

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: March 31th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I am joined by some familiar faces and by at least a new face. So, to my right, the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli – Judy, good afternoon. To her right Dr. Ed Lifshitz – Dr. Lifshitz, great to have you with us as always. Two to my left, the Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan. The Director of the Office of Homeland Security Jared Maples is with us, and also this afternoon we're joined by the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection Catherine McCabe immediately to my left. Catherine, great to have you.

As I've said many times, our response to COVID-19 is a whole of government endeavor, and lots of departments have key roles to play. And DEP is no exception as you will hear. And I've asked Commissioner McCabe to join us to talk about her department's role in our response, and Catherine, it's great to have you with us. Thank you.

Now, as we have done the past few days we're going to go right to the numbers and then we will fill in some details as we go from there. For the past 24 hours, we are reporting an addition 2196 positive test results, so our statewide count stands at 18,696. Again, 2196 positive test results overnight since yesterday; a total of 18,696 in total.

And we continue to lose invaluable members of our New Jersey family to COVID-19-related complications, and this does not get any easier to speak to never mind live through. Since yesterday, another 69 residents have died, and that total now stands at 267 – each of them a precious life lost from our New Jersey family.

A couple of taking that number, which is a big one, and putting a face to it maybe in a couple different ways. One of those precious souls lost was Passaic firefighter Israel Tolentino, Jr. He became a firefighter about a year and a half ago; he had been a volunteer before that. He had served as an EMT. He was only 33 years old. I spoke to his wife Maria earlier. They have two children, Alani who I think is 9 and Israel who is 7. I also spoke to his chief, Chief Trentacost as well as I exchanged notes with the Mayor of Passaic Hector Lora. By all accounts, an incredible guy and somebody who we mourn with his family and friends.

We keep his family in our prayers as we do every single New Jersey family who is dealing with the absolute worst part of this emergency. Another name, another young person – you may have read about Ben Luderer who was the head baseball coach at Cliffside Park, 30 years old, a star in that famous Don Bosco Prep I think undefeated team of 2008. They were number one in the nation. He went on and played at Marist. To his wife Brandy and to his family, God rest his soul.

Just stop for a second. You just heard about a 33-year-old and a 30-year-old. Now, you're going to hear from Judy when she goes through the dimensions of the fatalities that those are on the somewhat exception side; that clearly, the demographic that is older is the one that's being hit the hardest. But may I just repeat to everybody who's listening, this is a reality for all of us. This is not abstract no matter how good our health is, no matter how young we might be. And by the way, even if it doesn't impact you never mind kill you, you may unwittingly carry this virus and pass it on to someone else who you hold dear.

So, to each of Israel and Ben and to all the other 67 folks who we lost overnight, bless their hearts. The disease has taken service members, first responders, coaches, loved ones, many friends and too many New Jerseyans. And sadly, we know that this number will grow.

I cannot be any clearer in my call – stay at home before this hits home, like it has now for 267 of our families. Please do your part to flatten this curve that we showed you yesterday and think of what we saw and the totality of where this could go if it was left unchecked and where social distancing can take us. Again, the chart on the left, best judgement. Again, this is as of yesterday; this changes every day. But look at where this virus would have taken us had we not stayed at home, had we not done everything we can to flatten the curve. And you see on the left needing as many as just under 80,000 hospital beds, and there's no state in America that has the wherewithal or the resources to come up with that sort of a peak in surge and meet it.

But look at the chart on the right. That's just if we behave as an average state based on past pandemics. That's what we can do. Now, the blue line that surges at the top is still north of that red line that's straight underneath it. The red line is the current capacity of hospital beds and the blue line is the surge, but that's an average result.

We, I repeat, we are not an average state. We are the quintessential all come together, one family, we can do the impossible state. That is New Jersey, and our job collectively is to stay at home, keep social distancing and flatten the hell out of that curve to get it as close down to that red line as humanly possible. Let's all stay in this together. Let's prevent more losses like Israel and Ben and other blessed souls who have lost their lives. If we do our part, we can meaningfully slow the spread and save lives, and we can lessen the strain at the same time on our healthcare system and on our communities.

And as we always do, we thank everyone on the frontlines, especially the unsung and overlooked heroes who are out there working in our communities. And this is beyond the healthcare workers who are heroes, the first responders who are heroes. But how about the home health aides, sanitation workers, the retail employees at essential places of business to whom we've referred before? The teamsters and the truckdrivers and the transit workers – their commitment and dedication to the rest of us means the world, and it means that we know we will emerge from this stronger.

But let's also help them. And how do we help them? We help them by staying home and doing our part to slow the spread of COVID-19. This isn't about you; it's about us. I've said this many times. I know this isn't fun but now is the time to be selfless, not selfish, and for all of us to pull together. We accept and understand the anxiety, the cabin fever, the impatience, the restlessness, the unknowns. We get all that. The very best thing we can do together – and by the way, we'll shoot straight with you on what the facts are, where we are and where we're headed. But the very best far and away thing any of us can do is to stay home and keep your distance from anybody else, even while you're at home.

Okay, with that said, please allow me to switch gears a couple of times before I ask and invite my colleagues to speak. Tomorrow, Wednesday, April 1st the PNC Bank Arts Center drive-through site operating in partnership with FEMA will open at 8:00 AM, again for symptomatic New Jersey residents only. The Bergen Community College testing site will be closed tomorrow. Again, we're on an on/off, hoping to accomplish the same amount of tests in aggregate but to do it in a more coherent way.

Additionally, three more county-sponsored sites either have or are preparing to open, and I'll go north to south. I've been in touch with each of them and it's all good news as we continue to aggressively open up our testing regime, again for symptomatic persons. In a perfect world, the federal government would give us all the testing material we need, all the personal protective equipment that we need and we could be like South Korea. From the moment, from moment one we realized that that wasn't the case. We didn't have that level of material and support from the federal government so we made the decision, for obvious personal health reasons, to test symptomatic people only.

And by the way, that has an added benefit to the colleagues to my right, because that's the most valuable data we can get – both positives and negatives, and Judy will go through both in a minute. That allows us to get our arms around this and get out ahead of it.

So, starting tomorrow, Middlesex County in partnership with the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission is opening up a drive-through site located at the MVC's Kilmer Vehicle Inspection Center in Edison. That site will be open three days a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Testing there is by appointment only and you must be both a Middlesex County resident and exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness. The appointment window is now open and you can find more information at www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19testing (<http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19testing>). Again, that's www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19testing (<http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19testing>) or you can call 732-745-3100, 732-745-3100.

Ocean County opened its public testing site at Ocean County College yesterday and they served 126 residents. This site is open Monday through Friday by appointment only, again, for Ocean County residents who are exhibiting symptoms. That's the case all over the state. For more information or to make an appointment, please visit the Ocean County Health Department online at www.ochd.org (<http://www.ochd.org>). That's www.ochd.org (<http://www.ochd.org>), and we also thank Ocean County's healthcare partners Hackensack Meridian Health and RWJ Barnabas Health.

And tomorrow Camden County in partnership with Cooper University Healthcare and Virtua Health will be opening a testing site at Cooper's Point Park in Camden, which will be open from noon to 4:00 each weekday through April 15th. Testing will be available by appointment to Camden County residents, and anyone seeking a test should contact their medical provider at Cooper, Virtua, CAMcare or another provider. And again, it's for symptomatic folks only.

So, I want to thank our partners and leaders in Middlesex County, Ocean County and Camden County. They join a long list of other counties that are doing everything they can to test symptomatic persons. I've shown this exhibit several times to you this week and you'll see now the total list of testing sites continues to grow, and by my count there are 26 at least in the state. And so, we will continue that.

For any New Jerseyan, and again, I want to come back to our all-encompassing website. For any New Jerseyan who thinks they may need to be tested, a good first stop is our symptom self-test at our all-encompassing website www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>), www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). And if you do believe you may be exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, call your healthcare practitioner.

Before I leave testing, I had a very good conversation this morning, and my colleagues had preceded that with him both last night and today, with Tom Evers, one of the senior guys at Abbott Laboratories. They have, as you probably saw over the past couple days, they are developing a rapid turnaround test. And I'm honored to say that New Jersey has been picked as one of the early states that they're going to put that test equipment into, right now into Bergen County. More details on that to come as we know more.

It's a modest first step but it's an important first step, and according to Tom, he and his Abbott colleagues are going to continue to ramp up the ability to get that piece of equipment into as many hands as possible or access as much as possible. So, as I've said all along it takes a village, and in this case I want a tip of the cap to Abbott Labs.

Switching gears again to the topic of personal protective equipment or PPE, last night – and I'm going to ask Pat Callahan to say a few words before we go to Q&A about both PPE and compliance or lack thereof. Last night we received a shipment of PPE, another one – this I think is now our fourth shipment out of FEMA – that consisted of more than 260,000 pieces including masks and gloves. Again, deep appreciation. We are grateful for it. It by no means alleviates our need for more PPE and we continue to work every single avenue to get more for our state and our frontline responders, and to also ensure that our community health personnel have what they need as well. Remember, this fight isn't just in our hospitals.

This slide, I think we've got a slide, Mahen, that gives a quick glimpse into our current statewide PPE numbers. I'm hopeful that perhaps as early as tomorrow's briefing I'll be able to give, along with Pat and team here, a greater accounting of our PPE supplies and how they fit into our current needs. Our work both collectively and through Pat's efforts is to ensure that we are distributing our PPE supplies as efficiently and effectively as possible. This is why we've put in place the daily reporting mandate for all of our health systems and hospitals and why we're continuing to seek out every available piece of PPE and every available ventilator.

Make no doubt, we appreciate every single piece of PPE that we're receiving, whether it's through the federal government and the National Stockpile, from the many donations large and small that we have received, or through our own purchasing. But, and I repeat, we need a lot more. And I continue to push our case with the White House, with FEMA and with everyone I speak to. And as always, if you have PPE to donate please let us know through this website at www.covid19.nj.gov/ppedonations (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov/ppedonations>), and Col. Callahan and his team will connect with you to take that off your hands.

And it's not just PPE. We have also desperately mentioned many times that we need more ventilators, and I noted yesterday we continue to pursue every avenue on that front. The 300 ventilators from the Strategic Stockpile that we referred to yesterday have arrived and they're being tested as we speak – so far, so good. And George Helmy, my Chief of Staff and I have each been on with the highest levels of the White House this morning, reiterating and underscoring, particularly with another 69 fatalities, the need for more ventilators.

This as good a spot as any to say that I mentioned it takes a village, I mentioned Tom Evers at Abbott Labs. I had a long and incredibly powerful conversation yesterday with a guy who we've been in regular touch with, and that's Alex Gorsky, the CEO of Johnson & Johnson, one of our iconic corporate citizens. Alex and I spoke. A.) I wanted to reiterate my thanks for the 10,000

goggles that they had contributed, an enormous amount of money they're allowing their scientists and researchers to take – I forget what the sabbatical period is – but to go into hotspots and actually work at the frontlines.

You may have seen that they are working aggressively on a vaccine. Now, there are many working on a vaccine but there are a few out there, and I mean out there anywhere in the world, never mind New Jersey or America, who can realistically hope to achieve the scale – and that's the key here – the scale of production. Alex and I also talked through sort of the likelihood of how this plays out in terms of the sequencing of, as we've said all along, we've got to break the back of the coronavirus first and meaningfully reduce the cases, if not at toward zero; then begin to responsibly reopen our economy and our society.

He and I talked about, and again, I'm operating above my paygrade with my two colleagues to the right. We talked about the likelihood of therapeutics, drugs that can treat the symptoms becoming much more broadly available in his judgment, I don't want to put words in his mouth but sort of if you look at sort of the back-to-school timeframe. And then a vaccine that they are literally out testing, retesting, making sure it's safe and efficacious; and then the ability whether it's them or whoever, but obviously they are as big a dog on the hunt as any, to have vaccines at scale, God willing by perhaps as early as spring of 2021.

We have no bigger player in the healthcare space in this state than Johnson & Johnson, none with a deeper heritage. And again, to all I mentioned in the past week, Merck and so many of the other big, big companies that are proud to call New Jersey home. We wear their presence here as a badge of honor. They are all diving in like never before, proving that it not just takes a village in words but in actions. So, hats off to each of them, and as I say in particular, that conversation with Alex was particularly powerful and enlightening.

Allow me to switch gears again. On Saturday, I mentioned that we were close to having 100% compliance from municipal water companies voluntarily halting all service shutoffs throughout this emergency, and I'm proud to report that we now have that 100% compliance statewide. Between both municipal and private sector water utilities, no New Jerseyan should fear losing their access to clean water. And I thank everyone for their cooperation. I know Catherine's going to touch on this as well.

Switching gears again, from the Attorney General's Office I want to amplify the announcement made yesterday that we will crack down on any physician or pharmacist or anybody else hoarding certain prescription drugs or inappropriately prescribing them to friends and family. As we have read in the news, certain drugs are being investigated for their potential in treating COVID-19, I mentioned therapeutics a minute ago myself, and we must start now to protect that supply. Like a lot of other things, overwhelmingly these are fields filled with good actors but a few knuckleheads spoil it for the rest of us.

And from the Department of Labor, switching gears again, we cannot urge employers enough to keep your workers on payroll throughout this crisis and allow them to benefit from the expanded paid sick and family leave programs made possible by the recently-enacted federal response bills. If you do, you will be eligible for a dollar-for-dollar payroll tax credit against those costs. This is available I think to 99.8% of businesses in New Jersey and all but our largest employers. Again, I urge you to do the right thing and keep your employees on payroll throughout this crisis so we can deliver them peace of mind and so we can get our economy going that much faster when this emergency ends.

Also, from the Department of Labor, residents who are eligible for unemployment will receive an additional \$600 per week through July 31st because of the federal relief bills last week. This money should arrive I believe starting next week for those already collecting unemployment. For those of you who just filed it will take a little longer, but the Department is working overtime to process all of your claims and we ask for your patience due to the record volumes with which they are dealing. For more information, again, on any of these items, go to our all-encompassing website www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>), www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>).

There has already begun some chatter about the next coronavirus-related bill coming out of Congress. I spoke with Speaker Pelosi not once but twice yesterday on this very topic. Let me again reiterate our priorities – we need assistance for workers, small businesses, and flexible aid for states that have borne the brunt of this virus, and we certainly are at or near the top of that list. New Jersey and New Jerseyans who are in the eye of the storm should not be treated the same way as states less impacted by this invisible enemy.

Also, as we continue to think about a main street stimulus, Congress should undo the SALT deduction cap to help New Jersey's middle-class homeowners. I thank on this one in particular Congressmen Pascrell and Gottheimer for their continued efforts on this front. Speaker Pelosi and I spoke not just about the general need for another step and another bill and stimulus coming from Congress, but specifically spoke about lifting the SALT cap.

Related to budget, to money, to impact, we had a good conversation late morning with our teams, with the Senate President and the Speaker. We are as soon as we can looking to come to folks with guidance about where the budget is headed and specifically about tax filing deadlines. It was a good conversation. Our teams are following up on that as we speak. More to come when we have information for you.

Before I turn things over to Judy, I want to again express my thanks and indeed our thanks to the overwhelming number of New Jerseyans who are doing the right thing by all 9 million of us to get us through this crisis. I cannot thank enough the women and men who are out there every day in whatever capacity they're working who are keeping us going. And I must give a special shoutout to the many state employees who are assisting their fellow residents in any number of ways. To our state colleagues which measure in the many tens of thousands, I tip my cap to you.

I want to tip my cap actually as well to our educators up and down the state who are doing a phenomenal job in this just never-before-seen remote learning environment in which we're all living. As usual, we have the best educators in America if not the world, and they are stepping up in this case from home in most cases and walking our kids through the most unusual time in any of their educational lives.

And again, in general, I cannot thank enough the millions and million more residents who are staying at home and doing their extraordinary part to flatten the curve. We take our hat off to you. Overwhelmingly folks are doing the right thing. There are still unfortunately a few who are not, and so in addition to a quick comment on PPE before we take questions, I'm going to ask Col. Callahan to just give us a quick summary because we have to remind folks we need 100% compliance with our stay at home mandate.

By the way, you should know that we read practically everything you are sending us. If I don't personally read it, and I read a lot of us, I promise you we are reading it. We understand and completely appreciate the anxiety that so many of you feel. But I've said this before and I'll say it as explicitly as I can – leave the worrying to me. Leave it to us up here on this team. Our job is to lessen your anxiety, to be straight with you, to tell you the facts and to give you some sense of where we're headed.

We're doing all that we can to ensure the safety of our 9 million-member New Jersey family. We're doing all that we can to make sure that we don't just get through this but that we get through this stronger than ever before. We take your worries and your concerns to heart and frankly they educate our decisions just as much as we rely on the facts and the science. We're in this together. We will get through this together and we will move forward together.

I'd like to say it is going to be tomorrow. I'd like to say that we'll come through this unscathed – we've already lost 267 precious lives. I don't want anyone ever to look back at this day, March 31st or any other day, and say "You didn't warn us where this was headed." The numbers of positive cases will continue to rise; sadly, so will the fatalities. But at some point, God willing sooner than later, we will break the back of this damn virus, we will flatten that curve. We will have gotten the capacity in our healthcare system sufficient enough to deal with the cases that we have and we will begin slowly but surely together, never having turned on each other, as one extraordinary, diverse New Jersey family. Slowly but surely we will get back on our feet and we will be stronger than ever, ever before.

With that, please help me welcome the person who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. Judy?

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

As I've shared in the past, we continue to be most concerned about our long-term care facilities who care for the most vulnerable populations. Currently 81 of our 375 long-term care facilities have reported at least one COVID-19 positive resident. Yesterday, the Department issued updated guidance to these facilities that directs them to implement universal masking of all staff and anyone entering the facility. We are taking this step to reduce the risk of illness being introduced into the facilities. Also, all symptomatic facility residents, those who are showing respiratory virus symptoms, should be masked while staff is providing direct care.

Concerning the readmission of their residents back into their facilities and acceptance of new residents, our guidance outlines methods facilities should use to return or admit patients safely into their facilities. In addition to monitoring them for symptoms, facilities must create separate wings, units or floors to accept asymptomatic residents coming into or returning from the hospital. This may mean moving residents in a facility to create a new wing or a new unit.

They must limit the staff working between the wings or units as much as possible to avoid spread of the virus. They must create a separate wing or unit to accept COVID-19 positive residents and they must care for those suspected or confirmed with COVID-19 in a cohort. When a facility receives information from its local health agency that a resident of the facility or a facility staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, the facility should follow the guidance provided by the local health agency to implement all actions necessary to protect the health and well-being of its residents and staff.

Together, these two steps – universal masking and appropriately separating residents returning to the facility – will help facilities reduce the risk of exposure to the virus. Today, I will be on a call with the operators of all of our long-term care facilities to emphasize this guidance and to give them guidance if they cannot, because of the physical plant, abide by our instructions.

As the Governor mentioned, we're reporting 2196 new cases for a total of 18,696 cases in the state. And sadly, 69 new deaths have been reported. We have total fatalities in the state of 267. Of the total 55% are male, 45% are female. Three individuals or 1% were less than 30 years of age; twelve or 12% were between the ages of 30 and 49; 46 or 17% between the ages of 50 and 64; and 80 or 30% between the ages of 65 and 79. 126 or 47% are over the age of 80.

According to our records right now, and many are still under investigation, 42% had underlying conditions – obesity, hypertension, diabetes myelitis, heart disease and pulmonary disease. 58% are still under investigation for their full medical histories. 19% or 52 individuals were associated with long-term care facilities.

Of the breakdown of the new cases, Atlantic County saw 2; Bergen 235; Burlington 21; Camden 29; Cape May 3; Cumberland 7; Essex 237; Gloucester 25; Hudson 183; Hunterdon 13; Mercer 12; Middlesex 119; Monmouth 99; Morris 65; Ocean 46; Passaic 73; Salem 9; Somerset 40; Sussex 15; Union 111; Warren 8. And we are still gathering more details on 844 of these new cases.

With over 95% of laboratories reporting, we have performed 44,330 tests of which 17,253 have tested positive for an overall positivity rate of 38.92%. The mass testing sites of Bergen and Monmouth have tested 2593 individuals with 1052 – remember they're all symptomatic; all of our tests of symptomatic individuals – 1052 testing positive, for a positivity rate of 41.05%.

I'm also reporting today that a New Jersey State Psychiatric Hospital, another one has been affected. Ann Klein Forensic Center has one resident who tested positive for COVID-19. Again, we are being extremely vigilant for all residents in facilities in New Jersey, especially the most vulnerable – those in mental health facilities, long-term care facilities, pediatric long-term care facilities, state and county jails.

I know this continues to be a stressful time for New Jersey residents. You know, in times of crisis as the Governor has shared, we all get solace by gathering and being with one another. So, I want to remind you again to reach out, talk to your family and friends, especially the elderly and those with disabilities. Maintain your sense of community. Check in daily with each other. Technology supports that more than ever before. And for those who are in need of emotional support during this time, I encourage you to call our New Jersey Mental Health Cares hotline at 1-866-202-HELP. That's 1-866-202-4357.

So, I send all of you our best wishes to take care of yourselves and encourage you to abide by the social distancing that will make a difference. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you as always for that, not just the report but for your extraordinary leadership. A couple of points if I may jump on them.

This notion of reaching out and touching somebody, picking up a telephone, sending a text or an email, waving through a glass window particularly for someone who is older perhaps but more alone than not – it's not easy for any of us, the average New Jerseyan. Think about the folks who entered this with whatever challenges they may have in their lives. So, I think that suggestion is a great one and we know the mental health side of this reality is real.

I also want to, again, it's March 31st so let's make sure we say it again. We're not getting out of this in the next few days. I'll be the happiest guy in New Jersey if not America or the world if I'm wrong. But this is a marathon. We're going to be hunkered down for awhile. So, this notion of finding ways to communicate virtually, taking solace in what we talked about the other day – in our isolation ironically we're coming together because we're all in this together. That sort of spiritual side of this I think can nurture a lot of us and get us through that extra mile because we're going to need it. This is not something that we're going to be able to flip a light switch on in the next few days and get out of it.

You may have said this, Judy, and even if you did can we underscore this – of the long-term care facilities, 81 out of 375 have a positive. The sense you've gotten, and your expert, Ed and other colleagues, is that in maybe not every case but in a lot of those cases it was asymptomatic workers coming into the facilities? Is that a fair assessment?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think that's a fair assessment. What we did when we first saw this trend emerging, I was in touch with the Washington State Department of Health Long-Term Care Division. And they shared that their statistics had shown that it was individuals coming in, workers, healthcare workers that had contracted the disease, were asymptomatic and spread it into their long-term care facilities. So, that is why we are recommending universal masking of the healthcare workforce that comes into the facility.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is an important point and I want to make sure everybody hears that.

My task is usually also to tell you total cases now, the order of counties, the top five: Bergen again, far and away 2909; Essex 1900; Hudson 1606; Union 1418; Passaic 1294.

Before Catherine comes on, I want to just say one other thing that is not on the front burner but I had a conversation. I've been trying to reach out to folks who have deep history and expertise in this arena, not just obviously the medical community but also the policy community. I spoke with Ron Klain on Saturday night who helped oversee the Ebola response from the Obama Administration, Andy Slavitt a week or two ago who's built up expertise; last night with Neera Tanden who's the CEO for the Center for American Progress.

This is not for today and I'm not sure exactly the contours of this, but there's really two sides to this point. Number one, we're going to have, off to the side as they used to say a skunkworks team beginning now to look at exactly what it looks like and what's going to be required in advance to begin to turn the lights on again whenever that may come. So, we've got a team that is focused 1000% as you can imagine. You know, the house is on fire right now; our job is to put the fire out. But when we begin, how we begin, when we begin, what does it look like in a fair amount of detail to begin to get back on our feet. That's a group over there that we're sort of putting over there and asking them to begin work on that.

Relatedly, we're sure as heck not going to go through the pain we're going through to go down the road and find, just because of some other noncompliant, nonaggressive policies in other states in America, having people from those states – Neera and I actually spoke about this last night – then coming back into New Jersey and restarting the fire. So, I'm not sure exactly what that looks like either, but with all due respect to the states that aren't remotely as compliant as we are or as New York is by example, we're not going to go through this pain together, folks, and break the back of this curve – flatten it, break it, bring it down, begin to open up again just to be exposed to the lowest common denominator.

So, more on that as we sort of figure out exactly what that looks like down the road. But again, we're not going to pay this price and have to watch that movie again. And by the way, the virus in and of itself could ebb and flow even if we do everything right. But I don't want anybody coming in from some other part of the country where they had lax policies and lax regulations and undoing a lot of the good that we are collectively, all 9 million of us doing together right now.

With that, I said it was a whole of government approach. There's no part of government that isn't at the table right now, and whether it's access to safe drinking water, whether it's accessing supplies on their own, whether it's just making sure... We are the densest state in America, so as we go through this crisis, as we go through our everyday life, getting our relationship with our environment right is a pass/fail test for us.

And I'm honored to introduce the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection Catherine McCabe.

Commissioner of Environmental Protection Catherine McCabe: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon everyone. Today I'd like to bring your attention to just two of the many areas that the Department of Environmental Protection has been focusing on during the COVID-19 outbreak. Those two areas are keeping the drinking water on for all New Jerseyans during these challenging times, and keeping the New Jersey State Parks open to let residents get a little fresh air and exercise while maintaining the social distance that is so critical to our efforts to fight the virus.

Before I speak about those, I'd also like to share a bit of good news on the PPE front. The good men and women of the New Jersey Parks Department primarily but throughout our Department have gone to the closets and the cupboards and come up with 10,000, almost 10,000 N95 masks which are now on their way to our frontline precious healthcare workers where they are most needed. So, I thank them for their efforts to do that.

Turning to drinking water, as the Governor said I am very pleased to report that drinking water systems throughout the state have confirmed that they will not be turning the water off, even when people are late in paying their bills or cannot pay their bills on time. There will be no water shutoffs during this crisis. Clean water obviously is essential for public health at any time and at all times, but it's especially critical now when we are spending so much time every day, as I'm sure all of you are, washing our hands and being sure that we are paying attention to the critical hygiene needs. We need to be religious about those in our homes and in the places of business that are operating.

We also recognize that many families are struggling to pay their bills with so many businesses closed to fight this outbreak, and they are facing or will soon face difficult choices about which bills to pay first. So, the Governor and I very, very much appreciate and thank our New Jersey water utilities for their willingness to step up to the plate and do their part to help New Jersey residents protect their health and take care of their families during this public health crisis.

Turning to the parks, the other good news is that the New Jersey State Parks and forests and wildlife management areas remain open for passive recreational activities such as walking, biking, hiking, and fishing, to let New Jersey residents get a little fresh air and exercise during this stressful, cooped up time for many. We are also waiving park entrance fees during this situation but there are a few important rules and other things that are important to know before you go.

First, be aware that the park facilities, and that includes all the restrooms, are closed – so go before you go. Second, please keep travel to a minimum and visit the park that is nearest to you. Third, while in the parks or other areas visitors must practice social distancing. Go solo or with your immediate family only.

Please, do not go in large groups. If you see a lot of people or a crowded parking lot go to another area of the park or visit at another time. Keep your distance from others. Even outdoors it is important to remain six feet away from each other at all times. Even if you pass others on a trail please give each other a wide berth and hopefully with a friendly smile.

Do not use the park playgrounds or exercise facilities or equipment. They are roped off for a reason. The reason is to keep you all safe. And please do not attempt to force your way into closed park restrooms and please do not rip down the signs that our hard workers have spent so many hours putting up to protect you and to let you know the status of their facilities.

These rules are not optional, and they will be and are being enforced by State Park Police and Conservation Officers. Please respect the Officers' directions when they ask you to disperse or move on, and allow them, please, to maintain a safe social distance from you as well.

If you love to fish, a great social activity, we have good news for you. I shouldn't say a great social activity – I actually meant to say a great solo, not social. Trout season will open ten days early tomorrow, Wednesday April 1st, for catch and release only. This is to help us to help you maintain safe social distance while fishing. We've released the state-raised trout early to disperse them before fishing season opens so that you can disperse, too as you move out to catch them, instead of everyone gathering around the hatchery on day one of Trout Season, which is traditional.

If you find others gathered at your favorite fishing hole, consider trying a new location this year. The fish have moved out and you should, too. And at a minimum, please spread out to at least the required six-foot social distance. Conveniently, this is the typical length of a fishing pole so it should be easy for you to measure. And for better fishing you'll probably want more distance anyway. If someone gets too close to you, have a friendly conversation about that six-foot distance or find another spot.

So, please do feel free to go out there and get some exercise and enjoy yourselves, whether in a park or a forest or along a fishing stream. But please, please be responsible and remember that social distancing is absolutely essential to keeping you, your families and our communities safe, and to help us all flatten the curve of this serious viral outbreak. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Catherine, thank you. That was a report with overwhelming good news except for the trout. So, thank you for that. That's nice. For any of the trout watching, they just got a head's up here. But thank you seriously for that, and the notion for folks to be able to first of all keep their water supply as a reliable constant is a huge deal. Thank you for that. And the notion also, to be able to go outside and get some fresh air in a responsible way has to be a part of what our plan is about.

You know, we're telling everybody to stay home; the notion is everyone's cooped up. You want to be able to get outside and get some fresh air. That's a good thing. Please don't repeat those scenes from the waterfront I think it was in San Francisco of a few weeks ago where there were just gobs of people on top of each other running shoulder to shoulder, holding hands. We can't have that.

So, I just want to reiterate, whether it's fishing on that six-foot pole, which I think is a great way to think about it, or outside walking, hiking, jogging, please, please, please keep your distance. Thank you. Again, it's great having you and thank you for everything you do. And Sean, nice to have you with us as well.

Pat, before we go to questions, any quick comment on PPE and/or compliance matters overnight?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: PPE with regard to that algorithm that we're using is primarily for healthcare workers now. It's really only for healthcare workers now. We still have caches for first responders and Commissioner Persichilli can attest to it. I'm a Jersey Trooper but our healthcare workers need this PPE now as the highest priority. They are the ones that are at the frontlines in the hospitals, and their burn rate is considerably more than anybody who's a first responder.

So, our whole... If you reverse engineer this, how we get to how much PPE is needed it really starts with bed capacity drives staffing which then drives PPE. So, with that algorithm in mind we have laid this formula across all 71 hospitals, and as PPE comes in and also what they are getting from their regular streams and regular vendors. We just want to make sure that we're able to make the most well-informed decisions as to where PPE goes.

With regards to compliance there was an incident last night reported in Lakewood where two subjects were charged with maintaining a nuisance. And in Newark overnight, having spoken to Director Ambrose, across 21 separate incidents they wrote 161 summonses, they closed 15 businesses. I think of that effort as a zero tolerance policy that we've been talking about.

And I think everybody also has to understand that when law enforcement has to go to a large gathering, regardless of which municipality it is, that those law enforcement officers are now exposing themselves as well. This is a close up, hands-on profession. We cannot do this profession from six feet away sometimes. So, I don't understand why people aren't thinking about themselves, and if you're not thinking about yourselves then at least think about our first responders and our law enforcement, because we are going to take action. And I think the City of Newark last night showed what that policy would look like, in order to – as the Governor had indicated – to make sure that you're staying home before this hits home.

One gathering is one too many so I just ask everybody. We've been talking about it for four weeks now, it feels like now, so again, I just stress that from a law enforcement perspective and really from a public health perspective, just request that everybody cease and desist on the public gatherings. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Pat, appreciate that. And I can't underscore that enough, and we're going to take aggressive action, whether it's the State Police, local, County Prosecutors, whatever it might be. We have got to bring compliance to 100% and if we don't, we'll be living with this longer and the consequences will be more severe.

So, with that I'm going to go from my left to my right, and please try not to give us War & Peace in your litany of questions – not just to you, Brent, that's nothing personal. But to each and every one of you, let's try to snap through this as best we can. Brent Johnson.

Q&A Session:

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Number one, how are you feeling and have you been tested yet? I asked you that awhile ago. I don't know if that's changed.

Governor Phil Murphy: I have not been tested and I'm not symptomatic. I hope it stays that way.

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Some healthcare workers, some nurses, especially critical care nurses with symptoms say they've been turned down for testing because they are short on tests. Should hospitals be required to test symptomatic healthcare workers in order to find out if they're likely to spread the virus? And can you name the long-term care facilities that have been affected and if not, why?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm just going to take the first one as a general matter and Judy can address the second if that's okay. We have tried to prioritize healthcare workers and first responders across a number of both days and testing sites. I would ask any healthcare worker, unless my team tells me otherwise, if they're symptomatic they should go on www.covid19.nj.gov

(<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>) and register exactly who they are. And it's our job then to get out to them and give them a satisfactory answer regarding testing.

Judy, locations, names, etc.?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: You know, I think you've heard me say before we have lots of discussions internally at the Department of Health about how much information we give and at what level? Part of my conversation this afternoon with the long-term care facilities will be the fact that you all are asking for the names. And we don't want to scare anyone because there are people who have nowhere else to go. These are their homes. So, it would be like giving out your home address and we have some concerns about that, so I do want to have a discussion with the owners of the long-term care facilities. These are these people's homes.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I just also add to that? We were very explicit about St. Joe's in Woodbridge, and that's something that I know you're looking at disinfecting and potentially... It's happening right now. And Brent, I won't get into names of facilities, and again, this is a delicate area because you've got, not at all these places but in many places you've got end-of-life realities. And again, I'll have the healthcare experts correct me if I get this wrong. And so, what might be concluded at one level by one observer in terms of cause of death may in fact be more complicated than that. And just by nature of the notion of a long-term care facility, you're dealing with life and death issues on a much more regular basis than we are in general society. So, I don't want to get out over my skis here but it makes the assessment of exactly the facts more complicated.

Reporter: Certain counties, Atlantic to be specific, are starting to report numbers of recovered patients in their daily, weekly numbers. Is that something that state is keeping track of, number of recovered patients? And then, also on the new guidance for long-term care facilities, given the shortage of PPE, are these facilities asking for more masks? Do they have what they need in order to comply with what you're asking?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, do you mind addressing both the recovered numbers as well as the PPE?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, the PPE of course isn't an issue. They will not be asked to mask with N95s. They can use a surgical mask, which we believe we have the supply for them, and they can use cloth masks. Remember, it's to protect the residents from the employees that may have a cold or some respiratory symptoms. As far as recovery statistics, that's something again we discuss at Communicable Disease Service, so I'm going to let Ed talk about that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, come on down.

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you. We know that this information is important. As we have thousands of cases in New Jersey at this point, it is very difficult for us to track outcomes on all these people. We are working to get more of that information. We do have a team working to get, we call these outcomes data. At this point, we do not yet have enough of that information that I feel comfortable sharing exactly what we're seeing.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's clearly data that we're hoping to get to at a certain point. I look at the total positives – this is a nonmedical answer – the total positives, then on top of that the overwhelming amount of negatives. And then, if you'll recall, you've heard before that 80% to 85% are going to get mild to moderate symptoms and won't require hospitalization or intensive healthcare. There's going to be a segment of that remaining 15% or so that will require hospitalization, and sadly there'll be a percentage who we will lose.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Two questions, the first one: Shore Medical Center had sent out a letter asking if people want to voluntarily have layoffs. People heard about this – it sounded insane, especially with the call to action that's been put out for more doctors and nurses. So, is there any guidance about this, Governor? Would you be concerned about this? I think frankly a lot of people would be very concerned about this. How much of an issue in this in other medical centers and hospitals? And second question if I may, on compliance, perhaps the Governor and Colonel can talk about like what's the problem here? I mean, don't people get it? I mean, New Jersey residents are very smart. It would seem like the knucklehead factor here is a little unusual and unexplainable.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm flattered that you're using the knucklehead moniker. I had not heard about Shore Medical so I can let Judy address it. But I would say as a general matter, we need all hands on deck and we appreciate – believe me, we appreciate the stress this is causing our frontline healthcare workers. But we need all hands on deck, please.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we discussed this morning at our meeting that we have every morning on COVID-19 to redeploy any staff that's been laid off – to redeploy them up to the northern part of the state. Part of that is to get accommodations, housing for those individuals, so right now we have a team working on that, to get housing for people that would be coming from the southern part of the state up to the northern part of the state. So, more on that but we need every healthcare worker that we have in the state and more.

Governor Phil Murphy: Does anyone know... I actually didn't check coming in. Mahen or Dan or Judy, maybe you know, how many folks? We said 3611 had signed up yesterday on the website. Do you know the number today? Could someone while we're sitting here... This is a group that we sent and asked for volunteers.

On the knucklehead factor, I don't know that I've got a good explanation other than we're not happy. There's some amount of ignorance, there's maybe still some amount of "I'm above it all. This is somebody else's problem." But it isn't. No one's above it. I referenced two deaths today of people who were in their 30s in the prime of their lives. There's nobody for which this is

abstract and it angers us. And we believe the more swift, visible action that is taken such as you saw in Newark last night – and I want to thank Director Ambrose and his folks – the more quickly we can bring this noncompliant behavior to zero. Pat, do you want to add anything?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I would just add, I think we've been at a place where we've been looking at whoever was hosting the party or the gathering, and we need maybe to shift to – which I think you might have seen last night in Newark – that everybody at that gathering is now going to be cited. And I'm not going to say that's going to happen in every instance because I always talk about discretion, but I think you're going to see the... If and when those large gatherings happen, that everybody there is going to be charged.

Governor Phil Murphy: Remember, there are 9 million of us, right? So, the overwhelming vast majority of folks are doing the right thing. But this is a virus that wants to find the lowest common denominator, and these sorts of gatherings are that.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: To follow up if I may, Commissioner, you had mentioned with regard to the Shore Medical Center, the reason that they were putting out – not you had mentioned but the letter had mentioned that they're losing money because they can't do elective surgery. And they're trying to get as much PPE as possible, and this could be a concern for other hospitals. Is there that concern and how are we addressing it if we are?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think all of the hospitals are concerned for their financial position that this epidemic puts them in. Obviously, hospitals that are full with COVID-19 patients would have a financial foundation for that, because most of them have insurance – they would be paid for. But the impact of the curtailment of elective surgeries, my past life would tell you that if you don't do over like 50% elective surgeries in your hospital you're going to have difficulty managing your finances. So, every single hospital in New Jersey will have difficulty with their finances.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I just say this before we move back to Paul? And Paul, it's an honor to have you with us. That's why in the federal – and Matt will correct me if I'm wrong – this federal stimulus bill has a huge chunk of money for hospitals for this very reason. There are certain sectors that desperately need the help, and particularly the hospitals on the frontline of the COVID-19 are at the top of the list.

According to Mahen, thank you, and thank you, Ed, for passing it along. We have, as of right now, 4764 folks who have registered an interest in helping expand our Medical Services Corps. So, we are going through that and processing that, but that's a big deal for us. Paul, thank you.

Paul Mulshine, NJ.com: You've got a policy of letting people get out and exercise at the state level which seems to be working quite well. But I'm hearing all these complaints from people. For example, this morning I got a picture from the Belmore Boardwalk. They shut that down for walkers. There's a person walking in traffic instead. Now, if they had another person with them and they were six feet apart, one would be in the middle of the road. And you're seeing this all over, where beaches, boardwalks, local people are making these decisions to shut things down that at the state level would not be shut down. What are you going to do? And by the way, when they shut them all down, everybody congregates at the one that's open, the federal or state which creates the crowded parking. Are you going to do anything to have some sort of consistent statewide policy on that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Can I ask Matt Platkin to weigh in here, Chief Counsel Matt Platkin? Thanks.

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Executive Order 108 laid out that every, with very limited exceptions, no county or local government can implement an order that contradicts with the Governor's order. There are a few exceptions to that, one of which we gave local jurisdictions the option, in consultation with us, to close parks, boardwalks, beaches. And that's in part because some towns are very dense and there's local circumstances that just didn't make it manageable, especially with shortages in their law enforcement officers to monitor those public places. So, it is a local decision that we work closely with them on, but that's one of the few exceptions to the statewide policy.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Do you have one, sir? Please.

Reporter: Governor, in the course of covering COVID across the globe we've seen photos and video of other nations disinfecting public spaces. Is there any plans for that in New Jersey? And for the Colonel, do we know how many Troopers are out sick at this time relative to the whole force? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. I would just say this. I think we got asked this question – at least I answered it. I'm not sure why it fell to me at that point about spraying versus wiping down. So, there's an enormous amount of disinfecting going on. I think overwhelmingly it's wipe-down mode. Is that correct, Madame Commissioner? And so, I think you have seen, you saw a lot I think in Asia; to some extent in Europe. You saw the spraying routine. Ed, any comments on the efficacy of wiping down versus spraying?

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Not specifically as far as wiping down versus spraying. We certainly do encourage the wiping down of what we call high-touch surfaces – guardrails, handrails, anyplace that people are likely to touch with their hands on a regular basis.

Governor Phil Murphy: NJ Transit has an aggressive protocol that they've had now in place for a number of weeks, which you would not be surprised by given the line of business they're in. Pat Callahan on State Troopers.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I have the global law enforcement numbers which I won't give out of my head because I was wrong on Saturday. This morning, law enforcement positive across the state, 383; statewide quarantined law enforcement, 3081; and statewide out of work for another reason is 618. But I do that from our road field operations standpoint. It is a small percentage of troopers that are out.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Sir, are you asking or not, I can't tell. Are you just on camera? Okay. We'll go to Nikita, Elise and then John.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: So, I'll apologize like I did before because I have an obscene amount of questions again, but I'll start. Do you have a timeline for the June elections? Are you close to a decision to whether you're going to take those to all vote by mail? And then, since the Division of Elections is quarantining paper petitions, do you plan to extend the amount of days that candidates have to file a challenge or file bracketing letters? And it also seems like you've been a little bit less willing to criticize the President recently. Is there any concern on your part that doing so would endanger federal aid to New Jersey? And has the Administration identified any other issues that would require legislative action, and if so what are they and have you ruled out calling the legislature in for another remote session?

Governor Phil Murphy: Our administration?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Does the list go on or is that it? Okay. No closer on the June elections. I say this with respect because we respect each and every one of you. I think we thought after the last time you asked the question about our timeline we have a very different timeline on when to make the decision on the June elections. But we've got nothing new on that.

I missed the second part, Division of Elections, or quarantining something?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Quarantining petitions for 24 hours. The petitions that were handed in, in person, they're just sitting in a room to shed any viruses or whatever they may have. But given that not everyone's petitions have been checked as of yesterday, so the counties essentially have less time to file challenges.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. I don't have a crisp answer for you but I know Matt Platkin is more likely to have one.

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: The state as of now doesn't see a reason to change that deadline. They're actively working with the campaigns. They feel confident that they can count the ballots, or count the petitions rather; and they're also working with the County Clerks on that side.

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me address the President which has come up a couple of times. Again, I've said this before and it's just a fact, and I would hope the folks, the 9 million members of our family would appreciate this. I don't get to wake up in the morning and pick who's in what position in the country. And the President of the United States is Donald Trump and the Vice President is Mike Pence, and there's one federal administration. And if we're going to get through this crisis sooner than later, with a lower curve, with fewer fatalities please, God, and casualties in terms of sickness, it will be because we found – among other things. Among other things, a lot of it will be to do with what we do in this state, including the personal behavior of all of us; but a lot of it will also relate to how much common ground we can find with the Administration.

And so, it has nothing to do with what I think a given person wants to hear. It is substantive, deeply substantive. And I would just say, so he's a Republican, I'm a Democrat. Just as similarly I was on the phone twice yesterday with Speaker Pelosi talking about what elements we would like to see in the next stimulus bill. I was on, George Helmy and I were on at very high levels this morning with the Administration. We will do what it takes to save as many lives as we can save in New Jersey. We will deal with everybody and anybody. There's no price too high, political or otherwise, that we will pay in order to save as many lives and keep the amount of folks who are sick in this state as low as possible.

As it relates to our administration and the legislature, we had a good conversation this morning. As it relates to things like the budget, tax deadlines – I hope that we're going to have news to report on that sooner than later given that tomorrow is April 1st in particular. I don't know that there's, beyond dealing with the budget season and the tax reporting timeframe – those are the top two items I think, Matt, it's fair to say, that that's what we talked about this morning. Beyond that, I would have nothing else.

They've been really good, I have to say, about... I'll give you one example which is a few days old. They've been really good about making sure that we had a law in place where you couldn't foreclose on somebody, you couldn't evict somebody, just to pick one example. So, I want to take my hat off to the Senate President, the Speaker as well as the Minority Leader in both chambers. This has been an overwhelmingly bipartisan endeavor and I want to thank all of them for that. Thank you. Elise?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi. My first question is from Daniel Munoz from NJ Biz. Are you considering the sort of construction ban that New York has put in place in the next couple days? Are you reconsidering New Jersey's rules on that, and if so are you likely to go less or more restrictive? And then, the rest of the questions are mine. There's a \$680 million pension payment due today, the quarterly payment. I'm wondering if you're going to make it and if so, what's your guidance on cashflow over the next several weeks and months? And earlier, you mentioned out-of-state restrictions, restrictions on residents who come from out of state. Would those be as restrictive as those in Texas and Florida?

Governor Phil Murphy: On Daniel, the answer is we're holding where we are on construction but we look at that regularly. And we look at other areas as well, but that's one we look at. And New York did tweak I think to eliminate nonessential construction. That's something we've considered but we're still holding where we are.

The pension payment will be made. I don't have any window on the cash levels but that's, as you can imagine, a moving target and that is something that we're in close touch with the Treasurer on. And it's too early to say anything about what I mentioned. That would be down the road, both in terms of how we reopen and get back on our feet, but I just refuse – and I'm looking to the 9 million folks, many of whom are watching. We can't make the folks go through the pain that they're going through, which we have to go through and that we're going through together, just to emerge and find that some other state didn't take this seriously, that they were basing decisions that weren't based on science and data and fact; and therefore, through a backdoor we reignited the fire.

Now exactly, Elise, how that looks, it's way too early to tell because we ourselves with our aggressive policies haven't gotten that curve flattened yet. And we will, we will do this. Let there be no doubt about it and I hope sooner than later. But when we do this, when the numbers on the back half of that curve begins to come way down and the likes of Judy and Ed say, "You know what, you're getting into a place where you can responsibly begin to shed some more daylight on the economy and the society," I'll be darned if we're gonna let some lowest common denominator suck us back in. You had a quick one?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Yes, just a quick follow-up. The pension payment will be made on time?

Governor Phil Murphy: On time. I shouldn't have said that it was going to be made at some point; it will be made on time as it is stipulated. Thank you. John? John, if you sit there tomorrow I promise you we'll start right to left.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: Thank you. Are you keeping track of frontline medical workers, nurses the way that the Superintendent has available at his hands the data on police? And if so, how do things stand at hospitals? The PPE numbers that you gave earlier, what exactly were those? Were those state stockpiles, were they from the survey of hospitals or were they dumped from the federal deposit? And the CHIME model for COVID uses a social distancing percentage as one of its factors. What is the percentage that you're using right now in your estimates for your modeling, and what does that say about New Jersey's compliance rate in general?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll at least start, and Judy, you and Ed should jump in. Is that okay? PPE, that was state. I believe that's state levels at the moment, John. Secondly, on the COVID social distancing, the compliance I think that we've been showing is 31%, right? So, we've been showing two models: one was zero; one was 31%. 31%, again I'm going to hand this over to the experts, is based on historical pandemic experience. My call to arms to everybody is we're better than this. We can beat this. We can be better than 31%.

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: Right, but in your current models are you using another number besides 31%?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: 31%. In our current model we're using 31%. We hope it would get up to 44%. If it was 44% we'd be okay. Our capacity as we currently know it would be fine. So, we're expanding capacity because we're at 31%. We believe with working with the hospitals and the alternative care sites, of which there will be many, that we'll be able to handle the capacity at 31%. As far as tracking the nurses...

Governor Phil Murphy: John mentioned the frontline nurses.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The frontline nurses, those reports go to NJHA from the individual hospitals. We don't keep them at the Department of Health, the workforces dedicated to each hospital.

Governor Phil Murphy: John, may I use this as an opportunity, though, to go back? Can we pull up the two graphs, the two curve graphs for just a second? So, if you look, the left one is Armageddon, right? So, that's assuming we did nothing, go get 'em, enjoy yourselves. There's no state in America that can deal with that, and thank God that's not what we're dealing with. But even if you look at the right graph which implies an average performance, I just can't say two things enough because I don't want, again, anyone else to look back at today or any other day. The numbers are going up of positive tests and sadly fatalities. Our job, and again, there's no price that's too high to pay to save lives, and we will lay it all out to save lives. The numbers are going up. And secondly, even if you get the performance on the right graphic, you still are short on beds, you're short on ventilators and you're short on PPE. So, we are doing everything we can to augment all of the above, and again, we're short on all; and at the same time, beat the crap out of that curve – to use a diplomatic phrase – to get it down as close, the blue line as close to the red line as humanly possible. Did that do it for you or do you have something else?

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: That 31% though, at least here you haven't been... You haven't shut schools, you haven't done aggressive, stay home, hide in your house kind of social distancing before here. So, is 31% still the best way to model that or is there a higher number just to get a sense of how we're complying?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep. May I say this as a nonmedical, non-health expert? Remember a couple of things. We should have said this earlier. These are very good questions. We took a whole range of aggressive steps. You mentioned closing schools – that's now several weeks old. The most aggressive steps were taken a week ago Saturday. Those are ten days old. Judy and Ed, tell me if you disagree, we're getting specimens that are tested that may also be seven to ten days since the collection of them – the results, rather, today? The results that we're reporting today, I can't say this in every case but it is

highly likely, given how jammed up the testing facilities are – including the high-scale, high-speed ones – that these are also seven to ten days old. So, the answer is you may be right. We're not going to know though would be my personal opinion for another seven to ten days, to have enough data to begin drawing conclusions. Is that fair to say?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's totally fair to say. We're kind of looking in the rearview mirror because of the way tests come in. But again, we want to plan for what we think is the worst case and hope for the best. And the resiliency of our healthcare institutions, I believe they'll be able to handle what we're even planning for.

Governor Phil Murphy: But again, even in that better, far better scenario, we're light beds, ventilators, PPE. So, that means everything Judy and her team, and Pat and others are doing to build those capacities out is urgently needed. And for the rest of the 9 million of us, we've got to get on top of that curve, sit on it and drive that sucker down to at least where the red line is if not lower. Real quick, Elise, you good? Nikita?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Yeah, David just wants to know who's going to lead the skunkworks team.

Governor Phil Murphy: To be determined, but tell David I'm very happy that he's watching and give him my best regards. Don't know yet. Anybody over in here? Dave, before I come to you, Paul, are you good? You good in the back, Sir? Dave?

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Commissioner, it's been mentioned and you went through some stats today about the positive cases. Is it accurate to say that we are seeing more younger people in New Jersey than perhaps other states getting positive test results for COVID-19? If that is the case, do we have any reason that we can think of that that's happening? And are we testing... Do we have a demo of everyone that's getting tested? In other words, if it's negative do we know a certain percentage of younger people aged 20 to 30 or 20 to 50 or whatever have tested negative?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I don't have the demographics on the negatives. Ed, I think our statistics actually are following, trending the same as the rest of the United States. It's a slightly younger population than we've seen internationally at least as far as we know.

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Well, what we're seeing is similar to what other places are seeing. In the very young age groups we're seeing very few people being tested or being sick and so forth. As you get older we're seeing more. I don't have the numbers in front of me either but the other thing that we're seeing is that in the relatively young adult ages, 30 to 50, in that range, a lot of people are positive but not that many people end up being hospitalized. Whereas you go older and older, as the Commissioner was saying before for example, over the age of 80 – there aren't that many positives but a very high percentage of them end up being hospitalized. So, it's similar to what other countries are seeing in that the older you get, and the male-er you get to some extent, the worse this is looking.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, do you have one? I couldn't tell. You're good. Brent? We'll go to Paul and then Brent.

Paul Mulshine, NJ.com: Joe Pennacchio is saying that... He questions your policy on HCQ. What is the policy there? Can a doctor not prescribe it off-label or how does that work?

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed?

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: So, a licensed physician is able to prescribe any approved medication on an off-label use. That's always been the case. What this is saying basically is saying we don't want people to be hoarding or writing prescriptions inappropriately. We don't want doctors writing prescriptions for family members or friends or essentially pulling it out of the supply chain for those people, hospitalized or others, who might potentially benefit from this medication – which we still don't know whether it will work or not.

Paul Mulshine, NJ.com: Is preventive use of that by a doctor, is that illegal or what is the policy on that? For someone who doesn't yet necessarily have full symptoms.

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: The policy is designed to help protect against that sort of thing, because the thing you certainly wouldn't want to have happen is a large percentage of New Jersey to get prescriptions for a medication that may have no effect, and pull that out of the supply lines for people that we know it will work for, meaning used for other things; as well as the potential in sicker populations where it's still being seen if it will have an effect. So, we certainly do not want a doctor to be writing prescriptions out there for everybody in their family or on the block, or even in their patient practice who may not be at particularly high risk for this medication and use up the supplies.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nikita, I want to come back to one thing, though, that I do want to say about a group of folks that are going to look at how do we reopen this place. It'll be Jersey-run, to be determined as to who. But it will require by definition input that's probably both national and global because we have to learn from other models beyond our state, right? So, it's going to be, I mentioned speaking to Neera Tanden last night – input from a lot of the work that, as an example, they might be doing. McKinsey's a global firm that already helps us in different ways. That seems to be something that would help us here. Ron Klain who saw implications in the Ebola, there are others like that, but just to give some sense this is going to require more than just... As much expertise as we have in New Jersey it's going to require a national and global reach. Brent, I think you get the last word.

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Yeah, so real quick, I'm a little confused.

Governor Phil Murphy: I still haven't had a test since you last asked.

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: No, no, well, that would be very interesting. But do you, I'm still a little confused on talking about people from other states. Do you plan on doing what Florida is doing and having a 14-day quarantine? Are you not at the point of restrictions yet?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I'm not at that point to give you an answer but I want to put folks on notice, that I'm not going to make people in New Jersey... This is in addition to the fact the virus, if we do everything right – am I right, Ed and Judy – the virus could ebb and flow between now and the time that we get a vaccine that's efficacious and that's scalable. So, that could be a reality if we bat 1000. But I am not going to make the people of this state go through hell and back to flatten that curve – you can put the curve back up if you could – to smash that darn curve down, and all the isolation and social distancing and stay at home, only to have some lowest common denominator throw gasoline back on the fire. I don't know, has that evidenced itself yet? And it's too early to even say that because we're still in our own world doing what we have to do on our own.

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Real quick health questions. Will you issue guidance to hospitals about how long positive patients must remain at home? And have retired healthcare workers you've asked to volunteer started reporting in? And that's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I have to defer to the experts on the guidance.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm sorry, guidance for people that...

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Guidance to hospitals about how long their... One of my colleagues asked me to ask this. Will you issue guidance to hospitals about how long their COVID-19 positive patients must remain at home?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Ah, that's a great question because the serial testing is really an important aspect. I'll let Ed.

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Service, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: So, there is guidance out there, not just for hospitalized patients but patients in general who are recovering from COVID as to how long they should isolate. As the Commissioner mentioned there are two ways that you can look at it. One is you can do serial testing. In a sense, you look for two negative tests in a row. For most people that's not really practical, particularly if they're home and testing is difficult. So, our basic rule comes down to this which is a little bit confusing but at least one week after symptoms began and at least three days after symptoms significantly got better. So, a minimum of seven days from when the illness began is when we would say you can remove yourself from isolation.

Governor Phil Murphy: So, we're going to wrap up but I just want to just make a couple of quick points. One with the graphs still up behind me, again, our job – clearly the left graph is Armageddon. We chose in January we weren't going to go that route. There's no state anywhere in the country that can deal with that.

The chart on the right is assuming we punch at an average weight. I want to repeat what I said yesterday and what I've said already – we're not an average state. We are the quintessential state – high character, one family, nobody works harder. Now, that's the state we need to be right now to take that blue line that you see on the right and smash it down as close to that red line. And we need to do this right now. In the next couple of weeks we're going to know whether or not we are successful. It may well go beyond that, but we're going to have a really strong sense in the next week or two as to whether or not we've got a real shot of bringing that blue line down to the red line. And if there's one state in America that can pull that off it's New Jersey.

God bless you all. If you could put the website back up I want to leave you with this. If you've got any questions go to www.covid19.nj.gov (<http://www.covid19.nj.gov>). It's all-encompassing, from I lost my job to check my symptoms to where can I get tested and everything in between. We will be together same time, same place tomorrow at 1:00 PM. God bless you all.

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