

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 30th, 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 on my right, who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, great to have you both here. The guy to my left, who needs no introduction, the Superintendent for the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. Likewise, Pat. Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples is with us. Chief Counsel Matt Platkin will be joining us shortly.

We're starting a bit later than usual. And again, I appreciate everyone's patience and willingness to bear with us. As you now know, because we had the opportunity and honor to meet with the President and his team at the White House this morning into early afternoon, I was honored to be joined by Judy and our Chief of Staff, George Helmy, there's Judy right in front of us there. We had a productive and broad discussion about our COVID-19 mitigation strategies and our road back to restarting our economy. I thank the President and his team for the partnership that they've shown us throughout this emergency, from providing much needed personal protective equipment for our frontline workers to equally vital ventilators, to FEMA's partnership in our drive-up testing sites at both Bergen Community College and The PNC Bank Art Center, to the tremendous work of the US Army Corps of Engineers in helping us build out our hospital capacity.

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And I also made clear our need for direct financial support for our state. I told them that federal funding for states, not just New Jersey, by the way, but every state ravaged by COVID-19, both red and blue, is vital to ensuring that our recovery, when it begins in earnest, is allowed to continue without interruption.

Here in New Jersey we have made tremendous advances in righting our state's financial house and reversing course after years of budgetary mismanagement, by the way, on both sides of the aisle. We cannot have that progress stopped in its tracks, nor should we be gutting the very programs that our people in our state rely upon to lift ourselves up throughout our recovery. This money is not a bailout. It is about funding our response and keeping our police, firefighters, EMTs, educators and other frontline workers on the job. We need the federal government as a partner in our restart and recovery, just as they have been in our mitigation. We have pointed New Jersey in a new, more responsible and sustainable direction and we need to be able to stay pointed in that direction.

At every stage, this has been a team effort and there's no reason for that to stop now, and especially as we approach the time when we're going to need our partners the most. As I said, it was a very good and productive conversation and I'm happy to report that it has already produced important results for our state. I'm proud to announce that New Jersey is receiving 550,000 new COVID-19 test kits and 750,000 swabs from the federal government. This is a tremendous boost to our overall testing capacity. And as I have noted many times already, having a robust testing program is a not just a key thing in the here and now, but a key principle for our being able to get back on the road to recovery.

We've also secured a commitment that 358 nursing homes in New Jersey will be receiving a direct shipment of PPE, or personal protective equipment, from the federal government, and that will include roughly 220,000 masks, 19,000 goggles, 200,000 gowns and 1 million gloves. For this, in particular, I want to thank both the President and Rear Admiral John Polowczyk for their assistance. This proves that it is possible to put people over politics.

It's no secret that the President and I disagree on some things, but that's not going to stop me from doing everything I can to make sure that New Jersey has all the resources we need to move forward. My focus is on getting things done in this unprecedented pandemic for all 9 million people who call our state home. Again, I am grateful to President Trump, Vice President Pence, Ambassador Dr. Birx, who is with us today, and so many others on their team, including in the Oval Office, for our discussions. A lot of Jersey folks, in addition to the President who knows the state very well. I want to thank in particular Jared Kushner, Kellyanne Conway and Larry Kudlow, each of them a New Jersey product, and the entire team for their willingness to work with us throughout this process, and I look forward to our continued work.

Allow me if I could to switch gears, and let's go to today's updated numbers and charts, and may this never be about just numbers and charts. Today we're announcing an additional 2,633 positive test results for a statewide total of 118,652. Looking at the graph, we see the uptick from today's number, but we know we can just as easily push that back down. And if you look at the total number of cases, more people have exited the two-week incubation window, roughly 69,200 of them, that have received positive test results over the past two weeks. And that number, by the way, is 49,400. And across New Jersey, the rate of doubling new cases continues slowing in most counties, and you see that lighter shade, you've got a lot more counties in that over 30 days that it takes to spread this virus, and that's good news. We need that map to continue to get to the lightest shade possible for all of our counties. And remember the southern counties, while the days to doubling may not be as notable as those that are in the Central and North, the fact of the matter is those numbers are lower and the virus, as Judy has reminded us, has sort of migrated through the state from North to Central and now more so in the South.

The only way we can get New Jersey on the road back is if we all continue to practice social distancing over the coming weeks to really bend this curve down and to keep it going down. And let me be perfectly clear this upcoming weekend, with the reopening of our parks and golf courses, will be a crucial test. This is a test that we must pass, and we will be closely monitoring what happens in our parks and on our golf courses to ensure that we pass this test. As I said yesterday, we are placing tremendous trust in you to keep up with your social distancing. In fact, you have earned that trust. You've done an extraordinary job. But if we see this weekend what we saw that first weekend in April, I will not hesitate to reverse course and close our parks

again. That will bring me no joy, by the way. Bring me absolutely no joy, but we'll have no choice. We must be focused. We know that the overwhelming majority of you have taken this to heart and have been doing the right things. Do not let a minority of knuckleheads ruin this.

In our healthcare system, as of last night's reporting, as you can see, there were 6,137 patients hospitalized for COVID-19. We continue to see this number decreasing and that is a very good sign. In just one week, in fact, the number of hospitalized patients has dropped by 15%. Our field medical stations reported 50 patients. There were 1,765 patients reported in either critical or intensive care, and this continues the overall downward trend across the past week. Ventilator use currently stands at 1,271 and this is the lowest that number has been since April 4. There were 502 new hospitalizations yesterday and on discharges, 514 live patients were released from our hospitals yesterday, which is a slight increase.

Again, these are real numbers, showing real and so far positive trends. This data is a crucial measure of how we're doing in terms of both public health and healthcare readiness. If we continue to push the lines on those graphs downward as we have been, and I say that because these lines don't go down on their own, they only go down when we keep doing what we, all 9 million of us, are doing. We keep doing that and our job and doing our part, we get back on the road much more sooner and much more prepared for what's ahead. So again, remember, public health creates economic health. Public health creates economic health.

Now today, with the heaviest of hearts, we are reporting 460 additional deaths from COVID-19. Our total so far is a staggering 7,228. Extraordinary. As we do every day, let's remember some of those from our New Jersey family who we've lost.

This is Raymond, Ray Bullus of Freehold. Ray was a Bayonne native but settled in Monmouth County after completing his studies in math and computer science at Monmouth College. He got a job in Lakewood as a programmer, and after that he retired and settled into life in Freehold, which he called home for the past 20 years. He took joy in music and in computers, and in practicing karate, first with his children when they were young and then continuing on his own well into his retirement. He's survived by his children, Timothy, Jamie and Raymond and his sister, Melanie Brandon, with whom I had the honor of speaking. She actually lives in California. Ray, God bless you and God bless your soul and memory.

We also remember Edward Ed Konciak, who called North Arlington home for the past 26 years. He turned 66 just three days before his death. Ed was a longtime employee at UMDNJ in his native Newark before getting a new job as an IT manager at Securitas in Parsippany, a post he held for seven years before retiring only one year ago. Sadly, Ed suffered a very bad fall just before Christmas in a pickup basketball game that resulted in a traumatic brain injury. And he was on the road to reclaiming his health from that setback, with hopes of being able to return home, when COVID-19 took him. Ed leaves his wife of 41 years, Kathy, with whom I had the honor of speaking yesterday. By the way, Kathy was born Murphy, and Kathy remain by his side throughout not just the good times, but also throughout his recovery over the past five or six months. He also leaves behind many nieces, nephews, relatives and friends. He and they all are in our thoughts and prayers.

And by the way, without getting into the privacy and details, Kathy walked me through some of the saga that Ed and she had gone through since last December 20th, and it brought to life the vivid reality that so many are facing with loved ones in long-term care facilities. It was extraordinarily challenging for her and for Ed, and ultimately he passed.

And finally, we also remember a giant Doloris Dockery, who was a champion and role model for countless women living with HIV. Doloris was a leader at the Hyacinth AIDS Foundation where she worked for the past 15 years, with her most recent service coming at the Hyacinth Health and Wellness Clinic in Newark. Deloris learned she was HIV positive back in 1994 and never allowed that diagnosis to become a stigma. In addition to her work at the Hyacinth AIDS Foundation, she was active in multiple advocacy groups for those living with HIV, and quickly garnered a reputation that was recognized both nationally and around the world. She represented North America on the International Steering Committee of the International Community of Women living with HIV AIDS. She was a member of numerous boards, councils and committees and was the first woman to chair the Global Network of People Living With HIV/AIDS. I spoke with her son Philip yesterday. God bless her and God bless him and I extended to him and his family, and many, many friends,

including her granddaughter, our many thanks to his mother for her years of selfless community service. I told him that she was a hero, including to yours truly, but to so many, and she was only 60 years old. She died at her home in Union. May God bless you, Deloris.

The people we remember here every day are the faces of COVID-19. They are not and they should never be just seen as numbers on a chart. They were real people who accomplish great things, raised families and made a difference in the world around them. And it is for them that we will continue this fight and that we will win this fight.

Moving on, a couple of brief announcements, if I may. We are making real progress on meeting the second key principle of our road back. As I detailed on Monday, that principle is expanding our testing capabilities and making testing more accessible. Certainly the big lift from the federal government, the Trump administration today, is a huge step in that direction. But additionally, I'm proud to announce that at the Department of Corrections, universal testing for inmates and staff is expected to start as early as the end of next week. This is a result of a partnership between the department itself and Rutgers University on the development of a comprehensive plan to expand testing for all inmates and staff. And I thank especially Commissioner Marcus Hicks for his commitment, and also to Rutgers, Brad Strom and the whole team, for theirs.

Through Commissioner Hicks and his team, preparations have been made for the proper response to testing outcomes, and the overriding principle remains to protect people's health and allow for the necessary medical separation of those who do test positive, while ensuring the safe operation, obviously, of our facilities. In addition to this expansion of testing, I'm pleased to also announce that the department will soon begin providing non-congregate shelter for its staff who have been exposed to COVID-19. And this is a necessary step as we continue our overall fight.

Additionally on testing, all NJ Transit employees will soon have access to COVID-19 testing at the American Dream site in East Rutherford, which has been serving our first responders and frontline healthcare workers. Make no mistake, the men and women of NJ Transit have been an essential part of our COVID-19 response. They're the way many of our other frontline responders and essential workers in fact, get to their jobs.

Ensuring the health and safety of the men and women on NJ Transit also means enhancing public confidence in our mass transit system, and we know that our overall restart and recovery lies on ensuring that residents have greater confidence in their ability to get to work, or the store, as our economy begins to reopen in the weeks ahead. NJ Transit is working to expand access to similar testing sites in Central Jersey and in South Jersey, so stay tuned for more on this. I want to express especially my appreciation to Smart TD Local 60 President and friend, Jerome Johnson, and New Jersey State Council President of the ATU, Orlando Riley, for their partnership and hard work.

Across the state there are 104 locations where residents can be tested for COVID-19. A listing and a map of the 31 publicly run and community-based testing sites can be found on our information hub at covid19.nj.gov/testing. In addition, there are 73 other privately operated sites across the state to which your primary care practitioner can direct you.

As I noted, an expanded and accessible testing program is the second of the six key principles we put forward on Monday. Having this in place is essential for us to stay on the road back, and these announcements today, including receiving the half a million kits from the federal government means we are on our way.

Now before I hand things over to Judy, I want to continue our practice of giving some well-deserved shout outs to those in our communities who are going above and beyond to help us through this emergency. First up, are the members of the Westampton Police Department in Burlington County. The police in Westampton wanted to thank the many residents who have been adhering to social distancing and staying at home. So using donated funds, over the weekend, they bought 275 pizzas and delivered them to houses across the township where families were doing the right thing to help stop the spread of COVID-19. And to supply the pizza, they relied on local pizzerias, supporting the small businesses right in their own backyard. So to Chief Stephen Ent and the entire Westampton force, thank you for showing residents that staying home is its own reward, and New Jersey thanks you for your service. I know that's a force that Pat knows well and they deserve that shout out.

And here's a story from Cresskill in Bergen County. EMT Shawn Pandolfi and Paramedic Joanne Piccininni recognize the challenges that many frontline healthcare workers faced in shopping for items for their own homes after their workday ended, so they formed Help Frontline Heroes, which is doing the shopping for them and delivering care packages with items like soap, hand sanitizer and laundry detergent, along with some non-perishable foods to healthcare workers at their homes. So for remembering that our healthcare heroes need a lift once they leave the hospital each day, to you, Shawn and Joanne, New Jersey thanks you.

And a reminder to each of you, please send us the stories in your community using this social media hashtag #NJThanksYou. We love to see how community spirit is getting us all through this. And again, before I turn things over to Judy, a reminder that we'll be closely monitoring the situations at our parks and golf courses this weekend. We know that the overwhelming majority of you will be doing the right thing and following the need to keep a social distance from others. Personal request, please put a mask or face covering on, in addition to keeping social distancing. Do the right things. Don't let a few knuckleheads ruin it for the rest of us.

And with that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, she joined me this morning in the Oval Office, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, I am as pleased as the Governor is to report that our hospitals saw 6,317 hospitalizations of COVID-19. In fact, this is the lowest of the hospitalizations since April 2. We experienced the peak on about April 13th and 14th. At that time, our hospitals were treating 8,200 COVID-19 individuals. We have seen a flattening since then and a decline this week.

There are 1,765 individuals in critical care, and 72% of them are on ventilators. This is basically flat, so our hospitalizations appear to be going down but our individuals, our patients that need critical care is basically staying the same. Today, we're reporting 2,633 new cases for a total of 118,652 cases in the state, and 460 additional deaths. As the department reviews the death records and matches them to existing cases, we find deaths that have occurred in the past and we are adding them to the total death count. So as of today, there's a total of 7,228 fatalities in our state.

When we look at the hospitalizations, it's important to note that the Northern hospitals are reporting available capacity, both in intensive care and also in medical surgical beds. However, the Central region is still feeling a bit stressed by hospitalizations, and the Southern region is actually seeing increases.

As we look at the deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 52.5%, Black 19.7%, Hispanic 17.3%, Asian 5.3% and other 5.2%. There are 497 long-term care facilities in the state now that are reporting COVID-19 cases, for a total of 18,533 COVID-19 cases in these facilities. The survey team has been out and surveyed 54 total; one specialty hospital, one dementia care home, several assisted living, I think it looks like five, and the addition long-term care or what we would call nursing homes. These are focused infection control surveys looking at staffing, availability of PPE, and the capacity of the organization to cohort their residents.

At the state veterans homes, among a census of 700 residents, there have been 275 residents that tested positive and sadly, they are reporting four additional deaths for a total of 108 deaths of our veterans. At our state psychiatric hospitals, 160 patients have tested positive and there have been nine deaths among patients from a census of 1,257, and that has remained the same for the last several days.

According to our lab data, of the laboratories sending us COVID-19 results, 222,241 individuals have been tested; 92,975 have tested positive, for a positivity rate of 41.83%. That concludes my daily report and as always, stay connected, stay safe and stay healthy.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you and thank you for all, including representing us so extraordinarily well this morning at the White House. A couple of quick things, that positivity number is low, it's a cumulative number, as Ed reminds us. That's since the beginning. Again, this is an overwhelmingly symptomatic group, and that's the lowest it's been in a while, so that is an important number, I know, for Ed and the epidemiologists.

Secondly, counties, cumulative cases positive, again it's the same six with the most, Bergen followed by Hudson, Essex, Union, Passaic and Middlesex. However, the new cases that we're reporting give a little bit more texture in the migration piece of this. It's Middlesex and Passaic literally tied, followed by Hudson, Essex, Union and Mercer. We discussed Mercer earlier today. That's the first time, that's the overnight testing. Lastly, Dan Bryan, can I ask you a favor? We are occasionally doing the regional charts, hospitalization charts, can we try to work one of those in tomorrow? The North, Central, South. And again, the point that I think you've made today that we made yesterday with the chart is the curve is up, it's flat to down North, Central, it's up in the South, which is what we expected, number one. But number two, the numbers of cases are a lot lower. Thank God, let's hope it stays that way.

And I incorporate by reference comments that we've made, I think, now every day for three or four weeks, the representation of the African American community among fatalities versus the overall society in New Jersey, and that's something that we're very focused on and very concerned about.

With that, Pat Callahan, great to have you with us. Thank you for your leadership. Anything on compliance, PPE, infrastructure or other matters? Thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon, everyone. With regards to last night's compliance, overnight compliance, Newark issued 49 EO violation citations in West Deptford, a woman who was taken to a crisis center for evaluation spit in an officer's face. In Mount Ephraim, repeated reports of a convenience store operator not wearing his mask. Both the owner and an employee were cited for that. In Irvington, a furniture store which had been cited five days ago for operating a non-essential business was cited once again last night. In Passaic, the owner of a massage parlor was cited for staying open as a non-essential business. In Laurel Springs, a subject entered a convenience store, refused to wear a mask, police responded and issued a summons citation to that subject. In Elizabeth, a large crowd had gathered at a liquor store and were found to be gambling inside, which was in violation of the Executive Order, and nine subjects were cited there. And in Lakewood, one subject was cited for operating a non-essential business.

And just on two points, if I may, Governor. One is, we've seen, we have our Rock personnel monitoring the complaints on COVID-19 and we've seen an uptick on the reports on non-essential construction operating out there. And we are, I would say, well beyond the point to safely secure those non-essential sites, which was outlined in the Governor's Executive Order with regards to that. So, I just ask that for those, one who are operating at non-essential sites and should not be, and two those that see that and report it, can go to [covid19.nj.gov](https://www.nj.gov/covid19), where we have our troopers up at The Rock analyzing and assessing those complaints that come in on non-essential construction.

And lastly, I just wanted to point out that tomorrow will mark the 50th day of the State Emergency Operations Center being activated. Seven days a week, the men and women across federal, state, county and municipal agencies dedicated solely to keeping the citizens in New Jersey safe. I think at the beginning of this, New Jersey OEM was thrust into a role that wasn't really traditional, but if you think about it, just from hospital build outs, FMS sites, mortuary affairs, testing, PPE procurement, it is really something to be a part of. And I just thought I'd take 30 seconds to recognize them. Because they don't do it to be mentioned at one of these. They do it because they care about all 9 million residents in New Jersey and it is something that is not lost on me. And it's humbling to be inside of that Rock every day and watch them do it.

Right up to the three, Norma, Celeste and Lewis who do the cleaning at The Rock seven days a week. They are there before me and they leave after me, and they're keeping everybody who's involved in this response and recovery safe and healthy, and I just wanted to mention that, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, richly deserved. We're going to be over here, Matt. Richly deserved. A couple of quick things. We did a roll call, an honor roll call of some of the communications and IT folks. Dan, we should at some point do a roll call of the state, federal, county and municipal folks who are making the show go at The Rock, and it's all under your leadership, so hats off to you.

Secondly, I don't think we've got a VTC on the books for tomorrow with the White House, to the best of my knowledge. Unless Dan tells me otherwise, so I think we'll be together, unless you hear otherwise, tomorrow at 1:00 pm here and Saturday at 1:00 pm here. Dan is looking at his machine right now to confirm that.

Something tells me I got that wrong, unless you hear otherwise. We started late today. Sorry, tomorrow is at a different time, 2:30, that's my bad. Tomorrow is 2:30. Apologies. Tomorrow at 2:30, Saturday is at one o'clock.

We started late today, we're going to start questions. I'd asked you to keep it pretty short today, folks, if you could bear with us. I promise you, if we don't get to you, Dan and team will follow up with you. Matt Platkin, as advertised earlier, has joined us. Ma'am, we're going to start with you.

Q&A Session

Stephanie Faughnan, TAPinto Barnegat/Waretown: Yes, Governor, Stephanie Faughnan, I'm with TAPinto Barnegat/Waretown. Two things on the education end. I understand you got a letter from the superintendents asking you if you could make a decision about closing the schools sooner than later. And the second part of that is Governor Cuomo apparently waived the 180-day school requirement and is leaving it up to the districts. Would you consider that at all?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, is that it? The answer is we promised that – so what we've said is that we would have remote learning until at least May 15, and that we would let folks know at latest on May 15 about the balance of the school year. May 15 is two weeks from tomorrow. I've not seen the letter from the superintendents but I look forward to reading it. But as I said, I think yesterday, we would hope that we can beat May 15 in terms of an indication of where we're headed meaningfully. I don't want to put too much pressure on Dr. Repollet and Judy, obviously there's a big health component here. But that's something that I don't expect that we're going to wait till May 15 to make that call. I can't tell you exactly when.

Matt, where are we on waiving the 180-day requirement? I thought we had already crossed that bridge, but.

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: We took administrative action and then you signed the legislation saying that the days where schools are doing distance learning count toward the 180-day requirement. We have not considered waiving it in its own right and I'd have to review what Governor Cuomo did.

Governor Phil Murphy: I should say something that, I'll get out over my skis here. There's no announcement on education which envisions a shorter school year, to the best of my knowledge, with the exception of possibly spending some of the snow days that weren't used. So we're not going to shorten the school year. The only question is, is it going to be remote or physical? And so we'll come back to you as soon as we know. Thank you so much. Sir.

Phil Andrews, NJ News Network: Good afternoon, Governor. Phil Andrews, New Jersey News Network. You were sent a letter by the New Jersey AARP regarding family members who have members in some of these nursing homes. And they're concerned about not being able to get in contact with those nursing homes to find out what is going on.

And the other question is about the Governor Cuomo today saying that he's going to go ahead and disinfect mass transit by shutting it down every day, every 24 hours, and they're going to close MTA from 1:00 to 5:00, shutting it down completely, and then letting anybody who's a frontline worker use free Uber. How does that compare to what you're doing here?

Governor Phil Murphy: Sorry, letting any frontline worker...?

Phil Andrews, NJ News Network: Frontline workers, you know, doctors, anybody that has to use the transit system to get to work, right? It'll be shut down from 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. every day to be cleansed. He's offering, or the State of New York is offering free Uber services. I was just wondering how his plan differs from the plan that you guys implemented with SEPTA when you guys decided to start disinfecting all that transit.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll give some quick thoughts on each and then I'm going to ask Judy to come in behind me on nursing homes and maybe Matt, you may want to comment on NJ Transit. The lack of communication is deeply troubling and frustrating, and these are life-and-death situations to many. I don't want to get into the details of a situation I referenced earlier of a guy who's no longer with us, but a big part of the discussion I had about his situation, his past number of months. And again, in his situation, it wasn't COVID related, although ultimately that's what did kill him. But it was an enormous amount of frustration and anxiety about lack of communication.

And it is an uneven reality and it's completely unacceptable. We have let both operators know that directly, as well as the association that represents them. We expect more and better. Are there good apples in this? Yes, there are. There are operators who have been consistently doing the right thing and we applaud them. But unfortunately, there's been a disproportionate amount of folks who have kept loved ones in the dark and it's inexcusable.

I did not see Governor Cuomo comments on the MTA, so if you can bear with me and come back to you. Any mass transit system, particularly in the densest part of the country that's been dealing with what we've been dealing with, in New Jersey or New York, is undergoing a transformational period right now, both everything from hygiene to frequency of service to staffing. And, you know, we're no different from that.

I sense the MTA has got a similar set of issues. I think they may have even more acute issues than we have, and that's saying something when we've got service which ridership is down 90-odd percent. I can say this: we have got to be there for our frontline workers, we have no choice. Whether or not there's a better way to do that, that is outside of a rail car or a bus, I'm open minded. I'm hoping, based on these curves, that we're getting slowly but surely to a better place so that the clock is ticking in a good sense.

But I would also say this, that Commission that we put together, on the list of where we're going to need some advice is how to deal with mass transit, as a general matter, going forward, and how do you reintroduce that? On what basis, what capacities, what standards, etc.? So forgive me for not having seen Governor Cuomo. I may want to come back to you, Dan will keep me honest. Any other comment on the nursing home front, Judy?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I just want to remind everyone that we have a complaint hotline at the Department of Health that is manned 24/7. So please, use the hotline. You can go on our website and the number is posted. Before I leave here today, if I can, I'll give it to you. Oh, it's 1-800-792- 9770. I encourage you, if you have a complaint, it is manned 24.7, 1-800-792-9770 and we will follow up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. And by the way, there's a page on covid19.nj.gov as well. Thank you, sir. Please.

Reporter: Governor, NJTV did a piece a month ago about people who are waiting to receive their unemployment benefits. These people tell us they're still waiting and don't see any relief in sight. What is being done to remedy this situation? Do you have anything to say to the people who need this money and aren't getting it?

And I guess this is more for the Colonel. Is there any way to track any overlap of those with Executive Order violations in Newark and elsewhere in the state, against the IDs of those who are being tested positive for COVID-19? And what's the condition of the State Stockpile? Ventilators, PPE, etc.?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think we've addressed the unemployment question. I'll ask Matt if he wants to come in. We have chopped through an enormous amount of the backlog, the big nut that we had yet been able to crack sufficiently were independent contractors and we've gone to a better place within the past day or two. I would say to folks continue, please. We know this is trying your patience, but please try to remain patient and to repeat, you will not lose one penny of what's coming to you, including from the federal plus-up of \$600 a week. Again, deeply appreciate the frustration. I think we've made an enormous amount of progress. I don't have a number in terms of a backlog for you. Dan, we could get that, and Matt's going to weigh in. But also the fact that the independent contractor in particular was a group of folks that was, for particular reasons, a big challenge and I think we've gotten to a better place. Matt, do you want to add anything to that?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: I just got the updated numbers. As of April 25, roughly 930,000 workers have filed for unemployment in New Jersey since the middle of March. This was a multiple of many times exceeding the number of claims seen during Superstorm Sandy or the last recession. 622,000 are actively collecting unemployment. These claimants are receiving both the state unemployment benefits as well as the supplemental \$600 weekly unemployment benefits through the CARES Act.

Of the claims that are not yet processed which were just asked about, there's roughly 200,000. The majority are from the self-employed, gig workers and others who are not eligible for regular unemployment. The Labor Department is processing payments for the first groups of these workers on Friday.

Just one other point, Governor. The department has already distributed \$1.4 billion in unemployment benefits since the pandemic began.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Before Pat jumps in on both your overlap of Executive Orders and persons with positive tests, I would imagine that's going to be hard to square, but on the stockpile, this is something either Pat's got it or we'll get it to you. But know this is a movie, not a snapshot. What it looks like today is not going to have any semblance to what it may look like a week from now. I was just on a chain with a number of colleagues, for instance, trying to get 50 ventilators for ourselves, for our stockpile, from Germany, literally an hour ago. So this is a moving target, just to say that upfront. Please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor, and I would agree. It is a daily algorithm that we run. We have a meeting every morning at ten o'clock where we go through everything from the ventilators to the gowns to the gloves to the masks. The gowns are giving us, I think I mentioned it last week and we're still struggling to get gowns. We have an order in, but it hasn't been received yet. But it is a dynamic that changes. The 358 long-term care facilities that were supported by the feds' shipment was huge. We also have to think about not only the now, but even into the fall if this comes back. We're thinking strategically from a mitigation standpoint, how do we make sure that we have all that we need in our stockpile? So I'd say we are better off than we were a month ago, but it is a moving target, as the Governor said.

And with regards to the EO violations, overlaying that with positive tests, I think it's going to be a question that the Attorney General's Office would have to weigh in on. I do know that we were able to get the information with regard to the positive patients into our computer-aided dispatch systems. So if a fire house or if law enforcement was being sent to a house, it was at least flagged for public safety communicator to say, "Hey, trooper, just so you know, that residence is shown in the system to have a positive patient" Now certainly taken under consideration privacy and HIPAA, again, it's that balance of public safety and public health. But I think with technology we could do it, violations with that. I think it becomes more of a legal question and I don't know if Matt has a – Matt went to law school and I didn't.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat and I stayed at a Holiday Inn Express last night, so we're confident in our legal assessments. I think the lights got changed today. Maybe it's me, but something's going on with the lights, Dan, I'm not sure what's going on. I feel like we're opening on Broadway here. Anybody back there? I can't see terribly well. Okay, sir. Do you have a question? Yes.

Reporter: Governor, when you met with the President, you said the hit to New Jersey from COVID-19 may be \$20 billion to \$30 billion. How did your administration arrive at this number? And how much of the number is lost revenue? And how much is the cost of fighting the pandemic?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, how we arrived at is in consultation, obviously, with our team, both in Treasury, clearly, as well as the squad where Treasury is represented at The Rock. It's a combination of expenses as well as major revenue hits. And by the way, because I have to certify revenues and certify a budget, revenues are indirectly expenditures, right? So I've got to be able to balance. I have a constitutional requirement. So it's even a false choice to think about expenses versus revenues. The fact of the matter is, they're tied at the hip together. And it's an estimate. This is between, by the way, I should say between now and June 30, 2021. So it's what is now a 14-month window, and it's a huge number, right?

The fact of the matter is, though, it's the police, the fire, healthcare, educators, EMS, everybody who is at the front lines. We have got to back and fill, we've got to keep them employed. And the alternative is unthinkable, particularly in what is the largest and most profound healthcare crisis in our country's history, in addition to our state's. So we'll keep you, as we can fine tune that, we will. We give a range because we would be irresponsible otherwise to give a point estimate because it's just impossible to know. Matt, anything you want to add to that, or you're good? Okay, he's good. Thank you, sir. Elise, please. Good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. What's behind this abrupt jump in deaths? How many of the deaths reported today were the result of a reconciliation on the part of an extended care facility? Also, when do you expect the swabs and test kits to arrive? I'm assuming that the test kits are complete, but what about the swabs or the reagents on hand to use them?

Governor Phil Murphy: The arrival of the test kits and the swabs are imminent, or is imminent. That's happening as we speak in terms of getting to where they need to get to. I believe this is a full package, right? I think the answer is yes, it includes everything. But if I'm mistaken on that, allow me to come back to you.

Judy, any comment on the – or Ed? Just by giving the number earlier didn't give the proper context, as you rightfully point out, this is the single biggest day that we've had. And again, we've said this before, this isn't everyone who's passed since we were last together in this hall. This is a multi-day reality, but it is a very sobering number. Ed, do you want to jump in?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you. I want to say just a few things about the deaths overall. The first is that remember, this is a very backward-looking indicator. Meaning, if everything goes as smoothly as it can, from the time that somebody is actually infected until we would know and confirm that person as having died is going to be a matter of a couple, three weeks, no matter what.

Specifically, as far as what you're asking about today, a lot of this jump is going back and being able to essentially correlate between different databases and enter it into the systems. So I don't have the exact breakdown to me in front of me as to how many actually passed away in the last couple days compared to a further time ago. However, a significant number of those people did. So today was an unusual jump due to essentially catching up with some of that data that's coming in.

Governor Phil Murphy: It's also, Elise, an unusual jump for this time of the week. So you've heard us say before that Sunday, Mondays tend to be lower numbers, and then they get caught up on Tuesday. It's particularly sobering that this is now Thursday and that's happening. We'll come back to if there's any incompleteness – Dan, help me out on what we need in terms of raw material – but assume unless you hear otherwise from us, we now have what we need. Exactly how that gets deployed, stay close on that front. The plan is imminently being developed. Let's stay in the back and then we'll come down front, please.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Hey, Governor, It's Mike Catalini from AP.

Governor Phil Murphy: Mike, I didn't recognize you. How are you?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good, sir, thanks. I just wanted to ask, so the 550,000 test kits and the 750,000 swabs, is that part of how you will be able to double the testing in the state? And also, was there anything that you asked the President where he just said, "No, I'm sorry, I can't do that."? And then finally on your commandeering Executive Order, can you say whether that power has been used at all, and if so, specifically on what and the details about what has been commandeered and when? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Mike, sorry, the question on the 550,000 and the 750,000 again was what?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Is that how you're going to get to doubling? Is that the how?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yes. So our objective is to at least double testing capacity and capabilities by the end of May, and this is a huge step in that direction, yes. There are other steps being pursued. I mentioned Rutgers earlier and the Department of Corrections, but this is a huge element of our strategy.

To the very best of my knowledge and recollection, including today, nothing that we have raised with the President personally or with his team has been outright, heck no. And others will correct me if I'm wrong, but no one has said to us, heck no. We had a good discussion, including historical of where we are and where we want to be in terms of our finances but it was a very constructive discussion. But the answer is no, to the best of my knowledge, to the best of my recollection, I can't think. We didn't necessarily always get the amount that we asked for, as it relates to say ventilators or PPE, but we ultimately got at least some of what we asked for at every step of the way.

And by the way, today, a couple of you have asked about the swabs and the test kits, which is a huge, I mean, I'm not sure any other state has gotten this out of the administration so we again, thank them. But the PPE that is being shipped, overseen by the Admiral, directly to nursing homes, is another big ask and a big response to that ask. Pat, what have you been commandeering lately?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We have not commandeered one item that was registered from the front end of this. Thankfully, we didn't have to do that at this juncture.

Governor Phil Murphy: And that's a statement by the way, in fairness, also about compliance, so hats off to say the elective surgery places and the dentists who stood up and said, "You know what? You don't have to come get it from us. We will offer this up in the spirit of, this is a crisis and of doing the right thing." Thank you. Let's go to Matt and then Dustin.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Governor, sticking to unemployment for a moment. I'm curious if you could give any update on the enhancements that were made at the Department of Labor? Things like extra laptops being distributed, expanded hours and more staff. Any update on that and any plans for additional enhancements?

A colleague would like to know if people with developmental disabilities living in community housing would get universal testing like those people in developmental centers, and whether or not the National Guard officers would be sent to nursing homes.

And maybe just one quick follow up on these additional testing that you're announcing. Are you able to put into perspective, you said that we're doing between 7,000 and 9,000 tests a day? Are you able to put into perspective that number now, once we get all these tests, and it's up and running? Or is it premature?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, let me give a quick answer here on some of this, and then we're going to, I think, get back to you at least on part of it. Just to keep where I've been on the testing, it will at least double what we are now and I think we're closer to nine than we are to seven. So just assume that this will get us, to pick a number, at least to 20,000 tests a day. If someone disagrees with that, they'll come back to me.

We are actively and have actively looked at National Guard in the nursing homes. I've got nothing new on that at the moment, but that is something that is under and has been under active consideration. I'll go back to the top, unemployment. You're asking, Matt, what additional resources did we put in to deal with the surge? They definitely follow through, I just don't know what the math is. Do you happen to know it, body count or boots on the ground, and/or computers, laptops?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: We'd have to follow up with you, Matt.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you on that, if that's okay. And then, Judy, the developmental disabilities question that Matt asked?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: My understanding is we've going to do universal testing not only in the homes but in any of the congregate living or group homes. Today, at the end of the day, the Coronavirus Taskforce which was promulgated by the Governor, we have our meeting, and there will be a report on that. So perhaps I could give you more color on it tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dustin, you'll bat cleanup for us. Good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Thanks, good afternoon. On the federal funding piece, the President really didn't sound very enthusiastic about it today and said that's a tough question. Did he say anything in private that gives any indication of stronger support from him?

Will you rule out cutting or delaying pension payments to balance the budget.

And I just have two questions from the Philadelphia Inquirer. New Jersey ordered funeral homes to have closed casket ceremonies, which obviously causes families an emotional toll since they can't see loved ones before burial or cremation. Will the health department revise this directive?

And South Jersey funeral homes are alleviating pressure from North Jersey facilities and helping to cremate and bury the state's dead. As the virus picks up in the South, is the department prepared to see South Jersey funeral homes become similarly stressed in the coming weeks?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't want to put words in the President's mouth, so I can't say that I said can you give us X and he said you're done. But it was a constructive conversation. I don't say that just to be diplomatic. I walked him through what we had accomplished in the first two years, what we inherited, some of the history of that going way back, in some cases 30-plus years on both sides of the aisle, that the progress we had made, and that this was about, most importantly, about firefighters, police, educators, EMS, frontline workers. So it was a good discussion. I don't want to, again, put words in his mouth and it was far from a heck no. It was let me learn more about what's going on there.

I've got no comment on pensions other than we will do everything we can to meet our obligations. This is a huge deal for everybody associated with this, from the individual person who needs the money all the way to the rating agencies and everybody in between. We view this, and unless you hear otherwise, we view it as an obligation.

Judy and/or Pat, because I know Pat ended his birthday the other night on the phone with the Funeral Directors Association, so he's probably more qualified than I to answer this, but I can say this definitively. Will we ultimately change access to someone who is in late last stages of life and/or to services for that person, the answer is definitively, yes. What I can't tell you is when. I assume the answer on South Jersey funeral homes taken some steam off the North, will the North and Central funeral homes be there to help unburden them? The answer I think is again going to be yes. I can't tell you exactly what that looks like, but would either one of you want to add to that?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Just with regard to start with, the open versus closed casket. We are, I think, close to having a revision, an amendment out with regard to that directive. I was on the Governor's -- not kidding, I've been on the phone with the Funeral Directors Association and/or funeral directors every day this week, and certainly before. It is beyond -- I'll give you an example. I talked to a family member today who was told, whose loved one was taken to our Newark temporary morgue site today, but was told by the cemetery the burial will not be until June 1. And then you say why?

The one thing we're also struggling with is the concrete vaults that are used for the caskets when you bury are in short order too, so add it to the list of things that are in short demand. We're actively researching how to alleviate that too. I believe that directive is going to be amended and again, the funeral directors, I do anticipate as this kind of cascades south that you will see a greater stress in South Jersey funeral homes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you for that. I'm going to mask up here as we get ready to go. Again, tomorrow at 2:30. That was my mistake earlier, 2:30 here. Again, I want to thank Judy and Ed and your colleagues. As always, Pat to you and your team, Jared, Matt, the rest of the squad. We've got some choppy weather here, so everyone should be careful about that. We don't talk about weather as much as we used to, but that is a fact.

I just want to repeat something in the vein of thanks on a day that's pretty sobering when you look at the amount of fatalities that we've announced. The compliance continues to be overwhelmingly folks are doing what they know is right and what we've asked folks to do, which is to stay in, stay home, stay away from others. We have enormous gratitude for that and there's no question that correlates directly to our healthcare system being able to sustain itself in this crisis.

This is a big weekend in terms of our behavior, all of us. We're trying to let some steam off here. We're very sympathetic to the fact that folks have been cooped up for weeks on end, that there's a real mental health rationale to allow folks to be able to get out there and enjoy our parks or golf with the right protocols. We want that to happen, but we just ask you, please, do it responsibly. Don't congregate, keep social distancing, follow the rules. Wear something over your face, if at all possible.

And the reason I say that isn't just for the sake of state and county parks or playing golf, which it is, but we're in a little bit of an experimental mode here. If we can collectively do the right thing as we relieve a little bit of that pressure, it allows us a lot more degrees of freedom and latitude to begin thinking sooner of that, rather than later, about wargaming other steps that we can take. That, in combination with a huge step up in testing resources that we got today from the federal government, plus all that's going on already in the state with Rutgers and others on testing, you know, you can start to begin to see what a potential new normal might look like. And no one would rather bring that to you sooner than yours truly and the team here.

So again, this is a big weekend. We'll be back with you tomorrow. Before the weekend, I want to remind you one more time, and again, I say that mostly out of thanks and respect. New Jersey's complied unlike any other state in America, literally. We just need you to keep at it. God bless you all. We'll see you tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy

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