

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 8th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry to be a couple behind, we'll get right at this. I'm joined to my right by the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another person who needs very little introduction, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Thank you both for being here. The guy to my left, who also does not need an introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, is with us. Thank you.

Before we get to the numbers, I have a couple of announcements to lead with and both relate directly to the Road Back Plan that we announced last week, which will guide our restart and recovery. First, today I am signing an Executive Order to create the Governor's Restart and Recovery Advisory Council. This council will bring together leaders from various industry, community and faith-based groups and institutions across our state, quite literally hundreds of people to work in conjunction with the group that we announced last week, the Restart and Recovery Commission. If you think of the Restart and Recovery Commission as sort of the strategy, then the Advisory Council will be the actual tactics. I suspect there'll be a spillage both ways. I wouldn't be surprised to have tactics discussed by the Commission and I know that the Council will also address strategy from time to time.

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This is where the various voices of those on the ground in our small businesses, in our communities of faith, in our educational communities, among many others, will come together to advise us on the issues from the very specific and local levels. This is a boots on the ground, real-world approach to how we move forward. This Council is as diverse, smart and hardworking as New Jersey's economy was before the pandemic, which is why they can help us get on and stay on our road back.

And as with everything that we do, they will be guided by our North Star: to build an economy from the middle out, from the bottom up, and an economy that makes New Jersey stronger and fairer. The Advisory Council will break into nine committees, which will begin virtual meetings next week. And as you can see, the nine committees are: facilities and construction, government, healthcare, Main Street, manufacturing and supply chain, professional services, social services and faith, tourism and entertainment, and transportation and infrastructure. We understand that we need a smart and granular approach to recovery. Reopening the restaurants and boardwalk shops down on the shore is far different from, for example, restarting retail in downtown Morristown, Lambertville, or Collingswood, or anywhere else.

Moreover, the Advisory Council will not only help us gather the local intelligence we need to get our economy running again, but its members will help us create the framework for coping with our new, long-term economic realities. I have asked Secretary of Education Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis, New Jersey Economic Development Authority CEO Tim Sullivan, and Choose New Jersey President and CEO Jose Lozano to serve as the co-chairs of this Advisory Council and I thank them, as well as all those who have raised their hands to be a part of this effort, in advance, for all the work they will be doing in the coming weeks and months to ensure a strong and equitable recovery.

Second, I am pleased to announce that the community testing sites at Bergen Community College and PNC Bank Art Center, which we established in partnership with FEMA and the US Department of Health and Human Services, will provide tests to certain asymptomatic New Jersey residents. We ask asymptomatic individuals to contact a healthcare provider to make sure that they agree that you should be going and getting a test, and that is to keep the numbers down. That is critical so that testing is available for our frontline workers and vulnerable populations, in addition to the symptomatic persons who have been tested from day one there. To that effect, where resources are strained, testing for the asymptomatic will be prioritized for asymptomatic healthcare workers and first responders, personnel in congregate living settings, and New Jersey residents who have been in close contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Expanding access, as you've heard Judy and me say, I think I can say on countless occasions, to testing is one of our key principles for getting New Jersey firmly on the road back to restart and recovery. By building out our testing capacity, we can instill confidence among our residents that we are in front of the response and winning the fight against COVID-19. This expansion is a step forward for our testing program, and as I've noted over the past several days and as has Judy, we will have much more on this topic as well as the contact tracing infrastructure early next week, I hope very early next week.

In the meantime, I wish to remind everyone that there are 122 testing sites across our state. A complete list of those open to the public can be found on our information hub at covid19.nj.gov/testing, and your primary care practitioner can direct you to one of the many privately operated sites as well.

Now let's turn our attention, if we can, to the overnight numbers. Yesterday, we received an additional 1,985 positive test results for a current statewide total of 135,454. We continue to see, this chart says it well, to see the daily counts of new cases levelling and the rate of positivity among those who have been tested continues to decrease as well. You can see it there, and that is an average, statewide, Judy of 28%. That's the spot rate for specimens. My eyes are failing me, collected on May 4th, and Judy's got this, even more importantly, at a more granular, regional level. Not just North, Central and South. When you're going through your remarks, you may want to give a little bit more color around that. That's going, as you can see, folks, in absolutely the right direction. This again shows the positivity, and we promised to show you this, the positivity rate when we show you the daily rate, or the spot testing rate. We've been reminding you now for a number of weeks that the number that we've been historically referring to is a cumulative number. That includes every test back from day one. And as you can see, this has decreased significantly over the past weeks, and is currently at about 28%.

The map we'll turn to, that we have been regularly turning to, continues to show slowing rates of spread across the state, and that is a very positive sign. We need that entire map to be that very light color, and then we will reboot it and try to achieve an even lighter color.

In our hospitals, the number of patient currently being treated for COVID-19 continues to fall steadily, as you can see. This is a decrease of 1,000 from last Friday. As we see, the number of hospitalizations across our healthcare systems regionally continues to also trend down, including in the south. Our field medical stations reported 33 patients last night.

And staying on the topic of our field medical stations for a moment, today we're announcing that the station at the Meadowlands Expo Center will stand down over the weekend, with its operations transferring to the East Orange General Hospital site, which just completed construction and which several of us, the three of us, at least, toured a few weeks ago. Since its opening, the Secaucus site has admitted 268 patients and 251 have been discharged. The items and supplies at the Secaucus field medical station will be placed in storage by the Office of Emergency Management for rapid deployment elsewhere as needed. Again, we've talked to you about resiliency. This is an example of keeping those supplies in reserve for when we need them.

Now, this is in no way a sign that we can or will relax our vigilance. It is a sign that the work that we have all been doing, each and every one of us so far, to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to reduce the number of patients in our hospitals is working, and that that has put us in this position. So keep up the great work.

At our long-term care facilities, as you can see, the numbers of positive cases continues to rise as well as, sadly, the deaths connected to these facilities continues to grow. However, as you've heard from us over the past, frankly in one respect over the past two months, but in particular over the past week, we are confident that the efforts that we are taking will save lives.

The number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care continues to decrease as well, and it currently stands, as you could see, at 1,439. Ventilator use currently stands at 1,089. This number, too, continues to decline. There were 334 new COVID-19 hospitalizations yesterday, but there were also 464 live patients discharged yesterday. As we look across the state -- do you have this by region or not there, Mahen? We'll come back to that if we have it, but we've seen North, Central and South in terms of both hospitalizations and discharges.

I would just say this to remind everybody, Judy, I know you'd want me to remind everyone. We've made an enormous amount of progress, but when you have 334 people over the past 24 hours going into a hospital for COVID-19, it's as good an example as any that we're not out of the woods yet. No, Mahen, I met the actual numbers, that chart that we added, but it's okay. The most important point is that we're making huge progress, but we're not in the end zone yet. There you could see the breakdown that we started to show you yesterday, new hospitalizations and new discharges. That'll give you some color behind the 334 going in and the 464 leaving.

So as I note every day, Judy as well, the data from our hospitals continues to move in the right direction, which is down, but we also cannot overstate enough that even while we are pleased with this progress, our hospital systems are dealing with far more patients than they would otherwise be in any other year. The stress on our healthcare system, while certainly lessening, is still there. Only we have the power to push these numbers down further and we've done an extraordinary job to date. We need to keep working with those two things in mind. Public health creates economic health, and the data determines dates. Remember these as you put on your face covering to enter the supermarket or when you keep a social distance from others when you're out for a walk in your neighborhood. These practices are working and you've done an extraordinary job, folks. Let's keep it up. Public Health creates economic health and the data determines dates.

With that, with great sadness, we are reporting another 162 more precious brothers and sisters who have passed from COVID-19 complications, and our statewide total is now 8,952. And by the way, folks, if there are any revisions to that number, Judy and Christina I suspect will be in violent agreement, that number only goes up and not down as we parse through the enormity of this crisis. And again, even with the positive news from our hospital, there are still families and communities who are coping with the absolute worst news. Let's remember several of those who have passed.

First up, George Martin from Hamilton in Mercer County. Handsome guy, there he is. George graduated from Hamilton High School West as a member of the Class of 1949. He served in the US Air Force during the Korean Conflict and later in the New Jersey Air National Guard. He worked at the Globe Porcelain Company before establishing and being President of Joseph Steiner and Company, a post he held until his retirement in 1995. George was a fixture in Hamilton, which by the way, as you all know, is among our largest communities in the entire state. He served on numerous boards and committees and was a past treasurer of the Hamilton Township Lions Club, and was a longtime member of the Hamilton Township Rotary, and a member of the American Legion Post 31 of Hamilton Township. George was also a member of the Masonic Fraternity and Gothic Fraternal Lodge 270, and was Grand Marshal of the Grand Lodge of New Jersey from 1983 to 1984, State Grand Master from 1992 to 1993, and he served on the board of the Masonic Charity Foundation from 1984 to 1995, sitting as its president in 1996.

Only four weeks before George passed, he lost his wife of 67 years, there she is, Joyce to Alzheimer's disease. Bless them both. He leaves his sister-in-law Dorothy Wood, along with his nephews Scott with whom I had the honor of speaking yesterday, and Keith Turner, and their families. George, a life well lived. Thank you for your service to our nation. We will keep you and Joyce in our prayers.

This is Shanda Denise Stokes from East Orange New Jersey. She was a longtime employee of NJ Transit as both a bus operator and a depot master. But Shanda was, and this is how I met Shanda, was also Reverend Stokes, an ordained Minister at the New Psalmist Worship Center in Newark, under the leadership of Overseer and my dear friend, Reverend Bryant Ali. She faithfully served as a Minister, Praise Team member, Preacher, and Missionary. Before joining the team at NJ Transit, Shanda was a licensed beautician. She was also a world traveler who loved fashion, and you can see that, as if I had to say that, and lived out her faith. In Reverend Ali's words, and I quote the pastor, "She gave unselfishly to others and lived her life to the fullest." Shanda leaves behind her husband of 35 years, Archie, who I also had the honor of meeting way back when with Shanda at New Psalmist, and I had the honor, as I say, of speaking with him yesterday and reminiscing. She was a wife, mother, grandmother, daughter, sister, cousin, niece, coworker, and friend. May God bless her and everyone she touched

And finally today, let's remember Asela Gejo who we lost at the age of 92. Born and raised in Cuba, Asela, her husband Ariel and four children came to the United States in 1962 to escape Fidel Castro and communism. Soon after arriving in Miami, the Asbury Park Presbyterian Church sponsored their relocation from Miami to New Jersey on the first freedom flight to the state. In Cuba, Asela was a teacher for 18 years and she continued in education as a teacher's aide at Asbury Park's Bond Street School until she retired. Asela is now reunited with her husband, Ariel, and their son Ariel Jr. among other beloved family. She leaves behind her daughters Mirta, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, Alicia and Gladys. She also leaves nine grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. We send them our deepest condolences, and we thank Asela for her years of helping Asbury Park students, and for an extraordinary life. God bless you, ma'am.

So these are the lives that COVID-19 has taken from us, just a few. I wish we could speak about every single one. They were the faces that we would see every day, and they must remain in our thoughts. We cannot think of the toll of COVID-19 only in economic or mathematical terms, but also in its most basic human terms. We have now lost nearly 9,000 of our fellow residents. In all of World War II, which I will speak to in a moment, we lost 12,600. We know we will lose many more, but how many? And whether we mark another solemn milestone we do not wish to pass, it is again overwhelmingly up to us. Please, please, please keep practicing your social distancing. Keep wearing a face covering when you're out in public. There is no cure for COVID-19. There is no proven therapeutic, at least yet. There's no vaccine. We only have social distancing, face coverings, washing hands with soap and water, the basic stuff. Social distancing, or social solidarity, as we've called it here before, is all we have to save lives. We're saving them. But we need folks to save more.

Before I wrap I'd like to acknowledge, as we do every day, some of the New Jerseyans who are helping us through this crisis, one small act of kindness at a time. These stories speak to our Jersey spirit and our Jersey values. And by the way, you all have been terrific in sharing these stories with us, and I ask you to keep doing so by using the hashtag, #NJThanksYou on social media. We're all in. After all, we're all in this together.

First, let's meet Joe Mindak of Westfield. About a year ago to celebrate the Fourth of July, and you can see it right there, Joe painted a wooden shipping pallet that he had to represent our flag. But as COVID-19 raced across our state, Joe thought we could use a little more American spirit and began designing and painting

more patriotically themed pallets. He put each up for sale for \$50 with the proceeds going to businesses in downtown Westfield. With his wife, Audrey, who's with him there, and their children helping, Joe has now raised more than \$7,000 and more orders are coming in. So to you, Joe and your family, New Jersey thanks you, for not only supporting Westfield's business community, but for reminding us why we're all proud to be Americans.

And this is Tanisha Brunson-Malone, a forensic technician at Hackensack University Medical Center. That means Tanisha performs the autopsies and oversees pickups by funeral homes of the patients who have passed, and she oversees the refrigerated trucks that comprise the hospital's temporary morgue. What a solemn set of duties. What makes Tanisha even more special is the daily routine she has adopted during this emergency. Every day, she makes a stop at a nearby flower shop to purchase yellow flowers, just as you see in that picture. Hopefully, she hopes everyday daffodils, but carnations will do apparently as well. When she enters her work, she places a solitary flower with each new person who had passed from COVID-19 from the day before. It is a quiet, but powerful gesture. It ensures the dignity of those who have passed, a reminder that someone will be there to remember them, even when their families could not be there to say goodbye. So to you, Tanisha, thank you for reminding us all of our common humanity and for ensuring that those we lost are not forgotten. God bless you.

Finally, I want to note that today is the 75th anniversary of VE Day, the day that World War II came to an end in the European Theater, having defeated Adolf Hitler and his fascist ideology. As we fight this war, think back to that Greatest Generation, which fought in that war, in all of its theaters, and quite literally saved the world. In their honor, I have signed an Executive Order for our flags to also remain at half-staff today for them. But even while VE Day kicked off many celebrations, in its wake some of the greatest horrors the world has ever known were exposed, the depth and breadth of the Holocaust and the depravity of fascism. The world vowed never again.

Unfortunately, today, those words sometimes appear to be fading, especially now some misguided people, even in our own state, are taking the calling the necessary efforts we have undertaken to save lives and stop the spread of COVID-19 as fascism. Across the nation, we have seen other freely elected leaders of both parties, by the way, demeaned and depicted as Hitler himself. Not only is this an entirely disgusting false equivalence, it is ignorant and it is repugnant. It is ignorant of history and the horrific toll of fascism that is counted in the tens of millions who were killed by its megalomaniacal leaders, led by Hitler, but not only Hitler; 20 million soldiers, 6 million Jews and millions of others in death camps and untold millions of civilians.

Words matter, and when the word fascism or words like it is raised and Nazi slogans are used by people who claim to be patriotic Americans to protest against freely elected leaders, whether here or elsewhere across the nation, it should give us pause. It is our solemn duty to uphold the legacy as New Jerseyans and as Americans of that generation which fought valiantly to preserve the freedoms of hundreds of millions to live up to. The rights of people today to protest are sacrosanct. That's not in doubt, but so should our history, so should decency. As our Greatest Generation slips from us, as survivors from the Holocaust slip from us, whether from age or as we have seen tragically from COVID-19, we cannot let the lessons they taught us slip away with them. Never forget, never again.

That said, 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. Good afternoon. Well, every day we highlight the health impact of COVID-19 to our state. And the economic realities for many of our residents, as you know, have been devastating. The Department of Health, along with the Department of Human Services, are working to ensure food assistance support for low-income communities is still accessible through this epidemic. I want to remind you, the Department's Women and Infants, Children program, NJ WIC, that serves pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children under the age of five, is still available to our residents. New participants can apply for WIC services remotely by visiting wic.nj.gov/participantportal/. There is no need to be physically present at a WIC agency.

Current participants can continue to receive their benefits by having three months' worth of checks mailed to their homes. Participants who are quarantined and unable to leave their homes to purchase foods can designate an emergency proxy who can cash their checks at a store on their behalf. We've expanded food choices, giving participants more flexibility in the brand and size of foods that they can buy at the store. The department is working closely with their infant formula contractor to ensure formula supplies are fully stocked at stores. We are also working closely with their authorized stores to ensure that limits placed on certain food items to customers are not placed on WIC recipients. And we are preparing for the farmers market programs with modifications, including the mailing of checks to participants, conducting remote certifications and training new farmers remotely.

The Department of Human Services, their program, NJ SNAP provides money directly to individuals and families who need help affording groceries. Their agency has made some important changes to NJ SNAP to better serve residents during this COVID-19 public health emergency. Notably, Human Services has distributed an extra \$106 million in additional benefits to SNAP recipients since the start of the emergency. Human Services is also ensuring that everyone whose benefits were up for renewal in March and April and are due in May or June will be extended for six months. This means no individual's SNAP benefits will be ended for not completing the renewal. They are also making it easier to apply for SNAP during this emergency by waiving the required interview and the hard copy signature on applications to reduce the need for face-to-face interactions. So please visit njhelps.org to learn more and apply.

For my daily report, as the Governor has mentioned, the hospital's reported 4,605 hospitalizations of COVID-19 individuals or persons under investigation. There are 1,439 individuals in critical care, 76% of ICU patients are on ventilators. We see that the hospitalizations now are declining across all three regions of the state. Last evening, two hospitals in the Central region were on full divert. The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today.

As part of our deaths today, and sadly, we are reporting the death of a child who had an underlying medical condition. In order to protect the privacy of the child and the family at this time, we will not be releasing further details. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family.

In terms of deaths, the breakdown of deaths by race and ethnicity are just about the same, White 52.4%, Black 19.3%, Hispanic 17.5%, Asian 5.4%, other 5.4%. There are 514 long-term care facilities and assisted living facilities in the state with COVID-19 cases. There are 25,254 COVID-19 cases in our long-term care facilities. At the state veteran homes, among a census of 673 residents, 362 have tested positive and there's a total of 127 deaths, unchanged from yesterday.

At our state psychiatric hospitals with a census of 1,250, 177 patients have tested positive and we are sadly reporting another death at Ancora for a total of 12 deaths at our state psychiatric hospitals. As the Governor shared, our cumulative positivity rate of those tested is 37.37%. The daily percent positivity as of May 4 is as follows: in New Jersey overall on May 4, 28%; the Central West region, 35.5%; the Northwest region, 29.4%; Central East, 27.4%; Northeast, 26.7%; and South, 26.7%. That concludes my report. As always stay connected, stay safe and stay healthy, and Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers out there. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: You're shaming me on the Happy Mother's Day, I keep forgetting. Thank God we're together tomorrow, to give myself one more chance. Listen, Judy, I think the same six counties are still locus of the most amount of cases. That precious four-year-old, it's unfathomable, is the first fatality of anyone in the state from COVID-19 related complications under the age of 18. And as Judy said, we're going to keep the details of that, as you would want us to, out of respect to privacy.

The spot positivity, as Judy said, as of May 4, which I assume is when the specimens collected, right? It's still, even though, Christina, even though we have said only today that we're going to begin to slowly open up to some asymptomatic testing and we're gonna have a lot more to say about testing sometime in the next few days, it's still remarkable that even the highest number I think you said was 35% on spot testing, which means essentially, two out of three, who are historically going to be overwhelmingly symptomatic have gone in and come back with a negative test. We should probably take some continued comfort in that. Thank you for your report and thank you for your extraordinary leadership.

Pat, in addition to your daily burden of compliance, PPE, infrastructure, could you give us 20 seconds on what looks like some nasty weather, at least for some part of the state tonight?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks, Governor. Good afternoon. I would classify it as nasty. The four northern counties are going to be under a freeze warning from 11:00 tonight to 9:00 tomorrow morning, that's Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon and Maurice. The Northwest counties may experience up to an inch of snow and some minor coastal flooding may happen, but high winds from right now through Saturday evening, so just to be mindful of that. I know DOT and Commissioner Scaccetti is on top of that.

With regards to compliance, Newark issued 54 EO violations overnight. Clinton Township had a subject who had obscene posters out and was being obscene to passing traffic. He was cited for an EO violation. Prospect Park, a group of folks refused to disperse at a gathering and one person organizing that was cited. In Parsippany, a police officer went to the call in response to somebody committing criminal mischief in a residence with a hammer. That subject refused to put the hammer down. When finally being placed under arrest, the defendant began coughing and spitting and acting irrationally, indicating to the officer that he hopes that he gets corona. In Dover, a gathering of approximately over 50 people at a church had gathered. They had been warned several times. One of the subjects there coordinating that was cited. In Irvington, another host of a party of 15 people gathered or more was also cited. That's all I have, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Can I ask you a favor? Can we please drop the hammer on the hammerhead? What ridiculous behavior? Again, you're most worried about the four northern counties and really, after 11 tonight?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's it. Yeah, that 11-to-9 freeze warning that the National Weather Service put in place, I'm a Warren County resident.

Governor Phil Murphy: You're living it.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I keep an eye on that. The fact that we haven't talked about brining this winter is amazing, but here we are in May.

Governor Phil Murphy: Here we are in May. Dusting of snow potential?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yeah, I would say up to an inch in those four Northern counties.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. We're going to start over here, but before we do, Matt's got the microphone today. Martel is here, as always. Thanks for being here every day. A couple of logistical points. We'll be with you tomorrow at one o'clock where we can officially wish you, again, a Happy Mother's Day. Please help me remember, Judy. We will not be with you on Sunday unless we let you know otherwise, we'll be electronic and on paper. And we just made a decision to move Monday to the one o'clock slot. We had considered moving it later, there's a White House VTC, please bear with us. We might be a few minutes late if I had to predict, but we're going to shoot for one o'clock on Monday as well. So thanks again. We'll see you back here tomorrow at one. Matt Platkin, our Chief Counsel has joined us. Thank you, Matt, for being here. And with that, Elise, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi, good afternoon. Matt is here just in time for this question from John Reitmeyer at NJ Spotlight. John says, some lawmakers say that all or part of your emergency borrowing plan is not constitutional. What is your response to them? Are you getting an opinion from the State Attorney General that you could make public to settle any constitutional concerns?

And my question is, regarding the asymptomatic testing, how will the worried well be weeded out? And how many asymptomatic tests can be conducted each day? Do you expect to expand the asymptomatic testing to either a bigger population or a bigger geographic region?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, so let's start with Matt, and then Judy and I can tackle the testing question, Matt, constitutional question before the House, from John Reitmeyer.

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: I'm not going to get into back and forth on what some Members of the Legislature have said. We feel very confident that the plan is constitutional, both on the text of the statute and based on precedent from prior cases. Just, text of the Constitution. I'm not sure if I said statute, but text of the Constitution.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, thank you. I would just echo that we wouldn't be doing this if we didn't think it was constitutionally feasible. Let me make a couple, Elise, comments that are sort of more general and then ask Judy to come in and correct the record. A couple of things. Number one, we're in a much different place than we were two months ago, or frankly, even two to four weeks ago on testing and we're going to go through. We probably could have told you about testing as early as today in terms of the plan going forward, but Judy and greater minds prevailed and really made the very compelling point that testing and contact tracing kind of go hand in hand, and that we should do those together. So early week, we will do that. Again, what I'm saying today has some amount of relevance. What Judy's saying today has a lot of relevance. But you may hear, and you will hear, sort of the plan going forward.

Secondly, and Pat will correct the record here, but we were consistently not maxing out of late at either PNC or Bergen Community. This is a chance for us to dip our toe in the water. I think you heard me say this so still, if you're symptomatic, you're still obviously going to be a priority. But you also heard that we've got asymptomatic priorities as well. So, working in a congregate living space, healthcare workers and front first line responders at a minimum. And then the other sort of belt and suspenders we're putting on this, it would be really good if folks could check with their health care provider first so that you don't just get thousands of people showing up. We don't want the boat to be swamped. But that's sort of the order of priorities, and we want to try it and see how it works for a few days. Again, this is at the moment that we're also going to be unveiling a much broader sort of master testing plan going forward. Judy, anything you want to throw in there?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, before we made the decision to go forward with increasing testing, every day we look at the capacity, at the testing sites, and also the capacity at the labs, and then the availability of test kits and the availability of PPE. So you put that all together, we feel we can expand testing and every day we will be looking at this in our testing plan that we will reveal next week, which will look at populations and how we're going forward. It takes all of that into consideration.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I forgot the other priority category is someone who has been affirmatively in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Thank you for that. Nikita, how are you?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor, I'm well. I hope you are too. I have three questions for you today. First, I'm wondering if you have spoken to Vice President Biden since I last asked. Second, I want to know, based on what you've read and heard, do you believe the sexual assault allegations leveled at the former Vice President by Tara Reid? And then lastly, are you concerned that those allegations will help Trump get elected or that they'll hurt Democratic cabinets down the ballot?

Governor Phil Murphy: I literally, and I'm not trying to be rude. I have not spoken with the Vice President, although our teams are speaking regularly and he and I just haven't gotten one scheduled. And I've got literally no insight or no comment on questions 2 and 3. Thank you. Sir, do you have something in the back? No, you're good? Can we come across? Thank you.

Reporter: Governor Murphy, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services has issued a report following an inspection at Andover Subacute Two facility. They found numerous instances of non-compliance that they say led to the transmission of COVID in the facility, and that caused, or likely caused, injury or death to residents. What's your reaction to the report's findings?

And do you believe Attorney General Grewal should open an investigation into the closing of the George Washington Bridge as a violation of a state statute over improper use of government authority? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for both questions. Judy, I'm going to say something on the first piece. First of all, I've got no comment on the second. That's a decision for the Attorney General. I've got no insight on that at all. On the first one, I think it's fair to say, and Matt will correct our record if we get it wrong, the Attorney General has already, he sat here and he has established an investigation and I think we have to let that play out. Is that fair to say, Judy? Yeah. I would just say as a general matter, Judy and I have said time and again that the inconsistent performance by operators in the long-term care facility space is extremely disappointing, and I'll use a more diplomatic, that's a diplomatic word. But there's an unevenness and folks out there have lived this. Everything from what they did, actually, inside of facilities, to communication to loved ones and everything in between. It's why the Attorney General's investigating it. It's why Judy, I think, started on March 6, as I recall, with a whole series of directives. It's why we've brought in a nationally

recognized team to help us. It's why the National Guard is at Andover Subacute, I think as we speak, with 22 folks, I think Judy, you said. So we've taken a whole range of steps in the industry, but I'll leave the specifics of that particular location to the Attorney General's investigation. Thank you. Brent, good afternoon. Give us one sec.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Just two things to clarify before I get into my questions. Do you need to prove to a doctor that you've had no symptoms to be tested if you're asymptomatic? The death of the four-year-old anything else, location? How worried does that make you?

Some warehouse workers are saying your Executive Orders don't specify which retailers can go online and operate warehouses. Does that mean any retailer can do so? Because a company like Rent The Runway is selling gowns and makeup and their employees are complaining.

Two other quick ones. The State Health Department issued a letter March 31st telling resident nursing homes they could not require residents to be tested for the virus before allowing them to return to the hospital. Was that a mistake not to test discharged patients?

And other states have relaxed standards for getting a driver's license. Do you think New Jersey may do the same?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let's go – I'm not sure I either understood or remembered all of these. Proof to do what? To get tested if you're asymptomatic?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Do you need a doctor to say you're asymptomatic, but you should go? You need a doctor's note?

Governor Phil Murphy: No, we're not requiring that, but we want folks, and this is a little bit Scout's honor here, we want you to check in with your doctor before you actually show up. Is that fair to say?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we definitely feel it's important if you're going to be tested to be connected to a primary care physician, a medical home, because what if, you may be asymptomatic if you turn out positive, you want that connectivity to a healthcare system, whether it's the FQHC in your neighborhood. We just feel that's an important aspect of testing.

Governor Phil Murphy: On the four-year-old other than, Judy, what you said, which was the blessed four-year-old had an underlying medical condition, that's all we're going to say on that as of now. I mean, we've lost another blessed life, in this case, it's unfathomable that it's a four-year-old. It's the only fatality we've had under the age of 18 and the blessed four-year-old had an underlying medical condition. We're going to leave it at that. Your question on retailers come on back, Matt. Hold on, hold on, hold on. He's behind you.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Yeah, someone in my office is working on a story about how Rent the Runway, a company that rents gowns and makeup, is allowing their warehouse to operate because your Executive Order is not specific about which warehouses can operate or not. Amazon sells essential goods, but is there any – can you specify?

Governor Phil Murphy: I've got nothing specific to say on it. I'll ask Matt to weigh in on this, on Rent the Runway. We have said that we're looking and we hear, we get a lot of incomings on non-essential retail, which we respect. But we've also, we're still in a stay-at-home order and as we take those steps to reopen, we've got to do it right. Anything you want to add to that, Matt?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: The Executive Orders haven't closed warehouses, period. There's in-person retail that's non-essential as closed. Warehouses have to abide by the strict social distancing guidelines that were put in place through various orders that we've issued. If they're not, there's a complaint process and we'd be happy to look into it.

Governor Phil Murphy: We're going to have to bring the microphone back because – the March 31st letter, I didn't get that.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: The March 31st letter told nursing homes they could not require residents to be tested for the virus before allowing them to return to the hospital. Was that a mistake not to test discharged patients?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not aware of the letter, Judy, I apologize.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think the specificity in that letter was, we were having difficulties with readmissions from the hospitals, remembering that the nursing homes are the residents homes and they were requiring the hospital to do a confirmatory test after the resident was allowed back into the room. We said you really can't require that, that's a medical decision that would be made by the hospital. But if they had tested positive for COVID-19 or if they were a person under investigation, you should cohort them appropriately. If you cannot cohort appropriately or you do not have PPE, or you do not have the staffing to take care of the patient, then the individual would have to be placed in one of the nursing homes that we had worked with to provide beds for that person until they could go back to what we consider their residence.

Governor Phil Murphy: The wonder of having a personal device. The Commissioner of the Motor Vehicles Commission, Sue Fulton, has weighed in with the following answer to your last question. Georgia and Wisconsin are letting teenagers drive without a road test. We are not considering that. Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death among teenagers. We'll leave it at that. Matt, thank you. Mike, is that you?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Yep.

Governor Phil Murphy: You've got a mask up there, I can barely see you. Nice to see you.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good to see you too. Thanks, Governor. Just to follow up on something that you had said today about the asymptomatic testing, is that just at Bergen Community College and PNC? And does that mean that you got the HHS waiver that you mentioned before?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, it's at Bergen Community and PNC only.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Okay. I just had a few others. On testing, when you announced after your meeting at the White House, that they would be sending 550,000 tests, I understand that only 35,000 have arrived so far. Do you know why that is? And is that your expectation? Did you expect them to come over some amount of time?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, no, I'm glad you raised this because this was my fault. I misspoke. There was a delivery schedule that was agreed upon at the White House and they are delivering at least, if not more, than they had promised at the rates of delivery. Is that fair to say? Yeah. So I'm not concerned about that.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: And then just to follow up, the effort to double testing, can you say how that's going? Where we are? Where are we on it?

Governor Phil Murphy: You're going to hear about that early week. I'll leave it till then.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Just one more specific question for the Commissioner. Commissioner, on the demographic information that you give every day, the percentages, are those just for the change that day or is that the overall figure? If that question makes sense. When you say it's like 52% White and 19%, Black every day, those demographics? Is that just the change or cumulative?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Cumulative, total amount of deaths.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Mike. John, you get to take us out. Hold on.

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: The underlying condition for the four-year-old, was that Kawasaki disease? And is there any update on the National Guard at long-term care, are they still just at Andover or do you expect them to go this weekend to other places?

And Governor, on the Advisory Council that you announced today, what specific data will they be using to determine dates of opening? In other words, what specific metrics do you want them to be using to guide these decisions? Will their work the public? In other words, will we have access to their email? Will they issue reports, much like a transition team issues reports? Can we see that stuff?

Can you say exactly where you stand on beach openings? You say you'd like to have them, you expect possibly by Memorial Day. What's your thinking right now? The beaches are run by the municipal government. How does that square with the EO that says the state order is the state order?

Governor Phil Murphy: Are you good with that? Okay. I think we've said all that we're going to say about the blessed four-year-old we've lost. Can we leave it there, folks? Yeah, let's leave it there. National Guard is at Andover Subacute today, and we fully expect that they'll be in multiple facilities sooner than later. Is that fair to say, Judy?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I think we're expecting over 100.

Governor Phil Murphy: 120, I believe.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're identifying facilities for them to go into and help.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I think they're going to be deployed based on a needs assessment that Judy and team are working on as we speak. I don't have a good answer for you on whether or not, will their work be public and will they file reports? I'm not sure whether they are going to be filing reports, of the Council, Matt, do we have any guidance on that?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: They don't. We're still working out what form their product will be in. But principally, they're going to be advising, just generally, based on their understanding of the industries that they operate in.

Governor Phil Murphy: And they'll be basing their calls, as we will ask them to do what we have been doing, which is to base this on balls and strikes, the facts before them. Matt has been associated, thanks to me. I could give you one example. There's a faith and social services group to this. Matt has been involved with three faith leaders today, talking about very specific, not even requests, but realities and how that matches up with what we can or cannot do. Expect it to be, you know, I say tactical with enormous respect. We need real, granular, on-the-ground advice and it will be based on the facts.

Beaches, I asked for the out forecast, there's no day in the next two weeks that's going to be above a high of 60-something, so I would normally say that with a heavy heart, but that probably gives us a little bit more latitude. But this is also a good opportunity for me to say a couple of things about both beaches and parks. We're going to be heading out here in a moment.

Again, everybody, you were extraordinary last weekend. I don't think the weather is going to come remotely close to what we had last weekend. But we'd like everybody, if you're in a park, county, state, if you're golfing, whatever it might be, please, you know, keep doing what you've been doing. On beaches, John, what we've said is the following. This is in process. There are a number of earlier, feasible steps that we're looking at right now that will give guidance, sometime over the next week or so, would be my guess. Beaches are on that list. We're trying to come up with a paradigm that is consistent with not necessarily to the letter, but consistent with at least the mindset that we approached parks with.

For instance, and Pat spoke to this, we limited parking at the parks by 50%. That's the notion of capacity is something that we're looking carefully at. Social distancing, clearly. Masks, I think, Judy, I'm the biggest mask guy, maybe only behind you, but that may be hard to enforce on a beach. This is not necessarily exactly verbatim what we did here, we'll do there. But I will say this. It is dependent upon folks need to understand that while my optimism is high, by the time we get to Memorial Day, and assuming the weather is broken in a good way, it's subject to two really important footnotes for everybody to be thinking about.

Number one, the curves that we look at every day have got to continue improving. If they turn against us, there's no way we can responsibly take a step like opening beaches. And secondly, folks are just going to have to accept, just as you all have done brilliantly with parks, that going to the beach will be an experience which will feel, in some ways, like it always has and in some ways like it never has. And folks have to understand that. We're going to have to have steps in place, that capacity, social distancing that we just haven't.

Your last question, John was yes, the Executive Orders that we promulgate are the ones that bind, although at the same time, these beaches, other than Island Beach State Park, have a big dose of municipalities. I will say the cooperation that we have in our deliberations, Pat sees it, Judy sees it, Matt does as well, with municipalities and counties up and down the shore, as well as in our lake communities has been outstanding, and I have a high degree of confidence that we will be, wherever it is that we end up, we will be in very good harmony. You want to add something to that, Matt?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Just on the beaches, specifically. The Governor's orders are the orders for the state. In one of the orders he's issued, we explicitly delegated authority to localities to address beaches.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, I'm masked up. This was a homemade, this is a gift to me, a homemade mask, I've got Governor Murphy here, which is kind of cool. I want to thank Judy Persichilli, Dr. Christina Tan for your leadership, not just today but every day. Colonel Pat Callahan, likewise. Director Maples, Matt Platkin, the whole team. Again, a couple of things. Housekeeping, number one. We'll be back here at one o'clock tomorrow. Look forward to seeing you then. Happy Mother's Day to everybody who may not be tuning in tomorrow. Judy, thank you for reminding us. Thirdly, folks keep doing what you're doing. Just extraordinary work. With the exception of that very, very small cadre of knuckleheads, we are beating any other state in the nation in terms of social distancing, staying at home.

Know that the reward for that is our confidence that we can take more steps responsibly, and that at the same time, give you the confidence that you're going to feel that you're going to need to get back out there. Tomorrow, I think we're going to be joined by Judy's predecessor, although you're each other's predecessor. Judy ran University Hospital, while Sharif Elnahal was the Health Commissioner and now Sharif is running University Hospital and Judy's the Health Commissioner. I think Sharif is joining us tomorrow with representatives of the Red Cross to talk about plasma and plasma donations, the reality around that. As I said, Sunday we will be on the wire, written. And early week, we hope to put before you, in fact not hope, we will have to put before you not just tweaking testing as Elise asked about asymptomatic and Brent asked as well, but what the sort of master plan of testing and contact tracing and the infrastructure that underpins it going forward. Thank you all. God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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