

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: September 13th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Seated with me to my right, the woman 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, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, another familiar face. Good to have you both here. Guy to my left who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

Let's start with a quick update on our recovery from the remnants of Tropical Storm Ida, and it is a storm which has taken an enormous toll, and Pat has just informed me that the death toll is now officially up to 30, so please keep each and every one of these blessed souls and their families in your prayers and thoughts. Since the last time we were together, five more counties have been added to those where individual homeowners are now eligible for direct assistance from FEMA, so all total we have these counties, 11 now included under FEMA's major disaster declaration: Bergen, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, and Union, and we will continue to advocate for every family impacted by this storm. If you are in one of these 11 counties, please go to disasterassistance.gov. That's disasterassistance.gov – you can see it on the screen – to begin the process of filing your claim. This takes about 20 minutes to kick things off. Especially if you're not covered by flood insurance, you should work to get funding to help restore your home.

We continue to tour communities that have been devastated by this. For me, most recently, in Irvington on Saturday afternoon with their great mayor Tony Vauss. I spoke to a woman who lost both her husband and their daughter in their apartment – in their home, rather. Just devastation up and down the state, especially in

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the central and north, and of course, we had the tornadoes in the south. I am ever grateful to President Biden and his team, to our federal delegation, to numerous state legislators and all the county and local officials who've been working hard alongside our team to get our families and businesses back on their feet after the floods.

Let's move on. We are still awaiting word regarding federal authorization of booster shots. Even without this guidance, we continue work across all levels of government from Judy and her team, obviously the Department of Health, to our county and local health partners and with our healthcare networks and providers to ensure we are prepared whenever that authorization comes down. We are doing this in recognition that the window for boosters could soon be open for all of you who received your second doses as recently – again might be, this is not yet definitive from the feds – as six months ago, so pretty much everyone who had been vaccinated by March. We are continuing to ramp up capacity, whether it be reopening megasites or in pushing additional doses out to other distribution points. We are working hard to ensure that we will be able to meet what we anticipate will be a very high demand, but as we sit here right now, there remains uncertainty from the federal government regarding who will need to get in line for a booster and when, and as soon as we get that information from the federal food and drug administration and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, we will let you all know.

With that, let's take a look at the latest overall vaccination figures as of this morning. This is the number, the total of all those who live, work, and study in New Jersey who have now completed their vaccination courses. You can see how that breaks down. In addition to these, there are roughly, importantly 739,000 individuals who have received a first dose of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccines who are awaiting their second dose along with 67,371 individuals living with immune deficiencies disorders who have now also received a third dose of those vaccines. We remain a national leader in vaccinations, and we are incredibly proud of the program we've put in place just as we are in all of you who have raised your sleeves to get vaccinated.

Now we do also have updated figures as they pertain to the breakthrough cases of individuals who were fully vaccinated by August 30th and in every instance, the vaccines continue to prove incredibly powerful in preventing not only new infections but most importantly COVID-related hospitalizations and deaths. Here are the preliminary figures for the week from August 23rd to August 29th specifically. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, as figures are constantly updated as Dr. Ed and his team do their work, the cumulative totals are the most illustrative of the vaccine's strengths, but regardless, these figures who conclusively that the overwhelming number of individuals contracting the virus, going to the hospital because of a COVID-related illness, or sadly dying from complications of COVID continue to be folks who are overwhelmingly either unvaccinated or under-vaccinated. There is simply no other way to interpret this data. The vaccines work, and they work well. Here are the case numbers for today including the positivity rate from last Thursday and the seven-day average rate of transmission, and in both cases those are down from last Monday, although we still have a ways to go. Here is what was going on in our hospitals yesterday, and sadly, here are the latest confirmed losses of life. Unfathomable. Now let's take a pause to remember several more of those who COVID has taken away.

First up, we're going to remember this guy Vineland's Frank Guaracini who passed away on March 30th at the age of 65. He was an entrepreneur, president of Frank's Realty, and the operator of three supermarkets that served families throughout Vineland and Cumberland County. As a real estate developer, he helped create the Vineland Regional Transportation Center, which today houses 30 commercial tenants creating good jobs and opportunities. A proud devote man – excuse me. A proud and devout man of faith, Frank was an ordained permanent deacon of the Diocese of Camden, serving at St. Mary of Mt. Carmel in Hammonton. He also made sure that through his success others could benefit and was the namesake benefactor of the Frank Guaracini, Jr. Fine and Performing Arts Center at Cumberland County College. Frank left behind his beloved wife Elizabeth after 44 years of marriage. He also left his three children, daughters Constance and Elizabeth, and his son Frank, III and his wife Amanda, granddaughter Charlotte and grandson Grant who was born after Frank's passing. I had the great honor of speaking with his widow Elizabeth and his son Frank, III last week. We are grateful to Frank for a life spent looking after others, and may he rest in peace and may his legacy live on.

Next we'll head to Wald Township, which was the home of this gentleman, Edmund Brenner, who we lost on January 11th. Throughout his life Edmund also called Newark, Holmdel, and Manasquan home. He was 84 years old. He was a proud veteran of the United States Marine Corps. After his military days ended, he embarked on what would end up as a 39-year career working the power lines for JCP&L. A member of IBEW Local 1303, he was the president of his local for a quarter century and also served as vice president of IBEW system council U3, always looking after his brothers and sisters in labor. Back in his community, he was a lifetime member of the Holmdel Volunteer Fire Company #1, as well as a part-time special patrolman for the Holmdel police department.

At his passing, Edmund was reunited with his late daughter Joy who had passed in April of last year. He is survived by his children Jill, with whom I had the great honor of speaking last week, Robin, and Cliff, and their families including his seven grandchildren, Becky, Georgie, Christopher, Kelley, Connor, Jeffery, and Jason and four great-grandchildren. Edmund is also survived by his former wife Becky. We thank Edmund for his service to our nation, to his community, and to the men and women of organized labor. May God bless and watch over him and his family.

Now we have one more person to honor today, but first I want to honor the business and the business partner he left behind. This is Roz Feldman-Tyman on the right, a former operating room nurse who opened the Margate landmark Jamaican Me Crazy 27 years ago. Roz started with a vision of a store that could pack in all the fun of the Jersey Shore, and that's exactly what Jamaican Me Crazy aims to do. When the darkest days of the pandemic kept customers away, Roz worked with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to receive the emergency grant she needed to keep her vision alive. I checked in with Roz last week, and Jamaican Me Crazy is ending a successful summer season. Check them out on Instagram at JamaicanMeCrazyNJ and on Facebook at Jamaican Me Crazy Margate, but it is a summer that winds down that is also bittersweet because Roz had to do it without her long-time business partner, that guy on the right, Richard Raden who passed away due to COVID-19 on April 18th.

Richard was 70 years old, and he had dedicated many of his later years to Roz and the store, but beyond Margate, there are many more stores across south Jersey that Richard helped either create or succeed as a consultant and advisor. A former basketball standout growing up in Cheltenham, Pennsylvania, Richard was no stranger to Margate having been a longtime resident. In addition to his business ventures, he dedicated his life to helping others rise above the disease of addiction, something he worked hard on for himself as a 36-year member and leader in Alcoholics Anonymous. He left behind his children, Ryan and Lindsay, his two grandchildren, Avery and Madeline, his fiancée Diane – and that's the woman on the left – his siblings Ann, Sue, Lee, and Paul, and family member Robert. We are grateful for all Richard did to help others whether it be in business or in life, and I know Roz misses him as she and I spoke as do all of us. May God bless and watch over him.

Now one more business note before I turn things over to Judy. Today starts National Small Business Week, and I urge everyone to step out and support the small, independent businesspeople in your community, whether it be from the pandemic or the floods, our small business community has had to content with a lot recently. That's an understatement. They need support, and they need your support. When you support the small businesses in your community, you are not just supporting the hopes and dreams of that business owner, you're also helping to create new jobs in your community. More New Jerseyans are employed by small businesses than by any other employers, so this week, shop small. Support your main street businesses, and let's grow our economy together.

Before I turn things over to you, Judy, this weekend was obviously an incredibly emotional one, the 30th anniversary of the awful attacks of 9/11. We all observe this in our own ways. Tammy and I were in New York City on Saturday morning with three presidents and a host of other folks, most importantly family members of those lost on that day, and as moving as that roll call is and as impressive as it is that there was so much firepower there as it were, walking around as we do every year around the base of each of the towers, looking at names, photographs, meeting families, hearing the stories, just overwhelming. Then we came back on the Jersey side and were honored to take part in the Jersey City Empty Sky annual commemoration and ceremony, which was also incredibly moving looking across the Hudson back into lower Manhattan, which obviously has now been so rebuilt but with those memories still fresh in our minds, so God bless each and

every one of the folks lost that day, including 750 residents of the great garden state of New Jersey. With that, 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, and good afternoon. New Jersey has taken action to boost COVID-19 vaccination in our state. In addition to our effort to make it as easy as possible to get vaccinated and sharing the benefits of vaccination, the state has also established mandates for some groups to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in our communities. New Jersey has announced that all workers in preschool to grade 12 schools, all workers in certain health facilities and high-risk congregate settings, and all workers at state agencies, authorities, and colleges and universities will be required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or be subject to COVID-19 testing at a minimum of one to two times per week. By September 7th, all workers in certain state and private healthcare facilities and high-risk congregate settings were required to be fully vaccinated or subject to testing.

According to our survey of long-term care facilities, more than 77% of the long-term facilities' staff are fully vaccinated as of yesterday. By October 18, 2021, all workers in preschool through grade 12 will be required to be fully vaccinated or again subject to testing, and also by October 18th, all workers at state agencies, authorities, colleges, and universities will be required to be fully vaccinated or subject to testing. Workers are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 two weeks or more after they have received the second dose of a two-dose series or two weeks or more after they have received a single dose vaccine.

Late last week President Biden outlined several vaccine mandates at the federal level as part of his plan to get more Americans vaccinated to also decrease hospitalizations and death from COVID-19 and to keep our schools and the economy open. The Biden administration is requiring vaccinations for all workers at most healthcare settings including hospitals, hospices, home healthcare, those that participate in the Medicare and Medicaid programs. It is estimated that this will cover over 17 million healthcare workers. The president also signed an executive order that requires all federal executive branch employees to be vaccinated and another executive order that will require federal contractors to do the same. There's no option for regular testing as part of this requirement. Additionally, the federal department of labor is developing a rule to require businesses with 100 or more employees to ensure every worker is fully vaccinated or face weekly testing and provide employees – additionally provide employees paid time off to get vaccinated.

Vaccines are the most effective tool we have to end this pandemic. They are safe and effective. A CDC study released last week demonstrated how well the COVID-19 vaccine protects against severe illness from COVID-19 including the Delta variant. They found that individuals not fully vaccinated had more than 11 times greater risk of COVID-19 death and 10 times greater risk of hospitalization. The CDC also found that overall vaccine effectiveness against COVID-19 hospitalization was 86%. Vaccine effectiveness was 76% among individuals 75 and older, which was lower than among those 18 to 74 years, where vaccine effectiveness hit about 89%. This difference was similar to all three COVID-19 vaccines. However, CDC did caution that this decline in effectiveness could be related to changes in the virus or waning vaccine-induced immunity with increased time since vaccination. As you remember, this older age group was among the first to be vaccinated. Both of these studies reaffirm the importance of getting vaccinated. All three vaccines provide high protection against severe COVID-19. Vaccination continues to prove to be our path out of this pandemic. If you haven't been vaccinated yet, make a plan to get vaccinated today. Visit covid19.nj.gov/finder or call 855-568-0545 to schedule an appointment.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 1,114 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation. Hospitalizations have remained relatively stable in our state. There has been one new report of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 133 cumulative cases in our state. None of these children are currently hospitalized. At the state veterans' homes, there has been two new positive cases among residents at the Vineland home, and at the state psychiatric hospitals, no new cases among their patients. Positivity for the state, as of September 9th, was 5.32%, the northern part of the state 4.14%, the central part of the state 6.02%, and the southern part of the state 7.04. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, our friends, and our children. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for that and thank you for the strong imploring for folks to get vaccinated. That continues to be, as you rightfully suggest, the number one weapon we've got, and we just need more folks to get there. Pat, welcome. Thank you for everything, particularly over the past couple of weeks as we've begun to struggle to get back on our feet after Ida. Any more color you've got on the FEMA relationship and steps that are being taken there in particular. Weather looks decent I think for the next few days, so let's knock on wood. By the way, we'll be together with you – Mahen, correct me if I'm wrong – virtually on Wednesday, is that right? 1 o'clock on Wednesday before I forget to say that, but it will be virtual, so we won't physically be in this room, but with that, Pat, take it away. Thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Our Office of Emergency Management continues to work with FEMA and other state agencies just to make sure we're coordinating our resources to make sure we get assistance to our residents as quickly as possible. In all of those 11 impacted counties or at least declared counties, we will have what's called DRCs or disaster recovery centers. There's one open in Gloucester, Middlesex, and Passaic now. In those other eight counties we are out there with FEMA scouting locations to make sure – again, that's a priority for us to make sure we can connect the residents to facilitate the resources that they need. Working with your office, Governor, we're also establishing a joint field office, which is one location, probably in the center part of the state, where federal, state, and local partners are together to make sure we prioritize our response and recovery efforts.

Just a few stats which show that partnership with FEMA. FEMA currently has 410 employees here in New Jersey along with 16 disaster survivor assistance teams. They help with registering survivors in their system and processing applications, and so far they've visited over 1800 families. Also, this morning, FEMA reported approximately 31,000 survivors have registered for individual assistance, and so far, they've been able to approve 5 million dollars in assistance to those individuals, called the Individuals and Household Program. They also have 87 inspectors working out in the field ready to assist us in processing applications for those that have damages registered. To the Governor's point, that 30th fatality was just confirmed on our way here this afternoon, and just from a global, statewide perspective, New Jersey Office of Emergency Management has facilitated 200 resource requests which range from aviation, high-water vehicles, debris management, chainsaw teams, ambulance strike teams – the phenomenal effort. FEMA's been great at hosting calls with our delegation. We have one again today at 3, so the communication's been phenomenal.

On a COVID-related note, I'll share this and end with this. Just about every Monday morning, I write every chief or colonel or sheriff who's lost an officer in the past week regardless of what type of line of duty death. This morning I'm sorry to report that I wrote 23 personal notes to – just in the last week, and 22 of them were COVID-related deaths. I thought that was important to note the seriousness of this disease that goes on, and certainly, our condolences go out to all of those families who have lost a loved one in the line of duty due to COVID. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, on that last somber point, both the number 23 is high and the percentage of those who were lost to COVID is high.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: That's the highest I've seen in a week in two years.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good Lord. Bless them all. Let me ask you. These DRCs, each per county, so there'll be 11 of them. Those are one stop shop for individuals to basically go to one place to get all the resources and –

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: That's correct. FEMA as well as our in-state agencies, whether that's trying to get a motor vehicle there with the salvaged titles that we're going to need, human services for any type of counseling, health, children and families. We don't need our residents who have been through that having to go –

Governor Phil Murphy: Figure out which – where to go, right?.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Block to block to block. WE try to put it all in one center. I've seen it in the wake of so many disasters, and it really is – it goes a long way to the residents.

Governor Phil Murphy: FEMA is in that operation as well.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: You said likely central Jersey location where you've got federal, state, county, and local, that's internal to just making sure that the – that's not for individuals.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: That's not. That is federal, state, and local employees, basically the hub of all processes associated with the recovery effort.

Governor Phil Murphy: Fantastic. Again, it's disasterassistance.gov is the website, folks. If you're in those 11 counties, and again, tip of the cap to President Joe Biden, FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell. It's almost unprecedented to have a major disaster declaration in as many counties as we have, and God knows we needed it, so we cannot thank them enough for their partnership. Again, we will be with you Wednesday virtually at 1 o'clock unless you hear otherwise. Wanted to make sure we said that. We're going to stay with this twice a week rhythm just because there's a lot of moving parts, obviously the Delta variant, back to school, digging out of storms, just a lot going on.

Q&A Session

With that, let's start. Sam, is that you?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Yes, it is.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good to see you. How are you?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Good to see you. Thank you for having me. Couple quick questions first is from Katherine. There are still calls coming in from Democratic lawmakers to use ARP money to defray the costs to businesses for restoring the unemployment insurance trust fund. Is that now completely off the table for you? Second, you started the briefing with some discussion about waiting on the feds to okay booster shots. How long do you think it will take to stand up the megasites after the feds give that okay, and if they have a narrower aperture for who will be eligible for those boosters initially, do you think there's a chance you don't need to reopen those sites?

Governor Phil Murphy: Both good questions. I'll give you my answers but would like Judy and Pat to weigh in on the second one in particular. I'd say nothing's off the table, but we are constantly looking at ways to continue to put more money on the street for small businesses. We're behind only California and New York, and they're a lot bigger. They have a lot more small businesses than we do – of all American states since this pandemic began, but we're constantly looking at program. I had a conversation yesterday and expecting some sort of analysis on a potential step later on today, so we continue to find – want to find creative and robust ways to get money on the street for small businesses.

Yeah, I think, by the way, you don't get the word aperture in this discussion very often, so I want to make note of that. Thank you for that, but that's the right word because if it's six months, it's 2.4 million people, I think, eligible on whatever the day one is. If that is a narrower look and it's an eight-month, it's a much lower number, and certainly, if it stays with immunocompromised, lower again. I'd say this is a work in progress. It's a very good question. Put it differently, do you need as many megasites if the list of eligible folks at first is not as big, and that's something that we are all of us war gaming as we speak, but I promise you this. We'll be ready, and I also would promise you this that we will overbuild as opposed to under-build, but even when we do that, my guess is out of the shoot no matter what the eligibility is, there will be initially a supply-demand imbalance. Having said that, Judy, please weigh in.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: We expect to have at least one mega-site up almost immediately if not September 20th, shortly after that. We expect two other megasites within the state to cover the regions north, central, and south, and all – we would like all 21 counties to have a vaccination site that people can be directed to in addition to all of the existing outlets that we currently have.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, the sooner we've got guidance from the feds, clearly, the better, but we are determined to be ready to go. Pat, you want to clarify one thing on the MVC front, I believe.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: I do. The chair of Motor Vehicle Commission just – in an effort to make sure that I'm not contributing to misinformation that anybody who lost a vehicle in this storm does not need anything from the Motor Vehicle Commission, and she doesn't want to delay their insurance

payments thinking that they do if they're trying to get into a motor vehicle office. Salvage titles are between the insurance company or the city and Motor Vehicles weeks after the vehicle owner situation is resolved. I just wanted to clarify that on behalf of Sue Fulton. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, I mentioned I was in Irvington in addition to the loss of life, which was overwhelming in one family, house damage like you can't believe. Water levels at levels they've never seen before, flooding in places that never flooded before, scores of cars ruined. This is, up and down the state, a reality. Thank you, Sam.

Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, NJ.com: Good afternoon, Governor. Will you require childcare workers to get vaccinated or tested regularly considering these children, and more importantly the staff, are just as vulnerable as those in schools? On schools, do you have any preliminary information about outbreaks at schools? The dashboard remains unchanged. The probable deaths have increased by more than 30 people in the last two weeks after months of just minor week-to-week adjustments. Is there something specific behind the larger increases? Commissioner, I was wondering if you could clarify on the megasites. Do we know which three would be opening in north, central, and south?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start, Judy, if that's alright, and I may want to pull Ed in for the probable losses of life. I think on childcare, my sense is that we would go with the two-step move that we've been going with, which is requiring vaccinations in lieu of that, a very –

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: That hasn't been announced yet.

Governor Phil Murphy: – regular testing, but we've not made that official yet.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: We have a couple of other categories that...

Governor Phil Murphy: If I had to predict, that's where it'll end up. Is that fair to say, Judy, without making news?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't have anything on school outbreaks. Judy, do you? It's too early.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: It's too early to tell. We want to get some – several weeks of experience before we put the dashboard up because we have nothing to put on the dashboard right now.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll jump before we go back to Ed. On megasites, that is to be determined, partly related to Sam's question in terms of how many – what's the eligibility and how many we think we need out of the chute. We clearly – I'm saying this but I'm going to say it explicitly. We'd like certainty sooner than later, as you can imagine, which we don't have yet from the feds. God willing, we'll get that sooner than later.

Ed, good afternoon, welcome. A good question with a heavy heart, the probables have gone up by 30-ish over the past few weeks. Any color on that? Good to see you.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you and unfortunately, no, happy to get back to you on that. I have to take a look. I'm not aware of anything in particular, but I'll get back to you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Thank you, Matt. John, welcome to Jersey. John, you there? How are you?

Reporter: I am here, indeed, and I'm honored to be here. I was taking notes on you. I'm interested. Are you doing comparisons with other states on how your response to the Delta variant is or are you just focused here?

Governor Phil Murphy: Are we what with other states, sorry?

Reporter: Doing comparisons with other states.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, all the time.

Reporter: Give us a sense of how you're doing.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, I mean, I think the northeast generally – I don't think I'd trade – as bad as it's gotten, I wouldn't trade our hand with any other region in the country or probably any other state right now. I had lunch with our spouses with Governor Hochul in New York on Saturday, and we covered a whole range of topics, as you can imagine, including the pandemic. We speak with Governor Lamont all the time. I spoke with Governor Wolf of Pennsylvania last week. I think the northeast – Judy, you tell me if you disagree. The northeast feels to be largely as a block, and I think New Jersey very much so in a place that's worse than it was a couple of months ago but not nearly as bad as it was in the first or second wave and for the most part, highly vaccinated if not entirely highly vaccinated. I think we're the most highly vaccinated large state in America. Is that all fair? Yeah?

Listen, we look at other states that are struggling, and we pray for them and hope that they're able to make progress. There's a lot written about, overnight, West Virginia, which I think only two or three months ago, West Virginia was held out as a national model. They've been crushed. Governor Justice, to his credit, is out there pounding away to get folks vaccinated and I think saying and it looks like doing all the right things. I think they're the least vaccinated state in America. It's tough stuff.

I'm the vice-chair of the National Governor's Association. We have a call every other Tuesday. We have a call tomorrow. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas, our chair, will chair that. We'll know more. That's always an informative exchange with the White House and usually other folks like the CDC director and Dr. Fauci and others. Thank you; welcome.

Alex, how are you?

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon. How are you, Governor?

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: For Dr. Lifshitz, at what point do you believe that COVID-19 becomes another, for lack of a better word, manageable seasonal disease like the flu? Do you have a specific baseline, whether it's cases, hospitalizations, or deaths? I don't know if you know this offhand, but what does a bad flu year look like in terms of daily or weekly cases? At what point of those lines from COVID and flu start to look very similar?

For you, Colonel, can you confirm the 30th fatality? Is that a person who was missing? Is there anyone left still missing from the storm? I'd just like to ask you two to elaborate on what you mentioned about the letters. I mean, it is overwhelming that law enforcement is taking so much of the COVID-19 pandemic, but do you believe at all that in the last six months, some reluctance to get vaccinated could have contributed to that?

For you, Governor, I'd like to ask that if a private business decides to terminate someone because that person refuses to get the COVID-19 vaccine, is that person eligible for unemployment after that termination? Finally just to address a question to you similar to what I just asked Dr. Lifshitz, at what point does the COVID picture to you seem more to resemble the flu, or do you feel that your Administration is overplaying COVID, downplaying the flu, both, or neither?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, let me start and we'll ask colleagues to come in here. On that last phrase, I would just repeat that we have, at every step of the way, called balls and strikes as best we could. I've never thought of us over- or underplaying the reality. I think our job has to be putting the facts out and giving our best assessment as to where those facts lead us. Ed should weigh in here after a minute. I think Ed mentioned – this goes back several months. These are all very good questions. What does a flu season look like? As I recall, Ed, a bad flu season you mentioned – again this is several months ago – was sadly – we don't say this lightly, about a thousand fatalities a year. I remember when you said that, we were running at about 2,000 fatalities a year from COVID at that time. I'll come back to Ed in a second.

There's a lot of good press on this. I forget where it is, but it's easy to say it's – I say this as a non-health expert. It's easy to say this will be eventually manageable, but the distance between today and that and the complexities between today and that should not be underestimated I want to make sure, Pat, that we report

this as accurately as possible. We believe the 30th fatality has taken the missing list to zero, but I want to make sure we come back and confirm that. I'll leave it to you on the law enforcement question. I don't know that you, as you write those notes, you've got folks' vaccination status. It's hard to – but we'll come back in one second on that.

Private business terminates someone. As I understand, Parimal, the presidents – although we're still waiting for the OSHA rules and regs to come out; am I right? As we understand it now, if you're over a hundred employees, you've got the two-step option here. You either have to be vaccinated or subject to a frequency of testing, which is in fact what we have for state employees. Any more color on that?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, so if a business decided to be stricter on their own and decided not to have a testing opt-out, I think whether they could terminate someone and the eligibility for that individual for unemployment would probably depend on that individual's employment arrangement.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. With that, Ed, how do you answer the manageable, and then Pat, anything on vaccinations?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Alex, excellent questions, and these aren't for me to decide. It's a bigger question as to what is acceptable as far as death and illness and overall bad events. To some extent, I would take some exception to comparing it to the flu because you're comparing it to the worst communicable disease prior to COVID that's occurred on a regular basis in the United States and in New Jersey. As the Governor said, in a typical bad flu season, we'd lose roughly a thousand or so individuals. I would say that rather than – if we got down to a thousand – and as has been mentioned, we're now running closer to 4 or 5,000 per year at the current rate. If we were to get down to a thousand, would I consider that a success and say oh, great, we got down to a thousand? We're only losing a thousand people a year to a disease that is largely preventable. I certainly wouldn't be happy with that. I would want to go further.

We view the deaths of every flu pediatric patient every year, and luckily there aren't very many of them. They do well against flu just as they do well against COVID, but there are some. There's nothing more heartbreaking to me than when I review a chart of a child who died of flu and you see not vaccinated. You know that this was something that we likely preventable. Those thousand deaths a year we get in a bad flu season, they shouldn't be a thousand. They should be lower than a thousand and COVID should be lower than that as well. Certainly when will that happen? When will this be considered something that's endemic and is coming back every year and we'll be handling it more like other infectious diseases? I can't give you an exact answer to that. I would say that that's certainly a goal – my personal goal is always to save the most possible life. I would hope to do better even than we've done with flu.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, couple of quick things before we turn to Pat. Running 4 to 5,000 fatalities a year right now. When you made that statement several months ago about a bad flu season, what that looks like, it was 2,000. That gives you a sense – another way to look at the impact that the Delta variant has had. Still a lot less than the tragedy we saw in the first and second wave. Then secondly, your point, a bad – let's not – and I'm not – you're not and I know I'm not and you all aren't – a bad flu season, just writing off that level of fatality is just – takes your breath away. I mentioned a short while ago, 750 New Jerseyans died on 9/11, which is a staggering loss, to put that into context. Thank you for weighing in. Judy, you good on that?

Pat, you've got no way to know whether or not somebody's vaccinated when you're writing these letters, right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: That, I don't, but I do – regardless of what line of work that people are in, I do think reluctance to get vaccinated has contributed to – we've been in 19 months of briefings and meetings with the Commissioner and her team, and I don't think I could land on any other conclusion there, Alex. I did just get an update from the State Medical Examiner that that 30th victim had been hospitalized and therefore was not reported missing, Governor. Our missing person remains at one at this juncture.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for asking that. This gets – as usual, Rob Asaro-Angelo is watching on the UI question. I'll just quote Rob. "As usual, nothing with – unemployment insurance is simple. Each claim is judged on its specific particulars. There are many factors which affect UI eligibility; reason for separation is just one of them." Thank you for that, though.

Good afternoon.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Good afternoon, Governor. Question from David Cruz: Governor, your opponent in this election is calling for legislative hearings into your handling of Hurricane Ida, specifically why you took as long as you did to declare a state of emergency. Have you done a post-event analysis yet? Do you already have things you know you will do differently next time, and do you think legislative hearings would be constructive in this effort? From Lewis Stainton, Governor, does the state have a role in implementing the President's new vaccine mandate and if so, what does that look like? From Brenda Flanagan, is the state's variant testing capacity robust enough to detect and stay ahead of new variants? Are you sequencing breakthrough cases for variants? Do you think the state is under-detecting COVID cases? Could you also please comment on the rise over the last few weeks in ventilator use? What does that tell you?

Governor Phil Murphy: Of what, sorry?

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Ventilator use.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay.

Reporter: Yeah, thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: As it relates to David's question, we constantly – I'm not going to get into politics in this forum. We constantly do a postmortem on every single storm we deal with. What could we do better, differently, otherwise? There's not a lot new that I can add to that from answers I've given over the past couple of weeks. I do think we have to look in the mirror. We shouted out tornado warnings, flood warnings, and they came out with early and with a regular rhythm. When you lose 30 people in a storm, I think you have to look at all elements of this, including what folks have called a little bit – by the way, this is not their fault. I'd be in the same boat. This is just a human nature observation where you get these things and you feel like how many times have you gotten them and you turn them off. It turns out that sadly, you could pay an awful price for that. We look at everything and assess and we'll continue to do that.

The state's role on the vaccination mandate – I mean, obviously the booster piece is specific. We've got to execute. We've hit that one pretty hard. As it relates to the rest of the – I assume you mean the President's speech on Friday. I think we're awaiting the OSHA guidelines to come out exactly whether there's any flexibility I spoke with a CEO of a very large company today, for instance, who's got a lot of people in headquarters like campuses but a lot of offices with three or four people in private sector. When you talk about a hundred-person minimum, the implication is you're all in the same location. Is there flexibility or will there be flexibility? That's really within the private sector and the mandate that comes down from the federal government. I'm not sure there's any role that we play in that other than we want to make sure we've got the capacity to vaccinate, test, and care for individuals.

I'll defer to Judy in a second on do we have the right capacity on testing and the ability to sequence and on ventilator use, I'll also defer to Judy. I will say this, that over the past week, ventilator use, Judy, I'm showing has gone up from 111 to 131 over the past week. It's up, which is not the direction we like, but that's not up by any measure dramatically. Judy, any comments, or Ed, on testing capacity, ability to sequence, and secondly on ventilator use?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: First on ventilator use, we have seen a 20% increase over the past two weeks, but we are still 53% lower than the April 2021 peak, 76% lower than the December 2020 peak, and 93% lower than where we were in April of 2020. We keep an eye on it; it is a 20% increase over the last two weeks, but it's certainly nowhere near what the other surges – the use of ventilators in the other surges.

Governor Phil Murphy: How about testing?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we do believe we have enough testing capacity. We are working with the counties to make sure we set up more static testing sites in every county to direct people to. People are – we don't have a testing mandate; we have a vaccine mandate. Testing is a fallback position to try to protect people. It's not the easiest alternative. People will have to find a testing site

and be tested, and we do have testing sites throughout all of New Jersey. You can go on the COVID info hub and it will give you every testing site in every county where you can go, whether it's at a cost or whether it's free.

Governor Phil Murphy: It seems like five lifetimes ago but remember, it wasn't that long ago. It was a year and a half ago for several months. We would talk specifically about testing locations that were added since the press conference from the day before. I'm just looking at the past three weekdays, and again, there's a much higher take-up of testing on a weekday than there is on a weekend, which I think is a little bit counter-intuitive because you'd think you'd have more time on your hand, but that's not the – 37,677 on September 9th, 46,108 tests on September 8th, 51,362 tests on September 7th. That's per capita. We're testing in the higher upper echelons of any state in America, so we just want to make sure it stays that way. The more we know, the better equipped we are, particularly the health team, to deal with this.

With that, Dave, good afternoon. You'll take us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. When you – in the beginning of the update, you were listing the breakthrough cases, and it went pretty fast. I don't know if you actually gave us the specific information about –

Governor Phil Murphy: Mahen, can we put the breakthrough – the two slides back up? I didn't speak to them because we're getting to the point where we're allowing folks – this is cumulative as of August 30th.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Right. Could you review for us, Commissioner, of the total number of cases August 23 to 29? How many of these were breakthrough cases and how many of this group – what was the percentage, if you have it, of hospitalizations? What does this tell us, if anything, about how long the vaccines are staying effective, the efficacy of the vaccines? Do we know the age of the people that are being hospitalized if they're breakthrough cases? If we don't, maybe Dr. Lifshitz could talk a little bit about winning immunity and what we think may be happening and so forth.

Then I don't know – I know, Governor, you're a sports fan. I don't know if you saw the Giants game; they didn't look great.

Governor Phil Murphy: I was at it for the first half.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: You were? Okay. Eighty thousand people in the stadium. I didn't see anybody wearing a mask. Did the pandemic end? Did I miss something? Is this safe? I mean, some people that I was watching the game with were like, wait a minute, what's going on here? You see this not only in New Jersey but all over the country. How safe do we now think it is to attend a mass event outdoors without a mask sitting, yelling, cheering, crying, screaming for a couple of hours?

Governor Phil Murphy: More crying than cheering yesterday.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: More crying, yes, I was going to – I wouldn't want to go there, but it's only one game, as I heard somebody say. Seriously speaking, I mean, should people be concerned about this? It just seemed – we're talking about COVID hospitalizations, new cases, deaths, and then there's 80,000 people and everybody's saying oh, it's so great to have the fans back. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: So a couple of things. If you look at the chart in front of us and maybe Mahen, going forward, we can put what this translates into as a percentage matter, that – of the positives that were in the week of the 23rd to the 29th, I believe these are just PCRs. Is that right? I believe. I'm looking north of – just north – low 20% were breakthrough. If you look at hospitalizations, it looks like it's a little over 3% were vaccinated individuals, and deaths, thank God, were zero. Then if you go back, Mahen, to the slide before – if you could, go back. There you go. This is the cumulative lived experience, and those numbers are better except for the deaths. The numbers are better because it's a cumulative experience including periods of time that didn't include the Delta variant. I'm not sure if Ed or Judy want to add anything to that.

Listen, Parimal – and we'll come back if we need to correct the record. I checked this before I went to MetLife yesterday, and you are not required but you're strongly – it's a strong recommendation when you're indoors to wear a mask. When you are out of doors, you're not required to. I assume, Ed and Judy, the basis of that is what we've been talking about for 18 or 19 months, which is this is a lot less lethal outside than inside.

I grant you the fact that if you're sitting next to somebody you've never met before and you're not checking whether he to she is vaccinated and you're close proximity – thankfully yesterday was a beautiful day and little bit of breeze in the air. I was great to see football again with fans; all of that was good. When we were inside, my wife and I were inside, we had our masks on, but I would admit to you there was not a whole lot of adherence to that. I would just say it's not Giants-specific. This is any venue like that. If you're going to be on the inside – and I do know this is the case at MetLife. If you're in the inner part of that, you really need to – especially – it's one thing if you're walking down a hallway and there's nobody near you. That, to me, is a different – I'm practicing without a license here. That's a different level of care than if you are packed in at a bar inside waiting for your order. I personally think it's smart, forget MetLife, anywhere you're like that to have something on.

Anything you want to add, either of you, to that and/or add to the breakthrough cases question that Dave asked?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I don't have the breakthrough stats with me; I think they come out on Wednesdays. We can update on Wednesday.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, anything you want to add to that?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I can say this: there is obviously a lot of interest in how well the vaccine's working. Is immunity waning? What's happening with breakthroughs? How sick do people get? There are reasons why some of this is difficult to know for sure. We've talked about the fact that some vaccines which were used at the earliest were of one brand whereas others at different times were a different brand. The earliest people immunized also tended to be those whose immune systems might not be working the best, so they'd be more likely to have breakthrough cases. Overall, we have been getting a lot of information recently. We know, for example, last year the CDC came out and said that people who are vaccinated are about five times or so less likely to get sick in the first place and then slightly more than ten times less likely to be hospitalized and/or die than people who weren't immunized. We know that the New Jersey Hospital Association came out and based upon their data last week said that there was about a six times increased risk if you were not vaccinated compared to if you were vaccinated. We know their own internal data is showing stuff that is very similar, meaning that for the most recent time period, which would be when you'd expect a vaccine to be least effective, when it's had the most time to wane and Delta is around, we're seeing that those who were vaccinated have about one-seventh, or to put it the other way, those who are not vaccinated are about seven times as likely to be hospitalized if they get ill than those who weren't overall.

The numbers are always moving. They're always changing. That gives you – the general consensus overall is that we're talking somewhere between roughly six to ten times less likely to be hospitalized if you're vaccinated than if you aren't.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, no matter how you look at the data, every which way, even though the data's moving, it's overwhelmingly obvious that if you're vaccinated, you're far more protected against this than if you're not.

Judy, Ed, thank you. Pat, Parimal, Mahen, everybody, thank you. Matt had the mic today; thank you, Matt. Again, we'll be back here – we won't be here physically. We'll be back with you 1 o'clock virtually on Wednesday and we'll be back, unless you hear otherwise, in person here a week from today. Stay safe, everybody. Please get vaccinated and we'll speak soon. God bless.

y'all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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