

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 14th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

04/14/2021



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone.

Honored to be seated next to the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, to her right, the COVID-19 response medical adviser, and former state epidemiologist, Dr. Eddy Bresnitz; great to have you both. Guy to my left needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan; we have Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel and a cast of thousands.

This week marks Black Maternal Health Week. And with that, I want to salute all the hard work being undertaken by First Lady Tammy Murphy, in partnership with our state departmental leaders, hospital and health care leaders, and community leaders, and advocates among so many others. Their goal and our goal is nothing less than eradicating racial disparities in maternal health and making New Jersey the safest state in America, to have a baby, and to raise a child. So, to all, we recognize all that you're doing and remain committed to working alongside of each of you.

Now, I must start by reiterating our announcement from yesterday of our decision to temporarily pause the administration of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine upon the recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Food and Drug Administration, pending further investigation into six reported incidences of severe blood clots following vaccinations. Now, for sure, these six cases each appear to be extremely rare and serious as there had been nearly seven million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine administered nationwide.

And in New Jersey, where we had administered just over 244,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine prior to hitting pause, no similar adverse effects have been reported. Even with this pause, our overall goal of vaccinating 4.7 million adult New Jerseyans by the end of June remains not only in place, but entirely achievable. As of today, doses of Johnson & Johnson have accounted for only about 4%, Judy, of the more than 5.6 million total vaccine doses we have administered. I want to repeat that no one who has received this vaccine should panic or worry.

This review by the CDC and the FDA is coming out of an abundance of caution. Moreover, this review is critical to our efforts both statewide and nationwide to ensure confidence in our vaccination program, and in the vaccines themselves. I will ask if it's okay with her, Judy, to speak further to the work of the department in light of the CDC and FDA recommendation, and how she and her team are working with our vaccination sites to assist those who were scheduled to receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. But it bears repeating that there have not been any similar reported adverse effects with Johnson & Johnson's vaccine in New Jersey, nor have there been by the way from either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

This pause also has no effect on Mondays opening a vaccine eligibility to all New Jerseyans age 16 and over. We will keep pushing forward with the tools available to us. And again, I know that Judy will have more to say on this and she, and Dr. Bresnitz, and I will answer your questions in a few moments as we always do.

Next up, switching gears, I am proud to announce that through the American Rescue Plan, we are taking steps here to make health insurance more affordable for hundreds of thousands of New Jersey residents who purchase policies through our state-based exchange get covered New Jersey. Because of the new savings available under the American Rescue Plan, the Department of Banking and Insurance under Marlene Caride's great leadership has reallocated some of the money we are providing for state subsidies to help more people. For the first time ever, state and federal subsidies will be provided to residents at higher income levels and residents previously eligible for financial help under the Affordable Care Act will get even more savings.

This new financial help will be available starting tomorrow at that website, getcovered.nj.gov. As we had previously announced, enrollment through Get Covered New Jersey is open through the end of the year. But the sooner you sign up, the sooner you have access to health coverage in the new savings available. If you are already involved and enrolled, you will likely be able to claim additional savings. If you need coverage, check out your options. And if you receive unemployment compensation in 2021, you may be eligible for nearly free coverage. So, again, please go to that website, getcovered.nj.gov beginning tomorrow.

Now, moving on, let's take a look at some of the numbers that we have coming in. First on vaccinations, we are reporting today a total of 2,292,316 fully vaccinated individuals. The total number of doses administered by both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is just under 5.4 million. And the stability of their supply and distribution is why we remain confident of our ability to still meet our June 30th vaccination goals. We are reporting today an additional 3786 reported positive cases that's combining PCRs with presumed positive antigens.

The statewide rate of transmission continues to trend, Judy, in the right direction, downward. And today, it is at a seven-day average of .92. The rate of positivity on the other hand of 24,396 PCR test recorded on Saturday was 11.04%. That does not surprise us in the least. We've said this many times that the positivity rate from Monday

of fewer tests, people testing with an adverse selection, they don't feel well. That it goes into the low double digits. We take it seriously, believe me, but that is not surprising.

Looking to our healthcare systems last night, there were a total of 2,281 patients being treated across our 71 hospitals. And this includes 2,140, who have already tested positive. Our intensive care units were treating 457 patients, and there were 254 ventilators in use throughout the day yesterday. 297 live patients were discharged, while another 271 new positive, COVID-positive patients were admitted. And our hospital has not yet confirmed, none of these are confirmed, reported 24 in-hospital deaths.

Notwithstanding that they have not been confirmed, we are reporting an additional 43 confirmed losses of life due to COVID-related complications. And that is with the heaviest of hearts. The number of probable deaths has been revised upward by a net number of 19. As we do every Wednesday, we revisit that. That's now 2,592, and these remain under investigation by Dr. Ed Lifschitz and his team at the Communicable Disease Service.

I believe if you combine 22,414 and 2,592, you will note that we have crossed 25,000 losses of life, almost or beyond unfathomable. As we do every day, let's take a couple of minutes and remember several more of those we have lost. First up, we remember this guy, a friend to human and four-legged creatures. Dr. Adel Hamdan, a veterinarian who was a longtime member of the Clifton community. Dr. Hamdan was 74 years old. He was born in Jerusalem and earned his degree in veterinary medicine from the University of Baghdad in 1972.

Soon after, Dr. Hamdan made the decision to come to the United States and New Jersey, along with his brothers, Dean, a physics professor at Montclair State University, and oddly, an engineer and finance Professor now in Jordan. At first, he couldn't practice veterinary medicine, but during breaks from his job at a grocery store, he prepared for his US qualification exams, which he passed. And by 1976, he was heading his own practice in Maywood. He would later own and lead the Totowa Animal Hospital.

Outside of his clinics, Dr. Hamdan was a leader in the community, a past president of both the Maywood Rotary and the American Doctors Association of New Jersey. Besides his brothers with whom he joined in their search of the American dream, Doctor Hamdan leaves behind his wife of the past 12 years, Alia, his children Adam, and Nadya, and his grandson, Richard, he also survived by his sisters, Abeer, Aisha, Anbara, Awatif, and Aida, and many other relatives. And of course, he leaves behind many dear friends of both the two- and four-legged variety.

I spoke to Alia, his wife on Monday night, because I had tried her a couple of times. She got back to me later. She's not a doctor, but she runs the veterinary hospital, and ran it for Dr. Hamdan. And the reason she couldn't pick me up earlier, she was accompanying the medical professionals making their rounds at the veterinary hospital. We are honored that Dr. Hamdan chose to make his home in New Jersey. May God bless him and we thank him for his years of community service.

Next up, we honor Cranford's John Greve, that's John on the lower right, who we lost at the age of 86. A native of Garwood, John enlisted in the United States Air Force out of high school, serving as an Airman First Class during the Korean conflict and earning multiple military honors. Upon his return, he embarked on a three decades long career with Bell Telephone, while also working on the side for Premier Electric in Garwood compiling a total of more than 50 years there.

He served as an active member of both the Cranford and Garwood first aid squads for over 30 years, with notable time spent as both squad captain and president. John is survived by the four ladies standing behind him. His daughters Cindy, Penny, Linda and Katie, and their spouses, along with his nine grandchildren, Jessica Kerri, John, Steven, Luke, Emily, Ed, Holly and Caitlin, and four great grandchildren, Jackson, Bella, Avreigh and Casey. He is also survived by his brothers, Charles, and William, and his sister, Dorothy, and many nieces and nephews.

I spoke with his daughter, Penny, on Monday, and had a really deep conversation about her dad and Penny herself is a first responder. So, thank you Penny, and to your sisters, and the entire family there. We thank your dad for his service, both to our nation, and to his community. And may God bless him, watch over his memory, and his tremendous family.

And finally, today, we remember, she's in the middle of that picture, Alice Houston. Alice was born in Jersey City, but called Monmouth County home for the past 65 years, from Union Beach to Keyport to Hazlet to Holmdel, she was 73 years old, and had been a resident of Holmdel for the past 37 of those years. Throughout her career, Alice wore many hats. She worked for the Monmouth County Action Program in Asbury Park. That's a community service organization that served and empowered families in need across Monmouth County.

She would serve as a supervisor and bookkeeper at the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. And after that, she worked alongside her husband, Jim, who's on her left there, as he built his law practice in the Keyport and Hazlet areas. And she was a top realtor along the Monmouth Bayshore for more than 35 years, and I've heard from a lot of people about Alice. She was known and beloved by many. But behind all of her energy, not surprising from that picture was her family.

She is survived by Jim, her husband, and their children, Michelle, Ali, and Christopher, and their families, including her seven grandchildren, and I think we got a lot of them right there; Madeline, Caitlin, Colton, Jake, Will, Sam, and Molly. I spoke with Jim and Alice's son-in-law, Paul on Monday, what an incredible life she lived. Alice also leaves behind all nine of her siblings, which means she will also be missed by countless, not just siblings, but by nieces and nephews.

For all she did for the communities in which she lived, we pray for God to bless Alice for a lifetime of good work, and good deeds, and may God watch over her, her memory, and her incredible family. All three of those we remember today were cornerstones in their communities, may their legacies of service and caring for others be carried forward.

Before we move on, I wish to note that FEMA has begun offering funeral cost reimbursements to financially help families who have lost a loved one to COVID-19. In general, applicants who lost someone to COVID-19 going back to the beginning of the pandemic may be eligible for \$9,000 for any costs related to a funeral, as well as burial or cremation costs. I would encourage every impacted family to visit that website, disasterassistance.gov. That's disasterassistance.gov for more specific eligibility information for this financial instance, assistance, and then to call 1-844-684-6333, that's 1-844-684-6333 to apply.

It must be noted that applications for assistance are only being taken by telephone. Again, the website is to get information. You got to use the phone number there to apply. We know how tough funeral expenses have been for many families already reeling from the economic impacts of the pandemic. And thankfully, this help is available to you.

Now, almost there, staying in the Monmouth County area, I want to give a huge shout out to this guy, Chef Lou Smith, the owner and executive chef of Blend on Main in Manasquan, and the founder of Chef Lou's Army, which has its reach overwhelmingly into both Monmouth and Ocean counties. Created after the pandemic hit, Chef Lou's Army has spent the past year providing free and nutritious meals, as I mentioned, to Monmouth and Ocean County families, and seniors in need, along with the families of our health care workers and first responders.

Over the course of last spring, Chef Lou's Army cooked and deliver more than 1,000 meals every day, every day. But Chef Lou and his army aren't done. And they've recently partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority through the new Sustain & Serve NJ program to keep going. And with a \$250,000 grant in hand, I know Chef Lou is ready to keep the army going strong.

I had the opportunity to check in with Chef Lou on Monday. We had a great call. I thanked him for all that he is doing. He is just a man who loves to cook and loves to feed those in need of a meal. Take a moment to visit him at chefflousarmy.org, no apostrophe, chefflousarmy.org or stop off and say hi next time you're in Manasquan.

I also want to give this shout out. Lou's got a big fundraiser coming up on April 26th at the Manasquan River Golf Club, and importantly, he's doing it in combination with the organization, A Need We Feed, and we have already acknowledged A Need We Feed in a prior press conference. So, two have these great organizations, Chef Lou's Army and A Need We Feed, both of which are part of the New Jersey Sustain & Serve NJ program are teaming up, and that fundraiser again is April 26th, Manasquan River Golf Club. That same website chefflousarmy.org has the details.

And finally, today, I wish to acknowledge today's celebration in Israel and among our Jewish community of Yom Ha'atzmaut, the day on the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to Israel's Independence Day in 1948. Ever since the founding of the State of Israel, which by the way, President Harry Truman acknowledged 11 minutes after its founding, New Jersey has been a mutual partner, and a close cultural, and economic relationship. A driver of this relationship has been the New Jersey-Israel Commission, which was established in 1989.

To coincide with today's celebration, I recommit New Jersey to our continued partnership with the State of Israel by naming the 76 public members of the New Jersey-Israel Commission, including the reappointment of dear friends, co-chair Mark Levinson, and the appointment of his new sister co-chair, another dear friend, Karin Elkis, among many others. And that list includes former Israeli ambassadors, Dani Dayan, and another dear friend, and Michael Oren.

These members represent the true depth of the Jewish community in New Jersey, hailing from the worlds of business journalism, music, diplomacy, government service, and community engagement, technology, medicine, academia, and many others. And will work alongside the Commission's outstanding executive director, Andrew Gross. I congratulate this entire extraordinary group, and I look forward to seeing all the common good that continues to flow from the New Jersey-Israel Commission. And 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. While the department understands that the pause in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine has raised some concerns about receiving COVID-19 vaccine overall, it's important to remember that your risk of getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19 is much greater than experiencing this extremely rare possible side effect that prompted the federal government out of an abundance of caution to pause J&J administration, and take time to analyze the data.

We have had no similar reports in New Jersey among those who have received the J&J vaccine. Additionally, generally, the incidence of this type of thrombosis, this clot without vaccination is also very rare. CDC reported these blood clots have occurred in women between the ages of 18 and 48 with low blood platelet levels. Their symptoms developed six to 13 days after vaccination. In New Jersey, 47,266 women in that age group have received the J&J vaccine. But again, we have no similar reports.

If you received the J&J vaccine within the last three weeks, no matter your age, and you experience leg pain, abdominal discomfort or pain, shortness of breath or a severe headache, please call your healthcare provider, or go to the nearest hospital to be assessed. We are encouraging residents to keep their vaccine appointments for the Moderna and Pfizer vaccine, which have been demonstrated to be safe and effective.

The Moderna and Pfizer vaccine use mRNA technology, which is different than the J&J vaccine. We understand that concerns about J&J may increase your hesitancy. But it is vital that as many people get vaccinated to beat COVID-19 in our state, where we have lost one in 500 New Jerseyans to this virus. We are concerned about the impact of the variants that are circulating in our state right now, and the possibility of increased transmission as a result of the variants.

So, when individuals get vaccinated, it helps protect them, their loved ones, and their community, and millions of people in the United States have been vaccinated safely. This pause is a reflection of how seriously the federal government is taking the safety of vaccines. All vaccine sites in New Jersey have taken Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses out of inventory and will not use them until further federal guidance is provided.

The department has requested that all vaccinators develop alternate plans for those affected by this pause in the use of J&J, including maintaining the existing J&J vials in appropriately monitored storage conditions, and ensure that they remain segregated at this point in time, but ready to be safely used when the pause is lifted. State will not be receiving J&J until further notice. At this time, we don't know if we will be receiving additional increases in Pfizer and Moderna doses beyond what is expected.

Most sites get a mix of vaccine types so many are able to switch to either Pfizer or Moderna for their appointments. For example, Hackensack Meridian Health announced that they wouldn't need to cancel any appointments at their vaccination sites, which includes Bergen County. It includes the Bergen County Mega Site, and would provide, there are other Moderna and Pfizer vaccines in place of J&J.

There are no reported issues at the mega sites. For example, the Gloucester mega site will provide Pfizer in place of Johnson & Johnson. J&J vaccine was distributed across a number of sites in categories such as the federal retail pharmacy partnership, that includes supermarket pharmacies, federally-qualified health centers, some hospitals, some of the mega sites, county and local health departments, and additionally, Walmarts.

Over the past two weeks, more than 146,000 doses of J&J were distributed to a variety of sites. We have received feedback that sites with Moderna or Pfizer have begun rescheduling those who were scheduled to receive J&J doses while the pause is in effect. The department is also reaching out to sites that only have J&J doses to provide assistance with communication to those affected by the pause, including options to schedule appointments at other locations. J&J only sites are not prepared to receive Moderna, or Pfizer.

The department's office of local health is contacting local health officials to offer assistance due to this pause. Many are working to accommodate those who were scheduled for J&J. For example, both Monmouth and Ocean County health departments have indicated that they should have enough Moderna and Pfizer vaccines to offer it to those who were scheduled for the J&J vaccine. And the Somerset County Health office will offer Moderna for those who were scheduled to receive J&J.

However, because of its ease of storage, and the convenience of being one dose, we were using J&J for some specific populations that would benefit from a one-dose regimen. So, those persons will be impacted, and may have to be rescheduled to alternate sites if that is possible. We recognize the challenges this pause creates. And we are committed to working alongside these partners to continue to advocate for vaccine supply for vulnerable and specific populations. And to ensure that adequate testing, and assist with other COVID mitigation strategies are in place.

We are talking with our partners serving these populations and looking at which sites may be able to accommodate maternal vaccine, although it would be more complex to administer a two-dose vaccine for some of these special populations. If we need to go forward with a two-dose vaccine, we will work to do so because we are committed to an equitable access to this vaccine.

As you know, CDC has convened an emergency meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices today to further review these cases, and assess potential implications on vaccine policy. So, we look forward to receiving further guidance after their review of the data. Overall, more than 5.6 million doses of vaccine have been administered in the state, and more than 3.5 million individuals have received at least one dose of vaccine.

So, over time, we have been able to increase vaccination among our communities of color. Over the past month, the percentage of Black non-Hispanic residents with at least one dose rose from 5% to 8%. So, we do have a way to go in that regard. However, over that same time period, the percent of Hispanic individuals move from 7% on March 15th to 19% on April 15th, approximating their representation in our general population.

The percentages of seniors vaccinated in the state also continues to rise. Eighty percent of those individuals between the ages of 65 to 75 have received at least one dose, 75% of individuals 80 and older have received at least one dose. Onto my daily report, as the governor mentioned, 2,281 individuals are in our hospitals. Our hospital census over the last seven days has stabilized somewhat. And as I mentioned on Monday, a large percentage of our hospitalizations are under the age of 60.

Right now, about 49% of our admissions are under 60 years of age. In December, that percentage was approximately 35%. So, we have seen a rise in those individuals being admitted to the hospital in the younger age cohorts, particularly those under 60, from 35% to 49%.

There are a total of 1,164 reports of CDC variants of concern in New Jersey, 1,130 of those reports are the UK variant B.1.1.7. Additionally, our reports of the Brazilian variant P1 have risen to 19 total cases.

Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. Two of the children affected are still hospitalized. There are no new cases at our veterans' homes, and our psych hospitals report one new case in a patient at Ann Klein. On April 10th, Saturday, New Jersey reports a percent positivity of 11.04. The northern part of the state is 10.95, central 10.93, and the southern part of the state 11.43. So, that concludes my report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, socially distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested, get vaccinated, and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. Two comments to underscore, one on age, one on equity, and I think you and Eddy would agree, there's a correlation, strong correlation between the great progress we've made on vaccinating seniors on the one hand, who we know are the most vulnerable. And the flip side of that coin is a younger demographic getting sick in the hospital.

And then on equity, great progress, although it's a journey. I think African-American number was 8% that's up against plus or minus 13% as a general population matter. Latino numbers are closer to the actual representation. The flip side of that on the bad news side, there's no question that Johnson & Johnson hiccup is a challenge, in particular in the equity piece, I'm sure you would agree.

So, for instance, the homeless population to pick that population extremely vulnerable among the most vulnerable, the notion of, and we'll do it if we have to, right? You said if that's what it comes to, we'll do it. But the notion of cold chain storage to appointments is really hard with some of these hard-to-reach vulnerable populations. So, God willing review by the feds is a pace. It comes out with guidance that we can live with, and we get back to some rhythm on that front, but for all the above, many thanks.

Pat, whether you got compliance, whether it looks like it's coming down on us a little bit, please help us out there. They used to be called dispatchers, but I think it's public safety telecommunications week or month. Either way, we take our hats off to them because they've been central players in this pandemic fight, but any or all of the above, and whatever else he got in let's keep recruiting candidates to become state troopers.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks, Governor. Good afternoon. Since we last met, we do have one EEO compliance citation that was issued, Haddon Township police responded to a landlord-tenant dispute. The tenant had her utility shut off, and her belongings out on her front lawn, which is in violation of the executive order protecting those from illegal evictions. And the landlord was cited, Governor, with regards to the weather, we are expecting a serious amount of rain in the next couple of days.

So, we're keeping an eye on that. And I'm glad you brought up the public safety telecommunications, it is their appreciation week. I stopped up at the Rock call center yesterday to thank them personally. I was at Hamilton dispatch center. I'm going to hit Totowa tomorrow. They have been the lifeline for first responders and citizens for more than the past year. In the past year over 240 million 911 calls alone across America, and they do a phenomenal job, again, troopers, whether it's traffic accidents, calling in stops, 911 calls, motorist aids, phenomenal group of women and men that sometimes they don't do it for the glory or certainly for the recognition. But in this week, we take the time to thank them for being that lifeline to the men and women who are first responders and certainly are citizens. And to your point, nine days left in that application process. I was on with George Gore on the AG this morning on his radio show.

It's a constant push in these last nine days. So, njtrooper.com is where all that information is in a time when we know that there are women and men out there that want to step up, and join us in this call to action, and be part of the next century of service. So, thank you for that as well, Governor, that's all I have.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rumor has it you may be on open line in one of my favorite stations, WBLS on Sundays.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That is correct, 8:00 Sunday morning.

Governor Phil Murphy: I love that.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We'll be on that, again, continuing the push for the application process.

Governor Phil Murphy: Jennifer and the whole team, they're our best. Folks who answer the phone, in this case, specifically the public safety telecommunications, but I'm thinking processing your unemployment claim, your call center, how many calls a day are they filling? 20,000 calls a day are being answered by a live person on the call center. The FEMA support for funerals, which I just put up, and I made the note you can go online to get the information, but you got to call, somebody is on the other end. That's a federal program, obviously. But it has been the glue, how many 911 did you say, 240 million?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yes, sir. 240 million calls are just staggering.

Governor Phil Murphy: Wow, absolutely staggering. So, thank you for all of the above. And by the way, please, folks, this has rarely happened, but landlords cannot throw folks out on the street. There's a moratorium in place. Please, I know most everyone is abiding by that, including landlords who themselves are suffering. We've got a landlord assistance program in place for a reason. We completely get that, but there cannot be unilateral action that takes a home from out from under somebody.

Again, we're going to be virtual tomorrow. I know I've got an event tomorrow that's not specific to COVID. But perhaps we'll have COVID numbers, Friday, we'll be on the road somewhere, but we'll continue with the rhythm we've had of late, and then we'll be virtual over the weekend. Unless you hear otherwise, we'll be back with you right here Monday at 1:00. So, with that, [Dante] has got the mic. Matt, we'll start with you. Good afternoon.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM: Good afternoon, Governor. Commissioner, are you able to be more specific on how the state plans to get vaccines to people who are homebound and in difficult areas of communities to get these shots without J&J? I know, you touched on it a little bit, but just curious about specifics. And Are any of the vaccination sites tapping into any Pfizer or Moderna second dose reserves to meet the sudden schedule changes? And lastly, Governor, 34 undocumented immigrants are on day eight of their hunger strike, and they say they're going to keep on going until there's a commitment from your office to help extend - to help excluded workers, excuse me. Have you resent revisited using CRF funds like other states? Are you looking at using American Rescue Plan money? Also, have there been any updated ongoing talks with the legislature about stimulus checks, or unemployment payments for undocumented immigrants?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I'll start and then I'll pass it over to you. I think I predict you're going to save it to be determined, given we just heard this yesterday in terms of how we deal with homebound homeless folks that are hard to reach. But any thoughts you've got to the best of my knowledge, we're not dipping into the second dose supplies. But Judy can correct me if I'm wrong.

And again, our hearts are broken, and anyone who finds it necessary to be on a hunger strike. So, please, God know that we care deeply about this. And we are trying very much if not desperately to find a good solution here. And I'm confident we will find something. There was a meeting I know with some of the representatives of advocates, with some members of our team yesterday. Parimal, you were part of that I know.

We're looking at all the above. CRF, more likely ARP money, American Rescue Plan money, and again, it's because we want to do right by every single human being. But it's also because unless we care for all of us in the state, not some of us are not most of us, but all of us, unless we bring all of us along, we will not find our way through this challenging journey, so, to be determined in terms of what that actually looks like. Judy, any comment on hard-to-reach folks that otherwise would have where we would've used J&J and/or preservation of the second dose?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure, let's talk about the second dose first. We've asked everyone to make sure that they put aside their second dose so that we don't complicate the problem. We do a count of inventory. How many doses are on the shelf every single day? And we expect that all doses be moved within seven days, and that there's no more than a three-week inventory on the shelf. We are moving that guideline down to two weeks, and encouraging all sites to use as many first doses as possible to make up for the scheduled appointments that had to be paused.

That's the analytics and allocation team. We also have a team that just looks at vulnerable populations. They will be meeting going forward after we hear what ASAP has to say today. They will be meeting to make alternative arrangements for those hard-to-reach populations. It will be somewhat complex because of the reporting, and monitoring, and follow up for the second dose. But if we have to do that, we will do it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Something happened to Judy's mic there. So, if you could make sure we're still plugged in. Judy, can you say something else again, do you mind?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Can you hear me?

Governor Phil Murphy: Oh, yeah, there you go. You're back. You're back. I meant to say one other point. We had a meeting with some leading, both representatives from the assembly and a separate one with the Senate. And I want to give Senator Ruiz a shout out to your last question about trying to find legislative or other means by which we can get money to the undocumented population. Again, she deserves a shout out because she's a leader on this since she was extremely passionate about it. Thank you, Alex. Good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 NJ: Good afternoon. For Dr. Bresnitz, since students, schools, and children didn't end up being the virus vectors that we feared. Was it a mistake to close schools down and send kids into remote learning for as long as we have? For the commissioner, you mentioned the homeless population. Can you tell us some other populations that were being given the J&J dose and how the progress in that area is affected by the pause? And for the governor, teachers unions in Trenton are resistant to Mayor Reed Gusciora's plans to reopen schools for in-person learning, partial in-person learning on May 3rd. They say that sending students back into the classrooms for six or seven weeks, two hours a day or four hours a day, two days a week I should say, is not going to help with learning. The mayor says this is necessary for basically a shakedown for September. What's your view? Who's right there? And lastly, when do you foresee yourself rescinding the state of emergency or the public health emergency? What level do we need to be at? Does the RT need to be at zero? Do we need to be at zero cases? Because in theory, if Coronavirus continues, perhaps even becomes a seasonal illness, you could govern under executive order in theory for your entire term in office.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that, Alex. Eddy, I'm going to take this one for you. With all due respect, we got clobbered by something none of us had any history with limited knowledge at best, no capacities, no sense of which habits worked. You make the best decisions. At the moment in time, you make those decisions based on the information you have got. I'll let Judy come back to other populations, other than homeless.

I don't have insight in the particulars of the Trenton situation, so I'll come back to Alex on that if we could. I speak regularly to mayors, superintendents, teachers, union leadership, in communities, which I do almost daily. I was actually on with the leadership of the NJEA this morning, not specific to Trenton. Obviously, our mantra from day one has been we need to do it safely and responsibly. But we want to get kids and educators back in the classroom.

Because we know the educational experience is dramatically richer when it's face to face. I promise you we will not keep the state of emergency or the health care emergency on the books for one minute longer than it needs to be. It just is not something that we relish. It's not something that we want to be doing. We do it because we have to do it. And it's a topic of constant conversation within our team, with our legislative colleagues. And they've been great about that, obviously, with members of the press.

You don't hear it from the men on the street hardly at all. Frankly, they're much more focused on somebody's died in their family, or sick, or they've lost their job, or they lost their business, and they want to know what we're doing for them. In those state, both of those, that healthcare emergency and the state of emergency allows us to do a lot more than we normally could for those people.

And what do we need to see? I don't have a very specific this number gets from Y to Z. We'll do it, but we will not hold on to this one minute longer than we have to. We don't have any more joy in this being the case than anyone else does. Judy, what else other than homeless populations?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We'd looked at the homebound population, individuals that do not have a car or transportation, even to a site that maybe five or 10 miles away would be difficult. Seasonal workers or migrant workers who we know were in the state right now. Many of these by the way, the vaccination programs had already started. So, a percentage of this group have already been vaccinated, primarily by J&J without any adverse effects.

Major senior centers, again, where transportation, or that we'd be putting them more at risk if they were put on a bus in close contact with one another to move to a site. So, the team that we have working on this has identified every single population. About 30 different specific populations in New Jersey, and then there are identifying and/or have identified plans for each of the groups. So, these are the types that come to mind right now.

Governor Phil Murphy: And Judy, as you said, and as I underscored, it's not like we won't be able - that we won't get to them. We will get to them. It's just going to be more complicated. And it's going to take longer. And God willing, listen, there's no evidence, and I am going to pull Eddy out of the bullpen in a minute here. So, bear with me, Eddy. We got to give your money's worth. You're not here for the next few weeks, am I right? So, we got to make sure we make this one count.

But one outcome here is the J&J gets put back on the boards, right? Clearly, that is a possibility and/or it gets put back on the boards with some caveats in terms of who should be taken. And AstraZeneca is exactly that in Europe right now. They've emphasized seniors for AstraZeneca, not young persons. You could see something like that here. And even sir, you've got something? You're good. Okay. I'm going to slip you 20. Thank you. Dave, how are you? You're welcome to see you've got nothing either. No?

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: No, I do have something. But I would also like the 20 if possible.

Governor Phil Murphy: You can't have it both ways, my friend

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: To get Dr. Bresnitz out of the bullpen, or could you speak doctor, on the vaccine and medication history that we have in recent times? Do they always, after they go on to the market, are they always problem free? Or do we sometimes see problems similar to what we've seen with the J&J vaccine pause? How significant is this that the CDC is meeting so quickly, the advisory committee today? And when do you think we would get some kind of guidance about what they're going to decide? And what kinds of things will they look at? I mean, we know some statistics about these individuals that have had the blood clots. But how deeply do they go into this? And how do they figure this stuff out? Governor, you've mentioned that obviously, we want to try to encourage people, especially in minority communities, to not be afraid to get vaccinated because of this pause. So, what's your thinking on what needs to be done? How are we going to really encourage these people? Again, because of the history of the way this has played out in this country. And Commissioner, how many appointments do we have a sense had been cancelled, and how many had been rescheduled? And how is this working? When somebody gets a canceled appointment, do they go to the back of the line, or are they helped right away, and they're fit in? How is this whole system working? And just, Commissioner, if you'd be kind enough to give clarification, you've given some data on the percentage of Blacks? I think he said, 8%, we're up to 8% now have been vaccinated. Is that 8% of the total population of New Jersey or is it of 8% of Blacks that have now been vaccinated that live in New Jersey? That's it. Thank you very much.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dave, I'll start and then turn it to both Eddy and Judy. I'll start with the last one, that's 8% of the total population with a representation of approximately 13% of the African-American community. So, we are eight-thirteenths of the way there, if you will. The Latino number is within a point or two of being all the way there. So, again, good progress, but we know we remain on a journey. I want to add to your questions of Eddy, how common is it to see pauses? I think Eddy, you're going to say the answer as it is common. But I'll let Eddy answer that. How significant is it that they're meeting today? What sorts of stuff are they going to look like? And when do we expect to hear? I'm anxious to hear the answers to that, as well.

Also Eddy, it was described the challenges of the six women, as they were described to me yesterday, it was described as quite unique to have a blood clotting experience. And I'd love you to react to that. And before I hand things over to you, and Judy, I continue to be confident not just in the Moderna, Pfizer supply. But I continue to be confident in the system, in the following sense, regardless of where the CDC and the independent authorization committees come out, that that the guidance will be guidance that we can take to the bank, including if that guidance suggests that J&J is back to being okay as a general matter to use and/or it is okay for a particular part of our population to use. But we want to reiterate in terms of the efficacy, putting aside these six cases, whichever one is taking very seriously, the efficacy against hospitalization, severe illness, death, all three of these vaccines are money good. And folks need to continue to hear that. Judy, should we go to Eddy first, and then back to you on how the appointment situations work? Eddy, good to have you.

Dr. Eddy Bresnitz: Same here. Thank you. Welcome. Thank you, Governor. And thanks for those questions. There are several of them there. I'm going to focus on your question. I'm looking at mostly vaccines, although I can say for medications. It's the same thing when they do clinical trials. And then, post licensure, usually is licensure, then they're continually monitoring the safety of the product. But for vaccines, I want to divide it into those what happens during a phase-three trial and what happens after authorization or licensure?

And the experience of a pause with one of the phase-three trials with AstraZeneca, they had this transverse myelitis. They pause the trial, I believe, for a few weeks. And then, they restarted after they looked at the data. And they felt that in fact, there was not an association between the use of the vaccine and this particular disease. And then, of course, those phase three trials occur only in maybe 20,000 or so individuals. So, any rare event is unlikely to manifest itself in a small trial.

And so, with these vaccines, with the three that we had, including the J&J, the FDA assessed and advisory committees assessed that the benefits outweigh the risk, and they authorized their use. It's not surprising that when you put these vaccines into 10s of millions of individuals that you're going to find a rarer effect. And I think the commissioner said that the data or maybe the governor said was about one in million for the six women in the US who've had this unfortunate experience.

AstraZeneca, also in Europe has had similar experience, and reading the two articles that were just published in the New England Journal describing those cases, one came out of Norway and the other came out of Germany and Austria, it sounds like the same impact, the same of the vaccines. And as you know, the AstraZeneca, and the J&J vaccine are the same platform. So, there's clearly a similarity today. And so, although it happens, it's done because of the term that's often used is the abundance of caution. But really, it's about transparency, and about making sure that the public understands that everyone is watching, particularly when you have unlicensed vaccines, that we're looking to see whether there's these rare events, and we're going to assess whether these are real associations, cause association, and then whether the benefit outweighs the risk in continued use of these vaccines. I can't tell you what the ACIP is going to recommend today.

I think, Governor, probably on the mark, if I had to bet on it, I would think that they're going to recommend continued use maybe after a little bit more time, but maybe in a select population. But we'll see. What they're going to do today at the ACIP is they're going to review all the data. The manufacturer will probably present the details of those six cases. They'll probably review some of the AstraZeneca data too because of a similarity. There'll be some risk benefit analysis. And they'll look at other databases to see whether there are other cases that have been missed. And that's what they're going to be looking for. Are there other cases, other than these six cases that we perhaps need to look at as well?

And of course, they've had a very intensive safety monitoring process for the COVID-19 vaccines. And the committee or the CDC point person will be presenting the data from the workgroup that was established just to monitor safety for the COVID-19 vaccine program. And I would expect it to see, as I said, the ACIPs probably, they're not going to walk out of the room today without providing some guidance. The public is expecting guidance. There's the pressure of the continuing pandemic, with lots of cases around the country. And people are wanting to know, can we put forward the vaccine even though we have these rare events? Or do we go and just use the two-dose vaccines that we currently have? And that's a big decision that needs to be made. But it needs to be made quickly.

Governor Phil Murphy: Eddy, well said on all. The immediacy of this, I think gets to the point on transparency. Let's be right upfront about this. I think that should give people comfort that actually, they're dealing with this on an expedited basis. Thank you for all of that, very helpful.

Judy, any color on if I got my appointment canceled, how am I going to know? What am I going to do? Back on the line, et cetera.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: So, the first part of the question, we know this. We received 15,600 doses of J&J. So, not all of them are immediately appointed. In other words, I haven't made all those appointments. So, some percentage of that had to be rescheduled. And the rescheduling will take place through the local point of dispensing through the local site with the help of our call center, if needed. Right now, most of the large sites are keeping the appointments and filling them with Moderna or Pfizer.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, I'm sure that's not going to be that you all won't hear that, hey, I don't know that somewhere, somewhere in the system, this is a bump in the road, and we'll do everything we can to make sure folks get whole again in terms of appointments. Thank you both for that. Thank you too. [Nikita], good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. I'm wondering if you have any plans to impose or loosen restrictions on beaches, amusement parks, or arcades in anticipation of the summer tourism season. And with the gateway environmental review, due to be completed in May, I'm wondering if you expect a groundbreaking sometime this year. And then, I asked you about this last week, but the Senate has now scheduled a quorum for the

19th. So, I want to know if you expect to conditionally veto the mandatory minimums bill within the next five days. And then finally, Democratic Governors Association Chair, Michelle Lujan Grisham has settled the lawsuit brought by a former staffer who accused her of groping his genitals. I'm wondering if you believe that she should resign.

Governor Phil Murphy: When you go off topic, you go off topic. Let there be no

doubt about that. No news on beaches, amusement parks or arcades, but I would expect they will be on a list of guidance that we'll be providing as we turn toward the summer season. I assume Parimal will agree with that. Not sure I'm groundbreaking on gateway, but it's going in the right direction in a big way. And that's really good. The Portal North Bridge is ahead of it because we got the green light out of President Trump in June. So, my guess is if we're thinking about putting a shovel in the ground, it may well happen at Portal North Bridge beforehand.

Nothing new on mandatory minimums, although I note the same as you did that the Senate has called a quorum for Monday. And I think Governor Lujan Grisham is doing a great job running the DGA on its finance chair. So, I don't make the jurisdictional decisions any longer as I did when I was chair, but I think she's doing a great job, and New Mexico, I think is doing a very good job in the pandemic more generally. She's by the way, the former Health Commissioner, Judy, don't get any ideas. Thank you for that. Thanks to everybody. Very helpful discussion, Eddy, we won't see you for a few. Keep us in your prayers and in mind.

Dr. Eddy Bresnitz: I will be in touch.

Governor Phil Murphy: My commitment is when you come back, by the time you're back here, we have a quantum meaningfully improvement in the pandemic between today and then.

Dr. Eddy Bresnitz: There'll be nothing for me to say.

Governor Phil Murphy: There'll be nothing for you to say. You can come in and help Pat out with the weather, but, Judy, to you and Eddy, thank you. And again, Eddy, we'll miss you, but best of luck to you. Pat, Jared, Parimal, to everybody. Again, folks, keep doing what you're doing. We're getting there. The J&J vaccine thing is a bump on the road. It's not the first bump on the road. Let's remember that. And I think you all have done an extraordinary job reacting to bumps in the road.

And I just know New Jersey well enough to know that you all and we all together will react well, and figure out this minor setback, and get us back on track, and get us to the point that we know we want to get to, which is to your question, Nikita, a Jersey Shore summer, a summer in our lakes that we all will relish and remember forever in the best sense. And secondly, getting 4.7 million adult New Jerseyans vaccinated by the end of June. We are committed to both. God bless you all. Thank you

Governor Phil Murphy

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