

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: July 24th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Apologies for the slight delay. Got very wet outside very quickly, so apologies. Good afternoon, everyone. I am joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. Also at the far left, another person who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We're also joined – although she's in the audience. Please don't hold it against me, Tina – another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have you, Tina, with us as always. And joined today, especially to talk about some education matters, by, to the far right, Interim Commissioner of Education, Kevin Dehmer. Kevin, great to have you. And to my immediate left, our Chief Policy Advisor, Zakiya Smith-Ellis. Great to have you, as always.

So on Monday, I announced that the Department of Education would be releasing an update to its guidance that would give parents the option to choose all remote learning for their children for the upcoming school year. I've asked Kevin and Zakiya to join us today to provide greater details on this new guidance. The Department is releasing this guidance to make clear that this option should be allowed by school districts as part of their reopening plans. We have heard from numerous parents and families who have asked for this, and we have heard them loud and clear. Our top priority is keeping students, their families, and educators safe. And to do that, flexibility, local decision-making, and empowering parents and educators are all critical. Allowing this option will help decrease the student density within our schools and allow classroom spaces to stretch further, pardon me, to ensure proper social distancing for other students and staff.


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As I just noted, the health and safety of our educational communities is paramount, and with this guidance we are providing districts with even greater flexibility to ensure that they can meet this need. We are not mandating any one specific way to move forward. The scheduled start of the new school year is roughly six weeks away. We will continue to closely follow the public health data as we progress through the rest of this month and into August. We will continue to assess the realities of this virus on the ground and how they may impact schools' plans broadly. And we will make changes in real time if needed. Again, Kevin and Zakiya will be able to dive more deeply into the details and answer your questions.

Next, I want to address the coronavirus cluster that I was asked about yesterday in Middletown that is being linked, at least a chunk of it, to a house party attended by a group of teenagers. As we know, a bunch of young people ages 15 to 19 have since tested positive. First, I want to acknowledge and thank the work of Middletown Mayor Tony Perry and his local health officials to identify everyone who attended that party and identify anyone else who's been infected. I spoke with Tony this morning. I think he told me since Monday, they have 31 positive cases in Middletown of teenagers, not all from that party, by the way.

As I said yesterday, whatever activities these young people may have been engaged in is not anyone's focus, per se. Stopping a potential outbreak of coronavirus is, so we urge anyone who was at that party or is not – and who has not been identified or parents whose kids were there to call the Middletown Health Department at 732-615-2000. If you get that, you want Extension 2165, or you can go to COVID19@MiddletownNJ.org (<mailto:COVID19@MiddletownNJ.org>).

I mentioned this yesterday in Long Branch: the most distressing aspect of this case is learning from trained contact tracers that they've had multiple people refuse to cooperate with them, although I'm told by the mayor that that has gotten somewhat better. To be perfectly clear, again, this is not a witch hunt to root out anyone who was drinking underage, although we do not condone underage drinking. And remember, folks, it is illegal, but that's not what this is about. This is a race against the clock to ensure that everyone who may have been exposed to coronavirus is identified before they infect anyone else. It's instructive.

The questions that our contact tracers are asking are straightforward. They ask whether the individual who has been exposed has a safe place within their own household in which to self-isolate. They ask if the person who has been exposed has a private bathroom. They ask whether the person who has been exposed has any special needs, especially regarding their access to food for the 14-day self-quarantine. They ask if the individual who's been exposed is showing any symptoms of COVID-19 and they ask whether the individual may have gone somewhere where others could have been exposed. That's it. No one is looking to bust a kid for underage drinking. Again, we don't condone that. It is illegal; please don't do it, but that's not what this is about.

But everyone is looking out for the community at large. They're looking to make sure that everyone who was at this party or – and in some other case and their family members gets tested. Our community contact tracing corp is at the center of the effort to ensure that incidents like this don't progress into full-blown COVID fires. We urge everyone to cooperate fully with our contact tracers and to be forthright and honest with them. This is about protecting families and communities from a deadly disease, period.

Next, I want to reiterate the announcement we made yesterday. As I mentioned, we were in Long Branch inaugurating the Small Business Lease Emergency Assistance Grant program that will offer rental assistance to small businesses located in the 64 towns covered by the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority. And again, Zakiya and I did stare out a window over a Budweiser and come up with the 64 towns. These are in charter, in statute. They are under the purview of the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority. If we could get to every community in the state and we had the federal money to do so – more on that in a moment – we would, but this is the focus and where we start here. These are the underserved communities that have long been in the charter of the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority. So as we stated yesterday, we're allocating \$6 million of our Cares Act funds for this purpose and will provide up to \$10,000 in direct assistance to qualified small businesses. We know already that there is great anticipation for this program and the application window will be open at 9 a.m. on August 10th. This will be an online application process only, and everything will be conducted through the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority's website at www.njra.us (<http://www.njra.us>), [njra.us](http://www.njra.us). May we all have websites as easy to remember.

I want to give everybody associated with this a huge shout out. As we said yesterday, this is a one plus one equals three. So if you're having trouble making your lease payments, clearly a small business who's a tenant, this goes right at that. But it also goes to the landlord, many of whom are also small businesses themselves. And by making that direct lease payment, you're solving two sides of the same – two sides of a challenge right now up and down our state, and frankly across our county. I also want to give a shout out to Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security Preparedness. Great to see you, Jared.

Next up, I had the opportunity to speak with Federal Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie on Wednesday evening right after he toured the East Orange Medical Facility where Evan, Pat, and I went a few months ago, which was set up in partnership with the federal government. I wanted to thank them on the phone call and I want to publicly thank Secretary Wilkie for the extraordinary and great attention he has paid to New Jersey during this pandemic. We could not have a better partner. He is not always – he's not only always been just a phone call away but he's been tremendously responsive to our needs and attentive to our needs. And with all that's going on across the rest of the nation, I am grateful that he hasn't forgotten that we here in New Jersey aren't out of the woods yet. And he and I spoke explicitly about the fact that he would be there for us, God forbid, if we go back into a flare-up later on this year.

Next up, I want to give a big thank-you to the Federal Transit Administration which is stepping forward with a donation of 245,000 masks to NJ Transit, which will be distributed to commuters along the entire NJ Transit System who need one. As we have discussed, masking is required on all NJ Transit buses, trains, and light rail as well as on all private carriers. With these masks, we'll be able to ensure greater compliance with this requirement, and we will be better prepared to ensure that all riders are protected.

Now, as much as we appreciate that help, and we appreciate that deeply, I cannot express enough my level of frustration with Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell's inability to put together a relief bill that has any meaningful or significant direct assistance to states. Crafting this piece of legislation may be – may just be another game of politics by him but for governors across the country of both parties, by the way – I saw Governor Sununu of New Hampshire come out strongly earlier today in favor of direct state aid. This is a matter of survival. Senator McConnell's inability to ready a bill for a vote, pushing important decisions to the last minute, threatens the ability of states, including ours, to be able to safeguard for the long-term our public health and safety and education and infrastructure and other initiatives, not to mention that the unemployed and the millions of middle class families are still left twisting in McConnell's political breeze. The House of Representatives has already done its job and sent an aid package to the Senate. That should be the basis for moving forward. This is a plan there – there is a plan there ready to be voted on. There doesn't need to be an entirely new package put together with whatever scraps Mitch McConnell is finding in his office. We will continue to push for direct aid in New Jersey and every state that is shouldering the burden of this pandemic to come back stronger and more resilient. If only Senator McConnell shared our sense of the gravity of the situation.

And before I leave this, don't fall for the myths, folks. If you hear hey, we're going to loosen up your ability to spend the money that you already have, that money is either literally gone out of the door or it is allocated already to programs just like that lease – emergency lease program I just mentioned a few minutes ago. That money's spoken for. We need another significant slug of direct federal cash assistance. And by the way, when I say significant, for New Jersey alone, it's plus or minus, probably more plus, \$20 billion. This is not a modest, at-the-edges, nice to have. This is a got-to-have to keep us solvent, to keep us delivering the services, to keep the frontline worker

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With that, let's turn to the overnight numbers. We're reporting an additional 488 positive test results for a total of 178,345. The daily positivity – Judy, I think today is from July 20th, if I'm not mistaken, was 2.36%. That's a good number. The rate of transmission currently sits at 0.84. As we had mentioned on both Monday and Wednesday, we were aware of reporting problems from one of the private labs, which we strongly believe had skewed some of our reporting numbers over the prior several days. As that backlog continues to be clear, the data is reflective of this. And Judy, I'm out over my skis on this one but in specific, I'm going to say the 488 positive test results – my gut tells me that includes some catch-up over the past week, not just the ones that were taken on July 20.

In our healthcare system, as of last night's reports, there were 388 known COVID patients being treated with another 412 listed as persons under investigation pending the receipt of test results for a total of 800 total hospitalizations. Of these, 138 required intensive or critical care; 62 ventilators in use. With our daily check-in on the overall hospital trends, we see that we continue to move in a positive direction and our standing as compared to our sister states likewise continues to improve.

However, today we are reporting another 36 losses of life statewide confirmed from COVID-19 related causes. Of these 36, Judy and my math is right, 7 occurred within the past 5 days. Those are confirmed and again, this is apples and oranges as we discussed on Wednesday. I believe another six deaths were reported by our hospitals yesterday. Those are yet to be confirmed but just gives you a – we think a better window as to what the here and now looks like. And again, those six won't be counted in our total until their cases are lab-confirmed. As you can see, the total of COVID-19 deaths that are lab confirmed stands at a staggering 13,845 with an additional 1,920 probable deaths to COVID-19 complications.

As we do every day, let's take a few minutes to remember those – some of those who we have lost. Let's begin by remembering Esther Bobyid of West Orange, a noted yet extraordinarily humble scientist and researcher at Schering-Plough. Esther was born in Poland in 1936 and during World War 2 was sent with her family to live in Siberia, literally. After the war, the family moved to Israel where Esther earned her bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees at Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, a renowned institute, which I've had the honor of visiting a couple of times. Eventually, Esther founder her way along with her mother to the United States and to Bloomfield. She dove into her work at Schering-Plough never talking about her research but meticulously writing down every experiment and every discovery.

During her career, she would be awarded several patents for her discoveries including for the chemical compound that is a key ingredient in a product millions use every year, Sudafed. To everyone who seeks relief from allergies, you can thank Esther. Esther could also speak fluently in five languages, English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian. Esther spent her later years at the Daughters of Israel nursing home taking comfort in the Jewish cuisine and visits from her beloved cat Molly. Esther was 83 years old when she passed and leaves a lifetime of accomplishments. Esther was one of the scientists who made New Jersey the world-renowned home for discovery in the life sciences, even if she didn't boast about it. She leaves literally no survivors. The person with whom I had the honor of speaking about Esther was a friend, Andrea Sultan, from Jersey City who was a friend through their synagogue, but what an extraordinary life, and may her memory be a blessing.

Next, we recall Erma Mastalia of Fairlawn. Look at that smile. Born and raised in Paterson, Erma trained to be an accountant and made her career for more than 50 years. She was a woman deeply devoted to her Catholic faith and was a parishioner of St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Church in Glen Rock. All who knew her will remember Erma as a woman who found joy in everyday life and shared that zest with them. Erma was 90 years old. Erma is now reunited with her beloved husband Sisto who passed away from a heart attack in 1992. She leaves her children, Joe, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday, Emily and Linda and their spouses and partners along with five grandchildren, one of whom is Joey, Joe's son, who will turn 21 on September 21 – happy early birthday, Joey – numerous nieces and nephew and countless friends. God bless you and watch over you, Erma and your family.

Finally, today, we remember Mark Davidson of Swedesboro. Mark was 54 years old and lived his life proving that physical disabilities do not dim the spirit. Mark was born in Newark and lived in both west Orange and South Orange. He was a longtime employee of the south mountain arena where he would sneak into the stands to watch his beloved New Jersey Devils practice. That was before moving to Swedesboro about ten years ago. Despite his physical limitations – Mark lived, by the way, with neurological damage incurred at

birth –he was always eager to help others when he could and was always eager to have a positive impact on everyone he met. In addition to the Devils, Mark also loved to follow the New York Jets football and WWE wrestling. He loved music and movies. He loved a good adventure into the city including by himself to join the throngs in the canyon of heroes for one of the Yankees ticker tape parades during their run in the late 1990s.

Most of all, he loved his family. Mark leaves behind his dad, Barry, God bless his dad. His mother, Susan, sadly, had passed away previously. He also leaves behind his brother Richard and his sister Jamie with whom I had the great honor of speaking, along with his five nieces and nephews, Jason, Samantha, Nicolette, Cameron, and Justin. The family gathered at Mark's graveside this past Sunday to honor his life and pay their last respects. They are asking that donations in Mark's honor be made to the Special Olympics. May Mark's memory too be a blessing, and we thank him for giving so much back to us all. By the way, my colleague Paul Aronson, our ombudsman for persons with disabilities, would want me to remind everybody that this Sunday is the 30th anniversary of President George H. W. Bush's signing of the Americans with disabilities Act, an extraordinary step forward for our country, so God bless you, Mark. Three more of the thousands we have lost to COVID-19. We remember them to ensure that none we have ever lost ever just become another number. They were real people with real families and real lives who left a real and lasting impact, and we honor them all.

You know what? Just as we pay our respects to the extraordinary folks we have lost as we do every day, there are folks who have beaten this, and there are folks who beat it every day. I just got off the phone with Wendy and Jerry Lansky, and they've beaten it. They've still got their challenges. By the way, Wendy was working for Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield. She now works for our buddies Kevin Conlin over at Horizon, but she was working at Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield on 9/11 and was in the towers and escaped with her life, but she escaped with lung damage, and that was extremely, and unfortunately for her, important when she got COVID-19 because she battled this, man, and she was at the edge. Her husband Jerry, by the way, himself separately from another accident a paraplegic, also battled COVID-19. Both of them were in the hospital together, but Jerry's lungs were strong, and he got out a lot sooner and got through this a lot faster, but Wendy battled it for weeks if not months. Judy, she watched every day, including when she was drifting in and out, our daily press conferences, and she said to me that was part of the inspiration that pulled her and Jerry through. To all the folks who we have lost, we will never forget you, but to the folks who made it, we can't wait for the day when we can all gather and give each other high fives again and celebrate your survival.

Now, switching gears. Every week we look at our states progress in responding to the 2020 census, and every week, we see that more and more of you are going to 2020census.gov and making sure you and your family is counted. So far, 64.3% of New Jersey's households have responded to the census. As a state, we continue to run ahead of the national average response rate. Further, six counties now have a response rate better than 70%, placing them among the top 12 in the entire northeastern United States. That Hunterdon, Morris, Burlington, Somerset, Bergen, and Gloucester, and by the way, Warren County is right behind them. Even with this, there are other areas where we need more of you to respond. The countdown to finish the census has begun, and we're just a couple of weeks away from when the census takers will start to visit households that have not yet responded. Go to 2020census.gov today so you don't have to get a knock on your door in August. It's easy. It's fast, and it's important.

Our complete count commission is continuing its work to spread the work of the census's importance. This weekend in partnership with faith leaders across the state, we will be urging congregations to be counting, and next week there will be community-based activities across the state, particularly in under-counted, hard-to-get or hard-to-count areas to get the word out that the census is secure and it's vital. Everyone should be counted. The census doesn't care about your status. When we speak about our New Jersey family, we mean every single one of the nine million of us who call this great state their home. The rhetoric coming up from Washington is not just wrong. It's contrary to the spirit of our constitution, and it is unenforceable. Everyone has a civic duty to be counted. It's part of our shared American experience. It all comes down to this. The census is more than just to count. It's the basis for billions of dollars in federal aid. It's how we here in New Jersey make many decisions as well. It impacts every community, every family, every child, every student, and every one of us. Again, go to 2020census.gov today and be counted.

Now, I'd like to take a moment if I could to recognize another great small business that is positioning itself to be part of our long-term economic recovery. That is Carl and Susan Spatocco. They first opened Cape Island Foods in 2011, and today it is the parent company of five small businesses located at Cape May Airport in addition to several retail locations in Smithville and Cape May. The five are Cape May Peanut Butter Company, Smithville Peanut Butter Company, Cape May Olive Oil Company, Spice Cellar of Cape May, and my favorite, Cape May Airport Wingnutz Nuthouse. As Pat will recall, Wingnutz was a close second-place finisher behind Knucklehead early on in our deliberations. I love that. In addition, Carl and Susan also own and operate the Inn at the Park, a Cape May bed and breakfast, and a renowned one, I might add.

As with many small businesses, COVID-19 put the future of Cape May Island Foods in doubt. Cape Island Foods depends on a skilled workforce that it could not afford to lose. In addition to federal assistance, Carl and Susan also applied to the New Jersey economic development authority and received a total of \$15,000 in direct grants that allowed them to protect their workers' earnings and provide them with vital PPE, build their inventory, meet utility costs, and prepare Cape Island's line up of businesses for reopening. I had the great pleasure of speaking with Carl Wednesday afternoon, and I thanked them for their commitment, not just to their employees and customers but to our state's small business community. When we come back with an economy that is stronger and more resilient, it will be because of dedicated business owners just like them. To Carl and Susan, keep up the great work, and I can't wait to visit you.

Finally, for this week, I want to once again congratulate the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission on its recent nomination by the Location Manager's Guild International as Outstanding Film Commission for 2020. Ours was the only state film commission to be nominated, and we now stand alongside internationally recognized film locations. We've known all along that New Jersey is everything that producers and directors look for in a premiere filming location from our energetic cities to our iconic Jersey shore to our idyllic small towns. Our fast-growing film and television industry is poised for a very bright future. Thanks to the tremendous work by the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission, the Garden State is ready for its closeup. I want to congratulate Chairman Michael Uslan as well as Executive Director Steve Gorelick and all of the commission members and staff members on the great work that has led to this recognition. With that, Judy, do you mind if I go to Kevin and Zakiya first? Don't be mad at me for that. Please help me welcome Interim Commissioner of the Department of Education, Kevin Dehmer. Kevin?

Interim Commissioner of Education Kevin Dehmer: Thank you Governor Murphy for the opportunity to be here today.

When the Department of Education was drafting the Road Back and Restart Recovery Plan for Education for the coming school year, we relied on the input of a diverse set of stakeholders from across the state. We held hundreds of meetings with school administrators, classroom teachers, buildings and grounds directors, school nurses, pediatricians, parents, students, and more. When we announced the guidance last month, we promised that we would continue that commitment of listening to stakeholders. We also said that our guidance would continue to evolve based on public input and factors such as health data.

While our initial guidance emphasized the expectation that schools will open in some capacity for in-person instruction in the fall, we received a great deal of feedback from the parents including those who wanted greater input into the decision about whether their child should return to in-person instruction. We also heard from officials in school districts who asked for guidance that will allow for all remote learning. This announcement today is about honoring our commitment to listen to stakeholders. We heard what parents and school leaders had to say. To that end, the guidance that we are issuing today provides additional anticipated minimum standards for school district reopening plans ensuring that families can choose that their children continue full-time remote learning when the new school year starts.

Our guidance touches on a few key factors. First, all students are eligible for full-time remote learning if their parent or guardian so chooses. This includes students receiving special education or related services. School districts need to establish clear policies and procedures for families who want to take advantage of full-time remote learning for their children. Conversely, schools will also need procedures for students in full-time remote learning to transition back to in-person services. These procedures should be designed to ensure that families can make necessary arrangements to effectively prepare for their child's transition and to help schools maintain continuity of services. School districts must also communicate clearly and frequently with families in their home language about the availability of this offering and the related procedures.

Our guidance states that any student participating in all remote learning should receive the same quality of instruction and other educational services provided to any other student. It's also important to note that full-time remote learning must adhere to the same policies that in-person and hybrid programs follow when it comes to attendance and length of school day. Finally, to help us evaluate full-time remote learning, school districts will be expected to report data back to the Department about student participation in these programs. We understand that this school year will be unlike any that educators, families, or students have experienced before. We also understand that it will require flexibility, foresight, and planning for school districts to be responsive to the needs of their families and their communities. I thank Governor Murphy for his commitment to working with families to meet the educational needs of students and we look forward to continuing our work with school communities as we navigate these unprecedented times. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Kevin, thank you. Also, great to have – not only does Zakiya overlook our entire policy arena, but she herself is an educator and has a doctorate in education and is our former secretary of higher education. Zakiya would you love – can you come in and add anything to Kevin's comments? Great to have you.

Chief Policy Advisor Zakiya Smith Ellis: Thank you, Governor. Thank you, Interim Commissioner. I would just that we are hearing, as the Commissioner mentioned, from people every single day, literally talking to folks every day. We're constantly in communication with the Department of Health and Judy's team, and we appreciate that this is a frustrating and new time for everyone in dealing with this, but we are responding in real time. As we hear about things, and as we – as Kevin mentioned and as the governor mentioned, when we originally came out with this plan, as we get updated information, we are updating our guidance, and this is an example of us being responsive, I think, to the concerns that we heard from families. This really gives families the option to choose what they believe is best for their child I'm really thankful to the Department of Education for pulling something together like this.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. I'll just add a couple things if I can. Let me start – and Kevin alluded to this. This is not going to be a normal school year. This is really hard, and I think it's hard for kids, educators, parents, for all of us. I think regardless of where we or a local district comes out, it's going to be a challenge for everyone, so let's acknowledge that up front, and I want to commend everyone who's working so hard to work our path forward. Since the guidance was put out – and by the way, today I think the sole specific agenda today is to provide flexibility for parents, for districts, for kids. That's what this is about.

Since the guidance came out, Judy, you and Lamont were here about four weeks ago. Kevin, does that sound about right? About four weeks ago. Two things have happened. and we should acknowledge both, and they're both good things. To both Kevin and Zakiya's points, we promised we would listen. We've listened, and we've come back and said you know what? We're going to add this dimension of flexibility. That will continue to be our MO as we go through this. I can't predict, for instance, Judy can't predict or Tina what the virus is going to look like six weeks from now, so we're making these decisions with in mind as much flexibility as we can, but we're also making them as we always have based on the facts and where we think the facts are going, but we have to continue to assess that.

A second thing happened, though, which we haven't spoken much about as it relates to this. We found the money to provide universal devices and internet access to every single kid going to school in this state, so we're now able to do something that we weren't literally able to say or talk about or do a month ago. That's a huge difference. I don't think, Kevin or Zakiya – I don't want to put words in your mouth. Had we not found that money to address the device gap, the digital divide, the internet connectivity gap, I don't think we'd be saying what we're saying today because we would not be able to say that this is universally available, but Kevin used the word universal, and I want to underscore that. It is universally available. It's now up to – Kevin, correct me if I'm wrong, Zakiya – it's up now to the district to fold that this new dimension, this new flexibility into their plans

There's a lot of really good work going on around the state. Marie Blistan and I had a really good conversation this morning. We're going to sit down with her team and the NJEA folks in the next number of days. Everybody – I have to give a lot of credit even if we're not all in exactly the same place, there's a lot of really good earnest effort being put into this and will continue to be that way. Kevin, thank you. Zakiya, thank you for that. Now I get to say what I say every day. With that, please help me welcome a woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon.

As we've discussed recently, the explosion of cases in other states has been affecting testing turnaround nationally and most importantly in New Jersey. Testing, as you know, is the first step in our journey to containment of COVID-19. We recognize that it is vital to increase laboratory capacity in our state so we can ensure that cases are rapidly identified. With federal funding support, we are working to develop a statewide model for public, private, large-scale testing that will improve data-driven public health decision making.

This week, we issued a request for proposal to fund hospital laboratories to increase COVID-19 testing capacity and availability in our state. These grant funds will also strengthen and upgrade the existing healthcare laboratory system resources for infectious disease testing. The total funding for this initiative is \$94 million. The number of grants and the amount per grant will be determined based on the scope of work in each proposal and the number of eligible applications. Other considerations will include population density, existing regional resources, and the ability to rapidly scale up capacity quickly. Applications for funding are due on August 9, and we expect to announce the awards in early September.

The Department recognizes healthcare and hospital laboratories are critical partners to build infectious disease testing capacity and to provide support for public health surveillance and outbreak investigations. We are excited to build on the collaborations we have currently with our hospitals to better serve New Jerseyans. Along with a strong testing program, we also need robust contact tracing initiative to quickly identify those who may have been exposed to the virus so that we can contain the spread. To ensure we have the workforce needed to conduct effective contact tracing, the Department has chosen Public Consulting Group (PCG) to develop a supplemental contact tracing workforce that will support the local health departments. PCG will recruit, train, and employ contact tracers who can be deployed to carry out this work in areas with increasing COVID-19 cases.

The work to increase the community contact tracing core began with the assistance of Rutgers School of Public Health, which began recruiting and training workers drawn from their graduate program and their alumni. Currently, there are 1,092 contact tracers working in the state, which includes existing local health department staff as well as the newly trained contact tracers that have been deployed locally. Recognizing that the demand for contact tracer capacity could reach into the thousands, the department solicited vendor proposals to help us scale the core across the state. PCG will work to ensure that as many of these new contact tracers as possible come from and reflect the diversity of the communities they will be serving. They will be able to effectively communicate and engage with individuals who speak languages other than English and have diverse cultures. All individuals onboarded for contact tracing will be required to complete the contact tracing training developed by the Rutgers School of Public Health.

I want to remind the public that we need their help to make contact tracing successful. If a contact tracer calls you, please answer the call. Provide them with information on any close contacts you've had so these individuals can be reached and told to get tested and quarantine to break the chain of transmission. Trained contact tracers will provide information on how you can protect those around you from getting sick such as self-isolation. Contact tracers can help you. If you need a place to stay so you don't infect your family, there are housing resources available. If you're worried about your job, contact tracers can also refer you to community supports, such as job protection measures and pandemic unemployment benefits. They also can connect you to childcare services and resources and food assistance through NJSNAP and WIC. Please, answer the call. We need to work together to keep New Jersey on the right track.

Moving on to my daily report, as the governor shared, hospitals reported 800 hospitalizations with 138 individuals in critical care. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. The breakdown of deaths by race and ethnicity is as follows: white, 54.2; black, 18.3; Hispanic, 20.2; Asian, 5.5; other, 1.8. Of the newly reported deaths, seven have occurred within the last five days. Some of the deaths reported date back to April.

At our state psychiatric hospitals and our veteran homes, we have seen that infection prevention and containment strategies are working. It's been over 60 days since any resident of Ann Klein or Greystone have tested positive. At Ancora, there have been no new positive cases among residents in 25 days, and at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital, it has been 16 days. Similarly, the cases at the state's veteran homes have remained flat. It's been 60 days since any resident of the Vineland home tested positive. At Menlo Park, 50 days have

passed since their last positive case, and at the Paramus Home, it has been 23 days since a resident tested positive. We must continue to be vigilant as we know that residing in congregant settings puts these individuals at high risk. The daily percent positivity as of July 20 in the state is 2.36%, the northern part of the state, 2%, the central part of the state, 1.45%, and as we have reported, the south continues to be higher at 5.12%. That concludes my daily report. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, get tested, and mask up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything, and for that report in particular and please God, the psychiatric and veteran's homes stay that way because they were devastated. The veteran's homes numbers, particularly Paramus and Menlo Park, just an unfathomable onslaught of this virus in those locations. Vineland, while it had a handful of lost lives, was much less of a reality. Again, I want to thank Robert Wilkie because when we really needed the surge – you remember when we needed to surge help and the supervision help etcetera, they were there for us. Thank you for that, and thank you for everything. Tina is here to answer questions, and again, please don't hold this against me. I'll try to find some way to make it up.

Pat, in addition to compliance and gun violence, which we've talked about lately, any update on that front, I was driving home. My sons played in a soccer match in Wall Township yesterday. We were driving up the parkway home, and this was about 8 o'clock last night. We literally couldn't see anything the weather was so bad, and today we've gotten some more thunderstorms. It's a good reminder that we're turning into hurricane season and would love if you could comment for a minute or two on how our preparedness looks like. We've got a great relationship with FEMA, which has only been deepened in this awful pandemic, but any thoughts you've got on compliance, gun violence on weather. Thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon.

In the last two nights, there have been no executive order compliance issues reported to The Rock. Not glad to report that there have been four shootings. There was three shootings yesterday, and in the early morning hours today, a trooper responded to what was thought to be a motor vehicle accident, but when he arrived that subject was found deceased as a result of wounds inflicted by gunfire. That's currently under investigation.

To your point about the weather and hurricanes, I think one, I'll note that tropical storm Gonzalo, this is the earliest time in the history of hurricanes being recorded that a seventh named storm this early in the season has been named that most likely based upon the experts will transition to a hurricane. Back in May – I think I had mentioned it a few months ago – FEMA had put out COVID-19 pandemic operational guidance and how things will be different based upon this pandemic, how the state emergency operation center will have to operate differently. How does mass care, medical services, emergency assistance, all of those things and all of those emergency support functions come into play? We've been working closely with our county OEM coordinators. We have what's called a Hurricane Decision Support Tool, which gives us usually 120 hours out. Talk about evacuations. Talk about sheltering. With a pandemic, that changes because we need more time. We may need more locations and more space given social distance requirements. So again, our county OEM coordinators have weighed in. Their input is in with regard to that. I was asked by the Congressional Delegation about it yesterday and today provided them all with that FEMA guidance, but I just wanted to make sure people didn't think we were asleep at the switch because of COVID-19 and we're certainly watching the Atlantic basin and those systems form off the coast every day of the week. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. And we have to be able to walk and chew gum here, right? So we've got a pandemic and the economic crisis that's come of it. We also have to do things like get back to school, prepare for weather, etc.

One thing on compliance which was spoken about – and it's probably an obvious point, but I want to make sure folks are thinking about this, particularly parents. The amount of noncompliant behavior in places that you've heard, whether it's retail establishments, restaurants, and any venue has been remarkedly – have been remarkedly few and that's a good thing. And that's overwhelmingly due to the million of you out there. It's undeniable, and this is not just a New Jersey phenomenon. This is what happened. I know there are big flare-ups now in Spain, never mind in other American states and other countries. But a lot of the partying, a lot of the close congregation has gone underground into those – like that house party we talked about in Middletown.

Folks, let me just remind you. If you're indoors, the ventilation isn't good. You're closely congregated. You're largely sedentary, and if you don't have one of these on, you're asking for trouble. You're playing with fire. There's just no two ways about that. So in particular to young people where it seems to be more prevalent, Judy, the numbers are showing that it's getting younger in New Jersey as it is around the country. To the parents of those people, you are playing with fire. We are not out of the woods. So is it just the people who are returning from a hotspot state or visiting from a hotspot state? Yes, that's part of what we're trying to get our arms around for the self-quarantining and testing. There is still community spread in New Jersey. There isn't a lot of it, thank God, but there is still community spread. That house party in my hometown is an example omit, but there are other examples of it.

And no matter how good Pat and other law enforcement leaders are, we can't get into every house or every car or every basement. It's just not going to happen. So we need, again, on that list of personal responsibility – that's one in particular which we're focused on right now. So again, folks, you've done an extraordinary job. We just need you to continue to do that and with that work, we will get through this together.

Only because Matt looks so lonely over here, we're going to start over here. The microphone is held by Matt but before we do, we'll be virtual. Dan Bryan will be virtual this weekend unless folks here otherwise, and Monday, we're on for 1 o'clock here. The White House, I think, has kicked our weekly to Tuesday next week. So we'll be here at 1 o'clock and with that, Matt, welcome.

Reporter: Good afternoon. I'm curious, Governor, what the state is doing, if anything, to ensure that colleges that admit students in the fall who are coming from states that are required to quarantine follow those quarantine rules? I guess for example, is there any guidance going out that requires colleges to open their dorms two weeks early? Real quick, the rate of transmission on the dashboard is .75, and you said that it was .84. I just want to make sure that – just clarification on that. And finally the Essex County Education Association, which represents 12,000 teachers, came out today with a statement saying it's unsafe to reopen schools in September. Curious what your response is to that. Do you fear a teacher shortage, and can you tell parents when and if you will revisit the plan to reopen schools?

Governor Phil Murphy: Colleges, I'm blessed today to have the – just having left her position as the Secretary of the Office of Higher Education. This is – I just want to make one broad comment and then ask Zakiya to weigh in. I think we talked about this a little bit on Wednesday. This is a reality. We have to deal with this. We're going to have to – we are working with our colleges and universities. By the way, states go on that list and they come off that list. As we approve and announce that list with New York and Connecticut every Tuesday, I am one – let's hold out hope, hope for the best, prepare for the worst. So we'll have – we'll put together rules of the road but also let's hope that these flare-ups being to die down in some of these other states and that by their actions, as in the actions that we took, that infection curve starts getting in the right direction.

Zakiya, do you want to add anything specific to that?

Chief Policy Advisor Zakiya Smith-Ellis: Sure, I would just say the guidance that we had put out for higher education already had a plan for quarantine and they do have to – colleges, as part of that original guidance, had to have part of their dorms set aside for isolation and quarantine just in general. And so they can use that space as students come back.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, on the dashboard, any – the number I reported and you reported is the one I've got, so.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I think the – probably the one you looked at did not have the full download of the backed up cases. So it would definitely go up with more new cases being put in.

Governor Phil Murphy: So we're going to stick – we're sticking with .84.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Oh, yeah, definitely .84.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think that's probably not exactly what happened, not knowing for sure, but we had I would bet several hundred cases that were loaded in under the .75 pre-data.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we had more than several hundred. I think it was almost 400, wasn't it, Tina?

Governor Phil Murphy: Today that's 488 but of that, that's a big – there's a catch-up piece in that. If we've determined that it's not that, we'll come back to you.

I had not seen the Essex County piece, but I think I've largely addressed this. Again, we have to accept the fact this is not going to be normal, that facts are evolving and we promised we'd be open-minded and evolve with them. And again, a big fact that we were able to control is the ability to get every kid a device and to get every kid internet connectivity. That's one that we're able to check the box on, but we want to be able to provide beyond that as much flexibility as possible to parents, to school districts, so that they can implement their plans. And I think as we look at the upcoming school year, the principles that I would say that guide us are, number one, the health and safety of the kids, their families, and certainly educators and staff members. Second one look at the upcoming school year, the principles that I would say that guide us are, number one, the health and safety of the kids, their families, and certainly educators and staff members. Second one is how can we best educate our kids. And thirdly, equity, which we haven't talked about today other than through the digital divide but equity for families that, frankly, depend more heavily on in-person learning. Not everybody – this just in: not everybody has the space in their house, has the high-speed internet connectivity. Again, we're going to get that to everybody. But not everybody can go out and hire a tutor. Not everybody can stay home. You got a lot of families, overwhelmingly, with two household incomes. So not everybody is in the same spot, and our plans have to encompass those sort of objective. What's best for health and safety, what's best for education, and remind ourselves that equity has to be at the center of this. So those principles will continue to guide us. Thank you for that.

Sir, anything? You're good? In the back, Matt?

Reporter: Governor, a question from one of our viewers. They were curious what is the source of the data upon which New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut are basing their list of quarantine states? We know you're looking at stats from seven-day rolling averages, but what is the source of this information? Is it the CDC, or are you contacting individual states to get the data that helps inform this decision?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? I'll give you what the data is and Judy or Tina can come in with their sources. It's seven-day rolling averages, either more than 10 new positive cases per 100,000 residents, or 10% or higher spot positivity on tests that have been taken over a rolling seven-day average. Those are the number sources. That's it? CDC, SM, or...

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: The New York Department of Health, every Tuesday, collects the information and we get the reports.

Governor Phil Murphy: New York agreed on behalf of the three states to be the data collectors, so that's a good point. I'd forgotten that. Thank you for that. Charlie?

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Good afternoon, Governor and to Acting Commission Dehmer, congratulations. I know you came from the finance division of your agency, and could you please clarify your role in approving the closure of the Lincoln Annex School in New Brunswick and ask Acting Commissioner, will you commit to at least meet with the parents and students who oppose the selling of their school to hear them out before you make a final decision. And for you, Governor, I had asked a week ago and didn't get any follow-up, but I did want to know what you would say to those parents and students who are concerned about the plan to sell and close their school, and what's the best way for them to voice concerns about this to your Administration, and would you consider meeting with them?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I've got nothing and Kevin and I don't have anything new to offer on this. I think the best plan – and again, we take it seriously. We will follow-up, Dan. Make sure we follow up, Charlie. That's not – that was not a conscious effort to not follow up. I think the best plan I would suggest on Kevin's and my behalf is for the families to meet with the local district representatives, whether that's the superintendent or other folks. And I promise you, we will follow up. I'm not sure what the follow-up will be, but we'll follow up with you. Thank you.

Dustin? Like the mask.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Thanks. How many students across the state today can't access learning because of a lack of devices or access? Last we knew, it was about 90,000, but it just sounded like you said every student will be equipped to access remote learning, and where did you find the money? You've gotten into this a little bit before in the past about gyms being difficult to reopen, but can you explain exactly why or rather what the rationale is for allowing some indoor recreation activities like martial arts and yoga but not gyms since those should be able to also adhere to social distancing, masking, and hygiene protocols? And *NJ Spotlight* reported that you spent less than 3% of the \$2.4 billion in COVID funds, and two Republican senators criticized you for how little the \$6 million is that you announced yesterday compared to the larger amount the state received and that it's only going to a fraction of the state's towns. What's your response to that criticism and can you explain that apparent delay in using the federal money? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. How many – if I gave you the wrong impression on how many kids can't right now access – either have a device or access the internet, I wasn't intending to. What's the number, Kevin?

Interim Commissioner of Education Kevin Dehmer: We're estimating about 230,000.

Zakiya Smith-Ellis, Chief Policy Advisor: And can I...

Governor Phil Murphy: Please.

Chief Policy Advisor Zakiya Smith-Ellis: Let me just add, we updated that when we announced the digital divide. We said 230,000. The Department of Education came out with an original survey. They updated that survey data and that's where the new information came from.

Governor Phil Murphy: Where's the money coming from to close the digital divide. Matt Platkin, correct me if I'm wrong here, but this is Cares Act money, correct? It's both the internet connectivity as well as the device money.

Gyms, first of all, different licenses, so – and again, Matt, you'll correct me if I'm wrong here. Martial arts, yoga, Pilates have a different license and different set of requirements than an actual gym or a health club. And secondly, we've been pretty explicit on what even in the martial arts – just to pick that as an example, what they can do and what they can't do, and it's no contact, among other things. So that's on the list. Remember, we do allow gyms to do one-on-one instruction or one-on-bubble instruction, meaning you got family. And it's just that – and that's probably – those are the three most important points I would make today, and the other points we've made already.

I haven't seen what the Republican senators have said, but first of all, certain people out there can never be satisfied no matter how many steps forward we take. Every – federal money, Cares Act money that's been coming out way, if it hasn't been spent, it's for two reasons. And Matt, again, you can correct me if I'm wrong. Number one, we are still – I think we're largely there, but it took a long time to get the guidance we needed from the Feds and the US Department of Treasury in terms of how to spend that money. The second reason is we have allocated all of it that we can. In some cases, it's been spent and in many cases, it's allocated and not yet spent. Buying the devices, the expense associated with internet connectivity. I mentioned the other day we'd put – the EDA had committed \$100 million to small businesses, 10,000 of which had already got money but another 10,000 would be getting money from that commitment. And so it's either we didn't have the guidance and therefore couldn't spend it, or we had made the decisions, it's allocated, and it will be spent.

With that, Matt will come in and correct the record.

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: I just – I don't know where the 3% number came from. We spent significantly more than that. And remember, some of this is – they're programs that are in place, to the Governor's point, that are being spent over many months and without a guarantee of additional federal money coming from our treasury has worked with the legislature to present a plan for how we will use the full \$2.4 billion, but it wouldn't be prudent to put that entire amount of money out in one program all at once when it's going to cover a wide variety of needs in response to the pandemic.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, it is a limited amount of money and as I've said earlier today, it is a fraction of what we need from the Feds. And as Matt points out, would we love to be able to put another \$25 million, \$15 million, whatever it might be, to work to help people in small businesses to pay their leases?

Absolutely. As they say quite famously, show me the money. We need the money from the Feds.

Anything else you want to add?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Just to add to the Governor's point about the regulations being challenging, one of the reasons he stood up – one of the main reasons why he stood up last Friday a new office to oversee the use of federal funds is to ensure compliance and transparency with respect to how these funds are used, something I'm not sure another governor has done in the country and given the scale of federal funding coming into the state, we have to be very careful to ensure we're following the rules and regulations from Treasury, which are changing literally by the week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Thank you, Dustin. Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi, good afternoon. Questions in two areas: regarding the house party, is there any sign that parents are preventing any attendees from speaking to contact tracers? Approximately how many partygoers are isolating, and has the crowd been linked to cases beyond those who were at the party? And the other topic is regarding PPE. The *New York Times* is reporting that FEMA has supplied defective gloves, gowns, masks, etc., to nursing homes in California and elsewhere. Has any of it wound up here? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Elise, I don't know that I've got a good answer for you on number one, but if Dan – could we get back to Elise? I don't want to also inadvertently say something that is a privacy matter for someone. Again, I was on with the mayor yesterday and again this morning. The contact tracing reality, Judy, I heard at least today was a little bit better than it was. They were – there was a more – there was a higher level of cooperation. And as I may – I can't remember if I mentioned this today, but I did yesterday. To the best of their knowledge, all of the kids who believe they were impacted or certainly the ones who are positive, at a minimum, are self-quarantining. But beyond that, can we come back to you?

I don't know the answer to the question. Pat, have you heard anything, or Judy, on defective PPE?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I have no information. I think two months ago, and I don't think it was from FEMA, there was a report about defective isolation gowns that came in. But beyond that, we have no indication that anything was defective that came from FEMA.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, have you heard anything? So if we do, we will – or by the way, as importantly, if you hear specifically of an instance, we'd love to know, particularly in long-term care. I mean, as Judy has reminded us many times, there are 71 hospitals. It's double-digits. The association, it's a very tightly coordinated and several dozen members. The long-term care operators, this is in the many, many hundred and again, it's an uneven reality there and we've paid a price for that. Okay, thank you.

With that, I'm going to mask up, if that's alright with everybody. Thank you all. Kevin and Zakiya, very good to have you with us. Continued success and as I said, it's health and safety, it's education, it's equity. That'll continue to guide us, and flexibility. We want to give parents, kids, educators, districts, as much flexibility, particularly as new facts present themselves. So Kevin and Zakiya, thank you, Pat, as always, Jared, Matt, Dan, thank you all. We're going to be with you virtually Saturday and Sunday. We'll be with you unless you hear otherwise at 1 o'clock on Monday and folks, please keep up the great work.

On the educational front, again, I think we all have to accept this is not going to be normal, the old normal, that we're going to be going through this together, something in many cases we've never done before. But we'll get there and we're the king of the hill in terms of public education in America, and we're not there because we don't have great professionals, great parent, great kids. We are there because of all that, and that will give us a huge amount of momentum as we go through this journey together.

Continue your personal responsibility, folks, everything from self-quarantining if you're coming back from one of those 31 states to remember our admonishing about house parties and going underground. Please, social distancing, face coverings, washing hands, soap and water. If you don't feel well, if you've been in a hotspot, stay away, stay home, and don't congregate inside on top of each other.

And I want to conclude by acknowledging the woman on my right who we acknowledge every day but especially this day. Judy, thank you for everything. God bless you. See you, folks.

Governor Phil Murphy

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