

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Seated with me to my right, the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, to her right, another familiar face, State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Good to have you back, Judy and Tina, as always. Guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, Parimal Garg, and a cast of thousands.

First thing, over the weekend, FEMA granted our request for a major disaster declaration for residents in Warren County who were impacted by the remnants of Hurricane Ida. This brings to 12 – you can see them on the screen – the number of counties where individual homeowners can now apply through FEMA for direct financial assistance to repair damages to their homes. The easiest way to get started is by visiting disasterassistance.gov. You can see that on the left there. FEMA has also opened disaster recovery centers across the state where homeowners can go to meet directly with FEMA and their representatives to ask questions or start their application process. To find the center nearest you, please visit fema.gov and click Search Your Location from the homepage for locations and hours. We are committed to working in partnership with the Biden administration and FEMA and county and local governments and organizations to help every impacted New Jerseyan. Pat will have more color on all of the above in a few minutes.

Moving on today, I am signing an executive order pertaining to all childcare settings across our state. First, the order requires that all childcare workers and facility employees be fully vaccinated by November 1st of this year. Second, the order requires that all childcare workers and facility employees be fully vaccinated by November 1st of this year. Third, the order requires that all childcare workers and facility employees be fully vaccinated by November 1st of this year. This tracks with the requirements that we have put in place for healthcare workers.

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workers, state employees, and educators and school workers, and the requirement includes full vaccination by November 1st, so that means a second dose by no later than October 17. The order also clarifies that the masking policies in all childcare facilities must mirror those in schools. As recommended by the CDC all employees, all students and children in a facility's care ages 2 and over – ages 2 and over – and all visitors must wear facemasks with limited exceptions. Again, this brings us no joy, trust me, but it's the right thing to do.

We appreciate that it may be difficult to keep very young kids in masks for the majority of the day, but we are looking for these settings to provide kids with as much support as necessary to ensure the safest possible environment. This part of the order takes effect this Friday, actually, September 24th. We know that there are already many childcare providers who are doing their utmost to protect the children in their care, their employees, and their communities, and we thank them. This order ensures that everyone is abiding by the same strong standards.

Next up, this past Friday the federal Food and Drug Administration's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee – that rolls off the tongue – recommended that the FDA offer booster shots for those ages 65 or older or those who are at high risk of contracting COVID and who are six months or longer past their second dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Those in these categories who were fully vaccinated by March. There are a couple of important caveats on this one. First, we are awaiting final guidance from the CDC and FDA before we open a window for folks who qualify for a booster to get that shot. We anticipate this guidance in the coming days, I believe, Judy. In the meantime, we are continuing to prepare to push the additional doses necessary out through our vaccine distribution network. To administer these booster shots, we will be working through our existing partnerships with healthcare providers and community pharmacy partners among others. A complete list of vaccination centers is available online at covid19.nj.gov/finder.

Also, a reminder that only those who received the Pfizer vaccine are eligible for a booster. There is no approval for the mixing and matching of vaccines. The boosters are at this time only again for those who received the Pfizer vaccine. Judy will be able to provide little bit more detail on this in a few minutes, but again, we're currently working to make sure that we have the supply ready to go once the CDC and FDA gives us their final booster guidance. Remember, it has been the case since mid-August, folks who are immunocompromised are eligible and have been for the past month plus for a third dose.

With that, let's review the latest data from Dr. Ed's team on vaccine breakthrough cases. The latest update includes all data through September 7th, which covers more than 5,375,000 fully vaccinated New Jerseyans, so everyone who completed their vaccination courses, whether it be the two-shot regime of Pfizer or Moderna or the one shot from J&J by August 24. First thing, we're reporting a total of 22,246 individuals who have tested positive for COVID from among the close to 5.4 million folks in total. This is roughly four tenths of 1% of those full vaccinated, and given the efficacy rates of the vaccines coming out of their clinical trials, which topped at around 95% protection against the virus, the real-world results in our state are continuing to outperform those trials, but as we dig deeper, we continue to see the real power of these vaccines remains in keeping people out of the hospital or worse the morgue. As of September 7th, 457 fully vaccinated people – again, out of nearly 5.4 million – were hospitalized due to COVID. That is .008%. There have been 111 COVID-related deaths in total among fully vaccinated New Jerseyans, sadly. That is .002%.

Here's the data specifically for August 30th to September 6th. Not surprisingly, this is still in the thick of the Delta fight. Not all of those 5.375 million folks who have been fully vaccinated had to deal with the teeth of this variant wave we're dealing with, but this recent grouping, this recent collection of data does, and here I would point to the hospitalization and death figures in particular. Across the entirety of these eight days, our hospitals reported a total of 1,138 COVID positive admissions and Dr. Ed's team counted 49 fully vaccinated individuals hospitalized due to COVID out of that total. As we said before, this is a bit of apples and oranges given the differences in data sets, but these numbers are nonetheless very illustrative. So too are these numbers. For the period August 30th to September 7th, Dr. Ed's team confirmed 127 deaths due to COVID-related complications. None of them at this time are from anyone who was fully vaccinated.

We have been reviewing these numbers related to breakthrough cases now for about the past two months. There have been slight changes in the overall percentages, but they have been slight. Given the enormous increases in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths we've recorded as we've been under assault by the Delta variant, the fact that these changes have been slight speaks all the more to the power of the vaccines. I know

that for some of you there is nothing we can say, no number we can show that will ever convince you to get vaccinated, but for those who remain on the fence or who for whatever reason have put off getting vaccinated, take these numbers to heart and go out and get vaccinated immediately.

Let's take a quick look at the rest of today's numbers. First, here are today's updated vaccination numbers. Here is today's update on newly reported cases. You can see the rate of transmission has ticked up slightly as we had a few days last week with big positive test returns, so we need to focus on getting that back down again. Here are the numbers from our hospitals yesterday. We continue to see, Judy, a general leveling in our hospitalizations, but again, we have to see these numbers decrease before we can feel we've exited this phase of the pandemic. Moreover, think of the tremendous healthcare workers who have been on the job since the pandemic started. You may not like wearing a mask. How about dealing with a pandemic for 18 months straight? When you gripe about masking or vaccination, you're really showing you only care about you.

The rest of us who have taken this seriously, who continue to take personal responsibility and precautions, who have gotten vaccinated, we are showing respect for our entire statewide family, including for the tremendous healthcare workers who have been on the front lines for far, far, far too long. The reality is that the overwhelming number of those they are treating are in that first category, folks who are simply putting themselves before their families and communities. Sadly, here are the latest numbers of confirmed deaths. God bless them all. I believe all but one of those are in September, Judy, to the best of my recollection. Again, knowing the numbers we're seeing from the fully vaccinated, it is safe to assume that these are largely if not exclusively folks who were not fully vaccinated. A COVID-related death is a preventable death, and it is as simple as that.

Now as we do every day that we're together, let's honor the lives of those we have lost. Let's start here. On January 3rd, this guy, Bound Brook lost one of its leading lights, 93-year-old John Becci, Jr. John was, as you can probably tell by that hat, a veteran of World War II serving in intelligence and reconnaissance with the army and was part of the 24th division that entered Japan. When he returned from the Pacific theater, he married his wife Christine, started a family, and settled in Bound Brook. Professionally, John was a masonry contractor, and he worked at the site of many of the buildings constructed in Bound Brook including his own home. He also gave back to the community a volunteer fireman, member of the American Legion Post 63, and president of the PTA, and through St. Joseph's Catholic Church where he was a parishioner among many other activities. John and Christine would have this month celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary. John left Chris behind along with his daughters Jean and her husband Dwight and Carol and her husband Ed. I had the great honor of speaking last Wednesday with both Jean and Carol. He also left behind four grandsons – Brooks, Kyle, Shane, and Reese and their spouses and eight great-grandchildren, Mason, Capriana, Essex, Braxton, Carter, Siena, Colton, and Emma. He is also survived by his sister Gloria. We thank John for his service to our nation and to his community and may God bless and watch over his memory and his family.

Let's move just a couple of towns over to Millstone Township, which was home to Richard Corvasce. Richard was only 64 years old when he passed from COVID on January 5th. Born in Leicester, England, Richard grew up in Hazlet, earned a degree in accounting from Trenton State College, now the college of New Jersey, and an MBA from Monmouth University. As a teenager, he took a job with Wakefern Foods collecting shopping carts from the parking lot. 42 years later and two college degrees later, he was still with Wakefern but now as the corporate director of finance. What a story. Outside from work, he was an avid golfer and a New York Yankees fanatic who loved few things more than going to a few games a season with friends and trying to evade the TV cameras so his wife would not see that he was there or at least what ballpark food he was eating. Richard is survived by his wife April, and I reached out to her last week, along with his three children, Michael, Lauren, Erica. I had the great honor of speaking with Michael and Lauren – and their spouses, his grandchildren Isabella, Brady, August, and Gemma, and his stepchildren, Eddie and Lauren. He also left behind his father, Anthony, sr. Please keep him in your prayers, and his brothers Anthony, jr., and Robert, and many nieces and nephews. We are honored to have called Richard part of our New Jersey family, and may God watch over him and his family.

Finally for today, we honor North Plainfield's Carl Foerster, who passed the day after Christmas at the age of 74. A native of Plainfield, Carl earned a law degree and embarked on a 35-year career with the Veteran's Administration in Newark retiring in 2008 as a case adjudicator and appeals board member. As committed as

he was to our veterans, he was just as committed to the youth in Union County giving a total of 61 of those years to the Boy Scouts both as a scout himself and as the long-time scout master of Plainfield's Troop 5. For his service, he was duly awarded numerous district and national scouting honors and awards. A man of faith, Carl was also an active member of the United Presbyterian Church of Plainfield serving as a deacon and multiple church leadership positions and on numerous church boards. Helen left behind his wife Helen, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, his children, son Chuck and daughter Leslie and her husband Bill, along with his grandchildren William and Allison. He's also survived by his brother Robert, numerous relatives in law, and multiple nieces and nephews and friends. Helen wanted me to say above all that Carl was a man of humility. She wanted me to make sure I made that point that he was humble. May God bless and watch over Carl and his family, and we thank him for a life of service. Three more noteworthy lives from among the now more than 27,000 we have lost from our New Jersey family. As always, we honor them all.

Before I close, I want to give a quick shoutout to that woman, Dr. Catherine Golfinopoulos, the owner of Paramus's AG Psychotherapy and Counseling services. We know how hard this pandemic has been on the mental health of so many of our fellow New Jerseyans, and throughout this past 18 months, Dr. Catherine and her team have been there to help their individuals and families through these uncertain times. Just as they have been there for many others across Bergen County living with challenges in their own lives. Thankfully, Dr. Golfinopoulos partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to receive an emergency small business grant that allowed her to keep her doors open and phones and internet connected so she and her team could stay connected with their community. I had the great honor last Thursday of catching up with Dr. Golfinopoulos and to thank her for her continued support for those who have needed her and her team's help to keep moving forward in their lives. We are extraordinarily grateful for all they've done and continue to do. By the way, the rare business that has no website, but they have a phone number, and here's the phone number. Main line is 201-291-4100. 201-291-4100. With all that being said, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. The FDA's Vaccine and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee met on Friday to consider the approval of a Pfizer booster. After reviewing the data presented, the panel unanimously recommended an emergency use authorization to provide for a Pfizer booster dose at six months after the primary series to Pfizer vaccine recipients who are 65 years or older or at high risk for severe COVID-19. The CDC's advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, ACIP, will meet on September 22nd and September 23rd to offer further recommendations on the usage of Pfizer in this population. Following the issuance of ACIP's recommendation, the next step is for the CDC to accept those recommendations. The Department will direct vaccination partners in the state to begin administering booster doses once ACIP and CDC provide further guidance. We will provide updates to the public once eligibility guidance is available.

As we continue planning for the Pfizer booster, we are including the homebound population in these efforts. While many of the homebound received either J&J or Moderna vaccine, they will continue to be served by the provider who administered their initial series. Individuals can reach out directly to their local health department or complete the intake form available on COVID-19 Info Hub for homebound persons. To find the intake form visit covid19.nj.gov/homeboundvax, and for assistance completing the survey by phone, please call NJ COVID-19 vaccine call center at 1-855-568-0545. In the meantime, we will continue our efforts to vaccinate as many individuals as possible, especially 12- to 17-year-olds and also to remind people to get their second dose to ensure greater protection. As of today, 59% of the 12- to 17-year-olds in our state have received at least one dose. We also continue to encourage those who are immunocompromised not to delay their third dose of either Pfizer or Moderna. You can find the vaccine – a vaccination site at covid19.nj.gov/finder or by calling, again, 1-855-568-0545. If you are immunocompromised, you can get a third dose.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 1,137 hospitalizations of COVID positive patients and PUIs. 57% of COVID patients in ICU today are on ventilators. That's one of the highest percentages that we've had. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory system in children. Our cumulative cases remain at 133. At the state veteran's homes, there are two new positive resident cases among residents of the Vineland home since our last briefing, and at our psychiatric hospitals, there one new case among a patient at Ann Klein. The daily percent positivity as of September 16th for New

Jersey is 4.97%. The northern part of the state reports 3.94%, the central part of the state 5.43%, and the southern part of the state 6.60%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe, and let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, friends, and most importantly, our children. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you as always. The earliest we're going to get guidance on the booster is Wednesday?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. Folks, again, that's – what you saw on Friday was one hurdle, and we're waiting to make sure we go through all the steps before we can hit the go button, and you can imagine we're preparing intensely behind the scenes to have this teed up. Pat, I mentioned Warren County was added, which we're fighting to get more counties. We're up to 12, so that's a good development inside of this tragedy. Any more color on places where folks could go other than that disasterassistance.gov website, but any other color on FEMA or other related matters? Weather feels pretty good. We may have something toward the end of the week. Is that right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Yes. Thanks, Governor. Good afternoon. We are expecting some rain Thursday into Friday, but as far as it being severe, that does not seem to be the case at this point. With regard to disaster recovery centers, Morris County opened theirs today in Morris Plain. Essex County also opened today at a West Orange Kmart which is co-located with a vaccination center, so we'll see multiple benefits from there. I know the Warren County site is being assessed, and that'll be identified this week, and where it will be built out is pending. There are two small business association sites, recovery centers open, one in Gloucester, one in Bergen. There will also be one in Somerset. That opened up today, actually.

At our public assistance applicant briefings – that's where we sit and meet with all the affected counties and towns and build out their project worksheets for eligible reimbursements, whether that's debris management, emergency protective measures, bridges, roads, all those things associated with the Stafford Act. I think I mentioned it last week, but the joint field office, where the federal and our OEM partners basically run the entire recovery effort with regards to not only the recovery but also mitigation efforts and plans, whether that's elevations, acquisitions, various plans that we'll put in place with the DEP and partners from across the state, that's open. That's a 34,000-square-foot location, obviously keeping social distancing in mind, and that has opened up, and again, I've seen them in operation for a long time, and it's phenomenal watching that partnership come together and continue to flourish as we recover from Ida. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. That's in Mercer County, right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: It is. East Windsor in Mercer, yes, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's not a spot for individuals or small businesses to go to. That is the – I would call it the wholesale coordinating location, which is great, physically in one place, obviously, makes a world of distance. We're going to buzz through Mike. We'll start with you over here. Is that Sarah with the mic? Nice to see you, Sarah. We will be – we're going to stay with the two a week cadence at least until we get sufficiently through and get a better sense of how schools in particular have opened up, anything else on the post-disaster relief, and until we start to see the Delta crest. I think we have Dr. Allen-McMillan teed up for Wednesday for our first – not sure of that [], but she'll be here soon to give us a sense of what school looks like here after the first few weeks.

Q&A Session

With that, Mike, we'll start with you, and we'll be back here at 1 o'clock on Wednesday.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon. Thank you. Governor, can you explain why the mandate now for daycare centers? What information led to the decision today instead of say August when a similar decision was made for teachers? I wanted to ask a follow-up on the post-mortem on the administration's handling of COVID. You said that something like that would be done. I'm curious if you have a timeline for when, and do you think voters have – should be able to see the results of such an investigation before the

election this November or now. Ballots have gone out already even. An unrelated question on the Afghanistan refugees. Could you give an update on how many folks are at the joint base and what if anything the state is doing to help relocate them or assist them in any way? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Mike. No magic to today on daycare, but we had always said that we would always start with the most exposed elements of workforce, clientele, etcetera, and then expand out from there, so we started with healthcare. We then went to educators, state workers, and we're going to chop through communities as we see fit, and this is something that was always on the cards. We just hadn't made the final call yet. We feel this is the right time to do it. No update on the post-mortem, but we're committed to that. That hasn't changed. Part of the reason why there's no update is we're still in the game. We're not to Monday morning yet as it were. We're still in the fight. The politics of it is no interest to me win, lose, or draw, but no update on that.

On Afghan refugees, we'll probably at some point sooner than later give a more comprehensive update on where we stand on that, but it's many thousands at the joint base. We have been working in tensely across the whole range of government. I'd say Judy and her team most importantly. We have been doing everything we believe we can and should do to be a full partner. It's one of these processes that's not a straight line, but now that the original waves have come in, I think it's our hope and my hope and I suspect Judy and Pat – Pat's been very involved as well – we would expect to see a more regular process as you get fewer new arrivals, and Homeland Security as I think is now public has pointed to many hundreds who would be – ultimately they would hope that New Jersey could ultimately take of the population, and so that's very early stage, but that's something that we feel is something that is both our obligation and responsibility, and we'll do everything we can for the folks most of whom are here temporarily, and for the folks who ultimately end up staying here, we'll do everything we can to get them settled. Thank you for that. I do think a more comprehensive update in the next couple of weeks makes sense. Dan, if you can help me remember that. Thank you. Daniel, good afternoon.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Good afternoon, Governor. Last May, you and neighboring governors announced you wanted more personal protective equipment produced in your respective states. What's the status of that? How much more PPE is and the pieces of the supply chain are now being made in New Jersey? What's in the way of those efforts progressing? What are the current stockpile levels? With the smaller eligibility for the Pfizer booster, how many people in New Jersey are eligible for the booster shot as it stands? What does the infrastructure need to look like to administer booster shots for the smaller subset of the population, and how is that different from what had initially been proposed of I think it was upwards of 2.4 million New Jerseyans? Do any of the megasites need to be reopened? Once the guidance comes out, what's the soonest anyone in the state could get a booster shot? Anecdotally, there's been reports around the country of people lying to get a booster shot, saying – making up something so that they can get it. Has anything like that happened here? Do you advise against people doing that? That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, thank you. I don't have a PPE update in terms of what's being produced or the stockpiles, but we can come back on that one. Let's do that, and we'll come back to you, Daniel, on that. Judy, I'm going to say a few things here and then turn it over to you. In terms of the actual numbers, I don't have that number, but you may well – do you have the number for New Jersey in terms of if it's 65 and up?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: No time like the present.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Sixty-five-plus individuals that received Pfizer would be about 430,000. If you look at high-risk individuals if they move it to 16 to 64 with underlying conditions, we're making an assumption that healthcare workers might be considered in that high-risk group, and that's just an assumption, it could be as many as 1.1 million immediately eligible. We think it's going to be somewhat lower than that, but we're planning for the higher number, and it will be a combination of existing outlets, strong, active county sites, and probably one megasite to begin with and then adding as we add more individuals.

Governor Phil Murphy: Does the 1.1 include the seniors?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: It's the 400,000 plus –

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yes. It's all in, 1.1.

Governor Phil Murphy: You answered Daniel's other questions as well except for when. The when will be once we get the final go ahead, it'll be immediately, so it'll be immediately after the last go ahead. Are there people lying to get the – either to get the third shot now or ultimately the booster. I'm sure there are some folks out there, yes, but two things. One is overwhelmingly, no, and that's Jersey. People are doing the right thing and behaving responsibly, and secondly, in every step in the vaccination process – I give Judy and her team and Pat a lot of credit here. When faced with the alternative to have more layers of bureaucracy and proof and all that versus just get the shots in the arms, they've taken door number two, and that's what we're going to continue to do. Thank you.

Joe, is that you?

Joey Fox, NJ Globe: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, how are you?

Joey Fox, NJ Globe: Doing good. How're you?

Governor Phil Murphy: Good, thanks. What have you got?

Joey Fox, NJ Globe: You all have been talking a lot about eventuality of booster shots for 65-plus and high-risk individuals, but it also seems like relatively soon, there might be shot eligibility for 5 to 11 year olds. I was just wondering about your plan for that, potential mandates in schools, how that will intersect with the booster shot program, all those kinds of questions. I believe it was this morning, three state legislators announced that they wanted an independent investigation into the flooding in Bound Brook and a New Jersey Transit train that helped cause it. Do you support an independent investigation? Then finally, Governor, you and your campaign and your administration have made your pro-choice policies an important component, and right now the chief discussion of that is happening in the US Supreme Court. Do you support Chief – not Chief Justice, excuse me, Justice Stephen Breyer stepping down while democrats control the federal government? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. On the 5 to 11, it's still a lot of rumors right now. I think we are pretty convinced whenever it comes it'll be a different dose. I believe this is right. Tina should weigh in if she sees it differently. As a result, that means it will have to go through its own distribution channel, and I don't anticipate at this point changing any of the parameters we have around school, but please hopefully safely and sooner than later that we get that approval, and we can then go to the kids down to that level. Does that sound fair to all? Getting some good nods to my right. Pat, I assume you're good with that. I haven't seen the request for an independent investigation. We obviously want to make sure we know exactly what happened. I spoke to the mayor who's a really good guy right after it happened. I know he wants to get to the bottom of it, and I can say on behalf of NJ Transit, we'll do everything we can to learn and figure out what happened, learn. I think NJ Transit did a lot of other related stuff to mitigate, but again, that's where that is. Your last question, I can safely say, is way above my pay grade, but thank you for asking. Good to see you. Alex, how are you?

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Dr. Tan, setting aside the fact whether or not people are lying to get it, what would be the harm of a person simply getting a third dose of the vaccine with or without FDA approval. The vaccine's safe. It's currently free. What would go wrong if somebody decided to just get a third dose on their own? Commissioner, does the high-risk population include prisoners in correctional facilities, and is it possible that these prisoners could be getting their vaccinations, their third shots before some folks who are walking around on the street are able to? I also asked you this before in regarding to schools. You said that in terms of discipline for kids who refuse to wear masks in schools, it's up to the district. How does that discipline work for kids or parents in childcare settings, and will you categorically rule out ever having an institution, childcare or school call child protective services on a parent because the kid won't wear a mask?

For you, Colonel, can we have an update on the one missing person. Is that person still missing, and what were the circumstances that person went missing under? For you Governor, does the FDA's decision put a damper on your efforts to put these booster sites together? You were ready to go last week. Are you expecting to have resistance to getting these boosters out? It was tough enough to get two shots or in some cases, one into people's arms. Do you expect it's going to be difficult with the third? Just generally like my guess, how do you think that voters can make a decision on whether or not to reelect you without a full and independent review of your actions during the pandemic? Do you think you've made the right decisions? What's your pitch to voters? Is it fair that they judge your response to COVID in deciding who to vote for?

Governor Phil Murphy: I love the way you ask your questions. Tina, what can go wrong. These are good questions, all kidding aside. The first one – I mean, I would just say we play by the book. We look to the feds who've done the overwhelming amount of research and the manufacturers of trials, etc., but help us with why do we have to make sure this is a go?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Sure, the FDA and the CDC, they have special advisory committees just in general to make sure that they have that independent of all the data that are out there, particularly as it relates not only to how effective the vaccines might be or the recommendations for, say, if they're a dose or a booster but also safety data. With that said, as we had seen from the FDA Advisory Committee's review on Friday that they did still have some concern that there was not enough information and data related to the safety for those outside of those where there might be a benefit, 65 and older. An example that was cited relates to myocarditis events that have been noticed. Myocarditis is an inflammation of the heart. It could cause some significant medical issues in individuals, and we know right now, for example, that myocarditis – the likelihood of seeing more myocarditis cases are associated among young men but particularly after the second dose. For example, is there enough data to support whether or not it's safe for – looking at that particular condition. That's why our committees, these advisory committees, look at as much data as they have, and they make recommendations to FDA, to CDC, based on what they have.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, thank you for that. Judy, in terms of folks in vulnerable settings, I assume we'll take the CDC's guidance on this.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we'll primarily take the CDC guidance. We're hoping it'll be more expansive so it's not going to be a situation of either/or, one before another, as we did when we didn't have enough vaccine supply, but we do have supply so we hope – and we're prepared to give it, so we're going to hopefully have an expanse.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, let's remember in settings like the one you asked about, it's a broader population than just the folks who are there for – serving a sentence. It's correction officers, police officers, counselors, medical personnel. Sadly, some of them have died; we memorialized them.

Yeah, we probably take nothing off the table in terms of dealing with a situation with a child or a district or a childcare center. We're expecting folks to do the right thing. Admittedly in a childcare setting, you don't have a district reality. You can go to the district of Town X, and you know that you're having a conversation with someone who is responsible for that whole district. Daycare is clearly – childcare is clearly a much more diffuse, atomized reality. We're going to rely on folks doing the right things. They are regulated, so we have an opportunity to make sure they're regulated and that includes from a health perspective.

Pat, on the one person that's missing, I'm glad Alex asked that because we haven't talked about that lately.

Superintendent of State Police Col. Pat Callahan: It is my understanding that there is still one person missing, Alex. I've asked the SEOC for an update, so I might even have that by the time we're out of here today as far as circumstances and which municipality they were from.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sadly, we do know when we got to the 30th loss of life, it was not from the missing list. That was someone who had been in a hospitalized – yeah, in terms of – I guess you asked two questions on this last one. The infrastructure, I think you've heard Judy refer to this in terms of where we expect to see the booster shots be available. Again, this somewhat depends on the scope of the universe of people. If it's closer to 400,000 versus 1.1 million, there's probably a different answer there, as you would expect.

Will it be difficult? I think the fact of the matter is that you're already, by definition, dealing with a universe that's vaccinated. The difficulty has been the hurdle from no vaccination to convince people to get vaccinated. There's a block that, for whatever reason, are just not going to do it, but there's another block that we've been pounding away on who have a more legitimate reason, which is why we're knocking on doors and doing all that we're doing. This group is 100%, by definition, vaccinated. It should be a relatively straightforward exercise. Time will tell.

Yeah, on the politics, again, I don't have any – I want to, as always, keep that out of here. What I would say is we go up on the wire without a net somewhere between one to six or seven times a week depending on how you look over the past eighteen months with a lot of data and a lot of analysis including self-analysis on what's working, what's not working. I would say this very simply again: No politics. We're among the most vaccinated states in America. We are the most vaccinated large state and right now in our ICU beds, we have the smallest percentage of COVID patients of any state in America. Those are two facts and we'll just leave it at that.

Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. Governor Murphy, will you mandate vaccines for children five and up once the FDA grants full approval?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think we've already addressed that. The answer is we're going to deal with that population the same that we've dealt with other communities.

Reporter: Alright. For the Health Commissioner, how many children are currently hospitalized with COVID, and what percentage of all new cases over the last few weeks are pediatric cases? Several districts have already closed schools or quarantined entire classrooms due to COVID outbreaks. Some say guidance isn't clear on what constitutes in-school transmission and what might be – and that it might be more prevalent than reported. When should a classroom or a school close its doors? When will you share more detailed information about those school outbreaks on the dashboard?

Back to the Governor, has your office been in touch with the Biden Administration about the number of Afghan evacuees that New Jersey resettlement agencies will help find homes for here? Finally, what is the state doing to protect Ida victims from price gouging and contractor fraud as they try to recover?

Governor Phil Murphy: The first one we answered. COVID kids, as I recall, 24 pediatric cases right now, Judy? Does that sound right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Twenty-two.

Governor Phil Murphy: Twenty-two, and any color on – I know we'll have Angelica sometime sooner than later but from your perspective, a health perspective, how do you answer that question of what's the level of certainty that it was an in-school transmission from an out-of-school transmission? Tina should weigh here on this. When should, therefore, that school, that classroom take the step to close? Tina?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: In-school transmission, we have certain definition and criteria that we utilize to define what an in-school transmission is. That's basically when you have – we define an outbreak – an in-school transmission outbreak to be three or more epidemiologically linked cases where you don't have any household contacts among them and that there might be some common activity or contact among these. Certainly we do recognize that there might be sporadic cases, one-off cases, in schools that might not – that might just exist on its own. You might have a classroom where you have an individual who might've traveled recently and come back to school, for example, one individual but there's no additional transmission within the school. We certainly recognize that those individual sporadic cases are also being followed up by the local health departments. Recommendations for containment and monitoring are typically taken as we typically do with any sort of COVID case.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, anything you want to add or you good? Thank you, Tina. Mention this – your last question I think we've addressed, but we're on daily with the Biden Administration in one form or another, period, and specifically of late with – as it relates to Afghan refugees. The number that they are putting out there is an aspiration for ultimate, not just temporarily being in New Jersey as there are many thousands on the joint base but ultimately resettling here is in the hundreds; 500 and change is the number. At least that's

where we are at the moment. We'll continue – we want to do our share, whether it's temporary or permanent, and do the right thing by these folks who stood by us. That's the extent of the update we have now. Thank you for that.

Ma'am, are you – is that Katie?

Katie Kausch, NJ.COM: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: How are you?

Katie Kausch, NJ.COM: Good, how are you?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm good, thank you.

Katie Kausch, NJ.COM: Which megasite are you looking to reopen and when? Then when would a call be made on additional megasites? After last week's announcement on school outbreaks and cases, the online dashboard has been blank. When will that be fixed and how frequently will it be updated? Will those updates include the list of schools who've had to go virtual because of COVID and specific information about the number of cases or quarantines related to school outbreaks?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I don't think we have the – do we have the megasite answer yet? We'll still working that through, right? Do you want to jump in?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I think the first one that will open will be Gloucester, but it's not – and these not finalized yet til we know what we need.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, and that was one of the great ones we had when we first started this. Again, this gets back – I know we've said this several times, but you'll have to bear with us. When the bid ask is 400,000 versus 1.1 million, we've got to figure out – the infrastructure has to follow that answer.

I think there's a review of the dashboard this afternoon, I'm told, and it hopes to be up and running in the next number of days on schools, and I think it will include the virtual question as well, right?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: We're just waiting additional review of the dashboard before it becomes publicly available.

Governor Phil Murphy: As always, we want to make sure we get it right and it'll be sooner than later. I think it'll include the information that you'd want. I think we're probably going to do it on a county basis, which is historically what we've done. If you see – once it's up, if you see any advice you have for us, we'll take it. Thank you.

Dave, good afternoon. You'll take us home here.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. With regard to the school situation, some parents have been very concerned from the onset of the start of the school year and have argued for virtual alternatives. Would it make sense to think about offering a virtual alternative separate from just each individual school figuring out their own plan to have a more planned out overview of this situation so that if a school has to close, they can deal with it? Also, do you think that this business with the school and the outbreaks – is this just something we're going to have to live with for the foreseeable future? Who knows how long Delta and then what comes after Delta? We don't know.

With regard to the booster shot plan, will all of the locations, the dispensing locations that are currently in existence, be offering the booster shots? I think Governor, you've said a couple times there's more than 1500 right now. Would we anticipate that there would be appointments needed? Would these be walk-in centers? How do we think this is going to pan out? Pfizer, as was mentioned I believe with the 5 to 11 years olds, they're arguing now and have put forth their review and analysis that the shot is – the vaccine is safe for these age group children. How much of a difference do we think having children ages 5 to 11 getting vaccinated – how much of a difference can that make? Then finally with regard to the childcare settings, any of us who've had kids, especially remembering when they were about 2 years old. We know that it's not very easy necessarily to convince a 2 year old to do anything.

Governor Phil Murphy: It isn't when they're 20, either.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: That's also true, yes. Different type of problem, though. Specifically with the 2 year olds, I know girls tend to be more mature than boys, especially early on. Just to think of 2 year olds – keep your mask on. That's going to be next to impossible in many situations, I would think. Realistically speaking, how are we going to deal with this? I know you had said, Governor, counting on the parents to do the right thing, but in reality, this is going to be a problem, I would think. Thank you

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dave. Before we jump into your questions, Pat, anything on the missing person question also?

Superintendent of State Police Col. Pat Callahan: I do. Technically, Alex, the state medical examiner office is still tracking one that was a person reported in Nutley. Nutley Police has declared that as unfounded because it was based upon a witness statement. We will have an official answer for you but at this juncture, it sounds like it's tracking in a good direction and that report was unfounded, meaning that we probably most likely will have no further missing persons. I'll get that to you as soon as I have it. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Pat. I'd say your first question, two answers. One is if this whole thing goes south on us in a big way, obviously the answer I'm about to give you – we have to leave it on the table as an option to adjust the answer. Assuming we believe that we can achieve the safe setting for kids, educators, staff, and we believe the package we've put forward can achieve that, the option of learning loss associated with virtual learning is not an acceptable option. We have got to – assuming – again, assuming we can be safe, we've got to keep kids physically in person.

I'll give a non-medical, non-scientific answer. Is this something we're going to have to live with for the foreseeable future? I think the answer's yes. I think the answer has to be yes. Just as we've discussed – different question but just as we've discussed – Ed Lifshitz was with us several months ago and we had that discussion on what a bad flu season looks like versus the rate of mortality associated with this. It looked like it was trending toward that level. It's now significantly above that, but that is a different way of saying I think this is going to be with us. That's my opinion. I don't know how you all –

To be determined on where you get the booster. We have six – I just checked it. I've got 1,658 locations right now. Not all of them are offering Pfizer; that's going to be one big bright line, so it's Pfizer only. You had – your first shots had to be Pfizer. The booster will be approved presumably for Pfizer, so if you could bear with us on that one. That will be a bright line, I would think, Judy, right?

How much safer will we be if 5 to 11 year olds – I would think it's a big step, I would think. We're still pounding away on getting the 12 to 17 year olds at a higher hit rate. They continue to lag the state. In fairness, they started later; they weren't approved at the same time, so that's to be expected. It's got to be a big incremental step in the right direction in terms of safety, I would think. I don't know. Again, I'm practicing without a license here but so far, I'm getting some good nods.

I think you've said it right on childcare settings and 2 year olds. We're going to just – there's some amount of habit that's already developed because these kids are used to seeing – if they've got any muscle memory, they've been seeing Mom and Dad and maybe their older brother or sister wearing masks. It's not entirely from a standing start. I mentioned that a lot of these childcare centers are already doing best practices, which is great. It's going to be – we're going to have to do our best in here. I think the premise of your question stands, and again I think there's a habit that's in our midst that, God willing, these kids are a part of. They see it; they internalize it and we can bat at a better batting average than we otherwise would've if we were starting from a standing start.

You all good with that? Okay, I'm getting – continue to get nods. Thank you, everybody [inaudible 0:17:40]. Judy, Tina, as always, Pat, Parimal, Dan, Sarah, cast of thousands, we'll be again back with you live here unless you hear otherwise at 1 o'clock on Wednesday. If we have anything, either change to that or anything that we need to get you between now and then, we'll go virtual or electronic or in some other format.

I just would say let's all continue what you've done by the millions. Let's continue to do the right thing here. Please, please, please get vaccinated. Look to any guidance we set out about booster shots, possibly before we gather on Wednesday. I don't know what time they're meeting that day, but my gut tells me they're more

later in the day usually, so we'll probably have to bear with each other. Get vaccinated. Continue to do the right thing and to each and every one of you who are doing all of the above, we can't thank you enough. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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