

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: June 17th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

06/17/2020

Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, I am joined and have the honor of having to my right the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan, great to have you both. To my far left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, and a real treat, we are joined on my immediate left by the Secretary of Higher Education, Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis. I'm also joined here by Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples. Jared, good to have you.

It's no secret that Judy, Jared and Pat and I went out for a couple of beers last night, outdoors, a very successful endeavor. Folks are doing the right thing based on all the evidence we have, with very few exceptions; looking forward to doing some retail shopping tonight after work, and hoping to get out to a couple more restaurants in the next couple of days. So I encourage everybody to get out there, participate responsibly as we reopen the state and tip well.

Today the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education will be releasing guidance for our colleges and universities, laying out the framework for the preparations for the upcoming summer sessions and the fall 2020 semester. Not only does this guidance include requirements that must be met, it also includes non-binding items for institutions to consider as part of their restart plans. Zakiya and her office have put their focus on 10 key areas of on-campus life, instruction, housing, computer labs, libraries, research and labs, student services, transportation, dining, study abroad, and athletics. I'll leave it to Zakiya to dive into greater

detail, but each of these issue areas is supported by general safeguarding mandates, key precautionary measures, and a host of additional considerations to ensure that students, faculty and staff are protected as best as possible while on campus.

Colleges and Universities must submit their restart plans to OSHE -- which is the Office of Secretary of Higher Education, by the way, I don't want to get acronym crazy here -- at least 14 days before any staff or students return to campus. And these plans will be reviewed in coordination and consultation with, naturally, the Department of Health, Judy and her team.

Alongside this guidance today, I will be issuing an Executive Order allowing in-person clinical lab and hands-on programming at institutions of higher education to resume July 1, subject to the submission of the institution's restart plan. Additionally, career and training schools that are not under the Secretary's purview can reopen on July 1, subject to a similar set of health and safety protocols from their respective oversight agencies. This additional information is forthcoming.

As we move forward in our restart and recovery, these institutions will play a huge role. They are where our future workforce is being created, and where many of the advances in the life sciences and engineering and in other areas that will have a tremendous impact on our larger economy are taking shape. Their health, and the health of everyone on campus, is critical to the overall public health of our state and to creating the economic health we will need for the long term. So to you, Zakiya, I thank you and your team for your efforts on this plan, and we look forward for your more detailed report in a couple of minutes.

And, as you prepare to join the front office happily in a few weeks, as our new Chief Policy Advisor, I thank you for your service as Secretary of Higher Education. Under your leadership, New Jersey has not only remained a global leader, but we have raised the bar even higher. And for all, we say thank you.

Before we turn to the overnight numbers, I got my mail-in ballot in the mail yesterday. Please, everybody, make sure you vote. It needs to be postmarked at latest by the day of the election on July 7<sup>th</sup>.

Secondly, I want to give a shout out to a couple of dear friends, business manager Danny Gumbel, President Tom Sullivan of IBEW Local 164. They're in the process of distributing \$50,000 of PPE to hospitals in their area of operation, which is Bergen, Newark and Hudson Counties. Thank you, guys, to you and your colleagues.

Now, let's go to the overnight numbers. Yesterday we received an additional 330 positive tests, statewide cumulative total 167,703. Spot positivity rate for yesterday, 3.5%, that's from samples collected on June 13<sup>th</sup>. Our rate of transmission, or RT, is 0.7. These two metrics, spot positivity and rate of transmission, are our best measures for tracking the spread of COVID-19 and quite simply, both of these numbers tell us that the spread is slowing greatly, to among the lowest in the country. They tell us that the measures we took to promote social distancing have not only worked, but they continue to work. And as we sit here on day three of stage two of our restarting and recovery, they are two measures that will play tremendously into the timing, for not only the additional steps that we'll take in stage two, but when we think we can look to entering stage three.

And by the way, let us say this. I would also add to the trinity, spot positivity, Judy, rate of transmission, new hospitalizations, are probably the three that you and your team and yours truly look at more than any other. They're up a hair since yesterday, both spot positivity and rate of transmission. They're still among the best in the nation, but that's something that I know you watch like a hawk, and your team.

Now, moving to the next set of metrics that we rely on, as I mentioned, for making these decisions, the numbers in our hospitals. As of last night, the total number of patients being treated for COVID-19 was 1,352, a slight increase from Monday, and is back roughly to where it was over the weekend. As I mentioned, we will track this number closely to see if it's just a one-day blip or it's a first sign of something that we should be concerned about. There are now only eight patients in our field medical stations.

Long-term care positivity, 35,437 and the loss of life in our long-term care facilities, 6,079 blessed brothers and sisters from our New Jersey family. We can report back to hospitalizations though, that despite the increase in total hospitalizations, the number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care did decrease slightly to 358. Number of ventilators in use tipped up a hair to 254. Across the day yesterday, our

hospitals saw 64 COVID-19 positive admissions and 92 live patients left our hospitals -- stay there, Danny, for a second. We've added a new line here at the bottom to try to condense some of our slides, so there you now get North, Central and South, both new hospitalizations and new discharges. But we also do the addition for you, and give you the statewide number at the bottom.

Let's put these one-day numbers into better perspective and context as a measure of our healthcare system's overall capacity, and in comparison to where we were at the peak, and where we were just two weeks ago. In both cases, even with one-day increases and decreases, we have continued to trend in the right direction. These numbers, when compared with the decreasing rate of spread, means that our healthcare system is regaining capacity to meet the challenges ahead, and to a person at this table, we know there are still challenges ahead.

COVID-19 isn't going anywhere yet, but we are in a much better and stronger position today to beat back these challenges than we were even two weeks ago, never mind at the peak. But here's the other part of our reality. While we're still getting good news from our hospitals from a purely New Jersey perspective, we still aren't where we need to be in the national rankings. We continue, as you can see, to drop among our fellow states in terms of new cases, which is really good news, but we still have too many of our residents in our hospitals, fourth-most in the nation per capita. And we are again at top of the list with regard to the number of COVID-19 related deaths, again, per capita.

This is why we all must keep up with the social distancing. The only thing that will keep pushing our numbers down is social distancing, wearing something on your face when you go out, washing your hands with soap and water, the very basic stuff. And today, with a heavy heart, we're reporting the loss of another 47 New Jerseyans to COVID-19 related complications. We announced, by the way, the first death to COVID-19 in New Jersey on March 10. That was day one; today is day 100. And in these 100 days, our statewide total has climbed to an unfathomable number of 12,769. As we do every day, let's remember a few of those lives that we've lost.

Today, we begin by remembering Dr. Michael Burgio of Franklin Lakes, one of our frontline healthcare heroes. He was born in Sicily and came to the United States with his family at the age of eight. They follow the footsteps of millions of immigrants by entering through Ellis Island, and Michael would eventually find himself growing up in Elmwood Park. He was a 1974 graduate of Rutgers University, but he knew he had a passion for helping people, and answered his calling in medicine beginning with a second bachelor's degree from the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy, and eventually his medical degree from St. George's University.

New Jersey was his home, and he completed his internship at St. Joseph's Hospital in Paterson before working the emergency departments in numerous hospitals across New Jersey, including East Orange General, Hackensack Hospital, Bon Secours, Southern Ocean County Medical Center, Ocean Medical Center and Hackettstown Medical Center. But it was at Newton Medical Center where he spent most of his 35-year career in emergency medicine. Dr. Burgio was 69 years old. He leaves behind his beloved wife of 41 years, Piera, as well as his son Michael and daughters, Daniela and Cynthia. I had the honor to speak with Cynthia and she also wanted me to make sure that we keep her mom Piera, who's recovering herself, in our prayers. Michael leaves behind Cynthia's husband John, two grandsons, Anthony and Matthew, he also leaves behind his sister, numerous nieces and nephews, and of course his medical family in Newton. On behalf literally, Michael, of the thousands of New Jerseyans you treated, we thank you for your decades of service. May God rest your soul.

Next, we honor Hector Garcia of South Hackensack. He was a machine operator at a printing company and had a passion for writing, photography, music, art, history, literature, and learning about world cultures. He was only 58 years old. But his real love was his family, especially his wife Maria and his son Steve, and I had the honor to speak with both of them yesterday. Steve, by the way, is a sophomore at Boston University, pursuing a degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, with aspirations of becoming a doctor. He leaves them both. And to you, Steve, I know the values your dad worked to instill in you: compassion, honesty, and respect for others. All of those will serve you as you reach for your dream. I know you made him proud and you will continue to do so.

Hector always looked to see the best in people and believed that goodness still existed in the world, and he was an example of both May God bless his memory and legacy and may it be a blessing to all who knew him.

And finally for today, we remember Newark's Felicia Booker, better known simply to everybody as Fee. She was an only child raised and educated in East Orange, but for the past 34 years, Fee was a cherished member of the family at University Hospital in Newark, where she worked most recently as Assistant Director for Patient Accounts in the finance department. Fee was driven and lived by the motto, you could do whatever you put your mind to, words that inspired not just her, but those around her. Fee loved her family and friends, and they more than returned the favor.

Fee leaves behind both of her parents, her dad, Edward and her mom, Linda with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday. She also leaves behind her beloved daughter Alia, who noted how much she'll miss simply having her mom to talk to about life. She also leaves behind her best friend Hattie Jones and Fee leaves behind her University Hospital family, who she stood by all these years. Fee would have turned 53 years old in one month, and may God bless you, Fee, and your family. Judy, University Hospital, which you used to run, and your predecessor now runs, has paid a huge price, both in patients and in staff throughout this crisis.

So for Fee, for Hector, for Michael, and for all we have lost over the past three months, our flags remain at half-staff. Let's remember their names and never forget them and let's honor their memories. And as I've said before, the best way we could do so is to protect other families from the grief that has struck so many thousands of our friends and neighbors. So as you go out, as we're all beginning to, whether to a restaurant or a store, to pick up your kids from daycare or to visit the motor vehicle office, remember to keep your distances and to wear a face covering. And that face covering is especially important if you're somewhere where it's hard to keep that important six-foot social distance. And as Dave asked about a few weeks ago, none of these droopy masks. The mask has got to cover your nose right down under your chin, and make sure it stays that way.

We have, over the past three-and-a-half months, done tremendous work to slow the rate of spread to one of the lowest in the nation. Other states are seeing spikes, states which have not taken social distancing to heart and which rushed to reopen before their health metrics told them it would be safe. And we here in New Jersey are held up as one of the few who's doing it right, so let's keep doing it right. It's up to all of you folks, you've been extraordinary. Keep it up. Let's keep pushing the rate of spread down. Let's keep more of our residents out of the hospital. And as we do, we'll be able to move to the next steps in our restart and recovery.

And with that, please help me welcome the Secretary of Higher Education, an extraordinary leader in her own right, Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis.

**Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis:** Thank you, Governor, and I want to thank Commissioner Persichilli and her team of health experts who have really helped work with our office to develop guidance that will assist our state's colleges in their transition to repopulating their campuses and restarting operations that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Governor indicated, sustained positive health trends have allowed New Jersey to enter stage two in our road back to our new normal. And I'm glad today that after some months of uncertainty, we are at the point where we can safely begin restarting campus operations for students, faculty and staff.

That said, colleges this fall and summer will not look the same as they did last year. An equitable restart of operations has to be done carefully, through an iterative, staged process that balances the desire to move forward with concerns for public health. As we seek to ensure appropriate measures are in place so educational activity can continue, the health and safety of students, faculty and staff will remain our priority.

Through guidance we are issuing today, under the directives outlined by an Executive Order the Governor will sign, we are aiming to strike a balance between responsible public health considerations and the safe resumption of activities through a staged framework that will slowly and deliberately reinvigorate campuses' collaborative culture across the state.

In developing this guidance, we listened not only to our institutional leaders, but also, true to our principles, to our students and our faculty and staff, representatives from organized labor. Colleges are really diverse environments where there are a lot of different people from different demographic groups and age ranges

who are all interacting with one another. So while some may kind of think of students as being younger, we do need to be concerned about the precautions that we have to take to ensure the safety of all on the campus environment.

This guidance today aligns with our phased road back plan that provides a framework of mandatory guidelines and additional steps that institutions must consider when formulating plans, as well as examples of best practices in key functional areas that were described by the Governor just now.

So the mandatory restrictions that each phase must be adhered to will continue until we reach our new normal, but there are also these recommendations that can be adapted to fit an institutional community's needs. Throughout each stage though, institutions must observe standards of social distancing of six feet, sanitizing equipment and materials, hand washing, cleaning and disinfection, and accommodating individuals with symptoms or a positive diagnosis. Throughout all stages, students and faculty with any elevated health risks must be given the opportunity to learn or teach virtually or remotely.

In addition, institutions must require face masks or coverings in indoor spaces, except for when doing so would inhibit the individual's health. Institutions should strongly recommend face coverings or masks in outdoor spaces as well, especially where other people are present or in situations where individuals are unable to maintain social distancing. Two key public health drivers of our success throughout all restart stages will be robust testing and contact tracing, and individuals should work with their local health department to integrate contact tracing efforts. Institutions will be responsible for establishing their own testing protocols on campus that align with screening recommendations.

So for all institutions, in order to balance this flexibility with these mandatory steps that they must take, they're going to be required to develop restart plans that are submitted to our office and reviewed by the Department of Health, and they have to do that within 14 days of when they plan to restart operations.

To move on to some of the specific things that will be allowed, because I know people are interested in hearing what specifically will be allowed, in-person instruction will be allowed in stage two, but limited to instances where there are labs or clinical rotations, as long as those are abiding by state-established restrictions, including the social distancing, handwashing, etc.

Institutions can have instruction that occurs completely outdoors, as long as they are abiding by state established outdoor occupancy restrictions that allow for safeguarding. A limited number of students can return to residential facilities but in doing so, institutions will have to develop quarantine and isolation on campus for students, and all common areas will need to remain closed in this current phase. They've also got to think about prioritizing that limited housing for students for whom residential housing is necessary for them to gain the most equitable education.

There's other guidance for things like campus dining that is going to need to abide by the statewide restrictions in place currently, and transportation, athletics which transportation is going to need to abide by general statewide guidelines and athletics. , if they're part of a conference, institutions will need to follow their conference or NCAA guidelines and otherwise, our guidelines align with those for youth sports that were established earlier this week.

I just want to remind people about the graduation ceremonies. We've announced that institutions may hold modified in-person ceremonies after July 6, but they have to complete an online form and have an attestation that their ceremony complies with applicable requirements for gathering, including addressing social distancing. And that form must be submitted no more than seven days prior to the scheduled date.

We know that many students prefer in-person learning, particularly those who are experiencing hardship or for whom the home environment doesn't allow them to have a conducive environment for online education. And we know that we need to resume campus operations and repopulate campuses in a way that balances that need for some people to be in-person with a concern for health. I think this balance that we have, while allowing some flexibility, we have some baselines that will require us to look different than we did in the past. We're going to work with our colleges as they begin implementing these guidelines and restarting operations with these appropriate safeguards in place, answering questions that they have along the way, and helping them to come up with plans that are meaningful for their campus environment.

I again want to just thank the Governor and the Commissioner for their help and their leadership in this effort. It's not an easy task to balance all of these competing priorities, and we appreciate the opportunity to get back to work.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Fantastic, Zakiya, and again, thank you for all your work, your team's work. And again, we start out, in peacetime or wartime, with the number one public education system, pre-K through 12 in America, and among the top higher education systems of any American state, and getting us back safely, responsibly, to as near-normal as possible in all the above is a huge priority. I cannot thank you enough, wishing you the very best in your new position. And also, before folks even ask it, my guess is we're probably early to mid-week next week on the guidance that folks have asked for as it relates to pre-K through 12. We want to do this in stages, and again, thank you for your leadership.

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

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, Monday marked the start of stage two of the opening of our state. It's exciting to have more retail stores open and to have an opportunity to dine outside. And I know we are all anxious to see more businesses open as this stage progresses, but we cannot forget the important measures that lead to case numbers declining and the opportunity to begin reopening. Increasing cases and hospitalizations in states like Texas, Arizona and Florida serve as an important reminder, the pandemic is not over. We are also seeing cities such as Miami and Nashville pausing their reopening because of COVID-19 concerns.

The virus is still with us. To keep making forward progress, we need to ensure that the public is getting tested so that any new cases can be identified and isolated to limit the spread. We also need to continue to practice the measures that have protected so many residents throughout this public health emergency. Put distance between yourself and other people, at least six feet. Wear a cloth face covering that covers both your mouth and nose when around others. Clean your hands often, either with soap and water for 20 seconds, or a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Always stay home if you are sick. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Cover your cough or sneeze with the tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces daily.

It's also important that individuals with underlying medical conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, or lung disease, take steps to reduce the risk of their exposure. CDC released data this week that showed that deaths were 12 times higher, and hospitalizations six times higher, among individuals with underlying conditions. These individuals should take extra precautions to protect their health, such as avoiding large gatherings, and certainly avoiding individuals who are sick.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared our hospitals reported 1,352 hospitalizations with 358 individuals in critical care; 71% of those critical care patients are on ventilators. There is one new case of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. That's a total of 43 cases in our state. The children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19, or had antibodies that were positive, which suggests a recent exposure. In New Jersey, thankfully, there are no deaths reported. The ages of the children affected range from 1 to 18 years of age. Five children are currently hospitalized. The breakdown of race and ethnicity is White 19%, Black 35%, Hispanic 35%, Asian 8%, and other 3%.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of race and ethnicity, the deaths are as follows: White 53.9%, Black 18.4%, Hispanic 20.3%, Asian 5.6%, and other 1.7%. The state veterans' homes, our numbers remain the same, as do our psychiatric hospitals. The daily percent positivity, as the Governor shared, is a slight uptick to 3.5%. The Northern part of the state is 2.18%, the Central is 4.1%, and the South is 5.33%. That concludes my report. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, and get tested. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you for that, and thank you for all. Just to repeat both what you said and I said, a one-day slight uptick doesn't give us an alarm, but a multiday trend is one that we'd be looking at, so we'll keep an eye on all of the above. Thank you so much. With that, Pat, welcome; any news you've got on compliance or other matters? It was good having a beer with you last night, by the way.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thanks for buying, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** My pleasure.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Good afternoon, everybody. Yeah, the overnight, incredible compliance again, one gym and fitness center in Freehold, the manager was cited for being open and having several members from the public inside and on equipment.

With regard to protests, I think we have about five scheduled throughout the state today, in a state that's seen over 400 since May 31, and that number of arrests remains at 58, with thousands and thousands peaceful protesters, so all of us in law enforcement certainly thank the peaceful protesters for that. Thanks, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That number is staggering, because the number of protesters who have protested peacefully is probably in the deep double-digit thousands. You mentioned a gym. I don't want to pick on that gym, but I also saw the following story off the wire overnight and feel like I owe it to folks. Arnold Schwarzenegger -- I think we'd all agree a tough guy by any measure -- isn't quite ready to get back into his routine at his, -- I'll leave the name of the gym out -- his regular gym in Venice, California just yet. While he was eager to hit the gym once again, even making the bicycle ride down to the gym on Tuesday after it finally reopened, The Terminator star was taken aback when he learned gym-goers were not required to wear face masks, Judy, while working out. He was so caught off guard that he left and went home. There you have it. I think our new phrase will be, I'll be masked.

With that, Dante, we're going to start over here. Ma'am, do you have anything? You're good? You would like -- okay, we'll start at the wall, and then tomorrow -- Dan, where are you? I think we're at one o'clock. The White House sometimes does a VTC on Thursday, but I'm pretty sure on high authority it will not happen tomorrow. So unless you hear otherwise, we'll be with you at one o'clock tomorrow, and we're going to be earlier, I believe, on Friday. I think we're going to point to a late morning, assuming we get the numbers ready. So tomorrow at 1:00, and I think Friday will be, if you don't hear otherwise, at 11:00 a.m. Please.

Q&A Session

**Reporter:** Thank you, Governor. A quick question for you about the lawsuit filed by Chris Neuwirth. What is your office's response, or has Superintendent Callahan had any response to the allegations in the lawsuit?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Anything else or is that it?

**Reporter:** That's it, thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, so don't be mad at me for coming all the way over here to ask that question. I can't comment on a lawsuit, so forgive me, I can't and you'll respect that, I hope. But I will reiterate what I said yesterday. I don't know where we'd be without Colonel Pat Callahan and George Helmy; literally don't know where we'd be. They're extraordinary. I've said that about Judy and I'll repeat it about her. We've got an incredible lineup, and I literally don't know where we'd be without them, so thank you. Down front to Matt here, if you could. Good afternoon, Matt.

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Good afternoon. Governor, the Division of Developmental Disabilities continued to keep residents living in DD housing, isolated. Curious when parents of people with developmental disabilities living in these homes will be able to see their children?

Educators and parents are still clamoring for details about what schools will look like. You said you'll roll it out next week, but any hint of what we'll see?

Real quick, do you have any plans to make Juneteenth a holiday for state workers like Governor Cuomo did in New York?

And last one, Governor, I know you said you can't comment on the lawsuit filed yesterday, but beyond the allegations in his complaint, did any members of your staff call the Department of Health seeking to arrange COVID tests for family or friends during the pandemic? As you know, the state has the Abbott Labs ID Now testing equipment that has been able to provide much faster results than commercial labs or public tests.

And maybe, Commissioner, I'm curious if you received any similar requests from any legislators?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah, again, no comment on the lawsuit. Our M.O. and Judy can talk about health, but certainly in the front office, our M.O. was from day one, unless you had symptoms, or unless you knew that you were in contact with someone who was positive, that we were – and that continues to be the case. I was ultimately forced into a test because I went into the White House, and they gave me no choice.

I admire what Governor Cuomo has done with Juneteenth, I think we need legislation, but I admire it. We're going to make a big deal out of Juneteenth this Friday. I'm going to make a couple of different – I won't steal thunder from what may come, but we're going to make at least one significant announcement and I'm going to make some remarks. I like the notion. It's a combination of the right symbols and we're seeing a real "Come to Jesus" moment on symbols, and symbols matter, words matter, actions matter. So stay tuned on that.

I think on schools, my guess is, again, it's early to mid-week we'll give you the guidance, Matt, but my guess is that there will be, in many respects, in spirit of a lot of what Zakiya has announced on higher ed, with the overwhelming exception that there's a residency associated with a lot of higher ed that is not associated with most of the pre-K through 12 reality. And the extent to which there is residency, it's overwhelming that they are going to be private schools and again, we'll speak to that as well. But if you can bear with us, early to mid-week.

Judy, I know there's an enormous desire, whether it's the homes for the developmentally disabled, where our hearts are broken, folks in long-term care more generally, but this is one, you know, we know almost for sure it was either staff members or loved ones, asymptomatic, unwittingly, going in and out of these homes that started, that was sort of the first spark of the fire. Any comments you've got?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Sure. First, I think we all have to accept the fact that any congregate living situation is a high-risk situation with vulnerable population. We're particularly concerned about the DD group homes, of which there are just about 2,000 in the state. And we just, as recently as yesterday, had a meeting with representatives from Department of Human Services so that we can complete full testing of all of the individuals in those homes and staff members, and hopefully get the baseline that will allow us to open up visitation.

We want to be careful. We have to learn from what we've experienced in the past, and that goes for long-term care as well. I think Dr. Tan and Communicable Disease Services have some markers of how we can open up these congregate living spaces. I don't know whether you want to add anything to that in terms of positivity rates? Okay.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, I would just add two quick comments. One on that, and one back on protocol in terms of testing. One is mental health, clearly, I mean the evidence is overwhelming that this is not just a physical health pandemic and crisis, but a mental health one as well. I would just say this: I want to add to the list of anyone out there. We now have a lot more testing capacity than we did. It's light years different than it was two months ago. So the other thing I want to remind folks, if you are in a in a circumstance, whether you're peacefully protesting, whether you're at the beach, wherever you might be and you've come into a meaningful contact with others where social distancing just wasn't achievable, then we encourage you to get tested. And I want to make sure I repeat that. So thank you. Welcome.

**Reporter:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon.

**Reporter:** First question is for Commissioner Persichilli. Are you concerned by the rise in the spot positivity from 2.8% to 3.5%? And if not, is there a number by which that would increase that would worry you?

For the Governor. I know you're not going to comment on the lawsuit that alleges that your Chief of Staff George Helmy got COVID-19 tests for his family, but in this room several weeks ago, you did say that your Chief Counsel received a coronavirus test, even though he was asymptomatic, and you responded why. You said "We need him." Do members of your inner circle, are they entitled to special treatment when it comes to coronavirus tests or other topics?

And for Colonel Callahan, the actions that you took in regards to alerting the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office of a corruption probe and the transfer of six troopers, including some very far from their homes in Sussex County, do you believe that those decisions brought honor on the State Police? And do you believe that they fulfill the integrity and professionalism in the State Police mission statement? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Let me start on all these, and I'll turn to either Judy or Pat, as you wish. Judy, I think we said this yesterday. We've said it almost every day. It's going to be a multi-day, you know, five-to-seven, three-to-seven day trend in the combination, I think, of spot positivity, rate of transmission, new hospitalizations. You'll correct the record.

I don't know that I said it on the same day, but I also will say this. Matt, and I don't want to be getting -- came into direct, sustained contact with someone who had turned out to be positive, which led him to do that. So I do need him, I can't live without him, but that was the reason he got tested.

And I would just say to your last question, this matter was heavily covered. This predates us. This is back to 2017. And at the time, the Sussex County Prosecutor made a decision not to bring any charges. It was ultimately a labor grievance, and there's no evidence whatsoever that there was any inappropriate involvement by Colonel Callahan. But let me use this as an opportunity to reiterate how indispensable he has been, and continues to be, and will be here by my side for as long as I'm here. He has been an extraordinary Superintendent in both peacetime and wartime, and I think it's, frankly, a real stain on the Senate that they have not chosen or found a way to confirm him for some political reasons, which I think is outrageous. Are you with me on the trend? You both good on that? Pat, anything you want to add, or are you good with that?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** I will just add one thing, Governor, and thank you very much. As the Governor stated, that was covered heavily and ultimately ended up as a labor grievance. But as far as my career in law enforcement and my decision to follow my father into the State Police, I couldn't be more proud simply to call myself a Jersey Trooper. But unfortunately, as we all well know, sometimes when you reach a certain point in your career, that baseless accusations are leveled at you, and I knew that signing up. Thanks, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah, I would say this: Judy and Pat and I will have enormous harmony in the following, at a minimum: if you don't have thick skin, we're in the wrong line of business. Thank you. Sir, do you have anything? Nothing today? Back here? Thank you. Dante, back there.

**Reporter:** No, no.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You don't have any?

**Reporter:** Easy day for you, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Are you with him? Okay. Dave, I don't want you to start throwing your weight around and ask 20 questions here but --

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** I've only got 15.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** But finally to you.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Thank you. Governor, have you made a decision about when you will be taking the reporters who are in the room out for several beers, since you have indicated you're taking other people out as well?

Secretary Smith Ellis, could you be a little more specific? A lot of the stuff you said sounded kind of general and a little bit vague. For parents and kids that are thinking about, you know, either going to summer school or attending college/university in the fall, the dorms are going to be open but limited capacity? Would this basically be up to each school in terms of putting a plan together that fits the state guidelines at the time they go in?

If a classroom is supposed to have 100 students, for instance, would it mean that they're cut in half, to half the capacity? Would common bathrooms be allowed, or dining areas? I know when I went to college back in the 1800s, there were common bathrooms, so I don't know if this would still be workable today. But so essentially, is this basically up to each university to put together a plan?

And Governor, as I'm sure you're aware, Michele Siekerka of the NJBIA recently did an op-ed piece, talking about several points. She mentioned that private sector workers have been the ones really hurt by the pandemic because businesses were forced to close, historic unemployment furloughs and so forth. So isn't it fair and reasonable, do you think, to ask public sector workers to at least not get pay raises for the time being?

We know the economic impact of this pandemic will be significant for years. Is it not reasonable, do you think, to ask different departments to cut state government at least slightly to some kind of minimal extent, to possibly avoid tax increases? And since we don't know what the federal assistance is going to be, when we say shared sacrifice, shouldn't the "we" include everybody? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Let me start, if I can. Dave, based on your second question on higher ed parameters, I think you should submit your resume as a potential candidate to succeed Zakiya. I'll let her answer that. I love the idea of getting beers with the members of the press. We do a drink, usually in Washington on the Chamber trip, and I'd be down to doing something in warm weather, outside social distance, masked.

Op, I've not read Michelle's piece, so forgive me for that. She's been a good interlocutor in our time. I do think this is a time when we were all going to have to give of ourselves, without commenting specifically on what she said, but I want to reiterate something I haven't said in a few days. We need the ability to borrow as a state. That is essential. I applaud the General Assembly for already passing that bill and I would ask, respectfully, that the Senate do the same.

And secondly, the federal cash assistance and the need for that has not gone away. That remains uncertain, though. So the borrowing is not instead of, the need does not go away. If we heard tonight magically that the Congress was passing a bill and the President would sign it, we need and/both. And so the spirit of we're all in this together, we've got to find unusual ways. I mean, I don't wake up reflexively looking to put more debt on the books, particularly to cover our essential expenses. But if we want to keep firefighters, police, EMS, healthcare workers, educators employed at the point of attack, at the very moment in our state's history when we need them, we're going to have to.

Zakiya, with that, would you mind addressing some of the questions that Dave asked on higher ed?

**Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis:** Absolutely. And I will say, our guidance is 20-plus pages long, so I don't think any institution will think it's completely up to them to determine how to do this. Some of the things that you mentioned, in terms of classroom space, what people can expect. So social distancing really does change the classroom experience, but each college is going to need to – it's hard to have a maximum number because for some classrooms, the space might be the size of this; others, it might be much smaller. And if you're in a smaller classroom that normally can only hold about 20 people, you're literally going to need to go in there with a tape measure and measure six feet across and figure out how many people can be in that classroom space.

I think practically, that means that most institutions are going to be continuing with some hybrid version of in-person and online. We're not mandating that, but the practical realities of this are that it's not going to be full capacity in any space, because it's just not realistic. So there will need to be continued flexibility in that space. Obviously, that's not the case for every class. Some classes are smaller, I won't get into all the details, but this is part of why you have to have a plan. But the basic minimum is that yes, when you go to class, everybody will be masked unless they have a reason not to be. In any situation where you can't maintain social distancing, or you can't maintain social distancing at all, period.

I should say, Health Department has advised us that for instance, at cashier stands or other places that there should be Plexiglas. So in your dining experience, that's going to look different. No buffets anymore. Yes, we will need to be seated further apart for now, at the immediate moment, the state does not allow indoor dining. So that's, I mean, we're I think, hopefully –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Someday, sooner than –

**Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis:** Yeah, exactly. So by the fall, I'm not trying to scoop the Governor, but I'm hoping that by the fall that will not be the case. And so once institutions are thinking about restart, we have some guidelines about what they can anticipate so that they can begin to plan.

But they will need to operate their dining services differently. Communal bathrooms are a big question that a lot of people have, but then again, it's hard to have a hard and fast of what is or is not appropriate. I won't actually get into the bathroom guidance here. We actually do have a number of, kind of, don't have your personal items on shared spaces, more frequent cleanings than we're used to.

Also, orientation. I think we may remember for those of us who went to college you had an orientation. That orientation is now going to have to include COVID-19 precautions, because if students don't actually understand why this is important, they won't be inclined to do the things.

Another important piece that I just would emphasize is that no student can be required to live on campus, and most of our colleges don't do that. I think I've talked to the ones that would, and they don't plan to do that. But that is something because if somebody feels like they are immunocompromised, or they have a risk otherwise, we don't want to put them in a situation that is unsafe.

So those are just a number of the specific things that I think people can point to and look at, that says this will be different. Campus spaces will just look different because of all of those precautions and for parents and families and students, all of these plans, I don't know if I mentioned this, will need to be made public. So before you make the decision or before you sign up, you will be able to see exactly what is my institution doing? What precautions are going to be in place, and what will it look like for me?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Zakiya, thank you. I'm going to mask up and say a couple of quick words. Again, one o'clock tomorrow, unless you hear otherwise. My guess is we'll be earlier on Friday. Judy, Tina, thank you so much for being here, as always. Pat, same to you. Zakiya, a treat to have you here as well. Jared, Matt, Dan, and the rest of the team.

A couple of things I just want to note. Number one, and I've listened as Zakiya talked about this. And Tina and Judy will have forgotten more about this than I will know. This is not a life sentence. You know, this is until, at a minimum, there's a therapeutic that explicitly addresses COVID-19 or certainly when there's a vaccine. This is, I would view this, God willing, as a bridge period, as opposed to a forever and always.

My guess is, some of the habits we have will never go away. You know, my guess is we're going to do a lot less handshaking than we ever did before, and things like that.

Secondly, there was an extremely good article in the Wall Street Journal today which really delves, that that crazy left wing, lunatic newspaper that really digs in on the virus so much where you all, we spoke a little bit about it earlier, how it spreads. Really, really helpful. And, frankly, as painful as it is to have the economic impact that we've had, it validates that the notion of public health creates economic health and not the other way around is actually, in fact, the case.

So with that, I want to say thank you again to everybody. The compliance is extraordinary. Whether you're protesting, you're at the beach, you're doing outdoor dining, you're shopping, just up and down the state, unlike any other American state, all we can ask is please, please, please keep it up. Thank you all, God bless.

## Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](#)

### Administration

[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about/\)](#)

[Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver \(/governor/admin/lt/\)](#)

[First Lady Tammy Snyder Murphy \(/governor/admin/fl/\)](#)

[Cabinet \(/governor/admin/cabinet/\)](#)

Office of Health Care Affordability and Transparency

(/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)

Boards, Commissions & Authorities (/governor/admin/bca/)

Internship Opportunities (/governor/admin/internship.shtml)

Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket (<http://drumthwacket.org/>)

## Key Initiatives

Economy & Jobs (/governor/initiatives/#Economy)

Education (/governor/initiatives/#Education)

Environment (/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

Health (/governor/initiatives/#Health)

Law & Justice (/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

Transportation (/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

## News & Events

Press Releases (/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news\_archive.shtml)

Photos (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy>)

Public Addresses (/governor/news/addresses)

Executive Orders (/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo\_archive.html)

Administrative Orders (/governor/news/ao/approved/ao\_archive.shtml)

Direct Appointments (/governor/news/appointments)

Advice and Consent Appointments (/governor/news/acappointments)

Statements on Legislation

(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements\_archive.shtml)

Administration Reports (/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

Transition Reports (/governor/news/reports/approved/reports\_archive.shtml)

Press Kits (/governor/news/press)

## Social

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/>)

Twitter (<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy>)

Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/>)

Snapchat (<https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy>)

YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/njgovernorsoffice>)

TikTok (<https://www.tiktok.com/@njgov?>)

## Contact Us

Scheduling Requests (</governor/contact/scheduling/>)

Contact Us (</governor/contact/all/>)

## Statewide

**NJ Home** (<//www.nj.gov>)

**Services A to Z** (<//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html>)

**Departments/Agencies** (<//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/>)

**FAQs** (<//www.nj.gov/faqs/>)

**Contact Us** (<//www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html>)

**Privacy Notice** (<//www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html>)

**Legal Statement & Disclaimers** (<//www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html>)

**Accessibility Statement** (<//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html>)

(<//nj.gov/opra/>)

(<https://my.state.nj.us/openam/UI/Login>)

(<https://tech.nj.gov/>)

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2023  
Office of Governor PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000