

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: November 12, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

11/12/2020

Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. We have a lot of ground to cover, so we'll jump right in. I'm honored to be joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, great to have you both here. The guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, our Chief Counsel Parimal Garg, and others.

Before I jump in, I want to give a shout out and congratulations to an old friend Ron Klain who was just named overnight as President-Elect Joe Biden's Chief of Staff. Ron's a guy I've known plus or minus over 20 years. He's a guy that we've consulted on the back channel on our current reality. He ran the nation's Ebola efforts, in addition to a distinguished career both in the public sector and private sector. Hats off to Ron, we wish him the very best. He and I exchanged notes overnight. I'm very excited to work with him.

Another quick note at the top. Beginning this Monday, and I say this with somewhat of a heavy heart, we're going to go back to Monday, Wednesday and Friday press briefings. Again, that'll be for the foreseeable future, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, beginning this coming Monday.

As it was announced earlier today, I was proud to bring together – and by the way it gives me no joy. There's absolutely no join me on this, but I was proud to bring together a coalition of seven states to form an interstate compact prohibiting interstate youth hockey games and tournaments in the face of the virus' second wave. I mean, again, with a heavy heart we do this but we have to do this. I want to thank some good friends: Maine Governor Janet Mills, Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo, New Hampshire Governor Chris

Sununu, Vermont Governor Phil Scott, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, and my high school and college classmate, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker for their support of and partnership in this regional approach to interstate competitions. If I had to predict, this group will grow and I hope it grows soon.

We know that there has been transmission linked to youth hockey team activities and with numbers rising across our region, this is an important step to mitigate further community spread and protect public health. I will continue to work with the governors of other states on both sides of the aisle to grow this compact. This announcement comes after the Executive Order I discussed on Monday, which prohibits indoor interstate sports competitions in the state, youth leagues through high schools, and prevents our teams from using an out-of-state neutral site for a game between two New Jersey-based teams. Judy's going to get in -- I'll get into a little on this -- with where we see the spread coming from. It's fair to say on sports, Judy, we aren't sure that it's actually coming from the sports activity, it's more likely it's an adjacent activity, but in any event, it is unquestionably coming.

That same Executive Order I spoke to on Monday also direct restaurants, bars, clubs and lounges to close their indoor premises between 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. taking effect today. This means that all customers are to be out by 10:00 p.m. I must note that other states and cities are also now following suit, notably New York where Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a 10:00 p.m. closure time yesterday. Connecticut has also instituted a 10:00 p.m. close, and Maryland and San Francisco, among other places, are pulling back on indoor dining.

However, we know that congregating is not necessarily limited to restaurants, and that this is more of a problem in some areas than others. A new peer-reviewed study published this week -- and again Judy will get into this in more detail -- in the journal Nature concluded that indoor venues like restaurants and gyms accounted for roughly 80% of new infections in the early months of the pandemic. This study was based on mobility data from 98 million cell phones.

Therefore, today, I will be signing an Executive Order giving municipalities and counties the option, it is an option, to regulate the operating hours of non-essential businesses after 8:00 p.m. Municipalities and counties do not have to impose additional operating hours restrictions if they do not wish to do so. As we have been noting, our approach to the second wave is to act surgically within hotspot areas, and that means giving local officials the ability to take actions to prevent localized hotspots from becoming COVID wildfires.

We have received numerous reports that as the night progresses, people begin to congregate, let their guard down and take fewer precautions. Again, we know this is not true everywhere, so we are empowering local officials, elected officials locally, to address unique situations where they feel that an operating hours restriction in the evening would help their efforts to stop the spread of COVID.

However, let me be clear: other municipal or county actions such as restrictions on essential businesses, full business closures, or restrictions on gatherings or capacity that differ from the statewide rules are impermissible and will be invalidated. We simply cannot have a patchwork of rules where certain businesses are entirely shuttered in one town but not the next, by the way, especially in New Jersey, the densest state in America. That would lead to individuals traveling to different communities and potentially further spreading COVID.

We recognize that in many ways, what we are facing today is different from what we faced in the spring, when we were forced to take drastic action statewide to mitigate uncontrolled statewide spread in the face of scarce testing resources, and limited PPE and ventilators and, frankly, Judy and Tina, with limited knowledge of what this virus was, among other critical needs. Today, we have a much stronger testing regime in place and we have a greater ability to effectively mobilize hotspot teams and other resources. By working alongside and through local health and public safety officials, we believe we can have a more effective and efficient means of attacking this virus in the second wave.

As I mentioned, our testing capabilities are much stronger than they were in the spring. We are now at a point where we are recording, on average, approximately 45,000 PCR tests a day in addition to the rapid testing resources that have been and continue to be deployed statewide, and which are in regular use, including the 2.6 million total Abbott Labs Binax NOW rapid tests, which we are receiving in tranches from the federal government.

And to that point, last week we were notified by our federal partners that we will have another means of testing at our disposal. I am proud that New Jersey is one of the very first states, I believe five in all, selected by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services to receive a new rapid molecular test. developed by Cue Health. We are one, as I mentioned, of only five or six states at this point that will receive the new Cue tests. This test has shown to produce results with 99% accuracy in approximately 20 minutes. I was on with the CEO yesterday and he said it was 19 minutes when compared with lab-based PCR tests. Through the Department of Health, we are currently developing a distribution plan that will allow us to deploy this new testing system to our most vulnerable communities, including our long-term care facilities and veteran homes as soon as we receive them. I'll ask Judy, if she can, to speak a little bit more on this in a few minutes. I want to extend my thanks publicly to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, and a guy that we have an enormous regard for and work with all the time, Assistant Secretary for Health rather Admiral Brett Giroir, who I spoke with again or exchanged notes with again late last week, and their teams for keeping New Jersey atop the list of states when it comes to putting vital new resources into the field.

I've also spoken as of yesterday on a Zoom call with Cue Health CEO Ayub Khattak who is based in San Diego but he's an Alabama product. I spoke with him yesterday about the test and its utility here, not just in New Jersey and around the country. And I will say this, Judy, this is a big one which differentiates this from other rapid tests. This is an automatic sync up on the data flow into our health systems, and that makes that even more powerful. As you all, many of the members of the press have asked us, it's not just New Jersey. The country is challenged to sync up are these testing results, particularly the rapid turnaround ones, with our health system databases. This will be an automatic reality.

This is yet another example of our partnership with the federal government bearing fruit for New Jerseyans. We have put from moment one the politics aside and have, since moment one, obsessively tried to find at every turn common ground.

When you bring everything that we have done over the past several months together, and I'm hardly spiking any footballs here, we are in the midst of a war, let there be no doubt. Whether that's our efforts to build a sizeable PPE stockpile, our enhanced testing capabilities, our ability to move resources around at a moment's notice and now, giving our local governments the ability to take surgical action within their own borders, we are prepared to fight the second wave.

But none of this can be successful unless every New Jerseyan also recognizes their responsibility in this fight as well. We cannot let up on social distancing, on wearing our masks, or in practicing strong hand hygiene. We have got to get back to the mindset that saw us crush the curve throughout the spring. Look at all the places where and ways in which this virus is spreading. We can get a hold of this if we can get back to what worked in the spring and stick to it.

Especially with masks. The CDC has released updated guidance based on new evidence that wearing a mask is a stronger measure of protection than previously thought, protecting not just those people around the wearer, but the mask wearer as well. There is no reason whatsoever for us to stop wearing our masks. And yes, it also means that with Thanksgiving only two weeks away, we have to recognize that this is not a year for a large family gathering with loved ones coming in, especially from out of state or across age groups. Or conversely, for you all to travel to visit someone else out of state. We strongly urge you to have a smaller gathering with just your immediate cohabitants, family bubble. Anything else and you are risking your dinner table becoming a COVID hotspot.

To put a fine point on that, let me go through our current reality. 3,517 new cases today, cumulative total since March 4th, 266,986; 10,472 cases just since Monday. Essex County, more than 400 cases added today. Bergen, Passaic and Union over 300 added today. Camden, Hudson, Middlesex and Monmouth over 200. Five others over 100. We now have confirmation, with the heaviest of hearts, that another 18 New Jerseyans have died from COVID-related complications. A total of 14,694 blessed souls lost, with another 1,801 probable deaths.

Our positivity rate on test taken on Sunday is over 12%. Our rate of transmission is above one, it has been above one, it's now at 1.3. There are 1,827 patients in our hospitals. That's a number we have not seen since June 4th, including 243 new COVID confirmed patients who entered our hospitals alone, and 20 patients

again not included in our fatality number because they're not yet confirmed, who died in the hospital yesterday. We have 360 New Jerseyans being treated in our ICUs. That's the highest number since June 12th, and 117 patients, Judy, are on a ventilator. We haven't seen that number since July 7th.

Folks let these numbers sink in. COVID is not done with us, unfortunately not by a longshot. Unless we all recommit to the common sense measures that got us past the first horrendous months of this pandemic, we are in for a long, dark winter before a vaccine becomes broadly available. Again, we have got to get back to using our common sense for the common good.

I want to switch gears for a couple of other announcements. First, the Department of Labor has released the latest weekly unemployment numbers, as it does every Thursday, as every state and the federal government does every Thursday. Last week, roughly 21,000 workers submitted an initial claim for unemployment benefits. That's a decrease of more than 3,700 from the prior week and the fourth consecutive week of decline. That is little solace to those 21,000. But still, more than 1.78 million New Jersey workers have filed a claim since March, and more than 1.46 million workers have met the monetary requirements to receive benefits. That still is around 96%.

All totaled, more than \$18.7 billion has been released to unemployed and underemployed workers. Commissioner Robert Asaro Angelo and his team continue to work as hard as they can to help our families receive benefits, and they have our continued thanks.

Separately, we have also updated the dashboard tracking confirmed instances of in-school coronavirus transmission. Over the past week, another 15 outbreaks have been confirmed which have led to 46 new infections. This raises, on the left column, 51 instances of in-school transmission, and on the right column in total, that is 192 cases. All in all, while we fully expected and prepared for instances of in-school transmission these numbers are a sign. While we care about each and every one of these cases, they are a sign that those preparations to mitigate in-school spread are working. These numbers are lower than I believe any of us could have anticipated. Remember that we have over 3,000 buildings is the denominator, so you've got 51 of those. That's within our reasonable expectations and a lot better than I would have guessed.

While I'm at it, I must again dispel forcefully the irresponsible rumor that was spread on Twitter yesterday. We are not closing our schools. Today, staying with Ed, the Department of Education also will be putting online its statistics tracking our work to close the digital divide in our schools. As a follow up to this summer's Bridging the Digital Divide grant program, the department began collecting data from districts in mid-October. As of today, nearly 70% of districts have reported that they currently have no device or connectivity needs. The initial estimates from the summer were that 231,000 students lacked either the proper device or connectivity for remote learning. That need has now been reduced to approximately 40,000 students, again from 231,000 down to 40,000 and that's less than 3% of the public school population.

For the districts which have identified a remaining need, the most commonly reported issue has been related to either supply chain or delivery delays. While this data definitely shows positive movement, we are not going to let up for one second on closing the remaining gap. 40,000 students is still 40,000 students too many. The department continues its work in direct collaboration with districts to ensure the best use of resources, the accurate reporting of data, and effective communication between districts on the one hand and students and families at the local level. As I noted, the data will be available on the department's website. That's nj.gov/education and will be updated weekly as the new data comes in from districts. I'm grateful to Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen McMillan and before her, Interim Commissioner Kevin Deemer for the department's efforts.

Now, as I reported a few minutes ago, we have lost still more residents, still more blessed souls to this virus and please bear with me, as we do every day, as we remember three of the nearly 16,500 New Jerseyans who have died. We begin today by remembering Essex County restaurateur William "Bill" Racigliano. Raised in North Caldwell, he was a standout athlete at West Essex High before going on to earn a degree in business from William Paterson college. While a student at William Paterson, he worked part time at the Hanover Manor learning the restaurant business, and sparking a career that ultimately led to becoming the co-owner of Rupert's in Riverdale for 20 years, and the full owner of the Brookdale Tavern and Kitchen in Bloomfield, which he opened in 2016.

But life wasn't all work and Bill was also well known for his willingness to open the doors of his establishments to many civic organizations over the years. Bill is survived by his wife, Debbie. I had an emotional conversation with her about all the good deeds that Bill did. By the way, they started dating in 1984 and got married in 2008, so 24 years of dating before they got married. In addition to Debbie, Bill leaves behind stepson, Mark, step-granddaughter Marin. He leaves his brother Vincent and sisters Marilyn and Barbara, along with their families. Bill was just my age, 63 years old. He also leaves behind a community grateful for his hospitality and civic spirit. We offer them all our condolences, and to Bill we say simply thank you and God bless you.

And by the way, the Brookdale Tavern and Kitchen is continuing. It's open, it's under new ownership and Debbie and the family wanted me to say not only do they take their hats off and their hearts are with the extraordinary people of Brookdale, but they hope that they are welcomed and supported at that Brookdale Tavern and Kitchen just as she and Bill were.

Next up, we remember Patricia on the left, Pat Stabile, a longtime resident of North Plainfield. After graduating with a degree in education from Trenton State College, today the College of New Jersey, she became a respected and beloved educator in the Bridgewater Raritan Public Schools, teaching fourth and fifth grades across a distinguished 37-year-long career. Pat was also active within the North Plainfield community that she loved so much, serving as a member of the North Plainfield Library Advisory Board, and giving her time as one of the library's landscaping volunteers, a group known as the Soil Sisters.

Gardening was one of Pat's many passions. She was also an avid reader, apropos for a lifelong educator. Pat was 78 years old. Pat leaves her son, North Plainfield Councilman Skip and daughter-in-law Carolina, and also her brother Robert and sister-in-law Jane. I want to thank my friend Peg Shaffer for bringing Pat's passing to my attention. We thank Pat for her years of service to the children in her classrooms, and for making her community a more beautiful place. May God bless and watch over her memory.

And finally today, we recall Milton Rubin. He was 92 years old and a resident of Monroe in Middlesex County. As a child growing up in Morristown, Milton could often be seen helping his father in the family's business, Rubin's Deli on Speedwell Avenue. A gifted athlete, he would just as often be seen on the basketball court at Morristown High School in the Jewish Community Center Athletic Club. That love of sports continued throughout his life, whether it be playing in numerous adult softball leagues, his weekly tennis game, or coaching youth basketball and baseball. He served our nation in the United States Army during the Korean War era, ultimately rising to become Sergeant Milton Rubin. Professionally he worked in sales, most notably for the Dolly Madison ice cream brand and the Standard Uniform Company. He worked well into his 70s, by the way, mostly because he loved meeting new people.

His wife Irene sadly passed back in 2009. He leaves behind his son, Daniel and daughter-in-law Elizabeth, they're in California; daughters Deborah who's in New Brunswick and Miriam who's in Cranberry, and I have the great honor of speaking with Deborah and Miriam, and he leaves behind granddaughters, Amanda, Sidney, and Olivia. I think those are the three in the front row there. He's also survived by his sister Bella. He also leaves his longtime companion Rita. His daughters Deborah and Miriam wanted me to give a shout out to a guy who was with him right till the end, his aide who helped make their life as good as it could be under the circumstances. His name was Kevin. We thank Milton for his service to our nation and for being a role model and mentor for so many. May his memory be a blessing.

Now let's switch gears. As we've highlighted over the past weeks, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority has been working side by side with small businesses across our state to help ensure their health and vitality throughout this pandemic. On Tuesday, I was proud to announce that an additional \$60 million would be injected into the EDA's support program so we can help every business that has applied for assistance under the latest phase three grant program. But let's also celebrate the businesses who today are back open because of the EDA's partnership. One of them is this, The Little Gym of Jersey City, operated right there by Danielle and Tim Sporsic. The Little Gym provides gymnastics classes that come with a strong focus on developing and growing not just a child's physical skills, but also their social and cognitive skills. It's part of a commitment to not just producing a lifelong love of exercise but to creating a full, well-rounded individual. Check them out at thelittlegym.com/jerseycitynj.

Danielle and Tim worked with the EDA to secure an emergency loan that has allowed them to cover expenses and fulfill The Little Gym's premise of being a safe and healthy place for kids. I had the opportunity earlier this week to check in with Danielle and to thank her for all that they are doing to keep Jersey City moving. That's her husband Tim on her left. That's her son Landon in her arms. And if this weren't enough, she delivered a baby two weeks ago. Not pictured is two-week-old Serena. We wish them nothing but the very best.

As I do every day, I thank the millions of you across our state who are doing the right things to keep ourselves moving forward against this virus. The numbers that we're seeing today, this week recently are stark and sobering but they should not deter us from continuing the fight, not just against coronavirus, but also against our pandemic fatigue. Now is not the time to let up. Let's keep up our work to protect every single life that we can.

With that, please help me welcome the woman to my right, the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, every week I join a call with other state health officials to discuss the COVID-19 situation in our states, and we are all dealing with the same issues. Increasing cases and community spread are in all our states. Gatherings of individuals continue to spread this virus. We know that this virus is extremely virulent, and it is spread by exposure to individuals who are not practicing our public health measures. We also know that this virus enjoys cold weather. The cooler, drier air provides conditions that allows respiratory virus to spread more easily.

As the Governor shared, since Monday we have reported more than 10,000 new cases. This is a wake-up call. We need your help. We need you to strictly adhere to masking, social distancing, washing your hands, staying home if you're sick, getting tested if you've been exposed, and following quarantine guidance if necessary. If we are lax, if we continue on this trajectory, our state will return to the situation we were in last spring.

I want to share a few examples that are just a subset of what is going on in the state, to illustrate how quickly this virus can spread. As I said, this is just one subset. To remind you, we also look at new cases, cases per hundred thousand, new hospital admissions, hospital census, ICU census, percent positivity, and COVID-like illness in our emergency room, among others. But for example, recent gatherings, many of which were Halloween parties, have led to nearly 70 cases in Union, Gloucester, Somerset, Essex and Cumberland Counties. A Halloween party in Union alone, Union County, led to 30 cases. Another in Gloucester led to 22 cases. A third Halloween party in Somerset led to nine cases, and another in Cumberland led to three cases.

Youth sports also continues to be a challenge. Since the beginning of October, we know of 14 outbreaks among hockey teams in Gloucester, Union, Somerset, Bergen, Maurice, Passaic and Mercer counties. They have led to more than 70 positive cases. As you know, the department has issued revised guidance on indoor sports activities in conjunction with the Governor's Executive Order prohibiting interstate indoor K-12 club and league youth sports competitions. In addition to including the prohibition, the updated guidance also requires those engaging in sports activities to cooperate with local health departments on contact tracing, and requires coaching staff to strictly enforce social distancing and masking.

The goal of these revisions is to slow the spread of the virus among our youth participating in these activities. It's important to remember that it is often impossible to identify the exact source of the illness. We know if someone tests positive, but even to that person, it may not be clear when or how they were exposed.

This chart shows the overall breakdown of community outbreaks, excluding long-term care, health care and schools for March 20th to November 1st. As I said, this is just a subset of 164 outbreaks that were successfully traced because individuals answered the call, gave sufficient information for the public health investigation. Of these 164 outbreaks, 17% were among sports teams, 13% were party and gatherings, 12% was daycare, 10% was the workplace, 9% in our farms, 14% in the workplace to include public safety, food and agriculture, which includes restaurants, 5% weddings, another 5% in workplace, government, 3% in workplace, warehouse, 3% faith-based organizations, 2% workplace office settings, 2% in the general community, 2% in camp and 1%, each at animal facilities, hotel or other lodging.

From October 1st through November 1st, we saw the following percent of outbreak in the 51 outbreaks represented here. It jumped to 33% among sports teams, 11% in workplace government, 10% each attributed to workplace, public safety, daycare facilities and other types, 6% weddings, 6% party and gatherings, 4% workplace, food and agriculture, and 2% attributed to the community office setting, hotel lodging, casinos and animal facilities.

Our data, however, would be more complete if members of the public answered the call from the contact tracers and shared information on who they've been with, who they've been in contact with and where they've been. This information is vital to protecting the health of others and containing the spread of the virus.

Expanding testing is also critically important to fighting back the virus. As the Governor stated, New Jersey is one of the states chosen to receive Cue Tests to pilot. The federal government chose New Jersey because they were pleased with our progress on distributing the Binax tests. The Cue Test is a molecular test that uses a nasal swab to collect the specimen. The test has very high sensitivity, with a very low occurrence of false negatives. We do expect that it will perform better than antigen tests. Our deputy commissioner is working with the Interim Adjutant General Colonel Lisa Hou to plan for its use in our state veteran homes once we receive the test, and we expect to receive them very soon.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals are at 1,827 hospitalizations. September 12th, on a seven-day rolling average, as I've reminded you, that was 420. There are 360 individuals in critical care, holding at about 32% on ventilators. Fortunately, no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, currently reporting 61 cases, and there have been no deaths reported in New Jersey at this time.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. In terms of race and ethnicity, we're still reporting White 54.1%, Black 18.1%, Hispanic the highest at 20.2%, Asian 5.5% and other 2.1%.

At the state's veterans homes, cumulatively there are a total of 400 cases and 146 deaths. At our state psychiatric homes, cumulatively 254 total cases and 13 patient deaths.

The percent positivity in New Jersey as of November 8th is 12.02%. The Northern part of the state 12.96%, the Central part 11.99%, the Southern part of the state 10.80%, and that's the highest that we've reported across the state. There is no significant difference from the northern part of the state to the southern part of the state, or the central part of the state.

That concludes my daily report. Stay safe and remember, for each of us and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. It occurs to me, Mahen, we haven't done an update on contact tracers, size of the community corps or our hit rates, which we should probably do at some point next week, but your point was a great one. You picked a pool of 164 instances that were tracked down to ground, but I'll put words in your mouth. I know you'd love more people to pick up the phone and cooperate, right? We'd have a lot better sense of the reality here.

Pat, I know we're going to hear a lot on compliance over the next couple of weeks because I know that's a focus on all of our parts but you've got a pretty special report that's unrelated to that today. Am I right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I do. Thank you, Governor. Since Monday, we do not have any EO compliance issues to report but as to the Governor's point, that may change in the weeks ahead. And then a totally non-related story but on the heels of Veterans Day, if you missed it and in a time when positive stories are good, that we had 101-year-old World War II Veteran that was escorted up the turnpike by Jersey Troopers. 101 years old. His name is Sidney Walton, and it was our honor to escort him and salute him as he passed up the turnpike and we turned him over to the capable hands of the New York State Police, who took him up into New York. It was just our honor in a time, like I said, when we never can forget that Greatest Generation. We were humbled and honored to be a part of it. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: How cool is that? God bless him and God bless all of our veterans. We did our annual event yesterday, which is normally like a lot of things in person, it was done virtually, still moving. I taped my section of it over in Homedale at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which is an incredibly moving place, one of the most moving parts, Jared, right down the block from where you and I live. I encourage folks, that's something worth visiting if you've never done it before. Thank you, Pat and thank you, Judy, as well.

We'll take questions. We'll start over here. Dante's got the mic today. Again, just a couple of things. Housekeeping, number one. We're going to go virtually with you tomorrow, Saturday and Sunday, unless there's a reason to be with you in person, and we'll go to a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule beginning next week, out of deference to the fact that this thing is raging again. The more real-time information folks have, the better.

The second one is if I could ask our esteemed members of the press to keep your questions to a limit here. We have a lot of you today. Brent, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Hello. New York and Connecticut are limiting indoor gatherings to 10 people. Will New Jersey follow suit, and if not, why?

Will the state approve school district requests to delay a return to in-person classes or any switch to fully remote if the district solely cites the rising number of cases in their area as justification?

The regional risk matrix that measures the risk of COVID-19 currently sits in the moderate range for all 21 counties, but data appears to show some will move into the high risk category. Has that happened yet? Would high risk trigger automatic school closings?

The state's hospital divert status tracker has shown to be increasing lately, citing patient volume as a reason for going full divert. Is this due to surges in COVID cases? Is that a cause for concern? And is the state considering adding bed capacity with field stations or closed facilities again?

Do dance teams or bands or cheerleading squads, are they included in the interstate sports ban?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, you'll have to come in on a couple of these. On your question about the 10-person limit, all options are on the table. School district plans, the general community reality is obviously taken into account but we've said this before, and we don't make light of any one, not even one of these cases in schools, but there is a clear disconnect between the reality of what's going on inside of our school buildings and the communities that surround them. There's just no question about that.

And by the way, if you look to Europe, you're seeing the same thing, even in the countries that are cutting down dramatically or locking down dramatically. They've overwhelmingly kept schools open. The regional risk metrics, I assume that it's going from moderate to high. I mean, we're talking about 3,000-something cases a day. Judy, you can address that, state hospitals on diverts. Before you speak, Parimal, help me out on dance teams, cheerleading and band squads. Are they part of this?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Competitive dance and cheerleading are considered sports and subject to the Department of Health's guidance on organized sports.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you on bands. Judy, any comments you've got on regional risk metric and/or diverts among our hospitals?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'll talk about diverts and then Dr. Tan can talk about the CALI scores and what it looks like and what our expectation is. We have several hospitals on divert right now. It's a combination of full divert, partial critical care divert, and psychiatric service divert. A general increase overall in volume, certainly exacerbated by increasing COVID patients.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Related to CALI, COVID Activity Level Indicators, as mentioned, we update this every week and we look at several different metrics, including looking at the cases per hundred thousand, percent syndromic surveillance, COVID-like illness that occurs at emergency departments, as well as percent positivity. It's correct that right now the entire state is at moderate level and we have different cut offs for each of those three indicators. Right now, our numbers suggest that we're probably on a positive trajectory that pretty soon, probably will start seeing high levels of COVID activity throughout the entire state.

That said, how that translates to the school matrix, again, ultimately we have to remind everybody that the school districts in conjunction with the local public health departments consider all of these activity levels in their particular area. They make the decisions according to some suggestions about whether or not to close

or go remote and so on, based on those activity levels. We defer to some of the local decisions for those calls.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, thank you for that. We've we said this a lot in the spring. We are the densest state in the nation. In many respects, that's a huge asset. It is not in this case. We've got similar characteristics to say in New York, but we don't have the sort of lopsided reality that New York has with 9 million people living in one community, and then a dispersion. We have our own open space and rural areas as well, but we are on top of each other, 565 communities in many cases, we have, I believe, the two densest counties in America in Hudson and Essex County, just to pick those two by example. So thank you. Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. I know you just said that everything's on the table with regard to the idea of lowering the limits for indoor gatherings. Can you just give us a little sense about what your thinking is about this? I mean even increasing penalties, I understand the point that it's hard to crack down on this stuff, because it's private homes, but it sends a message. I mean, some cities in Jersey are already doing this. It gets people's attention, it would seem.

Schools you mentioned were doing really well and that may be different than exactly what's going on in particular communities, but we've had a lot of communication from parents very concerned about the whole idea that a lot of kids may be asymptomatic, so they're not going to get tested and it's possible that they are spreading it. Would you consider, or is it in your thinking to consider instituting an all-virtual situation at some point if we keep seeing these numbers increasing?

Finally, you mentioned, Governor, the study about masks and the importance of it. What is your message to the people who apparently are tired of wearing the mask over their nose as well as their mouth? They think it's uncomfortable and annoying and it's just too much for them to handle so they're just not doing it. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. You know what's really uncomfortable and annoying? When you die. That's my answer. And this is not a forever and for always. Yeah, I mentioned April/May where Tony Fauci thought there was broad distribution of vaccines. We had a meeting today and Judy, I don't want to put words in your mouth or Tina's, but you could see even the first wave is well ahead of that in terms of vulnerable communities and healthcare workers and frontline workers. This is not forever. We're in a sprint right now and I would just ask people to bear down.

Kids very well may be asymptomatic and unless Tina tells me otherwise, we believe that asymptomatic kids or adults can still spread the virus, so that's a fact. Would we consider going to all virtual? That option is always, sadly, on the table but the data we have so far, pretty impressive. Again, we're not we're not making light of any of these cases, 51 outbreaks, 192 people, but that 51 outbreaks is spread over 3,000 buildings.

Secondly, assuming we believe -- and the schools have done an extraordinary job here, I have to say, of just doing the right thing, and getting the physical plant and the way that the students and educators and administrators are behaving alike, we know the overwhelming richness associated with in-person education. I should update that, by the way. It's moved a couple since Monday. Right now 516 districts or entities that we have supervisory responsibility for are hybrid, 162 are remote, 97 are in-person, 36 have a combination. Those have all moved a couple since Monday.

You know, our limits I think are 25, would we consider going to 10? The answer is yes and I think your point is a good one, both in substance -- we don't want to do things only that are symbolic, right? We want substance that is attached to also the symbolic benefit. We notice there's transmission at bars, seated at bars. It also, I think, says something to folks. You know what? This is still serious even if I'm not sitting at a bar, this virus is still among us.

I also want to balance and I think we want to balance and Pat lives this more than I, you want to have rules in place that you know you can effectively enforce. You've got to balance that, but that remains on the table, without question. Thank you. Hello, sir.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Hello, Governor. I have three from NJ Spotlight. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Policy Lab is recommending schools in that region shift to online learning starting next week and calling for business restrictions as a proactive measure to help reduce the spread of COVID, particularly around Thanksgiving. Would you consider imposing additional infection controls, particularly in schools as a preemptive strike, given what models are showing for the coming weeks?

The City of Patterson is seeing its highest number of shootings in a decade, 143 people have been shot this year. What is your reaction to this increase in violence in Patterson? Is this a trend in other cities in New Jersey? What can you attribute it to? Some Patterson residents say the increase in shootings is linked to last week's inmate release. Are you seeing a connection there?

Last, to follow up on Monday, do you have any update as far as numbers on the election, particularly ballots cast, number of provisional ballots and the percent that remained to be tallied? Are you worried that Tom Malinowski may wind up losing reelection? His lead has narrowed to fewer than 9,000 votes with an unknown number of ballots remaining to be counted.

Governor Phil Murphy: On the first one was that, CHOP Children's Hospital of Philadelphia did you say? Okay, I can't speak for CHOP. That's a great institution but I think I've already answered the question. All options remain on the table. Our school experience so far statewide has been a positive one. It is worth noting that Camden County has nine of the 51 school outbreaks, and that's obviously in the metro Philadelphia area, but I don't think I've got any more to add on that.

On Patterson, I think it's endemic and I'll ask Pat to weigh in here, of a national reality, a national trend, which is probably being fed by all sorts of things, including people frustrated, loss of jobs, mental health challenges, all of which had been exacerbated this year. And again, bear with me. I know no correlation with the inmate release unless you're aware of one.

And then on either Tom Malinowski, Tom Kane's race or more generally, we will adhere to the let's count every ballot and then at that point, which by the way has to be November 20th at latest, this is Thursday. Yesterday, the provisional ballots were starting to be counted. I know that the mail-in number ultimately got over 4.4 million, that's probably an update since I gave you on Monday. I can't give you an exact number but Mahen can follow up and give it to you, but it was over 4.4 million. And again, the entirety of votes cast in 2016, which was the previous record, was 3.9 million so it's smashed through that. Pat, any color on Patterson or generally on gun violence?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. I was on with the Mayor of Patterson yesterday as well as With Director Spezielle and it is not a unique circumstance to Patterson. It is throughout New Jersey, it is throughout the entire nation that shooting homicides are up in the 28% to 35% range. It is a constant partnership, federal, state, county, local in Patterson and beyond to combat the gun violence issue.

Governor Phil Murphy: I thank my lucky stars, I pray each night that we have among if not the strongest gun safety laws in America, and that's something that's going for us. But we also know that guns come up the iron pipeline across borders. We're not an island on this one. We're also not an island in terms of the contributing factors, you know, loss of job, small businesses crushed, mental health stress, opioid use, whatever it might be, everything has been exacerbated in the year 2020. Thank you for that. Charlie, let's do you and then we'll go back to Alex and come around that way. Hey, Charlie.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Good afternoon, Governor. Three items for you. You made statements that implied the US Attorney had made political announcements about the civil rights investigation into the veteran homes and also about election monitoring in Bergen and Middlesex. Do you still believe that those were political statements? Do you have evidence to support that? What do you think his motivation was, considering you, sir, were not on the ballot in the election?

Data scientists believe it's crucial to make zip code level COVID data available, but the DOH is still suppressing the data for 70% of New Jersey's zip codes. The data available on the dashboard is more than two months out of date. Who is the privacy officer? What is their name, responsible for that decision? When will the DOH be updating that?

Finally, in September, you spoke to a couple of advocates for the Lincoln Annex School in New Brunswick. They say you promised them a meeting with your Education Commissioner, but they never got the meeting. Will your new Education Commissioner be able to make good on that promise?

Governor Phil Murphy: on US Attorney, I've got nothing new to add on that, Charlie. On zip code suppressing I would argue with the premise of the question, I've got nothing new to add on that unless Judy does. On Lincoln Annex School, I've got nothing new to add. I apologize. Alex, thank you.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Good afternoon. First for the Commissioner of Health or Dr. Tan, what is the statewide fatality rate for COVID-19 patients? Do you have a number?

Second for Colonel Callahan, I just want to follow up on the incident on the parkway the weekend before the election. Have you determined whether or not those Trump supporters intentionally jammed up the parkway or was it the troopers who were blocking their entrance to the rest area that caused that back up?

And for the Governor, just a moment ago you had your comment about masks and what's uncomfortable and what's comfortable. Obviously, we can all see your frustration that masks have become a cultural issue and people kind of associate based on that, but aren't kind of flip comments like that things that isolate the very people who you need to persuade to wear a mask in this critical time?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to actually tell you something about fatalities. I'm going to practice without a license, Tina and Judy. I actually this morning, looked at -- and you could pick different ways to look at this so forgive me, this is one very basic way that I picked. I looked at the first seven days of the past eight months, the average number of positive cases, and then I added two, three, four, five weeks to that to factor in the lag between the number of positives. I could have done the same thing with hospitalizations, but by definition, hospitalizations would have implied a more intense experience with the virus. Just the positive cases was broader.

It is quite interesting, if you look at the first seven days of April, first seven days of May, etc., etc. This has gone from consistently in the first three to four months, somewhere between 5% and 7%. Again, depending on which week you picked, for the past three months, meaningfully under 2%. That's one guy's cut at that. Tina, you're now the expert, you get to give the real answer.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: I think it's challenging to actually figure out what the actual rate is because we don't really know the full denominator necessarily too. Because it gets back to, what is your denominator of the actual case numbers? We have to recognize that there's still going to be a significant number that are not tested. You know, we also recognize that we in our daily counts count the confirmed cases. We also have many probable cases that we don't publicly report at this time, because we believe that that's an under-reported number and we don't want to skew that particular picture. But at the same time, we asked our local health departments to follow up on those as if they're confirmed cases as well. So it's difficult to actually ascertain the case fatality rate at this point, because we don't know the full denominator.

But that said, how the Governor characterized the changes over time, I think we'll start to see that rate potentially decline over time as we get a fuller picture of what the cases look like.

Governor Phil Murphy: Please, God. We used to say this all the time in the spring, we know what the numerator is, we don't know what the denominator is. I think it's fair to say we have a better handle on the denominator when you're testing 45,000 people on average a day. In the spring, both New Jersey and the nation, frankly, the world, had peashooters in terms of the amount of testing capacity, Pat, anything new one the parkway from the weekend before the election?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks, Gov. Alex, I would just say that I've been throughout New Jersey and the country, I've been on a lot of interstates where the rest areas have been closed and that never led to a highway being shut down. That's what I would say about that incident, Alex.

Governor Phil Murphy: Can I say something else, which I think is a testament to everybody on both sides of this political reality? I'm knocking on wood here, because that's not to say we're completely out of the woods but I'm incredibly impressed in our state and frankly, in the country, by the lack of incidents that I was expecting, are the lesser so. I hope it stays that way. I don't even know how to answer the last question because it's a fact, it's not flip. Folks who have politicized wearing a mask are putting either their life or others

around them at risk. That's a fact. That's a fact. Folks need to hear that. Folks need to hear that. Not fun if you don't like that, but you've got to hear it. The inconvenience associated with not wearing a mask or not wearing it properly, I speak to families almost every single day, and some days, multiple families who've lost a loved one. I'd love someone who's jerking around by not wearing a mask and making it political to speak to some of these families that I speak to. Daniel.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hi, Governor. A lot of restaurant owners are saying that the main point of having this Plexiglas between tables is to expand indoor seating capacity beyond 25%. With indoor dining, will a restaurant owner be able to go beyond 25% if they have Plexiglas?

To the Health Commissioner, you had said a number of hospitals are on diversion. Can you elaborate on which ones, how many and when the first diversion was during the second wave, what the most diversions at once were?

With marijuana legalization going on, how should the marijuana be taxed? Should it be in addition to the sales tax and the optional 2% excise tax, or is that enough?

Have the hospitals or the health department or any other health officials gotten an indication from the Trump administration on how much PPE or ventilators they'd get out of the National Stockpile?

Governor Phil Murphy: One more, or Brent's going to get mad at me for letting you ask more than he did.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Okay. A lot of restaurant owners feel like they're being punished quote, "punished for the few bad actors" end quote with the new restrictions, I think the owner of the Manasquan Bar where the outbreak happened said they felt like they were being unfairly cited by you as justification for the new restrictions. Do you agree with any of any of those assessments?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Daniel. On Plexiglas, not to increase the capacity but to make up for the lost capacity of the bar seating we are supporting that, as long as the barrier meets the Department of Health requirements or standards we are allowing restaurants to have tables closer together to allow them to meet that capacity, but we're not increasing the capacity and don't expect that we will in the near term. Judy anything else on diverts that you want to add beyond what you've already said?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I'm looking at our report. None of the hospitals were on what we call full divert. Some of them go on divert for four hours as they clear out the emergency room and make more capacity, discharge patients. The ones that were on divert were Atlantic Care, East Orange, Kennedy, Lord, St. Michael's, St. Peter's, St. Francis, University Medical Center Princeton, and Virtual West Jersey. Some of them were patient volume, some were psych services, a CT scanner was down and another one was emergency room. It's a little bit of a mixture all over the place.

Governor Phil Murphy: Kind of a mixed set of reasons, right. We had a good leadership meeting this morning. No resolution on marijuana. I still support both an excise tax upstream as well as at least a notional strong statement associated with investing the proceeds to address the inequities and the realities that the war on drugs created.

On the Trump administration, we're in touch with them all the time. I mentioned explicitly, we've been picked as one of the first five states and I know Louisiana, Alaska, Texas, New Jersey, I forget the fifth, does anyone happen to know the fifth? But we're pretty proud to be on that list and I think that again shows that we are able to consistently find common ground and check our politics at the door. I would say, not just on our side, but I would say to them as well on their side.

You know, it's and/both. There are bad actors and I previewed the fact that compliance and enforcing compliance is going to be an area of high focus but it's also just a general reality. New York's doing it. San Francisco is doing it. Maryland's doing it. Connecticut has already done it. The fact of the matter is, restaurants, there's evidence all over the place that supports that restaurants, as they're open later at night, habits change, they morph into something other than a restaurant. When was the last time -- no more by the way, even though I love you. When was the last time you had a dinner reservation at 10 o'clock? It just doesn't -- the fact that folks are making these claims proves the point. Thank you. Nothing offended. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Afternoon. Can the health department provide some more information on the dashboard about the age breakdown of positive tests and positive activity rates? Maybe even hospitalizations? Just to get a better sense of how the second wave may be different in terms of age and other demographics? Are tents going to still be allowed for outdoor dining through the fall and winter?

Tomorrow is the deadline under your Executive Order for the State Bank Implementation Board to deliver its report to you, but it doesn't look like that will happen. Can you explain the cause for delay on that and when you expect to get the recommendations? I know that you filed paperwork for reelection, but I don't think that, unless I'm mistaken, that you've come right out and said it. Can you just clarify what your plans are for a second term? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a big one you snuck in there at the end, Dustin. Age breakdown, yeah, I think that without question is useful and we have it, I believe.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I have it. I just don't have it with me.

Governor Phil Murphy: Are you asking also that it be on the dashboard? Tina.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yeah, it's all on the dashboard but generally speaking, over time, what we saw over the summer, remember we started to see trends of among younger populations in the summer, like the school age, the college age kids. But as we moved toward the fall, in September, October, we started to see the age shift more toward the working aged adults, up to about the 49, 50 age range. That's kind of where we're seeing most of our cases, in that working age area. Which again, you know, kind of reflects what we're seeing overall as we started reopening. First when we started going back to school, then we started reopening, it seems to make a lot of sense how these shifts in the age groups of the cases have happened over time.

Governor Phil Murphy: I also think it's a contributing factor. We've said it here, but it's a good question. It's a contributing factor to the fatality rate going down. It's not just that we know more and we have more capacity, but it's also that, so thank you.

I assume it's subject, Parimal, to a local municipal ordinance, but at a state level, we continue to be very supportive of anything we could do to allow outdoor dining to continue to be into the colder weather.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Sure, there's only one thing that I would note, which is that the tents do have to be consistent with our regulations around snow removal, so that they don't pose a safety issue.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a fair point. No color on why on the timing of the State Bank. I'll come back to you on that. Mahen, help me out on that. By the way, it's an extraordinary group. I think it is indicative, it's further indicative, this is one of the few that we haven't gotten to. Our batting average in terms of doing what we promised we would do or committed to do is very high. This one's been hard, for a number of reasons but I'll come back to you and give you a sense of that.

And you're absolutely right. I filed papers in early October to run for a second term. I'm all New Jersey, all the time although the overwhelming amount of my focus, as you can imagine, is on the pandemic. That'll continue to be the case. But unequivocally I'm running for a second term. Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. Elections officials pretty much around the state have been unable to report totals of outstanding mail in and provisional ballots with any reliability. I'm wondering if now that the election is some nine days behind us, if that's concerning to you?

Separately, and I'll preface this question by saying that I haven't, but have you heard of any instances of alleged voter fraud in last week's election?

And then lastly, the Executive Order that you announced today giving local governments the ability to close businesses, are you concerned that that might prompt criticism from political opponents saying that you're trying to avoid tying yourself to shutdowns that might be a lot less popular than they were, say, seven or eight months ago?

Governor Phil Murphy: On the first, at this point, we should be able to report a total number of mail-in ballots because they had to be counted by Tuesday at midnight. As I mentioned, it crossed 4.4 million. I don't have an exact number but we'll get that for you. Provisionals are being counted only as of yesterday. On that one -- so there should be no outstanding mail-ins and on provisionals, I can't give you that number yet, because we don't know that for sure. Very quick. Daniel will get mad at me for giving you this microphone.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: But in many cases, they're not in Morris, and Union County are still counting, for example?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah. Well, you may know more about those local realities than I. I was on the phone or texting today with two candidates in Morris County, and they had a pretty good handle on what the numbers were. I've got no known instances, I'll has Parimal if he knows something I don't know. I don't know of any instances of voter fraud.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: I believe there was one charge filed by the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office surrounding one alleged instance. But other than that, I'm not aware of anything.

Governor Phil Murphy: And given all the tough decisions we've taken, you probably anticipate by now that my answer would be we're not trying to avoid the political hit on something. It's just a reality. I don't personally believe there's a lot of communities where they will actually take this up. That's my current prediction, in terms of the flexibility to close non-essential indoor activities earlier. I think it is far more the case that it's another example of where we are trying to be surgical, that there isn't necessarily one size fits all. Most of the list is one size fits all. But on something like this, after having really kicked it around and thought about it extensively, obviously with a big input from health but also from the compliance side, this felt like one where we wanted to allow that ability. Not politics, but I think just another example of where we can be more surgical than blunt instrument.

I'm going to mask up, if that's okay with everybody. Thank you, Judy and Tina, as always. Pat, likewise. Jared, Parimal, Mahen, the whole team. Unless we hear from Mahen, we're back in person on Monday. We'll be virtual for the next three days and then we'll be Monday, Wednesday and Friday of next week.

I anticipate, without knowing what the numbers look like, that the next three days between now and meeting on Monday are going to be tough, particularly on cases and hospitalizations. Sadly, people are still dying. But as we discussed earlier, the percentage of folks who get it who are losing their lives has gone down, mercifully but that doesn't mean that people still aren't passing.

The one screaming ask is everybody please take this seriously and remember, it's not forever. I mean, literally, on the phone with the Pfizer CEO Albert Borla on Tuesday afternoon. This is real. Moderna's Stefan Bansal and I were back and forth on Monday or Tuesday, I can't recall which. Their development isn't quite where Pfizer is, but it's in the same type of -- I'm over my head here, but molecular structure and approach in their vaccine. I got that line from Pat. I personally will stick by what I said on Monday, I think we'll have more than one vaccine, and it'll be reasonably -- so my point is that this is not forever, but we are in the throes of it right now. We are still at war. In fact, we're far more at war than we were a month or two ago. We have got to ask you folks, please limit Thanksgiving. Please limit any private setting gatherings, please wear your face coverings, even if you're sick and tired of it and who could blame you? So am I. You've got to wear them.

Keep your distance from each other. If you've been exposed, you've got to take yourself off the field. Wait a few days, Tina, and then get tested. If you don't feel well, you've got symptoms, take yourself off the field, wait those days, Judy, and then get tested. It's basic stuff. The vaccine is incredibly complex. It's in development, regardless of who's doing it. We will owe them a debt of gratitude forever and always. The weapons we have at our disposal right now are not complex. They're incredibly basic. They're the ones I just mentioned. Please, folks, stay at it. You've been extraordinary. We need you to be there again, like you've never been before. God bless you and thank you.

Public health data continues to evolve, the states will reassess the need for continued restrictions on interstate sports activities.

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