

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 9th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Honored to be joined by the woman to my right, who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, State Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Coordinator Dr. Lisa McHugh. Lisa, great to have you back. To my far left, State Police Superintendent Colonel Patrick Callahan. Pat, as always. And particularly honored to be joined today by the guy to my left, of whom I'm a big fan, Congressman Andy Kim. Congressman Kim has been a leader in our delegation fighting for what New Jersey and New Jerseyans need from the federal government. I know we'll be able to count on his voice as we continue our push for much needed and significant federal assistance. Andy, great to have you with us and looking well, by the way.

Let's start, as we have done of late, with the numbers. Since yesterday's briefing, we have received another 3,748 positive tests pushing our statewide totals to 51,027. Additionally today, and Judy will give more color on this as she usually cleans up after me, starting today we will begin giving updated information regarding current hospitalizations, including the total number of people currently hospitalized, the number in intensive care, on ventilators, and the number of those released the day before. This has been added to the information available on the Department of Health's live COVID-19 dashboard. Again, visit covid19.nj.gov. Visit that portal for all the information you need.

As of the latest available numbers, to that end, 7,363 residents are hospitalized and 1,523 are requiring intensive care. A total of 1,551 are on ventilators, and over the past 24 hours, 471 New Jerseyans were discharged and returned home. Again, those are those numbers and we're going to begin, assuming we're

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comfortable with the data and we are completely confident in the data, we will begin releasing these daily.

Tomorrow, again, we are together early out of respect for Good Friday. We'll be together at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow in this very room. I'll speak for myself, Judy, I'm not sure we're going to necessarily have these numbers by 10:30 in the morning, but if we do, we'll have them for you. Again, you can see the numbers in front of you and Judy will give you more color. I also want to acknowledge Jared Maples, Director of our Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, great to have you with us, and Deputy Counsel Parimal Garg who are with us.

Sadly, while 471 New Jerseyans were discharged and returned home, we know however, there are those who will not return home. Since yesterday, we are reporting an additional 198 deaths, and with adjustments given further investigations, our statewide total of deaths is now 1,700. Again, 198 deaths we're announcing since yesterday, for a cumulative total of 1,700 deaths. This is well north now of two times the blessed fatalities that we suffered in New Jersey on 9/11. We know that this number is the worst of all to report to you. I have to tell you, it does not get any easier on us or any of you to speak these numbers or to hear them.

These aren't numbers, by the way, these are people; mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and even if they are complete strangers, they are our fellow New Jerseyans. Let us never, ever, ever let this get abstract. These are real, live human beings, members of our family, blessed souls who we have lost. Allow me to briefly, and I wish we could do this for all 198 today and 1,700 since the beginning of this crisis, but allow me to briefly commemorate three of those we have learned we have lost.

The Reverend H. Gene Sykes was the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Bayonne. Look at the pastor, man, what a guy. Born in Florida, he would make New Jersey his longtime home, alongside his wife Fanny and their children. God bless them and we send our prayers to Mrs. Sykes and their children. He was an Air Force veteran, so we thank him for his service to our country. And he worked in the private sector before making the ministry his full-time calling. He served as Vice Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Bayonne Housing Authority and was Vice President of the Bayonne branch of the NAACP. His loss leaves a hole in the fabric of Bayonne, certainly in the heart of his family, and we mourn with his family in that entire city.

Kevin Leiva, Kevin there he is, bless him, was an EMT in North Bergen and at St. Claire's Hospital. A Paterson native, he and his wife Marina called Pompton Lakes home. Kevin was only 24 years old. Bless him, we thank him for his service, for an extraordinary lifetime for his service to our state, and to our families, we are with Marina and his family and friends in prayer and we will not forget him. Kevin is a stark, real-life example of the fact that while Judy, when she goes through the numbers, she would agree with me, this hits disproportionately in older communities, none of us are immune from this and let us never forget that. God bless Kevin.

South Jersey lost a true community leader yesterday with the passing of Steven Ravitz. There's Steven, who headed his family's business, operating five Shoprite markets across the region. But Steve will perhaps be best remembered for his many philanthropic pursuits and his longtime support for community nonprofits and other organizations, which counted into the millions, literally millions of dollars. We know that his legacy will be carried on by his family. God bless you, Steve.

It is for these three and for everyone, and let's remember this, that we must continue to practice social distancing, because social distancing is our best weapon to prevent the spread of coronavirus that took their lives and the lives of now 1,700 members of our New Jersey family. I know and we know, the Congressman knows, all of us know that it's not fun. We know it can be inconvenient, but this can't be a time of convenience. We've said this many times. This is no time to panic, but it is equally so no time for business as usual. This is the fight of our lives. This is a fight to protect our families, our friends, and our neighbors. It's a fight for literally the heart and soul and future of our state. We need you to stay home, period.

And certainly, whenever possible, we need you to wear a face covering, even a homemade one, when you're going to the supermarket. I've got a friend who came in late to our press briefing yesterday and left before the end of it. We are all wearing some form of a face mask or face covering all the time. We only take these off because otherwise I'm not sure you'd be able to understand us. The fact of the matter is I'll put this on as I leave. I know Judy, Andy, Pat, Lisa, we all will, and we will leave and we'll keep them on for the balance of any amount of time we're remotely near anybody. We have to be that way.

So whether again, whether you're wearing it to the supermarket, whether you're in a room like this, everybody has got to adhere to that. Remember, this is a war with two fronts. And again, I want to keep harkening back to Churchill. Never have so few done so much for so many. It actually turns out, in this particular war, it works both ways. One front is for the many, the 9 million of us, to smash down the back, to flatten that curve so that we have a lower amount of people who are infected, which leads to a lower amount of hospitalizations, lower amount of folks who are in critical care situations, lower amounts who need ventilators. It literally passes exactly through that curve. We need to smash that curve down over here, the many of us. While the few, the extraordinary heroic healthcare workers, the first responders, the essential retail folks, the longshoremen, the NJ Transit folks, the warehouse folks, while the few over here, particularly our healthcare workers, are frantically building out, one foot in front of the other, our healthcare capacity: beds, ventilators, personal protective equipment, medicines that we need to run those ventilators, the actual ranks of our healthcare workers themselves.

It works both ways and our hope is that those curves meet at an acceptable level that allows our system and our state to digest the cases that we have, in the very best way possible, keeping as few people as we can sick and infected, and please God, the least amount of fatalities we can possibly have as we come through this. God bless you all for everything you're doing, for the healthcare workers, as heroic as they are, and for everyone else who's in this fight.

I want to pull up a map right now, we showed you this the other day. This is progress. We're not over the hump here, by any means. This is a map by county of the new cases that we're seeing. As you can see, and I'll explain why, our social distancing is in fact beginning to show effect here. There is light here. There is the early stage, we are in the early stage of progress. It's beginning to slow the rate at which the numbers of folks are getting infected, in this case, how quickly. Folks, the number of cases by county are doubling. When I showed this last time, maybe last week, Judy, I think? We only I think had one yellow county which was, which is Monmouth, my county. A yellow means you're doubling the amount of infected folks every five to seven days. The orange is every three to five days. There was only one yellow and there were several red, and the red was doubling within three days. We have no red at the moment. The last couple of counties we had recently were in the south, where the numbers were small, but the rate of infections was steep.

This is real progress. Are we spiking any footballs? No way, we're not near the end zone. It's still going up. The curve on the line looks like it's beginning to flatten, the positive cases but we're still having more positive cases. We've got to not only continue to flatten the curve, we have to get to a plateau and then begin to go down as fast as we can on the other side, and we can't do that alone. This isn't about you or me, it's about all 9 million of us. As we've said before, this is not a time for selfishness. This is a time for selflessness. And so many of you, so many millions of you, are doing the right thing. God bless you, thank you, please keep it up.

Many of our communities of faith have taken this to heart, especially given the season. There have been online Seders, and many churches will be offering online Easter services. These are critical means for us to come together, even though ironically, we have to stay apart. I know it's not what we're used to or necessarily what our faiths teach us, or what it will look like, God willing, next year, but right now it is what we have to do. Pat will, before we take questions, as always, go over compliance. But I have to say, given that last night was the first night of Passover, it's a refreshing compliance report. I want to give a particular shout out because we've been back and forth so intensively with the community and religious leaders in Lakewood. Pat will give more details on what it looked like overnight. But folks, you're doing everything you can, we know that. Please keep it up.

Quick shift of the gears to testing. Our two FEMA partner drive-through testing sites tomorrow, Friday, April 10. Of the two, rather, I apologize, Bergen Community College will be the one that's open. That site will open at 8:00 a.m. and remain open for at least 500 total tests. To be tested, you have to be both a New Jersey resident and you must, again, be exhibiting symptoms of a respiratory illness. So Bergen Community College open tomorrow on April 10. On Saturday, April 11, both sites will be open. Bergen Community College will be opened for the general public and the PNC Bank Art Center will be open exclusively for healthcare workers and first responders. Both sites will be open at 8:00 a.m. and each will be able to take up to 500 tests. And again, for both sites, to get a test you must be symptomatic. And then as I've said already but I want to repeat, both Bergen Community College and the PNC Bank Art Center will be closed on Easter Sunday.

A quick note on these sites, I must give Congressman Andy Kim and his colleagues, including others by name Congressman Donald Payne, Congressman Chris Smith, a huge shout out for their help in ensuring that we continue to have FEMA's partnership in operating these sites. Because of their work, we'll be in this together with our federal partners through the end of May, at the least. Andy, thank you for your help and leadership there, as well as your colleagues.

Across the state, there are 18 additional publicly run and accessible testing sites. These can be found by going on covid19.nj.gov/testing. However, there are many more sites run by hospitals or other private sector partners that are not listed at last count. Brady O'Connor tells me there are at least 57 in total. If you believe you are showing coronavirus symptoms, please call your primary care practitioner right away and they can assess you and if you meet the standard for testing, they can direct you as to where you should go to get a test.

And again, we have a symptom self-assessment at covid19.nj.gov. That self-assessment also gives us valuable data as to where we may be seeing the first wisps of smoke from a potential hotspot. We encourage you to take our self-assessment, just as nearly as 220,000 others have, because it allows us, not only does it give you peace of mind or give you a way forward, but it allows us to make smarter decisions going forward as to where valuable, for instance, personal protective equipment and other supplies may go. That's the site where you want to go and check out, frankly, a whole range of comprehensive answers for your questions, including to do that symptom self-assessment.

Switching gears for a couple of thoughts and announcements. I've taken a lot of feedback on closing state parks and county parks. Far more of it supportive and some folks are saying gosh, golly, I was out jogging in my neighborhood and there were a lot of people on the streets walking or jogging. Have you thought about the cost benefit of folks being out on a street as opposed to in the confines of a park? The answer is, we have. I want to make sure folks understand a couple things very clearly here. It brings me no personal joy, by the way, and this is not a life sentence. This is not going to last forever. The more we stay at home and the more social distancing we exercise at home or when we are outside of our home, and hopefully you're only going out if you have to, the faster we'll get through this.

But here are the facts. In the first good weather weekend of the spring, the evidence from State Park Police and other observations up and down the state was unequivocally an enormous amount of gathering in close proximity of individuals at both state parks and county parks. Additionally, an uncomfortably high number of out-of-state license plates. As we have, from moment one, beginning in January made every decision we have made based on fact, science and data, we didn't just wake up on a whim and decide to close state and county parks. We did this because of congregations. By the way, our State Park Police and other first responders as Pat can expand upon, by the way, we're putting them at harm's way when they go in and have to break up congregations of folks. We didn't take this lightly. We did it based on the facts as we saw them.

Again, I'm hoping as much as anybody it's not a life sentence, that we get through this as fast as humanly possible. And we will if we flatten that curve and we all stay home and only go out when it's absolutely essential. And, by the way, to the very rightful questions of hey, what about I'm out jogging on a street, or taking a walk on the street, be careful. We accept that that is an outcome here, not unintended. We understood that this is a consequence of this action. Please be careful. This can't be either/or, it has to be and/both. We had to shut these parks and we need you to be careful.

And to those who say, gosh, golly, we're more rural, how about just -- you know, here's the problem. The entirety of the rest of the state of New Jersey will be on your doorstep in your park. And/or, beyond New Jersey, folks from out of state in the region who will want to be in that park. We have some of the nicest parks, forget the Northeast, in the entire United States of America. Again, I say this not to be a jerk, not to be argumentative. We did this based on the facts and we will continue to keep this posture until we are through this. Again, if you're out there walking or jogging, please, please be careful.

We learned this morning that nearly 214,000 more New Jerseyans filed for unemployment insurance benefits last week. This is another record. It's one we don't like breaking, by any means. But as we have said before, we know that many of you are having difficulty accessing your benefits because of long wait times or online

lags. We know this. We're working as hard as possible to make it easier, given the age of our systems, and the unprecedented stress they are under, as Labor Commissioner Rob Asaro-Angelo noted when he was here on Saturday.

First, remember what we've said before, but this is important. No one will be denied one penny of their unemployment benefits. Second, as the Commissioner recommended, try accessing the online system either late at night or early in the morning when volumes are lowest, and please be patient. We understand your frustrations, believe me, but would ask you to please be patient. If you're calling on the phone, when you do get through, please remember that the person on the other end is there to help and is probably also dealing with the strain of making sure their own families are protected during this time. Let's all be kind to, and understanding of, one another, because we're all leaning on one another.

And for those of you who want to keep working and help us get through this emergency, the jobs portal at covid19.nj.gov, that website contains more than 50,000 active job listings from more than 630 employers across an array of essential industries. If you've lost your job due to this emergency, there may be another one waiting for you. Join the more than 470,000 individual users who have already clicked the jobs portal link at covid19.nj.gov, or who have gone directly to jobs.covid19.nj.gov.

Next, today I am signing an Executive Order extending the grace period for residents who may be finding themselves unable to pay their insurance premiums because of a loss of income or other impacts from this emergency. My order will require a minimum 60-day grace period for health and dental insurance policies, and 90-days grace for home and auto insurance, renter's insurance, life insurance and for insurance premium financing arrangements, among others. I got asked by this by some friends of mine at The Breakfast Club on 105.1 Charlemagne and DJ Envy and Angela Yee the other day. This was in the works and we didn't have a definitive answer, so I want to give them a shout out for helping give us a little, even more impetus to get this done sooner than later.

Additionally, this order makes it clear that all claims covered by the insurance policy must be paid out to those who are within these grace periods. And also, that insurers can't demand repayment of unpaid premiums in a lump sum at the end of the grace period, but rather they must spread these back payments out over the remainder of the insurance term. This is akin to the sort of methodology that we expect mortgage bankers to deal with your payments when their 90-day grace period is up. It can't just be 90 days and then you face a big lump sum payment. It's got to be, in that case, hopefully tacked on to the end of your mortgage. In the insurance case, smoothed out over the life of your premium payments.

And insurers will be required to provide each policyholder with an easily readable written description of the terms of the extended grace period. Not only should no New Jerseyan lose their insurance during this emergency, but we cannot leave them in a weaker position once it ends. We're all in this together and that's the only way we will also be able to come out of this, together.

It's that spirit we continue to see from our business community as well, so I want to give a quick shout out and thanks to Marriott who would informed us yesterday that they will be providing rooms at the Marriott Courtyard Newark free to the nurses and doctors working long hours, and who may need a place to stay to re-energize and prepare for the next shift. This is part of Marriott's nationwide Rooms For Responders initiative, to provide \$10 million in free rooms to our healthcare providers who are doing heroic things every day. So to Marriott, we say thank you, and to the woman to my right, who in a prior life was a nurse, I know this will be greeted with great joy by our first-line healthcare providers.

We continue to also thank the many of you across the state who continue to inspire us with your generosity and your willingness to do things within your communities that are carrying us through this emergency and lifting our spirits. We are overwhelmed by the number of stories you are sharing on social media using that hashtag #NJThanksYou and I've enjoyed retweeting several of them myself.

Here are a couple of other great stories that I'd love to share. At Rowan University, Joshua Meyer, Kunj Parmar and Colton Jacobucci, working with their mechanical engineering professor, and there he is on the left, Dr. Francis Haas, have taken to making polycarbonate intubation boxes that they are donating to help protect our frontline healthcare providers across South Jersey. A huge shout out to each of them.

And here's one that brings a special amount of joy to me and I know also to Colonel Pat Callahan and to Commissioner Judy Persichilli. Here's a picture of Dr. Jim Pruden. He's an ER doctor at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Paterson. Kevin Slaven was with us a few weeks ago, my first day back in fact, and spoke about Jim's struggle with COVID-19. He's also worked alongside our search and rescue team as a volunteer physician. In late March, as I mentioned, he contracted COVID-19 and for a while there it was touch and go. But yesterday, and this is a picture from yesterday, Dr. Pruden was released from the hospital, St. Joe's, the same place he works. I think he's gone into some sort of rehab, as I recall, right? His strength and his perseverance in the face of everything should be all we need to find our inner strength to power through this emergency and come out stronger and ready for the next day, just as Dr. Jim Pruden has. God bless him.

That's the message I ask you to hold close. We are going to get through this, unequivocally. Yes, we are going to see bad days. How can you not acknowledge that when you have 198 of our blessed brothers and sisters in the state who have lost their lives? Again, yes, we're going to learn of more members of our unique and diverse family who we will lose. But we are going to get through this and we're going to get through this together. Let's live the words of the pioneering German doctor, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, whose belief that we are all one family led him to found a hospital in West Africa that saved countless lives. And I quote Dr. Schweitzer. "One who gains strength by overcoming obstacles possesses the only strength which can overcome adversity." Yes, there are a lot of obstacles before us. For us here, it's our work to find more PPE and to source more ventilators and have more beds, and to have more than we need and make sure our healthcare workers get the relief they need.

For all of us, you may have the inability to get to work or the fact that you can't be with your friends at school. It's the disruption of your routines. It's even having to wear a covering on your face while at the supermarket. I get that, we get that. We all do. But the 9 million of us can play and are playing a huge role in getting ourselves out of this faster, with fewer infections, fewer hospitalizations, and please God, fewer fatalities. Every day we get stronger. Every day we are more prepared to see ourselves through this. This is the spirit we all need to muster now and for the weeks ahead.

So on this holiest of Thursdays, in Passover season, remember, this is New Jersey and we can do anything. With that it is my great honor to introduce a fierce representative of our state, of his district, a guy who goes to bat for us every single day. Please help me welcome Congressman Andy Kim.

Congressman Andy Kim: Thank you, Governor. I appreciate so much your leadership and your team and everything that you're doing to shepherd us through this crisis right now. Thank you for letting me join you here today for this conference.

I wanted to just start by talking to those and wishing everyone that is listening and watching that I hope you are safe. I hope that you are healthy. I hope your loved ones are staying safe and healthy. If you need help in any way, I hope that you're getting it and if you are not, please reach out to me, to the Governor, to others that are stepping up to try to make sure that you have a voice and you have what you need. We're not just talking about the health concerns about the coronavirus or about financial concerns that I know are on the minds of so many of you, but making sure that we're thinking about our own mental health, thinking about what it is that we can look out for each other and our neighbors. I talk to people who are down on their last dime and they're hungry and they're concerned. If that is you, please reach out to somebody, as we together are going to get through this.

My office and I myself were fielding thousands of calls throughout Burlington County and Ocean County, and I wanted to share some of what we're hearing. The first and foremost question that we're getting from people are the concerns that they have. Are they healthy? Are their parents healthy? Are their children healthy? Are their wives, their husbands, healthy? And their lack of knowledge on so many fronts worries them greatly. I know that's something that I've felt and experienced firsthand as I was exposed early on to someone who tested positive and had to quarantine myself, wondering whether or not that was something that I may have passed along to my parents or to my family. That hangs with you, stays with you, and I know so many others are experiencing this at such a deeper level. I think we want to make sure that we have that type of clarity.

It is why myself, the Governor, the New Jersey Congressional Delegation across both parties all recognize the importance of increased testing. There's really nothing else that we can do more important than understanding where this virus is, in order to be able to slow the spread of this and ultimately be able to beat

it. We won't be able to just think about this on a public health side, but we know that our economy is not going to be open. We're not going to be able to reopen our small businesses until we have an understanding of how to turn the corner on this public health crisis.

Our state and our counties have been working as hard as they can on this and we're grateful for the help in having FEMA ramp up with two testing sites in North Jersey, but we need a third FEMA site, a federally backed site in South Jersey, and we need it right now, especially at a time where we're seeing the numbers continue to climb exponentially. I've stood alongside my colleagues to call for this third testing site and been joined by every single member in this bipartisan delegation, and I'll continue to call for this site until we get it. And even then I will continue to push for every single federal dollar we can get to support New Jersey through this crisis.

I appreciate the Governor's request in helping us push forward for this third FEMA site and as we have the full head delegation, we had a full Congressional delegation and bipartisan and bicameral way submitted a letter to the FEMA on March 27. Today is 14 days later and we have heard no response and we are in a pandemic. We need quick decisions and we need a strategic response.

Fourteen days ago, the number of positive cases in Ocean County was 484. As of yesterday, and I'm sure the numbers will go up as we hear them, yesterday was 2,856. In Burlington County, 14 days ago was 88 and just yesterday, we heard those numbers at 801. Due to the limits of testing capabilities, we're left to wonder, is this just the tip of the iceberg? Is there something more that we should expect? And what will the next 14 days bring? We have one of the largest senior communities in the country. We have retirement communities, long-term care facilities.

And just on my way up to Trenton, I was hearing a report that the White House is now warning that Philadelphia may very well emerge as another hotspot, with cases starting to spike. We need to get ahead of this now. I pressed the head of FEMA for our region on a phone call the other day, and Congressman Norcross, Congressman Pascrell, Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, among others have all cited this as a top priority for our state. I want to make sure that as many people in this state, in New Jersey, have access to the tests and the access to the medical equipment that is necessary.

We understand that testing isn't just important for us to understand the spread of the virus and the concerns on the public health front, but it's critically important to understand how we're going to be able to move forward and get our economy up and running responsibly. This is how we are able to keep watch. If we don't have a coordinated and sustained testing regime, we're not going to be able to keep watch on the virus as we start to restart our economy. Additional testing, not just for who has been tested positive, but also testing for antibodies to be able to understand who might have immunity to this, will be important aspects of this going forward, in terms of how we open our economy safely and responsibly.

The second major question that I hear from people is what help can they get financially? Even before this crisis, we live in a time when 40% of Americans couldn't handle a \$400 emergency. I had personally repeated that statistic thousands of times to highlight the fragility that so many Americans live in, and I had heard those stories specifically in Burlington County and Ocean County. Now we see that fragile reality put to a test, the greatest test that we have faced with regards to everyone in this country facing it together.

Everyone is impacted by this crisis. I'm glad that we were able to highlight these stories, both of those that have survived, but it's so important to highlight those that have passed, the tragic stories of those amongst us. I heard from someone yesterday who told me about their first time attending a funeral by Zoom. Yesterday, I heard from a woman who was filled with anxiety about her struggles getting groceries and being able to go outside. We had a telephone Town Hall where we had so many people, hundreds of people telling their stories about their jobs that they lost and the work that they lost. We need to be doing everything we can to be able to help New Jerseyans that are suffering right now. And the CARES Act increased unemployment support, and as we passed direct payments to be able to help people through this crisis. I've been pressing to make sure that the federal government is getting our state everything that we need on passing this help to the people. And most important thing is getting people help right now.

We've also been making sure that our small businesses can stay afloat. I'm on the Small Business Committee. I'm the only Member of Congress on the Small Business Committee in Congress, and I've been pressing on this as a top priority. I'll be honest with you, I've been disappointed with some of the roll out of

the Paycheck Protection Program. We need to be doing better. Small business owners are struggling to keep people on their payrolls and their doors open. I've been pushing the SBA and Treasury to get the guidance out as soon as possible in a coordinated way, rather than the piecemeal way that we've seen so far, to be able to make sure this support gets to our small business owners immediately.

These are tough times, but New Jerseyans are tough and we're going to get through this together. I've been inspired by these acts of heroism that I see every day in our neighbors just doing their jobs, our doctors, our nurses, EMS personnel, grocery store workers, and so many others that are putting themselves in harm's way. We owe all of them a debt of gratitude in our efforts to put this crisis to an end.

And I want to end by just thanking, once again, Governor Murphy and my colleagues throughout this state, for engaging in this collective effort as we're trying to get the job done. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Andy, thank you. You know, in the category of it takes a village, no matter how good a job we do as a state, we need help and that includes local county faith leaders, nonprofits, and boy it sure does include our federal government. I thank you and your colleagues on both sides of the aisle who represent us so fiercely and so well in Washington. We're going to need, as you rightfully point out, whether you've lost your job, you're a small business, or frankly, the State of New Jersey with expenses that look like this and revenues that look like this, we need all the help we can get right now, more than ever before. I want to thank you for all of that. Great to have you with us today.

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

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As you know, the COVID-19 outbreak has impacted our entire state. Our local health departments are working around the clock to protect their communities and respond to this outbreak. And as we know, given the increase in cases and spread of the virus in the state, they need additional support. Understanding the importance of our frontline public health workforce, the Department of Health is allocating \$5 million in federal funding that the state has received to support our local health departments statewide. The funding will support critical, local public health efforts such as contact tracing, providing guidance to long-term care facilities, assisting community testing sites, supporting individuals who need a safe place to quarantine, and much other needed COVID-19-related activities. The allocation will be based on the population size of the communities they serve. New Jersey's 96 local health departments are the public health boots on the ground and we realize the enormity of this outbreak has put an enormous strain on their operations. We certainly hope this funding will support them during an extremely challenging time.

I want to also report that I visited our federal medical station at Secaucus this morning. I had the privilege to meet with the extraordinary team from the State Police, the National Guard and our volunteer corps of nurses and physicians. They had two patients admitted there yesterday. It went well, and they're expecting five more this afternoon. Pharmicare is providing full pharmacy services, and LabCorp is providing full testing services.

According to the data reported from our hospitals, there are 7,363 hospitalizations of individuals testing positive for COVID-19 or persons under investigation. 1,523 individuals are in what we would call critical care or licensed critical care, and 1,551 of those individuals are on ventilators. We've been predicting a one-to-one ratio of critical care to ventilators. We have also told you that our hospitals are increasing their critical care capacity and as you can see, with 1,523 individuals identified in critical care, more of them are in the hospital on ventilators.

We continue to work on a plan to address challenges in our long-term care facilities. This is a statewide as well as a national problem. We've also received reports that some of our veteran homes have been severely impacted by COVID-19. Specifically, the home in Paramus. The home in Paramus has 40 confirmed cases. Five are hospitalized. Since the beginning of March, they have reported 34 deaths. However, only 10 are related to COVID-19.

We have three Veterans Memorial homes in New Jersey. To date, collectively they report 58 COVID positive residents and 14 deaths directly related to COVID-19. The director of these facilities reports that they have had staffing issues and the Guard has sent 40 combat medics to Paramus, and 35 to the Menlo Park facility.

In addition, the Department of Health located through our volunteer corps five licensed practical nurses and four registered nurses who will report to the veteran homes on the 13th.

As I've said, we're continuing to work on a statewide plan to assist our long-term care facilities that do not have the sufficient physical space to be able to cohort COVID positive patients on a separate floor or a separate wing. Again, we're looking at this regionally and I've been in contact with several facilities who are preparing to accept COVID positive patients only in locations in the north, central, and southern regions. Right now, 262 of our facilities report at least one COVID-19 case. Overall, there are 3,388 residents in our long-term care, assisted living and dementia facilities testing positive for COVID-19. The overall population of these facilities is slightly over 75,000.

We're concerned about several of them that have increasing cases and outbreaks. Our inspection teams have been in contact with all of them, and some of them can expect a visit. Sadly, 198 new deaths have been reported to the department. Twenty of these new deaths were residents of long-term care facilities. As I've stated before, there's 262 long-term care facilities in the state reporting at least one COVID positive case. These case numbers include reports from long-term care nursing facilities, approximately 200 assisted living facilities, and other settings such as residential memory care housing. All in, there are approximately 110,000 residents of New Jersey in our specialized homes.

There are now 1,700 fatalities in our state. The racial breakdown for the deaths that we have reported are White 61%, Black or African American 22%, Asian 6%, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander less than 1%, and we are still investigating 11% of the deaths. All of these families of these individuals are in our thoughts and prayers.

According to the data from this morning, of the seven laboratories sending us COVID-19 results, which is over 95% of the tests performed in New Jersey, 100,478 tests have been performed, 43,313 have returned positive, for a positivity rate of 44.11%. As cases rise and we put into effect more social distancing requirements, we of course know that people are anxious and concerned. This anxiousness, coupled with being separated from loved ones, takes an emotional toll. We understand that. I want to share the Mental Health Care's number again, for those who need emotional support during the COVID-19 outbreak. Behavioral care specialists can help you or someone you love at 1-866-202-HELP, 1-866-202-4357. For individuals that have general questions, please call 211 or text NJ COVID to 898211.

This is a difficult time for all of us. So please be kind to one another, be patient and take time to take care of yourselves and your loved ones. We are all in this together, and we must take steps to protect one another. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. A couple of follow-up items, if I may. This last point, we've said this. We've got an overwhelming amount of folks in this state who, in this extraordinary moment, even while social distancing, we are all coming together in one cause. There's a bonding going on that is completely at odds with the physical reality. But importantly and particularly in times of spiritual and holy seasons, we've also got members of our state and our community who are alone and feeling that loneliness. Folks who have already extent mental health challenges or dependencies or addictions and other challenges, and we must not forget that we are one big 9-million member family. And while most of us, or the majority of us may be coming together, that's not working for everybody so I want to just underscore your last point.

Counties, again the top five total cases continue to be the same five, in order: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Union, Passaic. Judy, you've been talking about a one-to-one ratio of critical care beds and ventilators. If the math is right, we're even north of one to one right now. Is that fair?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes, exactly.

Governor Phil Murphy: Any color as to how you get there? These are folks who are not in critical care but are still requiring a ventilator?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, what we've asked all of the hospitals to do, as you recall, is to increase their critical care capacity by 100%. We had 2,000 licensed beds, I'm sitting here before you today to assure you that every hospital has done that. We have about 4,000 beds that can accommodate critical care patients. That's where you see the increase in the ventilators. What we still need are ventilators.

Governor Phil Murphy: You bet. But I mean, just to repeat the public service announcement that I think we make at every gathering, that we're going to need more ventilators, more personal protective equipment, more beds, more healthcare workers, more medicines that support all of the above. We've made progress on all fronts and hats off to the folks who are working tirelessly to make that progress, but we're not remotely home yet and we have to continue to remind ourselves that we are still, relative to where we think we're headed, short on all the above. And that's not withstanding extraordinary, for instance, we talked about yesterday, extraordinary creativity on the part of our hospitals and healthcare systems, the extraordinary daily efforts from our healthcare workers. The field medical station you reviewed today, great example of cooperation with our federal partners but we have a ways still to go.

Just acknowledging on the racial data. Again, the African American number of 22%, that is relative, let's not forget this folks, relative to about 14% or 15% representation of the general population in New Jersey and that's something that's we're seeing elsewhere in the country, and that's something that we're very focused on. You mentioned also the Asian community and that is also north of its representation of the general population. And it gives me a chance to say, Andy, are you the first Korean American ever to be voted for Congress? I know you are from New Jersey.

Congressman Andy Kim: Second ever in the country, first Asian American from New Jersey elected federal.

Governor Phil Murphy: Bless you and thank you for leading in so many respects, including being a role model for gobs of young people in this state who look up to you.

Congressman Andy Kim: Well, look, the concerns aren't just on the health side. We need to make sure that we understand that we've got to fight back and fight against any type of discrimination against the Asian American community in the state and across the country as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: I was speaking to somebody, speaking of which, someone from Asia who was helping us. We literally are running a worldwide phone banking system right now to find personal protective equipment. Pat's been right in the middle of that. He knows. I was speaking to somebody from Asia today and they said, listen, if we're able to get this to you, could you please remind folks that this is no time to be splitting along us-versus-them lines, particularly for our Asian brothers and sisters. I promised I would. Too early to announce that we have success in this particular front, but when we do I promise to repeat that. Pat, anything you've got on compliance, PPE capacity or other matters of importance? And great to have you with us, as always,

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor, and thank you Congressman, to, for always being accessible and answering on the first ring. I appreciate that. As far as compliance goes, overnight, and these are all Executive Order violations, so I'll go through them quickly. A subject charged with theft. He was stealing a refrigerator from a recycling center in Randolph. In Newark, they issued 34 summonses and closed two businesses. And I think it's important to point out when we talk about the, it takes a village, that more than 700 citizens in Newark since the Executive Order was signed have called the Newark Police Department to ask for them to come break up gatherings and cite folks, and more than 700 people have engaged in that effort as well, because they know how seriously the social distancing.

In Brick Township subject charged for having a barber shop and salon open. In Clinton Township, a subject charged for having offensive signs and using obscene gestures on Route 22. In Union City, a large gathering was broken up where a subject was cited. A woman who was engaged in an altercation spit on a victim claiming she had COVID. A subject down in Camden was admitted for an overdose, drug overdose. He did test positive and was to be isolated in a hotel that was being paid for by the county. He refused to stay at the hotel, cited some obscene things and ultimately was admitted for psychiatric testing. In Lindenwold a subject was charged for refusing to leave and disperse from a basketball court that was closed. In Paterson, a tavern was cited for remaining open for business and in Elizabeth, a liquor store was cited for having not only a large gathering in front, but having a back room filled with people consuming alcohol and the Alcoholic Beverage Control division did shut that business down.

And to the governor's point, I think he opened up with it, with regard to last night being the first night of Passover in Lakewood, that the amount of appreciation for the compliance and the adherence to the Executive Order go a long way, just to show how serious we're taking this, and on a time when I know that

Passover and Holy Week is a time when we do want to get together. That's certainly greatly appreciated.

Very quickly on the ventilators, we are in the process of delivering 120 of those today from our warehouse, I believe tomorrow over 240 ventilators will be distributed. I had submitted a request for FEMA to support our non-congregate sheltering on April 6, and today being April 9, in three days, they have approved that this morning, which is huge for us. That's to support vulnerable populations that need to be isolated, as well as our healthcare and first responders that need to be isolated as well, so they don't go home and contaminate and infect their families. And to the Congressman's point about the third testing, we are pushing FEMA hard for that, and hope that your support and the entire delegation's support, as well as OEM's ask of FEMA to have that third site stood up, hopefully in the near future. That's all I have, though.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, I would just add to your comment, not just about Lakewood which I had mentioned earlier, and we thank the leadership there, but up and down the state with one of the most significant and largest Jewish communities of any American state, second-largest per capita, I think fourth-largest overall, for folks who have kicked that sacred holiday off in as compliant a fashion as possible, particularly given, we mentioned this yesterday, I've participated myself as a Murphy in countless Seders, particularly given how communal and how family oriented and how much of a gathering Holy Period Passover is, particularly on that first night. It's quite gratifying. So I want to say a particular thanks up and down the state to our Jewish brothers and sisters.

With that, let's take some questions. I got Matt on the sides, after he's stretched, and he's got John up first to bat.

Q&A Session

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: Did we get age and gender for the deaths? I know we kind of look for it. I didn't hear that today. Sorry about that. Can you discuss, Governor, your Chief Counsel, his positive test? How did he get a test if he was not symptomatic? You have said in the past, you haven't been tested? Does that change your decision on getting tested?

And on the hospital data, can we get an idea of how complete this data is? How many hospitals are reporting in? And how often it's going to be updated? Is it daily, throughout the day? And there's some definitions that we're asking for. What exactly is something like bed capacity expansion potential mean? But the biggest question on that is, what should we do with these numbers? What should people looking at this, how to read these charts? What do you want people to take away from these numbers?

And Governor, on the shopping restrictions that you announced yesterday, you indicated that the number 50% of capacity would go down, or there's a potential for that to go down. What are the measures that you're looking at to tighten limits? What metrics do you want to see before you ratchet things down again? Was there anything specific that prompted the decision to limit retail?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I'll jump in first. Is that all right? And then you can come in, and maybe Pat, you may want to add a word. Actually, real quick, age and gender of the deaths. Do you mind doing that one real quickly?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The range is 20 to 103 years. 1% or 13 are under the age of 30; 4% or 75 between the ages of 30 and 49; 17% or 288 between the ages of 50 and 64; 33%, 572, between the ages of 65 and 79; and 44%, or 748, are over the age of 80. There are 1,122 cases or 66% that we are still looking into. No, I'm going to correct that. Of 1,122, 66% we know the race. Sorry for confusing that.

Governor Phil Murphy: And gender, sorry? Did you hit gender?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Gender, it continues to be about 58% male and 41% female. The race is based on 1,122 cases. It's 683 or 61% White, 242 or 22% Black or African American, and 6% or 68 Asian, and less than 1% is native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. And 47% are now reporting as having underlying conditions.

Governor Phil Murphy: As it relates to Matt Platkin, and I know Matt, who's obviously not here. Matt would want me to say that on the day that we announced 198 deaths, and there are 1,700 folks who have lost their lives, he appreciates everyone reaching out to him, but he's doing fine. Matt, as I understand it, I don't want to

get, this as a personal situation for him. But as I understand it, he came in contact with a number of people who it turned out had tested positive. Even though he didn't have symptoms, he felt it was the right thing to do. Now, why does he get a free pass to do that? Because literally every single Executive Order that I've written since I've been Governor, and certainly in this period, have been written by Parimal, Matt and their colleagues. We need this guy. I've been on the phone with him on four different calls this morning. He was never in this room with any knowledge that he may have, so the minute he took the test or suspected. He had been around people, again, he was not symptomatic and thank God remains not, so. He has been self-isolating at home. And again, I've been on the phone with him constantly, probably much to his annoyance.

Secondly, it hasn't changed my metric for two simple reasons. One is I don't have any symptoms. I hope it stays that way. Secondly, including Matt, I just don't go near people. This is the closest I'm near folks. I haven't been with Matt in a whole bunch of days. Even when we were in the same building, we were 20, and I keep it that way with basically everybody, 20 feet or more apart. If there's anything to report on that, I promise you we'll come back.

I'll finish my part of this. Was there any one thing on limiting retail? No, John, there wasn't any one thing but we hear one too many stories of good and bad actors in the sense that, hey, this place is really doing it right, Pat, you've heard these. They're calling you when they come in, when your prescription is ready. Or they're limiting the amount of people inside the supermarket. Great. We heard too many over here and so we decided to get more explicit. What we'll look to, will the 50% go down, I'm not sure there's a specific moment that we'll look at.

But I go back to the state park comment I made earlier, when we had such an overwhelming amount of evidence that people were gathering in clusters. We reserve the right for that number to go down. Let's let Judy answer, and then I'll come back if you've got any quick follow up. We want to keep moving today. Judy, you've got one on hospital data. How frequently? We hope to do that every day, I guess, right? Maybe the bigger question, what does it mean?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. The hospitals report, and I'm happy to report that they all report at the end of every day. And it's as accurate as it is at that moment in time. We've gotten reports as early as 4:00 p.m., but most of the reports are around 10:00 p.m. The level of activity in a hospital, particularly at a time like this, the in and the out is certainly evolving. We get it at a point in time.

So what do we look at? Well, the first thing we look at is the total number of hospitalizations related to COVID positive, definite COVID positive cases and persons under investigation. That's the 7,363 as of 10:00 p.m. last night. Then we look at the doubling time. What that is, is the number of days for the hospitalizations to double at the current rate. The doubling time, we want to see that increase because that means there's fewer hospitalizations. As of last evening, the doubling time was 28.8 days. The day before, it was 14.6. The day before that it was 12.4. Additionally, we look at the daily growth rate based on the last two days. Last evening, it was 2%, the day before it was 5%, and the day before that 6%. We want the daily growth rate to decrease, we want the doubling time to increase.

And then we keep an eye on intensive care or critical care patients because we know that in a surge, we may need 4,000 to 5,000 critical care beds and ventilators. We are constantly monitoring that.

Governor Phil Murphy: This should never become abstracted. This is never mathematical. These are human lives we're talking about. But there is, Judy, a certain amount of math that is derived in terms of predicting. So the map I put up earlier wasn't hospitalizations, but it was how frequently you're doubling infections. But that does ultimately lead to the question of, you know, the total number of infections and how rapid that comes down into who's going to, as Judy has reminded us, up to 85% of folks will have mild to moderate symptoms, but of that last 15%, they're going to need much more of an intensive healthcare experience, including hospitalizations, and ultimately, critical care. And sadly, we'll lose some of those folks.

There was one other question you asked, I want to make sure that you hit this, bed capacity expansion.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We know that every single hospital has expanded their bed capacity and their critical care capacity has been expanded into their step-down units. And really what that means is that they have the physical space to be able to put the equipment necessary around the bed that's required by the patient, and then have a ratio of caregivers to patient at a higher level than a typical medical

surgical ratio. That's the biggest challenge we have, because the healthcare workforce is dwindling as people leave to go on quarantine themselves, and then come back. So we are working very aggressively with a staffing solution.

Governor Phil Murphy: Which is why that matchmaking process you and I talked about matters so much. You've got the folks who have raised their hand over here, and you've got the needs over here. And the needs are growing as folks quarantine themselves. John, anything else you've got?

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: You've mentioned there's intensive care. And you say sometimes critical care. Is it –

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: It's the same thing. Intensive care and critical care are the same.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's me butchering, non-medical person, probably butchering the medical terms. I say one thing, because you're wearing a mask and we wear a masks. The other thing, in my answer to myself and others around us, we're all heavy face-covering/masks these days and we have been and so it will stay that way. Thank you. Elise, speaking of face coverings, I think that's you.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Yes. How does New Jersey have more patients on ventilators than it has in the ICU? Does that indicate that some patients are on ventilators as a matter of course? Reliant on them say the way the late Christopher Reeve was, and the vent is considered a chronic condition and not an emergency-type situation?

Also, at this point, when are you expecting the peak of hospitalizations?

Finally, I'm curious about the impact on the state budget. For instance, do you expect to be so generous after all, with school aid? And do you intend to bring the State Treasurer to these briefings at some point to answer our budget questions?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start with the non-medical. May I do that, and turn it to you? I'm intrigued by the idea of the State Treasurer. Mahen, we should take that under consideration. It's a good thought. Are we likely to have the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections tomorrow? We will, so that's one thing I meant to say earlier. Many of you have asked us questions about the corrections system. Judy's been communicating nonstop with Marcus Hicks. But we've indicated, I think for several days, we'd like to get him here and he will be our guest tomorrow. I should have said that earlier.

The impact on the state budget is significant. There's no other way to put it. We've been crushed with expenses that are skyrocketing as we deal on the frontlines with people who are sick, people who have lost their jobs, small businesses, you name it. It's too early to tell the impact on specifics as it relates to school budgets. Please bear with us on that, which is why it may make sense. I love the idea of the Treasurer being here and she's extraordinary, but it might make sense to wait a little bit until we have a better sense of the landscape.

It's also why Andy's role and his colleagues in the House, and our two Senators matter so much. We need, let me repeat, direct cash assistance right to the state and we need it in size, and we need it such that we can, as liberally as possible, interpret how it's used because we're getting crushed right now. There's no other way to put it. But more on the specifics of the budget, Elise, if that's okay. Judy, do you mind going through the medical questions?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, the critical care on our spreadsheet, our dashboard, is based on licensed critical care beds, but we know that they've enhanced their ability to move out the critical care capacity. So they're probably just outside of the critical care unit, but in a unit where they've increased capacity to handle critical patients.

Governor Phil Murphy: How about thoughts on a peak?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, we know that the Innovation Center has identified that a peak could occur in two to three days and could result in 14,400 hospitalizations and 2,880 critical care cases. That's from last evening. We look at this every day. It changes every day. So it's 14,400 hospitalizations

and 2,880 critical care cases. They said the peak could happen as soon as two to three days. Last evening, I believe we had three hospitals on divert. Most of them on divert because of workforce issues.

Governor Phil Murphy: I want to say this. Thank you, Judy, for that. Elise, you okay? We'll go back up here if we could, Matt. I want to thank Congressman Kim, I meant to say this upfront, he told me he's stacked up here, so he's got to jump. I want to thank Andy for being here, for being a great friend, a great representative and advocate on behalf of two of our most important counties, Burlington and Ocean County, and by doing so, making New Jersey and every county stronger and better. So thank you, man.

Congressman Andy Kim: Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great to have you. Please.

Reporter: Governor, we're seeing reports that the federal government will end funding for coronavirus testing sites this Friday. In a few places those sites will close as a result. Is this true? If so, will this impact New Jersey testing sites?

We've also seen that HUD is moving quickly to make over \$82 million of COVID-19 relief funding available to communities across New Jersey. What are the state's plans for this money? And what kind of transparency will be put in place so taxpayers can be sure that money is being spent wisely and for its intended purpose?

Finally, Senate leaders today announced the creation of a taskforce to monitor NJ's public education system during this closure, including around whether students are receiving the supports they need. Do you support the creation of this taskforce? And how would you assess how schools have done so far, especially around the issues of equity?

Governor Phil Murphy: So these are all me, for a change. You can put your feet up here for a few minutes Judy and Pat. Actually, Pat may want to weigh in on the first one. There was a moment in time, and it lasted several days, where we were hearing that FEMA may be pulling out of our two testing sites this Friday. We collectively appealed to FEMA and I personally appeal to Pete Gaynor, who runs it and Vice President Pence. And I'm happy to say, as of Monday, so this is now three days ago, they committed to stay in with us until the end of May. Our commitment in New Jersey from FEMA for those two sites is through May 31. I can't speak to whether or not that's different in other states, but they are going to stay in with us today.

I was on with Sheila Oliver earlier and she continues to an extraordinary job running not just as Lieutenant Governor but running the Department of Community Affairs. We had a brief discussion about the HUD money. Too early to tell, but she and her team are on it, so when we have news on that front. Mahen, could you remind me and keep me an honest man on that from? We'll give you a readout as soon as we get any more specifics.

I hadn't seen the Senate establishing that taskforce. I think in every time out, we've said we welcome any other good ideas folks have from other branches of government or other parts of the state. So bless them and if they've got some ideas that come out of this, we welcome them. This is an experiment that we've never done before. We've never gone through this before. The Commissioner, Dr. Repollet, was with us the other day. How can I assess, how do I assess we're doing? You never can say you're batting 1,000. You heard lack of access to devices, challenges, remote learning. We heard some early stages, Pat was really good early on and continues to be really good on getting a readout of food insecure kids and communities and families. You know, that's always something you want to, as best you can, bat 1,000, but you're always trying to get that perfection.

I think we're doing probably as good a job as any American state. We entered this with the strongest number-one rated public education system in America. That's a good place to start. Great educators, the best in America, if not the world, great smart kids and families. But again, you go into that also with an unevenness about this. Access to devices, your best, most reliable hot meal of the day through your school. Those are realities for hundreds of thousands of kids.

We're going to do, like everything else as I mentioned, we're going to do --I'm sure the world, America and New Jersey will do big postmortems on how we did and where we can be better going forward. You good? Dave, how are you? You switched seats with Elise today, so a little bit you threw me off, but it's good to see you both.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Good to see you, Governor again. Yes, I am totally discombobulated by the change, but I'm trying to deal with it. A couple of questions. We've heard a lot about the benefits of rapid testing, and how that could help us in terms of reopening the economy, preserving PPE, etc., etc. When? Do we have any idea when we'll start to see this on a widespread basis in New Jersey? How many rapid tests do we have now? How important do you think this is in terms of moving forward?

Second question, you mentioned in your discussion about why the parks and so forth were closed. We are seeing more walkers and joggers in the streets and not to sound silly, but sometimes it is crowded. Would you anticipate or would you suggest, is there any guidance about wearing a mask while walking or jogging? And is there a protocol that people should follow in terms of who gets out of the way? I haven't seen it be an issue but people being people, it might turn into something a little nutty.

On the small business front, any other plans in place or considerations in terms of helping, especially the small business community, I know a lot of them have expressed concerns about being left behind and not being able to cope with the enormity of what's happening.

To the Commissioner who needs no introduction, you've said yesterday that you've been through HIV/AIDS, Ebola, I believe SARS and you've never seen anything like what we're seeing with COVID. Could you talk about the reasons why you're saying that?

Finally, Governor, you just had an operation fairly recently. How are you holding up? How are you finding the strength to deal with this kind of huge crisis? Who are you leaning on? I know you've mentioned Winston Churchill. Are you leaning on Moses, your wife, The Beatles? What's your support system and how are you handling it?

Governor Phil Murphy: Faithfully, John Dewar & Sons. Let me say the following. I appreciate your asking. I'll come to that in a second. Rapid testing, I don't know the amounts that we have in the state. Judy, do you know? I don't know the volume we have. Lisa, do you know the answer to that? Nice to have you with us, by the way.

State Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Coordinator Dr. Lisa McHugh: Hi, good afternoon, everybody. I don't have an exact number of point-of-care testing, those rapid test kits. I do know that because they were recently approved, a lot of the vendors are currently working with many urgent cares, hospitals. The one that's coming on the market most recently is what's called a moderately complex, so you do have to have some complexity within your organization to be able to utilize that test. We are trying to work with our state public health lab partners and some of our care providers to make sure that we're understanding exactly who is offering those tests. Certainly the availability of tests and rapid testing that can be turned around in a couple of hours is going to be very beneficial, and so we do hope that they will start flooding the marketplace soon. We hope to actually be able to understand a little bit better about where they're being rolled out and how they're going to be best utilized.

Governor Phil Murphy: So Dave, in the intermediate term, and I hope this is sooner than later, I've had just in the past 24 hours, a series of conversations on what sort of health infrastructure do you need to have in place to responsibly reopen? As you and I have discussed on a number of occasions with Scott Gottlieb, who's the former FDA Commissioner, Vivek Murthy, who is the former Surgeon General, to pick two people. Judy obviously, and her team, and Lisa and their colleagues are thinking about this a lot, but everybody comes back to the ability to contact trace.

Once you've, whenever it is, and please God, I hope it's sooner than later. Once within the four walls in New Jersey we bring this sucker to as close to zero as possible, you want to then have a healthcare infrastructure in place. I spoke the other day as did Governor Cuomo about the notion of trying to do something coordinated regionally, and the ability -- tell me if you disagree with this, Lisa or Judy -- the ability at that point, for sure, to rapid test people so that you could quickly make an assessment. Quarantine, if necessary, is going to be hugely important to our success in reopening, as opposed to the alternative where you either do it too soon or you do it ahead of the healthcare infrastructure and you throw gasoline on the fire inadvertently. That's a little bit of an intermediate term.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Do we have any sense though, Governor, when this might start to roll out in a large scale? You know, we keep hearing soon and I understand there's no magic way for you to know but in a month? In six months?

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, do you want to weigh in here?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We actually did receive 15 of those Abbott machines, David. The issue right now is the CDC has what's called the International Reagent Reserve and they're almost like the National Stockpile. So the machines are great, but if you don't have the reagent, and I think we only have 125 right now, and the CDC is saying if an Abbott machine is going to the hospital, that hospital has to deal directly with Abbott. There's a little bit of, to be honest with you, some finger pointing between Abbott and the CDC and the International Reagent Reserve. We're working through that daily and hope to have that resolved so we can get thousands of point-of-care tests out in the very near future.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would think, by the way, the first time finger-pointing has ever been invoked as it relates to government-related activity. But I don't know whether or not you've got insights in terms of the innovations and how quickly they'll come online? Rutgers, for instance, is talking with great conviction about the progress that they're making. I don't know when it is, but I do know we're going to need it sooner than later. So I just would say that. Do you disagree, either Judy or Lisa or Pat? You can't go into sort of a reopening of your economy and not have the ability to very quickly test folks. I've said this, maybe a proxy for that is the thermometer notion of standing out front of the restaurant. But is it fair to say, to be able to test folks quickly and get results back quickly is going to be central to our ability to reopen? Judy do you want to add to that? Or do you disagree?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, I totally agree, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Other than be careful, and we know that this is a consequence of closing the state parks and the county parks. So folks have to really, really be careful. Social distancing, so if you're walking please keep your six feet, or if you're jogging.

As it relates to masks, the one thing I would say is this, and I would love the health experts to – wearing a mask that impairs your ability to see, assuming you're social distancing, is something I personally think is putting you at a risk that you don't need to be at. So in other words, we want you to wear masks. That does not trump social distancing, and certainly doesn't trump the notion that you might not be able to see a car coming around a corner. I don't know if you would agree or disagree with that.

And you asked me, and I appreciate your asking. My family, most importantly my colleagues don't come near me. They let me come into these sessions last and leave first. I'm in a bigger bus, far from the person who's driving, we're masked up. I began running yesterday, albeit on a running machine by myself. But I ran 15 minutes, I hope – I promised a 5K in April. I'm hoping I'll be able to deliver the goods. I fear it'll be by myself. It'll be really slow but so far, so good. Again, I came back a lot faster than I wanted to, but knock on wood. So far, so good, and I appreciate your asking.

You had asked Judy a question about having lived through SARS and other channels.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm struck by the number of people that require hospitalization and decline very quickly. So the hospitals, you know, when you're looking at 1,500 people in critical care on any one day, I've never quite seen that. Even though all of the other pandemics that we've seen certainly have a percentage that don't do well at all, as you know, but the amount of people coming into the hospital that immediately need pulmonary support and respiratory ventilation is what I've never quite seen. I don't know, Lisa, if you've seen anything like that. I've been working a long time. I've never seen it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Lisa, anything you want to add?

State Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Coordinator Dr. Lisa McHugh: No, I mean, I would agree with the Commissioner. I was here working in the department during the pandemic in 2009, H1N1 and influenza. Very, very different than what we saw then, even though it was similar. So yeah, I mean, it's certainly unprecedented and certainly concerning, but certainly what we're working 24/7 to try to help our healthcare and public health accomplish, doing good things and trying to bring down that curve.

Governor Phil Murphy: Real quick, Dave. Nothing really new to report on Small Business Administration. As you know, the EDA has put out a program and they've been overwhelmed with demand for grants and loans. Tim Sullivan, the CEO, gave me a quick update this morning. There was some hope that maybe we might be able to get a little bit more, find some more funds to make that a little bit more robust, but that's too early to report. I think Andy referred to this, the SBA piece of the federal, The CARES Act, is a much bigger chunk of money and we need to get that out on the street as fast as possible.

Last point on jogging and walking. Again, please God, this does not last forever here. We're talking about some period of time. As Pat Callahan reminds me, the combination of more people perhaps jogging or walking on the streets, maybe wearing a mask, which doesn't impair their vision, so be careful about impairing the vision. Probably not a good time to have the ear buds in with the music crack at 12 on a scale of 10, would be another sort of personal health hygiene piece of advice we'd throw out. Matt.

Matt Friedman, Politico: Governor and Commissioner, thanks. On testing, we're seeing about the same number of new positives and negatives each day. I'm curious if that means that we're sort of hitting a testing capacity?

Also curious, health officials in the hardest-hit parts of North Jersey, are we still doing contact tracing or is that just something that we don't have the capacity to do?

And finally, we're hearing of occupational and physical therapists in nursing homes who are still going room to room to provide services for patients. Curious, because there's fear that these folks could be spreading the virus, curious if you think these services should be suspended? And maybe Commissioner, I think you went back, you talked about this not that long ago but I'm curious if these folks are required to wear PPE and if anything has changed? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: One thing, Judy, before you jump in. Dave, I think Mahen is trying to get your attention. I'm not sure if he's got an answer, perhaps to an earlier question. The amount of testing goes up every day. That's a fact. We have more sites that are offering testing, as I said, now 57 as far as we can count between public and non-public. The percentage of positive, too, two things are not going up a lot, happily. Number one, Judy, the positives percentage, has really only been the past couple of days creeping a couple of tenths of a percentage each day. And secondly, the curve of the number of positives, just based on the denominator from the day before, has begun to look like the early stages of flattening. Today was a little bit. Today was an 8% increase over yesterday, yesterday was a 7% increase from the day before, but the number of tests is going up. That's the only thing I want to say. Judy, over to you.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm going to let Lisa talk about contact tracing.

State Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Coordinator Dr. Lisa McHugh: Sure, so as you can imagine, as the Commissioner has already mentioned about local health department funding, you know, we have a limited number of staff and sometimes you have to really do significant contact tracing. I think when a lot of the social distancing measures went in place, contact tracing becomes a lot easier because you're really just contact tracing family members and household members, thankfully.

So our advice to local health departments has really been, in some of those locations that are getting a limited number of new cases each day, to really try to do the best that they can to do as much contact tracing as they can, and the contacts that they're identifying, to try to prioritize those that may have touch points with some of our most vulnerable populations. So if they happen to have a household contact who would be a healthcare worker, who would have other types of touch points with other vulnerable populations, to try to focus on doing the contact tracing around those individuals, versus you have some kids maybe in your household that really aren't going anywhere, they're not going to school, they're going to be staying in that household. It's very easy to give one message to that entire household.

So the global message is, we are still advising our local health departments to try to do contact tracing as much as they possibly can with the resources that they have. In some locations, it's really not going to be feasible. In other locations that are getting smaller amounts of new cases, each day, they're still able to maintain that with the staffing that they have. And so we have not told them to stop doing that. It's just that in some places, it's just not feasible given the overwhelming numbers.

Matt Friedman, Politico: I'm just curious, would local folks report information to you, whether or not they're still contact tracing? How does that process work? I'm curious. I understand that the directive is coming, continue to do this and I appreciate the remarks about with fewer cases, that seemed to make sense, but would they report if they stopped doing this?

State Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Coordinator Dr. Lisa McHugh: So there's no real way for them to say daily, we can do this, we can't do this. I mean, that's just not really kind of -- we've kind of left this to them to manage their own staff that they have and to see what they can particularly do. A lot of them know their communities fairly well. They know where some of these cases are coming from. And in some circumstances they can pretty much immediately tell that a new case may be related to an old case and they can kind of lump them together. So we're really asking our local health departments to do that. They are really working hard in their communities and they know their communities well.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I think Matt had a question about occupational and physical therapists.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Physical therapy and occupational therapy. If someone's in a long-term care facility and requires what they called skilled level of care, which would be physical therapy, we encourage that to continue taking place as long as protective personal equipment can be provided for the people coming in. But we also have instructed all long-term care facilities to do a symptom assessment and temperature check on anyone coming into the facility and turning away people, if necessary. So it's a tough time for long-term care right now. I don't think I need to tell you that, and I'm sure for those facilities that are able to manage because their staff is still there, they have a lower percentage, perhaps, of COVID positive patients, those necessary services are taking place. But I would not be surprised to hear that they are not in some other facilities where there are staffing concerns.

Governor Phil Murphy: Real, real quick, Dave, what have you got?

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Right, so this is a couple of questions from Mike from the Associated Press. Was it news to you, Governor, that the National PPE Stockpile for states is depleted? Was Jersey told by FEMA, HHS, the White House or anybody else in the federal government that the National Stockpile was depleted and that no more distributions would be made from it? If so, when were we told? Given the news, what accommodations and strategies is Jersey pursuing to get the PPEs and ventilators they need? California is apparently using its market leverage to suck up a lot of this material and then distribute it to other states in need. Is Jersey part of that? Is New Jersey forming consortiums to increase purchasing power? Any other strategies to try to acquire this essential gear? Finally, how much has Jersey spent to date buying PPEs and other ventilators?

Governor Phil Murphy: You've got to tell Mike, if he's going to have that many questions, he's got to show up. I'll give you the broad answers. We long ago, I don't know when it was but long ago, Pat's going to come in and correct me, or Judy, probably a couple of weeks ago realized, at least -- more than that, that PPE, separate from ventilators. PPE was going to need to be sourced from a whole range of places and providers, including folks who have donated as well as folks we're going to buy from. And that's all around New Jersey, around the country, around the world as I mentioned earlier with Andy, when Andy was here. I've been on the phone myself with Asian, and back and forth on email overnight with European folks, literally this morning.

Ventilators, on the other hand, and Pat or Judy correct me, but it's expensive. I think Pat said \$27 million for what we had received, I think it was up into \$80 million in total. That's a week old or a number of days old. This is a huge financial lift. Again, a line of business the state wasn't in six or seven weeks ago. Ventilators, on the other hand, had been very frustrating to find a viable commercial or other avenue, other than the federal stockpile. So I want to again, give a big shout out to Gavin Newsom in California for getting 100 our way. As I've said the other day, the extent to which and as soon as we can raise our hand and say we're through this, we'll be more than happy to return the favor to any other place that is going through as a hotspot.

But again, ventilators, we're not going to give up asking for PPE from the federal Strategic Stockpile, whether it's depleted or not, but ventilators continue to be the most common ask, I guess in addition to bed capacity, where the Army Corps has been really good, helping us.

We're constantly looking at commercial arrangements. So not only are we looking at folks who are prepared to donate, we're also scouring the world and the country and our state for commercial arrangements. We prefer it to be donated and we are particularly appreciate that. But the extent to which we need to establish supply lines that are reliable and they're commercial and we have to pay for them, we're absolutely doing that. Pat, anything you want to add to that? I think we're good. You good? Okay.

So listen, thank you. I want to thank, to my right, the Commissioner of Department of Health Judy Persichilli, who's speaking of heroes, is a hero. Dr. Lisa McHugh, thank you so much for being with us. In absentia, Congressman Andy Kim, the guy to my left, who's doing an extraordinary job, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan, Jared Maples and his team at Homeland Security.

We will be here at 10:30 tomorrow out of respect for Good Friday. We hope that we'll have all the numbers that we normally have for you. We'll do our best. And I would just say this, again. This is the fight of our lives. This is, for folks celebrating Passover, bless you and thank you for everything you're doing. To our Christian community, this is Holy Thursday, one of the holiest days of the year. This is the day of the Last Supper and this is a time for all of us to remember, not just our history and our faiths, but to remember what our responsibilities are right now.

Again, for the 9 million of us, number one responsibility, stay home and stay away from other people. Only go out if you absolutely have to. That's what the so many are doing. For the so few, our healthcare workers, extraordinary heroes, frontline responders, first-line responders, right down through to the folks who are helping us get through this crisis, bless you and thank you. Together, unequivocally, if we each do our part, there is no question we will get through this. We'll get through this stronger, as one family, than we've ever been before. We will see you tomorrow at 10:30. Thank you all.

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