

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: June 22nd, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for your patience. As we predicted, our schedule is going to be a little bit jumbled today, so I appreciate your bearing with us. I'm joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. To my far left, another name you know well, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. And it is a particular honor to be joined by the woman to my left, who also needs no introduction, my partner in government, Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, and importantly the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, Sheila Oliver. Sheila, great to have you.

Today we are entering what I think should be considered as the middle phase of stage two of our restart and recovery. I should say upfront, we have a lot of ground to cover today, so please bear with us. This is the next step in our road back. Today, personal care businesses across the state are all reopening, with protocols and safeguards in place to give clients and staff alike confidence that their health and protecting them from the coronavirus are our top priorities. Additionally today, organized sports teams are again able to begin non-contact practices and drills, the first step in athlete conditioning as they prepare for a return to competition in the coming weeks. And, outdoor swimming pools were able to open today as well, just in time for a high humidity, 90-degree day.

One week from today, our shopping malls will reopen their doors to shoppers. By the way, I was interviewed this morning, someone called shopping malls our state bird. By the way, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples is with us, the Lieutenant Governor's incredible Chief of Staff Terry

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Tucker is in the house; great to have you both here.

And beginning today, we are proud to announce even more steps that we are able to take in our restart and recovery, and they're just the first of what will be multiple reopening announcements we intend to make throughout this week as we finalize our dates. We are able to take these steps to begin these late-stage announcements because we have stayed true to our two overarching principles: first, that public health creates economic health, and second, the data and nothing else decides the dates for our restart. Over the past several weeks, we have reiterated again and again that the most important metrics we are tracking are the current rates of spread of COVID-19 as measured by the daily percentage of tests coming back with a positive result and the realities within our healthcare system and hospitals. And today, we continue to see a rate of spread remaining at a point where we are confident in our ability to continue our restart.

The percentage of positive tests taken on June 17th, which is the last date for which we have complete result data, was just 2.42%. It was not very long ago that we were looking at positivity rates 5% or 6% or many more times that. Today, our transmission rate, our RT, stands at 0.76 and as we've discussed, this means that for every new positive test for COVID-19, we see fewer than one other new case. The rate of spread has slowed significantly. As our hospitals were hitting their peak in early to mid-April, the rate of spread was greater than 1:1 and in the weeks prior to that, it was spreading at a rate of more than five times that.

But because of the tough choices we made to implement strong social distancing measures, our requirement to wear face coverings in retail businesses, and our strong recommendation to wear them when outdoors and around others, we have put both our spot positivity and RT in places where we can move forward. Before you switch it, Dan, a couple of quick comments, a little bit of tough love.

I would be lying if I didn't say two things. One is we all acknowledge the enormous amount of frustration at all the steps we have taken. Coach Greg Schiano of the Rutgers football team reminded me at the end of last week, it is the pain of discipline, where the alternative is the pain of regret. As much as this has been tough on all of you and all of us, it's not been a lot of fun, the alternative is completely unacceptable.

The second piece of tough love is you could not help but look, and Pat Callahan and I were discussing this a few minutes ago, at viral videos of bars or beaches or boardwalks this weekend and draw a conclusion that folks have let their hair down a little bit too much. And so folks, we can't do that. We're taking these steps based on extraordinarily positive data, but we don't want to look like the other states that have gone through hell, and now they're going back through hell. We just don't want to do that. We won't allow ourselves to do that, and we'll take the steps as necessary to make sure that we don't do that. And Judy and her team will be guiding us at every step of the way.

So, the results of these practices, up until now at least, are clear in the data we see from our hospitals. Look at those numbers. It's a staggering amount of progress. We have come down 85% or more since the peak among the key data sets we follow, both new and total hospitalizations, ICU beds filled and ventilators in use. And just over the past two weeks in the right column, we have seen even further declines across the board of 40% or more. The rate of spread has slowed and our hospitals have regained a tremendous amount of potential capacity and resiliency. But don't just take our word for it, this is what we've done folks, together. Look at this map from the nonprofit COVID Act Now, a consortium of healthcare and public policy leaders from around the nation, including researchers and epidemiologists from Georgetown and Stanford Universities who have been tracking state responses to this emergency. They follow many of the same metrics that we do, by the way.

According to COVID Act Now's research, New Jersey is one of only four states in America today which it deems as being on track to contain COVID-19. Again, one of four states across the entire country. In this particular analysis, it is Massachusetts, New York, Michigan, and the Great State of New Jersey. This proves that the measures we put in place – again, the pain of discipline, and not the pain of regret, folks – and the hard decisions we made were the right ones. So as a result, and please don't let your hair down folks, please stay true to this. We are ready to take our next step. So, here we go.

Today, because of the progress we have made, I am pleased to increase the limits on gatherings effective immediately. Outdoor gatherings may now increase from 100 to 250 persons maximum, and we will continue to have no limits for outdoor religious or political activities. But if you're a part of those, wear something on your face, keep social distance as best you can, wash your hands with soap and water and get tested.

For all indoor gatherings, the new limit is 25% of capacity, but such number cannot now exceed 100 persons; that's up from 50. The 100-person maximum, again is double what we've had in place. Today I am also proud to announce, and this is a big one for Sheila and me both, that the casinos in Atlantic City will reopen on Thursday, July 2, and they operate at 25% of their capacity. This means that thousands of New Jerseyans can get back to work. Additionally, our racetracks will be able to reopen for in-person – that's including at their sports books and lounges, as long as they abide by applicable gathering limits.

Simultaneously, indoor dining at restaurants and indoor capacity at catering halls statewide will also resume on Thursday, July 2. However at first, and we hope we can do better on this over time, but that will depend on the data, at first all establishments will be limited to just 25% of their indoor capacity, keeping in mind that many restaurants and halls across the state have been able to utilize or expand their outdoor capacities already, especially outdoor dining. Judy I've been to four restaurants since last Monday, outdoors; three restaurants, four times outstanding. As we move forward, we fully anticipate being able to increase the indoor number as we feel it is safe to do so.

The further health and safety protocols that will allow for the casinos to reopen are currently being drafted and will be released within the next several days. Several casino operators also plan to open to friends, family and loyal customers first on July 2 to test these new protocols to ensure their efficacy. While this guidance is not yet complete, you should fully expect that they will include mandatory face coverings and masks and health screenings for all visitors and staff, and you should also expect density limits or capacity limits to ensure social distancing while inside the casinos, among other measures.

If any, I hate to say this, folks, but we're in this together. If any visitor refuses to comply with these simple safeguards, you will be escorted out of the casino. We are not going to tolerate any knuckleheads trying to ruin it for those who wish to enjoy themselves responsibly, those who need to get back to work, especially if those knuckleheads could be spreading COVID-19. Casinos have also offered to partner with state and local health officials to provide as much data as possible for contact tracing, and this agreement also helped inform our decision to move forward with a July 2nd opening date. We also expect to put clear testing protocols in place for casino workers if they ask for a test or begin to show any symptoms.

And the rules for indoor dining, which also will be released in the coming days and will be similar to the requirements in place for outdoor dining, will also extend to the restaurants in our casinos. Just as in the response of regulating gaming itself, nothing is static and our conversations with our friends across the casino industry will continue. I want to give a special shout out to Director Dave Rebeck and the team at the Division of Gaming Enforcement for their tremendous work alongside our casino and labor partners. They aren't considered the premier gaming regulator globally for nothing, and I mean that. People tell us that from all over the world, that our division of gaming enforcement is second to none in the world.

Additionally, the Lieutenant Governor and her team at the Department of Community Affairs have been undertaking a series of efforts as it relates to Atlantic City's restart more broadly, and for the businesses and residents in the shadows of the casino properties to be able to thrive. Reopening casinos isn't the end all be all of revitalizing Atlantic City's economy. I have asked, as always, my partner extraordinarily, the Lieutenant Governor, to join us to give us a fuller look into the efforts of the department, alongside municipal and business leaders, labor leaders, the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and the healthcare community, among others within Atlantic City. Our administration has made stabilizing Atlantic City a top priority, whether it be in strengthening local government or diversifying the local economy, and we are not going to let COVID-19 allow those efforts to backslide. So to you, Sheila and your extraordinary team, I thank you for your sustained commitment to a revitalized and thriving Atlantic City and I look forward to hearing more on this great work.

We heard the voices of casino operators and restaurant owners, labor leaders and our community partners loud and clear. But as with everything, we knew we had to see the health metrics continue to fall into place before we could make this announcement. The metrics continue to be of vital importance, and if the current trends change between now and next Thursday, or if we feel uncomfortable with the implementation of the guidance, we will hit pause on the current plan. But frankly, that's the last thing I or Sheila or any of us want to do. I know that if everyone keeps answering the call of personal responsibility and using their common sense

for the common good, we will see these numbers continue to track the right way, and we will get to July 2, as we have planned. And as I mentioned, we intend to make further announcements over the coming days related to a number of additional reopenings, including with respect to other indoor recreational activities.

So as I said, we are entering into the latter phases of stage two of our restart. We have been actively working on this for weeks and are very confident where things are heading. If we continue to be smart, we'll soon be able to set the date for our entry into stage three, but the only way we can is to keep up with the social distancing, wearing our face coverings, being smart about personal hygiene, and caring for the health and safety of all 9 million of our fellow New Jerseyans. With that, let's turn to the overnight numbers.

Yesterday we received an additional 359 positive test results and our statewide total is now 169,415. In our long-term care facilities, you can see both the day-over-day change as well as the totals. The number of new cases continues its downward trend, as does the number of associated losses of blessed lives, but we are committed to the health and safety of each and every resident and staff member, and we'll continue our efforts to protect them and save every life we can.

At our hospitals, the total number of New Jerseyans hospitalized for COVID-19 has decreased to 1,029. Our field medical stations reported 15 patients. The number of patients in either critical or intensive care was 287; 213 ventilators were in use. Yesterday, 46 new patients with COVID-19 were admitted, you can see the totals on the left by region, to our hospitals while 70 live patients left our hospitals, that's the column on the right.

But even with these positive signs, we must remain vigilant, and we have to keep up, as I said, with our social distancing and wearing face coverings. We're still a top 10 state in terms of total hospitalizations, and we remain in the top five in the numbers of loss of lives. Social distancing, wearing face coverings are the only way we drop in these rankings. And today, we have the solemn duty to report an additional 27 COVID-19 related deaths. We have now lost a total of 12,895 of our fellow New Jerseyans to this virus. Almost unbelievable. Let's take a moment, as we do every day, to remember several more of them.

First, we'll visit Little Falls in Passaic County, the longtime home of Ronnie Cordero. Ronnie was a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and joined the Little Falls Fire Department in 1980, and then since 1982, served as a member of Eagle Hose Company No. 1. He was a responder to Ground Zero on 9/11, served as the Company's Assistant Chief from 2007 until 2019, and was recognized as Passaic Valley Elks Lodge as their Firefighter of the Year for 2018. Along with fighting fires, Ronnie worked for the Township of Little Falls, and was the Code Enforcement Officer for many years. Even when his community couldn't gather to send Ronnie off, the bagpipes were played as Ronnie was led to his rest.

His family was his pride and joy, and he leaves behind his wife Jean with whom I had the honor of speaking yesterday. They had two children together, son Ronnie who's 25 and their daughter, Carla, who's 20, who's studying architecture. Ronnie himself was just 61 years old. We thank you, Ronnie for a lifetime of service to our nation and to your community. God bless you and watch over you.

Next we remember Albert Hill Duncan Jr. of Washington Township in Warren County. For 36 years he was employed at University Hospital in Newark, and was the maintenance supervisor for the physical plants. But back home in Washington Township, he also gave much of his time serving as a volunteer fireman. When he wasn't overseeing buildings at University Hospital or was on an emergency call for the Firehouse, Al dove into his love of motorcycles, or was behind the controls operating his ham radio. He also took special pride in his family and spending time with his beloved wife, Gail, and again I had the honor of speaking with her yesterday, their daughter Kelly and son Scott. He leaves them all behind. Al was 69 years old.

A couple things, Gail and Al would have been married 45 years next month. And by the way, Gail herself was hospitalized for 10 nights with COVID-19. She says she feels good on most days although she's crushed by Al's loss, but she wanted me to give a particular shout out to the nurses who served her so mightily at Hunterdon Medical Center, and all the healthcare workers there. We thank Al again for his commitment to his community and to the University Hospital community, especially that relied on him across four decades. May God bless you, Al, and watch over you and your family.

And finally today we head to Dumont in Bergen County, a community I know well, to remember MaryBeth Papetti. She and her husband Caesar called the Borough home for 34 years. MaryBeth was one of our frontline heroes, a registered nurse at CareOne at Livingston Assisted Living. She devoted her career to the nursing profession, starting at Hackensack Hospital, now known as Hackensack University Medical Center, before going back to school to become a registered nurse. She would later serve as the Director of Nursing at multiple long-term care facilities across North Jersey, a profession, Judy, you know well.

She is survived by her husband Caesar with whom I had the great honor of speaking. By the way, they spent 45 years together. MaryBeth also leaves behind her son Scott, and again, I had the honor of speaking with him and her daughter-in-law Courtney. By the way, both Scott and Courtney are educators, God bless you both for that. MaryBeth also leaves her two sisters, Eileen and Barbara, her two brothers, Brian and Richard, along with sisters-in-law Helen and Susan, brother-in-law Michael and numerous nieces and nephews. She will be remembered for doing all she could for those in her care, and for being an inspiration and role model to her colleagues. God bless you, MaryBeth, and all of our healthcare professionals, and the family and friends that you leave behind.

Three more members of our New Jersey family taken by COVID-19. We will remember them as we remember all we have lost, and as we stand in solidarity with all who have been left behind. Several quick things here to shift gears before we turn things over and ask Sheila to weigh in. A couple of things. Number one, we had a very good conversation with the Chief Scientific Officer at Eli Lilly on Friday, Dr. Dan Skovronsky, and that was centered on the development of therapeutics, and there's a lot of promising activity there. Lilly is not alone, but Lilly stands out and I wanted to give them a shout out.

Also, Judy and I and others got on the call at the end of the week with Dan O'Day, I'm not sure we said, that's CEO of Gilead, and talked about Remdesivir and the distribution, and that was another good private sector call. Judy, Pat and I were on a call with the White House this morning which was coordinated by Vice President Pence. I thought that was a good discussion and was a particularly good analysis on some of the states which have had flare ups over the past couple of weeks.

I want to switch gears again to reiterate the announcement made over the weekend of the Federal Transit Administration's commitment to accelerating \$766.5 million in federal funds for the Portal North Bridge replacement, and authorized entry into the engineering phase. This is a huge, long-awaited win for New Jersey and for our commuters and beyond us, frankly, for the entire economy of the Northeast Corridor, which by the way, is plus or minus 20% of the United States entire economy.

Since day one of this administration, we have made securing federal funding for the Portal Bridge replacement among our highest priorities. This is a key infrastructure project that we needed to get off the ground, and quickly, if we were to see our overall efforts to restore NJ Transit to a success. We worked this at every level and I took this case directly to President Trump. These efforts are now coming to fruition, and I thank the President and the federal administration for their commitment to this project, and to helping us usher in a new era of safe, modern and reliable mass transit infrastructure for our region.

Finally, before I turn things over to Lieutenant Governor, I want to remember a couple of losses from our New Jersey family that were non-COVID-related. And this is one you've got to be in my vintage -- Dave, I'm not looking at you, but you'll know this -- Jim Keck passed away over the weekend, one of the great running backs for the Miami Dolphins, died at the age of 73. Again, non-COVID. Born in Lincoln Park in the Great State of New Jersey, Boonton High and then University of Wyoming, Miami Dolphins among other teams. Remember him with Larry Csonka and Mercury Morris, forming an incredible backfield and a team that is the only one to this day that went undefeated, Morris County's own Jim Keck.

But I also want to remember a good friend. Unlike Jim Keck who I did not know personally, I knew this guy very well and many of us, I bet you everyone in this room and many out there knew him as well. If you were a viewer of NJ TV, you may recognize that guy right there, Nick Acocella, as the face of Pasta and Politics, a show that combined his two great loves, Italian food and talking Jersey politics. Nick was a Hudson County native and a New Jerseyan through and through. As I noted yesterday when I learned of his passing, Nick was the kind of guy who could give you a rundown of all the latest political news and gossip, tell you a new pasta recipe and break down with tremendous precision the lineup or bullpen status of his beloved New York Yankees, all by the way, within the same five-minute conversation. He was a friend to so many in our state's

political circles, certainly to our friends in the media, a trusted reporter who put a premium on getting his story right. He was also a scholar of our national pastime, with 20 baseball titles to his credit. Nick was 77 years old, but gone far too soon. I spoke with Nick's son a few weeks ago, Bart, when I heard that things were not looking great and to you, Bart and your sister and Nick's wife and the whole Acocella team, God bless you all. Rest easy, my friend Nick. I hope you're somewhere where the pasta is hot, where baseball's being played, and there's something intriguing in the political world to follow.

And now it is my pleasure and honor to introduce my partner in government, the extraordinary Lieutenant Governor of the Great State of New Jersey and the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, Sheila Oliver.

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver: Since Governor Murphy and I took office in 2018, there has been a collaborative and collective effort to renew Atlantic City. This has been a holistic effort involving the state, the city, the Casino Reinvestment Development Agency, public servants, businesses, stakeholders, educational and health institutions, churches, civic associations, labor groups, cultural organizations and community groups. And in those early days, Governor Murphy was able to tap the energy and expertise of Jim Johnson, who many of you got to know through his work in Atlantic City, and he issued something that was called the Atlantic City Transition Report. We are pleased to announce the Atlantic City Restart and Recovery Working Group that we are forming. It's going to be made up of members of the Atlantic City Executive Council, and key stakeholders to examine seriously the post-COVID economic recovery of Atlantic City.

This will be the first of many steps that we will take on a journey to a new, reimagined Atlantic City. Getting the casinos open and operating again is important, but we need to keep our focus on diversifying the city and county's industry, and supporting local government. The strategy of bringing everyone to the table was working in Atlantic City pre-COVID, and it was producing great results. It strengthened the civic and economic foundation of the city, which is going to help speed the city's recovery from the challenges of the pandemic.

The Executive Council is made up of almost every person that has an investment in Atlantic City. Block association presidents, casino industry representatives, higher education within Atlantic County, small business owners, local board of education, etc. The group convenes and meets the second Tuesday of each month, and of course we've kept that schedule but we bring ideas to the table and the Executive Council has various working committees that are working on tangible projects on the ground in Atlantic City.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Atlantic City was making great progress in diversifying its economy and in attracting new investments, which we know is essential for a thriving Atlantic City. Standard & Poor's global ratings and Moody's gave Atlantic City a rating upgrade, and its finances a positive outlook two years in the running. The city's ability to manage its budget and address longstanding challenges is greatly improving. There is more work to be done, which is why we want to keep all of the city's key stakeholders strong, thriving and working together.

We can see the fruits of this approach in some of the outstanding projects that have transpired throughout our administration, in just two short years. We watched and participated in the expansion of the Stockton University Campus in Atlantic City. When the campus opened, it was immediately filled up with students. They built a 500-capacity dormitory and every room was taken before Labor Day. With major funding from CRDA, AtlantiCare is developing a medical arts building that will house maternal fetal medicine and urgent care center, outpatient dialysis, psychiatric care and addiction services. And we want to thank First Lady Tammy Murphy for focusing in on the city of Atlantic City, which has the highest infant mortality death rate in the state amongst the delivery of black babies.

We have worked on bringing a supermarket back to the city, and that project is moving forward very well. We created something called a neighborhood coordination officers program, that CRDA funded for us, and it was created to strengthen community policing. That initiative is working very, very well and enables the police in Atlantic City to develop one-on-one relationships with people in neighborhoods. And thanks to Governor Murphy, a monumental agreement with wind energy developer Orsted is moving forward to create the largest offshore wind farm in the country. We are extremely proud of this progress and we encourage investment in these projects, and more, to continue the Atlantic City reopening and the recovery.

And because of this collaborative strategy, and the fact that it has proven to be an effective one, we believe it should continue in this post-COVID-19 world. In particular, the partnership between the city and the CRDA has been especially fruitful, and will continue to be critical to the city's ongoing recovery. CRDA has taken on responsibilities in the tourism district by maintaining overall cleanliness along the boardwalk area. And during this critical time, they have stepped up to fund key initiatives in every ward of the city, including providing meals to senior citizens in need in AC. They've also provided critical funding to a variety of public safety programs, and some of this funding has permitted Atlantic City to hire additional police officers.

To aid with economic development, they have provided technical support to the Planning and Development Department in City Hall in order to complete the city's master plan. In partnership with EDA, CRDA has also assisted small businesses in Atlanta. City and the Greater Atlantic County region by providing \$2 million in grant funding during the COVID pandemic. Overall, CRDA continues to be an outstanding partner with us and this administration in our efforts to restore Atlantic City, and we are thankful for all that they have done. We can only gain from working in partnership with other entities and hearing the important perspectives of people who are affected by the success and failure of casinos in Atlantic City. All of our fates are intricately intertwined with each other.

There is continued agreement that Atlantic City and the region must strengthen and expand the diversity of its economic base to better weather economic downturns and crises such as this one. The city has a very dedicated and resilient small business community that we will continue to see play a large role in the economy as we restart the recovery. I'd like to give a shout out to Atlantic County County Executive Danny Levinson, who has assigned his county administrator and other staff to work closely with us, in addition to the Atlantic County Economic Development Corporation.

Recent data shows that as a result of COVID-19, Atlantic County has by far the highest unemployment rate in the state of 33.3%, more than any other county in New Jersey. Atlantic City, by far, has the highest unemployment rate at 43.3%, more than any large municipality in the state. In addition to Atlantic City, three other municipalities in Atlantic County topped the state in highest unemployment rates. The Atlantic City Transition Report, which was issued in September '18, offers recommendations for investment and economic development that still holds true today. And to begin to work toward these goals once again, we are announcing a return to work plan for city employees as we recover from this crisis.

COVID-19 is not going to stop us in Atlantic City and as we like to say, a slogan created by the mayor, it's a great day in Atlantic City, and that will always stand true. I also would like to acknowledge the work that has been invested by the staff at DCA, particularly Deputy Commissioner Robert Long, Assistant Commissioner Kim Holmes and the Director of Local Government Services, Melanie Walter. Without their dedication, we would not have achieved the milestones that we have. Thank you, Governor Murphy.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sheila, thank you. Extraordinary leadership in Atlantic City and beyond, and those three colleagues you named at the end, in addition to Terry and other of your extraordinary team, have made a huge difference in Atlantic City. I'll bet you that unemployment rate is not only the highest in New Jersey, it might be one of the highest community unemployment rates in the country.

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver: It absolutely is.

Governor Phil Murphy: Folks have been in a world of hurt and I know you join me in the enthusiasm we have around, even if it's limited capacity, finding our way back on our feet, what will be next Thursday. And thank you for the extraordinary work day in and day out, not just in Atlantic City, but up and down the state. I don't know where we'd be without you, so bless you and great to have you with us as always.

Please help me welcome another woman who needs no introduction, the woman to my right, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, as the reopening of our state continues to move forward, it's most important that we still remain vigilant. New Jersey residents have done such a great job in reducing the spread of the virus in our state. You have all literally saved lives by your compliance with social distancing. We must keep up that good work and not go backward. We are seeing this happen in other states, where there are increasing rates of COVID-19, particularly among younger populations, many asymptomatic.

We must all commit, no matter our age, to practicing the important public health measures that have been successful in saving so many lives. Put distance between yourself and other people, at least six feet. Wear a cloth face covering that covers both your mouth and nose when around others. Clean your hands often, either with soap and water for 20 seconds, or with hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, and then throw the tissue in the trash, and clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces daily.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over. The virus is still circulating, and we have a role to play in reducing the spread of that disease. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the department is also concerned that the overdose epidemic will not only persist but will worsen. Social isolation, grief and job loss are just some of the factors that could contribute to an increase in deaths. This year, there have already been 1,339 suspected overdose deaths, which is up 20% from 2019. We do not want to see this trend continue.

The Department of Health continues to be vigilant in monitoring overdose data and promoting access to treatment and care. To better inform preventive and recovery initiatives in our state, today the department is releasing a request for applications from local health departments for funding to help them study patterns of overdose in their communities. Local health departments are eligible to receive grant awards of \$100,000 to establish overdose fatality review teams. These multidisciplinary, countywide teams will analyze data, identify regional trends, and evaluate strategies to decrease opioid deaths. Local health officials know more about how the epidemic is affecting their communities. They can more effectively direct policies, practices and partnerships to prevent future overdoses, and allocate prevention resources and services where they would do most good.

The department recognizes the importance of local solutions to bring about a sustainable change that is needed to address the overdose crisis. The power of these teams is that they combine robust data with local partnerships, which is the perfect public health recipe for success. These teams will bring about innovation to help end the overdose epidemic.

Moving on to my daily report, our hospitals reported, as the Governor shared 1,029 hospitalizations, with 287 individuals in critical care, 74% of them are on ventilators. There is one new case of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children reported since Friday, so the total is 44 cases in our state. All of the children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19 infection or had antibody tests that were positive, showing a recent exposure to the virus. Thankfully in New Jersey, there are no deaths reported at this time. The ages of the children remain from 1 year to 18. Six of the children are still hospitalized.

Our state veteran homes and our psychiatric hospitals, numbers remain the same. The daily percent positivity of New Jersey overall as of June 18th is 2.42%. The North is 1.55%, Central 1.94%. The Southern part of the state is 5.37% That concludes my daily report. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy and get tested. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. You and I, among others were debating earlier about whether or not that Southern number could be, I hope it's not a canary in the coal mine of shore-related infections, but that's something I know you're watching carefully with Christine and your team. Thank you for all and amen on the support for the addiction crisis that we continue to face in our state. Thank you for everything.

Pat, a couple of things. I was being interviewed this morning and they delayed me a couple of minutes because of a horrific crash on the New Jersey Turnpike that involved one of your troopers. I would love to get an update on that. I think you and I are sort of in two worlds at the moment in terms of compliance in the sense that your reports have been quite strikingly low and I don't know if they continue to be that way today, but you and I are also seeing the viral videos of too many people, too close to each other, not wearing any face coverings, which are driving you and me and Judy and Sheila and everybody else up here crazy. But any comments, particularly on your trooper who was involved earlier?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks so much, Governor. Lieutenant Governor, good to have you here. That accident, if you have not seen the pictures of that trooper car, how that trooper lived is unbelievable. He was actually ejected through the front windshield and thrown approximately 30 feet which, believe it or not, we think is what saved his life. Serious injuries, but we do think he's going to be okay. It serves as a reminder of the risk involved and also a good reminder about our move-over law in the State of

New Jersey, which came after the death of Trooper Mark Castellano, when safe to do so if vehicles can, whether it's a tow truck driver, DOT, trooper, law enforcement, if you can safely move over from the right to center lane. But thank you for asking. Governor.

With regards to our weekend, we did have two incidents, to the Governor's point. One was a subject arrested for domestic violence in New Egypt. While being processed, he coughed on the officers claiming to have corona. And in Elizabeth, a subject who was arrested for being a fugitive from justice did the same thing, coughed on the officers while being processed. And I'll just again echo both the Commissioner's and Governor's remarks. The fact that asymptomatic and younger populations being key factors in transmitting this disease, to see the DJs and the boardwalks and those loud large crowds that aren't really socially distancing and no facial coverings gives us a tremendous cause for concern. We just, us collectively as a state need to remind one another that that's what's going to ultimately tamp this down. We're monitoring that as well, Governor.

And lastly, just with regards to fireworks. Fireworks do remain illegal in New Jersey. It is very dry. We have moderate risk throughout the entire state. Just a reminder to save our forest fire service from that. They've responded to over 700 fires already. It is obviously dry and hot out there, and just as a reminder that they are illegal and should only be done by those permitted professionals. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless your colleague. And by the way, if ever you wonder whether or not there's a greater power, a greater force, it was a dump truck whose axle literally broke and flipped over on him, flipped over on the Trooper's car. Sort of you talk about the fluke, beyond the word fluke. We're going to start over here in a second. Tomorrow we will be together at one o'clock, same time, same station as they say.

Since we last saw you on Friday, I just have to give the shout out. We had several things of note. Huge step forward on environmental justice. Sheila and I were together with Senator Troy Singleton, Assemblyman John McKeon and several advocates, one in particular, Kim Gaddy, who is a dear friend of all of us, to give them a shout out in Trenton. We're going to take a step that no other state in America has taken in terms of environmental justice and make sure that both the benefits and the costs of pollution are equitably distributed, and not the way they've been in our state or our country.

And then secondly, if that weren't enough, Sheila and I were together, with Terry, I might add, at Friendship Baptist Church with Reverend Pastor John Taylor, a dear friend of a lot of us here, including as a chaplain for the State Police. Sheila and I and Pastor Taylor spoke, commemorating, observing Juneteenth and that was a pretty special gathering. It's a church, by the way, that its history and roots go back to slavery and the connectivity and a way forward for so many who were fleeing. And if that weren't enough, we had Father's Day yesterday. Lots happened since we were last together. Nikita, we're gonna start with you. Good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor, how are you?

Governor Phil Murphy: Good.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Glad to hear. At least five municipalities in the state are considering what to do with statues of Christopher Columbus. In Garfield, one was vandalized, in West Orange and Camden, they've removed their statues, and Jersey City and Ocean Township, local groups are calling for the removal of such statues. I know you were asked about this last week. Have you given any more thought to whether or not you'd support the state eliminating Columbus Day as a holiday? And have you yourself ruled out participating in any Columbus Day events this year or next? I'm not exactly sure when Columbus Day is, if I'm being honest.

And then on your desk, your famous desk, I don't know if you got your Woodrow Wilson talking points ready but I know that Monmouth University recently removed his name from a building, so I was just wondering if you landed anywhere on continuing to use that desk?

Finally, Legislative leaders are looking to be back and conducting business in person in the Statehouse by the end of the month. Do you think that's realistic?

Governor Phil Murphy: So on Columbus, I'll go through in order. On Columbus, I haven't given it -- you know, I gave you a preliminary answer, or whoever it was, I think it was you who asked me this question. And, you know, I'm of the opinion that you've got a couple of things that are running against each other here. Columbus Day has always been sort of an iconic day for the Italian American community and that's something that Ms. Persichilli to my right will verify that. But by the same token, if there are statues, symbols that are offensive to folks, we have to have a reckoning with that. It seems to me there's a way still to be able to do both, and I would suggest we leave it to the municipalities to make that decision. I know there's a statue, for instance, in New York City. That wasn't Theodore Roosevelt in particular, but there was a depiction of a Native American and an African American that was particularly offensive and I think we have to acknowledge that and find a way to be able to both celebrate Italian American Heritage on the one hand, but also remove symbols that offend people.

All kidding aside on Wilson, it's the only desk I've got, but that's something that I will have to deal with. There's no question about that. I just haven't. I don't have an alternative at the moment. But I respect what's gone on elsewhere. And the legislative leaders in the Statehouse, by the end of June, I mean, we've lifted the indoor number to the lower of 25% or 100. I would think if you're socially distancing, that is a real possibility. But folks, again, have to be really careful. We've said this before, but indoors, this thing is much more lethal than it is outdoors, and that gives the impression, and I don't want to undo the very good points that Pat made, that outdoors we're not seeing the proper, personal social distancing and face coverings, but indoors you've got to be really, really careful. Thank you for that. Matt, let's do you down front and then we'll go back behind you.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Governor, I know you spoke about this just briefly about scenes from the Jersey Shore over the weekend, including a favorite spot of yours, D'Jais. I mean, I'm just curious beyond your statements about what we can expect in terms of enforcement, or is there any plans to really lay on local enforcement to tell them that they need to step it up?

You mentioned briefly that other indoor activity rules will come this week. Any hints about whether you'll be making announcements on gyms and museums, can you spill a little on that?

And just lastly, on unemployment, in the past few days, I've heard from a handful of people, a retired state trooper in Somerset who says he's, quote, "in dire straits". I've heard from a 24-year-old homeless man living in a homeless shelter who can't get through to unemployment, or NJ SNAP to be able to afford food. I've also heard from a man in Williamstown. All these people, by the way, gave me their information, begging me to provide it to you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: But a man in Williamstown, who said that he was able to get through to a lawmaker who checked in with somebody at DOL, and said that he was scheduled to get a call back from DOL on September 2. I mean, I'm just curious what you say to these folks? I know what you've said in the past, but as somebody who's often described himself as growing up middle class, on the best day, what do you say to these folks that have just not had a paycheck, you know, in months now?

Governor Phil Murphy: So from the top, yeah, we've had conversations. And again, I'm going to repeat something that we've said hundreds of times at this point. Folks have been extraordinary. And after you've been cooped up for three months or more and it's 90 degrees and it's hot as heck and beaches are open and outdoor dining and bars, outdoor bars are open, can you blame people for coming out and you know, letting their hair down a little bit? I certainly can't blame folks for doing that. But we are going to have to tighten up. There's just no other way around. There's too many viral videos for my tastes over the past 24 or 48 hours. That's something that we've had private discussions on this morning and I think we're going to have to come back to you. But folks should know that we can't look the other way. It's one thing if it's a little bit non-compliant, but this stuff is out of bounds.

No previews for you, except to say for me, at least, museums are easier than gyms. Gyms are just one of the hardest things I think we have to deal with and I think Judy would agree.

Listen, I hate to say this. It doesn't matter what my background is or not. We feel the pain of folks who have not gotten what's coming to them in terms of their unemployment insurance. Most people have, but this is an unprecedented tsunami and not everyone has gotten there yet. We have complete respect for them,

understand their impatience, in some cases desperation. They'll get every penny that's coming to them. I think you'll do this because you've done this before, Matt, we'd love the details. Again, repeating something that I've said many times here, these turn out to be really hyper specific to the individual's case. Dan, if you could get the details from Matt, we will, I promise you, follow up on each of those. And by the way, hearing you're going to get called back on September 2, let me just say categorically is unacceptable. Let there be no doubt about that. Thank you. Let's go up back here. Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon, thank you. First for Commissioner Persichilli, does the elevated positivity rate in South Jersey give you pause on reopening casinos? Because obviously all the casinos are in South Jersey? Could that be a data error, or is there a reason for this elevated positivity rate?

Question for Governor Murphy. Can you talk to us a little bit more about the data that went into your decision on both casinos and indoor dining? Did any of the results from outdoor dining influence your decision on indoor dining?

And for the Lieutenant Governor, some of the numbers that you mentioned about Atlantic City's unemployment rate are truly staggering. However, is some of that due to the fact that Atlantic City has a very seasonal economy? And Governor Murphy's endorsed Mayor Small in the primary. Will you be making an endorsement of either Mayor Small or your niece, Pamela Thomas Fields, or will you be staying out of that election? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me start if I can, and turn it to both Sheila and Judy. We had this very conversation earlier about the numbers in the South and you'll address that, I know. The data that's driving us, most important, three points of data, the spot positivity rate, rate of transmission, new hospitalizations, and they continue to be in a really good shape. When I say really good shape, on a national, if not global basis. That is allowing us to take the steps gingerly indoors. We started indoor faith last weekend, today hair salons, barber shops, etc. Malls next week, or next Monday, pardon me, and then casinos and indoor dining with big capacity constraints. These are big steps, admittedly. But those numbers have allowed us.

The outdoor reality influencing indoor has not, at least from yours truly, been part of it. It's the three data points that I just went through. Rate of transmission, spot positivity, new hospitalizations. Again, we're in as good a shape as any state in America. And by the way, importantly, with testing that is number one in the American class, contact tracing, hiring people by the minute, plans for isolation, we've got that in place if it does flare up, Judy and team have a plan to surround it. Judy, do you want to hit the elevated numbers, and Sheila, any comments on Atlantic City?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I'd be happy to. Of course we're going to be vigilant whenever a positivity rate increases, but the specificity of the rate is something we have to look at. It could be that the overall total number of tests are down and the positivity rate goes off. So we have to make sure that testing is available, that we're testing at rates that we've been seeing in the past and it's the Southern District overall. We do know that there are some areas, particularly the testing of the seasonal workers, that has caused some of that to go up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good point on seasonal, which we haven't talked about in a few days, as another possible contributor. Sheila, you've got big seasonal, I mean, part of the reason why you and Judy and Pat and Tina and I have been trying to get to the casinos is not just the good data, but assuming we felt the data was good enough, we were able to responsibly get things open before the Fourth of July. Huge seasonality. Any comments on that?

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver: Yes, it definitely is because there is a seasonal economy here, but during my remarks I touched upon a lot of our focus has been diversifying the economy in the Atlantic County region, because it is an economy dependent on the casino industry. And not just Atlantic City residents, but other contiguous towns and even over into different counties. So our efforts must be to sustain an economy whereby people can gain employment in things other than the casino industry.

There's one other thing I'd like to add that I left out. The casinos have been extremely philanthropic in working with us and for the second year in a row, everyone is anting up and we will be able to hire more than 200 youth this summer in the City of Atlantic City. We run some exceptional internship programs designed to

develop some local leadership, because we have to begin to look at the future in Atlantic City. Not what Atlantic City is right now, but where is Atlantic City going? So we are paying attention to employment, post high school education, and getting a younger demographic involved in what goes on in the city.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think to the food bank that was set up as an example of Joe Jingoli and Jack Morris and AFL-CIO and Bob McDevitt, and Local United Local 54 and the combination of a lot of folks just stepping up and doing the right things for a lot of people who were incredibly hurt. So thank you. Sir. Nothing? You good? Okay.

Ian Elliott NJTV News: Governor, some of our viewers over at NJTV News are asking about bowling. Is there any guidance, any idea of when that might come back? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for your economy of questions. I've got no answer on bowling, nothing yet. So to the bowlers out there, including a couple we have eulogized over the past three months, nothing new to report, but thank you. Terry, do you have any questions? You're good. We'll go to Mike and then we'll come to Dave to finish up.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon, Governor, thank you. With the Primary coming up, we were just hearing from some people that they're getting more than one ballot at home. Other people are reporting to us that they're getting ballots for people who don't live at that address anymore, are getting ballots for people who have died. Can you talk about, is there a system in place in the state to weed any of that out, or sort of catch that? Just be specific about what systems are in place to keep any kind of fraud from happening in the election, something that the President actually just tweeted about as well. He said if people are well enough to go out and protest and riot, he said, they could go vote and keep the election honest. I wonder if you could react to that as well, please. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll make a comment or two and Matt Platkin is with us as Chief Counsel, he may want to come in. Again, inside versus outside is a different reality, so I just want to remind everybody. It's not the Holy Grail, but Tina, it's a different virus indoors versus outdoors. Having said that, we are, Sheila and I and the rest of the team are providing at least 50% capacity per County, and at least one polling location per municipality, to allow folks to avail themselves of an in-person voting experience. So we've not gone completely one way at the expense of the other. I think the balance has been a good one.

I don't have a specific answer on some of the cases, Mike, that you're talking about and we take that seriously, I promise you, but I want to separate the facts, and Nikita has raised some of these questions as well. I've not yet spoken since Friday with the US Postal Service again, but I will be doing that shortly. They bear a responsibility to get the ballots out and get them out efficiently and in proper timing. But there's also a political narrative that has sort of developed around vote by mail, which I think far exceeds the actual reality of what the experience is like in terms of the challenges associated with it. I want to remind everyone of that. This has become a political football as opposed to just the facts of where may we have a legitimate break in the system that we need to address. Matt, anything you want to add to that, please?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: The Governor is correct. We're working with the Postal Service and they need to ensure that the ballots are delivered promptly and properly. The Department of State has announced, both through the Governor's Executive Order as well as last week a number of measures, building off of the lessons we learned from May 12th. The reforms that were announced last week are important with respect to the care process for signatures on the ballot. Basically, if your signature doesn't match, we will now have a process for you to appeal that, which was an issue that arose in the May election.

The administration takes the concerns that have been raised very seriously. We're doing everything we can to combat against any potential fraud and ensure that everyone who wants to vote can vote, and can do so safely and properly.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Thank you, Mike. Dave, take us home here.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Okay, thanks, Governor. On the overdose problem that we're noticing, do we have a sense about what's going on here? Is it just the social isolation issue, or is there something else happening? Governor specifically, what's your reaction to this problem and the fact that it is apparently getting worse?

Just for clarification, on the indoor maximum, you would say 25% or 100. If a banquet hall can hold 1,000 people, would the –

Governor Phil Murphy: 100.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: 100 would be the max. And you had mentioned racetracks. Would the limit for spectators come July 2 be 250?

And final question, you had mentioned and talked a little bit about the viral videos of people going wild down the shore, and no social distancing and partying and so forth. Is this a concern because there's a thread of concern throughout the update today about, we've got to stay vigilant. We can't get sloppy. Is this just based on these videos or is it something else? And how concerning is this is this? Have people reached a point in their attitude where it's like they can't take it anymore? Because frankly speaking, I mean, I noticed I made a couple of comments, I'm sort of a big mouth when I go into places and people are not wearing the mask properly. And I told several people, you know, it doesn't do any good if it's drooping under your nose. And they people looked at me like, yeah, and? So, you know, it didn't go anywhere. I mean, do you think that people have just had it and how big of a problem is that?

Governor Phil Murphy: My pleasure. I'll jump in and then Judy, I would love you to come back on a couple of these. On catering, the only thing I want to say there, this is not a forever and always. I hope that these are moving. For instance, the indoor guidance on 25%, the lower of 25% capacity or 100 was just lower of 25% or 50 only less than two weeks ago. I hope that we're going to show that assuming the numbers stay good, we'll continue to move. Racetracks 250 outside is absolutely correct. There is a difference between gatherings and just people going in and out of an indoor setting, and that's one clarification I would make. So for instance, in a retail store, you're measuring people going in and out, but they're not gathering. And that's probably more akin, honestly, to what the inside of a racetrack looks like in terms of going into place a bet and leaving.

I wouldn't say overly concerning but we are seeing other states that either didn't take the proper steps upfront, or took them and then let their foot off the gas. Judy mentioned this earlier, I think the call Pat and Judy and I were on earlier today, there was an uncomfortable amount of data, not in New Jersey but around the country on young people. Again, not to beat this to death but big difference between inside and outside. I saw some packed beaches this weekend. I didn't see anybody willfully doing anything silly. There weren't a lot of face masks. The face covering compliance is very low. I don't mean sitting at your table with your family at the outdoor restaurant, but I just mean as a general matter. I would love to see that get amped up but I didn't see outside a lot of examples where it really concerned me. What I was concerned about, close proximity under an awning, maybe with a flap of a tent down. That is concerning. We are presenting the data as we see it every day. We're going to watch it like a hawk.

Judy, I would think overdosing is a lot related to mental health, isolation, lack of engagement with the normal role models and services that are in one's life, but any more color you've got on that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Obviously we're looking at, it's a confluence of situations. We're looking at so many parts. Having a buddy to get you to the hospital, because we saw the actual room visits go down as well. May was the highest number of monthly deaths that we've seen in a while. We're looking at a lot of things, and that's why we're going to give grants to the local health departments who are closest to the work, closest to the people, to try to find out what's going on.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'm going to mask up here. We threw a lot at you today and appreciate the fact that this was a day with a high volume. We're going to continue some more guidance to come on some of what we've discussed today. We're going to continue to monitor the data, especially to the question, especially rate of transmission, spot positivity, new hospitalizations, because those are real-time data points that tell us whether or not things may be getting a little bit off track. So far, so good, by the way, and folks, you've been incredible.

Please keep it up. Particularly if you're in a closer setting, make sure you've got the face mask, washing hands with soap and water, try as best you can social distancing. Remember that inside is harder than outside. The virus is tougher on the inside than it is on the outside and therefore, take the precautionary steps that you think makes sense in that respect.

Again, but overwhelming, deep appreciation for everything. We'll be back again tomorrow at one o'clock. Judy and Tina, thank you as always. Sheila, an incredible honor, as always, to be with you. Pat, likewise. Jared, Matt, Dan, the whole team. God bless you all and thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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