

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: November 30th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Sorry to be a couple minutes behind here.

I'm joined today by the guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of State Police, Col. Pat Callahan; a guy to the right, another familiar face, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Great to have you both with us. Jared Maples, Director of the Office of Homeland Security Preparedness, with us, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg. As folks are likely aware, we had a positive case at the Department of Health. And following the public health guidance, a number of our colleagues, including the woman who needs no introduction, Judith Persichilli, are quarantining and working remotely. And we send all of them our very best wishes.

I hope everybody had a pleasant Thanksgiving. And I also hope you took some time this weekend to support our small businesses as the holiday season kicked off. Each day, over the past few months, we've highlighted – I it's now six months, in fact, we've highlighted a different small business that has partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to receive vital assistance, a grant or a loan, or a guarantee for a new startup capital. All of this has kept many small businesses frankly open across our state. But we also can't forget the organizations and associations those businesses belong to who have also stepped in to assist. And one is the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce under the leadership of two dear friends, the guy on the left, CEO, Carlos Medina, and on the right, Chairman, Luis De La Hoz.

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The Chamber itself in fact received a grant from the EDA, which it in turn, used to help its member businesses learn about and apply for the assistance that they needed, and to offer counseling, and other programs for their members. I spoke to Carlos last week. By the way, as luck would have it today, is Carlos Medina's birthday. So, happy birthday, buddy, and had a really good conversation with him. Their website, the Chamber's website, is shccnj.org. S-H-C-C-N-J.org. So, this is how we do it. We look out for each other and pay it forward. So, to Carlos, Luis, and everyone at the Chamber, I say, thank you, and dios te bendiga. And to everyone else, I say, support small businesses in your community. Together, we will make it through.

Now, we do have a few announcements to make today, which I'll get to in a minute. First, however, I want to quickly address the rumors that we have begun hearing about some impending statewide shutdown and lockdown. Those rumors, whether told to you by a friend or posted on social media, are just that rumors. Just because we say that all options are on the table – and by the way, you would want us to say that, given that we're dealing with a pandemic and enormous loss of life. That does not mean that we are about to exercise any of those options. We have made it clear over the past weeks that we are not in the same situation we found ourselves in during the spring, when we had to take dramatic and drastic actions to immediately regain some control and save lives.

Today, we see more moves on the board that we can take. We are no less committed or steadfast in our approaches today. But we now have the ability to be more focused and surgical. We have much better data and science to draw from now than we did eight months ago. And we could focus restrictions on the activities that have proven to have the greatest risk of transmission. And we continue to be driven first and foremost by science and by data. Our overarching aim is to ensure the stability of our healthcare system and in the ability of our state's 71 hospitals to ensure proper treatment for all who need care.

When we took the steps that we did in the spring, we did so because the rapid real-time increase in hospitalizations and the potential numbers our modeling was showing both pointed to the overload and potential collapse of our healthcare system. Every metric was not only pointed in the wrong direction, but the cliff we were standing on was frightening. We also took the steps we had had to because we were also faced with severely limited testing capabilities, shortages of critical personal protective equipment and ventilators, a scarcity of scientific knowledge about this new virus, and no timeline for when or even if a viable vaccine would be available. Every single one of those shortcomings has been addressed over the past eight months.

We are on a much better footing. Our concern remains overwhelmingly the situation in our hospitals, even more than the increase in the raw numbers of cases. And it comes down to this maintaining the stability of our healthcare system and ensuring the ability of our frontline medical workers to treat patients starts with implementing restrictions that will keep fewer people from becoming a hospital patient in the first place. Speaking of which, as of last night, there were 2,961 total patients in our hospitals. 2,761 of those confirmed positives, the balance, persons under investigation awaiting their test results.

And while 263 live patients were discharged throughout the day, they were replaced by 378 patients who were new hospital admittances. And this is apples to oranges. These are not confirmed deaths. But we had yesterday, 26 in-hospital fatalities. There were 575 patients in our intensive care units. And of these, 332 were requiring a ventilator. At the end of the day, this is all a simple direct matter of cause and effect. Over the past eight weeks as the number of daily reported cases has increased, so too with a little bit of a lag, is the number of hospitalizations. And we know that some percentage of the 3,199 new PCR positive cases today, which have been reported, will require hospitalization.

Stability in our healthcare system starts with carefully chosen steps to hamper the spread of the virus. And because of the data, we know how and where we can best meet this challenge. So, effective this Saturday at 6:00 a.m., December 5th, all indoor youth and adult sports, including both practices and competitions, and inclusive of all risk levels set forth by the Department of Health, are being placed on a full and complete pause through January 2, 2021. The only exceptions are for collegiate level and professional teams. This aligns by the way with both the efforts of the NJSIAA and those of our neighboring states. We do not take this step lightly.

As folks probably know, I'm a huge sports fan, and all of our kids play sports. I hope and intend to see the winter sports season in January. I want to see, especially that high school senior, get to play her or his last season. And I value the importance of sports for the physical and mental wellbeing of our children. But we

are seeing outbreaks related to indoor sports, and this is a prudent short-term step to slow the spread. And effective 6:00 a.m., Monday, December 7th, and until further notice, the gathering limit for all outdoor activities will be no more than 25 individuals. The only exceptions here remain for religious or political activities, which enjoy constitutional protection and funerals, memorial services, and wedding ceremonies.

And let me reiterate that separate groups who are dining outdoors at our restaurants do not constitute a single gathering. Outdoor dining is unaffected by today's announcement. It continues to be governed by the health and safety regulations already in place. So, while we know that outdoor environments are safer than indoor environments, and there's no question about that, during this dangerous period, any type of mass gathering creates risk. As you start to make your holiday plans, please recognize that the gathering limits are back to what they were in May and June, when we all came together and crushed the curve as much as any state in the United States.

We continue to urge you to keep gatherings as small as possible, particularly with individuals outside of your household. As I've said, our steps continue to be dictated by careful analysis of science and data. And on Wednesday, we are planning on providing a deeper dive into our current second wave modeling to give you all a better idea of what it is we are potentially up against. And Pat, you'll forgive me if I may make my first holiday-themed comparison of the week and of the season. That modeling is not unlike Scrooge's fate at the end of a Christmas carol. Remember, the model is like what the ghost of Christmas future showed Scrooge, not images of what will be, but rather, of what may be should we not take any direct action, or should we give in to pandemic fatigue.

So, as we recommit to social distancing, masking and good hand hygiene, the model will take this into account and be updated, hopefully for the better. Next time you're on with Tiny Tim, please spread the word there. And we also get a tremendous amount of good data from testing. Testing tells us where the hotspots are, so we can direct more resources to put out a virus flare up. Testing is also easy. And in many cases, it is free. Today, we are reporting a statewide positivity of 11.34% for all tests that were recorded on Thanksgiving Day. And admittedly, that might be somewhat distorted. And the statewide rate of transmission is currently at 1.11. And that is as of November 28th, which is Saturday.

So, I encourage everyone to get tested and to get tested this week, especially if you are at a Thanksgiving table with people from outside your household or outside your bubble. One of our greatest fears is that someone's innocent Thanksgiving will ignite a hotspot. And that's why we spent so much time urging you to set a smaller table this year. And by the way, the overwhelming anecdotal evidence, at least, is that you all did just that. So, hats off to you. There are more than 400 testing locations listed online at our COVID-19 information hub. That is what's in front of you, covid19.nj.gov/testing.

And this page is also updated daily with additional pop-up and mobile testing sites around the state as they're being set up by the Department of Health, by local officials, by community nonprofits, or through partnerships among all of the above. And to this, the Department of Health is also stepping up with an enhanced program of testing in our long-term care centers, which will run over the course of the next two weeks, and make use of some of the BinaxNOW rapid tests we currently have at our disposal. The residents at our long-term care facilities are among our most vulnerable. Our aim is to catch any new cases quickly, so proper precautions can be taken before coronavirus is spread throughout a facility.

Our aim, as it always has been, is to save lives. Under this directive, long-term care – long-term rather, facility staff, are to be tested either every other day if they work three consecutive days, or when 48 hours have passed since their last shift, if they work a staggered schedule. Testing will be a requirement for all facility visitors apart from on-duty emergency responders arriving because of a call for assistance. And any resident who leave their homes for regular outside treatment or who are out of the facility for more than 24 hours will be tested upon their return. The department has already begun distributing test kits, and 366,000 have been distributed in this first tranche.

And as I noted, this directive will remain in place for the next two weeks or until by next now supply runs out, especially as we come out of the Thanksgiving holiday when we fear a spike in cases among staff or among returning residents who went to be with their families, making sure that this virus is kept out of our long-term care facilities, is a paramount concern. I know Ed will have some more color to add to this in a few minutes. Now, on the other side of testing, let me switch gears, is contact tracing.

The data on this slide, a little bit of an eye chart, which is also online at covid19.nj.gov, is for the week prior to last. But it nonetheless gives us a tremendous pause. The number of individuals who refuse to cooperate with our contact tracers is now up to nearly 70%. For the 31% of you who have cooperated, hat's off to you. You are heroes. You are doing exactly what we need everybody to do, which is to help us find a flare up, surround it, and drive it back into the ground. Now, as of today, with more than 600 new contact tracers who started their training last week being put into the field, we now have approximately 3,000 contact tracers on the ground. Each and every single one of them have only one concern, stopping an outbreak.

If one reaches you, please take the call. Please, cooperate with them. I can't say it enough. There's no witch hunt. And our contact tracers are not out to snitch on anyone. Their sole focus is on making sure you know that you have been exposed, so you could take the steps to protect yourselves or your loved ones, or your community. And again, I urge everyone to download our COVID Alert NJ App to your smartphone, which can also alert you if you have potentially been exposed to the virus. It is free, and it has already been downloaded by more than 420,000 times, which is great. But that's not nearly enough.

While our overarching goal is to save lives, we continue to lose resonance to this awful virus. Today, we're reporting an additional 15 confirmed deaths. And when we add in the 1,829 deaths currently listed as probable to the new total of 15,164 confirmed deaths, we see that we've lost nearly 17,000 blessed souls of our New Jersey family to this virus. Think about this for a second. For perspective, the total number of New Jerseyans killed in both World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam combined is roughly 18,300. So, in eight months, we've lost nearly as many New Jerseyans has died in a war over a 60-year span. Let's now honor, as we do every day, three of these blessed souls we've lost. We will begin by remembering what a great family, retired New Jersey workers compensation court judge, Anthony Minniti.

He's there on the left. Judge Minniti was a resident of West Orange and was 71 years young. Prior to joining the state bench, where he served for over two decades, he was the West Orange Municipal Court Judge and a former three-term town council. And to put it succinctly, he loved the community he called home for 43 years. Aside from his legal and political activities, Judge Minniti was also active within West Orange coaching his son's sports teams, and even being a certified New York City Tour Guide. That's kind of cool. He leaves behind his wife of 48 years, Diane, in the lower left. She, too, was COVID positive. I had the great honor of speaking with her last week.

He also leaves behind and you could see them there, their sons, James and Mark, and keep a third son, Anthony, who predeceased them and him at the age of 29, in your prayers. He also leaves behind his sons and their families including his grandchildren, Madison, Michael, Ava, and the newly born, Olivia. He also leaves his brother, James, and his nephews, Jim, Sam, and Matthew, and their families. By the way, his wife, Diane, told me that in his memory, his grandkids got together and established and did a virtual basketball tournament to raise money, a fundraiser. They raised \$50,000 pot, and they gave the money all to either first responders or folks who were hungry and food and secure, pretty special.

So, we thank Judge Minniti for his years of service to West Orange and to the State of New Jersey. May he be remembered fondly, and may God bless and watch over him and his family. Next, we remember a father and son, Gerald and Martin Derer, father and son, and both last to COVID-19. Marty Derer on the right was just 56 years old, a graduate of Camden Catholic High and Rutgers University, he lived in the Williamstown section of Monroe township in Gloucester County, and spent his days as a Gloucester County Court services supervisor. A lifelong basketball fan and player, Marty played actually while at Rutgers.

He refereed throughout South Jersey for more than 30 years, showing his passion for the game and using it to teach younger players the right way to play in hopes that through basketball, they would find positive paths for their futures. Only one week after Marty's passing, the Derer family suffered a second heartbreak with the passing of Jerry on the left. At age 79, Jerry split his retirement between his home in North Wildwood and another home in St. Petersburg, Florida.

He, too, was a proud graduate of Camden Catholic where he played basketball. And after graduation, you won't be surprised when I say this given his hat, he joined the United States Marine Corps. After completing his service, he became a police officer, serving in Camden and in Pennsauken for three decades. Father and son were proud members of both the Wildwood Elks Lodge and the Cape May Emerald Society and Ancient Order of Hibernians. I say that on behalf of Callahan and Murphy.

They were pre-deceased by respectively, mom and wife, Joann, who passed in March of 2019. You talk about an incredibly hellacious couple of years for this family. And they're survived by Jerry's daughters and Marty sisters, Sue and Debbie, and I had the great honor of speaking with each of them last week, and by their grandson and nephew respectively, Tyler. We thank them both for representing the very best of our New Jersey values, service, and community. We thank them for the service to their communities, their state, and to our nation. God bless each of them and watch over their families they leave behind.

So, as we come out of a warm Thanksgiving weekend and turn our gaze to the December holidays, we must remember that this virus is not done with us. The virus is back. Let's remember the roughly 17,000 New Jerseyans we have lost. Folks like Judge Minniti and Marty and Jerry. Let's re-commit to saving lives and protecting our communities. Let's re-double our efforts and end the year by crushing the curve a second time so we can look better with confidence to a better and stronger 2021.

So, finally for today, our flags fly at half-staff in honor of memory of the late David Dinkins, the 106th Mayor of New York, who passed away last week. Now, some of you may wonder why we lowered our flags for a former mayor of New York. Well, the answer is simple. And this has come from many different directions including the mayor of this great community, Reed Gusciora. Dave Dinkins was a son of New Jersey. He was born right here in Trenton.

His father who we live with was a barber and real estate broker, right here in the capital city. Dave himself was a member of the Trenton Central High School's graduating class of 1945. He spent his public life breaking down institutional barriers of racism and prejudice. Barriers he first encountered at Trenton Central when he was barred from using the school's swimming pool because he was Black. Much of the progress made in New York City over the past 30 years got its start during the Dinkins Administration.

And his administration was also the first to have a cabinet whose members reflected the city's great diversity. He was a good man and a proud leader who steered the city in a new direction after a period of political turmoil. Our entire region is better because of his leadership. May God bless him, watch over Mayor David Dinkins. With that, let's leave things where they are for the final day of November. It is now my honor to introduce the guy who doesn't need an introduction either. Please help me welcome, Dr. Ed Lifshitz.

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you.

As the Governor mentioned, the restriction on youth and high school sports until January and the lowering of capacity limits on outdoor gatherings to 25 are additional layers of mitigation aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Youth sports, in particular has presented a challenge as we have seen a number of outbreaks related to these activities.

For example, there have been 20 outbreaks in more than 100 cases tied to youth hockey. The pause in these activities will help slow the spread of the virus. These new restrictions will give us some added protection. But as we progress through this difficult holiday season, it is every individual person out there who can through their efforts and increased vigilance truly make the difference. This is a team effort. And we need every New Jerseyans help.

Wear a mask indoors and outdoors in public places. Practice social distancing. Limit gatherings, even with family members, especially those across generations. Stay home when you're sick. Download the COVID Alert NJ App. Get tested if you think you've been exposed and cooperate with contact tracers. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer.

Given the increased risk of spreading the virus for both residents who travel outside the state and for visitors into the state, non-essential travel is strongly discouraged. Anyone traveling outside of New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Delaware should quarantine for 14 days. We know that this is a time of year we're used to gathering together with loved ones and friends to celebrate. But this year, we need to change how we enjoy the holidays.

The Health Department will be issuing holiday guidance today that prioritizes health and safety throughout the season. This guidance will include recommendations for limited travel outside the home, limiting indoor gatherings to household members, visits with Santa with a preference for virtual or outdoor visits and

measures for choir performances and caroling. Christmas tree and/or menorah lighting events should be held outdoors and must adhere to gathering limits.

It is strongly recommended that people consider alternatives to visiting Santa indoor locations such as virtual visits or outdoor socially distanced visits and photos with Santa. If malls and other indoor locations still choose to offer in-person visits, these visits should be made via reservation, be socially-distant, and time-limited. Santa staff and guests over age two must wear masks. Children should not be permitted to sit on Santa's lap. The guidance also sets protocols requires in caroling due to the increased risk of COVID-19 transmission.

All singing groups should be socially distanced from each other, and their audience during each performance. Singing groups that perform in public must be at least 10 feet away from others or have physical barriers between them and the audience. All performers and guests must wear masks. In addition, holiday parades are discouraged. If holiday parades are organized, consider limiting in-person attendance, and instead having the parade live streamed, so the public can view it virtually.

Parade participants should not be permitted to throw items from their floats or cars to spectators. With increased cases, we must continue to maintain our vigilance against COVID-19, and celebrate safely, and responsibly to ensure healthy holidays. As we continue to see increases in community spread, testing continues to be vital. As the governor mentioned, the department is requiring all long-term care facilities that receive BinaxNOW test, and have a CLIA certificate, which is required for those performing point of care testing to test all staff and visitors starting today, and for the next two weeks, or when facilities run out of supplies, whichever comes first.

The directive also applies to residents who leave for more than 24 hours, and for those who leave regularly for medical appointments. Staff who are scheduled to work three or more consecutive days are to be tested every other day using BinaxNOW tests. Other staff are to be tested every other day, or 48 hours after the last shift they worked. Facilities that have not received their BinaxNOW test from the department as of today, and that possess ample supplies to their own point of care tests are encouraged to use them to test staff every other day until they receive BinaxNOW allocations from the department.

This two-week pilot will help inform further guidance to protect our vulnerable seniors in their homes. And now, for the department's daily report, as the governor shared, our hospitals reported 2961 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation last evening. There are 575 individuals in critical care, 57% of those critical care patients are on ventilators.

There has been one new report a multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children since the last briefing, this leads to a total of 62 cases in the state. Luckily, there are no deaths reported at this time. One of these children's is currently hospitalized. The governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported in terms of deaths, the breakdown to death by race, ethnicity is as follows, White 54.1%, Black 18%, Hispanic 20.3%, Asian 5.4%, and other 2.2%.

At the state veteran homes, there have been a cumulative total of 407 cases among residents across these facilities. At our four state psychiatric hospitals, there have been a cumulative total of 263 cases among residents. Overall, our daily positivity was 11.34%. But again, this is referring back to Thanksgiving Day, with a relatively small number of tests done, so I would take that with a grain of salt. And as always, stay safe. Please continue to mask up, social distance, stay home when you're sick, and download the COVID Alert NJ app.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Ed. I would think, and I don't want to put words in your mouth. I would think if you're getting tested on Thanksgiving Day, you're probably not doing it as a casual matter. You're doing it for a reason, I would think, right?

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: And that's generally what we see with holidays, and weekends, and other events. People tend to be very sick. Testing goes down, the positivity goes up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that report. And thank you for being here as always. Pat, lots of moving parts. We had a long weekend. Compliance is obviously a question, a lot of prayers in and around the cadet class. We get some nasty weather outside now and later. For that, anything else we got, great to have you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. With regards to executive order compliance since last we met, since Tuesday, we've had 10 EO violations cited. Nine of those were by the Newark Police Department and establishments throughout Newark. One was in South Orange issued by South Orange Police Department. We also had our ABC and criminal justice investigators out last Tuesday and Wednesday.

On Tuesday, they cited a establishment in Neptune City, and one in Tuckerton, and they also went on compliance inspections, 67 compliance inspections Wednesday night, where they cited 11 licensed establishments for EO violations, which were a combination of failure to wear masks inside, as well as capacity, over capacity. The weather, as you said, Governor, nasty afternoon, high winds, a lot of rain expected, hoping to clear out by later this evening.

But we're really most concerned about the branches and trees coming down on our power too. So, we're in lockstep with BPU, up at our State Emergency Operations Center. And with regard to our recruit, he remains in critical condition, and out of respect to both him and his family, their privacy, I will not comment any further on that, and simply ask that you pray for him, for his family, and for the members of his 161st State Police class. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless them. And we will do just that, Pat. Several things, we'll probably start over with Dustin. But before we do, several things I wanted to hit. This week, we'll be back on the Monday, Wednesday, Friday rhythm, unless you hear otherwise, from us, from [Mahan], or [Dan] or one of our colleagues. And my guess is we stay with that rhythm for the foreseeable future.

Since we last saw each other, which was a week ago, at this point, a number of productive a whole range of things as you can imagine we've been dealing with, but I had a good one-on-one conversation with Vice President Pence. To some extent, it was about transition, but that become a moot point. But it was also about some of the areas that we're working on together.

We had a white house call, Pat, on Monday afternoon, and we've got another one right after this, which is why we're earlier than normal on those, but almost exclusively based or focused on rather vaccine and vaccine distribution. So, if we learn anything this afternoon, we'll at latest report it on Wednesday. But the conversations have been productive. And I think you have to balance two realities.

I was on Fox yesterday morning and both of these statements are true. Incredible progress has been made. Hats off to the folks in there battling through this, and in the current administration, as well as the private sector players, the decades of investment in public health in our country, all the contributing factors, but you have to call it as it is, it's pretty impressive for the vaccine development.

Whereas, there are other parts of the national response that had been wanting, this is an area that is bright. But you can also say, at the same time, and you've been in these calls with me, the complexity still before us is enormous. And that is why linking up of the to the current administration of the next administration matters so much, and why the federal partnership and response is going to matter so much because this is really complex.

It'll be expensive. Whether you're setting up a special mega site, think through the FEMA testing sites that we had up early up in Paramus and Holmdel as examples, whether it's through CVS or Walgreens, whether it's to your local pharmacy, your federally qualified health center, your hospital system health care providers. This is particularly two shots, cold chain requirements for at least these first two vaccines.

So, we can both laud the progress that has been made, and continues to be made. And also, let's acknowledge the fact that the road went out in the end zone yet that this remains complex. Two other quickies, we had a really good CEO council call this morning, again, I want to give Charlie Lowrey, CEO of Prudential, and Ken Frazier, CEO of Merck, a shout out for convening that group, really good discussion.

And included, by the way, not just Ken Frazier of Merck, but Alex Gorsky was on, CEO of Johnson & Johnson, and they're another entity that's trying to as quickly and safely as possible, develop yet another vaccine. It was a really constructive discussion about not just what I've just said in terms of what we've done, and what's ahead of us, but also other topics, specifically, focused on our economic restart and recovery.

And I'll make one last point in our Restart and Recovery Commission. I was incredibly happy to see that our good friend, Neera Tanden, who's the CEO of the Center for American Progress is nominated by, I guess, not yet literally nominated, but designated by President Elect Joe Biden to oversee the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, for the country, which is an incredibly important position.

She is first rate in every respect. She's been great to us as a state. She continues to serve on our commission and want to give her a shout out. So, with that, we'll start over here if we could, and we'll start, Dustin, with you. Bless you.

Q&A Session:

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Can you provide details on an apparent outbreak among staff members at Ocean Medical Center? We're hearing between 100 and 200 employees have tested positive the past two weeks, but want to get something official on what's been going on there. Can you also tell me what defines how you define an outbreak at a facility? And can the health department in the future publish data on individual hospitals so the public can know the status of positive cases among staff and patients?

Has the National Guard been deployed to veterans' homes or redeployed? And if so, can you tell us where and what the reason is for that? And for you, specifically, Governor, do you think the state should still be doing business with McKinsey now that it's come to light that the firm proposed paying pharmacy companies rebates for Oxycodone overdoses effectively capitalizing on people succumbing to addiction? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. May I ask, I missed the first – what Medical Center?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Ocean Medical Center in Brick. I don't have any insight on that. Do you, Ed, at Ocean Medical Center?

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: A bit. Let me say this. I mean, with this upsurge, with the second wave, unfortunately, we are seeing again, an increase the number of outbreaks in a number of our facilities, long-term care facilities, and also acute care facilities. I don't have the exact details that you're asking for. We can get back to you as far as that goes. But certainly, we are aware and concerned that acute care hospitals are showing more cases now than they were certainly three, four months ago.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think your second question was what constitutes an outbreak, Dustin? Do you mind addressing that?

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: And that's the other thing, it's relatively easy to say whether there's an outbreak going on in a long-term care facility where people aren't coming and going. Basically, if you're staying there, you got sick, you had to get it from somewhere, and had to be brought in. It's an outbreak. In places like hospitals, where people are coming and going all the time, where people coming in with COVID all the time or undiagnosed, where staff members are working regularly and very commonly are exposed in the community, not in the facility itself.

It is much more difficult to know for sure, whether in fact, the cases are coming from the hospital itself. In general, we consider three cases that are epi-linked, meaning that have a clear link together to constitute an outbreak.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Ed. Dustin, I'm not aware of the National Guard being deployed at the veterans' homes. If I'm wrong about that, we will get back to you. And obviously, we take our own city looking at 62,813, which are the confirmed 146 losses of life at the three homes respectively, Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland, and every one of those lives lost. There's no silver lining to any one of those blessed lives who gave themselves in service to our country.

But that number has not changed since June 10th. And please, God, it doesn't ever change again.

Listen, on McKinsey, Dustin, you'll forgive me for speaking on both sides of my mouth on this one. I read the same story. I've got no insight into the facts. But I read the same story you did. It's appalling if it's true. And this is about compensating, somehow giving a rebate back in their deliberations with Purdue Pharmaceutical, I assume that's what you're referring to.

I mean, the notion of putting a price on somebody's life is so offensive. It's beyond the pale. On the other side, we have been advised by a number of firms over these past nine months, by professionals in their lane, medical, and in many cases, long-term care. And they have done a really good job, I have to say, and that includes McKinsey. It includes [MNAT], the firm that Judy, and Ed, and colleagues hired to hold up a harsh mirror to our long-term care industry and to us. And we continue to monitor that, trust me, but that story was sickening as a separate matter. [Elise], can we come to you? Is it all right?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi, I have two questions. The first is from Carly Citron at POLITICO. All six regions on New Jersey's color-coded Cali map are now orange or high activity. When you first announced the color system, it was presented as a way to help local school boards and districts make individualized decisions. Should schools be considering limiting or rolling back in-person learning? Will the state have any more guidance coming? And my question is Connecticut has reported allegedly, fraudulent pop-up testing sites. Is there any evidence of this in New Jersey? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Elise. On the latter, I'm not aware. Ed, unless you are? Or, Parimal, I'm not aware of any. And we will be sure to come back to you if that is otherwise. You're absolutely right. The six regions, I believe, are in orange, number one. Number two, it is a factor. And Ed, correct me if I'm wrong here, it is a factor. But the in-school experience, the in-school transmission experience, well, we take every one of these cases deadly seriously.

The last time our dashboard has been updated, it's 66 since the end of August, cumulative outbreaks impacting 269 persons, whether they'd be students, educators, staff. And that is well within any expected range of reality. So, I have to say what's going on outside the building clearly impacts what may be going on inside the building. I worry more about transmission coming from the outside into the school setting. I think you're seeing the school setting as a general matter, not just in New Jersey, but the school setting as a general matter to be one of the safer settings.

And that, by the way, does not mean it's a stress-free school year. Bless our educators, our parents, our kids, our administrators. This is not a normal school year. And this is not without risk. The question is, can you do it safely and responsibly as possible? But we continue to clearly monitor that, both what's going on outside the building, as well as inside. It looks like New York City is going back at least for the younger grades. But this is something you can imagine we watch like a hawk. Ed, anything you want to add to that?

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: Not much. We do have guidance out there that we do publish that can help school districts together with the local health departments decide what actions to take as the state moves through these different risk categories. And when it is in high risk, as you say now, there are some recommendations that we make, together again, with locals, with the school board, should be deciding whether they should take those steps. And those include things such as restricting activities, involve interactions with multiple cohorts. Meaning, things that will bring together children and/or staff from different groups that aren't in the same group every day.

So, we do put those recommendations out there. And we certainly do continually reevaluate what we think is likely to make a difference.

Governor Phil Murphy: And again, notwithstanding a better experience than we were anticipating, that does not mean it's stress-free. And that does not mean that we're not taking our hats off to educators, parents, kids, administrators up and down the board. Thank you, Elise. Charlie, good to see you.

Charlie Stile, Bergen Record: Oh. Okay. I just have one question off the contact tracing numbers, 70% non-compliance. How does that inhibit your ability to make decisions about closings and re-openings if 70% of the people that you're contacting are not providing any information? And how much of that do you think that non-compliance or people not responding is a result of some of this anti-mask, anti-lockdown sentiment that's running somewhat rampant on social media?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? Good to see you. Good questions. It's really frustrating. I think it's largely non-compliance because people don't want to feel like they ratted out their kid or they ratted out themselves, or a neighbor. And that's not what this is about. I think that continues to be the biggest reason, Charlie. Again, hats off to the 31% of the folks who are doing the right thing and cooperating. And I'm begging the 69% who are not. It's a data point we would really like to have. But the good news is, and Ed can get into this, we have a lot of different data points. So, I'm more concerned about a specific situation than I am about our ability to make the right call. So, we know there are outbreaks with indoor hockey as an example, or at restaurant X or Y.

And for the most part, people are doing really the right thing, and hats off to them. Some of it is related to your last part of the question, Charlie, in terms of the anti-vax, anti-mask. We got protested over the weekend, folks of that wing of our state, just throwing up their arms. If you look at any public polling of where people are on this, that's not 69%, it's a contributor, I'm sure. I think it's much more personal. I don't want to rat somebody up, especially somebody in my own family. Ed, anything else you want to add on that? In a perfect world, if you had 100% response rate, maybe that's a different way to put Charlie's questions, how much of a different better world are we in?

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: Well, the responses are important for two reasons, first and most important, because it helps track down other people who might have been exposed that they can then be quarantined and/or seek medical care, and testing that they might need. That's the single most important thing. And that's why we would tell you, "Hey, you're not ratting out your neighbors. You're helping to protect them. You're helping to protect the other people who might have been exposed. And that's very important." The other one is, yes, it does give us additional information as to where we think that somebody might have been exposed. But contact tracing, while it can help determine where you might have been exposed, it's really geared much more to determining who you might have exposed.

So, it's more about figuring out who you might have come into contact in the last couple of days before you got sick, so we can let them know that they might be at risk. Than it is about going back a full two weeks and saying, "Well, where might you have been? Where might you have picked it up? Was it at a restaurant? Was it at a gym? Was it somewhere else?" So, certainly, we'd like to have the additional information. But it's not the primary thing that contact tracing is about.

Governor Phil Murphy: And obviously, compliance as you went through this weekend, what happened last Wednesday, which is a big historic party night, is another piece of the puzzle. So, thank you.

Krystal Knapp, Planet Princeton: Krystal Knapp, Planet Princeton. One question for Governor and Superintendent; Trenton experienced its 38th and 39th murders of the year this weekend, sadly breaking the city's records for homicides in a year. Any comment on that, in state efforts to help the capital city?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? Yeah, Krystal, tragic. I reached out to the mayor this morning. I know the state police. Pat, you may want to comment, because the state police plays a big role in Trenton, as it does in many communities around the state. I'd argue no bigger than the role that is played in Trenton. I sure wish, as proud as I am of the gun safety laws that we have passed, and we're probably the safest gun safety law state as measured by that of any American state, we're right across a river. We're right up a highway, I would sure love to see a national reality in terms of gun safety. And we continue to work with the Mayor, with the community leadership, faith leadership, certainly with the Police Department, Mercer County Sheriffs.

And it's not a milestone that anybody looks at with anything other than a very heavy heart. Pat, do you want to add anything?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I would just add that the state police is part of the taskforce to reduce crime, especially gun violence. And just in the last two weeks or so, we've had two phenomenal investigations. One that we believe stopped a very violent night last week, where 24 subjects were arrested while planning, what we believe is a retaliatory shooting. Seven weapons were recovered that night. The week before that, a straw purchaser from South Carolina had come up from South Carolina, eight brand-new handguns that would have been on the streets of Trenton had that taskforce not been there as part of that violent crime reduction initiative.

The US Attorney's Office, the Prosecutor's Office, to the Governor's point, the sheriff, the Police Department, it is a daily mission for us to make sure that we protect the citizens of Trenton.

Governor Phil Murphy: And this is a great community. I mean, we've talked about Dave Dinkins today, one of probably thousands, if not tens of thousands of – or sons or daughters of this great community that have gone on to change the world. And I think it's our collective job that we continue to work in partnership with Trenton and with the county, and do everything we can to allow this community to achieve its highest heights. Thank you. Good to see you. Sir?

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. If a region hits very high COVID activity, would you mandate school closures for that reason to that region? And if so, how many regions would need to hit very high activity or level red for you to mandate a statewide closure of schools? According to a WHYY story, Philadelphia moved to recommending people do their own contact tracing after the daily case count hit 200 new diagnoses. And the city's team could no longer keep up. Has this happened in New York or other communities in New Jersey? And what do you see is the maximum daily caseload that contact tracers can effectively handle?

And also, on contact tracing, to what extent do your contact tracing core focus on those who have been hospitalized or died recently, in light of the lack of cooperation your teams are receiving? In general, aren't those people and their families a captive audience who, because they are actually sick, could yield important information about how – excuse me, important about the current state of the pandemic? If so, what are you learning about their behaviors that may have contributed to their becoming infected? Is there anything that you're learning about the second wave as a result?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I want to go back to Krystal for a second because I just got a text, which is a good thing. Trenton Thunder has saved. I think this is just, hat off to the press. They will be part of a new MLB Draft League, a new MLB Minor League. They will have a 2021 season just announced. That's good news.

I don't have anything really new to add on a school front. I do not anticipate as a broad statewide matter of schools are going to close in New Jersey. I will be very surprised if they do. That option has to stay on the table. Again, we've got a blessing New York City, one monolithic School District, we've got hundreds. At one level that makes our work a lot more complicated and harder, but it's a blessing in the sense that you can rifle shot into a community and assess that particular community or to your question a region and be very tailor-made in terms of your solution.

And you see this by the way in the hybrid versus remote school numbers that have now begun to shift a little bit back and forth, and you see that very reality taking place. And my guess is it'll stay that way. If there's a local specific reason to take a two-week pause, a lot of the transmission again is outside in. School districts are doing that. But for the most part, the experience – again, not stress-free by any means has been well within any expectation. And there's a bunch of contact tracing questions. And needless to say, you've forgotten more about this subject. And I'll know, so I'll turn it to you.

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: Let me start by saying this, in general, contact tracing is one arrow in our quiver. Obviously, it does help with containment as we can track down those people who might have been exposed and then, have them quarantine, so, that they can't infect other people. And we want to use it for exactly that reason. As cases increase in the community, as community transmission increases, it becomes somewhat less effective because you have more and more interactions, more and more people, more and more people who are positive.

And that's why we use other containment measures, other mitigation measures, the actions that we've been talking about here, everything from wearing the mask, the social distancing, to closing down sports for a hiatus for a short period of time, all those sorts of things help as well. So, that's all important as we go forward. And again, that contact tracing is just one part of it.

Of course, if we get overwhelmed as we were in the spring, essentially, contact tracing became almost impossible because there are too many cases for the number of contact traces that were out there. We do have a lot more contact traces now. We are adding more contact traces every day, but even at this point, given the large and sudden relatively rapid increase in cases in some places the contact traces have been having trouble keeping up. Are we at this point looking to move towards a model where we basically tell

people, "Well, just notify your own contacts." Not solely meaning is not a bad idea. It's always a good idea if you know that who you may have exposed that you talk to them directly. But at this point, we're not ready to say, "Well, we're not going to try to have the contact tracer reach you."

Governor Phil Murphy: Did you address, "What do you think the maximum caseload could be for contact tracer?"

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: For contact tracer or overall for contact tracing? Obviously –

Governor Phil Murphy: For tracing.

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: I don't have an exact number as the number of people per contact tracer. It goes without saying that at some point they do become overloaded, but now, I can't put an exact number on when that happens.

Governor Phil Murphy: We can come back to you if we've got – a couple of things occur to me. There's a lot – Krystal, I'm coming back to you in a second because there's a lot of movement on Trenton here at the moment. I do think and I actually have thought about this. I suspect Pat, you have, and I suspect Ed, you have. It's probably good hygiene for all of us to keep a general log of where we are, where we've been, and who we've been with. Less here because we're socially distance.

But if we are packed in some place besides just our local – inside the bubble family, our immediate family, I think that's probably a good idea for us to have in the back of our minds. I was at that restaurant. I worshiped on Sunday. I had a meeting at the rock whatever it might be. I think that's smart. So, that if something does happen, you've got it at least – I'm not saying names rank and serial number, but you've got a general sense of where you've been.

Krystal, back to you. This is just in from the mayor. So, again, a lot – and Trenton today, the City of Trenton is having open houses today, through the fourth of December, so, that's through Friday. For the 50 properties that Trenton has up for public auction on December 9, which is a week from Wednesday parallel, I believe. And the information is on the website, Trentonnj.org. So, that's potentially exciting development in the capital city. Thank you. [Brent], give us one second to get the mic to you. Good afternoon.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Why is the rate of transmission been dropping despite the rise in other numbers? What science and data did you specifically use to make today's decisions regarding sports and gatherings? Does the indoor sports suspension apply to things like indoor swimming and gymnastics, group lessons, clinics?

Please describe the recent and outgoing outbreaks at each of the three Veterans homes, how many cases and death? What is being done there? How many nursing home operators have contacted you about not having space to segregate residents returning from Thanksgiving at their family's homes? Are you considering banning elective surgeries again? And how many people in the state health department are quarantining? And how many have tested positive?

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, why don't you check us off with the paradox we've discussed here before with a spot positivity rate, which continues to be sticky, high, or low. As you and I both said today is based on a holiday, and we know that holidays are going to have lower testing. And the data is going to be somewhat distorted versus a rate of transmission. To Brent's question, which has come down each of the past four days, I guess.

Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz: The rate of transmission is a statistical way of looking at where the cases have been smoothed out for over time. So, if the rate of transmission is one, for a long enough period of time, the cases will remain exactly the same. If that number is very high, it could be 10,000. If you're having 10,000 cases a day, and it stays at 10,000 cases a day, your key will be one even though your overall numbers are high.

It's measuring the change not the actual number. What we've seen is we've seen some decrease in the rate of transmission from – and I don't remember the exact number, roughly 1.4 or so down to about 1.1 or so. And what that is telling us is that the rate of increase has been slowing, and that's a good sign. As long as it's

above one, the numbers will continue to climb, which is a bad thing. So, they are climbing but not as fast as they had been. And this compares to again, the spring where we had been above five. So, basically, as I've said, what we saw in the spring, as we saw our cases or hospitalizations everything else associated with it was going up in an elevator. It was going almost straight up.

Now, what we're doing is we're taking more of the stairs, we're going up, but we're going up a whole lot more gradually. And that is because of all the work that people have been doing after all the mitigation, the mass squaring, the social distancing. It's not like that hasn't been working, it has been working. If we hadn't been doing it, we'd be more likely we're in the spring with that extremely rapid uptake in our hospitals like we already would be overwhelmed. It's not doing it perfectly, and we need to keep on going and doing even more to push it down to get that RT below one so that the numbers can get into drop down.

The positivity is just a basis on the total number of tests you're doing. From the strictest sense, I don't really care about the positivity. I care about the total number of cases that that's what really matters. Why do we look at the positivity? The positivity is really a measure as to whether we think we're doing enough testing to find all those cases. When you had a positivity as high as 60% as we touched back in the spring, what that's telling you is well, yeah, clearly weren't testing enough people, so, you weren't finding all the cases.

If the positivity drops further down, and there's no exact number where that is, the World Health Organization recommends around 10% or so, then, that's telling you're doing a good job as far as testing to try to find as many cases as you can.

Governor Phil Murphy: What scientifically – by the way, there was an article I read recently that folks are saying – I'm not sure whether or not they're making decisions based on science or data. And then, the last quote somebody say, "Having said all this, I'm not sure what I do." And that was a nice touch. We have to make the calls, balls and strikes. And so, in the notion that we're not making these calls based on data is ludicrous. Indoor sports just looking at this, we know that at least 28 outbreaks impacting 170 individuals. We know that as a minimum, so, that's a fact.

We are less concerned on the outdoor gatherings honestly, Brent, but the high school football season is over. As long as folks were wearing masks and socially distancing, it's time to bring that outdoor limit down as well. And so, where we see transmission, we try to understand why and put the right policy in place up against it. And we don't do it just to make ourselves feel good because where does that get us?

I do not have an answer. And we can come back to you. Do you have the veteran's home number of cases? We'll, come back to you on veteran home cases. And also, your question about not having – how many long-term care facilities have come to us and said they do not have enough space to segregate. We have to come back to you both...

Reporter: Does the indoor sports thing apply to...

Governor Phil Murphy: Oh, sorry; apologies.

Brent: – soccer clinics and swim classes...

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll clarify this. And I assume that this will be online and will be out. It includes an indoor organized sport. It does not include you or I going to a batting cage. So, if it's organized and it's an organized activity, I think that's what it is directed at. Did I get that right, Parimal? Yeah.

There's no plans at the moment on elective surgery. Remember, the numbers are going on the wrong direction here, so, this is not a forever and for always. We peaked on COVID hospitalizations at about 8300 in the spring, and that was mid-April. And we're now up about 3000, that's COVID, and then, you add to that other reasons why somebody is in the hospital. So, there's no move on the chessboard right now on elective surgeries. That's not to say it wouldn't happen or it couldn't happen, but we're not there.

The Department of Health I'll just say that to the best of my knowledge, for privacy and other reasons is one positive case that I'm aware of, and it is 10 or fewer people in total. Unless Ed tells me otherwise it's about – I think its high single digits. Thank you, [Nikita].

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: So, I just have three – you've asked people from out-of-state to not visit New Jersey. I'm wondering if –

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm sorry, again?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Sure. So, you've asked people from out-of-state to not visit New Jersey. I'm wondering if that should be taken as you discouraging out-of-state residents from Christmas shopping here, including for stuff like clothing, which is not charged with sales tax. You mentioned that Neera Tanden was appointed or announced as the next OMB director. I'm wondering will she resign from your Restart and Recovery Commission, and do you know of any other staffers within your administration or members of your administration broadly that are under consideration for posts in a Biden White House during the Biden Administration?

And do you support Attorney General Grewal's bid to stop the State Board of Chiropractic Examiners from reinstating the license of Dr. Bajakian, a convicted sex offender? There are also four vacancies on that board. I'm wondering what your timeline to fill those is?

Governor Phil Murphy: Before I answer that, Pat reminds me that the Federal VA is still supporting our veterans' homes through the end of next month, I think, right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We've for them to support it last December 31st. And we're confident that that should happen, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: And they've been great. And the secretary in particular has been really – and their teams have been outstanding. On your third question, I literally have no insight on that. And Nikita, we'll come back to you. I'm not good, no insight. So, the out-of-state travel is does not include transit travel. So, if you're going to work, you're going to worship, you're going to see a doctor, and I assume if you're going to shop, and you're going in and out in the same day, that's exempted from this. That doesn't mean we want you to be letting your hair down and being flagrantly afoul of our regulations.

But there's no there's no restriction on that. Neera we'll have to clearly step down from the commission because the President-elect is not yet president. I'm not sure what time with the timing will be because he is not technically nominated because he's not yet there yet. I know of nobody else. But there's always and I think this is a badge of honor. There's always a lot of interest in our team members.

And we've got a very good relationship with the incoming administration. We're back and forth with them all the time. I know of no one else at the moment, but that doesn't mean that that could not happen. That commission is filled with an incredible talent by example, and that is certainly a possibility. And on the third question, if you'll allow us to come back to you on the question as it relates to the AG.

Just get ourselves organized here. Thank you all. Put the mask up. Thank you all. Ed, thank you for being here wearing a couple of hats today. That as always, we'll keep that young lad, and his family, and everybody in that class in our prayers, Jared, Parimal, Mahan. So, again, unless you hear otherwise, we'll be on the Monday, Wednesday, Friday rhythm. And we'll let you know that if we veer from that. As I said, we'll get another call with the White House this afternoon, which is overwhelmingly focused on vaccines.

And again, we continue to enjoy wide open partnership and communication with both the Trump Administration and the incoming Biden Administration. And we'll continue to do that call balls and strikes as we see them. And the fact that they're speaking with each other, I think is a good thing for everybody.

Folks, again, please, particularly in the teeth of bad weather. This is a classic day here, right? So, we got no choice but to live our lives indoors today, right? Unless your job literally is outside, you're inside today, which means the risk is higher than it would be otherwise. Just everybody, please keep doing what you've been doing. Keep your guard up. Don't let your hair down. And this is not a forever and for always, we are literally – we could have hundreds of thousands of vaccines next month.

Obviously, first and foremost health care workers, frontline, essential, vulnerable communities, but that's the beginning of what we expect will be a wave that gets into very big numbers very quickly and gets to the broad population. Only in a matter of a month that's a huge deal. We just got to keep the bridge strong between today and that better day. So, keep it up, folks. God bless you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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