

Governor Phil Murphy

# "The Road Back: Restoring Economic Health Through Public Health"

04/27/2020

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon, everybody.

I am joined by Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli, and State Police Superintendent Colonel Pat Callahan.

With us today, as well, is Congressman Tom Malinowski, who will be able to give us an important federal perspective.

And, I also want to recognize Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz, who is also with us.

We'll start, as we usually do, with updated numbers and charts.

Today, we are announcing an additional 2,146 positive test results, pushing our statewide total to 111,188. Please note that, because of our early start time today, these numbers are incomplete as they only reflect the positive results received as of last night.

As we look at the curve of new COVID-19 cases, it remains flat, but as we will discuss in a few moments, before we can get ourselves on the road to recovery, we need this curve to bend down and stay down.

And, sadly, we also must report 106 additional deaths, meaning that we have now lost a total of 6,044 residents to COVID-19 related complications.

In our health care system, as of last night's reporting, there were 6,407 patients hospitalized for COVID-19.

Our Field Medical Stations reported 75 patients.

There were 1,801 patients in either critical or intensive care, and this number is down roughly nine percent from where it was last Monday.

Ventilator use continues to trend downward, to 1,303 currently in use – this is down 18 percent from just one week ago.

There were 314 new hospitalizations yesterday, and the trend line continues to point in the right direction.

And, for the 24 hours preceding 10 p.m. last night, our hospitals reported 480 total discharges. We continue



to see discharges exceed new admissions.

This data, which we receive and report every day, is the measuring stick of our progress against COVID-19.

And, to be clear, our progress to date has been driven by the hard work of tens of thousands of dedicated health care professionals and first responders. And, it has been aided and amplified by the work of the millions of you who have kept the need for social distancing and personal responsibility close to your hearts.

And, this progress has been carried on in the memory of those we have lost, and in solidarity with the family and friends left behind.

Because of the work of our New Jersey family, we can announce today a vision to put our state, and our people, on the road to recovery.

However, there is still much work to be done. If we let up even one bit with our aggressive social distancing measures too soon – even one day too soon – we can easily see ourselves skidding off this road.

As I have said several times before, I – and everyone up here, and our respective teams – will be guided by one overarching principle – and one principle only – as we plan our state's reopening.

It is this – public health creates economic health.

That's the order in which we must proceed. It means that before we reopen non-essential stores and businesses, before we can reopen our parks, or before we allow in-person dining in our restaurants – among any host of other activities – people need to know, first and foremost, that their health will be safeguarded from COVID-19.

With that principle as our starting point, we can put ourselves on The Road Back – with a clear vision for moving forward, and guided by objective metrics and mileposts we must meet to move forward.

The Road Back is driven by data, science, health progress, and common sense. We will use rigorous standards that are equally smart and thoughtful. And, everything we do will be filtered through our New Jersey values.

This road map is designed with one goal only – to restore the health, strength, and well-being of New Jersey for the long-term.

But, let me repeat a basic truth – until we give the public confidence that they should not be fearful, we cannot take further steps. A plan that is needlessly rushed is a plan that will needlessly fail.

As we travel this road, we will ensure that every community is along with us.

I had a good conversation Saturday with Linda Goler Blount, President and CEO of the Black Women's Health Imperative. We know from the data that COVID-19 has had an outsized impact on our communities of color. So, we must not only ensure that these communities can thrive again, our system must ensure equity as we get to that point.

COVID-19 did not create the inequalities in our society. But, it laid them bare. So, this is also our opportunity to help close those gaps.

We will also ensure that our road back merges with those being traveled by our regional partners through the Multi-State Council.

This isn't just about New Jersey. For us to rush ahead of either Pennsylvania or New York, or any of our other four state partners – or vice versa – would risk returning our entire region back into lockdown mode.

Now, to be clear, this doesn't mean that we will, or even can, take every step at the exact same time, or in the exact same way, as our neighbors.

But, we will share information and make decisions based on the guidance of our public health and security experts, and with an eye on our north star, which is to protect lives across our seven states and across our nation.

And, I think I speak for all seven governors when I say we only want to have to do this once.

So, here are the six principles that will keep New Jersey on the road back, using renewed public health to create renewed economic health.

Adhering to the first four principles will secure our public health...

One, following trends of sustained reductions in new COVID-19 cases and other key metrics reflecting a decreasing burden of disease;

Two, expanding testing capacity and speeding-up the return of results;

Three, robust contact tracing;

And, four, ensuring safe places where those positively diagnosed in the future can isolate;

When we have accomplished these, we can move to principle number five, responsibly restarting our economy to restore our economic health.

And, to secure our future, we move to principle number six – ensuring our resiliency.

If we follow this road we give ourselves the best possible chance to succeed in the months ahead.

Our first order of business is to secure the public's health, and, as I noted, this will require us to meet our first four principles.

The Stay-at-Home Order which has been in effect since March 21st will remain in effect in its entirety until further notice.

For us to move out from underneath this order, we will need to see, at the least, a sustained reduction in the number of new positive COVID-19 test results, new COVID-19 related hospitalizations, and other metrics.

And, we also will need to see our hospitals step down from functioning under a crisis standard of care.

We will be looking for trend lines that show 14-day decreases. We cannot look at just one day or one snapshot in time and say we've succeeded or failed. We will need to look across a length of time, and to not be distracted by statistical noise.

We need to ensure we have a robust and fully functioning healthcare system ready to meet the challenges ahead. And, it's not just our hospitals, but also ambulatory facilities, long term care facilities, provider practices – everywhere health care is delivered.

And, when we see fewer cases, and fewer hospitalizations, we know our system will be prepared for these challenges.

Second, we must have a significantly ramped up diagnostic testing plan in place. We need to, at the least, double our current testing capacity.

I am proud to announce that we are actively working toward doubling our diagnostic testing capacity by the end of May, and having everything in place – from the kits themselves to the lab capacity necessary to ensure quick turnaround of results.

We will have a flexible testing plan that is accessible to all residents who need it – whether it be through walk-up and drive-thru sites, tests at local pharmacies, or even at-home testing capabilities. We will prioritize testing for health-care workers, other essential workers, and vulnerable populations.

And, we will ensure those who test positive will be linked to a health care provider.

Our system will also be prepared to engage in targeted surveillance testing within communities, to further protect against the resurgence of COVID-19 and to build datasets that can help us better understand its spread.

To achieve these aims, we will need significant support from our federal partners, and we will continue to expand our partnerships with private-sector labs, and with institutions like Rutgers University, which have created innovative new testing platforms.

And, we are working closely with the White House, which has agreed to be a partner in helping us meet this important threshold.

With this expanded testing in place, we can move to our third marker – robust contact tracing.

Whenever a new positive COVID-19 test is returned, we must be able to leverage not just that individual's recollections, but also employ new technologies to help identify those with whom that individual may have come into contact.

We will need to recruit and deploy an army of contact tracers whose sole purpose will be to identify these individuals, so we can follow-up and ensure they do not contribute to further spread of COVID-19.

At the heart of much of this effort will be our local health officials, who have done amazing work throughout this emergency. And, backstopping all of this will be our Department of Health and its experienced and dedicated professionals.

According to national guidance, a proper program will require anywhere from 15 to 81 persons engaged in contact tracing for every 100,000 residents.

For New Jersey, this can mean the need for anywhere between roughly 1,300 to more than 7,000 people to take on this work. But, we are also actively engaging a number of tech companies in a search for innovative solutions that can assist in this massive undertaking, and not only make the work of human contact tracers more efficient, but perhaps mean we need fewer of them.

And, this moves us to our fourth step in securing public health – to the greatest extent possible, we will need to provide those who do test positive in the future with a safe and free place to isolate themselves and protect others from COVID-19. We must also be prepared to support these people with wrap-around services, as needed.

We are fully prepared that, when we restart our economy, we will see new COVID-19 cases. That much we are sure about. Our goal will be to prevent these new cases from multiplying.

Meeting these four benchmarks – a sustained drop in the curve, expanded testing, contact tracing, and safe places for people to isolate – is critical to giving our residents confidence that we are not only in front of this crisis, but that when we do restart our economy, they should not fear going out and being part of it.

And, restarting our economy and returning people to work will be done methodically, strategically, and responsibly. This is our fifth principle.

To guide this process, tomorrow I will be announcing the formation and the members of the Governor's Restart and Recovery Commission, a group as diverse as it is talented – economists, business leaders, labor leaders, and health care experts among them, with local, national, and global experience and knowledge.

It will be their task to balance multiple competing needs to ensure we arrive at equitable decisions that work for every community in our state. And, I will ask them to help us, and our businesses, leverage any and all available federal funds and programs to support our recovery.

I will ask the Commission to give the highest priority for reopening using a clear standard of “essential and safe” – beginning with businesses, industries, and activities which are not only essential to our economy, but which provide the lowest risk of disease transmission.

Then, we can move up the matrix, bringing more businesses and activities online until we achieve a fully functioning and open economy.

As we begin this restart, however, expect to see the continuation of social distancing measures – including, potentially, requirements for face coverings in certain locations and for work-from-home directives for employees who do not need to report to a physical location.

I want nothing more than to see every Main Street filled with shoppers and diners once again. I want our construction sites roaring with activity once again. I want to see the Shore humming through the Summer.

We will move as quickly as we can, but as safely as we must.

We have to be thoughtful in how we unfold our economy. This virus is now among us, and our task will be to contain it as best we can. But, with our public-health protocols firmly in place, and with our health-care system prepared, you should not fear heading back to work or elsewhere.

And, finally, we cannot think of COVID-19 as a one-and-done.

Whether we are hit with a rebound of COVID-19, or a different strain, or an altogether new virus outbreak, we have learned valuable lessons that we would be foolish to ignore.

Ensuring New Jersey's resiliency for the next outbreak – and that no one will be left unprotected because of racial or socio-economic status – must be part of our response to this outbreak. COVID-19 showed no favorites in ravaging our state, and neither will we in preparing for the next wave.

We must use this window of opportunity to fill gaps and fortify our health care system. I will be looking to see that our hospitals and health care systems – and anywhere else healthcare is delivered – have the personal protective equipment, ventilators, supplies, and staff they will need to provide the highest quality of services.

At the state level, we will ensure that we, too, have the supplies to backstop our healthcare facilities, and our first responders and essential workers. That means building our own state stockpile of PPE – from masks to gloves and everything in-between – so we can properly outfit not just our front-line health and public safety responders, but also our essential workforce.

And, it also means we must have ventilators on-hand that we can push out to hospitals before they hit crisis mode. Throughout this process, we have purchased hundreds of ventilators. Don't think for a moment that we're going to be sending any of them back once the current emergency ends.

We cannot find ourselves in another situation where we must rely on the federal government, or our corporate and philanthropic partners, to source what we need. We must build our resiliency now.

And, governmentally, we now have a playbook that we have put together and can refer to – or hand off to future administrations – complete with the framework for the dozens of executive orders and other processes necessary for facing a global pandemic head on and emerging stronger from it.

In the course of just two months, our entire world – and our entire worldview – has changed. Pandemics aren't something in a far-off place that we just read about in the news anymore. We are living it right here in one of the most advanced states in the most advanced nation in the world.

And, even as we work to put New Jersey back on the road of progress and prosperity, we know that this war is still far from over.

We need to continue focusing on our social distancing, and taking the steps necessary to push the curves of new cases, new hospitalizations, and COVID-19 related deaths down, so we can move down this road.

I don't know when we'll be able to formally and finally start this journey. Hopefully, if we all keep at it, it will be soon.

But, just as we began planning our response to COVID-19 six weeks before our first positive test result even came back from the lab, we will be ready to put the car in gear as soon as we see a green light.

This is a plan for how we move forward – not if we move forward.

So, let's do this together.

Let's start by lowering the curve. We can do this if we all keep focus over the coming weeks. And, when we do this, it will be that much sooner that we are able to reach our destination – a New Jersey that is restored to economic health because we took the steps to restore, and secure, our collective health.

That all said, I will now turn the microphone over to Congressman Malinowski.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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