

Governor Phil Murphy

Press Pool Coverage: Governor Murphy Visits Community-Based Vaccination Site in Newark and Observes Airport Workers and School Support Staff Being Vaccinated

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Governor Phil Murphy visited the community-based COVID-19 vaccination site at the Donald M. Payne, Sr. School of Technology in Newark where several airport workers and school support staff were vaccinated as part of New Jersey's vaccine eligibility expansion.

Murphy was met by Naipaul Rambaran, MD, coordinator for Essex County's vaccination sites, Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo, Jr., 32BJ Service Employees International Union (SEIU) State Director Kevin Brown, and Department of Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli.

Also on hand were State Senator M. Teresa Ruiz (D-Newark), State Assemblymember Eliana Pintor Marin (D-Newark), Essex County Commissioner At-Large Brendan Gill, and Newark North Ward Council Member Anibal Ramos, Jr.

Murphy and the group walked through the vaccination site, where local residents have been receiving the Moderna vaccine.

Murphy then congratulated Leslie Williams, who works in food services for the Orange school district, who was the first person in line to get the first shot of the two-dose Moderna vaccine at the school.

"Congratulations! How do you feel?" said Murphy. "I feel OK. I'm relieved now," said Williams. "I need to be around my grandchildren, and I've got another one on the way. I want to be here for them."

The governor next witnessed Andre Cooper, a cabin cleaner and security specialist at Newark Liberty International Airport, getting the vaccine.

"I feel safer going out of the house and to the supermarket now. This is a very scary disease we've all been dealing with," said Cooper, an East Orange resident who has two children. "I'm grateful that I got the shot. Better to be on the safe side and have peace of mind."

After getting their vaccine, patients are guided to the waiting area where nursing vaccination staff monitors them for 15 minutes.

Murphy's visit to the vaccination site came one day after the state expanded the groups of people eligible to receive the vaccine, including public and local transportation workers such as bus, taxi, rideshare and airport employees, NJ Transit workers, the homeless and people living in homeless shelters or domestic violence shelters.

Teachers in New Jersey were initially set to be eligible for vacation on March 15, but became eligible earlier this month after President Joe Biden declared that teachers, school support staff, and child care workers could be vaccinated immediately.

Murphy noted that New Jersey plans to mirror the Biden administration's mandates going forward.

"President Biden has been clear that as of May 1, anyone who wants to register for an appointment for a vaccination will be able to in America, and I have every expectation that we'll be able to meet that in New Jersey," Murphy said. "We need more supply from the federal government, that's the biggest challenge we've had. We've built our distribution network out ahead of the supply, and based upon what we're hearing from the feds it's about to go up. And when it does, we'll have the system in place to make sure that anyone who wants the vaccine can get it."

Murphy acknowledged that many people in communities of color have expressed concerns about receiving the vaccine, with some Black Americans having lingering mistrust of the medical system in the wake of the infamous 20th century Tuskegee medical study involving Black men.

But Murphy, the governor of a state that has had more than 23,000 confirmed and probable COVID-19 deaths, 840,000 confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases, and more than 3 million first and second vaccine doses, expressed commitment to closing any racial equity gap regarding access to vaccines and putting any other concerns of communities of color to rest.

"The one-dose, regular refrigeration Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a particular benefit in terms of getting to places that are hard to reach, including to disadvantaged communities," Murphy said. "Role models matter, and we've put a huge emphasis on getting leaders in communities of color to step up and get the vaccine. It's our job to overcome any skepticism."

Shortly after vaccinating Leslie Williams, licensed practical nurse Ekinadose Lebart, cited the need for normalcy as a driving force among all communities as New Jersey continues to battle the pandemic.

"People just want human contact again," said Lebart as she prepared to administer more vaccines. "This is the first step toward hugging their families again."

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