

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: March 21st, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Making a major announcement on our fight against COVID-19. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I've said a couple of times this week we're going to need a bigger boat. I did not necessarily say we're going to need a bigger room, but we certainly got one of those as well.

Thanks everybody for joining us and I'm sorry we're a little bit behind. We were deliberately trying to let the White House press conference play out a little bit longer, and that started quite late. So, forgive us for being a little bit behind today. Good afternoon, everybody.

I want to begin by thanking Rutgers Newark for opening their doors to us on a Saturday, when all the students are at home, in particular to Chancellor Nancy Cantor and the entire team here. We are deeply thankful and appreciative.

I'm joined today by some folks you now at this point know well. To my immediate right, the person who literally doesn't need an introduction Commissioner of Health Judy Persichilli; to her right the Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan; to my immediate left, the Adjutant General of the New Jersey National Guard Jemal Beale; and to his immediate left, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples.

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And to them and their teams I thank you, and to other members of their teams who are here today including members of the Guard, State Police, members of the Homeland Security team as well as Commissioner of Health. I also want to give a shoutout to my buddy Dante Colucci who lost his grandmother last night. So, she's in our prayers, Dante. God bless you, buddy.

Lots going on as you can imagine. Judy and Pat and Jemal will likely have comments about, among other things, testing and hospital bed capacity in particular. In the first instance, working in partnership with FEMA and in the second instance, working in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers.

We had our second day in the Bergen site at Bergen Community College. I think they shut down after 300-something tests. We are limited based on the PPE, based on the supplies that we're getting from the federal side to execute these tests, but I will tell you this: there are 1000 more people who got tested over the past couple of days than were tested at ADM yesterday morning. And that trend will continue. The Bergen site will be open again for business tomorrow at 8:00. My guess is, and Judy and Pat and Jemal can get into this in some detail, my guess is we're looking at several hundred a day would be my guess.

We are still on track to open the PNC Bank Arts Center site on Monday morning at 8:00 AM. And again, I want to give the team a huge shoutout for their support there. I'm going to go swing by that on the way home after this just to look at it with my own eyes and look at the preparedness. I know Judy will give you an update not just with her perspective on testing but also as it relates to the ongoing deliberations with the Army Corps on reopening wings, reopening hospitals, looking at repurposing other facilities.

This morning we received notification of 442 new positive test results. That brings our total to 1327. Judy as usual will give more detail particularly on the demographics and regional characterizations of those new tests, as well as five additional COVID-19 related deaths which brings our total amount of deaths to 16. God rest their souls. We keep each of their memories and their families in our prayers, and please join us in that regard. Again, Judy will have more detail on both the positive testing and what that looks like, as well as some topline information on the tragic deaths.

Again, I want to reiterate something that we've said from the get-go. The increase in the positive test results is completely expected. And to some extent you've got community spread as an element here but the overwhelming reason is our aggressive testing posture. We have been ahead of the curve on testing. It's not perfect, by the way, trust me. Nobody's patting anybody on the back here, no one's spiking any footballs. But we have been ahead of the curve on testing and the numbers will continue to grow significantly. There's just no other way around that and that will be many, many thousands.

And again, I know this may be counterintuitive to some, but the more data we have, the more information we have – and Judy and her team are experts at this – the more able we will be to break the back of this virus. So, the more information we have the better off we will be.

Again, these numbers as we've said all along are going to go up. We started meeting on this literally in January. I think it was Super Bowl Sunday we put our whole of government team. We had a conference call and put our whole of government Taskforce in place led by Judy. We've been taking steps along the way.

We mourn the tragic loss of life – let there be no doubt about that. Each and every individual pains us deeply and that will continue to be the case. But our job right now is severalfold – one is to expand the testing as fast as we can; two is to break the back of that curve, flatten that curve, and I'll be addressing that in a moment where we have taken aggressive steps and we will continue to take aggressive steps. And then, finally, is to expand our healthcare capacity.

We know that flattening the curve will take the pressure off the healthcare system. We just can't know exactly what the timing looks like, and we are almost certainly going to be in need of every single critical care bed we can find in the state – which is why Judy and Pat and their teams are so aggressively out working with the Army Corps of Engineers to expand that capacity.

Again, these numbers, the positive results are no cause for panic but they are a sobering reminder of the challenge we are confronting as one New Jersey family. As I've said before, while it's no time to panic it's also no time for business as usual. And it's with these individuals, both the precious loved ones who we've lost as well as folks who either are positive testing or will positive test – with all of that clearly in mind I make the following announcements.

This morning I signed an executive order directing nearly all of our 9 million residents to quite simply stay at home. As I said, we must flatten the curve and ensure residents are practicing social distancing. As I have said before, we can no longer maintain a sense of business as usual during this emergency. And again, I repeat, just as it is no time to panic but it is time to be smart, proactive, transparent, aggressive; it is also no time for business as usual.

And as we work in continued and increasing partnership with our neighboring states – in particular New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Delaware – it becomes even more vital that we all speak with one voice. We cannot run the risk of residents from one state simply moving their parties or their shopping habits across state lines.

So, under this executive order, all gatherings are cancelled until further notice. This means no weddings, in-person services, or even parties. This decision is not an easy one and it pains me that important life moments will not be celebrated in the way we are accustomed to. And I know this will be disappointing to many residents, but my singular goal – our singular goal, not to mention frankly my job – is to make sure we get through this emergency so that you can safely gather with family and friends later and enjoy many more birthdays and weddings in the years to come.

Anyplace people congregate is a place where coronavirus can be spread. This is no time for anyone to be acting selfishly and taking a gathering underground. But this is the time to think about your family, your friends, your neighbors and to do the right thing.

Additionally, I urge those who have homes at the Jersey Shore to not go to them at this time. The local infrastructure, especially the healthcare infrastructure and especially in the offseason is not prepared for the influx of part-time residents. So, there's absolutely no excuse for a party on the beach. Please stay at your primary residences.

Further, I am directing all nonessential retail businesses to indefinitely close their physical stores to the public effective at 9:00 PM tonight – by the way, 9:00 PM in particular out of respect of the Sabbath.

Only businesses critical to our response may remain physically open to the public, and that is an increasingly limited list: grocery stores and food banks, pharmacies, medical marijuana dispensaries, medical supply stores, gas stations, auto mechanics and repair services, convenience stores, banks and other financial institutions, hardware and home improvement stores, laundromats and dry cleaners, printing and office supply shops, pet stores, stores that sell supplies for young children, mail and delivery shops; and as we've already noted, restaurants, liquor stores and bars providing takeout services.

Additionally, all essential state, county and local public health, safety and social services will remain accessible. I want to give a shoutout in particular to my partner in government. We made a decision a couple of days ago to divide and conquer. I want a particular tip of the cap to Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver.

And work at construction sites may continue as can manufacturing, trucking and transportation operations. That is work that largely cannot be done from home. But aside from the limited exceptions, all retail businesses must close. And all businesses, not just retail but literally all businesses, must move their employees to work from home wherever possible.

Further, I signed a second executive order stating clearly that the rules that I've laid out supersede all other orders issued by county or municipal officials. We cannot have a patchwork of regulations that change from one town or one county to another. And I'll repeat what I've said over the past couple of days: folks' hearts are in the right place – that's not the question. But we've got to run this state with one set of rules, and that's what that second executive order in fact does. We must be on one page and reading from the same playbook as one state, period.

Now, even with this order in effect, and the main order I call the Stay at Home order – I think that’s the right way to think about this, stay at home. Even with this order in effect, life in New Jersey does not have to come to a complete standstill. Residents can still take a walk or go for a run outside. We do want people to stay healthy, both physically and mentally.

But – and this is a big but – If you do go outside for these activities or head to the grocery store or to some other essential place, we urge everyone – we’re not only urging it but ordering it. We’re ordering everyone to continue practicing social distancing and to keep a safe six-foot distance between you and others. We cannot have what we’ve seen too often in other states, again, where we tip our cap to the intentions but we cannot see people walking right beside each other, business as usual, casually as if nothing is going on here.

So, if you do go out, you must practice social distancing while you are out. Again, six feet is the amount of distance that is broadly recommended. But if you’re not doing what I just said, and going to a grocery store or a pharmacy and taking in some fresh air, at all other times and unless we need you in our response efforts, we need you to just stay at home.

At a time when new COVID-19 cases continue to be identified, and they will be in the thousands, and the number of related deaths sadly continue to rise, we have to change our behaviors. As I’ve said, from January we’ve been doing everything we can to aggressively get out ahead of this, and when needed we have adjusted our approach. And we are adjusting it meaningfully today as of 9:00 tonight.

I said this earlier and I want to reiterate this. I don’t take these measures, we don’t take these measures lightly nor do we take them easily. We have considered very carefully every aspect of daily life. We have taken great care to ensure that we would not have to go back and revise our work. We wanted to make sure we got this right at the first go.

We also recognize the impact this order will have on our small businesses who are the backbone of our economy and the employers of the majority of New Jerseyans. We know this will only add more hurt at a time when you are already immeasurably hurting. But we must take this step to protect our residents. And we remain absolutely committed to working with you to ensure that you have the help and resources you and your employees will need going forward throughout this emergency and beyond.

Employees who will be out of work should work through the Department of Labor regarding available benefits. Their best website is www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>). Again, any worker who’s out of work, the best place to go is the website www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>). And employers who can continue to pay employees, they’re urged to do so because of the benefits available through the recently passed federal response law. In other words, you’re not going to get compensated for an expense that you don’t have. So, for many reasons, including helping our workers and their families stay afloat, please do everything you can to keep them on the payroll.

This will not be the last time I mention this website today or probably in the days and weeks ahead. But for employers there’s a good, robust page as part of a new website we’ve set up: www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). I’ll come back to that in a moment. www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). We encourage you to go on there. And this is something that we recognize, that employees are hurting and employers are hurting and we accept that.

We essentially, the group of us here as well as our colleagues, we have only two choices in the broadest sense here. Number one, to let the virus run its course, to not take the steps that we’re taking and ultimately pay a huge price in fatalities and sickness and pay an enormous economic price. That’s one set of choices that has been available to us. From moment one we’ve rejected that. Our job collectively is to flatten the curve, break the back of that curve as aggressively and preemptively as possible.

That comes with economic pain, enormous economic pain in the here and now both for employees and employers. But at the end of the day we will get through this. We know that, unequivocally we will get through this. We’ll get through this together. And because we’ve taken that set of choices, while the economic pain is significant now, we will save many lives. We’ll keep a lot more people healthy, and frankly, at the end of the day, the economic pain related to what we’re doing will be a lot less consequential than had we let this virus run amok.

Those are the two choices that have been before us since day one. We have unequivocally taken choice two and we will continue to do so. That does not mean that we do not understand, appreciate and have enormous sympathy for the pain that this is causing. And I remain absolutely committed along with, I think frankly every Governor from both sides of the aisle, to getting the federal assistance we will need in every form it will be needed. And again, we have been calling out as a region, we believe it's a \$100 billion direct cash assistance requirement for just New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

And so, we have been burning of the lines with federal representatives as well as other Governors and all sorts of leaders. And I would just say, since we were together at our press conference yesterday, I've had meaningful conversations with Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senators Menendez and Booker among others in our Congressional Delegation, although frankly I think all of them; but direct conversations with Bonnie Watson Coleman, Frank Pallone, Donald Payne, Josh Gottheimer, Bill Pascrell. George Helmy, Matt Platkin and I have been back and forth with Chuck Schumer's offices. I've been on the phone directly since yesterday with Governor Charlie Baker in Massachusetts, Andrew Cuomo in New York, Ned Lamont in Connecticut, Tom Wolfe in Pennsylvania, Jay Inslee in Washington, Jeanie Raymundo and John Carney back and forth among others. And we are in so many respects in similar circumstances.

We need direct federal assistance to allow us to continue to work with those workers, those employers; to have the healthcare response; to have the offices of the National Guard as they are so nobly called up with the State Police and the Office of Homeland Security. The meter is running. We need to continue to be at the point of attack and we need the federal assistance to allow us to do that.

May I say something else, and a couple of thoughts before we close. We also urge residents to ensure that they are getting their information from reputable media and official government sources – from everyone, by the way as an example, here in this room. We know there is a growing amount of disinformation appearing on social media, dire warnings that are meant solely to sew fear and distrust including one especially ominous warning of a coming national lockdown. Please do not feed into the disinformation campaigns of others. You do not help anyone by spreading rumors.

So, I mentioned this a minute ago but I want to come back to this. To assist in getting the facts out to the public we have created a new online information portal, www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>), which is a one-stop for answers to frequently asked questions, important information and updates, and a list of phone numbers and other available resources. Again, that's www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>).

And I'm grateful in particular to the team at the Office of Innovation led by our colleague Beth Novek who worked in coordination with the private sector partner Yext, which donated its services to help create this vital resource. So, tip of the cap to Yext. I've mentioned a bunch of private sector players throughout this week and so many of them are stepping up in a big way, helping us out. It will take a village. We were with BioReference and LabCorp yesterday. I mentioned Verizon and Comcast and Home Depot earlier in the week, and Yext joins that list of august private sector partners.

Again, in conclusion, I know that the actions we are taking today are strong and they are going to change daily life, but they are absolutely necessary to our ability to stay out ahead of this emergency. This is a time for all of us to come together under one mission, to flatten the curve and slow and eventually halt, and break the back of the spread of coronavirus. It is not up to someone else to do. No one is immune from coronavirus. Winning this battle and getting life back to normal, even if we are looking at a so-called new normal, will take all of us coming together as the One New Jersey Family we are and we always will be.

Let's do this, New Jersey. Let's be smart. Let's save lives and together, assuming each one of us does our part, we will come through this and we will come through this stronger than ever before.

With that, please allow me to turn things over, I think the only other formal speaker today. And after Judy is done, Pat, Jemal, and Jared will join Judy and me in answering your questions. Please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon.

So, we certainly understand and appreciate that rising cases of COVID-19 are causing concern. We continue to take every step possible to protect the public health. The aggressive social distancing steps that the Governor has put in place are designed to protect you and your loved ones and are intended to prevent further spread. We expect that the spread of the virus can be slowed if we act now and if we act together.

In anticipation, however, of the coming surge of patients, the Department is working to identify unused inpatient hospital beds that could be brought online in the coming weeks to increase bed capacity. We know cases are going to increase. We're working to prepare now to be able to handle medical/surgical patients that will need care in a hospital.

We're looking at closed hospitals as I said yesterday, which would accommodate up to 300 patients each. I want the public to understand we are not developing COVID hospitals. Every hospital in New Jersey is expected to and will be caring for COVID-19 patients, or should I say, patients who have COVID-19. I want to make that clear. We still are taking care of patients and they happen to have COVID-19.

In addition, we want to bring online inactive wings of existing hospitals that could be used for inpatient capacity. We're working with the US Army Corps of Engineers and they are prepared to standup field hospitals particularly in the southern part of the state where bed space is more limited than in the northern part of the state. We're also collecting information on long-term care facilities that could take care of patients that are not COVID-19 patients, that are moving from the medical/surgical departments in hospitals to clear space for those that are more critically ill.

So far, we've identified almost 500 beds that are available right now. Another 500 could come online within two weeks, and another 400 would take about four to five weeks to get in working order. So, that's a total of almost 1000 beds in the next two weeks, and another 1300 after that. No options are off the table. Efforts to expand bed capacity are critical in emergency preparedness, and I want to give a shoutout and thank all of the hospital CEOs who are really standing up and partnering with us on this initiative.

As the Governor said, we're announcing 442 new cases for a total of 1327 cases in the state so far. Sadly, we have had five new deaths reported to the Department: a male in his 50s from Monmouth County, a male in his 80s from Essex, a male in his 40s from Bergen County, a female in her 70s from Morris County, and a male in his 90s from Bergen County. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families.

The county breakdown of the new cases is such: Atlantic 1, Bergen 113, Burlington 4, Camden 3, Cape May 1, Essex 34, Gloucester 3, Hudson 31, Hunterdon 3, Mercer 8, Middlesex 40, Monmouth 39, Morris 28, Ocean 13, Passaic 17, Somerset 7, Sussex 3, Union 38, Warren 2. And we're still gathering details on 54 additional cases.

Events are changing quickly and we know that many people are anxious and concerned. We certainly understand that. So, we encourage individuals with questions to call 211 or text NJCOVID to 898-211. The Department and the local health officials and healthcare providers are literally working around the clock to respond to these cases and to implement efforts to protect the health of New Jersey residents. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, before we throw it open, may I ask a couple. Just to make one statement, I believe this is still the case – although we have a total of 140 unknowns out of our 1327, Salem County continues to be the one county where we don't have a reported case, although I'm sure sadly it's a matter of time; although it may well be embedded in the unknowns that you're parsing through.

A question that I know has been asked by some of the folks here today, any color on adjacent health issues for any of the five blessed fatalities?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I do not have any underlying comorbids. I don't have that information yet. The volume of activity coming into the Communicable Disease Service is a little overwhelming but they're working through it. We will have that. What I do need to tell you is that of the new five, three are from post-acute facilities, either long-term care or

rehab. So, we're looking very critically at that as I announced yesterday. That is a concern so we will be looking at the long-term care facilities and rehab facilities a little bit more aggressively.

Governor Phil Murphy: I know you're going to speak to each of the particular facilities this weekend where those fatalities emanated from.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, absolutely.

Governor Phil Murphy: And I think one of the things we talked about earlier, hold the space of your consideration of potential steps, even further steps you may want to take with those facilities.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we will be to the degree possible, because they are serving a purpose, to decant our acute care facilities – particularly those that do skilled nursing and rehabilitation services. But we want to curtail as many admissions as possible to long-term care.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. I'd mentioned I spoke to Governor Inslee yesterday who's somebody I know well over the years. But in particular it was this particular challenge that they faced I think before anybody, in the state of Washington. So, thank you for that and I want to thank Pat, Jemal and Jared to be with us, along with Judy and myself, to field any questions.

Q&A Session:

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: Again, very explicitly, what can people actually do under this order? And can you detail the penalties for people who willfully ignore this? There's people who are out there now after weeks of already urging them. You're urging, you're telling – will they face criminal or civil penalties if they're out monkeying around?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me give you a general answer to your question and give you a little bit of how we've thought about this, and then, Pat, I'd like you to come in. Let me start with the if folks are monkeying around? We will take action. And Pat can get into some of the action. In fact, we had a very specific situation last night. We heard rumors on the shore of a town where there was some activity going on. Thanks to Pat and his team and working with the local police in that department, in that community rather – I'll leave the community nameless – the police went in and made their presence felt. It turns out there was no untoward behavior but good action was taken.

So, we have sort of two ways to go here. One way is to be really prescribed about what is on the list, as some other states have done; really prescribed about what is nonessential. We have chosen to be particularly prescribed about what is essential, and I gave you the list of entities and types of venues and types of activities that are essential. Beyond that, folks should assume certainly in retail that everything is nonessential and we mean it. And furthermore, if you are a business that is non-retail, we expect you to immediately go – assuming it's practicable – to 100% work from home. And we can't mandate your particular company in terms of how you do that but we expect you to do that period.

And we're doing it at the state. I mentioned last weekend I think we can't expect the private sector to behave in a certain way that we're not prepared to do so at the state level. So, we're doing that and we've been doing it since last Sunday. Each department, Judy has a unique set of challenges versus Pat versus Jared for example. But we want to be very clear about what is essential. We want you to assume that everything that's not on that list is nonessential; and that if you are a business and you make something or you happen to be a business of any sort that we didn't ask to be closed down, you've got to have 100% work from home policies in place. And we expect people to stay home.

And I would just say one more wrinkle on this is earlier last week we said if you're travelling around the state between 8:00 PM and 5:00 AM and you're nonessential, we want you off the roads. We're basically saying that's now 24 hours. We don't want you out there period. Pat, will you just talk a little bit about how we're going to enforce this and anyone else who wants to

weigh in?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I will and I know yesterday the Attorney General hosted the phone call which the Governor and I participated in. The Attorney General outlined the guidance. That guidance has been put out, John, it was last week to the degree that all 21 County Prosecutors have designated an Assistant Prosecutor to be on call. The 2C Statute, there's a few different ones but it's predominantly a disorderly conduct charge. So, when the Governor says we'll take action we're at that point.

Last week I know I talked about discretion and that being the greatest tool of law enforcement, but I think we're beyond that now given the measures that we've placed. And I just think if we hadn't put the measures we put in a couple weeks ago, where would we be today with the numbers? So, that 'we'll take action' is all police departments, all chiefs were advised of what those charging manuals are and where they can find them. And all of law enforcement including all 21 County Prosecutors are ready to enforce them and prosecute them.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, I know when I was laid up Gurbir was here earlier on in one of our gatherings, in particular as it relates to consumer protection and price gouging. And unfortunately we've had some examples of that. That may be a, I'll just say to my team, getting him back at the table with us, getting his perspective I think may be valuable.

Reporter: An analysis from ProPublica recently put the need for hospital beds at a projected 3000 in Newark over a twelve-month period. Is the state taking numbers like that into consideration when they're identifying how to meet the capacity? And have you identified how you will meet that capacity?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, are you saying that ProPublica has identified, just to make sure we repeat the question, 3000 critical care beds, the projected over the course of the next year?

Reporter: Over the course of twelve months the projected need for beds will be over 3000 in Newark alone.

Governor Phil Murphy: And you'd like our reaction to that, is what we're seeing a similar number and what our plans are?

Reporter: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Judy?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Certainly. We're not done with our predictive modeling. Some of it has to do with us making the right assumptions about how our mitigation interventions would take hold since we put them in a number of weeks ago. We're looking at the worst case though and we want to plan for the worst case. We've done an inventory of all the critical care beds that are currently operating in New Jersey which are about 2000. What we're doing now is looking at, if you're familiar with hospitals they have what they call stepdown beds. So, you go from critical care to a stepdown bed. The stepdown beds in most hospitals are fully monitored and can be handled as critical care beds.

We believe that the critical care beds and the stepdown beds together will give us enough critical care to handle a moderate surge. So, then you'll ask well, what happens down the road? You go from critical care to stepdown, to a medical/surgical bed and then you get discharged. You either go to a long-term care facility or a rehab facility, or a skilled nursing facility or homecare. That's what we're looking at the field hospitals for and opening up hospitals that are currently not available. They've been closed within the last five years. That's where those med/surg patients would go. And we start decanting the whole hospital, keep the critical care nurses, the intensivists that are used to working in that particular hospital, know the IT systems, the monitoring systems – we keep them together with critical care.

So, we're finalizing that. It will be available at the beginning of next week and we believe we will be with the field hospitals and the opening of closed wings and shuttered hospitals. We think we will be able to handle a moderate increase. If it goes to a more significant increase we need to be able to adjust critical care.

I'm more concerned quite frankly with the availability of the workforce and the availability of ventilators since this is a pulmonary disease that's hitting the lungs; it's causing bad pneumonias. So they're the two things concurrently we're working on: workforce with the Nursing Association and ventilators with aggressive outreach to vendors. And that's worked on 24/7, both of those items.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I just, Judy, underscore that? I think the planning as it relates to hospital beds is proceeding well but there's a long road in front of us. Our healthcare workers, we cannot say enough things about them and the heroism. I was on with one of the union representatives last night and they've been just stars, working under extraordinarily challenging conditions. Both for their benefit as well as the health of the patients that they're caring for, just to repeat something we've said I think at every single gathering – we are not remotely where we need to be on personal protective equipment.

So, I think Judy gave a great answer on the beds and we're doing everything we can to plan for that, but in the here and now, the so-called PPE we're not remotely where we need to be. And we continue to uncover every single stone both within our own hospital systems, what we can purchase as a state, donations from private sector players. We desperately need another slug from the Strategic Stockpile which we continually are asking for from our federal partners. That to me is the here and now. Is that fair to say?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Absolutely, absolutely.

Governor Phil Murphy: Both to protect the healthcare workers as well as to treat the patients as best we can.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor, I have two questions. So, Board of Education elections were pushed back. Did you intend to extend the terms of the incumbents or would you like to see those seats vacated at the end of April as scheduled and for them to stay vacant until an election winner can be certified and sworn in? And secondly, you mentioned the importance of transparency to your administration and also the importance of the media. The Public Records Act has been a fundamental tool for journalists and other citizens to get that type of accurate information you're talking about, but yesterday you signed a bill that takes the teeth out of that law. Can you tell us why you felt that was necessary to roll back the requirements for clerks to respond to open Public Records Act requests?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me say something which probably is apparent to you. We're at war. We're at war if that is not apparent already. Look at all the things we're talking about today. There's no need to panic but this is not a normal time. So, we're taking steps that we feel like we have to take and it's nothing against the journalists, the media community or against journalists. Trust me, that's not the point. In fact, I'm going out of my way to praise media as an essential service because I mean it. We don't have to say that but we mean it. We just have to deal with the reality of manpower, the ability to turn things around. This is, we've gone to a different place. So, there's nothing personal. There's no thematic association with that other than we're at war with a virus.

I haven't given the question of whether or not incumbents will be extended or their terms will end literally four seconds of thought so I don't have an answer for you. We'll come back. I assume if their term was over at the end of April and the election isn't until May, I assume that we'll extend the terms otherwise nobody would be in the seats. I assume that's the answer but we'll come back to you for that. Why?

Reporter: The Board of Ed has other members that could continue doing business.

Governor Phil Murphy: I really didn't give it four seconds of thought. I'm not trying to be glib about it. I did know this, that for the safety of our citizens, for the election process, to make sure that we did this the right way we had to at least defer the March and April elections to May 12th on the days that otherwise the nonpartisans would be taking place. If you can bear with me I'll come back to you with an answer though, thank you. Mark?

Reporter: Governor Murphy, do you think it's a good idea that the state has closed liquor stores?

Governor Phil Murphy: First if all, good to see you. Secondly, the mic is actually all of a sudden amplifying so I can hear your question, and thirdly, we haven't closed liquor stores. Liquor stores are still open.

Reporter: But you know, at the same time I was walking around The Ironbound the other day. By 8:00 most of these liquor stores, well before 8:00 had already been shut down. There's a situation where there's a combined pharmacy/liquor store where, because it's a pharmacy there's still sales and people are jamming the doors. There's even some, you know, pushing and shoving going on. Are you worried that going forward, if liquor stores are closed, if things get that tight that there could be potential disturbances?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I referred to this earlier, Mark, and I'll maybe be more specific about this. A couple things. First of all, liquor stores are not closed. We have deemed them to be allowed to be open. Secondly, in certain communities they have – not ones that I'm aware of that share pharmacies. I don't know that I've ever been in one of those by the way so I've got to separately, at some point compare notes with you. But there are some in some communities that are used for social gathering. That is a concern. And so, in that respect we've been unequivocal that no social gatherings. Whether you're in a liquor store, in your house, in you-name-the-venue, those are now barred. That we will, with Pat and his brothers and sisters in law enforcement, we will aggressively enforce that.

And then thirdly, as I mentioned, if you're... [noise] That might have been the liquor store interests weighing in there. If you're in a liquor store, a grocery store, a pharmacy, whatever is deemed as essential you've got to practice social distancing. So, the notion of not only are we prohibiting gatherings regardless of where they are but you can't be on top of each other even if it's been deemed to be essential. So, pick something that we would all agree is beyond the pale of essential – medical supplies. Even if you're in that venue we need you to social distance. Thank you.

Lucy Yang, ABC7: Thank you, Governor, Lucy Yang with Channel 7.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nice to see you.

Lucy Yang, ABC7: Nice to see you, too. Would you clarify the workers that fall under the categories of home healthcare attendants, nannies, housekeepers who could wipe down houses, individuals like that? Where do they fall in this executive order?

Governor Phil Murphy: Those are overwhelmingly essential services.

Lucy Yang, ABC7: These are all essential.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean I would want to make sure I've thought through all of those but the answer's yes. We have to continue to keep that safety net alive and well including folks who do that work in homes, not just in healthcare institutions. Thank you for that. Brent?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Hospitals are looking for guidance on two things according to one of my fellow reporters – one, when they should use masks 'cause apparently there's different rules all over the place; two, they're saying that there's no guidance on elective surgeries being cancelled. I asked you this yesterday, Governor, but people are still expecting that to be done. So, that's my health question. Construction, is that all shut down, too? Commercial and residential?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll add to that quickly. Construction has been deemed as essential. Construction will continue.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: All kinds of construction?

Governor Phil Murphy: All kinds unless we... By the way, one other element of the executive order which is another element I like, the guy two to my right has the ability to either open the spigot or close the spigot as he and we determine and see fit.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Physical therapy offices?

Governor Phil Murphy: I believe essential. Physical therapy, still essential, yes.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: People who are moving from a house to another place, like who are deemed to move in this weekend, that's essential?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yes, they have to. You have to allow that to happen. Please don't give me like 80 of these.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: No, that's it. Have you been tested for coronavirus?

Governor Phil Murphy: I have not. I have no symptoms, by the way, so I'm in the category of folks that we're actually discouraging from being tested and I hope it stays that way selfishly. We need folks to show up to be tested who are symptomatic.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: And then the hospital questions about masks and elective surgeries.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep, is that it? So, clearly Judy is the... I mentioned that Judy and I did the other day, I thought a really productive call with healthcare system CEOs, workforce representatives. There's a follow-up call apparently early week at a working group level. Harmonizing if not standardizing practices across the systems was a big ask and that deals with trainings, PPE were probably two at the top of the list. Is that fair to say, Judy?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Absolutely. The issue of masks has come up repeatedly. The CDC has put out some guidance, particularly looking at the conservation of the N95s if you're running low on that. On my way here I had a call with Kevin Slavin from the Hospital Association trying to figure out a way that we can use the inventories of the hospitals and get more collaboration, so that depending on the types of patients that the hospitals are seeing, that they might be able to share their inventory more aggressively than they are right now.

We are right now, as I'm sitting here there's a team at Department of Health working with the Ambulatory Surgery Association, working with the Surgical Association to draw up guidelines for the curtailment or postponement of elective surgeries for the preservation, where it's safe, by the way, obviously where it's safe that supports patient care for the preservation of PPE primarily.

Governor Phil Murphy: If I can mention on a very personal note that I normally wouldn't talk about but it's relevant, is that my surgeon two or three nights ago told me... I was operated on March 4th and by the way, I had a tumor on a kidney that needed to be dealt with within a certain amount of time, and my surgery almost certainly would have been postponed if it were this week to give you a sense of it.

Reporter: Governor, do you feel that individuals that are in these essential services like supermarkets and liquor stores, the home healthcare workers, should all have the opportunity to be tested in fact because they're meeting and seeing so many individuals and the only way to know is to test them?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'd defer to Judy on this. The question if you didn't hear it is a fair one. Folks who are at the point of attack, particularly healthcare workers but maybe home healthcare workers, somebody who's working at a pharmacy, maybe a grocery store checkout counter. I guess the first thing I'd say is we are strongly encouraging everybody on the hygiene, personal hygiene front and also hygiene of surfaces. We had this discussion the other day about regular wiping down with proper disinfectants the counters and belts at the supermarkets as an example. But the question is, Judy, should these folks be in the category – even if they're asymptomatic, and I know what my answer would be but I'll defer to you. Should they be prioritized in terms of testing?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: If there's a healthcare worker that's asymptomatic but has had a nexus with a positive COVID-19, more than likely they should be tested. However, the general category of pneumonia without a known cause, exposure to a COVID-19 individual or travel internationally or now nationally to an area where there's been community spread are still the first criteria that we would screen all individuals. But healthcare workers, we cannot have a group of healthcare workers scared to come to work. But do remember, they could test... Any one of us could test negative on Monday and five days later be positive, especially asymptomatic. So, the goal of testing is people that should be tested must be tested and they're the symptomatic individuals that fulfill the criteria. And I think we have to say at this point that people that want to be tested, although that's a secondary goal, should be able to get the test.

Governor Phil Murphy: If you look at the amount of people who got tested this week versus last week it is an exponential, it is a multiple. Our hope is that we have the same week ahead of us that we do behind us. We're doing everything we can. The raw materials for those tests are going to be our constraining factor. The ability of enough PPE, the ability to have enough of the intake side of the equation – probably more of a constraining issue now than the ability in the commercial labs to produce and perform the tests.

There are five blanket, and I'm using the word 'blanket' deliberately, exceptions to the executive order that I mentioned, the big one that I signed earlier, the Stay at Home Order. First of all, healthcare or medical service providers; secondly, access to essential services for low-income residents including but not limited to food banks; thirdly, the media; fourthly, law enforcement; and fifthly, the operations of the federal government or the movement of federal officials when operating in their official capacity. I wanted to make sure I said that.

Jared, I mentioned disinformation. To what extent are our blessed enemies out there deliberately sewing confusion among our people?

Director of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples: So, thanks Governor. We've been in constant contact with the intelligence community at the federal level, the FBI, DHS, etc. And we've maintained a constant coordination for intelligence across the board. We are operating 100% in that capacity. And one of the pieces, the Governor mentioned the text message that went out that essentially alluded to knowing a federal official or a military official that is saying this impending lockdown is coming. We do know that came from a foreign power. That was deliberately sent out to sew discord and discontent. And so, it's an example.

There's a lot of other official examples. Government officials in Iran and China for example have spread disinformation about COVID-19 itself and the origins, etc. So, those types of information strains are only causing to do more harm than good and certainly sew panic. And that's what we're trying to alleviate. Col. Callahan mentioned the call we had with the Attorney General the other day, with law enforcement – that was one of my big messages to that group, is make sure you get information from the right sources and the right sources only.

So, that COVID-19 portal for example, certainly our official webpages. www.nj.ohsp.gov (<http://www.nj.ohsp.gov>) has disseminated all information regarding the disinformation that's out there and again, it is a coordinated campaign. There's no question about that. We are aligned again with our federal partners in that assessment and we'll continue to publish only accurate and timely information because that's how we're going to all get through this together, and as the Governor has said, be stronger on the other side of this.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen, and again, www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). General Beale, how are your women and men holding up and how are things going both at the Bergen site and the preparations down at the PNC Bank Arts Center?

Adjutant General Jemal Beale: Absolutely no issues, sir. Our personnel are transitioning from civilian attire to their military entire. They're already embedded in the community so they don't have far to travel. And all I ask is that as they're out and about please engage with them and ensure that you give them your full cooperation. We're here to help.

Governor Phil Murphy: Extraordinary efforts. I can say this is a point of personal pride, best National Guard in the entire United States of America.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: The only thing I wanted to ask, is there at all... I know you guys have taken a lot of steps, but one, are there any more you can take? And two, is there at all thought that you maybe should have acted sooner or did you act as soon as possible?

Governor Phil Murphy: My lord, I don't think any state has acted as proactively. I'll put our record up against anybody's including breaking China early on when we were by ourselves. I mean, a statewide callup of the National Guard – I think we were at the top of the list; restricting travel from 8:00 PM to 5:00 AM. I've said this to you before, and again, we're not patting ourselves on the back.

When we take steps we don't want to take it for the sugar high and we want to get it right. You know, when we closed schools we wanted to make sure there was no kid who was going without a meal, the remote learning stuff that we had figured out, the daycare which is complicated that we had done – so, waiting a day or two to get that done. Could we have done this yesterday? Yeah, we probably could have but the fact of the matter is I think we landed in a really good place in terms of what we're deeming as essential and nonessential and how folks should think about that.

There's not a whole lot more we could do to be honest with you, because we're basically saying unequivocally stay at home. Unless you're part of an essential service and that we really need you to keep the state functioning and to keep fighting this virus, there's not a whole lot more we can do. But we reserve the right, if something does come up which we think could make a meaningful difference, we reserve the right. As I mentioned earlier, Col. Callahan has enormous latitude working with me to tweak this any which way we deem necessary to protect the safety and health of our residents.

Reporter: Governor, a couple of questions. I just received one – Hudson crossings, any issue with those?

Governor Phil Murphy: No issues, just make sure if you're crossing the Hudson it is for a reason. So, crossing the Hudson to go hang out with people in New York City is not a good reason. And vice-versa, nothing against New York City – same for them coming over to us.

Reporter: Okay. Doctors' offices, which ones would you consider essential?

Governor Phil Murphy: They have to be essential, all healthcare. I said this earlier, I want to make sure I said this right. Healthcare or medical service providers period. Again, I'm with Judy though. If you think you've got an elective surgery and it's scheduled for the next month and you think that's going to happen you've got another thing coming is my personal opinion. Is that fair to say? I don't want to be too much of a jerk about that.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: In New Brunswick we've got three out of four people are renters. There hasn't been a lot of guidance for renters or landlords on what, you know. What would you tell a family who has enough money to pay the rent and nothing more? And should people be paying their rent on the first?

Governor Phil Murphy: I've been pleading and we've done some of this already by statute, but I would plead with people in the landlord community to please God give our people a break here. And we probably should give you more guidance as to exactly what that means but this is not the time to jam people. We mentioned this earlier. I've been asked, I don't have the week totals yet for the entire week but the Unemployment Insurance applications have exploded. You've got people literally living from hand to mouth.

Brent, I can't condone that by the way, I can't condone that. Just as I couldn't condone Mark coughing into his hand. I want you to go straight back to the men's room and wash your hands with soap and wipe down your iPhone when this is over. I don't know where Mahen or Marthelle, maybe you can help me out here. Mahen, I want to come back to this gentleman with a couple of questions he's asked about the Board of Ed and also what more specific guidance we can give to landlords and renters in particular, thank you.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: A couple questions, one for the Commissioner on ventilators. Is the survey data completed on that as yet, a sense of some shortage coming, where those ventilators will come from? Can you speak a little bit to that specifically?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure, I can't give you specifics of where they're going to come from. I can just tell you that we're surveying every company, every vendor that develops the ventilators. One of the questions that came up amongst our physicians, you know, the current ventilators that people use, they're used to a certain type. And we're really pulling, you know, calling up any ventilator and there's all different types. The training is going to be really important, and one group of professionals we don't talk enough about is the respiratory therapists.

So, one of the things that we're looking at with the Respiratory Therapy Association is calling up respiratory therapists, 'cause no matter how many generations of respiratory therapists they have they will know the generations of ventilators that we'll probably be calling up. We're also surveying long-term care acute hospitals. They're the hospitals that take care of long-term ventilator patients and they have ventilators as well that we could probably redeploy into the critical care and hospitals. And every single ambulatory surgery center in New Jersey, which is extensive, almost 1000 of them, they're required to have one ventilator. So, we're calling them up as well.

I think we'll get there but I don't want to overstate the situation. Ventilators are going to be, next to PPE it's going to be our most important piece of equipment.

Governor Phil Murphy: Not specific to ventilators, we'll come back to you in one second, but Judy just mentioned something – respiratory specialists. One of the things I think you've seen Judy and her team do and we've been aggressive about this, I've been involved in some of this, is to broaden the pool. We're trying to broaden the pool of beds, of PPE, of ventilators and of healthcare workers. So, for instance, one of the steps we took this week, if you're licensed out of state you're heretofore licensed to practice in-state. Judy's been on with the Nursing Association trying to think through bringing retired folks perhaps back in. Pat's married to a nurse so he knows this. School nurses we've talked about; other professions where there's some adjacency, to bring them in.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: And then, a broader question. I know it's impossible to know for sure, but do you yourself have an estimation on how long these restrictions will be in place? Are we talking many weeks, many months? And secondly to that, are there things you're going to be looking for that will allow you to pull them back at all or incrementally?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, it's somewhere measured in weeks to months would be my advice to folks. This is not next week. I wish it were. A similar question that I gave you on schools – we haven't made the final call yet but the chances are overwhelming we're not going back to school a week from Monday. And these restrictions, we can't flatten the curve and break the back of this... In fact, one of the things about flattening the curve which Judy reminded us yesterday, we should probably get that chart to join us again. Mahen, we should probably get the chart to come back and join us at one of our upcoming meetings early in the week.

You have the same amount of cases but you spread it out over a longer period of time which allows the healthcare system to be able to stay ahead of this – which implies this is not going to change anytime soon. I don't have a crisper answer than that. I'd ask Judy what are you looking for, what are a couple of datapoints or signs that you're looking at to say, "You know what? This is beginning to turn in the right direction?"

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's a very difficult question. I think the monitoring of the positive cases and the admissions to the hospitals. Admissions to the hospitals, we've said before we expect a lot of members of the public to get coronavirus. We expect that most of them, 80%, 85% of them, mild to moderate symptoms, stay at home, monitor yourself for 72 hours. Monitor your temperature; be in touch with your healthcare provider.

15% of them will probably need to be admitted to the hospital and then 5% of them will need critical, critical care. And we're not sure about the mortality rate. It's hanging around 1%. We would hate, it would be terrible if it went up to 3% but that could happen. So, we'll look at those statistics on a regular basis. It's the people needing care. It's not the actual incidents of coronavirus because I think it's going to be significantly widespread, the actual incidents. It's the people that need care, and as that smooths out I think we'll be able to relax a bit.

But I can tell you that social distancing is a term we haven't used very frequently in my career – it is the key to stopping this. There's nothing more sophisticated about it. We don't have a vaccine. Wash your hands. Wash them frequently during the day. The droplet infection can stay on inanimate objects from three to five hours to three to five days. So, the minute I leave these things, I go in the car and I use an antibacterial scrub.

Governor Phil Murphy: With at least 60% alcohol, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: With at least 60% alcohol. Coughing into your sleeve, social distancing, six feet away from other people. I can't emphasize that enough. There are some epidemiologists that are saying, "Clearly we've done containment, mitigation, you should go to suppression." And we're starting that. Suppression is exactly what the Governor is talking about. Stay home. Practice good respiratory etiquette, good overall health hygiene and do it for a long period of time. That's what we have.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. And by the way, I'll repeat what we've said now ad nauseum. The number of cases are going up; they're going up into the thousands. That both gives us a sense of how significant this is but it gives us the data that we need in order to get our arms around this. And social distancing, good hygiene is the way we get out of this. It's no time to panic but it is certainly no time for business as usual.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: Yes, the Commissioner just mentioned admissions to hospitals were one of the signs to see about breaking the back as it were. Do you have data on admissions to hospitals, total admissions? Can you tell us how many people are going to hospitals now? And also, within the last hour Valley Hospital put out a public plea for N95s, surgical masks, gowns. Do you have a survey, an assessment of how dire the situation is for protective equipment at the hospitals now? And on the testing, the two days of testing up in Bergen, has anything... The long lines, will you be making any adjustments to the one that's opening in Monmouth on Monday or any thoughts about that?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, may I just say a quick thing, Judy, and then we'll turn it to you? Literally, the minute we break here, I believe George, Pat, Judy and others in this room and their colleagues are going to have a very specific meeting about the PPE supply chain. So, I'm not sure we'll have a lot of magical answers coming out of that meeting, but I just wanted to say that number one.

Number two, I'm incredibly... Listen, the lines were long; the waits were significant. We had to shut down based on the amount of supplies the feds have given us to actually conduct these tests, including PPE. I mentioned this, John, the other day. To say the demand was pent up would be the understatement of the century, all over the state but particularly in Bergen County. So, my gut tells me, assuming the supplies can stay current – and I think we've got 2500 allotted per site per week at the moment. And again, Pat's working with Judy and Jemal will be a part of this, to see whether or not we can get other sites up and running over time.

My gut and my hope would be I think they've done an incredible job. 1000 more people were tested than were yesterday morning at 8:00, and that each day – maybe not incrementally but over time, each day the process will begin to smooth itself. That's assuming the manpower and the supplies – again, we're relying on the feds for a lot of this – stay with us and stay up, stay current with the demand that we have. Judy, any other comments on the PPE?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: In terms of hospital census, we do get those reports on a regular basis. We'll tighten that up a bit now, particularly critical care. That's what is giving, in my discussions with CEOs that's what's giving them the most concern. I mean, my whole career has been mostly on the hospital side, and I can tell you that the workforce of hospitals are so extraordinarily resilient they will figure this out. But it will be very difficult for them if we don't give them the PPE, the tools, the resources and supplies, the ventilators that they need. They will figure out how to take care of people. They're extraordinarily innovative in that regard. But we have to get the supplies.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, we're going to conclude. Judy, thank you. I want to thank Col. Callahan, Commissioner Persichilli, General Beale and Director Maples, and to all of their teams. www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>), that's new, that's up and running. I'd love folks in the media and folks at home to check it out and give us your reaction to that. And obviously, it'll become more robust over time.

We'll have a briefing tomorrow, Mahen, that will be by telephone at 2:00 PM. Is that correct? Okay, so 2:00 PM tomorrow.

And let's just review a couple things as we break here. Stay at home. This is the Stay at Home order. Only if we need you out there, only if you're an essential service in which case we do need you; otherwise, stay at home. Keep social distancing not just at home but even when you go to the grocery store or the pharmacy.

And know that the two big gaps right now that I would say rise above all others, I would say number one is personal protective equipment and that's why there's a meeting right now, and we're doing everything we can to turn over every single stone to get as much of that as we can get, including we continue to ask the federal government for another slug out of the Strategic Stockpile. And secondly, the economic impact on workers, on small businesses, on the state frankly is going to be overwhelming as a result of this.

We have no choice. That economic impact will be overwhelming one way or the other. I'd prefer to take it now and I'd prefer to take it in concert with keeping deaths and sicknesses as low as possible. But boy, do we need the federal government. We need direct cash assistance to the tune of many, many billions of dollars in New Jersey, \$100 billion in the region. We need the federal/state cost sharing on federal programs like FEMA, like Army Corps to go from 75 Feds/25 State to 100 Feds/0 State. We think that's only right.

We need to be there for our small businesses, for our employees and working families. Again, www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>) to get your questions answered. And by the way, for the Department of Labor www.nj.gov/labor (<http://www.nj.gov/labor>) if you are looking, if you've been laid off; if you're looking for a way forward here.

God bless you all, thank you all. We'll speak to you by telephone tomorrow at 2:00.

Governor Phil Murphy

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