

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. I am joined by the woman who needs no introduction to my right, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right the former State Epidemiologist, another familiar face, COVID-19 Response Medical Advisor Dr. Eddy Bresnitz. Great to have you both. Eddy, nice to have you back. Guy to my left needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Jared Maples, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

As we noted on Monday in response to a question, the Departments of Health and Education were working together in reviewing the latest CDC guidance with regard to classroom configurations as our schools continually reopen. Based on that review, the Department of Health is today releasing its revised guidance for local health departments for k-12 operations. Judy will give a much more detailed report on today's guidance, but I wanted to hit on a couple of the broader points. First, if masking and frequent hand-washing can be maintained by students and educators and support staff in a classroom, then full-time in-person instruction can begin with the distance between students within that classroom reduced to three feet. This updated social distancing guidance applies to all elementary grade levels across all levels of community transmission risk. It also applies to middle and high school grades at low and moderate risk levels.

In communities where the rate of transmission is listed by the department as high, six feet to the maximum extent practicable will remain the recommended standard social distance for middle and high schools. The guidance reiterates that for all schools regardless of grade or risk factor, six feet of distance is critical in indoor common areas when masking is not an option such as when students are eating and drinking in the school cafeteria. As more and more of our educators receive their vaccinations, we must ensure that they continue to wear face masks and take other preventative measures even once their vaccination schedule is complete. There are further recommendations and guidance that Judy will review in a few minutes.

With this guidance being released, I reiterate what I said here last week. Now is the time for all of our schools to meaningfully move toward – forward, rather, with a return to in-person instruction, whether it be full-time or through a hybrid schedule. The strong safety protocols to help prevent in-school spread that have been in place since August will remain in place, and that is because, overall, they have been quite successful. The number of cases linked to in-school spread since August 1st is 890. That is fewer than two tenths of one percent of all the cases that we have recorded in what is now closing in on the past eight full months.

This guidance comes are more of our districts, charter, and renaissance schools and special needs schools continue to trend towards in-person instruction. You can see on the slide, this morning 143 schools or districts are currently open for all in-person instruction. That accounts for roughly 97,000 students. Another 534 are open for hybrid instruction. These schools and districts add up to slightly more than 833,000 students. This means that more than two thirds of our 1.35 million students are back in their classrooms in some form. Further, roughly 121,600 students are in 44 districts that are implementing a mix of in-person, hybrid, or all remote learning. We don't have an exact tally, but it is safe to assume that a significant percentage of these students are back in their classrooms either part time or full-time.

Each day when I get this, Judy, I take that last group, and I cut the number in half and add it just as an approximation to the either hybrid or all-in. If you do that – I did the math this morning – you get to 73.2% making that assumption of all of our kids are either in hybrid or full-time in-person instruction. This leaves roughly 302,000 students in 90 schools or districts who remain in full-time remote learning. These students have now been out of their regular classrooms for more than a year. We know there has been learning loss in these scenarios especially. We are working directly with these districts and through their local health departments with this guidance today to get these students and educators safely back into their classrooms and back to in-person learning.

I remain thankful to Judy and her team as well as to Acting Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan and her team for their work, and I will say this. We all recognize this has been an extraordinarily stressful school year. I mentioned learning loss especially with the all-remote kids, but there's been learning loss up and down the state and across our country, and I applaud everybody who's associated with this school year whether they be educators, parents, kids themselves, superintendents, staff, other leadership for everything they're doing to try to get to the right place. I regularly make it my business over the past number of weeks calling mayors, superintendents, union leadership to thank them for what they're doing and to encourage them further to get as safely and responsibly back in person as soon as we can.

Next up, unrelated but importantly, I have a quick announcement, which I hope should provide a relief to some residents who have received their federal American Rescue Plan funds. Working alongside both the New Jersey Bankers' Association and the CrossState Credit Union Association and with numerous financial institutions directly, we have secured support from 49 banks and credit unions to protect the rescue payments being received by New

Jersey residents from being garnished for past debts or overdraft accounts. We expect more financial institutions to sign on to this agreement. To aid in this effort, I am issuing an executive order exempting stimulus payments under the American Rescue Plan from garnishment by creditors and other debt collectors.

Our bottom line is that the American Rescue Plan is for the American people, not the banks and creditors. We want residents who have received funds to be able to put it – to put those funds to use as they deem necessary. We don't think that's an out of line desire, and we are pleased that numerous banking institutions agree with us. Again, I want to extend my thanks as well to Marlene Caride and the Department of Banking and Insurance for their assistance in providing this extra measure of relief to our families.

Now let's turn our attention to our latest numbers. We continue to move tens of thousands of shots into arms every day, and our dashboard, Judy, I'm showing us of this morning 3,638,002 total doses administered into arms and nearly 1.3 million individuals are now fully vaccinated because either they've received their second dose of Pfizer and Moderna, or they have received their single dose from Johnson & Johnson. We can also report that our federal retail pharmacy partners, CVS, Rite Aid and Walgreens, have vaccinated roughly 34,500 educators across 370 educator-specific clinics since March 5th. We know many others are being vaccinated at our mega-sites and other points of distribution statewide, but I do want to give a shout-out to our pharmacy partners.

We know, folks. There is still a lot of pent-up demand for vaccines. We are hopeful that we're now entering into the last week before our supplies begin to grow significantly and that we can open up many more appointment slots, but make no mistake. We are making significant progress every day. We remain among the top states in terms of our distribution, and as I noted last week, we are the 11th most populous state, so we have been covering a lot more ground than some of the other states which may be ahead of us in one category or another. As we move to the numbers of new cases in a second, we continue to see this stubborn plateauing, Judy, that we discussed on Monday and in fact last week, so let's turn to those numbers.

We're reporting 4,337 new cumulative either positive PCR or antigen rapid tests. The positivity for Saturday's 22,857 PCR tests was – guess what – it's a weekend. It's back up. Look at that – look at the graph. It is literally a sawtooth. Monday through Friday, 6-8% and then up to the low double digits on weekends, 12.49% in this case, but again, part of the reason is we think you're not getting tested on a weekend unless you've got a reason, but there's also a drop of roughly 50% in the number of tests that are recorded on weekends versus weekdays. Statewide rate of transmission is hovering as it has been for the past several days at 1.09. This means that every new case we record is directly leading to at least one other case. The spread of the virus is – even if it's slightly – is increasing and not decreasing. In our hospitals, after several weeks of the hospitals being under 2,000, yesterday was our second consecutive day where it is once again exceeding 2,000, in this case 2,136 patients, 2,010 of whom were confirmed COVID positive.

Number of patients – and I'm going to come back to this in a minute – in ICUs, 430, number of ventilators in use, 218, and throughout yesterday, 267 live patients were discharged from our hospitals, but another 312 patients were admitted, and as you can see, while not yet confirmed, 27 in-hospital deaths. Before we move on, Judy, we talked about this earlier. We said a few weeks ago – which I still think is the case, even though hospitalizations are up a couple of hundred over the past couple weeks – there's a decoupling between cases and severe illnesses measured in the first instance by hospitalizations. Again, that's maybe – that gap may have shrunk a little bit because hospitalizations are up, but we know these variants are more easily transmissible.

You and I were talking earlier. There now feels like there might be – and I say might, Eddy. I'm not hanging my hat on this yet – a decoupling between hospitalizations on the one hand and intensive care and ventilator use on the other hand, so you saw just, folks, yesterday to today, hospitalizations went from 2,000 – all hospitals reported, by the way, so there's no anomaly in reporting – 2,066 two days ago in the hospitals to 2,136, but at the same time, intensive care went from 433 down to 430. Ventilators in use went from 234 down to 218. As we've said – I don't know – a thousand times, one day does not make a trend, but that's another potential decoupling that we're seeing, and that would be consistent with the efficacy of the vaccines, which while in a range for preventing you from getting COVID are all at least as of the current readings 100% effective against severe illness and death, please God. This may be a contributing factor. I will leave it to the experts on my right to either confirm or deny this, but I think we think that that may be something.

Again, given the stubbornness of our case numbers and the increases in the rate of transmissions, the numbers overall, the plateauing overall are not shocking, but more than anything, they speak to our need to keep wearing our masks, keeping social distancing, washing our hands with soap and water, and using commonsense. Take yourself off the field if you've been exposed. If you don't feel well, get tested at the right moment, and by the way, all of this even if you've been vaccinated. We need to slow the spread and to not – and to ensure, rather, that our hospitals will not get anywhere near the danger zone before we can take any further steps to reopen. Only all of us together control the direction in which these numbers move.

We know there is tremendous pandemic fatigue. Who the heck could blame you? We've got it up here ourselves, but we need to keep up folks, and with the weather warming, which is a good thing, and more vaccines into arms, another really good thing, we need to move more of our activities outside but continue to be vigilant. It's why we have been as cautious and as methodical as we have been in our reopenings, in our increases of capacities, which we want to continue to pursue, but we cannot put in jeopardy the extraordinary progress we have already made. Balancing all of that is our job number one, and that's just not our job number one. It's all of us collectively together. Today, with heavy hearts, we must report another 28 losses of life confirmed from COVID-19. It brings, as you can see, the total confirmed loss of life to 21,757 and the number of probable deaths as we normally do on a Wednesday has been revised to 2,535.

With that, let's take a couple of minutes and honor the lives of several more of those who we have recently lost. We begin today by honoring that guy. What is that – not a bouffant. What do you call that? A pompadour, maybe. That is a great look and a handsome guy. We remember him, Joseph Metallo. He was 83 years old and had spent 75 years as a New Jerseyan living in the New Brunswick area. He lived in Jackson, Sewell, and ultimately Hammonton. Joe left us in April, but his family recently reached out to our office to ask if we might consider remembering him in this forum, and it is my honor and our honor to do so. It's kind of cool with a guy name Joe Metallo, he was a sheet metal worker and a proud journeyman for Sheet Metal Workers Local #27 out of Highland Park until 1991. Retirement meant he had more time for bowling, and he was not just an avid bowler or a reliable teammate in the Ocean Lanes Bowling League in Toms River. He was a near expert bowler with multiple perfect 300 games to his credit. He found a second pastime as a gardener at Six Flags Great Adventure.

He left behind his wife of 53 years, Karen. They had three daughters, Darlene, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, Colleen and Eileen, and he is survived by them and his sons in law, Dave and Steve, and his eight grandchildren, Stefany, Bethany, Chase, Joseph, Kenneth, Jason, Steven, and Nicole, and a great-grandson who was born after Joe passed. His grandson's name – great-grandson's name Levi Joseph Colin Metallo, a namesake after his great-grandfather. Joe is also survived by his brothers Rocco and Nicholas. We hope that over the past 11 months since his passing, Joe's family's grief has at least turned somewhat to the appreciation of his extraordinary life and the tears given way to smiles of memories. May God continue to bless and watch over his memory and his extraordinary family.

Next up we recall one of the giants – I will say to our members of the media, one of the giants of our journalism community, Robert Comstock. Bob was 93 years old. He was born in New York City but moved to Ridgewood at the age of three in 1930. At the age of ten, he got a job as a paperboy for the *Ridgewood News*, and the journalism bug bit. He enlisted in the navy after high school at the very end of World War II, and after serving our nation, he returned home and promptly enrolled at Rutgers University to pursue a degree in, you guessed it, journalism. Bob had a love of theater, appearing on a CBS radio competition where he got to perform and even share an on-stage kiss with

Barbara Stanwick. Perhaps I'm with Judy and Eddy as the only people either in the room or watching this program who will have any memories of Barbara Stanwick. She was one of my favorites. One of the great American movie actresses.

He spent his summers working – Pat, I'm not sure. You may have as well. He spent his summers working the public relation lines for Summer Stock in Corning, New York, which further exposed him to many other entertainers. Bob made his newspaper career at the *Bergen Record*, becoming a mentor to many. He took a break from the paper to serve former governor Brendan Byrne as his press director but then returned as executive editor. He also helped educate a new generation of journalists as an associate professor at Rutgers University. Bob was a member of the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority, the New Jersey Committee for Humanities, and the Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct of the New Jersey Supreme Court among many other civic engagements.

Bob is now reunited with his beloved wife Barbara, whom we lost in 2015, with whom he shared 59 years of marriage. He leaves behind their daughter Kate, which whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and son Eric, and his grandsons Alex, Ben, and Theo, and he's also survived by his sister Margot. We honor Bob and his legendary career. We thank him for his service to our nation, and may God bless and watch over him.

Last but not least, let's also take a moment to honor this guy, Pat, former Bloomfield police officer, Benedetto Benny Christiano. Benny was just 53 years old. Benny was a Bloomfield lifer, born and raised. In all he served 28 years serving his neighbors and community and had only retired – are you ready for this – on December 1st. A motorcycle enthusiast, as if I had to tell you that, Benny loved his own Harley-Davidson, which he rode with the Hired Guns Motorcycle Club. He also rode for the Bloomfield Police, leading numerous funeral processions for those in the community who had passed.

He had a heart of gold and was a loving and compassionate father and husband. He also shared that compassion as a regular volunteer for the Special Olympics. Benny leaves his wife, Julie, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday; his daughter, Lyndsey, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday as well, as well as with Lyndsey's mom, Jackie. Keep Lyndsey in mind on July 30th of this year which she will turn 16. Bless her. He also leaves behind his stepchildren, Christopher and Mario.

He is also survived by his father, Benedetto Senior, as well as by his sister Donna and nieces Nicole and Lauren and a great-nephew, Mossino, among many other aunts, uncles, cousins, and dear friends. We thank Benny for his career of service to the community of Bloomfield. May God bless and watch over him and all who he leaves behind.

We have now lost, when you add up the total of confirmed and presumed, a total of 24,292 members of our New Jersey family. It's just draw-dropping, and we honor each and every one of them. Next, switching gears, a couple of weeks back we highlighted the efforts of the Holly City Development Corporation to help downtown Millville and its small businesses weather the pandemic. Holly City was the participant in the Department of Community Affairs Neighborhood preservation COVID-19 Relief Program, overseen, of course, by none other than our great Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver. That program is directing grants into Millville and 18 other communities across the state.

One of the Millville businesses benefiting from this partnership and grant program is Wildflower Vegan Café, which was started by that guy, Eric Nyman. It was a lunch truck in 2010. Within a year, Eric was successful enough to outgrow his truck and move to a permanent brick and mortar presence. For the past ten years Wildflower has been an anchor in the Glasstown Arts District. They are, by the way, 501 North High Street in that Glasstown Arts District.

Particularly with the glass heritage and history in Millville, it's a really cool part of Millville. Always paying it forward, Eric and Wildflower are also – I'm having a hard time saying Wildflower – are also partnering with a local nonprofit to open a community center for restaurant job training, a project that will also allow them to feed even more people. Through the Neighborhood Preservation Program, Eric received a grant to upgrade his restaurant with a COVID-compliant HVAC unit that will allow him and his team to stay open and working. He was also able to stay current on his utilities and rent, and he partnered with Holly City in both their small business gift card program and to improve his own online marketing. I had the great opportunity to catch up with Eric on Monday among everything he has going on, which I thank him for the time. I know he's ready to help lead Millville out of the pandemic and into the future. I gave you the address, 501 North High Street; their website, not surprisingly, wildflowervegan.com.

Finally, for today, to our Jewish community, as you prepare for Saturday evening Seder in the beginning of Passover, not only do we wish you a blessed and happy Passover, we urge you to remember this cannot be as in years past. We are still in a pandemic, as we all know, and we cannot risk any family Seder from becoming an event where this virus spreads further. By the way, we'll have the exact same plea and instructions and warnings for those celebrating Easter a week from this weekend. To those celebrating, Passover, bless you. We wish you nothing but the very best, but please keep your Seder to just those in your immediate bubble this year so we can guarantee that we'll be able to all gather together again next year.

We are completely confident we will be able to do that. If it is possible where you live, also consider moving your Seder outdoors. I believe, Pat, the weather will be warm for the next few days; a little bit of precipitation, but largely warm. We know if you're outside, we know you can gather more safely. This virus is less lethal outdoors than it is indoors. Again, to all who celebrate, blessings, and I wish you a chag Pesach sameach. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Has the Governor mentioned the Department will be releasing revised guidance based on CDC changes to help local health departments assist their schools in providing safe environment for students and staff? Based on available data, in-person learning in schools has not been associated with substantial community transmission. Though outbreaks do occur in school setting, multiple studies have shown that transmission within the school setting is typically lower than or at least similar to levels of community transmission when mitigation strategies are in place in the schools.

K through 12 schools should be among the last setting to close after all other mitigation measures in the community have been employed and among the first to reopen when they can do so safely. A revised guidance is intended to offer public health recommendations and strategies for local health departments regarding K through 12 school operations. However, schools that have implemented mitigation strategies that have allowed them to successfully open full in-person instruction may generally continue to follow those strategies.

Local health departments should continue to use the COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix, the CALI scores, when providing guidance for schools on actions they should take based on the level of COVID-19 risk in their region. In our updated guidance, we recommend full in-person instruction with a minimum of three feet of physical distancing between students maintained in classrooms for elementary schools across low, moderate, and high risk areas and for middle and high school when the region is in low and a moderate risk level. When the region is in high risk, middle and high schools should maintain six feet of physical distancing to the greatest extent possible and consider in-person instruction if they are able to maximize physical distancing of six feet or more. We are recommending this additional space for middle and high school students because they have a higher incidence of transmission than the younger children.

Strict adherence to mask wearing should be enforced at all times. We continue to recommend six feet of physical distancing when masks cannot be worn, such as while eating or drinking. Six feet of physical distancing is particularly important between staff members in school buildings and between staff members and students or in common areas such as school lobbies and auditoriums and also during activities when increased exhalation occurs such as singing, shouting, band practice, sports, or exercise, even if masks are worn. Students and staff are still required to stay home when sick.

Students and staff, unless fully vaccinated and asymptomatic, should stay home if they have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 within the past 14 days. If someone in their household is being tested for COVID-19 due to illness, they should also stay home until the test result is received unless they are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic. Teachers and staff who have been fully vaccinated should continue to follow current guidance to protect themselves and others, including wearing a mask, staying at least six feet away from others while in the community, avoiding crowds, covering coughs and sneezes, and washing your hands often. To reduce risk of transmission in schools, it is recommended that schools work to improve air flow to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air by opening windows and doors when appropriate without posing any health, safety, or security risks, or using child safe fans and exhaust fans, and also consider having activities such as classes or lunches outdoors when the circumstances allow.

The recommendations provide information about the length of school exclusion, the role of testing, and steps to take to respond to suspected and known positive cases among students and schools and outbreaks identified in schools. Regional risk levels are just one tool that the local health departments and schools can use when assessing the COVID-19 risk. Local health departments have additional knowledge of COVID-19 in their jurisdictions that can inform local planning and response actions.

The Department has also recently updated its quarantine guidance. The Department is following CDC recommendations that say individuals who have clinically recovered from COVID-19 in the past 3 months and those who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine after having close contact with someone with COVID-19 as long as they remain asymptomatic. However, there are exceptions for high-risk congregate care settings. The best practice continues to be a 14-day quarantine period, but a shortened period of 10 days without testing or 7 days with a negative test collected at 5 to 7 days is sufficient in some cases where risk of transmission is low or moderate.

In the coming days and weeks, the faithful of New Jersey's religious communities will be celebrating various holidays. Under normal circumstances these would be times to congregate for religious services and family gatherings. We continue to urge residents to abide by the limits set for indoor and outdoor gatherings, the gathering size, and religious service capacity to reduce the spread of the virus. As a reminder, the gathering limits are set at 25 individuals indoors and 50 individuals outdoors. Indoor gatherings for religious services must be limited to 50% of the room's capacity.

Even within gathering size limits, individuals should continue to wear masks and practice physical distancing. We ask that religious leaders notify their congregations of any live streamed or televised services that may be available and provide them with suggestions on how they can create meaningful celebrations at home without gathering with large groups. We also ask for their assistance encouraging their members and congregations to remain vigilant with mitigation efforts such as social distancing, masking, getting tested if necessary, and cooperating then with contact tracers.

Moving onto my daily report as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported a slight uptick, 2,316 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation, with 430 individuals in critical care, and 51% of those in critical care are on ventilators. Thankfully, there are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 110 cumulative cases in our state.

We are currently reporting a total of 415 reports of CDC variance of concern. At our state veterans' homes there are no new cases among residents at the homes. At our state psychiatric hospitals there are no new cases among patients. The daily percent positivity as of Saturday, March 20th as reported in New Jersey is 12.49. The northern part of the state reports 12.47, the central part of the state, 13.56, and the southern part of the state 10.72. That concludes my daily report.

I do want to mention that this week is National Poison Prevention week. I want to acknowledge the excellent work of New Jersey's Poison Control Center to raise the awareness of poison prevention and reduce unnecessary emergency room visits by offering callers access to free confidential and medical advice. On top of their daily work throughout the COVID-19 response, they have helped and spoken to nearly 100,000 callers to answer their health questions. Stay safe, continue to mask up, socially distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested, and remember for each of us, for all of us, please take the call. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything. Thanks for the whole report, especially the depth of information about school guidance. Your last point on poison, it's a good reminder that life marches on. Challenges remain among us. I had a call with some friends yesterday just ticking through a bunch of outstanding items; lead paint, lead service lines, to pick an example. It's not like because of COVID all these other challenges that as a society or as a state that we face have gone away. So it's a great reminder that – both good news and bad news, right? So there's so much to be thankful for and proud of and at the same time, the challenges that we had 13 months ago have not all miraculously gone away. Thank you for pointing that out.

Pat, as I mentioned earlier, the weather's decent, a little bit of precipitation, but warmer which allows us to get outside. Remember, folks, in a restaurant there's no limit on capacity outside. There are social distancing requirements between tables, but the capacity limits are indoors, not outdoors. So the extent to which folks can get outside, whether it's celebrating a religious holiday or celebrating something or having dinner, whatever it might be – would love to get a sense, Pat, of non-weather stuff, compliance, etc. Great to have you.

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Since we last met, there was just one executive order violation reported to the ROC. Elizabeth Police Department responded to the Excel Nightlife club, which had a large disorderly crowd there and were found in violation of the executive order. To your point, Gov, it is supposed to be very warm, almost 80 degrees on Friday. I think, though, with rain in the weekend, supposed to be nice for the kickoff of Passover and Holy Week. So that's all I got.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got Palm Sunday on Sunday in addition to First Seder, I guess, on – this weekend as well. So to everyone, blessings to all. I think we'll start over here. Sam, is that you? Good to see you. Before we jump in, a couple of things. I think we will do as we have predicted. I think we'll be virtual tomorrow and we'll be on the road on Friday. I looked at our tentative plans, Judy, on Friday and I think it's going to be late morning. So I can say with a fairly high degree of confidence that we will have the COVID numbers wherever we may be on Friday. Pat, we'd love to have you join us, as well. We will then get back to the regular rhythm that we've gotten. With that, Sam, good afternoon, welcome.

Q&A Session

Sam Sutton, Politico: Afternoon, thank you. Pardon me for the long wind-up on this one. There was a big push last year for parents to get their school-aged kids scheduled for typical childhood immunizations. Those dipped a bit during the height of the pandemic.

Governor Phil Murphy: Could you get the mic closer? Not to – sorry.

Sam Sutton, Politico: Sorry, through the two masks.

Governor Phil Murphy: No problem.

Sam Sutton, Politico: The typical – there was a big push last year to get kids their typical childhood immunizations. Those numbers dipped a bit during the height of the pandemic. I'm wondering if those numbers have recovered at all and with there being such a big push to get kids back in the schools and with vaccine skepticism increasingly pervasive, if you think it might be time for the legislature to revisit eliminating the religious exemption.

Second question, also schools-related, School Development Authority CEO Manuel DaSilva said yesterday talks between your office and legislative leaders have stalled over the fit of the SDA. Also with schools set to reopen and major infrastructure and ventilation projects left unfinished, what are your plans for the SDA and how are districts supposed to fund much-needed renovations? That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sam, thank you for wearing two masks, by the way, even though it may be a little harder to hear you. This is a great example of what Judy and I were just talking about on the immunizations. I mean, this is a case where life marches on. Having said that, I've got no comment on the question on eliminating religious exemptions. I've got no further thinking on that but Judy, any color on – actually, let me hit the SDA and we'll come back. Any color on immunizations overall and the impact that it may or may not have on the impact of getting back into classrooms?

On SDA, listen, it's an ongoing reality. We want to absolutely get to a good place. It's a topic that we've brought up with legislative leadership over the past – actually at this point, couple of years. We've had good, constructive discussions. In the absence of having a bigger master plan agreed upon, we've got – and Parimal will correct me. We've got \$200 million in the budget in lieu of what otherwise would've been an increase in indebtedness that is directed toward the SDA. I think we've got 75 or \$80 million in the budget as well for emergency repairs that otherwise would've been bonded but money that we can – assuming the budget is approved, can go right to the point of attack. So we're not sitting around on our hands on that front awaiting a sort of broader multi-year solution, which we are committed to getting to with legislative leadership.

Judy, any comment on immunizations as a general matter, or Eddy?

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: Yeah, the 2021 immunization data is not available yet. I'm trying to find out when it will be for you, Sam, but I don't have it quite yet.

Governor Phil Murphy: Can we come back to you? Mahad, will you keep that in mind? Let's hit Matt next. Sam, it was good to see you. Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM: Good afternoon. Will parents have an option to do virtual learning in September if they want that for their child or children even if schools are ordered to do in-person education?

Governor Phil Murphy: As we're sitting here now, no.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM: Okay, thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: We want to be – I want to be unequivocal about this. We are expecting Monday through Friday in person, every school, every district. Obviously if the world goes sideways, we have to revisit that but as of this sitting, the answer's now.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM: Great, a few on vaccines. How do you respond to the Newark Mayor's statement yesterday that he wants to make vaccines available to all adults now since the inoculation rate is so low in urban minority communities? Can you provide the number of vaccine doses you expect to receive over the next four weeks and detail how much of a role J&J will play in that? Can you clarify your comments just earlier now? You said – I think you said that the goal was to have 4.7 million first doses in arms by May as opposed to 4.7 million people fully vaccinated by May. Have you shifted? Is it now just getting that first shot in the arm? Lastly, from Karen Yi, how are vaccines distributed to each site? Is there a specific formula? If so, is that something you could share or is it more subjective? If that's the case, could you explain how the process works and who's involved?

Governor Phil Murphy: I was just on – Judy'll be happy to know. Joe D and I were just back and forth. Essex County's done an extraordinary job. Judy can give you a little bit of color on that. If I implied 4.7 first doses only, that was not my intention. Our objective continues to be 70% of the adult population fully vaccinated either – I may've meant it in a J&J context in which case, it is only one shot, and that's as soon as we can. Mayor Baraka, by the way, continues to do an extraordinary job. We're going to open things up as soon as we can reasonably open it up, and I think it's going to be somewhat dependent, if not meaningfully if not mostly dependent on supplies that we get and the indications we get out of the feds. Remember, we've got more communities coming online on Monday. We're not making any news today, but I would hope sooner than later we can signal at least probably one other set of communities that will come online at some point, I hope not too long in the distant future. Then again, by May 1st, everybody's up to bat. I also think to the mayor – and the mayor's done an extraordinary job not just on COVID as a general matter.

To the mayor's point, Judy and I were on the phone with the team this morning talking about in the very near term, supply's hopefully going up from the feds and using things like the mobile vans at our disposal hopefully sooner than later that can go deep into urban communities, especially that have been harder to reach. I think Judy, you've got some sense of next week's supply, which is as we guessed up, not quite as up as we had maybe hoped, but they're still signaling – the feds are still signaling that there's going to be that quantum increase. Any color on that and/or the formula and how you think about allocating vaccines across various distribution points?

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: The first thing – and I've said this a number of times – we don't know weeks in advance what we're going to get. We find out every Tuesday by the end of the day what we're going to get delivered directly to the points of dispensing the following Monday barring any weather emergencies. It usually arrives on Monday. For example, this week, the week of 3/21, our total allocation was 416,660. Of that, the total Pfizer was 231,660. They were both prime and booster dose. Prime doses, 120,510, so of Pfizer in New Jersey this week, 120,510 individuals will start their vaccine journey; 111,150 individuals receiving Pfizer will get their second dose.

Moderna has not changed over the last couple of weeks. Total is 174,800. Prime doses, 87,400, so 87,400 individuals will start their Moderna vaccine journey this week and booster, 87,400. This week, and it was a surprise to us, we did get some J&J. We were not expecting it. We got 10,200 doses of J&J.

Governor Phil Murphy: A pleasant surprise.

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: A pleasant surprise.

Governor Phil Murphy: Given all the surprises we've –

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: Now, next week, we had another surprise. We are getting 494,430 doses; 267,930 of Pfizer, prime doses, 148,590, booster doses, 119,340. Moderna stayed the same, 174,800, of which it was split between 87,400 prime and 87,400 booster. We were notified that we were getting a total of 51,700 J&J, so another good surprise.

The next question is how do you allocate that. Well, first of all, the booster doses are already allocated, so we know exactly where to send them to match them to the individuals that received their prime doses either 21 days prior with Pfizer or 28 days prior with Moderna. Then we look at every point of dispensing, of which now we have over 600. We look first at equity, so there is an – what we call a parody formula that we use. How close are the administration's to the representative population? It's equity. Then we look at disease burden. What are the COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 in that municipality or county? Then we look at SVI, the social vulnerability index, which takes in the percent of poverty, percent of individuals from communities of color, percent of individuals that do not have a car, for instance. Then we look at throughput. How many doses can each point of dispensing move through in a day? We don't want to give them more than they can handle because then the doses end up on the shelf. We have a rule that you have to start dosing within 24 hours of getting the vaccine.

Then lastly, we look at inventory. How many of the points of dispensing more than three weeks' inventory on the shelf? As we get more vaccine, that will probably close down to two weeks but right now, it's three weeks. So it's equity, disease burden, SVI, throughput, and inventory. We do that for all 600 sites. Then we start allocating depending on how fast, how quickly, how efficiently, and how many doses we can move by the end of the week and start all over again.

Governor Phil Murphy: A master class. It occurs to me – you don't want to create an eye chart and nor do I, but Mahen, it might make sense at some interval to just put up the big numbers of the doses and supplies we're getting, right? That was – Matt, you're probably sorry you started asking the question there, but you got – it was a great tour de force. Judy, thank you.

Back to Mayor Baraka's rightful concern about the vaccine getting into all communities in our state. Pat, anything you want to add to that?

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thanks, Gov. I would just add that Judy and the team and I are on daily with regards to the various challenges and similar to what we saw which children and education connectivity, we face that same challenge with our minority and elderly populations. Then that challenge coupled with transportation is certainly one of them. That's where these mobile units are going to come in. If you think from the IT technology standpoint, that's the registration piece. That's the appointment piece. That's the availability of vaccines and where they are. Every day, that incident management team from Health and from the state police and FEMA trying to overcome those challenges to make sure that equity piece – and certainly we need to move the needle considerably.

Governor Phil Murphy: Those efforts are only going to intensify and we commit to that and promise that. Matt, thank you. Kenny, is that you?

Kenny Burns, WHY: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, sir, how are you? Is that a New Jersey flag?

Kenny Burns, WHY: It is.

Governor Phil Murphy: Another reason to welcome you. Thanks for coming.

Kenny Burns, WHY: Thank you, Governor. Continuing the theme on accessing – you already answered some of these questions, so forgive me in advance for repeating this. As we acknowledge that the number of people who were vaccinated among the communities of color are already low, will the community-based sites be enough? You just mentioned the vans that will go further into the neighborhoods. Also, if the issue is access, and it sounds like it is, how is that going to be improved?

Governor Phil Murphy: Did you say access?

Kenny Burns, WHY: Access.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think the issue really is more supply than access but it's both. Go ahead.

Kenny Burns, WHY: Also, can you talk about how the state is helping those who are not within that mile or so to get the access link for – to get to public transportation to get to a site? Then my last question –

Governor Phil Murphy: Sorry, those are folks who do not have the transportation to get to a site?

Kenny Burns, WHY: Right, so like if they call NJ Transit access line, they're outside that halo. Then the last question is AARP has called on the state to come up with a plan to reach those who are home-bound with the vaccination. Where are you in the planning stages if you have addressed that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, Judy and Pat should jump in on a lot of these. The community-based sites I think you mentioned, we've got a lot of these with FEMA. I would hope we're going to continue to find ways to work with FEMA and broaden that out, whether it's with FEMA or our own two legs. Judy can talk about that. Vans, I think you're thinking of the next three weeks. We've got the vans. We ordered them. It took a while to get them; we have them. Judy should come back to that.

The question I think you asked, your third question is – is it what do you do with folks who – is it access – and I added I think it may be supply as well as access. I think all of these answers kind of get at that, but I wanted Judy to come back to that. What are we doing with folks, I think you said, who had no transportation and then separately home-bound, so sort of similar, two sides of the same coin. Again, that's begun to some extent. Remember, the J&J vaccine, one shot, regular refrigeration, don't have to cold-change storage in the latter and in the former, don't have to keep track and record of when you have to come back for your second dose allows us a lot more flexibility to take the vaccine to the community. Again, we're still – while the J&J numbers this week and next week are better than we thought – I'm going to just ballpark this, Judy – I bet you we've gotten 150 to 200,000 doses in total of J&J since the beginning, something like that. We've gotten 3 to 4 million Moderna, Pfizer doses. So the – we need all supplies to go up, but the J&J piece of this especially in terms of our ability to get the vaccine to people.

Judy, on any of the above, do you want to weigh in?

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: Sure, let me start with the vans. We did – we call them the triplets. We have three vans. We delivered – they got delivered last week. We are working on getting them licensed because the vans have to be licensed under a healthcare facility to be able to give the vaccinations. We are going to put a van out for testing because you don't need to be licensed to do the testing through the van, just to get one of the vans on the road and see how it works. Our goal's to go deep into communities, park the van. Hopefully with J&J doses, be able to vaccinate individuals.

Our goal overall in the state is that everyone will be within a 15-minute walk or a 20 to 30-minute drive to a vaccine site. There should be no reason why someone cannot get access to a registered vaccine site. Accordingly, we've learned through our pop-ups that our percentages of individuals from communities of color increase exponentially when we're in a community center, when we're in a church. FEMA has helped us with that. We've had a number of those what we call pop-ups throughout the state, and we will plan more hopefully with FEMA or with the state in collaboration with local health departments. That is the best way to get deep into communities who otherwise have a digital divide, cannot register, have some disabilities that cannot bring them to a larger site.

That brings us to the home-bound We are working with the Department of Human Services to identify as many home-bound individuals as possible, and our local health departments who are authorized to go into homes, along with VNAs in community health agencies. We will be working with them. Some of them have already done pilots going into the home to vaccinate the home-bound both with either Moderna or J&J.

So what else? What did I...

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, I would make two comments. First of all, Tammy was today at the Buffoon Community Center in Jersey City where you and I were a couple weeks ago, great example doing extraordinary work. Mayor Phillip and the whole team there are aces in terms of – again, right in the middle of the community, right on MLK Boulevard.

Secondly, there's no denying – and I don't think any of us would say this – that we are not where we want to be as it relates to equity. We, as a general matter, don't have enough supply. That's beginning to correct itself. We're proud of the record we've got so far of getting shots in arms relative to the supply we've got, but that's an overall contextual

reality to everybody. As it relates to equity, this is a work in progress; there's no question about it. We will get there. We commit that, period, full stop. Again, I don't want to pin it all on J&J, but the J&J supply is the bigger game-changer that allows us a flexibility that we just don't have with Pfizer and Moderna. Thank you.

Please, good afternoon.

Reporter: Afternoon. Governor, for you and Commissioner Persichilli, a new study from the *New England Journal of Medicine* finds vaccination of healthcare workers resulted in a major reduction of COVID-19 cases among those who received both doses even with a surge of the UK variant. Does that jive with what you're seeing amongst New Jersey's healthcare workers in healthcare settings? Also on vaccines, any response to the request from Senator Menendez to reexamine the vaccine allocations to Hudson County to address what he called lagging vaccination rates there? I know you just spoke at this at length, but are you confident that the allocation process the state has in place allows for equitable distribution? Finally for you or Colonel Callahan or Director Maples, NJ Spotlight News was contacted by business owners concerned about social media posts allegedly made by Patriot Party New Jersey. It calls on residents to participate in maskless shopping this Saturday at Freehold Raceway Mall. Has the Administration been made aware of these posts and have they been verified? If so, how are you advising these owners and employees to handle the situation?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Let me go through these one at a time. We got Eddy Bresnitz here. We got to bring Eddy in from the bullpen, Judy, to make sure he gets his money's worth. I think your question on the first one – *New England Journal of Medicine*, healthcare workers who had two – so they're fully vaccinated, both doses, and the conclusion was that it worked even against the variants, and how does that square with our data? I think it squares quite well with our data. Eddy, over to you.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Eddy Bresnitz: I don't know that we have specific data looking at the baseline, if you will, of peak of cases amongst healthcare workers back last spring, a year ago now almost. I don't know that we've actually had that data to see whether there's been a trend downwards. Obviously the healthcare workers were in the first category of eligible people in our Phase 1A. To a large extent, certainly hospital-based workers got vaccinated as well. There – I did not see the study that you refer to, but I did see another study that was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that looked at a small group of people; I think it was in Missouri, in a hospital in Missouri, who had actually gotten COVID-19 and so had some baseline antibody level. After one dose had a significant increase in their antibody levels basically showing that they were already had a response because of natural infection and then got a bump with the first dose, although they were subsequently going to get the second dose. So it's expected that healthcare workers really should see a reduction, at least among those who got vaccinated.

Yes, it's true the variants are more – the major variants we really should be talking about. There are many different variants, and most of them actually developed – self-destruct, actually. The three variants of concern, the one that we call the UK, the one from South Africa, and a couple from Brazil – actually there's four. It's really the one from the UK, the B-117 variant, that's of most concern not just in New Jersey but in the US as well. Yes, it's true that it's increased transmissibility, but it – there doesn't seem to be that the vaccines don't have efficacy against those variants as well.

From my perspective, there's confidence that there's less disease among healthcare workers and also even though the variants are circulating, they have less likelihood to get infected because the vaccine's not working against it. It works, and I think we should be confident in that as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: Eddy, I used the word data, and I misspoke. I think it's consistent. I would put it this way – again, the non-medical expert – consistent with our expectations, right?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Eddy Bresnitz: Correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: We could ask this question all the time: listen, you're making great progress on vaccines, but you got a lot of cases and depending on the day of the week, we might be number one in America and it's not the number one we want. I personally think as a combination, probably some fatigue but overwhelmingly density, especially not just the state but the region adjacent to New York, and the fact that we have up until now had to conduct most over the past several months indoors our business, whether it's eating, whether it's celebrating, whether it's whatever it might be, and that's not the case in states in the South, and I hope it won't be the case here, either, soon.

Let me just give Senator Menendez a huge shout-out at many levels including the American Rescue Plan as it relates to the Senate side of this. I don't think we would've gotten it if it weren't for Bob Menendez, period. Secondly, I take his letter very seriously, and it is consistent with the conversations that we had with Matt and with Kenny that we have a way to go. I think Hudson and Essex County – I believe this is correct – are both the number one and two densest counties in America, and the number one and two most diverse counties in America. We take that letter very seriously, and it is not inconsistent with our sense and it's certainly another reason why – like I said, we're not telling you we might. We will get to all corners, especially the hard-to-reach elements of our urban communities over the next period of time.

Not only are we aware of this ridiculous flier that's gone around about maskless shopping but I am personally aware of it and extremely unhappy about it. Having said that, I'll turn to the experts on my left, Pat, and then I'll let Jared Maples to come in briefly on the heels of Pat.

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Yes, to the Governor's point, we are aware of it. Our regional operations intelligence center staff in collaboration with Director Maples's shop, county prosecutor's office, local law enforcement aware of it. We have not formulated it but if we did, guidance would probably be two-pronged. It would go not only out to law enforcement but to store owners. Our early initial overview was in a time when businesses had been struggling to put them in a position that they may have to close their doors seemed hard to fathom for us.

Governor Phil Murphy: And also, they're not law enforcement and to put them in a position – the overwhelming amount of whom have been doing, Pat, the right thing for day in and day out now for 13 months and make them be the guy or gal at the door that has to say to some knucklehead who's trying to make a political statement that actually you can't come in. Therefore, you lose the business and/or you get into a confrontation. That's the last thing we need right now. Jared, having said that, I feel like Khrushchev, pound on the table with my shoe here, so over to you.

Director of the Office of Homeland Security Jared Maples: To reemphasize, we completely agree with the Colonel.

Governor Phil Murphy: Something else that very few of us will remember.

Director of the Office of Homeland Security Jared Maples: The state police and OHSP were in lock-step, as we always are with these issues. Two quick points to emphasize; this really does show the importance of reporting through the system, whether it be local police department or through our See Something, Say Something campaign, so I want to emphasize that. Then also, our direct connectivity with critical infrastructure partners like malls, like the stores, we maintain a almost daily contact with all of them. So yes, we are in constant coordination and communication with law enforcement and the private sector.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for both of those. We'll come down to Dave here if we can. I know our time is running short, but we can't cut you guys off. We got two more folks to get to.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: This is sort of a follow-up to Matt's question. He did steal my question again regarding the vaccine supply, so I will be asking for a formal investigation by the state attorney general's office. That being said, Governor –

Governor Phil Murphy: You guys have to take that outside, please.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: You have in the last couple of weeks talked about this quantum leap of vaccine supply. Would you say that next week, almost we're expecting nearly a half a million doses. This is the beginning of the quantum leap. With regard to the Pfizer vaccine, a couple of weeks ago there was discussion about does not necessarily need to be kept at ultra-cold storage temperatures. Could you, perhaps commissioner or Dr. Eddy talk about what are the mega-sites doing in terms of when they receive either Pfizer or Moderna supply? How are they keeping it cold? Is it just dry ice? Do they have super cold freezers there? How long do they keep the vaccine?

Finally, you guys mentioned the hospitalizations are up slightly with the ICUs and the ventilators are down a bit. This may reflect that we have more vaccinations going on. People are protected from severe illness, but if you're so sick that you go to the hospital, isn't that severe illness? I guess the question becomes when should somebody go to the hospital? Under what situation, what kind of symptoms do you need to have now to be able to say boy, I better go to the hospital? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll give you a couple of quick thoughts and then we'll turn it to Judy and Eddy and we'll be brief just because the clock is working against us. Judy, what was your total for next week on vaccines? I've –

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: Four hundred and ninety-four thousand, four hundred and thirty.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, so it – personally it isn't quite the quantum leap that I had anticipated, but it is certainly going in the right direction. The sense we're getting – and it's a sense from the feds – that that number is only going up. I think in fairness to them, they don't want to give us some level and then not have the confidence that they could continue to meet that level week in and week out.

To the best of my knowledge, we're still doing ultra-cold chain with Pfizer at all of our locations, but Judy should come in on that. Then the question of when you should be hospitalized, I would just say as an amateur answering this question, it's the same reasons as it was three months ago or six months ago, but we know a lot more than we did then. So with all the above. Judy anything on ultra-cold chain and/or Eddy on when folks should get hospitalized?

Commissioner for Department of Health Judy Persichilli: Pfizer's only allocated to those sites that have the ultra-cold chain at this point. Our hospitals, the main retail pharmacies, and some mega-sites have on-site ultra-cold chain refrigeration. As far as severe illness is concerned, in order to be admitted to a hospital, you have to have severity of illness and intensity of service. Anecdotally from our CEOs who I meet with on a regular basis, patients rightfully are coming to the hospital when they see a dip in their O2 saturation. That needs to be monitored carefully on the hospital's side. That would be considered a reason to admit someone trying to get ahead of the disease.

Governor Phil Murphy: We haven't said this in a while, but the monoclonal antibodies and the speed by – with which one reacts if they test positive continues to be a game-changer. Am I right, Eddy?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Eddy Bresnitz: Yeah, I mean, the [inaudible 1:07:13] of hospitalization has two parts to it. First of all, somebody has to have symptoms and then seek medical care. Then the decision to hospitalize somebody is made by the clinical staff, usually the health provider, the physician in the – often in the emergency department, but it could be from a clinic as well. The first thing is if somebody's got symptoms, they need to get tested. Make sure that they basically have confirmation of diagnosis. If they fall into the eligibility category, then they need to contact their physician or local hospital and see whether they can get monoclonal antibody, the earlier the better. When they do have symptoms and they qualify, they really should seek getting monoclonal antibody.

Then generally speaking, those are only for outpatients, monoclonal. That's the indication. They go home. They're given advice about what to monitor, how they feel, shortness of breath, cough, and anything like that. If it gets worse, they're advised to come back to the institution and then there's a clinical decision. As the commissioner mentioned, O2 saturations are a piece of it, but I don't know that all people are being monitored at home with O2 saturation these days. It's really how they feel. Within the hospital setting, let's say in the emergency department, they'll measure O2 saturation. They'll probably do a chest x-ray. First and foremost, they're going to examine the individual to see what their clinical condition is, their vital signs and so on. Then based on various criteria, they may or may not be admitted.

Obviously if they have underlying comorbidities, that will impact the severity of their illness and the decision whether to hospitalize then or not. Finally, what kind of support services do they have at home? If they're at home, it may be that they can't take care of themselves, even feeding themselves, or dressing, or activities of daily living. All those factors go into making the decision of whether somebody should be hospitalized.

Governor Phil Murphy: I can't recall who it was off the top of my head. I have my notes back at the office. One of the survivors with whom I spoke on Monday of the folks I memorialized today said that – she said they wished they had known a lot more about oxygenation levels sooner and had the ability to monitor that at home because that ultimately was a game-changer for their family member who's loss. Thank you.

Nikita, good afternoon. We'll close it out with you.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. We're all on your cabinet today. This is to the superintendent. You were nominated in 2018 and in the three years since, there's been no action by the Senate to confirm you to your position. Given the fact that I don't hear criticism of you from either side of the aisle, that seems strange to me. So I'm just wondering if you can say why is it that you have not been confirmed.

Separately on the filling of vacant Cabinet posts, so Commissioner Catherine McCabe resigned to move – actually, I'm not sure. She resigned last December and we're now in late March. What's the status on the search for a replacement, and do you think it's realistic to get a new DEP commissioner confirmed before the end of the year? Same question for commissioners from Human Services and DMVA. I'm wondering how far you are from nominating permanent commissioners there and whether there's a reason you haven't nominated acting commissioners Shawn LaTourette or Sarah Adelman. Finally, what is the status of Acting Commissioner Allen McMillan's confirmation?

Governor Phil Murphy: You'll be sorely disappointed by all the answers. Pat is an extraordinary leader among the very most impressive leaders I've ever worked with. I remain confident while it may have been – taken a long time, this ship will ultimately get into port. I can't tell you when, but I can't say enough good things about him.

As it relates to, I think you said, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Human Services, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, we have at the moment very good and able leadership in each of those organizations, Sarah Adelman in Human Services, Shawn LaTourette in DP, and Colonel Acting Adjutant General Lisa Hou at DMVA, and thank – in Lisa's case, we're particularly thankful she's a medical expert overseeing the National Guard because yes, we've still got hundreds in Washington, DC deployed, but I suspect residents out there who watch us every day and have been vaccinated, they've seen a member of the National Guard, I almost can guarantee that, in that process. Nothing new but obviously they're really outstanding leaders, and the same thing with Dr. Allen McMillan. She's doing a terrific job and again, she's been thrown into the fire. In that process, again, I don't have any

specific answer, but those processes, whether it's interviewing folks, whether it's working in the advice consent side of our life with the Senate, those processes go forward. Again, we are blessed as a state with each one of those people beginning with the guy to my left by extraordinary leaders.

With that, thank you all. As always, I'm going to mask up. I got a couple with me, Sam, today, and I will say it does make it harder to be heard, so I'll be brief. Judy and Eddy, thank you, as always. Great to have you both. Pat, as always, Jared, Parimal Garg, the rest of the team. Couple of quickies, and I will be brief. Folks, keep doing what you're doing. You've been extraordinary whether that's the millions of you or whether that's proprietors or everybody in between. One of the people I'm going to memorialize on Monday, I spoke to his granddaughter today, and he passed at St. Joe's. I said, "What line of business are you in?" She's a nurse at St. Joe's. We don't say this often enough: to the healthcare workers, to the members of law enforcement, to the frontline essential workers, whoever you are, our hat is off to you.

Please be particularly careful as you celebrate the couple of big religious holidays coming up. We've got Passover beginning this weekend. We have Holy Week and then Easter a week from Sunday, and we've got Ramadan only in a few weeks coming up one, two, three. Would ask you please celebrate those holidays responsibly and if you can, preferably out of doors. Again, we'll be on the road on Friday and we'll be at a time – I believe we'll have COVID data with us and otherwise, we'll be virtual tomorrow, over the weekend, and we'll see you back here at 1 o'clock on Monday. Thank y'all. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

Statewide

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Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket (http://drumthwacket.org/)	(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)		
Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket (http://drumthwacket.org/)	Press Kits		
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