'm here. We've heard from at least one summer camp that has canceled its programming for the entire summer, and many parents are trying to make arrangements for the summer, unsure of if this is going to happen. Do you think any kind of summer camp can happen this summer? And also, when do you expect to release guidance on childcare, daycares?

Governor Phil Murphy: The answer is, I have a high degree of confidence, assuming that the numbers keep going in the right direction, that we can have summer camp activity. We're just not there yet, and we have, I was going to say a small army, it's actually a fairly sizable army, working on that right now. And I would also add to that daycare. You've got daycare, youth sports, summer camps, all of which are at a fever pitch in terms of putting together what we think are a responsible set of guidelines for folks. Please bear with us. We know there's a lot of demand for it. We're not sitting on our hands, I promise you, but we're not quite there yet. But if folks are asking in a similar vein as I was asked over the past couple of weeks, should they continue to hold out hope to have outdoor graduation ceremonies? And I said they should continue to hold out hope. I would say the same thing about daycare and about summer camp. I just can't tell you when. Thank you. Sir, are you good? You? You're good. Okay. Thank you. Matt, and we'll come across. We'll get you, sir. We won't forget you.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Governor, there are major archdiocese officials in the state who say they're going to restart indoor masses as soon as this weekend. There's also a coalition of gyms saying they'll reopen after June 1. I just wanted to get your reaction on what these gyms and churches can expect from your administration and local officials?

On unemployment, workers who have exhausted their unemployment benefits are now eligible for the extra 13 weeks. They've been telling us that they've received emails and texts last week saying they could begin certifying on May 24, last Friday. Curious, have those people started to be certified? And if not, when? Some of them have just been telling us that agents told them it won't be until June 8.

And lastly, Governor, you've repeatedly said that nursing home owners failed to perform. Curious what you think they should have done?

Governor Phil Murphy: So we're going to have, I think we will have guidance, I hope, sooner than later. I'm going to leave it at that on indoor faith, indoor more generally, gyms. Matt's spending most of his life on those topics as we speak. I would just say, I personally put indoor faith in a category different than I put gyms, not just because of the spiritual elements but because of what you're actually doing when you're at those places, but if you could bear with us.

I can't, not because I don't want to, I don't have an answer on whether folks began certifying on the 24th but we can get that answer to you. We also will have new unemployment numbers tomorrow. I know Rob Asaro-Angelo can't be with us, but we'll have someone from his team with us tomorrow. Matt, do you want to say anything about that?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Actually, just on the first question, I think, you know, we've obviously had a couple of high profile examples of businesses that have decided to open, the one gym in South Jersey has since been ordered by a judge to close. I would note that the vast majority of businesses, even gyms, have been compliant and are working with our office on a variety of reopening plans, and we appreciate how collaborative they've been. I don't think the examples, both on the faith side that you reference, as well as on the gym or other small business side are emblematic of the broader business community.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I probably should have said that. There is overwhelming good behavior and compliance, and we're talking to a lot of the folks who are either spiritual leaders in the case of faith or owners in the case of gyms. I mean, I'll give you my answer on uneven performance. But may I say this? The Attorney General still has an outstanding investigation. Judy hired a renowned national team who's out there without draining resources from us, because we need every one of us in the ranks to continue to save as many lives as possible, but they're out doing their own independent assessment. I'll largely defer on the resolution of each of them. But I think we've cited communication that was – in some cases, not all cases – uneven is the word I've used, more often than not; communication that's unacceptable or lack thereof.

We got asked a lot, particularly last week where there was some talking point out there from somewhere that Judy had authorized or that I had authorized COVID-positive patients to be put back into a general population, which we never authorized. In fact, to the contrary, you were brutally explicit about cohorting, and that's a word I want to make sure folks know what that means, separating patients as well as staff. It's not clear, I don't want to make any accusations on that front, it's not clear that happened in every case. But it certainly was a clear directive from Judy and her team. But I think for the most part, we let both the teams, the outside teams work play out. We let the Attorney General's investigation play out.

And again we're, as Matt uses the phrase, we're still flying the plane. How many new hospitalizations today? 241 people went in the hospital yesterday. We lost 148 souls. We're still in the fight. I would say this, the VA, the National Guard, the outside team, everybody in Judy's team, the Attorney General, as I mentioned, we're all in on this and trying to save as many lives as we can. Anything you want to add to that, or you're good with that? Okay.

We'll come back to you on unemployment if we can. Sir, last but not least, unless my wife has a question. Are you good? Thank you.

Reporter: Hi, Governor, thank you. On the proposed toll hikes, the timing does seem peculiar for the state to try to slip this in while people are focused on a deadly pandemic. There's also the economic hardship on families after more than a million people here have lost their jobs. Why make those families pay more now?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I don't have a lot more to add on either of those points. The economic hardship I think I addressed, to Dave's point. We get what we're going through. We live it every single day. We need a state a year from now, five years from now, 10 years from now. And what we have done consistently is we have underplayed the hand that we were dealt, and there's no better example of that than infrastructure. And again, these are specifics. This isn't abstract. This is the bridge you go over on the Turnpike or the Parkway that is way old and way long needed to be repaired or replaced. It's the two lanes in the south that should be four lanes and you're sitting there idling, wasting your own money, polluting the environment. It's the turnpike extension and the Newark-Hudson piece, in the most dense part of the United States, one of the densest parts in the world.

And it's doing it, I think, listen, it is what it is, but it's also not kicking the can down the road. It is taking politics out of it and it is investing in our future. You know, we've got to invest, given who we are, we've got to invest in two things consistently. And unlike our recent past where we have underperformed dramatically, we've got to invest in our talent, which is why our schools and education system means so much, and we have got to invest in our infrastructure. God knows there's another investment that we've learned the hard way as a country, we have to invest in our public health infrastructure, and we will continue to do that.

So with that, unless you've got any questions, I'm going to collect our stuff and pack up and mask up. I'll tell you, I have become, not just overnight, but I have become a rabid believer in face coverings as a game changer. We were on with a friend of ours who used to be the head of government in Hong Kong. We were bemoaning the steps that have been taken against the one country, two systems in Hong Kong, which is for another conversation, for another day. But it also morphed into, why has Hong Kong had the result in COVID-19 that's so dramatically different than in America, in particular in the Greater New York reality that we have seen?

And by the way, if you want to know what that reality is, there are about a million fewer people who live in Hong Kong than in New York City. They have had four deaths, four fatalities. And so we asked, we were back and forth with Anson Shannon. Anson said, listen, we've been gutted by viruses before in Hong Kong. We've been gutted by, in particular SARS, bird flu, others, and the notion of masks, we lived there in the late 90s and it was more, I wouldn't say everybody was masked up, but it was something you'd see regularly. They learned the hard way.

I say all that to give a shout out. I think the more we cover our face, the better off we're going to be. It's right, it's part of the Holy Trinity for me: social distancing, face coverings, washing hands with soap and water. I want to thank Judy and Tina, Pat, Jared, Matt, Dan, certainly Tammy. I want to thank you all, most importantly out there, for continuing doing an extraordinary job. The metrics that we're watching are allowing us to take steps without question, one after the other. More to come, assuming this progress keeps up, we have more to come, I think sooner than later. Again, cannot thank you all enough for everything you've been doing. No state has performed like New Jersey, period, full stop. Again, tomorrow we'll be with you, unless you hear otherwise, at one o'clock. Thank you all. God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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