

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: March 17th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds Coronavirus Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. As you might be able to tell from my attire that it's St. Patrick's Day, so I wish each and every one of you a happy and blessed St. Patrick's Day.

Honored to be with Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver to my left, as always my partner in government; to her left, Commissioner of Labor Rob Asaro-Angelo – we'll hear from Rob. Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan, great to have you. A woman now known to everyone in the State of New Jersey, Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli; State's Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan and Assistant Commissioner Chris Neuwirth in addition to the Director of the Office of Homeland Security Jared Maples and other members of our team here today.

We'll do the overnights first and then Judy as always will follow up. We have received an additional 89 positive test results. Our statewide total is now 267 and we had announced I believe last evening our third fatality. Ad clearly, this is an evolving reality, and Judy will get into the details including the demographic and geographic details in a few moments. In many respects, this is Day One of life in New Jersey under the measures we put in place yesterday to ensure social distancing and to help flatten the curve and slow the spread of coronavirus. And again, as we said yesterday and was said many times, the extent to which we can, through social distancing flatten the curve over here, we take the pressure off the healthcare system over here and save lives and health in the process.

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I want to thank everyone who has taken to heart the need to stay in after 8:00 PM. We need all New Jerseyans to follow your lead. Bing watch something, play a game with your family. Call family members or neighbors to make sure they're doing okay, particularly the elderly among us. But please just stay in after 8:00 PM.

We urge you to do this for, among other reasons, so that essential personnel can attend to their jobs. For example, we must allow truck drivers to be able to make deliveries for restocking our grocery stores or getting supplies to our frontline healthcare responders. Truckers are essential workers in our response and we tip our cap to them. And the same goes for the members of the media, who are essential to getting the facts and the resources out to the public. And for that we thank you. If there is no reason to go out, however, don't go out. Let the people we need to be out get their jobs done.

Earlier today, and I've been speaking regularly with fellow Governors, and spoke to Governor Cuomo this morning along with Mayor DeBlasio and exchanged notes with Governor Wolfe, and this is a constant neighborhood watch if you will. In response to a request from Governor Cuomo, President Trump said the US Army Corps of Engineers would be, and I quote the President, "Ready, willing and able to help stand up temporary hospitals." So, to ensure our greater regional preparedness, I have now sent a letter to President Trump and have put a call into Vice President Pence, making this request for New Jersey as well – that we are in that first wave of response.

This move would be prudent to expand capacity and alleviate the strain on our hospitals and so we can both properly cope with this public health emergency and ensure the continuity of care for other emergencies. And by the way, again, what we do over here in terms of flattening the curve and social distancing, we believe increases our likelihood dramatically that we'll take pressure off the healthcare system over here. But we can't take that for granted, which means we have to do and both. We've got to flatten the curve, social distancing aggressively over here; but over here, we've got to make sure we have enough capacity. Because we think this is right we have a high degree of confidence, but this is a virus unlike anything we've ever seen in our lifetime, and we want to make sure that we have belt and suspenders, if you will.

I also want to make it evident that we understand that county and local governments are focused on their own concerns. In certain circumstances, it may make sense for certain localities to take actions relating to those unique concerns. We are very mindful of these actions and are reviewing them individually in fact, to ensure that they are fully aligned with our statewide guidance. Where necessary, we will support these actions. But where also necessary, we will override them. We ask county and local officials to coordinate closely with us prior to making any local directive. And again, there's no doubting everybody's hearts' in the right place, but we have to do things in a coordinated fashion. And at the end of the day, where necessary, we will override local or county actions to make sure that we are consistent in our approach.

Further, I am directing effective 8:00 PM tonight the closure of all indoor shopping malls, amusement parks and amusement centers across New Jersey until the current emergency ends. Restaurants which are located within these indoor malls and which also have their own entrances separate from the general mall entrances may remain open under the same rules and regulations we announced yesterday for restaurants and bars, which is take-out or delivery only.

Let me be clear that outside of our indoor malls, other businesses specifically ordered to shut down – or the restaurants and bars which are limited to providing that take-out or delivery services only – all other nonessential retail, recreational and entertainment businesses may remain open until 8:00 PM if they abide by our social distancing guidelines. And that's a big if. This is how we will be able to stay strong throughout this emergency and how we will emerge from it stronger and more prepared for the long term.

Now, for residents who are out of work as a result of this emergency, help is available. Workers whose place of employment has closed or whose hours have been cut as a result of this emergency are in all likelihood eligible to receive either full or partial unemployment insurance benefits for however long they will be either out of work or working fewer hours.

We saw a record number of Unemployment Insurance applications or so-called UI applications, Rob, yesterday, so many in fact that the state system crashed. You're back, which is good news. We are asking the federal government for assistance in ensuring every application is properly received and handled.

Additionally, New Jersey already has among the nation's strongest and best laws as they pertain to guaranteed paid sick leave and expanded paid family leave. Both of these laws are here for precisely situations like this. I urge every resident whose job has been directly impacted to visit www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>). That's www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>). A link to a comprehensive page pertaining to available benefits is prominent on the Department's landing page. Commissioner Asaro-Angelo will address this in a few moments in more detail. And when it comes to our union brothers and sisters impacted by this emergency, I also thank all the leaders of organized labor who are working alongside us to get the word out to their members and who are helping them and their families get through this time.

We also know that the anxiety is high among New Jersey business owners, and particularly among small businesses which are the backbone of our economy. Small businesses, Rob, in the aggregate I believe employ about 60% of the workforce in the state of New Jersey. Our entire economic team from my office to the Economic Development Authority is currently working alongside the federal Small Business Administration to ensure that available financial relief can flow into New Jersey as quickly and efficiently as possible. Our full application to the Small Business Administration for disaster loan assistance was submitted this morning, and we are pushing to get that approval as swiftly as possible, as early as – fingers crossed – today.

We are also working to ensure continuity of operations for ongoing construction projects. In addition, we are working with our partners in the legislature in hopes of standing up a state business assistance program within the coming week. And I want to go out of my way again to thank our colleagues in the legislature. I've spoken to both the Speaker last evening, the Senate President this morning. To each of them, their teams and all the legislators, we cannot thank you enough for your passion and your willingness to support the folks in our state who need that help the most in this very trying time. So, I take my hat off to them.

Separately, I also encourage banks, particularly the local and regional lenders who are deeply embedded in their communities, to do the right thing and work directly with their small business clients to defer loan payments or to open up credit lines for critical working capital whenever possible. I also urge banks to do what they can for their mortgage customers to make loan repayment much more flexible in the coming weeks and months. This is particularly true for workers in the hardest-hit sectors who work by the hour or those in the gig economy.

I thank every business large and small doing the right thing and keeping their employees on payroll in whichever way they are doing it. We implore every business owner to every degree possible to follow their model and to continue paying workers, and here's why among other reasons, in addition to the fact it's the right thing to do. The emergency response bill, currently moving through Congress and which we hope will become law, would provide employees with significant sick leave and paid family leave benefits. Not paying employees now might keep them from taking advantage of these. As I said, we know people are anxious but we are working nonstop to ensure that we are on a strong footing to protect our economy and people's jobs so we can emerge stronger once this emergency is over.

And to all residents, I urge everyone to be vigilant against – and I hate to have to even say this but it's true, we've got evidence – against scammers trying to profit from this emergency. And it's not just price gouging either which we've already addressed previously, and Sheila's been a leader on that front. Just this morning, one of my colleagues received a phone call on his state phone by the way, at his desk from a telephone number spoofed so that it appeared to be coming from another state office, from someone trying to sell him Medicare or Medicaid insurance coverage. If you receive a call from a scammer or see any incidents of price gouging, please report it immediately to the Division of Consumer Affairs which is within the Attorney General's Office. The best number's 973-504-6240. That's 973-504-6240 or go online at www.njconsumeraffairs.gov (<http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov>). www.njconsumeraffairs.gov (<http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov>).

And I will close if I might with a few words to every New Jerseyan, and I referenced this and I have in the several gatherings we've had like this, in person and on the phone. And I know Sheila has been doing it before I. Let me just say a couple of things.

We know this is a time of anxiety. We get that. The number of cases will almost if not literally, certainly rise in the coming days and I would bet weeks. We understand that anxiety, we get it, we respect it. We're doing everything we can over here to flatten that curve, to keep our distance, to please God stay at home whenever you can. Work from home. Certainly don't go out at night. Find ways to keep your distance. And the extent to which we can do that, we can take the pressure off the healthcare system over here, lessen the likelihood that we're going to need surge capacity although we are planning for that – more details on that shortly – and most importantly, save lives in the process.

So, our job is not, as I said, this is no time to panic. But equally this is no time for business as usual. So, the steps we're taking may lead to short-term pain for 9 million of us living a different sort of lifestyle. It is for good reason and as a result, our job is to not just accept that anxiety and respect it but working with you to lower it.

I mentioned yesterday there were two other types of folks. We've had a really positive reaction overnight coming out of yesterday. So, I would just briefly say, to anybody out there who still doesn't believe this is real – believe, trust us. This is real. And as I said yesterday, if we collectively are wrong about this it's on me personally. Trust me, it's real. Believe us. Take the steps we are suggesting.

And that third category, in particular our young people, who are maybe even benignly or innocently carrying on in life. And again, we've had a very good reaction overnight so I think we've shrunk both of these populations, I hope meaningfully if not entirely. And that is, "You know what? I'm healthy, I'm virile, I'm confident. I'm a young person. This doesn't pertain to me." But while the data may not suggest that you are the most vulnerable, although you still are vulnerable to this – let me underscore that – you're going to visit with your grandmother or your grandfather, or an older parent, or an aunt, an uncle, a coach, a teacher. You may be asymptomatic but you may unwittingly give this virus to somebody you love.

My kids were saying this morning that Donovan Mitchell of the Utah Jazz was on a live feed last night, looks terrific and he went out of his way to say he has no symptoms. But the only reason he knows he has the coronavirus is because his teammate got it, and the fact of the matter is, if he weren't self-quarantined what would that mean?

So again, to those who have anxiety we get it, we respect it, we understand it, we respect it. Our job collectively is to help lower that anxiety by being aggressive, proactive, I hope smart and working with you. To those who don't believe, and I think there are fewer and fewer of us, believe, trust us. And those who don't care, particularly among our youth, please care. Please know this is relevant for all 9 million of us.

And I'll conclude where I've been concluding the past number of days. Assuming we do all of the above, all 9 million of us do our part, from the very basic washing hands with soap to social distancing, to using common sense, staying in at night, doing the sorts of things we've laid out, we will get through this – not unscathed, not without mistake but we will get through this as one New Jersey family stronger than ever. And for all of the above, on behalf of all of us, to each and every one of the 9 million New Jerseyans watching, we thank you.

With that, we'd love to turn things over to my partner in government, the one, the only, the singular Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver.

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver: Thank you, Governor Murphy.

Governor Murphy described the anxiety that many of the residents in the state have, particularly those who are from the most vulnerable populations in New Jersey. And I just want New Jerseyans to know, particularly those who are living in underserved communities that we will be available at the Department of Community Affairs to accept rental assistance applications. When we look at the businesses that are being closed, when we look at the gig workers that the Governor has described so aptly, we know that the next thing that they're confronted and challenged with is that April 1st is among us and the rent is due. So, New Jerseyans can go to the website of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs www.njdca.gov (<http://www.njdca.gov>). You will see all of the housing assistance programs that you can apply for. And we serve veterans, we serve the elderly, we serve single parent populations – a wide variety of cohorts that find themselves in that situation.

I want landlords in this state to know, and we provide 33,000 housing subsidies in this state; and landlords accept these subsidies and it enables us to provide housing to many, many people. I want landlords to know they don't have to worry about receiving their rent as we are in the midst of this emergency. We will have staff available that will continue to process payments. I want our nonprofit service deliverers to know that we are taking steps to keep you whole during this emergency. Last night we advanced to the nonprofits that we contract with an additional 25% of the value of their contracts, so they're able to continue operations, pay staff and to provide social services to the people coming in the door.

You should know that we have many senior centers that provide a meal. General Jemal Beale, as Governor Murphy described yesterday, they will be doing a variety of tasks. Also our National Guard for homebound seniors who can't pick up a grab and go meal, they will do delivery of meals to our senior citizens, our most vulnerable.

So, I just want to emphasize, yes, we are doing 10,000 things all at one time but the vulnerable populations that live in New Jersey are not forgotten as all this activity is going on, and we are doing all we can to leave you whole and sustained during this crisis.

Governor Phil Murphy: Really well said, Sheila. May I add one observation to that and one that I wanted to make somewhat related but separate? That is, invariably when something like this happens the folks who need government the most are the ones who are impacted the most. And I take my hat off to you and to our colleagues for making sure that government is there for the folks that need it the most. And we should be proud of that.

Separately I wanted to add... And by the way, that includes not only some of the populations you talked about but millions around this state. Our communities of faith are being hit particularly hard, and we've reached out, particularly as we've dropped the maximum gathering from infinity I guess to 250 and then from 250 to 50. We heard from a lot of our faith leaders across the spectrum of faiths that this is really affecting their ability to survive frankly in some cases. So, that's something that we're spending a lot of time thinking about and will continue to.

I mentioned yesterday a couple of really good corporate citizens. I think one of the things, there's more evidence of this overnight. There's some really good non-government action coming out of philanthropy, out of the corporate community, folks who just want to do the right thing. And I think it's our job to try to help steer them, bottle that as best we can. So again, Sheila, thank you for everything.

As I said, one of the most now well-known people in the entire state, it is my honor to turn things over to our Health Commissioner and to give mor color on the new overnights of 89 positives, also a sense of how the healthcare system is holding up and how we're doing on the testing front. And for all of the above, Judy, I can't thank you enough. Judy Persichilli.

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

Last evening Governor Murphy announced New Jersey's third death related to COVID-19. This Bergen County resident in his 90s was being treated at Hackensack University Medical Center, and of course our thoughts and prayers go out to the family.

We know that COVID-19 can cause severe illness and hospitalization, particularly for our older adults and those with underlying health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease or diabetes. Currently, about 55% of New Jersey cases that we know of are hospitalized, but as we continue to see large numbers of new cases every day that number will change.

Over the past few days, New Jersey has seen a significant increase in the volume of cases concentrated in the northeastern portion of the state. Some of these cases have been directly linked to previously confirmed cases, and then there are some that do not have any linkages. This is an indication that community transmission is occurring. The risk of contracting COVID-19 in these areas is likely higher than it is in areas of the state where case counts are still limited. However, the risk overall still remains low when you follow social distancing, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.

The potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 as you know is high both globally, in the United States and now in New Jersey. Individual risk is dependent on exposure. Under certain circumstances, as we begin to see increased community spread, certain people will have increased risk of infection. For example, people in communities where ongoing spread of the virus has been reported at elevated levels yet the overall risk of exposure still remains relatively low. Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are at an elevated risk of exposure. Close contacts of a person with COVID-19 are also at an elevated risk of exposure, and travelers returning from affected international locations where community spread is occurring are also at elevated risk of having been exposed.

And as cases increase, we know the pressure on the hospital system grows exponentially. We've been working closely with our hospitals since January to prepare for a surge related to COVID-19. In collaboration with the New Jersey Hospital Association, we are surveying hospitals to get information about the resources they need. As the Governor mentioned yesterday, over the weekend we received a small fraction of personal protective equipment we asked for but we know we still need much more.

We have also been working to expand hospital capacity. The Department is talking with several CEOs about the possibility of opening up eight currently closed acute care hospitals that have been closed in the last several years. This is under review right now. Additionally, the Department is working with hospitals that have departments or wings of hospitals closed, to convert the total wing to negative pressure. At this time, there may be 185 additional rooms available if we do that.

We also are moving forward with expanding testing in this state. The Department has provided guidance to counties on how to standup these testing clinics. FEMA is working to set up testing sites in Bergen and Monmouth Counties. As we test more individuals, we do expect to find more cases in the state. The risk of contacting the virus is greater in areas where we have seen large numbers of cases than in counties where we are not seeing many cases.

Today, we are reporting 89 new cases for a total of 267 cases in New Jersey. Here is the breakdown from today with the information we have. Bergen has seen 23 additional cases; Essex has seen 11; Gloucester 2 more cases or I should say two of their first cases; Hudson 6; Hunterdon 3; Mercer 3; Middlesex 5; Monmouth 8; Morris 1; Ocean 1; Passaic 1; Somerset 2; Union 7. There are 16 cases still under review to confirm their counties. We're gathering more details on them.

The age range for the total of the 267 cases in the state is 5 years to 93 years of age. More than half of our total cases are male. The median age for those affected in New Jersey is 52. As I've said before, those 60 and older and those with underlying medical conditions are at most risk for COVID-19 complications.

The increases in cases exemplifies why it is critical that our residents follow the important social distancing steps the Governor has repeatedly outlined. These mitigation interventions can slow the spread, and if we all work together we can lessen the impact on our state. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. A couple of quick things before I ask Rob to say a few words and then we'll throw things open to questions.

I just have to underscore, first of all thank Judy and Christina and Chis and their whole team, but underscore the heroism of our healthcare workers right now. It's just extraordinary. I spoke this morning to three of the union leaders and they have some legitimate challenges which we're working through on their behalf. But their heroism and their willingness to be there, and Judy herself is a nurse so she knows from whence she speaks, as well as doctors and workers of all shapes and sizes. What extraordinary efforts being put in by them right now.

I also had the chance to speak to a couple of the big hospital's CEOs and they reiterated the same thing so let's not forget that. I don't know where we'd be without them. Secondly, Judy was very simple in her three-legged set of advice. Practice social discipline, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. And if we hit that trifecta that's the best thing any of us could possibly do.

Lastly, I can't give up this moment as we always do, if you have any questions call 1-800-222-1222. 1-800-222-1222 or www.nj.gov/health (<http://www.nj.gov/health>) is the website. Again, Judy, thank you.

I mentioned we have a lot of folks not surprisingly applying for unemployment insurance. We've got a lot of workers out there either still working full or part-time who have anxiety, or folks who are no longer working who have even probably heightened anxiety. And I'd love to ask our Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro-Angelo to say a few words. Rob?

Commissioner of Labor Robert Asaro-Angelo: Thank you, Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Because of your leadership, New Jersey already has one of the most generous paid sick leave laws in the country, a law that covers unanticipated school closings and public health emergencies. It allows workers to take time off to care for themselves or a loved one in times like these.

There are many situations related to this virus for which a worker may be entitled to earn sick leave. Visit www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>) to learn more.

New Jersey is also one of a handful of states with a family leave insurance law, again allowing workers to take time off to care for themselves or a loved one. Workers who test positive for COVID-19 or if they were exposed to the virus, have compromised immunity or are taking care of a sick family member are likely eligible for family leave insurance.

An easy-to-read chart on our website in English and in Spanish lists our benefit programs for which workers might be eligible. We urge everyone to visit our website, again, www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>) to learn about our programs and eligibility.

The Labor Department has a bigger responsibility than perhaps at any other time in our history. It's obvious that workers and business owners will be drastically impacted by COVID-19 and are already. We understand there is uncertainty and anxiety out there. Workers and businesses each have a part to play to ensure we all get through this crisis together and come out stronger and better on the other side.

First, as the Governor said, we urge businesses to continue to pay their workers if at all possible whether or not they're able to work. It not only helps individuals in the workforce, but also helps keep our economy moving in a positive direction and also helps us flatten the curve.

And here's an important message for our business owners. As the Governor mentioned, the federal government is moving COVID-19 aide packages that will reimburse them 100% for giving employees COVID-19 related paid sick days and family leave. If the bill's passed as written and as expected, 99.8% of New Jersey employers will be able to defray months' worth of employee paid time off related to COVID-19. Paying workers during this pandemic gives our workforce the peace of mind they need to stay at home when they or a family member is ill.

Second, we're asking workers to visit www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>) to determine whether they may be eligible for unemployment, temporary disability, family leave, or worker's comp before they apply. Look at the chart on our website to determine which program you think you might be eligible for. This is really important. Applying for a program you are not eligible for could set your application back weeks, delaying your much-needed income support.

Workers are urged to apply online for the fastest service but we ask for your patience. We've seen a twelve-fold increase in benefit applications this week and we're experiencing extraordinarily high call volumes. As mentioned earlier, we had some problems with our online system – we're back up now. Applying online is easy and will save you precious time in receiving your benefits. But please know, if you can't get through over the phone or online, your claim will be backdated so you won't lose a day's benefits that's due to you.

This is a challenging time. We've made it through challenges before, most recently when Superstorm Sandy knocked us down but not out. Together, we'll make it through this challenge as well. With our continued support, our businesses will rebound and thrive and our workers will be back doing the work they do that makes this state great. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, thank you. I mentioned this several times over the past couple of days, that we entered this crisis with a lot of assets. And I've referred to, in many respects to healthcare aspects – the quality of our healthcare system, the safety of our hospital systems, etc. We also entered this crisis with among the lowest unemployment rates we have ever experienced in this state. That's changing as we speak, let there be no doubt about it but at least we've started in a good place.

It's also why I have some optimism that once we get through this – and I don't know when that is, so let's not hold each other to when that might be – we will I think more readily be able to get back on our feet because we entered into this with a good amount of strength. So, when we go to the federal government – I spoke to the President and Vice President yesterday and the Vice President Friday night; I've got a call into the Vice President a short while ago – our asks are pretty, we're pretty consistent. Personal protective equipment, as Judy said, we got a fraction of our ask. We need a lot more and we're hearing that from the frontlines. We're doing everything we can to source that including on our own. But the biggest source, potential source is the strategic stockpile at the federal government.

Two, we're going to need – going to the other end of the spectrum – an enormous amount of help getting workers and businesses back on their feet, whether that's direct into the pockets of workers and their families or in a stimulus package. I don't think we can underestimate that we're going to need an enormous amount of support from the federal government, certainly not just in New Jersey but I know in New Jersey.

And then, thirdly, and I want Pat Callahan if he could give us 30 seconds on this, we talk about boots on the ground. And boots on the ground has expanded a little bit over the past 24 hours. It now includes unequivocally the Army Corps of Engineers to help the National Guard, to help Pat and his folks, to help Judy and her folks in reopening those wings, repurposing those closed hospitals; looking at dormitories that we might be able to use for low-level quarantining by example. And so, that's a letter that I've signed and sent to the President today.

It also, as we mentioned over the past couple of days, it includes FEMA boots on the ground. And Judy mentioned both the Bergen and the Monmouth testing sites, the drive-through testing sites. And that's got some constraints as it relates to supplies, which we're trying to work through – particularly that frontend set of supplies that you need for the sample, more so I think, Judy, than the backend testing right now, right? But Pat, can you give us 30 seconds on how things are going with FEMA and what's your crystal ball here tell you over the next several days?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Sure, Governor. As I mentioned yesterday, FEMA deployed an Incident Management Assistance Team to our state Emergency Operations Center. They arrived this morning. I had a meeting with them at 8:30 this morning to talk specifically about testing and about also their assistance hopefully with the Army Corps of Engineers to get those locations that Commissioner Persichilli talked about up and running as functioning hospitals.

So, the question that may come up is where are those supplies? I asked that question this morning and was told that a truckload left Georgia and a truckload left Indiana today. It is our anticipation that those supplies are in New Jersey by tomorrow. They will be warehoused until we're up and ready to get the site in Bergen and the site at the PNC Arts Center up and ready, which we hope is sometime in short order. I would give it a few days, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. I think in a perfect world we'd love one of those, I think our collective ambition is to have one of those up and running this week. And this is not insignificant, right? This is potentially a couple thousand a day, is that right? I think a couple thousand tests a day.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: And I think they're sending us... Each site will have the ability, I think it's 2500 kits plus the PPE and that'll come in weekly as we need it to be replenished. And that is strictly for those two sites. I want that to be clear, too, 'cause I hear some rumblings of other counties that may think about opening a site. The FEMA-supported are the ones in Bergen at the Community College and the PNC Arts Center just to be completely clear.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, as we've said, if we can find the supplies and the manpower to open more of these we are all in to do that, and that's going to be dependent on supplies and manpower – and supplies including the PPE.

With that, let's take some questions.

Q&A Session:

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Lieutenant Governor, I have a question for you but then also for you as well, Governor, if I may. You had talked a little bit about expanding social services. I know many seniors especially are concerned about getting rides to supermarkets and other areas, pharmacies perhaps to get what they need. So, is that continuing? Because there's been some concern about that. Question number two, Governor, principally for you, you've continually stressed how important it is for people to stay home, this is not business as usual; we need to really limit exposure to other people, social distancing. You put the number at 50; I know President Trump yesterday was talking about 10 people. However, it has come to our attention that the New Jersey Turnpike Authority is still planning to have two public hearings tomorrow, one in Woodbridge and one at Camden County College. And heaven forbid that anybody should ever get the wrong impression that these folks might be more interested in raising tolls significantly than protecting the public safety and health. Could you clarify that for us, sir, and what's your feeling about this as this continues to move forward?

Governor Phil Murphy: I will try the second, Sheila, and then we'll go back to the first if that's alright. I believe, and I'm looking at Mahen Gunaratna and Dan Kelly and Jared and others here. I have very little insight into those hearings other than I said it was very important to me and to us that they not exceed the limits that have been put in place. And I believe they are, as a result, live streaming those hearings. Is that correct, Mahen? So, that is correct. So we will, and I'll make sure that we reiterate, Mahen, to the Turnpike Authority that they adhere to the 50-person max in that room assiduously, which by the way, we are now. I counted 32 people a couple of minutes ago, so we're taking that seriously in this room as well. And there is livestreaming capability as a result of that. Whether or not they would have live-streamed it otherwise I don't know, but they definitely will livestream it as a result of the limitations. Sheila?

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver: Thank you, Governor. Just to put a little detail on what you described with New Jersey Transit, our Division of Local Government Services sent out an advisory to most of the public entities in the state including municipalities, giving them advice on how to comply with the sunshine laws of this state and OPRA. So, we haven't forgotten that this is a crisis but we still have laws we must comply with, and most of those entities are making provision to make sure that the public is not cut off from their statutory abilities that they have.

And with transportation, yes, transportation is critical to the older adult population. But what we are trying to do is to encourage our older adults to stay at home. We are advising, unless it is critically needed, to cancel your regularly scheduled medical appointments. Many of our healthcare facilities in the state are contacting their patients and telling them that they're going to defer their upcoming appointments. But in the event that we do need to get a senior someplace and it's emergency-bound, every county has a special transportation program for older adults. Interestingly, it is funded by casino revenue.

I do know that some of those counties have taken those vehicles offline for a couple of days so they can do a total disinfectant of every inch of those busses and shuttles. But we do have ability to get seniors to where they need to go. And I think when the Governor makes reference to boots on the ground, we are going to rely on some of those boots on the ground to do those transportation services for us.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Sheila.

Reporter: Can you talk a bit about confusion? There's a lot of confusion. Your order tonight shuts some things down, but a County Executive yesterday said something about shutting malls down, then had said something different this morning. Local towns are doing different bans and shutdowns and whatnot. Are you speaking directly to county, local leaders and telling them what to do? And secondly, on the confusion, the 50 and over has got a lot of people confused. Does that mean funerals? Can you still have funerals in town? Should people cancel their medical appointment? Are medical practices being told to shut down? What is the state doing to reach out to certain groups like that to answer these questions?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, on the first, there is by nature going to be some amount of confusion when you take steps that are this drastic. I mentioned in my remarks, I don't hold it against any local or county leadership. I haven't found one person whose heart's not in the right place, and we have been trying to be as deliberate and as constructive as possible in, in some cases, accommodating those local and county actions. I'll give you an example. I live in Monmouth. It was spreading around Monmouth a couple of days ago

aggressively where towns were closing restaurants and bars. And again, we ultimately got there – so, we got there yesterday. Again, they're open for take-out and delivery service only. So, I think you've got a natural... As we sort of, in the early days find our footing here, you've got a natural amount of a little bit of fits and starts.

Having said that, at the end of the day it's the state that makes the final call. I mentioned that in my remarks and our reserve the right to either enforce and underscore a local action or override that action as the case may be. So, it's unequivocally at the end of the day, the last word is with the state. Again, I don't begrudge anybody the fact that we're sort of a little bit in the early days, because it's the nature of the beast. We've never done this before. I mentioned this yesterday, I'm actually literally note even kidding. I think we took more action yesterday as a state since than we have since the Revolutionary War. So, we're in uncharted territory.

Secondly, as it relates to things like funerals and gatherings and whatnot, first of all, institutions are responsible. So, it's the institutions themselves. So, it's not the person going to get their checkup; it's the healthcare provider who's hosting the facility that we are relying on. You know, we can't, Pat and team, National Guard and team, local – we can't possibly police every single gathering so we're asking folks to use their common sense and to do the very best they can. I've been asked about funerals now, I was asked about weddings before. We just have to do our best. Is somebody going to come in in the middle of a funeral and break it up? I don't see that frankly; I would hope we wouldn't. But I would also ask folks to also please do everything they can to abide by this.

On stuff that's less benign than a wedding or a baptism or a funeral, and there's willful flaunting of our restrictions, we will take actions and we'll be aggressive.

Reporter: So Commissioner, just sort of a multi-parter here and I want to give you an opportunity to answer them. I'm curious how many of the total cases today, how many of those people are being treated in hospitals versus home or self-quarantined at home? And how many are currently on ventilators if you can say? And also, just briefly, are you able to discuss generally how, the amount of people that are getting sick just generally how sick are these folks getting?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I definitely do not know how many are on ventilators. I can tell you that many of the individuals that enter the hospitals with moderate symptoms but enough to be in a hospital, when they do get admitted to critical care it appears that the disease is moving very quickly. They can within 24 hours require a ventilator and that's what's being reported to us. I don't know exactly how many are hospitalized from the new cases. We do know overall that of the 267, about 55% are in the hospital or have had hospitalizations.

Governor Phil Murphy: So that's about 140 out of the 267, does that sound right, ballpark? I'm doing the math in my head here.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: But as far as those on ventilators I don't know. But I can tell you we had a conference call with the CEOs of the hospitals last evening and their two biggest concerns are adequacy of their workforce, number of critical care beds; and followed very closely by the number of ventilators. So, we're doing a full survey to see how many ventilators we have in the state. We know we have 2000 ICU beds; we also know that medical/surgical beds can be converted to ICU beds, critical care beds. That's more the monitoring equipment and the adequacy and numbers of workforce, particularly RNs and intensive care physicians. Is that helpful?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think you had said you have about 700 negative pressure chambers.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have 700 isolation negative pressure rooms. We're looking at converting full wings of hospitals to negative pressure so then we don't have to worry about doing room-by-room and they can house all of the patients.

Governor Phil Murphy: Fantastic.

Reporter: Hi, Governor. Can you speak to how schools are doing today? Are they all closed first of all? I think today was the last day. And in general, how's the transition going? Are the kids getting served? Are they getting the meals that you've heard about?

Governor Phil Murphy: Unless you've got a gotcha and you're going to give me examples where I'm going to be wrong, I don't believe they were all closed. They were mandated to be closed by the end of the school day today. I don't know for sure that there were schools in session, but I believe there were a small number. Secondly, Pat...

Reporter: They'll be closed tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yes, at the end of school day today they are closed, correct – public and private, religious, parochial, etc. I asked Pat as a favor... Dr. Repollet couldn't be with us today and for good reason as he is overseeing this process. I asked Col. Callahan to reach out to him and Pat, you may want to just give us a quick sense of if we got a good feedback from that.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I did, Governor. About an hour ago I talked to Commissioner Repollet to kind of see how the 'pilot distribution' went, and he was very overwhelmingly pleased with how that went, with the way the whole community and the process came together. And then, in regards to the emergency response plans that we had asked for, over 600 school districts and we're down to three that are outstanding, which gave us a pretty good amount of comfort for today. So, that's going to be a daily situation that we're going to monitor, and the assessment of it today was that it went very well.

Governor Phil Murphy: I might add that the school districts, I believe Lamont would not correct me here, overwhelmingly the school districts that were late getting their emergency plans in – although we need them to bring them in on time – were overwhelmingly the very rural districts and they've got their own particular issues. And so, again, as Pat said we're down to three I think that are still not in.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: The acute care hospitals that you're examining reopening, what is the likelihood given the pace of positive cases that you'll have to open a closed hospital?

Governor Phil Murphy: I mean, Judy's really far more qualified, let there be no doubt, to answer that. I don't have a particular answer but if we are unable to flatten the curve we will overwhelmingly need access to more capacity. So, I mentioned this kind of casually earlier but this is true – we are belt and suspending this in the senses that we are aggressively... I mean, we started this in January and we put our first Taskforce together under Judy's leadership I think on February 2nd or 3rd as I recall. We are aggressively over here trying to beat the heck out of that curve to flatten it; but we also over here have to buy the insurance policy of finding more capacity if, for whatever reason our efforts to flatten that curve – which I'm highly confident in that we'll be able to do. But if for whatever reason we are not able to we've got a backup plan over here. Judy, do you want to add to that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think we have to anticipate that we will be opening up one or two of those hospitals if they're in a shape to open up. As we're sitting here, I have a team going to one to do an inspection. The most important thing is that the hospital has medical gasses so that patients can be appropriately and adequately taken care of. But I would think that definitely two, maybe even three should be opened. As the critical care bed need increases and we increase the capacity of critical care on the medical/surgical floors of hospitals that are currently open, then we'll need more medical/surgical beds in these newly-opened facilities.

Governor Phil Murphy: If we open wings or hospitals and we don't need them, that'll be the best mistake we ever made.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yep.

Mike Davis, Asbury Park Press: I wanted to ask a couple of topics. One is really just a follow-up detail on something that was said earlier about a record number of unemployment benefit applications yesterday. Do you know what that number is? And then, the broader topic I was hoping you could address, that students and teachers and parents acting as teachers all probably want to know – are the state standardized tests still going to be conducted in a month or so?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, I think on the latter, and Rob will take the former, I think it's TBD. We're just going to have to wait and see here. I think our edict on the schools was at least two weeks and it's far more likely to be longer than that. One of my kids told me that the SAT exam that they were applying to sit for in May has

been cancelled; obviously not the same league but a similar reality. I think the answer is to be determined and we will need to look at how this unfolds. I'm assuming that we are in a suspension mode here longer than not and that's probably going to inform our decisions. Rob, do you have a number or is it just a general?

Commissioner of Labor Robert Asaro-Angelo: About 15,000 yesterday, Michael.

Governor Phil Murphy: Which is why the system crashed.

Reporter: Hi, Governor. Newark officials are looking for a woman who tested positive for coronavirus but gave false information about her identity and address. What to your knowledge is being done about this and what are the dangers posed by her being at large?

Governor Phil Murphy: I spoke to the Mayor about this, obviously a concerning... Again, I tip my hat to the overwhelming good behavior including self-policing, doing the right thing, not going out, keeping social distance. I don't know the details for sure but if this turns out to be in fact the case, this would not be in that category. This would be an unfortunate incident. I spoke to the Mayor; I spoke then to our team earlier today. I need to get guidance from the Attorney General because there are obviously privacy issues and whatnot, but we've also got somebody – again, if this is true – who's out there again with a potential test who we've got to get our arms around. Thank you.

Reporter: Governor or anybody else, companies, universities and other employers seeking guidance from the state have been asking us what information they should share with their employees and the public when someone tests positive for COVID-19? What should those folks and individuals do?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, what advice, or team, would you have with that? Because obviously we've got the balance of public health with the privacy issues that are obviously a part of our healthcare system.. Dr. Tan?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: That is a really important question about what to do in a controlled and in a calm fashion that actually will help promote the public health. Generally speaking, what happens when a business might identify someone who is a confirmed case, it's important that the local health department get involved because that kind of kicks in the immediate contact tracing element. But more importantly, the local health department can work with the business to develop the messaging related to self-quarantine if you were exposed, 14-day self-quarantine, monitor for symptoms. And for instance, some businesses might have methodologies. They may choose to use their employee health, for example, to help with managing that particular situation. And it really will vary business-to-business and according to what the local health department might advise.

Mike Davis, Asbury Park Press: For the Health Commissioner, you've mentioned before that the state only learns about positive test results that come from the private labs or from the hospital labs. Can the state get that information about negative results? Is there a value to knowing how many negative results that they get? I was having a conversation with somebody about how we're sort of in the dark about it without having that information from them.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: So, with regard to trying to get the denominator data – in other words, the negatives – we are working with some of the commercial laboratories. It depends. They're not required to provide us with the negative results but some of the commercial laboratories have been willing to provide us that information. As soon as we're able to actually take stock of the data we could provide something to give like a bigger picture of what the laboratory testing is. We can't promise that at this point for all the different commercial laboratories but we're certainly trying to work on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to add something to that in a moment, but Judy, let me ask you a question. Yesterday, I think you had said that 66 of the 80 overnight yesterday were from outside of DOH. Do you happen to know what that number is today?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, today our labs, our state lab did 18 of the tests and the commercials and other labs – because we have a couple of hospitals that now are approved to do testing – is 71.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you happen to know in your own labs how many negatives you had?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I don't have it in front of me but we would know that definitely.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, a question I'm trying to, by inference get to Mike's endpoint, which I know is something we all want – is there any value to comparing the DOH numbers and then extrapolating into what the private lab numbers might look like?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Certainly there will be value in taking a look at the overall denominator, like both our laboratories as well as the commercial laboratories. It just gives us kind of a ballpark of how many people are being tested in the positivity rate. So, certainly that would add some value. Our priority right now, though, is to concentrate on the positives and working on those individuals who are positive, healthcare workers for example are priority groups. And at some point we'll be able to pull the data together in a way that's actually going to be meaningful to add to the discussion.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you have the negatives?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I do have the negatives. In our lab last night, total PUIs tested was 41. Positive were 18 and negative 23.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, A.) I'm not a healthcare expert, I hope that I don't have to remind you of that; but B.) I can't vouch for the math but you could sort of do some comparison there and maybe that helps you get to... But let me say this just in addition to the healthcare reality, and there's no better team in America than this group and their colleagues. We are using moral suasion as well. There's not like there are 1000 private testers here. This is a handful of entities that are either commercial or hospital providers. They know this information is important to us. In fairness, the commercial labs are at a much bigger scale to their credit and we need that. We've said this I think from day one, there's a gap of information and knowledge between what these folks have through the DOH versus hospital systems versus the commercial high-speed labs. Our hope is over time, and I think Dr. Tan alluded to this, is to shrink that gap. How soon we can shrink it, to what level of accuracy, too early to tell but that is our objective. We want to get to the same place that your question implies.

Reporter: In the last couple days you've done walking up steps – not necessarily closing all the schools at once. You've taken those measured steps. Yesterday, counties around the Bay Area ordered a shelter in place order. New York City's reported to be considering one as well in the coming days. Is shelter in place for all of New Jersey something that is an option to you? Is that something that you'd consider? And at what point are you... What are the signs, I know it's still early for this – what are the signs that you guys are looking for to tell you that it might be time to lift some of these restrictions down the road?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, and I spoke both with Governor Cuomo and Mayor DeBlasio today and we've been speaking constantly. And so, the good news is there's a lot of communication. Right now the communication across the sort of rainbow of Pennsylvania to New Jersey to New York to Connecticut is very high, and while we're not entirely doing the same things – so, for instance, Connecticut's got some pretty unique realities with their casinos, shared somewhat by New York State which we don't have – we have a high degree of harmony. I know Judy and her team... Governor Wolfe and I spoke the other day and we both thought it made sense for our Health Commissioners to be speaking. And guess what? They were already speaking. And that's true, and that's all a good thing. And when we move, it's stronger when we move together because we impact that many more millions of people.

Our intention, to the core of your first question, our intention is to not be incremental for the sake of being incremental; that we're too timid to do 1 through 10 today, so we're only going to do 1 through 8. We truly are trying everything we can to get that bigger boat, to get out ahead of the shark; to stay out ahead of this thing. And one realization, and Dan Kelly's here and helped write the order overnight, was the indoor mall was a piece that just didn't feel – as Sheila and I and the rest of us slept on it – it just didn't feel like that's right. And so, we've now shut that window.

We reserve the rights to revisit all of this and I don't say that as ominously as it may sound. But we will flatten this curve, and if we're not flattening this curve we will take more aggressive action to flatten it period. And I would say it's too early to tell whether or not we're flattening it. You know, we had 98 positives on Sunday, we

then added 80 yesterday, we added another 89 today. These numbers are going to go up before they go down. So, just because they're going up right now doesn't mean we're concluding that we're not flattening the curve. But likewise, it also doesn't mean that we're taking steps off the table.

I'm going to defer on the second part and we'll conclude here. I'm going to defer to the advice Judy gives me. You'll see me say a lot, "Based on the guidance from the Commissioner of Health" is a phrase that rolls off my tongue quite readily because I'm not an expert. But I think we'll have to see that we've flattened the curve and that we are, without question that this thing is headed in the right direction. I don't know if you want to add anything to that, Judy.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's a good question but a really difficult one to answer. We know that and we've shared with your prior that it's a bell-shaped curve and you go up and then you go down. Dr. Tan, who has experience in doing the H1N1 and many other epidemics might be able to share more information.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Unfortunately I think we don't know. But the good news is, as we monitor the epi curve we've thrown a lot of different layers of mitigation right now. It's going to be, I'm just going to put this out there – it's going to be impossible to tell which particular intervention might have had the most impact. But the important thing is that as we monitor the cases through time and just see how this goes, we look at it relative to what's happening in our surrounding states as well. We have to continue to monitor the situation. We can't predict right now whether it will be two weeks, four weeks, eight weeks.

So again, as we continue to implement these layers of mitigation we'll have to see. I think what we're seeing right now because there's a lot of testing, seek and you'll find. And the important thing is that, as we start to look at how the numerator and denominator shift over time, that'll also help give us an indication of whether all these multiple layers of interventions that we've implemented are collectively doing the job.

Governor Phil Murphy: And I just want Pat Callahan to weigh in here with the last word. I mean, just as they teach you in math, you want to freeze variables to determine, or in science projects, which is the one that's the most constraining or the most unburdening. We've thrown about twelve different variables on the wall at the same time. And the other reality, which Dr. Tan again so eloquently addressed, we not only have something which probably has some element of community spread on the one hand, we're also dramatically increasing testing on the other hand. And so, those are two variables that we're going to have to live side-by-side with. Col. Callahan?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I just wanted to take a minute to talk about mitigation from an emergency management standpoint, to speak to the unprecedented nature of this. Mitigation since we've ever known it is about the next storm. It's about acquiring houses in low flood zones. It's about elevating homes. It's about quick-connect generators at gas stations so we can get fuel out of the ground. It's about sewage treatment plants.

The intervention efforts we're doing here and the mitigation efforts are about this storm which is a very different place for all of us around this table and in this state to be. So, it's a tough question to answer because mitigation, we're always thinking if we raise the homes in Manasquan we won't need \$20 million from FEMA ten years from now, right? And just to get everybody thinking differently, which I think we all need to do about mitigation and what's enough and when do we come back? As we said it after Sandy, how high should we put homes up? Is it 8'? Is it 12'? What's the right answer? So, I think that's what everybody collectively on this team and around the state and country are struggling with.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. With that we thank you. We've got about low-30s people here we had at the most so we're going to monitor that carefully. Unless Mahen tells us otherwise, we're going to continue to do these gatherings at 2:00 PM Monday through Friday and we'll do them at 2:00 PM on Saturday and Sunday by telephone. I suppose there may be a moment that we may turn to doing these telephonically as well but that moment is not upon us. We'll continue to be in person unless you hear otherwise, that means tomorrow at 2:00 PM.

I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor for her leadership. Commissioner Asaro-Angelo, thank you, Rob. Colonel, thank you for your help. Commissioner Persichilli, thank you Judy, for everything. Dr. Tan, Chris, to each and every one of you, many thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy

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