

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: October 26th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Phil Murphy holds a coronavirus briefing on Octo...



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, folks. Again, appreciate your patience for being together virtually today. My guess is we'll be doing the same thing on Thursday. We're back to our Monday-Thursday schedule, and we're going to be pretty much virtual this week, at least up through and including Thursday. The good news for me, selfishly and my wife, we tested again negative this morning so I'm at work, and that's a good thing. That's my fourth negative test since last Monday, and Tammy's third, all negative in her case as well. But we just think the right move here is to not engage needlessly or when we don't have to. These formats have become pretty much common-use formats for so many of us. If we can use it, let's use it.

And by the way, forget just about the august group that joins me today on the virtual dais, but members of the press, the tech crew that sets us up and runs the show, our state troopers who are always with us, it's for them as much as it is for us. There's no question, and we'll go through today's numbers, the numbers are surging and if we can get together virtually and not have to be in the same room, even though it's a big room, that's going to be our bias I think for now, at least as I say through Thursday of this week when we have our next press engagement. We'll be with you electronically between now and then. Don't expect to see much of a public schedule on my part, or probably any of our part that's actually in person. We'll do some things virtually, as we've been doing, and we'll continue to do that.

A number of you asked about my colleagues, Mike Delamater, Dan Bryan, I've exchanged with both of them this morning. They're both doing well, thank God, and just keep everybody who's tested positive, or certainly those who are in the hospital, and certainly the families of the loved ones who we have lost, in their

memories, let's all make sure we do this for them. We're in a tough spot right now, there's just no other way to put it, and we're only going to get through this if we do what we've been doing from the beginning. We band together as one team and do this together.

Before we get to health stuff, a couple of nonspecific health items. First of all, before even I introduce my colleagues, I just received the latest update from Secretary of State Tahesha Way and the Division of Elections. As of this moment, as you can see on the slide 2,527,780 general election ballots have now been returned, which is 64% of the entire amount of votes cast, which is about 3.9 million, in 2016. Just an extraordinary outpouring. And again, I don't care who you're voting for. We care that you vote. Again, 64% of what we had all last year. We still have eight days to go, so let's close this election out in as strong a fashion as possible and make a statement with the largest election turnout in any election in state history. Get your ballot in and then if you want to track it, that's exactly the website, go to vote.nj.gov and track your ballot, which a lot of folks I know are doing. Again, really extraordinary behavior and turnout so far. Let's keep it up.

I'm proud to be joined by the august group with us today. The woman who's actually sitting on my screen below me for a change, Judy, you're not even on my right as you usually are, the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. Below her is another familiar face, a guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. But we've also got some other special guests today. Former State Epidemiologist Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, great to have you with us. And then below Eddy, we have the Deputy Commissioner for Public Health Services in the Department of Health, Dr. David Adinero, and I think we have the Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, on as well. Ed's not on my screen, but I believe he's with us today, so we've got a cavalcade of stars. They're going to go through after I finish, I think led by Judy, in fact, go through not just her daily report, but a very thorough discussion of our vaccine strategy.

Before we get to my comments on that, we haven't in a couple of weeks gone over where we are with schools, and I just want to give you that update, folks. As of Friday, we have 439 districts in hybrid mode, 232 in remote mode, 90 in person, and 39 in some combination. And you're seeing, especially as we predicted based on the plans that were submitted, the hybrid number continues to go up and the remote number goes the opposite direction, which is about what we thought. There's a slower conversion from hybrid to all in person for the very simple reason that, I say this kiddingly but I'm not too far off, we would need right now five newly built Pentagons to be able to accommodate the amount of space we would have for social distancing requirements to get everybody back in person, in school. That number will go up, but it will go up more slowly than the number that's swinging from remote to hybrid.

I'm just told Mahen is on and Dr. Lifshitz is not on today, so I want to make sure I correct the record, so Mahen, thank you for that. With that being said about elections and our format and introductions and schools, let's get into some health stuff.

Ten days ago on October 16th, the Department of Health submitted to the CDC -- that's a week ago Friday -- the state's first draft COVID-19 state vaccination plan. However, this is not a plan that was thrown together quickly, as some vaccines have been in their final testing phase. Indeed, it is the product of months of collaboration among clearly the Department of Office of Emergency Management, other state agencies represented from state and local health departments, and certainly the Department of Health.

We began our first discussion on how to ensure an equitable and workable vaccination plan. Distribution, that includes distribution, allocation, vaccination, monitoring, at a time when the pandemic was ravaging our state, and one of our main focuses was to have the PPE stockpile and testing capacity we would need to fight this virus. In March of this year, Judy first convened the New Jersey Department of Health COVID-19 Professional Advisory Committee, which has been offering expert guidance on several crucial issues, such as allocation of scarce resources. And in April, the department began its planning for the distribution of potential vaccines that were in early phases of development.

When those first thoughts about our vaccination plan were being formulated back in March, we knew that a COVID-19 vaccine was going to be an important preventative measure to help bring the pandemic under control. But with the knowledge the vaccines would not be available for some time, and the immediacy of the

crisis in the state, developing a vaccination plan was lower on our priority list; we were just frankly trying to get through the day. But we knew that while we were tackling the pandemic in the short term, we had to look long term to create a stronger, fairer and more resilient post-COVID New Jersey.

This planning process kicked into higher gear in July as the Vaccine Task Force comprised of a panel of state experts began its broader work alongside the state's Coronavirus Task Force and other state vaccination experts and with the CDC, the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. The goal was to focus on the hurdles and challenges that would await any viable vaccine: logistics and distribution, prioritization, vaccination, public outreach and confidence building, among many other issues. Lessons learned from our childhood immunization programs as well as the vaccine response to the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic were also brought to bear. Now even though we had this initial plan with the CDC, it is by no means final. I use the word draft deliberately. We continue to refine and recalculate. It is a work in progress. We continue to think of how we can ensure greater efficiency, and we continue to list the new unknowns we have to consider, many of which only the federal government and the vaccine clinical trials can answer.

But with the growing reality that one or more vaccines are merely months and not years away, this work has taken on greater urgency and I am proud to say these four words: we will be ready. Our strategic aims are threefold, as you can see on the screen. One, to provide equitable access to a vaccine. Two, to achieve maximum community protection. And three, building public trust in not just a COVID-19 vaccine, but the vaccines that can protect residents from other potentially debilitating and deadly illnesses. When we make these aims, we will meet our initial goal of vaccinating 70% of the state's eligible adult population.

We are keenly aware that COVID-19 has highlighted the stark disparities that have emerged across communities when it comes to vulnerability. Judy and I speak about this invariably at every one of our press conferences, along racial and ethnic lines, along economic lines, along lines drawn by age. At the same time, we're also keenly aware that any vaccine rollout will likely come with a limited initial supply. And even if there is enough to meet an initial public need, that a proper vaccination program is a long-term proposition. However, we will work to quickly move across population segments and deliver vaccines into the communities that were hardest hit, not just those that are easiest to reach. This will be an effort like our overall response to this pandemic that will be supported and coordinated at the state level, but delivered through our local partners, local health departments, federally qualified health centers, hospitals, medical, clinical and retail pharmacies, all of those groups will play a key role.

We will ensure a data-driven process as we have from the get-go that will focus on prioritization and those at highest risk of infection, our vulnerable communities, and those for whom early inoculation would have the greatest benefit, and then build out from there. Our plan will be informed by recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to the CDC, and our own Professional Advisory Committee, as well as other stakeholders. Our plan will include clearing regulatory barriers that could impede distribution and ensuring affordability.

We will also work closely with healthcare providers and key community influencers to ensure that information is put out in clear and concise language, recognizing the needs of our multicultural and multilingual residents, and in terms that are easy to understand within individual communities. In other words, we cannot let the online rumors and social media-driven conspiracy theories jeopardize our ability to build statewide immunity against the deadly virus. We know from public polling that there is already growing skepticism of a vaccine. In the face of this virus, that skepticism could prove to be as deadly as the virus itself.

We are committed to building trust in the vaccines in all of our communities, and we will not wait until we receive the vaccines to start that process. As I've said many times before, while we will welcome one or more COVID-19 vaccines, we are not going to simply rush forward. We will be as methodical and deliberate in our approaches to a vaccination plan as we have been in every aspect of our responses over the past eight months. Judy and Eddy and our health experts will be closely reviewing the science, and will make the call as to when a vaccine, and which one or ones will be acceptable for New Jersey. In every step we take, we will work closely with our federal public health partners to ensure supply it.

As it pertains to the federal government, federal funding for vaccination program will be essential. The federal administration has so far indicated no interest in providing further financial assistance, whether it's to New Jersey or to any other state. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the Association of

Immunization Managers had sent a joint letter to the Congressional leadership, calling for an additional \$8.1 billion to support a national state-based program. The National Governors Association has also made its concerns known regarding funding.

Let me be clear on this. If we do not receive any additional funds, achieving a 70% vaccination rate will take many years, if it even happens at all. We will work through the New Jersey Immunization [inaudible] for proper handling and storage, vaccine ordering and tracking of those who get vaccinated, and with our county and local health teams to ensure proper distribution. And we will work directly in communities to combat misinformation and disinformation.

This effort brings me back to one of the key ideals that has driven our response, and we've said it many times those words, public health creates economic health. As a COVID-19 vaccine is introduced, it will join a host of other vaccines that are vital to our broad-based public health and economic vitality. We are all watching and waiting for a vaccine against COVID-19, but that should motivate us to increase vaccination rates more generally. We can't ultimately win the war against COVID-19 only to find another virus sneaking up behind it.

As I noted, this is our initial draft plan. We are working daily, literally, to refine it as we await the initial approval of a vaccine and its distribution. And in doing so, when that time comes, we will have in place a plan that is ready for the moment.

One plan that we have had in place and in motion is our community contact tracing corps, which currently includes a total of 1,906 contact tracers statewide. That's an average of more than 21 per 100,000 residents in each county. Over the last reporting period, which was October 10th to October 17th, our tracers were able to follow up in more than two-thirds of cases, and 55% of cases were followed up within that crucial first 24 hours. We do, however, continue to have challenges in getting those our contact tracers speak with to provide contacts for follow up, as 58% of those contacted during this period refused to cooperate with our contact tracers. Come on, folks. Again, I urge everyone to take the call and cooperate with our contact tracers. Nobody is on a witch hunt and no one has any concern other than protecting your health, your family's health and your community's health, period.

And I further encourage you to download our COVID Alert NJ smartphone app and add your phone to our fight against COVID-19. So far, the app has been downloaded more than 260,000 times and by the way, each new download is another way for us to trace COVID-19 and keep our community safe. COVID Alert NJ is available for download from both the Apple App and Google Play stores.

Finally, before we return to the overnight numbers, I've extended the public health emergency in our state for an additional 30 days. These declarations, by the way, unless they're extended expire after 30 days, and as we've mentioned before but I want to repeat, this actually means that we continue to be vigilant and prepared and ready to act. It also continues the authority of the Department of Health to coordinate our health system's response to this emergency.

Now let's turn our attention to today's reporting. And again, this is a sobering report. We're reporting an additional 1,223 cases, bringing our cumulative total to 229,684. Bergen, Essex, Middlesex, Passaic, and Union counties are each reporting at least 110 cases today, and over the past week to 10 days, those five have been the consistent group of five. Hudson would have been the sixth. Hudson is not terribly far behind, Hudson is at 75, so that's an improvement. And by the way, Monmouth and Ocean are off of their peak when they were bubbling up as hotspots a couple of weeks ago, they're off meaningfully. Still reporting cases, but meaningfully better.

Positivity for all tests recorded on Thursday, October 22nd you can't see it completely, it's 4.48%, a number that is too high relative for our tastes and higher than on average that it's been over the past number of weeks. Statewide rate of transmission stands at 1.23. That's the first time it's bounced out of that 1.15 to 1.18 band in a couple of weeks.

Yesterday, our hospitals were treating a total of 948 patients. That breaks down 767 confirmed COVID positive, 181 considered persons under investigation pending the receipt of their test results. Judy, when you speak, could you give a little bit of color anecdotally as to how those PUI feel like they're converting? I appreciate that.

There were 178 persons in our ICU and 75 of them required a ventilator. Again, we need to stop the rise of the curve and push these numbers back down and folks, only we can do it together. There's no mandate that we can drop on you right now that we think meaningfully changes these numbers. It is the acts of all of us as individuals, particularly in private spaces, private homes, where we can crack the back of this.

Today, with the heaviest of hearts, we are reporting an additional seven losses of life confirmed. That brings our statewide total to 14,503 confirmed losses of life from our extraordinary family, 1,789 probable deaths continues to be that number. Four of those seven occurred in the past week. I think, Judy, you said to me earlier all seven are from the month of October.

Judy and I always want you to hear this, even though it's apples to oranges. These numbers are not included in our dailies. 19 patients in our hospitals died yesterday, and that's several days in a row, Judy will correct me if I'm wrong here, of double-digit deaths in our hospitals. And those, by the way, are still being investigated to confirm in fact that they're from COVID-19. They're not those numbers but that's a spot sense of the reality right now. Everywhere you look it is screaming out that this is surging right now, folks, and we've all got to band together and turn these numbers down, particularly hospitalizations and losses of life.

Let's take a moment if we could to remember three more of the blessed souls from our New Jersey family we have lost. First up we remember, she's right there with her kids, Mary Piccola of Clarksboro section of East Greenwich Township in Gloucester County. She passed away the day before what would have been her 85th birthday, God love her.

Mary was born in North Jersey in Teaneck, to be exact, and was an outgoing and loving woman of faith who faithfully served in her church for many years. She loved taking day trips to Red Bank Battlefield and nearby National Park to watch the airplanes over the Delaware River, as well as to Barnegat Lighthouse, Barney, on our Jersey Shore. But mostly she loved being with her family and friends whether for a game of cards or a shared meal. Look at that great group there. Mary leaves behind those four, her children Patricia, Carolyn, Jean Jr. and Rich, and I had the great honor of speaking with Rich at the end of the week, and their families, by the way, including her 12 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. She's also survived by her sister Joan, many nieces and nephews and by her lifetime close friend, Laurie Miller. We know all who knew Mary will remember her fondly. They'll pray for her and so will all of us, by the way, who never met her. May God bless and watch over you, Mary.

Next up, we recalled Barbara Marshall, who was a member of the family at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for more than three decades. She worked in the Office of Commissioner and among her many roles was serving as the point person for many of DEP's annual awards and recognitions. Barbara retired in 2012. But as important as her work in one of our most impactful state departments was, she was even more deeply involved with her family, whether it be as a leader of the Holy Assumption School PTA in her hometown of Florence, or with CYO basketball programs. She loved to read and love to travel and surely she made it to her favorite place, Disney World, in her retirement.

Barbara leaves her husband of 52 years Charles, keep him in your prayers, and her two daughters. Charlene, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, Charlene hangs her hat in Burlington County and Nicole, her other daughter who by the way, guess where she works? New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. She also leaves behind her son-in-law Mark, as well as her grandchildren Ryan Casey, Samantha and Aaron, and her great-grandchild Carson. We must include among her immediate family, her constant companion who she's left behind, sadly, Buddy, her beloved dog. She's also survived by her sisters Maria and Lillian, brothers Walter and Paul, and numerous cousins, nieces, nephews and friends. We thank Barbara for her career of service to the people of New Jersey and may God bless and watch over her memory and her family.

And finally, this is thanks to my dear colleague Pat Callahan, we remember Woodbridge Township's Rocco Ferraro, who was a New Jersey State Police security guard for nearly 20 years, and who took extraordinary pride and dignity in his work. Rocco was a native of Bellville, spent his formative years in Colonia, and he also called Rahway home. He served as President of the Rahway Italian American Club for six years. This did not shock me Pat, with the name Rocco Ferraro, I was not shocked to hear that, before settling in Avenal. He was a diehard fan of both the Yankees and the Raiders and loved taking trips to Atlantic City. Rocco was just 49 years old. He leaves behind his parents Savato and Ann, his brother Richard and his sisters, Cindy and Candy.

Cindy, by the way, I believe it's Cindy, is a nurse, also was COVID positive. Please keep her in your prayers. Candy's husband Rocco he leaves behind, along with nephews Peter and Anthony and niece Gillian. Savato, by the way, his dad is in the hospital being treated for COVID-19 and we ask you to keep him in your prayers and his mom Ann also had COVID positive, but I believe she is doing better. We also thank Rocco for his service to his state and for his commitment to his community and family. May God bless and watch over your pal, and your parents and your siblings and their families.

So we remember Mary, Barbara and Rocco, as we remember each and every New Jerseyan we have lost over the past eight months. For them and our own families, we have to recommit to the practices which helped us crush the curves the first time, and which we need to double down on to crush them again. Social distancing, wearing our masks, washing our hands regularly with soap and water, taking yourself off the field if you don't feel well or if you know you've been exposed to someone who's positive, or if you're positive yourself. Quarantine, wait a number of days, get tested, because that virus takes a while to incubate.

I spent a fair amount of time today, as will Judy, talking about our plan for vaccinations, but let's remember one important thing. We don't have a vaccine today. We don't have therapeutics today. All we're left with is the simple stuff: social distancing, face coverings, washing hands with soap and water, taking yourself off the field, getting tested. We will not throw up our hands in defeat and let this virus run rampant until that day when we have either therapeutics or vaccine. We will fight this, as we have fought it since day one. We must work hard to make sure our communities stay safe and healthy. Until that great day comes when we have that vaccine or when we have those therapeutics that we know are safe and efficacious, and that we know we can get to you in the right form. Until then, we've got each other and the basics.

Switching gears, here's a reminder from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority that preregistration for phase three of our emergency grants program for eligible small businesses is open, and it will remain open until five o'clock tomorrow. That's Tuesday, tomorrow, Tuesday, October 27th. Any small business looking to apply for a grant must preregister. For more information and to preregister, by the way, go to that website, cv.business.nj.gov By doing so, your small business can join the many others that have already teamed up with the EDA to receive vital funding that has allowed them to remain open.

One of those businesses is in my, broadly speaking, hood, is Jersey Freeze, a landmark ice cream shop and restaurant in Freehold for nearly 60 years. Jersey Freeze is run by those two, Matt Cangialosi and Katie DiNonno, who bought the store in 2014 from the family that opened it back in 1952. I have to say this, Katie started working there when she was 15. How cool is that? So when the pandemic hit, Matt and Katie got creative, starting a new takeout system delivering orders curbside and lowering their prices and putting together what they call family bundles for fun to help their customers. They also provided regular meals to the first responders in the Freehold area.

Jersey Freeze was also looking to open a second location inside Bell Works in March and while the pandemic slowed those plans, today that location is open for takeout, particularly for special occasions there. So to cover their expenses, Jersey Freeze received a phase two grant from the EDA. I had the opportunity to check in with Matt at the end of the week, and I look forward to stopping in for a treat next time I'm in their neighborhood. Check them out by the way, great website, jerseyfreeze1952.com. That's the year they were founded.

Finally, before I close today, I have to give a huge shout out to Coach Greg Schiano and the Rutgers Scarlet Knights for their Big 10 season-opening upset of Michigan State this past Saturday. I watched literally every second of the game, and this team shows the true grit of New Jersey. Sometimes underestimated, but always stepping up. So again, Coach, to you, to the team, your assistant coaches, the staff, to Rutgers, congratulations on a huge win and a great start to a new era of Scarlet Knights football. We will all keep chopping right alongside you folks.

With that, 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. Well as the Governor shared, to date there is no globally approved COVID-19 vaccine. However, there is an expectation that a vaccine will become available either by the end of the year or the first quarter of next year under an

emergency use authorization preapproval, an EUA. An EUA allows the FDA to facilitate the availability of unapproved medical products to be used to prevent serious or life-threatening diseases when there are no adequate approved and available alternatives.

As you know, COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus, never seen before in humans. As such, it requires new vaccines to provide an acquired immunity to the virus. As the Governor shared, the Department of Health has been preparing for the introduction of a vaccine and a wide scale vaccination program since July. There is still much we do not know about COVID-19 and the vaccine, but here's what we do know. We know that the Department of Health has had experience with pandemic vaccinations during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. We also know that our vaccination experience with the flu vaccination results in about 50% of the population in the state receiving the vaccine, of which about a little over 70% of them are children. Our goal for COVID-19 vaccination is 70% of the New Jersey adults.

We also know that several vaccines are in phase three clinical trials. Some of the vaccines we know will require a two-dose regimen, 21 to 28 days apart. Some of the vaccines require cold chain or ultra-cold chain storage, making refrigeration a challenge. And we know that the FDA may issue an EUA, an emergency use authorization, again by the end of the year or the first quarter of next year.

Here's what is likely: the federal government is likely to provide a limited number of vaccine doses in their first allotment. The federal government will likely provide guidance on the prioritization of the limited quantities, but it will be up to the states to determine the exact allocation. The allotment, how much New Jersey will receive, will depend on multiple factors, such as the population of essential and healthcare workers, current spread or prevalence of the disease, and the vaccine availability.

What we do not know right now is the efficacy and the adverse event profile for any potential vaccine, as the trials are still going on. Our inspirational goal for a wide-scale vaccination program in New Jersey is to vaccinate 70% of the adult population in a six-month period. To accomplish that goal, we will need to vaccinate approximately 81,000 individuals a day, five days a week; or about 3,200 a day, five days a week, in every 21 counties. We submitted our draft plan to the CDC on October 16. The plan calls for an all-of-government approach to accomplish this goal. We have nine teams working on this project and our professional advisory and health equity committee, or PAHEC, meets weekly to monitor the progress of the vaccine development and ensure that all discussions are made through the lens of equity.

The PAHEC convened in March to provide guidance to the department, to ensure that our response to COVID-19 is based on the latest scientific, medical, ethical and public health evidence. The more than two dozen PAHEC members include healthcare leaders and academics, former commissioners, and ethicists, representing geographic, demographic and professional diversity. The PAHEC is chaired by former Deputy Commissioner and State Epidemiologist Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, who is here with us today. After leaving the department, he spent nearly a decade at Merck and has deep knowledge and expertise about vaccine and the development process.

The department's Vaccine Task Force has nine teams focused on logistics and PODs, or points of dispensing, including local partnerships, state and local sites, cold chain management, and PPE and supply requirements. There's a group working on federal interoperability, information technology and data flow management to monitor and track all doses delivered and administered. We have a group working on specific population planning, focusing on vulnerable, high risk and essential workers. There's a group working on enabling policies for directives and other regulatory or policy tools.

Management and administration teams are working on workforce development, contracting and budgeting. We have a group working on analytics and reporting, and one working on strategic communications. Most importantly, we have a group working on public confidence to include stakeholder calls, bringing up a call center for questions, and for a public awareness campaign. At the same time, we have a team under the expert leadership of Dr. Barbara Montana, focusing on flu vaccine acceleration at the same time.

The expectation is that the first allotment will be limited and under the prioritization guidance of the federal government. The CDC guidance stipulates that in phase one, the limited doses will be reserved for persons serving in healthcare settings, who have the potential for direct exposure, or for essential workers, or for

individuals at risk, including those 65 and older. Our understanding is that shortly after the first tranche, during phase two, there will be sufficient supply to meet the demand, and phase three will allow open access to the vaccine.

One of the challenges we have is building public confidence in a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine. We have to build trust across the state, including among healthcare providers, local public health, vaccine providers, and the vaccine recipients. I am talking with stakeholders to raise awareness and cultivate a network of diverse partners committed to safe, accessible COVID-19 vaccination. I've already briefed our Congressional delegation, our Legislative leaders, the Latino Black Legislative Caucus, county executives, local health departments, mayors, interfaith-based groups, the New Jersey Commission on American Indian Affairs, hospital and health system CEOs, unions, and we will also be talking to community partners, the education business, law enforcement, and medical professional associations. We have posted a series of FAQs on our Department website, along with the executive summary of the COVID vaccination plan and the full plan.

Credible and consistent health communication messaging will be shared across multiple platforms to address concerns of specific audiences using timely and science-based public health and medical information from trusted sources. Messaging will be culturally appropriate and translated into multiple languages.

In raising awareness and providing education, our aim is to arm stakeholders, partners and the public with accurate up-to-date facts to engender intergenerational trust in vaccinations and as the Governor shared, we will be ready. At the same time, each of us must do our part to remain vigilant against this virus in the face of increasing cases in New Jersey and nationwide. Saturday, we saw the highest number of cases since early May and now with flu season upon us, it is urgent that we keep up the fight by wearing face coverings, socially distancing, washing your hands frequently, staying home if you feel sick.

An essential part of the fight against this virus is contact tracing. As the Governor outlined, we need more individuals providing information on close contacts. Local health departments have shared that many of the positive cases say they prefer to inform their contacts personally, instead of sharing their information with the contact tracer. While that might seem like a nice gesture or a personal touch, it's hindering the overall contact tracing effort. Public health officials can provide expert information to close contacts on how to protect themselves and their loved ones. They can connect them to vital social service supports, such as safe places to isolate or quarantine. Please help these professionals do their job and better protect New Jersey by giving them the information they need to connect with those who might have been exposed to COVID-19.

We continue to build up this workforce and with 100 newly hired contact tracers beginning this week and another 100 next week, we will have enough individuals in New Jersey to do this job. Given the increase in cases, we once again are calling on our residents of the state to do their part to protect themselves and their loved ones.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals report 948 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive persons and persons under investigation. 178 of those individuals are in critical care, with 42% on ventilators. Hospitals are reporting that the conversion rate from persons under investigation to positive is running about 20%.

There are no new cases, thankfully, of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. We currently have 60 cases in the state. The last reported case was on October 22. The children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19 or have been tested positive for antibodies. In New Jersey, there are no deaths reported at this time. The ages of the children affected range from one to 18, and one of these individuals, one of these children, are currently hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 54.2%, Black 18.2%, Hispanic 20.2%, Asian 5.5%, other 1.2%. At the state veterans homes, there is one new case among patients at the Paramus facility. At our state psychiatric hospitals, the numbers remain the same.

The daily percent positivity as of October 22nd is 4.48%. The Northern part of the state is reporting 5.05%, the Central part of the state 3.58%, and the Southern part of the state 4.36%. So that concludes my daily report. Stay safe and remember for each other, for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, great report, as always. Interestingly, on your regional spot positivity, it's pretty clear, you know, we're not out of the woods, but it's pretty clear that we broke the back of the big flare ups and hotspots in Monmouth and Ocean in particular, which would have been a part of that. So Ocean, again, not out of the woods, folks, but Ocean 62 cases today, Monmouth 61. Those were each regularly a couple of weeks ago over 100 in each of those places. It's quite clear that the counties that we started out with today, the over 110 plus one or two others, Hudson would be on that list is where, it's all over, but those are the big numbers. Thank you for that. Pat, what have you got in terms of compliance? Anything, by the way, on weather, which I know is back on the radar here, at least for potentially later this week. Welcome, thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon, everybody. With regards to compliance we did have the owner of Bobby Ray's Bar, which is in Pennsauken in Camden County was cited over the weekend for exceeding the 25% indoor capacity. With regard to the weather, we do have our Office of Emergency Management is monitoring Tropical Storm Zeta, which I believe is going to be upgraded to a hurricane this afternoon, Governor. That's probably going to bring us a substantial amount of rain Thursday and Friday. I think we're expecting one to three inches of rain and just remind folks that this time of year with the leaves, that the storm drain grates get clogged, and standing water and cars hydroplaning so I know our DOT partners as well as county and local road departments are out there. Homeowners could also play their part on their residential streets in order to try and keep those storm drains clean. We're keeping an eye on that as well, Governor. That's all I have.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat give us 20 seconds on Rocco Ferraro. It sounds like he was a giant.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Roc, yeah. And just loved -- I think I did talk to Richard and his sister Cindy, who's a registered nurse, just again, brought up a phenomenal amount of passion and just one of those faces of New Jersey, whatever state building, wherever he was assigned, passionate, loved what he did, I think will be tremendously missed by us all, and certainly his colleagues, some of the closest ones to him. He was just, had a heart as big as a lion. We will keep his entire family and him in our prayers. Thank you, Governor, for praying for them too.

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, the least we could do and by the way, too young. 49 years old, for crying out loud. This is a guy who was taken long before his time. Thank you, Pat and thank you, Judy. We're all here for questions, Eddy, David, the rest of us. I think we'll do this the way we did it, I know Michelle has been reaching out and asking members of the press if they have questions. We'll go a little bit beyond, I know we had a hard stop at two o'clock on Thursday. We'll go a little bit beyond that. But again, I apologize, but this is back to a more normal sort of press interaction.

But I hope everyone heard me up front that what we're doing in terms of keeping this virtual is not just for our sake; it's for the sake of all of us, including our members of the press, the technicians, the troopers. We're in a big room, we're socially distanced, everyone wears face coverings so hats off to everybody for that. But you know what? With these numbers, let's be virtual for a bit and when we think it's safe to get back in the same room again, we'll do it. With that, Michelle, over to you.

Michelle DeAngelo: Okay, we're going to start with Dan Munoz.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Daniel.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hey, Governor, can you hear me?

Governor Phil Murphy: I sure can.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Thanks for doing this. Hope you're all hanging in there. I have a number of questions but the Saturday spike, what caused that to spike to nearly 2,000 new cases? Any thoughts on Mayor Baraka enacting local restrictions for Newark? A number of questions about the vaccine? Would this be a mandatory

vaccination? Would there be certain activities off limits if you refuse to get the vaccine? Will there be religious exemption? If New Jersey doesn't get to the 70% threshold, does that mean restrictions would stay in place? Or is there some other thresholds that can be met to lower restrictions?

You mentioned, quote, "regulatory barriers that need to be cleared." Which ones can be done via executive action and which ones have to be done by legislation at the state efforts? That's it. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'll give a couple of comments, Judy, and then turn things over to you and David and/or Eddy. The Saturday spike that Danny is referring to was obviously a big number, 1,994 cases. The spot positivity on those days was from October 20th. The positivity rate was 3.98%. My guess is it was a date of a lot of tests, which Judy can come back and color on. But it is an outlier in the sense that it's 50% or more higher than even the higher numbers that we have been printing of late. I'll let Judy give you more color.

We've been on with Mayor Baraka and his team. I spoke to him myself over the weekend. Lots of moving parts, trying to nip hotspots that I think were principally, in Newark's case, in the East Ward and to a lesser extent the North Ward. Judy and team have been plussing up testing resources, tracing resources, helping them out with enforcement from either state or county resources in that respect, as well as helping them amp up and make the bullhorn even more effective, including in non-English language communications more aggressively. Mayor Baraka is a great mayor, a great leader. This isn't the first time Newark has gone through this, right? They have painful history with what happens when this thing flares up and no community has seen that pain more so than Newark, and we are right beside them in the steps that he's taken and the ones we're taking with him.

Judy, I'll turn it back to you and/or your colleagues in terms of the vaccine. But I will say this, as I turn it back over, your comments and my comments were both pointedly and not coincidentally directed at the fact that there's too much anti-vaccine noise out there to begin with, even before we had COVID-19 in our midst. We've got to make sure that vaccine compliance is high. If we, based on all the experts conclude beyond any reasonable doubt that this is safe and efficacious, and it can be scaled and delivered in the proper ways, then we need folks to do their part. We will not put anything on the street that we can't say all those things about. But Judy, any comments on some of Daniel's specific questions?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. First on the spike, we do know that there's been basically some pandemic fatigue or relaxation of some of the safeguarding, which has caused a general increase in cases. We also know that there was some throughput from a backlog that was built up at one of the major labs. But overall, the increases in cases are the relaxation of safeguarding, probably due to social gathering, small social gatherings, more than likely indoors as the cold weather has come in.

There's no indication that, nor do we anticipate that the vaccine will be mandatory. What we're hoping is through public awareness and education, bringing in partners to help us reach diverse groups throughout the state, that people will make a choice to be vaccinated at this point in time. But as the Governor shared, we have to do our job and our role of making sure that it's a safe and efficacious vaccine and that we stand behind and promote and make accessible vaccinations throughout the state.

As far as regulatory clearances, we are reviewing all regulations in New Jersey as they apply to vaccinations. Right now, we don't see anything significant that may have to be changed. We are looking at input into our information system, which by statute requires a specific consent to opt in. We want to make sure that doesn't slow down the process of a mass vaccination program, so more to come on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. Hey, Dave.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: I know, Governor, that you and Judy have talked a lot about the 70% goal and you're going to try to get the word out on how safe this is and so forth, only when it is safe. But we had the same kind of goal with the contact tracing, there was a big push initially when we were hiring more and then I think the statistics you gave is 58% of people are refusing to cooperate with the contact tracers. Is there a fear that this could happen with the vaccine? What else can we possibly do to incentivize people to get the vaccine?

Second and last question, you know, we continue to see these COVID numbers as well as hospitalizations rise. What do we think this is going to mean in terms of the virus killing people in New Jersey? Our numbers, thankfully, are still pretty low right now. But especially, I guess, Judy and her team, do we expect these numbers, you know, the mortality numbers to go up in the next couple of weeks and months? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Dave. I'm not sure there's correlation. I'm frustrated by the contact tracing piece, and I'm frustrated by the general anti-vax environment, but I don't think there's correlation. Judy, unless you can correct me, I don't think that that's a direct. I still think this is a lot of parents trying to protect their kids who had a six-pack of Budweiser, which we do not condone. Pat may have an opinion on this as well, as opposed to some health yea or nay reality. I think the contact tracer refusal to pick up is folks not wanting to rat people out, including maybe their own kids, or somebody's restaurant they were in or someone's club or something.

Judy, I think, said this well, to one of Daniel's questions. This continues to be not exclusively, our battles right now continue to be in the private home, private space battlefield, as opposed to the public square. I'll have one more comment on your second question and ask if Judy or Pat have anything they want to add to it.

Sadly, I think it's – listen, here's good news. We've got a lot more capacities, PPE, ventilators, hospital beds, etc. We test a lot more, which allows us to spot this earlier. We trace to the point of a corps that's now 2,000. Our medical professionals have a lot deeper understanding today, by far, than they did eight months ago. It does feel like the demographic has become somewhat younger. All of those, again, I'm practicing without a license, all of those would contribute, I think, to lower mortality rates.

Having said that, I said earlier 19 people died in our hospitals overnight. I mean, we know when we see hospitalizations and we know the lag associated with someone who's coming in the door and I mentioned earlier the percentage of what Judy thinks, at least anecdotally flip from persons under investigation to actual COVID patients, how many in ICU, at some point this is mathematically hard to avoid that mortalities are going to go up again. I personally think there's a lot in place to keep them going up at a slower pace, and they get to a lower number but I believe they're still going to go up. Judy, thoughts?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: You're right, they're still going to go up. I think that the new ways of treating patients has resulted in lower mortality. I think they found that individuals that went on the ventilators earlier did not have as good outcomes as proning and high flow oxygen and Remdisivir and dexamethasone. That seems to be what's working right now. I don't know. Dr. Adinaro, if you have anything you'd like to add.

Dr. David Adinaro: Yeah, I agree with both you and the Governor. We're clearly seeing that there are fewer cases converting into being hospitalized and fewer hospitalizations result in the ICU, we would hope that means also fewer deaths. A lot of that could be because of the age of the patients and clearly our care has increased. But I think both you and the Governor effectively pointed out, this is still a potentially lethal disease, and even just the people hospitalized, some of the people's recovery time for a lot of these patients, we're seeing people developing chronic problems related to COVID. I think it's important to point out that it's not just people who die, but also these long-term effects of this disease that can last you know, we don't know how long at this point.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a good point. The so-called long haulers, and I've gotten to meet a lot of them over the phone, in particular, over the past eight months. Well said. Thank you, Judy. Thank you, David. Hey, Carly.

Carly Sitrin, Politico: Hi, Governor, thank you so much for taking our questions today. First, two on Newark. Did Mayor Baraka's office come to you with a request to impose early closing hours and targeted shutdowns? And Newark isn't the only hotspot right now. Are you encouraging other local governments to take similar steps as Mayor Baraka?

And then one on schools. A lot of districts are approaching their end of the marking period benchmarks and they're beginning to rethink plans for next marking period, whether they're in person or hybrid or online. We saw Newark and Patterson as well announced it would be remote only through January. Will your administration and the Department of Education be coming out with new guidance now that the marking period is wrapping up?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I'm anxious as well, as the marking period comes to a head, making sure our senior in high school does well in his marking period. On the last one, I don't anticipate any new guidance, but each of the districts has to coordinate, and this has worked well. I think everybody agrees that this approach is both flexible, but also specific to the districts in question. I don't anticipate the guidance changing but I do anticipate a continued high level of communication between districts, on the one hand, and our Department of Education with big Department of Health input on the other.

And as I mentioned when I listed the schools yesterday, the trend – and your question's a good one, Carly, because it highlights the fact that a lot of these plans had some relevance to the end of the marking period in terms of where they might shift their model, in particular from remote to hybrid. But no, I don't anticipate more guidance but I do anticipate continued high level of communication and cooperation.

We've been on back and forth, either me personally or our teams, on with Newark throughout the weekend. You know, on our side, the particular commitments are around what we could do to plus up enforcement, to augment what Newark is doing themselves. I think Pat was on with the director of law enforcement earlier today, Director Ambrose, tracing, testing, including mobile testing, amplifying the bullhorn and making sure it's effective in cross languages. Those are the areas that we've been focused on, and again, our lines of communication are wide open and I can't say enough good things about Mayor Baraka.

And you're right, it isn't the only hotspot. It is our largest city, however and so Newark's numbers just as it relates to raw numbers, absolute numbers, are large. I don't want to declare victory. I mentioned Ocean County earlier. We had, in particular in Lakewood and adjacent communities, we deployed this playbook a couple of weeks ago and Judy was at the front of that, that's plussing up tracing, testing, working with community leaders, stressing the need to enforce the public health guidelines and the numbers suggest that we've gotten largely – again, you know, you don't declare victory, but we largely got through that flare up. That's a similar playbook. Different community, obviously, different dimensions, but a similar playbook that we're working on with the mayor and his team Newark.

And I'm sure, to your question, it won't be the last community that we'll be doing that with, unfortunately. Hey, Brent.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Hi, everyone. Do the positive tests listed on the dashboard include rapid testing? If not why? You proclaimed them a game changer a few weeks back, and you and your staff recently received rapid tests in the past week.

The Newark announcement, is your Executive Order still in place from back in March when it said that only the state could set these rules? Is Newark violating that or do they have your blessing?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? Oh, my Lord, Brent. I can't speak to the dashboard question. I do know that we're using Binax. Dr. Adinero has now given me four, I believe, four total. I think he gave me the first one a week ago. I had the honor of inviting him into my house on Saturday. I'll defer on the dashboard, but we did say there was a big challenge between the Abbott side and linking up that data effectively into our own public numbers. These are not, by the way, this is not a New Jersey only challenge.

The Executive Order is still very much in place, Brent. This is literally some steps at the edges that the Mayor took which we think are smart steps, as I mentioned earlier, but are not counter to our Executive Orders. Parimal Garg is on if he sees that differently, he'll come in and correct the record. Judy, on the dashboard, anything you want to?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: As you say, there is no electronic transmission from the antigen rapid test directly into our system so we're relying on manual input. We're trying to capture as much as we can. I can't promise you it's 100% but I can tell you that there's a group that's working on developing that interoperability as we speak. We hope within the next couple of weeks we'll have a solution to that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well said. Parimal, anything on the Executive Order, you want to add, or are you good?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: No, I think you're right Governor and Executive Order 108 remains in place. If there are any local restrictions that pose an obstacle to the statewide response, then we'll take a look at those. But right now, we don't feel that the steps that Mayor Baraka has taken pose an obstacle in any way.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Meg Baker.

Meg Baker, CBS NY: Hi, Governor, a question for you, again on Newark. Newark is taking a huge step back with this second wave of lockdowns. Do you think that the entire state is heading in that direction at all? Or how many cases would it take to have the entire state take a step back like Newark is doing?

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, I think we endorse – we've got a great partnership with Newark and this is no exception. So again, hats off to Mayor Baraka and we're all over Newark, as you can imagine. To Carly's questions from a couple of minutes ago, it won't be the last hot spot, I fear, that we'll be using that exact same playbook.

Again, I personally and Judy and her team and we speak about this constantly, we speak to it at these press engagements regularly. It continues to feel to us is that a lot of these cases are coming out of fatigued behavior in private settings which are beyond, you know, our ability to effectively regulate and/or enforce compliance. If we thought or if we think that shifts – so there were very few steps you could take other than pleading with people to do the right thing and that's what we're doing, and that's what we've been doing over the past month. And that's what folks, to their enormous credit, overwhelmingly have been doing.

I continue to believe, Meg, that there is not a blunt instrument, statewide step that we believe would effectively chop these numbers back down. I mean, we look at capacities by example, regularly; that's something we'll continue to look at. And that's obviously we leave everything on the table. I don't have a number for you as to where that would change. But, you know, clearly not just jumps in numbers, but meaningful jumps in positivity or rates of transmission or hospitalizations. We've already seen, obviously, some significant upticks. But remember, our rate of transmission at one point in March was 5.31. Judy, I forget our all-time high on positivity rates, but it was very much deep double-digits, and that's when we were taking crushing statewide steps. That obviously remains on the table, but we do not believe that those steps match the moment in terms of where the cases are coming from.

Judy, are you good with that, or anything you want to add? You're good. Thank you for that. Thank you, Meg. Hi, Shlomo.

Shlomo Schorr, The Lakewood Shopper: Hi Governor, thank you for staying around, I appreciate it.

Governor Phil Murphy: My pleasure.

Shlomo Schorr, The Lakewood Shopper: You've been warning about the indoor gatherings and you mentioned Thanksgiving. I wanted to know if you're worried about election night parties, I'm hearing about a lot of them planned for election night, if that's a concern.

And two, about a month ago, you'd mentioned that you requested a disaster declaration for several southern counties relating to the tropical storm we had. I wanted to know if there's been an update with that. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Shlomo. Listen, I mentioned how thrilled I was that Rutgers beat Michigan State on Saturday, which was huge. But what I wasn't thrilled about was somebody anonymously sent me some drive-by videos of a watch party, where everybody looked like they were on top of each other and not wearing masks and doing exactly the opposite of what we want people to do. By the way, in a private home. So if it's a football watch party, if it's an election night, if it's Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or Hanukkah, or whatever it might be, please, please, please – I'm glad you asked it, Shlomo – this is not a normal school year. It's not a normal sports year. It's not a normal year, period. We need folks to do the right thing. The down payment on hopefully getting back to something that is normal next year is to accept that it's not normal this year and to limit, limit, limit. Limit whatever gathering you might want, and you bring up a good one with election night, Thanksgiving, watching a game. Please do it the right way. Limited capacity, strong preference

that it's with people in your own bubble, like your family or the folks that you've been living with; a stronger preference, I know it ain't pretty out there today, looking out the window, but to do it outside, if at all possible. And that's the only way we're going to get through this.

There's nothing, I have no update on the disaster declaration and that's not surprising because these things take time and when we do have an update, I promise we will get to you. Parimal, would you agree with that, that there's no update on that?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, we'll check on that and circle back.

Governor Phil Murphy: Shlomo, if we find out more on it, we'll come back to you. So again, thank you for bearing with us folks, for doing this remote. Better to be safe than sorry. I'm thrilled that we've gotten, as a personal matter, a bunch of negative tests back but just with these numbers the way they are doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense as far as we're concerned gathering in rooms. We need to protect public health to the very best of our ability, not just our own but the members of the press, the camera crew, the technicians, the troopers, other folks, our teams. So thanks for bearing with us.

Unless you hear otherwise, we'll be with you electronically in the next couple of days and back to a virtual format, almost certainly a virtual format on Thursday. I know the next White House briefing is scheduled for Friday so if we think anything comes out of that of note, we will probably communicate with you electronically.

I want to thank Judy, David Adinaro, her deputy, Eddy Bresnitz, our former state epidemiologist who's been in there giving us extraordinary advice every step of the way, Pat Callahan, as always, Parimal, Mahen and the rest of the team.

You know, I think I reiterate the point that we ended on a minute ago, and that is, it's in the private spaces. It's just doing the right thing. It's battling through that fatigue. It's face coverings, it's social distancing, it's washing hands with soap and water, it's taking yourself off the field when you know that makes sense. It's getting tested at the appropriate point in time. If we do all that, we can break the back of this and we won't have to resort, to Meg's question, to big statewide blunt instrument moves. But if we can't get a hold of this thing, that's probably something that is a consideration that is going to have to become more meaningful. We'll have no choice at that point. Let's not get to that, folks. Let's break the back of this long before we get there. Again, thanks, everybody. God bless you all, keep well.

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