

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: June 21st, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Sorry to be a couple minutes behind. I'm joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz; great to have you both. To my left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. Parimal Garg is with us, cast of thousands.

The first thing today, I'd like to put out a remind about the expanded child tax credit available to many middle class and working families under the American Rescue Plan. This is major tax relief. For more information about the tax credit and to make sure you are enrolled to receive yours, please go to that website, childtaxcredit.gov. If you filed a federal tax return in 2019 or 2020 and already received your federal stimulus check, this expanded child tax credit will begin being distributed to you monthly starting in July. If you did not file a federal return, you need to take action to make sure you get your tax relief.

All working families with incomes of up to \$150,000 or if it's a single parent household, \$112,500, are eligible for the expanded child tax credit of up to \$3,000 for each child ages 6 to 17 and \$3,600 for children under the age of 6. There's no reason for any family to leave money on the table. This tax credit is here to support you and your family as we recover from the pandemic and move forward. Again, more information is available at that website, childtaxcredit.gov. I encourage everyone to go there.

One more thing I'd love to encourage everyone to do is to support the small businesses in your community. Tomorrow I'll be signing a series of bills to provide further financial support for our small business community as they continue to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. I want to thank our legislative partners for working on these bills with us. While I know these supports are welcome, nothing is more important to our small businesses then the support of millions of you all out there.

One business I'd like to highlight today is Woodbury Antiques, a fixture on Broad Street in historic downtown Woodbury in Gloucester County, owned by that woman, Kathy Furber. Woodbury Antiques is a cooperative that covers 17,000 square feet and features items from more than 3 dozen vendors. Woodbury itself was a recipient of support from the Department of Community Affairs Neighborhood Preservation COVID-19 Relief grant program, which has helped numerous downtowns and business districts stay open for business. With a direct grant as part of that, Kathy was able to make sure that Woodbury Antiques rent was kept current so her vendors would have their retail homes waiting for them.

With the grant funds, South Woodbury also created an e-gift card program that doubled the value of in-store purchases, which can only be redeemed at establishments which participated in the neighborhood preservation program. This further helped Kathy and her fellow small business owners keep their customers. Today our main streets from Woodbury to Wood-Ridge and everywhere in between are open for business. Our small businesses are the backbone of our economy.

Thanks to great people like Kathy, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, I think it was last Thursday, and businesses like Woodbury Antiques, I know we're poised to come back stronger than ever. I thank Kathy and every small business owner who has kept the faith throughout the past 15 plus months. Check them out, by the way, woodburyantiques.com. It is well worth it, trust me.

Let's move forward with our numbers for today. This morning we're showing a total of 4,801,626 fully vaccinated individuals who live, work, or study in New Jersey. As I noted on Friday when we celebrated our crossing of our initial goal of 4.7 million, we had no intention of stopping. Today's numbers prove our commitment to pushing this total higher and higher.

As part of our Operation Jersey Summer, we have our COVID-19 Community Corps working door-to-door across a bunch of communities, municipalities to make sure everyone not only has the facts they need to make the right decision about getting vaccinated, but that they know where to get vaccinated. Our COVID-19 community core team have knocked on more than 134,000 doors – incredible, right – in addition to making nearly 60,000 phone calls and texts. This is this week's list, **[24:02]**, right? They will be this week in Jersey City, Bayonne, North Bergen, West New York, Hoboken, and Union City in Hudson County, Passaic, and Paterson in Passaic, Newark, East Orange, Irvington in Essex County, Perth Amboy, New Brunswick, Piscataway, Old Bridge, Woodbridge in Middlesex County, Camden and Gloucester in Camden County, Vineland and Cumberland, Trenton right here, Atlantic City in Atlantic, Howell in Middletown, my hometown, in Monmouth, Lakewood, Toms River, Brick, and Jackson in Ocean Counties. As we promised on Friday, Judy, and predicted and Pat was with us, we're not stopping. Just because we got to our goal, we have the hammer dropped. I thank each and every person walking their communities to help us get the word out that the vaccines are safe, effective, and free.

Because we are now where we are in our vaccination program, we continue to see our daily case rates drop to record lows. Today we are adding only 126 additional confirmed PCR test results to our tally, along with 42 presumed positive antigen tests. The statewide rate of transmission, which by the way, we've said this now repeatedly of late, is almost exclusively measuring the spread of the virus among the unvaccinated, is 0.99. The positivity rate is 0.95.

Judy, there have been very few moments in this pandemic when we could have basically transposed the positivity rate and the rate of transmission and come up with the right answer. That has not happened terribly often. In our hospitals we were down to only 233 confirmed with 72 people awaiting confirmation. ICUs and ventilator use you can see are also continuing to drop. We had another day of lower admission numbers stemming from the decrease in our hospital metrics, lower discharge numbers as well.

I know we've been banging on the drum lately especially, but the simple fact is these numbers are being almost entirely driven by the unvaccinated among us. The vaccines have proven to be more than 99.9% effective in preventing serious illness and hospitalization. There's a direct correlation between our increasing vaccination numbers and our decreasing infection and hospitalization numbers. I cannot put it anymore directly.

If you don't want to be one of the numbers on our dashboard, go out and get vaccinated today. Especially with the emergence of the more transmittable variants, the time to get vaccinated is now. We cannot risk any COVID brush fires in any communities where vaccinations lag.

Sadly, we must today report an additional three deaths that are now confirmed to be from COVID-19 related complications. The reality is that death from COVID-19 complications is now largely preventable. To protect yourself and your loved ones, please go out and get vaccinated. As we do every day, let's take a couple of minutes and tell several more of the stories from among the more than 26,000 of whom we've lost since last March. Today, given what I've just said a minute ago, it must be noted that all three of these deaths that we announce with the heaviest of hearts took place this past December.

We're going to start by remembering a couple. This is on the left Dung Pham and her husband Dinh Le. They were from Middlesex, Vietnamese immigrants who came to New Jersey in 1989 to make a better life for themselves and their family. Dung passed on December 27th, and Dinh followed her 3 days later on December 30th.

They both worked at the Foothill Acres Nursing Center in Hillsboro. Dung was a certified nursing assistant. Dinh worked in the maintenance department. They were both parishioners at our Lady of Mount Virgin in Middlesex. Dung was a huge fan of *Dancing with the Stars*, while Dinh immersed himself in technology and a love of soccer, especially when the world cup rolled around every four years, as it will do again next year. This time for the first time ever it will start in November.

Together they love their adopted home, but they love their family even more. That is the family that they left behind. They had three daughters, Nga Pham, My Tran, and Lana Nguyen and their spouses; their five grandchildren, Phuong Le, Phuong Thi, Phuong Tran, Kevin Tran, and Dalena Nguyen. I spoke with Dalena back on Wednesday. She, by the way, is the daughter of Lana Nguyen.

Lana had COVID positive and Lana's husband, Dalena Nguyen's father, had it so bad, Judy, he was in the hospital for three weeks. They also left behind their great-grandchildren, Vincent, Vivian, Phuong, Nhu-y, and Thien-An. Dinh also leaves another son, Lee, and a granddaughter, Anna, and Dung also left her sister behind, Susie. We are grateful that Dung and Dinh chose to make their American dream a reality in New Jersey. They added to the rich tapestry of our state and may God bless them both and the extraordinary family they leave behind.

Today we also remember this gentleman, Joseph Kieselowsky, of the Parlin section of Sayreville Middlesex County. He was 84 years old. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania and served in the United States Air Force, as you can see, from 1954 until 1958 as a mechanic working on the B-36 Peacemaker bomber aircraft, rising to the rank of staff sergeant. He came to New Jersey in 1964, making his home in Parlin to begin a career in the real estate and home improvement industries.

He put his mechanical skills to good use working on small engines, including for the lawnmowers and other landscape equipment he used to tend to yards and properties throughout Sayreville later in life; a job, by the way, that he did alongside his wife, Anna. Joe was also an accomplished woodworker with more than 2,500 birdhouses to his credit. He was a lover of polka music, a good joke, and an even better martini. He was predeceased by his first wife, Barbara, in 1997. He also previously lost his brother, Peter.

He and Anna enjoyed 18 years of marriage. He is survived by her and his children, Joseph, Richard, Steven, with whom I had the great honor of speaking last Wednesday; Deborah and their families, including his grandchildren, Nikita, Natasha, Garrison, and Quinn. He also left his stepdaughters, Natasha and Valentina. Joe is further survived by his sister, Gloria, and brother, Robert, and their children.

He also leaves family in Ukraine. By the way, Ukraine is playing, as we speak, a very important consequential European cup game. Joe passed on December 11th, and we thank him today for his service to our nation and for making our state his home for nearly 60 years. May God bless his memory and his family he leaves behind.

That's all I've got for this Monday. Before I turn things over to Judy, I simply want to reiterate what I said about her on Friday when we were together with Pat to celebrate our breaking the 4.7 million vaccination barrier; much of our success is due to her steady leadership and constant focus on public health. I know Judy was taken aback by the quickness of my announcement that the new Department of Health building in Trenton will be named in her honor, but it is richly deserved. We know Judy has been the right leader for these times. I know Judy would also want me to say that our success is ultimately rooted in the work that millions of you have undertaken to keep yourselves and your families and your community safe from masking, testing, social distancing, everything over the past year, especially now to getting vaccinated over the past number of months. This has truly been a statewide effort, and we are going to win this thing. With that, 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. Also, thank you for your kind words. Good afternoon. We marked a significant milestone on Friday, but our work goes on to vaccinate as many people as possible.

I announced Friday that the Department of Health will be sending vaccine ambassadors to high risk counties to work with elected officials, community leaders, school districts, and faith leaders to bring vaccines closer to where the people are, neighborhood pharmacies and doctors offices and popup clinics and barbershops and churches. As the Governor has said, COVID-19 is now largely a disease of the unvaccinated. If you are not vaccinated, you are at risk for getting infected, particularly with one of the variants of the virus that are circulating and now spreads more rapidly and result in more serious disease. For those who have yet to be vaccinated or fully vaccinated, there's reason to be concerned about the increase in the highly transmissible variant like the variant B.1.617.2, known as the Delta variant, the variant that was first seen in India.

The spread of this variant, first identified in India in December of 2020, is another reason for us to remain vigilant and to continue to strive to increase vaccine rates. We are seeing the impact the Delta variant is having in the UK. We're following that, so we cannot let that happen here. The CDC upgraded the B.1.617.2 mutation of COVID-19 to a variant of concern last week. It has been detected in at least 66 countries, including the United States.

According to the former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb, the Delta variant is between 40 and 60% more transmissible and could become the dominant strain in the US sometime next month. Children and young people seem to be the ones spreading the Delta variant in England. While this variant has increased in New Jersey recently, it is currently a minority of the variants that we're seeing. It's about 7.3% of the variants that have been sequenced in the last 4 weeks.

The CDC estimates that it may be responsible for nearly 10% of all new COVID-19 infections in the United States. In some Western US states, the variant may be responsible for nearly 20% of the cases. We do expect to see it increase in our state; however, the vaccines authorized for us in the United States have been reported to be effective against the Delta variant as well as other variants. In one recent study, researchers in the UK found that a two-dose regimen of the Pfizer vaccine was 88% effective against symptomatic disease from the Delta variant. As Dr. Fauci says, if you are vaccinated, you're going to be protected, which is another very good reason to encourage people strongly to get vaccinated.

Also, as we have discussed, there are going to be cases of disease that we call breakthrough, even among those that are vaccinated. While we are not seeing any significant impact from the Delta variant at this time, there is a lag between a few weeks of analysis and reporting of the variants. We're being vigilant every day to review that information. Earlier this month we announced that the Department had identified 1,319 breakthrough cases, which represents 0.06% of those fully vaccinated. That means 99.94% of individuals vaccinated did not test positive for COVID-19.

On my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported a low of 305 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and PUIs. That number continues to decline. Fortunately, there are no new cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. We have had no new cases since the beginning of June.

There were 127 accumulative cases in the state. None of these children are currently hospitalized. Also, fortunately, at the state Veteran's homes there are no new cases among the residents and no new cases among the patients in our psych hospitals.

The daily positivity rate as of June 12th in the state was 0.95%, the northern part of the state, 0.92%, the central part of the state 1.04%, and the southern part of the state 0.90%. That concludes my report. Please continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, and our friends. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for the report and thank you for all. We've got Ed as well to answer any questions that may come up. Thanks to each of you. Pat, we've got some pretty hot, muggy, humid weather.

I suspect we've got thunderstorms potentially. I know we had some over the weekend in some places, folks getting a little bit over the top as it were. What do you got? Thanks for everything.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. With regard to the weather, obviously it's hot. There is a heat advisory in effect for Mercer, Northwest Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester Counties. We expect some severe thunderstorms tonight into tomorrow. Then it's obviously going to get nice for the rest of the week.

We also are watching that tropical storm, the third main tropical storm already that's heading out to the Atlantic through the outer banks right now. We're, believe it or not, watching another one about 900 miles east of the Windward Islands; always watching the weather, especially during this hurricane season. That's all I gave, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. One thing, the heat advisory is a good jumping off point to remind folks for these schools that are still in their final days and pretty much everybody by the end of this week is going to be out. I'm pretty sure that's right. You've always had the ability to get an exception to having to wear a mask if it were for health reasons, Judy. One of the health factors or one of the considerations is high heat. Remember that especially over the next few days where it's going to stay pretty hot. Thank you, Pat.

Thank you, all. Ruth, is that you? We'll start over here. We will be on the similar rhythm this week that we've been on of late. We'll be with you virtually tomorrow. Unless you hear otherwise, we'll be back here live Wednesday at 1 o'clock. With that, hello, Alex.

Alex Roubian, NJ2AS: Hey, good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Alex Roubian, NJ2AS: Good after and good to see you again.

Governor Phil Murphy: Likewise.

Alex Roubian, NJ2AS: I hope you had a wonderful weekend.

Governor Phil Murphy: Very nice. Hope you did too.

Alex Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah. I had a great time on my boat. You've indicated on several occasions that you're proud of the fact that New Jersey has the toughest gun laws in the country. These additional laws, which are all felonies, that make New Jersey the toughest are possessory only or permitting paperwork violations with no criminal intent.

Governor Phil Murphy: Could you get the microphone a little closer to Alex? Thank you.

Alex Roubian, NJ2AS: They are almost exclusively forced against people of color. When you say that New Jersey has the toughest gun laws, aren't you really saying that New Jersey puts more blacks in prison for petty offenses than any other state in the country? Is this something that New Jersey should be proud of? That concludes my question.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Alex, You've asked similar questions on this theme over time. I've really got nothing new to report. We have a state which we inherited with enormous inequities. This virus has laid those inequities bare.

It didn't create them, but it's laid them bare, everything from public health to education to housing to criminal justice system. We're doing everything we can to shrink those inequities and we'll continue to. Good to see you. Matt, welcome back. We'll get down front here with Matt, if you could.

Matt Arco, NJ.com: Good afternoon. Governor, will the budget include an increased pension payment; if so, by how much? Is that for this fiscal year or the next? Members of the Atlantic City Council say they sent you a letter requesting the state police take control of the local police department in the wake of an uptick in serious violence there. What are your thoughts on their request?

Finally, candidly, what restrictions are left under your control? For example, the legislation that dealt with emergency powers said that, for example, mass would be tied to CDC guidance. What is left under your control, and when do you expect those to be lifted at the point we're at now?

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, you may want to come in on the second one. On the pension payment and other budget matters other than the announcement that the [24:02] speaker and I put out this morning along with the budget chairs talking about some more aggressive tax relief, which we're all collectively very proud of, nothing to report beyond that. Although as I've said to you – I don't think it was to you, Matt, but as I said last week or the week before, if there's an opportunity to put more money against any of the structural deficits as a state that we have, color me between open-minded and enthusiastic. Obviously, if we could, one of the big ones would be the pension system.

Secondly, I'll jump to restrictions. Judy, tell me if you see this differently. The ones that are left, again, we're looking at the CDC overwhelmingly for these, are basically wearing face coverings in places that are either vulnerable, healthcare related, or transit. It's buses, planes, trains, healthcare facilities, long-term care, other vulnerable communities such as a correction setting. Those to me are the big ones that are left. Would you agree with that?

I've not seen the letter. We care deeply about Atlantic City. It's on that list of communities. As it goes in many respects, so goes New Jersey. We have succeeded in migrating from a boot on top of them, top down in terms of the relationship to a partnership.

I give the Lieutenant Governor enormous amount of credit for being the lead person from our government in that partnership. That includes the whole gamut of interest in Atlantic City, including public safety and law enforcement. We'll continue to take that extremely seriously. Pat, any comments?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: I would just add after we had that town hall a few weeks ago, Governor, on public safety and public health, that Atlantic City Council Vice-President Kaleem Shabazz has asked me to come on with the council on Thursday, which I will do virtually. We support Atlantic City with an Atlantic City task force, our crime suppression, our Real Time Crime Center that's down in Gloucester County. We do it.

As far as the notion of sending in marked troop cars, that's still yet to be determined. It could be certainly on the table. Similar requests are coming to us from our major cities across the state.

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, it's not specific, Matt, to Atlantic City, but I kind of alluded to this in the exchange Pat and I had before we took questions today. This is not unique to New Jersey. There's a lot of behavior right now. I suspect partly, if not a lot, due to coming out from the pandemic; 95 degree, high humidity weather does not help. There's a lot of kinetic activity in the state right now and in the country.

In Monmouth County we saw some of that over the weekend. This is not just a matter specific to Atlantic City. We've seen upticks in gun violence in the state, in the country. We've just got to plead with people we get it. Everybody wants to get out there and unshackle themselves from this pandemic.

Who could blame you? Please, God, do it responsibly. We'll continue to have the honor to work closely with Atlantic City on all matter, including public safety. Mike, is that you? Good afternoon.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon, Governor. Thanks. I'm curious if you could explain how you decided to move away from the 70% of adults vaccinated? You weren't talking about that number on Friday or today, focusing instead on the 4.7 million. Could you talk about the decision making there? Is the percentage then that the CDC is using is the percentage that we should be using to report to people and that the public should look at to understand?

On the budget agreement that you announced today with the legislative leadership, is there an overall budget deal or is that still being negotiated? On those pieces that you announced today, if you add them up, they come to about \$126 million in the new tax relief. You're talking about that \$300 for the \$500 checks was announced previously. It's no doubt that I'm sure that will help some people, but that's also just a small fraction of the \$10 billion surplus that the state has. Why not do more tax relief or what else do you plan to do with the rest of the budget surplus? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: We haven't moved away from the 70%. In fact, we will hit it. I don't want to make news today because we're not hitting it today. We'll get there within a matter of days. I think the reason why Friday – by the way, we'll put that day up in lights as well. These are both milestones worthy of celebrating.

The reason why I think Friday was more relevant, when we started this way back on December 15th, the eligibility for the vaccine was far more limited than it has become. We wanted to make sure somebody who is vaccinated in the state, that matters. We need to celebrate that. They would otherwise be exposed. They could otherwise transmit the virus. It's both.

Judy, anything you want to add to that? On the CDC we obviously look to their numbers. I think they're actually going make some announcements later today you had mentioned to me earlier.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: My understanding the CDC will be coming out with an MMWR that looks at age breaks and race and ethnicity We've been working almost every day with the CDC to reconcile their numbers with our numbers, and there's a lot of movement. For example, the federal pharmacy program, the reporting of their numbers was significantly lagging due to a third-party vendor that had significant backlogs, and we're just now catching up with all of those backlogs as well, but we're pretty close right now with the CDC through a lot of reconciliation and working with them and looking at what's present in Tiberius, and all in at this point, we're 4.8 million as of this morning. 70% still stands. We won't rest until we get 70% in every county and municipality.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. Nothing, again, Mike, on the budget deal. No news to report other than what we put out already, but it's been a very constructive process, and I have to give a big shoutout to the legislative leadership led by Senate President, the Speaker, the budget chairs. It's been really good, and I think that gets to your last question as well. Stay tuned. There are lots of moving parts, and I think when the entirety of this and at the point that we feel we can talk about the entirety of the budget, I think it's going to be one that we can all look to and say that it makes the sort of investments, provides the sort of relief that it's balanced in that including investments as Matt asked addressing the structural deficits that have been building for decades in the state, so stay tuned. Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor. On May 12th in this room, I asked you if you were going to count 12- to 15-year-olds as part of your 4.7 million vaccinations goal. You said, "The objective is 4.7 million initial, 70% of our adults, so we define adults as 12 and up." You continued saying we're not going to use that, 12- to 15-year-olds, to leg into that objective. When did you move the goalposts and why? Were you concerned that you were falling behind your vaccination goal, or were you not telling the truth on May 12? A budget question as a conceptual matter, the Senate President has announced 500-dollar rebate checks for property taxes will be coming out starting July 1st. If you're interested in lowering property taxes – and who isn't – why not take the 319 million from the millionaires' tax and give it to municipalities or school districts or use it to encourage consolidation, which would truly drive property taxes down in the long-term. Is this just about an election year gimmick like Brendan Byrne sending out a check with your name on it to folks? Lastly, you've promised a post-mortem for more than a year on the state's –

Governor Phil Murphy: Promised a what? Sorry.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: A post-mortem.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: In your words on the state's COVID-19 response. When will that begin, and will you commit right now to at least starting that post-mortem before election day?

Governor Phil Murphy: Alex, I love your questions. I think I've answered your first one. We're going to hit 70% within a matter of days. I can't tell you exactly – probably soon after we had the ability to vaccinate the 12- to 15-year-olds, it's pretty obvious that a vaccinated person who lives, works, or studies in New Jersey is a vaccinated person that is helping us in our overall public health objectives. Not only helping themselves, it's helping us be a healthier state, so it's and both. There's no – the goalposts are right where they were. We're celebrating both of these, and I think we've been quite clear about that.

Nothing else to add on the budget front other than to say one of the structural deficits that we inherited – pension plans where there hadn't been a full pension payment for decades outstanding indebtedness that was exploding, healthcare costs for public sector employees that were getting – rising both for the employee as well as the taxpayer, just one structural deficit after another – property taxes right up there. I'm proud to say that three of the five lowest property tax increases ever on record are the first three years of our administration. I'm very happy as we announced earlier that we're at long last going to update the basis upon which the homestead rebate is calculated. That may sound technical, folks, but trust me that's a good thing in terms of property tax relief.

All-time record until now – I don't want to make any news in the budget, but you can assume that this is in the ballpark all-time record investments in public education. Why does that matter? Because on average 53% of your property tax bill is for public education, so the more the state picks up the tab, the less the locality has to pick it up, and that's good news, so we're going to continue to chop away at this, and there's no gimmick here. This is cash on the barrel. The millionaires' tax – so-called millionaires' tax, that's going to be directly into checks that families up and down the state in the middle class and those aspiring to get into the middle class are going to receive.

We're absolutely committed to doing a post-mortem. In fact, I was with Governor Kaine sadly at a memorial service on Friday. We had this conversation both on what should be happening in America with January 6th – and he's been quite vocal about that. I think you may have mentioned that, or we exchanged on that, but I reiterated to him that we would have an absolute full accounting of the pandemic and the response, and by the way, lessons learned and require – public health infrastructure, for instance, that we need going forward. I'm not going to commit to exactly when that is because we're still in the game here, although thank God it's gotten a lot better as we all know over the past couple months, but absolute unequivocal commitment to that. Thank you for that. Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. Advocates at a Juneteenth rally this weekend in Newark called for a reparations task force and say the wealth disparity task force you recently announced does not go far enough. They're critical that the word reparations is not included in the conversation. What is your response, and do you support a reparations task force?

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, how great was it we were able to celeb rate Juneteenth as a state holiday. In fact, we were together the three of us on the holiday. So much for taking a holiday, but of course, because it was a Saturday, we celebrated as a state and as a country, and I think that's another great thing that happened with a lot of bipartisan support and quickly, and I thought that was a great – given this period of us versus them that we've been battling through as a country, I thought that was a pretty darn good sign. I would just say I was – after we were together, Judy and Pat, in Newark, I had the honor to go up to Paterson and Calvary Baptist Church with Pastor Lassiter, great group of community leaders, elected officials, Marc Morial, who's the president of the National Urban League among others and sign the most progressive anti-discrimination housing law in the country. The notion of ban the box now applied to housing, and we heard from an extraordinary guy whose life will be directly – has been in the negative and now in the positive will be directly impacted positively by this.

I also announced the chairs of the wealth disparity task force, and that's going to be a game-changer. This is looking at all reasons, particularly in black and brown communities why the gap in net worth is as staggeringly wide as it is. It's all-encompassing. This is a far-reaching endeavor. Four co-chairs including led from the government side by Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, and the numbers are staggering, so this is a huge piece of unfinished business that has been building for centuries. 402 years, I believe, since slavery first came to our shores in that respect and also the decades of the carnage created by the war on drugs, but if folks don't know the numbers, they need to understand the numbers as a first step, and you're talking about gaps in net worth that are 40 to 50, not percent off, times off.

On average, an African American family or a Latino family, you look at their net worth, and you compare it to a white family, it's literally hundreds of thousands of dollars in the latter, and it's under \$10,000 in both of those communities in the former. We've got to do something about that, and it's a far-reaching reality in terms of why we are where we are, and it's going to need to be a far-reaching scope of that task force. I'm happy that we've finally been able to stand it up, so thank you. Do you have one, sir? Yeah, okay. I didn't think you had one.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. It's been a couple of months up in here, so I've got a couple of softballs for you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. By the way, you don't need to stand.

Reporter: Happy to. Governor, first of all, belated, happy Father's Day.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Same right back.

Reporter: Callahan. In my 40 years of covering sort of as a hobbyist the budget, this I think to my memory is the earliest we've had a budget agreement between the three men in the room, so congratulations on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you.

Reporter: Then Governor, I'm sure given your Celtic heritage, and yours too Colonel, you didn't let June 16th pass you by. How did you and your family celebrate Bloomsday?

Governor Phil Murphy: Which day, sorry?

Reporter: James Joyce, Governor. Bloomsday, June 16th.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah.

Reporter: I would've bought you a pint myself had I known.

Governor Phil Murphy: It doesn't – I don't want to put words in Pat's mouth. It doesn't take a whole lot to get us over the goal line and having the pint, but I don't know that I did anything unusual to celebrate that. Did you? This is last Wednesday. A pint or two? Okay.

Reporter: My boys and I and scones. Proper James Joycean Bloomsday.

Governor Phil Murphy: I will make note. Next year we'll be more adherent on the holiday. Happy Father's Day back. Thank you for that. Dave? Good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5 Hi, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Take us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: No questions about pints.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: The state has basically – New Jersey's basically reopened now, but the state is still acting like the pandemic is in full swing when it comes to our state buildings including this one. All of the reporters in this room are wearing masks. The MVC still closing offices for weeks if anybody tests positive. The labor offices are not open yet. Courts are still shut down. I've been told buying and selling a house is a nightmare because people can't get the paperwork that they normally are able to get. For state facilities that are open as I just mentioned you've got to still wear a mask indoors. When will the state offices reopen? People want the option of talking to a human being face to face instead of doing everything on the phone, and don't you think the taxpayers have the right to use these services?

Next question, some town schoolboards – the latest my understanding is Middletown – are already announcing mask policies for when classes begin back in September saying masks will be optional unless they're required by law. What's your reaction, Governor, and is there any concern on your part that this could start to spiral out of control before we even know what's what in August, for instance, when we're going to have perhaps different COVID metric numbers to deal with, and you mentioned this last week. Hard to figure this out in June when school won't open again until September. Then finally, two points of clarification. You announced the budget deal on the middle-class tax rebate and the Homestead Rebate this morning. Who is eligible? What are the cutoffs for this eligibility?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, Dave, I'm going to probably need Parimal to help me out with the last one. I want to make sure I get it right. State offices, nothing – not making news today, but that clearly is not a forever and for always. This will change, and my guess is it's generally in the sooner than later category. Sue Fulton just weighed in from Motor Vehicles and said they haven't closed an MVC since May 7th in Eatontown. God willing it will stay that way. I think that your point is a good one. Folks have a level of comfort even if it doesn't move the needle on the actual – whether it's an MVC experience or an unemployment benefit claim experience, there is some amount of comfort that we understand completely even if the substance of the interaction does not have any different timing or outcome. I'd say largely in the sooner than later category.

Again, we keep having the numbers like Judy and Ed – we've got to bring Ed in from the bullpen here. Ed, could you walk through Dave's questions on the budget for me? Sorry. Listen, on mask policies, I would just at one level completely understand why folks don't want to have their kids wearing them. I hope they don't have to wear them either, so I get that completely, but unlike an HVAC system or some other capital investment, even more modest ones like Plexiglas or signage on the hallways one way versus two-way – and I'm not suggesting we should wait until Labor Day at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, but you could literally wait until then to make that decision for the next morning. It's literally do I put this on

or not, and so I understand everyone wants to get to that point and knowledge is important. We've actually got a meeting on this later today, so we're beginning that process ourselves to try to predict what it looks like in the fall and get some sense of what the parameters are like. I would just ask everyone to just have some patients. Parimal, eligibility on the tax programs, or do we want to get back to Dave separately?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: The details on the middle-class tax rebate are largely what they were announced this past September, so it's up to \$500 with an income threshold, and there's a sliding scale based on the number of members in the household and the amount of income that the household makes. For the Homestead Rebate it's largely updating the base here for purposes of the calculation, but we can get you the details offline.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tell me if you agree with this statement. The Homestead Rebate eligibility did not change. The basis upon which the calculations have made – are made have changed. I believe it I've got this right it's updated from budget year 2006 to budget year 2017. Is that correct? Again, no change in eligibility, just an updating in the numbers which has this salutary effect of giving more money in people's rebate.

Ed, serious question before we break. We've got to get our money's worth here. Judy's talked about the Delta variant. Since you were last with us, it's clearly become more prevalent in the country where we've got the best data but also here. We've mentioned many times that the UK among other reasons is getting harder hit is – the science and medical experts believe – such as yourselves, I might add -that by stringing out that second booster shot, there was an exposure there that they – that this variant is particularly – is taking advantage of. Any other color on that? How concerned are you? Do you see the gap between the vaccinated among us and the non-vaccinated to be as bright a line as we're portraying?

Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: Clearly the vaccines work. Clearly, the vaccines are extremely effective. They're never going to be 100% effective and whether they're any less effective against Delta or other variants is not 100% clear, but they are looking to be very effective against these variants as well, so that's the number one takeaway message. Go head and get vaccinated. It'll protect you. It'll protect other people. It'll help protect against new variants continuing to come about that might be able to get around the vaccines in the future, so extremely important to go ahead and get vaccinated.

The Delta variant in particular, it is clearly out competing the other variants, which means it's more transmissible. It's getting there more. It's becoming an increasing percentage in New Jersey and other places as well. As of now, we – while we've been seeing those numbers rise, we're not seeing particular numbers rise as far as hospitalizations or other things go, so that is certainly reassuring. Overall, at this point, I'm cautiously optimistic as far as the Delta variant meaning that I do believe that vaccine is very effective against it, that those people who do get it are not likely to become more sick than people who get other strains of it, and clearly, while I can't say for sure the vaccine is as effective as it is against all other variants, it certainly looks to be very effective and may well be.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, it's a good reminder to everybody that the second shot matters. We've been running ahead of the national average on the second shot. We have to continue. Don't assume that you're protected to the extent that you may think you're protected if you've only gotten one of the – this is obviously of the two-shot vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer. Ed, thank you. Judy and Ed, thank you as always. Pat, great to be with you. Parimal, Dan, Ruth, everybody else. Folks, keep up the great work. Please stay safe and cool in this very high heat. Thank you, folks, for doing everything you've done by the millions. Please get vaccinated. Stay safe. We'll see you back here on Wednesday. God bless.

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