

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm honored to be joined by the woman on my right, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, another familiar face. Ed, welcome back. To my left, a guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, otherwise known as the father of the bride.

With a heavy heart, I want to begin today by honoring United States Marine Private First-Class Dalton Beals of Pennsville, who tragically passed away on Friday during his final training exercise at Parris Island in South Carolina. There is no question that Private First-Class Beals was made of the stuff of which all great marines are made, and I know that he would've served with distinction, honor, and bravery. If you look at the quotes from his family, from coaches, teachers, it's overwhelming, and it's an awful tragedy. In his honor and memory, our state flags have been lowered to half-staff for today. We send our condolences to his family, his friends, his mentors. His loss is a loss for our entire state and indeed our nation. May he rest in peace and honor.

This morning's reports to the Department of Health have us moving in excess of 4.43 million fully vaccinated New Jerseyans between those vaccinated at one of our in-state sites as well as those the department has recorded as having been vaccinated out of state. Looking at the CDC's figures, we rank sixth among all states with 72% of all New Jerseyans eligible for vaccination – that's everyone, by the way, ages 12 and over – having received at least their first shot. That's nearly 5.5 million individuals, and Judy, it's fair to say we are alone in that ranking among big states. It's not just any states, but we know we still have some work to do to make sure that everyone who wants to get vaccinated is vaccinated, and we remain focused on bringing up the numbers in some communities which continue to lag, and equity continues to be a big obsession with us.

We're making progress in black and brown communities, but there's no doubt we have more progress that we need to make. The list of cities with populations greater than 10,000 residents but with vaccination rates at 50% or lower is now down to just 10. They are in ascending order of vaccination rates – you can see them there – Phillipsburg, Pemberton, Lakewood, Irvington, New Brunswick, East Orange, Camden, Glassboro, and Wallington all under 50% and Bridgeton

coming in at exactly 50%. By the way, in, I believe, each one of these communities, progress – if you looked at a week or two ago, progress has been meaningful, and we take our hat off to each and every one of them. I think I'm in Irvington later this week with Brian Bridges, our great Secretary of Higher Education, and so we've not only got folks banging on doors, but we're trying to do as many events to catch people's attention as possible.

There's no naming or shaming here. We are working with these communities in partnership. We continue to work, as I say, with local officials in these communities among many others across the state to get them the resources they need to move these vaccination rates up to where they should be and where we know they can be. For young people especially, now is the time to get vaccinated to protect yourself and your friends. We know there's a direct correlation between our steadily increasing vaccination numbers and our steadily decreasing case counts and hospitalizations, and it's not by accident. It's because we have safe and effective vaccines in our toolbox that are proving themselves in their ability to prevent serious illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. That doesn't mean there aren't rare cases of vaccinated folks falling ill. I know both Judy and Ed will provide some more information on these cases in a few moments.

Let's take a quick look at the rest of today's numbers. We are reporting an additional 197 confirmed positive PCR tests and 50 presumed positive antigen rapid tests. We are now consistently reporting our lowest numbers of confirmed cases since last July when we were in the deepest part of our summer lows. The rate of transmission is currently .74. The positivity rate for Saturday, by the way, interestingly, Judy, below two again for a weekend day, which is a big deal, 1.73%. Again, these numbers are not only both low in their own right, but given that our baseline is so much lower, it means that the spread is also that much slower. This trend is also emerging in our hospitals. As of last night's count, there were a total of 436 patients hospitalized. By the way, you can see the breakdown between confirmed and persons under investigation. Our statewide ICU count was 104. 60 ventilators in use. These continue to be lows that we have not seen since very early last October.

Here are yesterday's discharges and new COVID positive admissions. These numbers are so low because we are steadily decreasing the spread of this virus, which means fewer new cases and therefore fewer hospitalizations, but we do need to recognize one thing. As the data shows, those who are testing positive or entering our hospitals or dying, sadly, are now most likely overwhelmingly those individuals who have not been vaccinated. There was some press – I think it was the *New York Times* today in a community in Tennessee – so this is not just Jersey. This is national – that I think had only a 20% vaccination rate, and their hospitalizations over the past period of time are up 700%. As one of my colleagues said, increasingly, this is a pandemic among unvaccinated individuals.

Today we are reporting an additional 14 – with the heaviest of hearts 14 confirmed COVID-related deaths. The number of probable deaths has been revised and today rests at 2,685. Since last March, if you add that up, we have lost 26,316 New Jerseyans, both confirmed and probable deaths. Let's tell three more of their stories now. Let's begin with this guy. You think he liked the water, Pat? Bridgeton's Harry Springfield. Harry was 70 years old. After high school, he served as a fireman with the United States Navy and earned an honorable discharge in 1970. Harry wore many hats throughout the 1970s from store clerk to pizzeria worker to glass company employee before settling in as an occupational health and safety specialist for the United States Department of Agriculture. He retired in the year 2010 following a 30-year career with the Department, but he still kept busy operating one of the iconic tram cars on the Wildwood Boardwalk in the summer and going back to school at Cumberland County College and earning his associate's degree in 2012, God love him. Harry was also a theater buff and was a patron of the famed Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia.

He is survived by his sister Cindy, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and Peggy, and their families including five nieces and nephews and numerous great nieces and nephews. He was known I think as magnificent Uncle Harry, if I've got it right, but it's MUH, by all of his great nieces and nephews and great nieces and great nephews. We thank Harry for his service to our nation and God bless and watch over his memory and his extraordinary family.

Next up we remember Thomas Quinn on the right of Franklinville in Gloucester County, which he had called home for 21 years. Thomas also served in the US Navy and found a career as a truck driver upon his return home. Most recently driving for Lee Transport out of Pittsgrove. Thomas enjoyed camping at the Adventure Bound Campground in Elmer, so much that he was affectionately referred to there as the mayor as he rode around in his golfcart checking in on other families. If he wasn't camping, Thomas would probably be found riding his motorcycle or at the home of a friend lending a hand on a new project or just doing whatever he could to illicit a laugh from someone who needed one.

He leaves behind his wife Robin, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, and his children April, who's 35, Bart who's 32, Lisa, who's 30, and Hayley who was 17 at his passing, has since turned 18 and just graduated from high school, along with their families including his four grandchildren, Zachary, Kyleigh, Gianna, and Natalie. He's also survived by his six sisters and numerous other family and friends. He was just 58 years old. We thank Thomas for his service and for sharing his personality throughout south Jersey. He will be missed, and may God bless him and watch over his memory.

Finally today, we honor this very special woman. We honor the life of Patricia Faggins who had called Westfield in Union County home for more than 50 years. She was a community leader in the truest sense, the director of the Westfield Community Center for more than 30 years and a founder of both the Westfield Neighborhood Council and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Association of Westfield. She continued to lead the neighborhood Council and MLK Association for many years. She was equally active in the life of the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Scotch Plains where she played piano, sang in the choir, served as an usher, and sat on the scholarship committee.

She is survived by her son Johnathan, and her daughter Donna, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and their families, which includes 11 grandchildren and five great grandchildren. She also leaves her brother Howard along with numerous relatives and dear friends. Upon her passing, the MLK Association remembered Patricia as its "moral compass and guiding light". We are grateful for all Patricia did for Westfield, which is a gem among our communities. I was there this weekend. She leaves a tremendous legacy of service. May God bless and watch over her, and may God bless every New Jerseyan we have lost and their families.

Now before I turn things over first to Judy then to Ed and ultimately to Pat, I want to put the spotlight on the Harriet Tubman Museum in Cape May, which is preparing for its in-person grand opening next week in correspondence with our commemoration of Juneteenth, and I am especially honored that this year for the very first time, Juneteenth is also an official state holiday. The Harriet Tubman Museum chronicles the efforts of the abolitionist movement and the African American community in south Jersey and specifically in Cape May throughout the early- to mid-1800s. Cape May was a vital stop on the underground railroad where Harriet Tubman herself shepherded African Americans to freedom. I was honored as you can see there to attend last September's ribbon cutting of the Harriet Tubman Museum and to sign legislation formally designating the historic Howell House in which it is located – you can see that – as New Jersey's official Harriet Tubman Museum. Over the past months, many of the museum's displays have been available virtually. Next week, however, the museum will finally open to all.

To get to this point, the museum partnered with Cape May City's Franklin Lafayette District, which is a participant in the Department of Community Affairs Neighborhood Preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant Program. Through the Department's efforts, the museum was able to secure the grant funding it needed to complete the rehabilitation of its historic building and to keep its programs funded. Several other nearby small businesses also received critical funding, so I congratulate both Founding Executive Director Cynthia Mullock and Board of Trustees President Lynda Anderson on next week's opening. I had the great opportunity to speak to both of them on Monday. The Harriet Tubman Museum is a welcome addition to our state's cultural community. Please check them out. The website is harriettubmanmuseum.org, harriettubmanmuseum.org, and next time you're down there, give them a visit. They are at 632 Lafayette Street. 632 Lafayette Street, and given – especially given our current national discussions on race and community, we need more than ever to learn from the lessons the Harriet Tubman Museum can teach us. With all of that out of the way, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. COVID-19 vaccines are a critical tool to bring the pandemic under control. However, no vaccines are 100% effective at preventing illness, so some cases among fully vaccinated individuals are expected. As part of their surveillance, Dr. Lifshitz's team has been reviewing data in which fully vaccinated individuals tested positive for COVID-19, which are known as breakthrough cases. Their analysis has provided reassuring results that the three COVID-19 vaccines are extremely effective. Between December 15th, 2020, and April 23rd, the Department identified 1,319 breakthrough cases, which represents .06% of those fully vaccinated. That means 99.94% of individuals vaccinated did not test positive for COVID-19. This high percentage demonstrates that breakthrough infections are extremely rare. As expected, people who are fully vaccinated had less severe illness based on the number of hospitalizations and deaths.

The Department found that 92 individuals with COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough infections were hospitalized. However, only 30 of those hospitalizations were reported to be related to COVID-19 illness, so 92 hospitalized, only 30 reported to be related to COVID-19 illness. There were 14 total deaths among individuals with COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough infections. However, only seven of those deaths were reported to be related to COVID-19, so a total of 92 individuals were hospitalized, 30 of the hospitalized were reported to be related to COVID-19 and seven of those individuals were reported – their deaths were reported to be related to COVID-19. Dr. Lifshitz will talk more about the details of the analysis in a minute.

In addition to our data review, the Hackensack Meridian Health Network and their Center for Discovery and Innovation have been tracking how well the COVID-19 vaccines are working among their staff. They found that just 138 COVID-19 positive cases among 26,000 vaccinated healthcare workers, and none were seriously ill, so 138 COVID-19 positive cases among 26,000 vaccinated healthcare workers, none seriously ill. Both our data and this study demonstrates overwhelmingly that the vaccines work, so the Department continues its surveillance of variants also, variants of concern and variants of interest in the state. We now report this data by percentages rather than numbers because it provides a rough estimate of the burden in the state. B117, which originated in the UK, remains the prominent variant in

New Jersey, representing more than 54% of the variants identified last month. B1.526, which originated in New York state, is the next common variant. That is a variant of interest. It represents 16% of the variants identified in our state. P1, which originated in Brazil, represents 5.4% of the variants identified in the last month, and B1.617.2, which originated in India, accounted for 3.1% of all specimens sequenced in the past four weeks. We're also seeing some small percentages of two variants that originated in California.

The Department continues its work to bring vaccines to where people are. We are meeting individuals in their communities where it is familiar and they feel safe. As part of that effort, we are expanding our work. To increase vaccine access at primary care providers and pediatrician offices. We know that patients trust their physicians, so they may feel more comfortable receiving a vaccine in those offices. Additionally, for many individuals, it's more convenient than a vaccination site. Our vaccine preventable disease program has been working with primary care providers to prepare them for distribution of vaccines in their offices. 180 primary care providers have already received allocations. The Department is reaching out to the remaining providers across the state who are registered in our Immunization Information System and who want to administer COVID-19 vaccine. We're currently talking with them about when they can be ready to receive allocations and administer the vaccine safely to their patients, for example ensuring that they have the appropriate refrigeration to store the vaccine. Any additional providers interested in offering vaccine can enroll in the New Jersey Immunization Information System.

Moving on to my daily report as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 436 hospitalizations of COVID positive patients and PUIs. This trend continues to head in the right direction. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. Cumulatively, we have reported 127 cases in the state. At the state veteran's homes since our last briefing, one positive case among a resident at the Paramus home has been reported, and at the state psychiatric hospital, no new cases among their patients. Overall, on June 5th, the percent positivity in New Jersey is 1.73%. The northern part of the state 2.07, central part of the state 1.41, southern part of the state 1.35. That concludes my report. Please continue to stay safe, get vaccinated, protect ourselves, our family and friends. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, very interesting data, which Ed is going to expand on as we speak, but confirms the general sense that we've had. The overwhelming folks who are getting sick and getting hospitalized right now are not vaccinated. Ed, great to have you. Welcome back.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you. Yes, as Commission Persichilli said, the Department has been investigating vaccine breakthrough cases, which is defined as individuals who test positive after becoming fully vaccinated. As of April 23rd, there were a total of 2,189,946 New Jersey fully vaccinated residents. Thus, at least two weeks had past since their final dose. Of these slightly more than two million individuals, 1,319 or .06% tested positive for SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Of those 1,319 individuals, 505 had symptoms. 377 had no symptoms, and an additional 437 did not have this information available on their charts. I'm sorry. 92 of these individuals were hospitalized. 30 of them were hospitalized for reasons due to COVID. 59 were hospitalized of other reasons. This would commonly happen, for example, if somebody was hospitalized for anything from a broken hip to a heart attack or something else, and the hospital just as part of their routine check, we do a COVID test, and that would come back positive. An additional three are still under investigation.

As mentioned, there were 14 deaths, half of which were deemed to be related to COVID-19 and half not. 14 deaths. It is important to note that over this same time period, there are approximately 3,500 COVID-related deaths in New Jersey, so only about 14 out of 3,500 deaths in this time period were in people who were fully vaccinated. While vaccine breakthrough cases were seen in all vaccine-eligible age groups, hospitalizations and deaths were only seen in those over the age of 50 with the risk increase with increasing age. Those over the age of 80 accounted for almost half of all hospitalizations and half of deaths related to COVID-19. Women accounted for close to two thirds of the symptomatic breakthrough cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. Because people with no or mild symptoms are unlikely to be tested for COVID-19, we know that this data, particularly as it relates to the number of breakthrough cases, represents an undercount of these individuals.

Still, what we have found is reassuring. In this time period, the risk of a fully vaccinated individual testing positive was 602 out of a million, so only out of a million people, 602 would test positive. 42 per million would be hospitalized. Six per million would end up dying from any cause. To put that number in perspective, in their lifetime, about 885 people per million will drown, 395 per million will choke to death, and seven per million will be killed by lightning. Not directly comparing apples to apples, but just putting the risk of dying from COVID is extremely small. Basically, I'm just going to reiterate the message. The vaccines we have, they're not perfect, but they're pretty close. They're literally lifesavers.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, may I ask you a question, and Judy, I have one that's unrelated to this, back to vaccines, but Ed, what's your speculation as to two thirds of the cases are women?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: It is hard to know. We do know that particularly earlier in the process, the people that were vaccinated were more in long-term care facilities and so forth. They tend to be more – very much over-represented as far as women go. Healthcare providers also tend to be more women than men. We don't have the exact breakdown as to how many were hospitalized – sorry, how many were immunized at different times, but it's likely that at least part of that is related to more of them getting vaccinated earlier.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a good answer. Makes sense. Judy, this is back to the distribution of the vaccine to primary care folks, and if we don't have this number, we can follow up with it. You mentioned, I think, 180 primary care participants are already – and that you've gone now to the broader group. Do you have any idea how big the broader group is?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: We do know that over a thousand physicians in New Jersey are registered in the IIS system. That doesn't mean they're registered with the CDC to give COVID-19, but it's the first step, and many of them are pediatricians, and we're going to queue them up because we're hoping that younger individuals will also be approved for the vaccine at a point in time.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. 180 now. By just guessing, it's at least another several hundred that are in the on-deck circle, right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Absolutely.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great. The emphasis on pediatricians because we're hoping – not only do we have the 12 to 15, but we're hoping for the under 12 here as well. Thank you. Pat, great to have you. Again, you've got a big day coming up this weekend. We wish you nothing but the very best. One of life's special moments to the father of the bride. Anything on weather, compliance, other matters? Great to have you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. We are expecting more thunderstorms. I know this afternoon I think our service providers and BPU have done a great job. I think we had about 2600 outages as of this morning, and they continue to work through those. Our State Emergency Operations Center did contact the US Geological Survey's national Earthquake Information Center, and they did confirm a 2.4 magnitude earthquake this morning just south of Tuckerton in Ocean County. There were no damages or injuries reported, and our emergency management folks didn't receive any resource requests. I just use that opportunity just to remind the public with regards to preparedness. I know with a hurricane or snowstorms that we usually have a pretty good advanced notice on those, but earthquakes and tornadoes pretty much come without any warning at all, so I just steer everybody as we always do to prepare your family for all hazards and all emergencies to ready.nj.gov, ready.nj.gov just to have your communications, plans, and your go bags as we call them and just to plan in place. That's all I got, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Pat, what time did the earthquake hit did you say?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: 7:52 this morning exactly.

Governor Phil Murphy: 7:52 okay. Alright. Let me just get myself organized here. We've got a big crowd here today, so I'm going to ask you as a favor to be economical with your questions if you could. We'll be in the schedule that we've been on of late, so we'll be out there probably on the road somewhere tomorrow on Friday. We'll be with you virtually, and if we've got a reason to get back together, we will do so. Otherwise, we'll be back here next Monday at 1 o'clock.

Q&A Section

Alex, welcome back.

Alex Roubian, NJ2AS: Thank you, Governor. Governor, NJ2AS has done an extensive search and is unable to find a single black person that has ever been issued a carrier permit that was not work related. If black lives matter, why does the state of New Jersey to rely on the police for their sole source of protection and deny them their right to protect themselves? That concludes my question.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I've got nothing to add on that. I'd love to get back to you. I've never been asked the question before. I know it's a theme that you've hit before, which I respect. We continue to believe that the fewer guns, particularly illegal guns and crime guns that are in New Jersey, the safer we are, but we'll be happy to follow up with you. Thank you. Good to see you.

Let's go back to Mike and we'll circle back if that's okay. Thank you.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Sure, good afternoon, Governor. I wonder if you had a chance to see Jack Ciattarelli's comments last night after – during this victory speech. He criticized you as being someone from out of the state. He criticized that your policy is leading to unaffordability for New Jerseyans. What's your reaction to that?

Governor Phil Murphy: What for New Jerseyans, sorry?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Making the state unaffordable. I'm curious on the vaccine, are there any unused doses sitting on shelves? I think the Biden Administration is getting ready to send some overseas. Have they contacted you about using any of those unused vaccines and can you just give any detail or insight as to what the status on unused or about-to-expire vaccines are? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'll have Judy address the unused vaccines. Listen, I was honored to get the nomination from my party. This is not a political event, so I'm going to be very brief on this. I was honored to get the nomination from my party. I congratulated Assemblyman Ciattarelli in a note to him last night, and I look forward to a robust general election.

I would just ask anybody who wonders where somebody was born, ask them if they had any say over where they were born. Then let me say this: that my wife and I came to New Jersey to raise our four kids. That was a volitional decision that we took, probably the best decision of our lives. I would just say to the Assemblyman, he was in public service as an elected official during the time that the property tax crisis went out of control. We inherited the mess that he and his colleagues created. We've got three of the five lowest property tax increases in the history of the state. We're trying to fix the stuff that he and others broke. I look forward to that discussion more broadly. I'd rather not get into any more politics, if that's okay.

Unused doses, Judy. What do you got?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: We have – we monitor the inventory that is on the shelves every single day, and we also look at the expiration dates. We are not from a centralized perspective moving vaccines around the state to make sure that we have as little wastage as possible. We have not sent any vaccines out of state or overseas. We are identifying how many people remaining in New Jersey to get vaccinated, and we want to keep enough inventory to make sure that we have a dose for every single person.

Governor Phil Murphy: We also continue to have, Mike, which is related – I think we've got among if not the highest hit rate of you send us vaccine doses, we get them into the arms. There are a lot of other states with a much bigger percentage of their supply sitting on the shelf than we have. Thank you.

Let's stay back and we'll do Alex standing and then we'll come back down and do Matt. Good afternoon, Alex.

Alex Zdan, News 12 NJ: Good afternoon, Governor. I wanted to ask you why you have not yet chosen to sign a bill that was approved unanimously in the legislature that would authorize a one-year extension of classes for as many as 700 students with disabilities who are scheduled to age out of these programs and they were obviously not able to go to these classes during the pandemic. I would also like to ask Commissioner Persichilli, we were expecting guidance on camps today. Can you tell us what that is? Have you changed the masking mandate? For Dr. Lifshitz, what is the science behind masking children outdoors? Has the Department of Health documented a single case of COVID transmission outdoor from a child to another child or a child then to an adult? Lastly for the Governor, there's a large crowd, obviously, outside – you probably saw it – of people who are pro-life. They are objecting to the Reproductive Freedom Act that you've expressed strong support for. What's your message to them? You said in a Zoom press conference about a month ago – you quoted a number from Texas. About 44% of people being, I believe, pro-life. You were disbelieving of that number. Do you not believe that somebody can have a heartfelt, genuine disagreement with you over the issue of reproductive rights?

Governor Phil Murphy: We're certainly moving around with those questions, that's for sure. No comment, Alex, on the bill itself. Enormous sympathy with the challenge in the most vulnerable communities that've been crushed by this pandemic, and that includes those kids and their families in a school setting and the burden that they have had to deal with. No news yet, as we normally don't, on bills that we haven't made a call on, but we will let you know as we let you know.

It occurs to me – we were going to fill out more of the summer camp guidance today, and that's my fault. We previewed the fact that we are going to go with a pretty liberal and open interpretation for kids and staff who are vaccinated I think both indoors and outdoors, but I think we do still owe you that. I think with the crush of business, we'll come back to you on that.

Your question to Ed, is there any evidence of a kid transmitting outside?

Alex Zdan, News 12 NJ: That was one part of it. One part – the first part is the science behind masking kids in general and secondly if there was any recorded instance of outdoor spread of COVID from a child to another child or a child to an adult during this pandemic.

Governor Phil Murphy: Before Ed jumps in, Alex, I would just say one is on schooling in particular, because I know that's where it's gotten a little bit hot. We follow the CDC guideline. Secondly, as Judy intimated a minute ago, the reason why we're now expanding to pediatricians is we're anticipating a vaccine that does not yet exist for kids under the age of 12. Thirdly, all of us want to get to the place, sooner than later, that our kids are not wearing masks. Trust me, there's no underlying reason we want that to continue. I would just hope that folks together have some patience that we continue to make these decisions based on CDC guidance, the facts, etc. Ed, outside, what do you got on that?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure. Let me start with – I mean, we all a hundred percent absolutely agree that outside is safer than inside. I think we can also agree that it is not necessarily a single hard line. I mean, indoors encompasses rooms like this, wide open with lots of space. I can be in a closet with three people and I'd be feeling totally different about it. Similarly, if I was outside – if I'm outside with space and the wind blowing on a nice day, it's totally different than if I'm with a group of 12 people in a very small inclined windless day and science clearly says that. It's harder to make that very hard distinction between indoors and outdoors because I was saying that yes, in general outdoors is going to be safer than indoors.

We know that masks in general help protect. That's been shown in many different studies. We know that masks can be safely worn down to the age of 2 years old or so. We know that the American Association for Pediatrics supports kids down to the age of 2 wearing masks on a routine basis, and we also know, as has been mentioned, that yes, we want kids to be able to be kids. I want them to be able to run around outside and clearly kids running around outside are going to be at a lower risk than sitting together in a tight room inside.

Answer to your question as to whether we've documented any specific cases related to kids transmitting, I don't have one off the top of my head. I can tell you certainly we had outbreaks in school-aged kids which are involved in outdoor sports such as football and others that appear to be associated with outdoor spread. It is hard to tell for sure, and here's the other very important thing: I don't know where most of the people in the state got infected, but they all got infected from somewhere. That person may've been – and often we don't know. They may not've known they were infected. They might've passed it to somebody else who had mild or no infected symptoms at all, and that person may've then passed it to that person who ended up, unfortunately, becoming very ill and dying. Yes, it's a very good thing that kids have mild to no symptoms in general, although occasionally they do have more serious symptoms. It is still a real concern that if they get infected and at this point, they can't be vaccinated, that they can pass it to other more vulnerable people, and that becomes a much bigger problem.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, we haven't said this, Judy, in a while that we knew – and by the way, there still remains – sadly, we mourn the loss of each and every one of these lives. There still remains at this level for some time now seven losses of life under the age of 18. We haven't said this in a while, and Ed, you alluded to this as it relates to sporting activity. We knew we had transmission both indoors and outdoors, but we just – it's hard to tell whether it was the actual sporting engagement or event that did it or an adjacent activity in the locker room, at a pizza party in the basement, etc.

I drove by very quickly, so I did not – I was on my phone, so I did not pay an enormous amount – I didn't see – I'm told there were folks out there. To your question – then I'll make a statement that's unrelated. Again, I don't want to get too political here. Do I have respect for people with a different opinion on this? Absolutely. I've got people in my own family who have a different opinion on this. I was raised as a Roman Catholic and that's a reality. The fact of the matter is *Roe v. Wade* is case law. The New Jersey case law is built on top of that case law. The reproductive rights of women are not in statute, and I feel strongly that that has to change, that they must be in statute, particularly with the risk around *Roe v. Wade*, and I believe we need to do that sooner than later. Thank you.

Matt, we're going to come down to you.

Matt Arco, NJ.com Good afternoon. Commissioner, how concerned are you with the Delta variant given what's happening in India and the UK? Of the seven deaths from breakthrough cases, which vaccine did those peoples received? Also, will breakthrough data be added to the data? Governor, on Monday you announced schools could make masks optional due to extreme heat, and some districts have implemented or immediately implemented policies to make them optional for the rest of the year regardless of whether or available air conditioning. Many districts have complained, and there's been a little bit of confusion. What clear message can you give districts? Is going maskless optional regardless of whether permitted?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. I will just address the school piece and Judy, you may want to add to that. Then you and Ed can hit the Delta. I was actually going to – Matt, you've asked a question I was going to ask, big discussion about the Delta variant this morning. I saw Tony Fauci talking about it on CNN. On schools, again, I just repeat what I've said. I think we're going to leave it to the judgment of the district, but what we're not saying is that you can take your mask off forever and always. We are saying that if it's a particular health reason, and extreme heat is one of them, that would cause a health risk of kids, or educators, or staff, that they have the right to make that decision locally. We would just ask as we've asked millions of people over the past 15 months, use your responsibility wisely. Do the right

thing and if it's a really hot day – pretty hot today, Pat, I think. I think today would quality Judy, I don't know how you feel about that. We're not saying we're there yet in terms of forever and always. We want to get there. We'd like to see a vaccine for kids under 12. We'd like to follow the CDC guidance, and I hope this doesn't get political, because that's the last thing we need right now. Let's make the decision based on the facts.

Any idea which vaccination, Ed, that those seven deaths had and any observation on the Delta variant, Judy or Ed?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure. We are tracking to see which vaccine is associated with hospitalizations or deaths, or I shouldn't say associated with but cases and people been vaccinated with that manufacturer. At this point, though, our numbers are both so low and there's so many confounding factors that go into it such as, for example, Pfizer was the first vaccine that was out, so a longer time when somebody might've died from it. It also went to more people in long-term care facilities, so people who were vaccinated with it may've been further than the Jansen. At this point, both because the numbers are so low and because there are confounding factors there, I really don't want to say them because it would give a misunderstanding that one vaccine might be better than the other and the truth is they're all great. I mean, they all – the numbers are so low that they're all working incredibly well at preventing hospitalization and death. Basically you got a vaccine. It's working. If you didn't get a vaccine, get whichever vaccine you want and it will work.

As far as the Delta variant, yes, certainly we are paying attention. As the Commissioner said, we're seeing a gradual increase in the state. At this point, we're up to roughly 3.1%, I believe, were the last numbers, so it is still relatively low compared to much of the rest of the country where the rates are higher, particularly over on the West Coast. We are concerned with all variants. We know that Dr. Fauci and others have been talking about particularly with the Delta variant. It's particularly important to make sure you get that second dose because while there's some protection with one dose of it. A two-dose vaccine, it's the second dose that really boosts and really gets you where you want to be. We know that the more people who are unvaccinated, the more people who are able to catch this virus, the worse it is over the long time because that gives the virus more people to attack, more chances to continue to mutate, and more of that virus out there. Again, just one more reason to say go ahead. Go out and get vaccinated.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think one other question you asked, Matt – we're going to move over here, Brendan One of the question, Matt, you asked is should you expect – should we expect to see more data on this, and the answer is yes, emphatically. Again, I'm not the expert here, but I will say this: it is quite obvious that this is a pandemic right now of unvaccinated people overwhelmingly. The data is overwhelming and we owe that to people to make sure you know what the facts are and the risks associated with not being vaccinated. Do they exist if you're vaccinated? Yes, but they are literally de-minimus if you listen to those ratios Ed talked about compared to the risks that you have if you're unvaccinated. Thank you for those.

Don't give me that long 20-question laundry list, please.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Do the best I can, Governor, thank you. A New Jersey health system, Atlantic Health System, announced today that its patients can link their vaccination cards with Clears app so that they have access to it digitally. Is the state having conversations to adopt a COVID-19 vaccination app? There has been confusion on what powers schools do or don't have over mask rules. A Monmouth County superintendent was put on leave because he would not go against state mask mandates and wanted students to keep them on inside. What is the state's response about this? Questions from Colleen O'Day, when do you plan to replace Corrections Commissioner Hicks? What will you be looking for in a new commissioner? Some would like to see an outsider, someone without attachments to the current leadership team or union. Governor, you are now regularly are referencing the CDC's vaccine data, which differs from New Jersey's. We never got an answer as to why the CDC vaccine counts don't match those of the State Department of Health. Can someone please explain the differences between these sets of numbers. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Could you go back to your first question? I literally don't under – didn't understand the first one.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: The first question, Atlantic Health System announced today that its patients can link their vaccination cards with an app so that they have access to it digitally. Is the state having conversations to adopt a COVID-19 vaccination app?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think it's fair to say on the first question, we're considering our options, right? I continue to be concerned about – and Judy, tell me if you've got any difference here. I continue to be concerned. I think it's good that we can digitize your vaccination, but to then use that, that gets you into something when we're still not where we need to be on equity concerns me, even not intentionally to be discriminatory. Are we considering technology and digitizing this system? The answer's emphatically yes, right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we're – it's under review. Several systems are under review right now to make consumer access to their immunization record for COVID-19 more accessible, so more to come on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: I've kind of already answered the question about mask mandates. We're asking folks to take personal responsibility at the district level and do the right thing. Again, it's a combination of an absence of vaccine that's been approved for anybody under 12; the CDC guidance is clear, yet we have always had in place the ability to make a decision locally if there's a health risk, and high heat is on that list, that you can make the decision you think you have to make. I would just ask districts to be responsible, do the right thing, make the decision based on the facts. They can have their own sense of what high heat looks like. It's pretty clear today's on that list. Let's not get political about this; that's the last thing we need right now. Let's leave the politics out of it.

I assume – because we – Commissioner Hicks submitted his resignation yesterday. I assume – so that was – I may misheard the question, but I assume it's in that – given that, what are we looking for? It's too early to tell but yeah, you should assume that this will be a very broad search to replace the commissioner. I thank him for his service. I wish him the best. My guess is this is something plus or minus that looks like a nationwide search to get the very best person possible.

Judy, anything on the CDC data other than we believe, not surprisingly, they have access to information and channels of information that goes beyond the access that we have at the state level including New Jerseyans who are getting vaccinated in some other form or channel than we have control over. Anything you want to add?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, there's several reasons, exactly the reason that you just spoke of. They have better eyes on New Jersey residents that were vaccinated out of state, not only New York and Pennsylvania but, for example, many were vaccinated in Florida. They also have better data on the federal employees that they vaccinated directly, so federal employees that live in New Jersey were vaccinated through a direct channel from the federal government. Any federal partner that they sent vaccine doses directly to, we're reconciling all of that data with the data that we have. When they sent directly to a pharmacy, they have exactly what was sent and exactly what was delivered, so several reasons. We are close to reconciling all of it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Just back to the first question on the app, Chris Rein also weighs in, our Chief Technology Officer, to back – to further bolster Judy's comment. I think he – you all are working together to try to launch some kind of an app that documents your vaccination, maybe even as early as later this month, so more on that to come.

Let's go to Dustin in the back, if that's alright, just because Brent – and you're standing there. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. What's your reaction to the State Commission of Investigation report from last week finding long-standing structural and management deficiencies at the SDA? Do you think it needs more reforms, or should it be abolished? Senate President Sweeney said he's "not giving that organization another nickel," and I'd like to get your reaction to that. On the bill you signed ending the public health emergency, what's your justification for keeping in place the immunity provisions and the COVID-related OPRA exemptions for response times? You just went through this whole segment on the effectiveness of vaccines and you lifted indoor masking requirements almost two weeks ago, so why are you and we still here wearing masks? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Why are we here?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Yeah, well –

Governor Phil Murphy: We're not all wearing masks, by the way.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: I'm wearing a mask. We're all wearing masks, for people that can't see.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, the answer is this is a state building and that lifting did not include, as of this moment, state facilities. I suspect that changes, Dustin, but it has not yet changed. Was that the end of your questions?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: That's it, thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: I will let Parimal take the immunity question in a second but on the SDA, saw the report. Our team and I have gone through it. The current leadership I think is doing an outstanding job. We took the situation when we first heard about it, understood it, seriously. Took action quickly. Got the facts first, which is always important. Took action, and I think opened – still an open question as to what the future looks like. I know where the Senate President has been; I respect his position. I think we all, having said that, agree on the need of the mission, how that mission is actually prosecuted going forward to be determined.

Parimal, could you answer the question on the immunity provisions?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Sure, so the immunity provisions take effect on September 1st just to give hospitals and other healthcare facilities an opportunity to adjust to the new reality of getting back to pre-pandemic levels of liability.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Let's stay outside. We'll do Nikita and then Dave will close us out. Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. When will you sign the bill changing the timeline for members of county committee organizations to – rather, for county committees to hold reorganizations? The deadline is effectively Monday when local party officials will be sworn in without their elections having been certified. Next, any intention to give Republicans equal representation on the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission now that you are going into a general election? Lastly, do you believe Victoria Kuhn, who was Chief of Staff at the Department of Corrections and is now Acting Commissioner there, can reform the department given her close ties to leadership that oversaw the – I guess it's called a debacle at Edna Mahan

Governor Phil Murphy: The first question, tell me if I've – if this is – we're on the same page here. This is due to the fact that by extending the vote by mail, reach that window, that it would overlap where the counties would normally reorganize, right?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: That's right, yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Have we not already taken that step, Parimal, or is that to be taken?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: So the bill that Nikita referenced is on our desk. We'll get back to you when we have a decision but certainly aware of the issue.

Governor Phil Murphy: We got called by both sides of the aisle on this with very reasonable rationale for why it should be extended. I'm very sympathetic, I have to say, but no – I've got no crisp reply on the Law Enforcement Commission, but I will ask Parimal to get back to you offline, if I could.

Listen, Victoria Kuhn is an outstanding public servant, I have to say. She's got a very significant career if you read her biography. She and I had a good conversation last night. She's got a lot of experience that's relevant, including in law enforcement as a prosecutor. She's in this line of business for the right reason. She's the Acting Commissioner and as I said, I suspect, without making any news, we'll have a very broad search for the replacement of Commissioner Hicks, and I want to thank Victoria for stepping up to serve as the Acting Commissioner in the meantime. Thank you.

Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. With regard to the mask issue, not in this building but generally, a lot of people are still wearing masks. Some supermarkets suggest it. We'd like to see people wearing masks. I believe you, Governor, when you're out and about, you're still wearing a mask sometimes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sometimes, depends.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Some people are confused by this. They're like well, okay, the vaccines we heard today, very, very effective. I got my vaccine. Why do I or why should I or why should I feel pressured or should I feel pressured about wearing a mask? Can you give us your opinion about this and guidance in terms of what you're looking for from the people of New Jersey about wearing a mask outside, in a supermarket, and so forth? Maybe Commissioner, you could also weigh in on that. Specifically for the Commissioner but I would also like to get maybe Dr. Ed's opinion on this and yours as well, Governor, a couple of weeks ago, we were talking about the percentage of people that had been vaccinated with one shot but then skipped the second one. I believe the national percentage was about 8%. I think we were a little bit better around 7%. Do we know what the current situation is and could all of you guys remind us why you feel it's so important for people to get the second vaccine, especially now that the numbers are improving, hospitalizations down. People may figure eh, what's the big deal? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'll start and Judy and Ed should weigh in. These are both good questions. On the confusion on masking, let me just say that it has been lifted indoors and there are exceptions. The exceptions, I suspect, are not forever and always. They include state offices, any train, plane, or bus, or other similar type of public transit, health facilities, long-term care facilities, other facilities with vulnerable populations. That would include, as an example, corrections. Otherwise, it is lifted but there is the ability either for the proprietor or owner, whatever – whoever the role may be, or the individual themselves to choose to be stricter than that for whatever reason.

I attended a church service on Sunday in Bergen County. By the way, I'm now keeping one of these in my pocket at all times. We had this conversation We were going into the church and as I was going in, I had it in my pocket and not on my face. I asked does the church – does the pastor require it and the answer is yes. I was at a political rally last night. One of my colleagues who I know is fully vaccinated, had a mask on, and it was an indoor rally. That was a situation where the proprietor was not requiring it, but there was an individual, and he was not alone. There were others who were choosing

out of an abundance of caution to wear the mask. Again, I don't think this is forever and for always, but I think there's going to be a period like this that's going to last – the balance of the school year is going to be like this. I hope we'll be in a better place when we open in the fall, but we don't have to make that call yet.

I was in a supermarket on Sunday. The staff, I think overwhelmingly if not entirely masked. The clientele, a third probably masked. I think we should be okay with that, and I think we just all have to realize that we've gone from a we never masked before to everybody masks, so to two black-and-white scenarios, and now it's going to be a little bit gray. Again, I don't think this is gray forever. I think this is a period of time, and that includes the state offices as well.

On the second shot, we continue to punch very well. I was going to ask – this is another good question that I got asked that I was going to ask Ed earlier. Judy, you and I have talked about this. There was some sense in the medical community that the reason why the Delta variant was spreading so rapidly in the UK was not only because they've got a big south Asian population but they chose volitionally [as heard] to push off the second dose. I think that's still part of the underlying medical rationale. You all should make the point, not me. Remind folks why that booster matters. You get a lot more protection against this thing, including the variants, if you get the booster.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Yeah, I mean, that sums it up. Specifically talking about the Delta variant there, there is a study that showed that after a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine or the Astra-Zeneca vaccine, you were about 33% protected. After two doses, you were more than double that, about 88% protected. Clearly, you get some protection. You begin to produce antibodies with that first vaccine and it will give you some protection, but you get a whole lot more if you get it boosted. You get those antibodies really up there, and I would encourage people to go out and it's not too late. If you're more than four weeks past when you should've gotten it or you delayed and you think now I've already missed a month and why bother now? I would still encourage you that even with that delay, it is extremely likely that that second dose will boost those antibodies up and will give you excellent protection. I would strongly encourage people to go out and get that second dose.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, would you be broadly there but also on the masking, we should allow folks the gray area of flexibility?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Sure, first on second dose uptake, we range between 90 and 93%. We look at that daily. Everybody that's been registered through our vaccine scheduling system have actually received a call if they had not – if we could not find their second dose identified in our immunization system. We feel very strongly that second doses are the thing to do. As Ed said, if you're outside the 21 or 28-day window, we still encourage you. You can get a second dose at any current point of dispensing. It doesn't – you do not have to go back to your original place where you got your first dose.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a change that we put in place over the past several weeks just given the amount of different locations.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, and as far as masking's concerned, I think that masks – one thing this epidemic or pandemic has shown us is how effective masks can be. We have some of the lowest flu transmission than we've had in years. The only reason – logical explanation is so many people wearing masks, so I just leave that to the general public for their own deliberation.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, the data is pretty clear about a couple of things right now, right? The fact that we had almost no flu season, the lowest on record, the fact that the folks who are overwhelmingly sadly getting sick, hospitalized, and sadly dying are folks who are unvaccinated. The data is screaming out at us. I assume – I'm going to put words in your mouth. I assume you do care that the second shot is from the same provider as the first shot. In other words, Moderna/Moderna, Pfizer/Pfizer.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we would like it to be the same, but just get your second shot.

Governor Phil Murphy: Secondly, you're also hearing there is a better late than never element here. Even if you missed it and you're six weeks out, it's still worth it.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Get it, yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Get it. In fact, the UK right now is frantically doing that with folks in many cases who are 12-plus weeks after the first shot.

Busy day. Judy and Ed, thank you, as always. Pat, God bless you and the family as you celebrate a great day on Saturday. Parimal, Mahen, cast of thousands, we'll be with you virtually for the next couple of days. Please, folks, keep doing the right thing. Please get vaccinated. It's the – forget what it does for Jersey, and by the way, it does a lot for Jersey.

Remember what it does for you and your loved ones. It's a big change, a big game-changer. It's a big life-changer. God bless y'all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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