

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 3rd, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Sorry to be a minute or two behind. We have a lot of ground to cover, so we'll jump in. Good afternoon, everyone. With me is the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, another familiar face, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Great to have you both. On my left is another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel, a cast of thousands. A point of personal privilege, Happy Birthday to New Jersey icon, 87 years old, Frankie Valley.

Before we get into the meat of the order, Pat, as a quick follow-up to something you said at Wednesday's briefing, several of our friends in the media, Elise Young in particular, there was some discussions of potentially filing an Oprah request that they were aghast that you mentioned your dog, a blue tick coonhound, but did not give his name or provide a photo, so everybody, here goes. This is Rudy Clyde Callahan. Don't let it be said – when you all ask us about more information and transparency, don't let it be said that we don't follow up.

On a very serious note, Pat and I were together this morning with the survivors of the triangle honoring the late Sergeant Bryan McCoy who passed in April of last year but passed because of complications – health complications from his work in rescue and recovery at the World Trade Center just after 9/11. I believe, Pat, he is the 74th member of the New Jersey State Police to have been lost in the line of duty. Each and every one of their names were read out as it is every year. Last year it didn't take place because of COVID. It did this year, so to Rosie McCoy and her great family and to the survivors of each of the other 73 members of the state police who lost their lives during – in the line of duty, we say you are forever in our prayers. It was great being with you. Thanks for having me. Jared, you were with us. It was great to see you there as well.

Let's get to the news of the day, and we do have some significant announcements. First up, I'm signing an executive order today moving up the effective date of the reopening steps that we announced last Monday which were to have taken effect one week from today on May 10th. They are all moved up to this Friday, May 7. As a reminder, these included the increasing of the outdoor gathering limits to 500 individuals, increase indoor room capacities to 50% up to 250 individuals for political gatherings, weddings, funerals, memorial services, and performances, reopening dance floors at private catered events. That includes proms. For those of you having your prom this weekend, let it be said that we heard you – increasing capacities at large, outdoor stadiums and venues with more than 1,000 seats up to 50% capacity and other steps. We feel confident in moving up this timetable by three days given the accelerated progress we are seeing in our vaccination program and hospital metrics and lower daily case counts.

Additionally, effective this Friday, we will lift the prohibition on indoor bar side seating. The Department of Health is currently finalizing its guidance, but all impacted restaurant, tavern, and bar owners should be prepared to ensure proper social distancing between patrons at their bars, either the CDC's six-foot requirement or physical partitions. We are counting on restaurants and bar owners to enforce this guidance and prevent congregating at the bar as we have warned all along that those situations present a higher danger of allowing the virus to spread. Also effective this Friday, we will lift the prohibition on buffets and other self-service foods at restaurants. Again, full guidance is being finalized, but we will likely maintain the current limitations requiring food and drinks to be consumed while seated.

Additionally, if you're not seated at your table while eating or drinking, you'll continue to be required to wear a mask. As I noted last week, we have been fully expecting to be able to take additional steps to relax regulations as more people are vaccinated and the weather warms up, and so long as all the vital metrics continue to keep moving in the right directions as they have. Today, additionally, in coordination with Governor Andrew Cuomo in New York and Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, we are ready to announce the next date for this further expansion so long as we do not see any change or backtracking on our current path. With that, here is where we anticipate being on Wednesday, May 19th.

First, we anticipate completely removing the limit on outdoor gatherings. Instead of a hard cap on attendance, we will simply require that all attendees at any outdoor event keep social distances of at least six feet and current mask requirements will remain in place. This means that the events that we all associate with a summer from fireworks displays to parades to the state fair can all go forward as long as attendees are keeping six feet of distance, and should the CDC – as I mentioned a minute ago – revise its six-foot distancing guidance, we will revise our requirements accordingly. I have no inside knowledge here. My guess is that that six-foot number will come down assuming the nation continues to make progress.

Next up at our restaurants – again, this is all effective May 19 – we will remove the current 50% capacity limit and allow restaurants to operate at whatever capacity allows them to continue to ensure a minimum six-foot distance between groups. This will bring indoor dining in line with the current requirement for outdoor dining, which has never had a hard capacity limit but has always been based on table spacing. We will also be removing the prohibition on tables of eight persons or more and tables may be spaced closer than six feet if DOH compliant partitions are in

use. For other indoor settings or businesses currently governed by a percentage-based cap, religious services, retail establishments, casinos, gyms and fitness clubs, personal care businesses, indoor and outdoor amusement and recreation businesses, and indoor and outdoor pools, the current 50% capacity limits will be lifted and be replaced with the same requirement as I just mentioned: a minimum of six feet of social distance between individuals and groups.

We are also substantially revising our indoor gathering limits. The general indoor gathering limit which applies to house parties and other purely social events such as a birthday party will be doubled from 25 to 50 people. For catered events, funerals or memorial services, performances and political activities, which are currently limited to 50% of a room's capacity up to a maximum of 250, the percentage capacity will be scrapped. This means that these events will simply be limited to a maximum of 250 people so long as social distancing can be maintained. We are also stating that gatherings overseen by commercial entities, whether they be conferences, expos, or trade shows, will also be subject to the higher 250-person limit, and to accommodate even larger indoor gatherings for which 250 people would be insufficient, whether they be sporting events or concerts or the like, we are stating that all indoor – all large, rather, indoor venues with 1,000 or more fixed seats can operate at 30% while maintaining the requirement that ticketed groups remain at least six feet apart. A reminder that for all indoor activities our current requirement that everyone wear a face mask except when eating or drinking is unchanged.

Again, these steps will take effect in two weeks from this Wednesday on May 19th, so long as – and again, this is an important footnote – so long as we do not see a backslide in our metrics. Given the tremendous work that so many of you are continuing to put in to improve our numbers, I have every expectation – I'm sure Judy and Ed and Pat join me – that we will hit this May 19th target date with a bulls-eye. These are the most aggressive steps we have taken to reopen to date, and we feel confident that we can do this safely because our numbers have trended decisively in the right direction over the past three weeks. We have done exactly what we have said we would do all along. We have made these decisions based on our public health metrics and not on politics.

While our COVID numbers are going down, there is one thing we can do above all else to ensure that these numbers keep going down, especially as we reopen further, and that is to get vaccinated. Every single activity that we just discussed is substantially safer if you are vaccinated than if you are unvaccinated. Therefore, on a parallel track – this is going to take a while, Judy. I hope you've got some time on your hands today. On a parallel track, we are going to also put into overdrive our work to make sure that we do everything we possibly can to meet our initial target of 4.7 million vaccinated New Jerseyans by the end of June. That means making sure everyone who gets a first shot – excuse me – of either Pfizer or Moderna gets back for their second, and it means reaching out and blanketing the state with information to help convince those who may still be on the fence to decide to play their part in our opening and recovery by being vaccinated.

As I noted last week, we knew right from the get-go going into our vaccination effort that there would be a huge pent up demand that would see our initial numbers quickly skyrocket to where they are now, and we always knew there would be a leveling off after that initial rush, so we have used our time wisely and spent the last several months preparing for just this moment and creating a comprehensive multimedia public awareness campaign to help us to get to our goals. This campaign is hitting their targets with a variety of strategies from digital marketing and virtual town halls to broad-based television ads, and today I am proud to be able to announce our additions to that effort outlining what we are calling Operation Jersey Summer. We didn't just sit, by the way, in a dark room and make these strategies up. In partnership with the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, which continues to do great work – njprf.org – look them up – we undertook cutting edge research efforts speaking directly with New Jerseyans to make sure we're addressing their concerns and their hopes with the right words, and now we're ready to put this effort into full swing.

In many ways we are running a campaign, and as with any campaign, you know right away who was with you and who was going to need a little bit more of a push. With 7,035,235 shots in arms as of today, we know who's with us and already getting vaccinated, and we thank and each and every one of you. Now we are pulling out all the stops, unlike, I might add, any other American state to bring the rest of New Jersey along. First, we're making it easy for you to get vaccinated. Each of our six mega-sites are now offering walk-up hours every day where you can be vaccinated with no appointment necessary. We know many other locations are also offering no appointment walk-up shots. We know that one reason some folks may not have yet gotten their shot is because they tried to make an appointment and were discouraged by the wait time or they found that available appointments that conflicted with their work or school hours or time they needed to be caring for a family member. Walk-up hours eliminate those roadblocks.

From our mega-sites where we can, we're also going to use them as a center of a hub and spoke model to move available doses directly into neighboring community centers and medical offices. We're also going to try to make vaccination numbers more localized and more widely available, collating and releasing hyper local data giving local officials and community leaders a clear look into what's happening in their neighborhoods so they can work with us at the state level and with their county partners to focus on lagging areas. I'll show you this for example. This slide shows 16 municipalities with populations over 10,000 where currently fewer than 40% of eligible residents have received an initial dose and where we are currently deepening our engagement with local officials to move forward together.

This is not going to be a competition between towns and communities or meant to shame any community. To the contrary, but having these numbers out there for everyone to see is important to ensuring that everyone is working and pulling together. Like any good campaign, we're also putting an army of boots on the ground safely knocking on doors in communities throughout the state. They will work directly in under-served communities reaching out to residents with information and resources necessary that will help them make the decision to be vaccinated. Our call center through the Department of Health under Judy's leadership has been proactively reaching out to residents who preregistered for vaccinations but who have yet to make their appointment, and they are connecting them directly with live operators to help them make the critical vaccine appointment.

Also, our Office of Innovation under Beth Novak is working with the Department of Health to begin a targeted email program to the hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans who have signed up for email updates ensuring they have the information they need to protect themselves and their families. We are also continuing our work with our diverse communities of faith, especially in under-served communities. We know our faith leaders are people residents trust, and trust has been so critical to every aspect of our fight against COVID. We relied on our faith leaders to help us expand COVID testing throughout last summer, and over the past three months, they have opened their doors to turn sanctuaries and community rooms into vaccination centers. These vital efforts will continue, and we will partner with them for an effort we're calling Grateful for the Shot, making it possible for congregants to go directly from religious services to vaccination sites. This is a, if I might add, a knock-off on Souls to the Polls, which is a similar notion of folks worshipping and going to vote. This is ripped out of that playbook.

Finally, perhaps at the other end of the spectrum, Pat, we're not going to be afraid to try new things. Our office and the Department of Health in partnership with the Brewers Guild of New Jersey are teaming up to launch our new shot and a beer program to encourage eligible New Jerseyans ages 21 and over to get vaccinated. Any New Jerseyans who gets their first vaccine dose in the month of May and takes their vaccination card to one of the following participating breweries as proof of vaccination will receive a free beer courtesy of the participating brewery. It's the only reason I regret waiting to get my first shot. That's all I can say. We got our second on Friday, which was in April. I just want the record to show, so if you see me showing up, you'll know that that's – I'm not playing by the rules.

We are incredibly grateful to the breweries who have already stepped up to be a part of this effort, and I want to read them out because this is coming directly from them: Battle River Brewing in Toms River, Bradley Beer Project in Bradley Beach, Bolero Snort Brewing Company in Carlstadt, Brix City Brewing Company in Little Ferry, Carton Brewing Company down by me in Atlantic Highlands, Flounder Brewing Company in Hillsborough – that's the stop I

believe we made to talk our first discussion last October as I recall on restaurant and bar aid – Flying Fish Brewing Company in Somerdale, Gaslight Brewery and Restaurant in South Orange, Hackensack Brewing Company, Kane Brewing Company in Ocean Township, Little Dog Brewing company in Neptune – also by me – Magnifying Brewing Company in Fairfield in Essex County, and Riverhorse Brewing Company right down the road here in Ewing. Again, our tanks to the brewers who have come on board, and we look forward to adding more to the list.

As I noted, this is a public awareness and information campaign that has been educated through listening to New Jerseyans and working alongside our community leaders. Over the next eight weeks, we are going to be doing everything we can to make sure that every New Jerseyan recognizes that the vaccines in our toolbox are safe and that they're effective. We're going to make sure they know how easy it is to get vaccinated. We're going to do everything to make sure that everyone understands that our ability to end this pandemic and to get our economy and our communities back up and fully running again requires all of us to keep working together and getting vaccinated.

Don't forget, another piece of this, you can play a direct role in this as well through our Your Voice, Your Shot video contest. Your own 30-second video telling us why you chose to be vaccinated could be voted to become a central part of our statewide COVID-19 public health campaign, so please go to that website, covid19.nj.gov/yourvoice for more information.

Operation – actually Dan, let's go back to Operation Jersey Summer. That's got a nice look to it. There we go. Folks, this is how I think about this. I want to put this in a context of 1945. We had been at war for the past 14 months with this virus, and just as in that era, we are winning this war. Then and now, we're still losing too many of our comrades. What this is, Operation Jersey Summer, this is our comprehensive effort, again, unlike any effort in any other American state to drop the hammer. It's time to take Berlin and put a stake into the heart of this virus. That is what this is about.

Let's get to the numbers. Over the weekend, we passed two significant numbers in our vaccination program as we administered both our 7 millionth shot and counted our 3 millionth fully vaccinated person. Additionally – and Judy, I think you and Ed are going to provide more color on this in a couple minutes. We have identified approximately 155,500 New Jersey residents who have been fully vaccinated at out-of-state sites, whether it's you work in New York, you got a second home somewhere, or you're in college somewhere. I know you'll go through that. When we add them to the 3,112,660 New Jerseyans vaccinated at one of our in-state sites, the total of fully vaccinated residents climbs to more than 3.25 million. These numbers are reflected on our dashboard and will be updated as we receive more information.

As we see the number of vaccinated individuals climb, we continue to see the numbers of new coronavirus infections decline. Today, we're announcing 1,077 either positive PCRs or presumed positive antigen rapid test results. Now surely 1,077 is too many for our taste, but let's recall that exactly one month ago today, that number was 4,433. The rate of transmission is artificially low. I think it's 0.37, Judy, and I think you and Ed and team believe this is because it includes that day where we took the tenth – recharacterized the 10,000 cases, but it is still, by any measure, meaningfully under 1, and that's a huge deal. The positivity for Thursday's 35,761 recorded PCR tests was 4.94%. Again, not where we want it to be, but without question, progress.

This progress is carrying over to our schools where we continue to see a transition away from remote learning to either full-time, in-person instruction or hybrid schedules that have students and educators in their classrooms part-time during the week. You could read that, I think, for yourselves. This is significant. I would focus on the all-remote piece of this. The number of districts or schools remaining in the all-remote posture is just 17. That's down from 47 last Monday. The number of students this impact has had decreased by 125,000 over the past week, and you can see it's just under 54,000 or 4% of all students. Of these 17 hybrid locations, I believe eight are single-charter schools. By my count, if you add up the hybrid and in-person, and you take half of a little bit of each and a little bit of that, that combo, that last category, 89.74% of our kids are in some form of in-person instruction. That has climbed. I think we have every expectation to believe it will continue to climb.

Likewise, the situation across our healthcare systems continues to improve. As of last night's report, 1,424 patients are in the hospital, 1,317 are confirmed positive. Again, by comparison a month ago, 2,191 in our hospitals. There were 325 patients in ICU beds, 197 requiring ventilators throughout the day yesterday, 148 live patients left, 128 were admitted, and our hospitals reported, not yet confirmed, 18 losses of life. However, with the heaviest of hearts today, we are reporting 16 additional confirmed COVID-related deaths. This brings the statewide total to 22,991 with an additional 2,625 deaths still listed as probable.

Let's take a moment as we do every day to acknowledge and remember three more of those we have lost. Let's begin with Vito Lombardi, from the Colonia section of Woodbridge Township. That's Vito in the back. He was just 54 years old, not surprisingly, born in Italy. He came to New Jersey at the age of 2, first living with his family in Irvington, then calling Kenilworth home for a decade. He graduated from Brearley High while living there before settling with his wife in Colonia 25 years ago to raise their family. Vito was an assistant mechanic supervisor for Union County for the past 35 years. When he wasn't at the garage, he was helping his kids, whether by leading Boy Scout Troop 143 in Woodbridge or holding down responsibilities as a Colonia High School band parent.

He could also be found in his garden, tending to his beloved fig trees. He will be remembered for his kind and generous spirit. Vito leaves behind his family and they're all in that picture, his wife of 25 years, Lilliana, their children, Antonio and Graciella. I had the honor of speaking with the three of them on Wednesday, along with his sister, Angela, and brother-in-law, George, among other in-laws and relatives he leaves behind. I had the honor of meeting his son, Antonio, on the right, who is a 2020 graduate of Rider University when he introduced me at an event hosted by the Rebovich Institute for New Jersey politics. My friend, Mike Erasmus and the institute director recalled seeing Vito in the audience, beaming with pride as his son introduced the governor. I know he is still proud of the tremendous young citizens his children have become. We are honored that Vito found his American dream in New Jersey, and we know he'll still be watching over his family and his fig trees. May God bless him and watch over him and his family.

Next up, let's come right here to the Trenton area to remember Bliss Michelson, the Blissman, an accomplished musician and long-time classical music host at WRTI Radio. Bliss was 71 years old. He was born in West Chicago and picked up a double bass while in junior high school, sparking a love of classical music that would lead to his earning a bachelor's degree in music and performance from the Chicago Musical College at Roosevelt University. Across his career as a professional musician, he would perform with the San Antonio Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic, New Jersey Capital Philharmonic, Staten Island Philharmonic, and New Town Chamber Orchestra. In an orchestra, he was one of many, but every Monday for the past seven years, listeners of WRTI could find him on their dial. He previously worked as the production manager at another West Windsor station, WWFM, for nearly 20 years.

Away from work, Bliss could often be found tending to the sheep at his home outside of Hightstown. Bliss's wife – this is unbelievable – the oboist, Peggy Wilttrout also died of COVID back in February. They had met at the Jersey shore during a rehearsal with the orchestra of Saint Peter by the Sea in Ocean Grove and were married in 2013. Bliss is survived by his niece, Amy, who I had the great honor of speaking with on Wednesday, and a nephew and other relatives. We thank Bliss for a lifetime of beautiful music. May his life and career inspire tomorrow's musicians. May God bless and watch over him and Peggy.

Finally for today, we honor the short, yet spirited life of this guy, Jeremiah Trusty. He was just 38 years old and called Jersey City home. Born and raised outside of Philadelphia, the son of a mother who worked in sales at Dupont and a father who was a postal carrier, Jeremiah showed numerous talents at an early age. He could sing and act, had a tremendous sense of humor and timing. He was a standout basketball player. His aptitude on the court earned him a scholarship to play basketball at Wheaton College in Illinois where he earned a degree in communications. Never one to be pigeonholed throughout his career, he would tend rides at Disney World, play basketball in Japan, work in

improvisational comedy and be a successful model and commercial actor. He enrolled in musical theater workshops at the New York Film Academy and studied under the famous actor and director, Tom Christopher Warren. Sadly, due to the pandemic, we will never be able to see Jeremiah fulfill his promise. He is a light snuffed out way too soon.

He leaves behind his mom, Diane, who I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday. She's in Delaware, and that conversation was among the more brutal that I've had over the past 14 months. He also leaves his sister, Ionna, and brother-in-law, Terence, and brother, Isiah. He also leaves his niece, Armani – nieces, I guess, Armani, Ameri, Ajani, and Mason. He was pre-deceased by his father, Raymond. Jeremiah's mantra was, and I quote him, "I am going to help you and make you happy." For 38 years, he lived those words. May his memory bring smiles for years and years to come. May God bless him and his family. So three more tremendous lives lost, three more families added to the list of those who have already experienced the worst of this pandemic. We honor them all.

Next up, switching gears for a second. Let's honor another organization that is helping its community stay strong throughout these times by keeping families fed. The HealthBarn Foundation of Ridgewood in Bergen County was founded by registered dietitian and author, Stacy Anton. Founded in 2015, the HealthBarn Foundation has stayed true to its mission, which is to provide nutritious meals to children, families, and seniors in need across Bergen County and North Jersey. Prior to the pandemic, through its various programs, Stacy and her team of volunteers were logging thousands of hours to provide more than 9,000 hot meals for families. They partnered with the Ridgewood Chamber of Commerce to provide meals to front-line workers and families.

The struggles with food insecurity stemming from the pandemic have meant that the HealthBarn Foundation is now averaging more than 1,300 meals a day, relying on a small army of more than 100 volunteers to deliver them. For her tremendous efforts, Stacy was invited to ring the closing bell on the Nasdaq Exchange this past January. More recently, the HealthBarn Foundation received a grant of \$1 million through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority Sustain and Serve NJ program. This means Stacy and her team can partner with Bergen County restaurants to provide the meals the community needs, and more than \$550,000 of that grant has already been put back into Ridgewood's restaurant communities. I caught up with Stacy on Wednesday, had a great conversation, and thanked her for the great work she and her volunteers are doing for the families who rely upon HealthBarn Foundation and the restaurants who are being kept strong through their grant. She hopes that the Sustain and Serve NJ program keeps going. She made the fair point there was food insecurity before the pandemic, and there's going to be food insecurity after it. This program is the ultimate win-win and this organization, HealthBarn Foundation, is as good as it gets. Check them out, healthbarnfoundation.org.

Next I once again must note that while we're making great strides against the pandemic here at home, there are others of our world that are facing their darkest days. Right now, all eyes are on India, the nation from which so many of our fellow New Jerseyans hail and where many still have family and friends. There are several great organizations working to provide the supplies that India needs to turn the tide, ventilators and oxygen, PPE among them. These groups – this is not a complete list, but these are good groups, I promise you. These groups include the New Jersey chapter of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, also the Sewa International USA. Aid to India is also being directed by numerous international organizations including, as you can see, Oxfam, Rapid Response, and UNICEF among others. Tammy and I made some donations across these five organizations today to help speed relief to India. If you all have the means, I encourage you to do the same. As I said last Wednesday, the world stood with us when we were at our lowest. Now it's time to return the favor, and it is especially noteworthy for us to stand with India, which holds such strong connections with our state and our people.

Before we leave this, money is clearly a big part of this but it's not the only piece of this. I know there's a hospital called, Dan, I believe on right now between the Hospital Association, members of our administration with hospitals of India, and I assume it's their administration. I had a fair number of conversations over the weekend on specific items. We will continue to do everything we can, whether it's money or other resources that India needs in their hour of need.

Lastly, and this is awful, I must acknowledge the tragedy in Israel last week when a crush of celebrants at a religious festival in Mount Moran turned into a stampede. One of the 45 who loves their lives was a fellow New Jerseyan, this guy, 19 year old Donny Morris of Bergenfield. We send our condolences to all in Israel and especially to Donny's family. May his memory be a blessing. I tried his dad earlier and sent him a note, but they are in Israel, I believe returning tomorrow. Please, God, keep this lad and his family in your prayers.

That does it for me. I know we covered a lot of ground but the fact that we can do so much at this time is because you all have done so much over the past year plus to help us crush the curves and position ourselves for victory against this pandemic. Again, keep in mind, we have been at war. We want one last huge offensive battle to run this thing into the ground once and for all. Let's keep it up. Keep getting vaccinated. Keep using your common sense. We are getting there, and we will get there together.

It's now my pleasure to welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. As the Governor shared, our vaccination program surpassed the 7 million doses administered mark, and more than 3 million New Jerseyans have been fully vaccinated. That's two incredible milestones. To keep this momentum going, we know we have to be more strategic to get even more residents vaccinated. As the Governor shared, we began the deployment of the COVID Community Corp over the weekend at University Hospital's Health and Wellness Festival in Newark. Members of the corp engaged with about 200 individuals answering questions and providing accurate information about the vaccines.

Throughout the event on Saturday, 338 doses were administered; 87 of the individuals who received their first dose that day were actual walk-ins. The goal of the COVID Community Corp is to increase public confidence in and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine, particularly in under-served communities or hard-to-reach communities across New Jersey. We began recruiting members in March and since that time, more than 900 members have been trained on COVID vaccine 101, vaccine eligibility, and pathways to register for the vaccine. These individuals will be visiting under-served communities to connect people to the vaccine by scheduling appointments and to help address misinformation and vaccine hesitancy. They will also assist those with limited English proficiency and individuals with limited technology access with the vaccination process.

We also used one of our mobile command centers – command units for the first time at the festival in Newark. In advance of rolling out the mobile units, the department has identified 40 municipalities that can benefit from mobile or community vaccination efforts based on the percent of racial and ethnic minorities, the percent of those living in poverty, COVID-19 death rates or disease burden, and vaccination rates. Ten of the forty municipalities have already benefited from community vaccination engagements in partnership with FEMA and faith-based organizations. The mobile command centers will start providing mobile vaccine events to the remaining 30 identified municipalities. The COVID Community Corp and our mobile units will be vital in helping us meet our vaccination goals.

We have also been tracking doses administered to New Jersey residents out-of-state and have added that number to our dashboard today. Three hundred and fifty-seven thousand, nine hundred and seventy-four doses have been administered to New Jersey residents out-of-state. Additionally, based on what we are seeing in our vaccine program, we've estimated the number of New Jersey residents vaccinated out-of-state who are fully vaccinated is probably around 156,261. To create that estimate, we divide fully vaccinated residents by the total doses administered and multiply that by the number of doses delivered to New Jersey residents out-of-state.

Moving onto my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 1,424 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation last evening. These numbers continue to decline. As a point of reference, the last time we were at this number of hospitalizations was last June. Three hundred and twenty-five of our patients are in ICU or critical care, and sixty-one percent of the ICU patients are on ventilators.

There are 3,147 reports of the CDC variants of concern in New Jersey; 2,901 of these reports are the UK variant B-117. Additionally, we're reporting 97 cases of the Brazilian variant, P-1, 7 reports of South African variant B-1.351, and 142 cases of the California variants, which are in two categories: B-1.427 and 1.429. Since the last press briefing, there has been one new report of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. We now have 116 cumulative cases in the state, but none of these children are currently hospitalized.

At the state veterans' homes since our last press briefing, there have been two new positive resident cases, one in Menlo Park and one in Paramus. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there are no new cases among patients. As reported, the RT today of .37 appears lower than expected and most likely is due to the 10,000 duplicate cases removed from our case count due to the seven-day rolling average. This is factored into that number. On a daily basis, the RT is approximately about .62. We will be continuing to evaluate that and see how this result goes forward. Suffice it to say, we are definitely under one and the lowest RT we've seen in quite a long period of time.

In terms of positivity in New Jersey, the daily positivity as of April 29th is 4.94; northern part of the state, 4.47, the central part of the state, 4.76; and the southern part of the state, 6.78. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe, mask up, physically distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested, and let's get vaccinated, NJ. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen to all. Thank you, Judy, for today and for everything. Pat, I know you got some uncomplacency. Again, it was a really moving morning, I have to say. Bless you and thank you and your colleagues for that. I know you also have a hand in the Grateful for the Shot element of the campaign here, so any or all of the above, please.

State Superintendent of Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon and thank you and the LG and AG and Director Maples for being there this morning. It was good to be together on that somber event. With regards to compliance, ABC is reviewing apparent violations of the Executive Orders. They went out to both Ocean and Cape May Counties. They did 23 in Ocean and are reviewing three establishments; that would be the Breakers Kitchen and Tap in Waretown, Black Dog - 7 Stools in Little Leg Harbor, as well as Klee's Bar and Grill in Seaside Heights. They did 12 inspections in Cape May County and are reviewing seven apparent EO violations, and they are in the following seven places: Yesterday's in Upper Township, Tuckahoe Inn, also in Upper Township, Levari's Seafood and American Grill in Upper Township, Old City Pub in Wildwood, The Deck in Holly Beach in Wildwood, Firehouse Tavern, Wildwood, and Blue Water Grille in Wildwood.

Yes, to your point about Operation Jersey Summer, I was on a Zoom call Saturday morning with Bishop Tyrone McCombs, South Jersey Ecclesiastical jurisdiction pastors among community engagement and a building trust phone call with – engaging with our – those that we serve, but a big part of that meeting was their agreeing to assist us with that Grateful for the Shot campaign, so a big thank-you to Bishop McCombs and those pastors from South Jersey who have agreed to step up so we can do our part in getting shots in the arm. I will just close with the understanding that Rudy Kline's cellphone has now blown up from his family and friends in Alabama where we rescued him from. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, that's nuts. I love what you're doing with his headgear there, too, very nice. We'll leave compliance where it is. That's a higher batting average than we've had of late, so that's a little bit concerning. We got to make sure we're doing the right thing. Again, we're taking a whole bunch of steps here today which should make it easier to comply. I would just say my – the number one thing that I would be focused on – I'm sure the ABC will be focused on after May 19th – is congregating at a bar inside. That's going to be, I think, our number one compliance challenge. Folks, know that we will be – our colleagues will be focused on that.

I think we'll be in a similar rhythm this week that we've been of late, with you virtually tomorrow and then back here at 1 o'clock and probably virtual for Thursday and Friday. I think that's it for now. Mike, is that you? We'll start over with Michael and sweep across. Good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Michael Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon, Governor. Thank you. What's left, if anything, to still open up? Are there any big remaining things that should be opened up or will be opened up soon? Can you talk about enforcement of the social distancing at some of the restaurants and bars and so forth? Will summonses still be released? Then a question – or issued, I should say. Then a question from my colleague, Wayne Parry in Atlantic City. Wayne asks, he says, "Anti-smoking advocates are calling for the temporary COVID-related ban on smoking at casinos to be made permanent once the pandemic is under control or over. Do you favor doing that or are you going to let a return to the pre-COVID 25% on casino floors?" Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: We're going to try to do this quickly today because we got – and I'm honored to go next door after this and nominate another extraordinary member of our cabinet. What's left, Michael, is a fair amount of stuff. Some of it's in the fed's hands and some of it's in our hands. The six-foot distance is still very much out there; that could change. We do have capacity restrictions on the inside, so at a catered event, it is what we've said it is. I think large seat venues on the inside, we've said 1,000 seats or more. You're at 30% capacity. That, hopefully, will change. Again, outdoor fixed-seat venues, what's keeping the cap after May 19th on Met Life, if you want to put a fine point on it, is the six-foot requirement, which I think by our math, if everyone bought a single ticket – and this is – so it's going to be higher than this, but it's 28,000 plus or minus. That clearly we want to see go up. There's a number of things that we still have in place, but these are huge steps, unlike any we've taken since the beginning of this and I hope we can take more.

Will things be enforced? You betcha, and I think I anticipated your question. The one that I'm looking at and am most concerned about I think you are, as well, and Judy is, is indoor bar congregating. We're going to allow this Friday indoor bar seating. Either you're six feet apart or you've got DOH-sanctioned partitions. I'm not sure Judy's going to ever bar to confirm that, but Pat and I are very happy. I know Ed will join us as well to help ease the burden. We don't want people standing around on top of each other.

I've got no opinion yet on – we haven't considered the anti-smoking piece. I've seen the advocates make, I think, a very compelling case. I was in and around casinos a couple of times this weekend and by the way, it looked like everyone was doing the right thing. Really impressive when you see – talk about partitions at every single gaming table; they exist. People wearing face coverings pretty much to the person, really impressive, but no news on that, Michael, yet. Good to see you.

Brent, let's come across to you. Good afternoon.

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Good afternoon. What about increasing in-person government services? Will you still keep issuing public health emergencies now? Does this affect the fate of eviction and foreclosure moratoriums? Off-topic, what do you think about Pine Valley Golf Club finally admitting women and have you ever played there? NJ.com ran a story this weekend saying women appointees hold only 28% of seats on state boards and commissions. What can be done about this and would you support a law calling for all boards to be 50% women?

Governor Phil Murphy: I missed your – you went so fast I missed – I got government services, public health, and what was the next one?

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Government services, public health emergencies. Does any of this affect the fate of eviction and foreclosure moratoriums?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, I got it. I understand the government services in terms of when they're back in person?

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, that'll continue to depend on which part of government, but a reason that is – the reason to we got to all go back in the office because it's been 14 months isn't a good enough reason. It has to be you're going back because the virus has been driven to the ground; the positivity rate is at an acceptable level; we have proper health protocols in the offices, but it'll depend on the office. You've been going in every day for 14 months; I've been doing the same; Pat's been doing the same. That'll continue to depend on what part of government you're in. Obviously motor vehicles has got a big in-person component, and that will continue to be the case.

I would hope that we would be able to bring these public health emergencies that we have to extend every month to an end, but I think what you heard from me unequivocally is we're in the last big – we think the last big assault of this pandemic, and we have to succeed in that assault, but I hope that's sooner than later.

None of what we're announcing today has any impact on evictions. That continues to be a status quo.

Brent, I can't believe you asked me if I've ever played at Pine Valley. You should've asked me do I play golf. I caddied over the weekend for my son and drove a cart for him for a few hours. I'm not a golfer; I play about once every year or two. I've never played there, but I do think – as I understand it, they're now going to allow women to be members. That's high time. I was a member of the Hasty Pudding Theatricals at Harvard, which was all male until a couple years ago, and that's the same statement I made then; it's about time.

Listen, I saw the headline of the article; I didn't read it, but I would just say this. It is a work in progress. Diversity generally, gender diversity specific to the article in question, and I could tell you I'm incredibly proud of – I'll give you by example. We replaced four male board members of the Economic Development Authority with four female directors. I just nominated two female prosecutors; the week before that, two members to the port authority board. Our Lieutenant Governor is Sheila Oliver. Judy represents, I believe, a majority female cabinet and the most diverse in our state's history. I'm literally walking 40 feet to my left to nominate another member of our cabinet who's an outstanding woman.

On the one hand, I feel like we've made a lot of progress and on the other hand, I'm going to be the last guy to say that we have accomplished our mission. We have still as a state, as a country, and my guess is well beyond, it is a work in progress, so we have a long way to go. Thank you.

Daniel, good afternoon.

Daniel: Hi, Governor. Hope you're doing well.

Governor Phil Murphy: I hope you're well. Nice to see you.

Daniel: Likewise. Given the restrictions are being – how many restrictions are being relaxed, I'm curious to what extent you need the 4.7 million, 230 threshold, and how that threshold was met in the first place of that many doses by that date. If I understand correctly, there's 250 persons for conferences and training shows and other business events. It doesn't seem that helpful for these events where there's generally thousands of attendees, so how could this help them? Lots of restaurants just don't have the space to be doing six-foot distancing, and they don't have really good outdoor seating. This doesn't really look this will be that helpful to them, either, does it? Regarding the COVID situation unfolding in India, have you seen any indication that that particular variant is present in the state?

Governor Phil Murphy: That it's what, sorry?

Daniel: That that particular variant is present in the state, any area, or that you're monitoring – of the population – any area in the state that you're focusing more on? One more, just given the small presence of the J&J vaccine and the two doses wait time period between Pfizer and Moderna, does the state essentially have until the end of this month to reach its 4.7 million goal by June 30th? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'm going to start and Judy and

Ed can weigh in. Ed, we've got to get your money's worth here so particularly the Indian variant you may want to come in on. The 4.7 objective was 70%, 7-0 percent, of our adult population, and I think Judy is – Judy and/or Ed have referred to this over time. If you take that number plus the presumed folks who have some immunity because they've had coronavirus, that combination gets you to a level that Tony Fauci and others talk about of 85% of the population, so that number continues to be an important objective for us. We always say an initial objective. This is the surge to get us to that initial.

I recognize raising it to 250 for conferences is not the promised land, but at least it's a step – a meaningful step in the right direction. Let me just walk you through why this may be a bigger step than it appears. I'll think about a couple of casinos with big fixed seating indoor like the big theater at the Ocean Resort or the theater at the Hard Rock to pick two. Borgata's got one as well. They use more of ballroom setup. It's 250 persons per room, so that's an important point. These places – you look at the back of Harrah's with their big convention center. They've got a massive back end there, and secondly, if you've got a fixed-seating theater, you could combine as – if my math is right, on May 19th, you could combine 250 people in various rooms for a breakout along with 30% of the capacity at the fixed-seating arena, and I don't know how many they sit, but they sit quite a bit. I'm not suggesting for a second that it's full on open for business, but we think it's a pretty meaningful step.

On restaurants, we also think it's meaningful, and again, we can't – to say that we've dropped everything right now is inaccurate. We have not, but these are big, big steps, and there really are two steps here. One is to allow bar seating, which we've heard from countless restaurants is – was one of their biggest restrictions on being able to get more people in under their capacity definition. We've rejected raising 50% to 75% for the very reason you pointed out because the six-foot rule bites first in most places as opposed to your ability to get more capacity, and so we believe that that combination of bar seating and saying you've got no capacity inside as long as you're six feet apart is meaningful. A big meaningful step would be – we've alluded to this – further step would be if the CDC drop the six-foot guideline, and my guess is they will at some point.

I will ask Judy and Ed to comment further on the 4.7 Million or the variants that are being seen in India, and your last question is particularly given with the so far modest supplies of J&J – no second bite at the apple. You're good on this – and therefore you need the two-dose vaccines, Moderna or Pfizer, are going to be the overwhelming weapon. You're right. End of May, early June, that's it. Again, can we use J&J to back and fill in June if we have to? Yes, but if you've got – one of these is three weeks apart, which is what I had, Pfizer, successfully on Friday, by the way, Judy. No fallout other than they added ten more pages to my remarks today, which may be part of the reaction to the second dose – or four weeks Moderna, you get end of May early June, and you're absolutely right. Comments on the 4.7, the Indian variants, is the timetable right on the vaccine?

Department of Health Commissioner Health Judith Persichilli: I'll talk about the 4.7. We still think that holds. We know at this point we probably need about 2.4 million doses to complete the regimen of the two-dose. I'm putting J&J aside. If everyone was in a two-dose regimen, that would be 1.2 million people showing up for their second dose – they've already gotten their first dose – and another about 640,000 individuals that need to get first and second doses, so we are getting now about 450,000 doses a week directly to the points of dispensing that we as a state have put up, and then there's approximately another 400,00 that go directly to – from the federal government directly to FQHCs and the like, so we think we will make our goal of 4.7 million fully vaccinated by the end of June.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, this operation Jersey Summer is to go on the offense to ensure that happens, right?

Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, how about the variants in India? Are we seeing them here and any reactions you've gotten? Great to see you.

Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure, thank you. The catastrophe that's going on in India now is due to a number of factors, one of which is the fact that they are seeing a new variant there. How much of their increased caseload is due to this variant versus the UK variant, which is circulating through the country, versus everything else that you've heard in the news from their large populations, close crowding, relaxing of restrictions and all those sorts of things are difficult to know for sure. As far as New Jersey goes, we have not yet seen this variant in New Jersey, which does not mean that we won't and does not mean that it isn't circulating in very low numbers here, but it does point once again to the importance of getting vaccinated because we know that these variants are going to continue to arise in different places, and the single best defense that we're going to have going forward is getting vaccinated so that these variants won't be able to take hold.

Governor Phil Murphy: There's a fair amount of evidence, Ed, to that last point that it is a lagging vaccination regime in India, which is the biggest – we focus a lot on oxygen and PPE shortfalls, which are sadly, tragically true, but the root cause is you've got a lagging vaccination program, not that the vaccinations don't work against the variants.

Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: Which is an important distinction.

Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I believe somewhere around 2% of their population has been vaccinated compared to our much higher percentages here.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a big gap. Thank you for that. Thanks, Daniel. Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor. How much today's announcement was due to Mayor DeBlasio announcing the potential full reopening of New York by July 1st?

Governor Phil Murphy: Zero.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Okay, I'll move on. How much of your decisions are based on pressures from governors like Governor Cuomo and Governor Lamont? Is that multistate compact that you had used to issue decisions early in the pandemic back up and running after it seemed to have broken down especially with Governor Lamont announcing 100% indoor dining some time ago?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll have to give you a two-part answer on this one. First part, zero. No pressure. Why all of the sudden would we start buckling under pressure giving all the crap that's been coming at us over the past 14 months? That's not how we operate, but the more constructive answer to your – the second part of that question is yeah, we really have felt on these steps they're so meaningful that getting some broad – again, not at every microstep but having – even I'd say in this case more than thematically but getting a fair amount of coordination to get the region right, we all three of us thought that made sense.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Then I'd like to ask what your message is to small restaurants and bars. Some small venues, some small restaurants, some bars will not be able to increase capacity because of the six-foot distancing, and some may not be able to afford those partitions. I wanted to ask your message to them. For the commissioner, the Governor talked about these restrictions, these openings staying in place unless there is a backslide in metrics. What would a backslide in metrics look like? What would the line be for an RT or case numbers that could cause a tightening of restrictions? For Dr. Lifshitz –

Governor Phil Murphy: Last one if you could, Alex.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: How often do you brief the governor on these numbers, and how much input do you have in reopening decisions?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to take the lead on all these, and Judy and Ed can come in behind me. Small restaurants and bars, I think I've answered this with Daniel. We were – the evidence was unequivocal on the inside – talking about the inside now – that the two steps that we could take that would give them the most amount of oxygen – no pun intended – was to allow them bar seating and lift the capacities completely while keeping the six-foot distance. It did not make any sense as we studied this and thought about it putting the bar seating aside to go from 50 to 75, for instance. That doesn't get it done when you've got the six feet in place, so I would say to them two things – three things probably. This is the most responsible, biggest step we feel we can take. Secondly, I would – again, I'm not making news here, but I'll bet you the six feet comes down at some point, and thirdly, we're still awaiting guidance on the American Rescue Plan money. There's a lot of money for small businesses, restaurants, and bars, and I hope part of the answer is we can put cash on the barrel to help these folks out.

Judy, you can talk about backslide, and the fact of the matter is our teams speak all the time. We're not going to give you any inside pull. We speak – we don't make these steps – we don't show up here and I'm making all these announcements and Judy and Ed are hearing about them for the first time. These are done across the whole of government with an especially heavy dose of our great leaders in the Department of Health. Judy, I mean, backslide for me would be I would think the metrics we look at positivity, RT, hospitalizations, ICU, vents, less deaths, sadly, because they lag, that those started to go meaningfully in the wrong direction. Is that how –

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's the LI COVID-like illness in our emergency room, which is really the leading indicator.

Governor Phil Murphy: So I think you – and we saw it, sadly, because we had the second wave – first of all, we had the first wave crash, and then we had the second wave come up but more recently and I think more relevantly, the second wave came down. It went up a little but more importantly, it went sideways. I don't want to put words in your mouth but Alex, one question you didn't ask which I think is a worthy follow-on is if it just went sideways right now, would we backtrack on these steps. My answer would be no, if it stayed at the levels we're at now, I think we're pretty comfortable with that. Thank you. Is that gentleman with you? Okay.

Sir?

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: This is somewhat of a follow-up on restaurants, but a lot of the restaurant owners at NJ Spotlight talked to said that expanding wouldn't really make a difference because they can't add any more seats without the extra six feet.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to be quick on the answers because I basically said – I've told you everything I already know about this.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Then sorry, I lost it. Obviously vaccine hesitancy is now something you're tackling pretty aggressively. Do you have any numbers or data as to how prevalent vaccine hesitancy is in New Jersey?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? I apologize. I didn't understand you. Your point was the restaurant questions we'd already answered. Is that what you're saying? We had already addressed them?

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Specifically they were wondering why not shrink down the six feet.

Governor Phil Murphy: We don't run the CDC, so we would be violating – we would be going directly against the CDC's guidelines, and on something like that, I don't know about you but I'm not going there. I think that's something we'll eventually change.

Judy, your last polling on vaccine hesitancy had gone up a little bit because of the J&J challenges, but it was still within the margin of where we needed to get to 70, I think, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: It went down about 3%; that was it the last...

Governor Phil Murphy: The confidence went down.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, confidence went down, not significant.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I think we still think it's within – and again, the way I'm thinking about it is it is 30 and under, and it's gotten up to about 30 or 31 but that really popped up because of the J&J incident. I think it had been mid to low 20s, right? I also think – we've said this many times. The more people who get vaccinated who don't have some severe health reaction, that is a visible proof to your neighbor, your family member, your coworker, your friend that these things not only work but that they're safe. Thank you.

Dave, let's come down to you.

David Mathau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. With regard to the restaurant situation, the partitions that can be used to separate tables, they can then be closer than six feet. I think the people have a feeling that the devil is in the detail here. Is there any thickness of partition, or does it have to be a certain number of inches high, or can any kind of partition be used? For instance, I've seen in some supermarkets they're actually using shower curtains to separate people. Maybe could you give us a little specific information on that? Then the six feet to three feet, maybe Dr. Ed could talk a little bit about – it seems like it's okay for kids to sit in schools three feet apart but it's not okay for people to sit in other locations, obviously according to the CDC so far. Is there anything magical about the six feet? I've also heard in some instances, there – people are – experts are saying you should be 10 or 12 feet if somebody sneezes, but if nobody's coughing or sneezing, then three feet might be fine. Lastly for you, Governor, the double masking apparently is continuing for you. At some point, now that you've been totally vaccinated, will that end? Do we still recommend double-masking for people who have been completely vaccinated? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I will start and Judy and Ed should jump in. On the last one, I think about that, actually. Tammy and I went running on the boardwalk in Atlantic City yesterday, and we run, it's just the two of us and then we've got a couple of Pat's colleagues with us, and they're usually behind us. I think technically, we don't – we're in the same bubble. We're in the same household. We've both been vaccinated, which I think is less relevant in this case. It's more that we're in the same bubble. We were wearing our masks. Our standing policy is if you're outside and you can't socially distance, you should wear your mask but if you can, you don't need to. That obviously does not include someone in your own household. It's habit. I think I'm in the better safe than sorry, but I do think about it. My guess is that's going to change. I think someone responded that President Biden – I think over the weekend, he did not say this but one of his colleagues says he wears it now as much out of habit outside. I have some sympathy with that. I don't know about you, but you should jump in on that.

The six to three, I assume – and Ed, you should weigh in on this. I assume that it is an acknowledgment that kids just have been less impacted by this virus. It's probably partly an acknowledgment that there's no school system in America large enough to keep every kid and educator six feet apart from each other; it's just not doable, but I'd like the experts to comment on that.

I've got no color on the partition. I've not seen any shower curtains, I have to say. Was in a restaurant Saturday night that actually had decent distancing but had plastic six feet high, pretty sturdy separations of a couple of tables where they didn't feel like they could quite get the full six. Pretty impressive, but either six versus three with kids or specs on partitions? Ed, any...

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Try Ed.

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure. First off, as the Governor said, certainly I would strongly encourage – that's what we always do to follow the CDC's lead, so I don't think we'll be changing anything until the CDC goes ahead and changes that. You are correct that there's nothing magical about the number six feet or three feet or ten feet. Clearly the further apart you are in general, the better. In some countries in the world from the beginning, it's been one meter, which is just over three feet has been what they've been talking about from the beginning. As the Governor also said, it is somewhat safer in children both because they tend to be less impacted if they get ill. They're all being masked all the time, and they're also staying in that one group, that one cohort unlike people who might be in a restaurant, or bar, or someplace else where they're mingling back and forth from group to group. They're much more staying together as one group, and that makes it easier to control if something does happen.

I do expect in the future as vaccination rates go up and cases go down that numbers will likely be relaxed as far as distancing goes. Until that time happens, we'll follow what the CDC says.

Governor Phil Murphy: Partition specs?

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: We do have partition specs that are out there. I don't have them off the top of my head exactly what they are. We do list them in our guidance exactly how far they can be and you do have to worry about getting too close to the ceiling because it can become a fire hazard for something like those, but we can get them to you exactly what those specs are.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll get them to you. They do not include shower curtains, though, I believe. Fred, is that you?

Fred Snowflack, Insider NJ: Yes, it is.

Governor Phil Murphy: How are you, man?

Fred Snowflack, Insider NJ: I'm fine, Governor, thank you. Let me ask you a question about politics. You have been outspoken at least pre-pandemic about the tax incentive program. Especially you've highlighted some of the problems related to Camden, which begs the question – we have a mayoral primary going on. You going to make any endorsement in that primary? Just wondering.

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it?

Fred Snowflack, Insider NJ: That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nice to see you.

Fred Snowflack, Insider NJ: Nice to see you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I'm not sure either of those two points are connected. They're not in my mind, by the way, worth saying. I've got no plans to do anything there. That does not mean that we won't, but I appreciate your asking. First time I've been asked that question. If we can come up with a crisper answer, I'll come back to you.

I will say this, by the way. As Camden – I've said this many times. There's about five or six communities – and don't be mad at me if you're not on the list, but I won't even get through all – but Camden's high on that list. As it goes, we go. There's a handful of communities including this one right here and it's a city of enormous, enormous promise in the years ahead. Good to see you.

Nikita?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: I'm wondering have you or your staff reviewed any opinion polls on reopening commissioned by –

Governor Phil Murphy: Hold on one second. Can I call you back in a few? I'm in a press conference. Thanks. That was my son, Charlie, who said to say hi. Go ahead, Nikita.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Charlie. Have you or your staff reviewed any opinion polls on reopening?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not hearing you well.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Have you or your staff reviewed any opinion polls on reopening commissioned by your campaign New Direction New Jersey or the Democratic State Committee? If so, what role, if any, did those polls play in today's decisions? Separately, during a debate last night, Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttelle said senatorial courtesy, a practice that allows senators to indefinitely block gubernatorial nominees from their home county, should be done away with. Do you agree with that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? I'm not aware of any poll on reopenings other than – it's really not on reopenings other than the one that you conduct every few weeks on vaccine take-up, but you don't talk about reopening. That's what I'm saying, so it's not even reopening. The answer's no.

The data that today is based on and last week was based on and May 19th will be based on and this Friday, May 7th will be based on is this data that I carry around with me and put under my pillow at night, which is the health metrics.

I did not see the debate. I've never been asked the question. It's a little bit like Fred asking me his – I've not been asked the question about senatorial courtesy. I have to say my bias just being asked it for the first time is that it's a rightful element of a balance of power. Even where it may frustrate you one day or another, at the end of the day, I think the notion of having the equal branches of government exercising their rights I think is a good thing I think both at the country level and at the state level. Again, that doesn't mean that one day in time you're not frustrated by I wish this happened sooner or this happened. It's not one that's high on my list in terms – you say quick, you can change things in the state. I think it's been largely a good thing over time. I think that's where I'd be.

Thank you all. Again, I've got a real treat awaiting me because I'm going to nominate a fellow cabinet member to the two of you here. Let me just get myself organized here. Again, big steps. Again, I know we went through a lot of them, but just want to reiterate. What we've done is basically two things other than Operation Jersey Summer, which is the proactive last onslaught to put this thing into the ground through vaccination take-up. On reopenings we basically are saying two different buckets. One is the stuff that was going to reopen a week from today we moved up to this Friday. Again, for the folks who have proms this weekend and wanted the dance floors opened, we heard you. Please be responsible. Then we added to that a couple of bells and whistles. The biggest one is indoor bar seating, so that's Category 1. Then Category 2 is that's going to happen this Friday almost no matter what, Judy, right, and Ed?

The stuff on May 19th, which is two weeks from Wednesday, are even bigger steps. Those steps, I think, are very likely to happen. We should plan on them happening, but they are predicated on continued progress on the health front. Again, I think we all expect that'll be the case, but we all together, you and we, have to make sure it's the case.

Then lastly, I think this is back to either Mike or Brent's questions earlier, this is not the end of the journey here. Assuming we meet the objectives, both the health data that we do well on this Operation Jersey Summer, that the numbers continue to go in the right direction, that we're able to continue to make progress beyond May 19th. Let's get this – let's keep on this journey one stop at a time.

With that, everybody, keep doing what you're doing. You're doing an extraordinary job. God bless you all and thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

Statewide

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First Lady Tammy Snyder	(/governor/initiatives/#Environment)	(https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/)	FAQs
Murphy	Health	Snapchat	(/www.nj.gov/faqs/)
(/governor/admin/fl/)	(/governor/initiatives/#Health)	(/https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy)	Contact Us
Cabinet	Law & Justice	YouTube	(/www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html)
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Affordability and	(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)	Scheduling Requests	Legal Statement &
Transparency	News & Events	(/governor/contact/scheduling/)	Disclaimers
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Boards, Commissions &	(/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contact.html)	(/www.nj.gov/nj/contact/)	Accessibility Statement
Authorities	Photos		(/www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html)
(/governor/admin/bca/)	(/https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy)		

Internship Opportunities Public Addresses
(/governor/admin/internship.shtml) (/governor/news/addresses)

Governor's Residence - Executive Orders
Drumthwacket (/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

(http://drumthwacket.org/) Administrative Orders
 (/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

 Direct Appointments
 (/governor/news/appointments)

 Advice and Consent

 Appointments
 (/governor/news/acappointments)

 Statements on
 Legislation
 (/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

 Administration Reports
 (/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

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