

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm joined by the guy to my right, who probably does need an introduction in this case, the Deputy Commissioner of Health for Public Health Services, Dr. David Adinaro. David is an incredibly important player at the Department of Health, came on board during the pandemic – not exactly a normal time to start or to switch careers – but I want to thank him for all that he's been doing, and thank him especially specifically for being here today. To his right, I think a pretty familiar face, the state's epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan. Tina, great to have you with us. To my left the guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples is here, Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

As you may have read, Health Commissioner – the woman who does not need an introduction, Judy Persichilli – is observing a period of self-quarantine and working remotely in an abundance of caution after a member of her staff tested positive. We know that she's watching today. We just got off the phone with her a short while ago and we all send her our best, as we do as well to the member of her team who has tested positive.

A quick note at the top, and just a short statement that I share President Biden's outrage at the release yesterday by the Pakistani courts of the terrorists who murdered American journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002. Daniel Pearl grew up elsewhere, but he was a proud son of New Jersey, born in Princeton. I trust the Biden administration will do everything in its power to find justice for Daniel Pearl.

Let's start today with a check on our vaccination progress. As of mid-morning, we have administered 724,371 total doses statewide. This is an increase of just under 44,000 from yesterday.

Now, let's look at our cases. Today we're reporting an additional 6,209 new positive test results. That breaks down 5,023 confirmed positive PCR and 1,186 presumed positive rapid tests. Our statewide cumulative total is now 687,269.

So, this is something to be said, we have now put more shots in arms than we have had total cumulative confirmed PCR and presumed positive rapid test results – right about now, about 37,100 more vaccinations than reported cases. This difference is only going to grow as we're averaging about, it depends on the day, 20,000 more vaccinations daily than we are recording new cases. God willing, that gap only grows.

I once again ask for your patience. We know that demand still far outstrips supply. We also know that what our nation is undertaking right now is the greatest logistical undertaking since World War II, if not ever.

We are also aware of a technical issue on the New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System platform that caused double-booked appointments for yesterday. Unfortunately, we needed to cancel a number of appointments that were erroneously double booked. We will work with those cancelled on rescheduling their appointments at the nearest available time. We regret the confusion this technical issue caused and we are working with our vendor – and as you can imagine, those exchanges are spirited – to address the root cause that this does not happen again.

I want to give a colleague a big shout out here and a guy, Pat, you and I know well, Chris Reinn, who is the Head of our Office of Information Technology. Chris and his team have been doing an extraordinary job, including battling with a vendor and doing it, in some cases, through the night and last night was an example of that.

We are working every day to maximize every dose we are given and to administer to as many people as our supply will allow. As the federal government increases our allotment, we'll be able to open up for more appointments. And as we will now know what our allotment will look like, at least three weeks down the road, we'll be able to make more long-term decisions to improve our vaccine program.

So we know there is still room for growth, believe me, and I reiterate that the vaccination infrastructure we have purpose-built from the ground up is ready, but with today's numbers we have crossed a milestone and this in and of itself is a very positive sign.

A quick timeout as it relates to distribution infrastructure. Pat and I – and I think literally a cast of thousands – were together this morning at the Bergen County mega site with Senator Bob Menendez. Congressman Josh Gottheimer, County Executive Jim Tedesco and the mayor and a whole bunch of Legislators, Lisa Howe the Acting Adjutant General of the National Guard.

This was, first of all, a really good visit – really cold I might add, but really good visit. Like the other sites, Pat, you and I have visited, really well laid out, really well thought through, including if you show up without an appointment, they'll put you into a separate line and work with you to try to find an appointment. Just really, really impressive.

To give you a sense very specifically, and this site, it's plus or minus for the state, but this will give you some flavor for where we are in terms of supply versus where we have to be or want to be. They're going to do 800 vaccinations today at that site, as you and I heard, Pat. Their capacity is 2,400. So we've thrown around two, three, four times our

...supply should be a supply that we could comfortably use and distribute. I think the Bergen County site is a great example of that. If they had another 1,600 doses, they'd be doing them. And hats off to everybody associated with that.

Speaking of vaccines, we all read this morning the reports from Johnson & Johnson regarding the results of their clinical vaccine trial which showed 72% overall efficacy across its U.S. participants and 85% efficacy in preventing a severe case of COVID after 28 days. But the major takeaway here is that according to the data released today, the vaccine provides complete protection against hospitalization and death after 28 days, and complete protection against even a severe case after 49 days, and those results hold for every known variant, even the South African.

These are numbers that cannot be overlooked. We need every tool in our toolkit, and should the FDA grant Johnson & Johnson emergency use authorization, and the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices provides an appropriate recommendation – a vaccine, by the way, that only requires one dose and does not require cold-chain storage just regular refrigeration – it could be a game-changer in our ability to quickly ramp up our own vaccine distribution and administration.

I want a quick timeout. I had a very good call with Johnson & Johnson – by the way, an iconic New Jersey firm – with their CEO and friend of ours, Alex Gorsky – and went into this sort of data in a little bit more detail. Tina, especially, they made a point of deliberately, in their trials, they went 40% if my numbers are right, 40% U.S., 40% South America largely Brazil, 20% South Africa, so they went into the teeth of this virus at its peak and into the teeth of the variants, which I think makes the numbers coming out even more impressive.

God knows we could use more doses. I don't think it's a tomorrow event, so they've got to get through the EUA process and then the CDC Advisory Committee process which you all know very well. But assuming they do, I think their commitment has publicly been that they're going to put 100 million doses on the street by the end of June. And again, in this case, you don't have to divide by two, that's 100 million people.

And we continue to – by the way, same church, different pew – we continue to make progress across the 1,379 long-term care centers in our state which are part of the federally run pharmacy partnership and whose vaccination clinics are being run by CVS and Walgreens. Both CVS and Walgreens will be scheduling multiple clinic dates at each facility to ensure that all eligible residents and staff are ultimately vaccinated. I think Judy told us, reminded me this morning, that each has a minimum requirement of three separate clinic days at each of the facilities. So today we can report that all the facilities enrolled in the program – that's 1,270 – have had at least their first clinic scheduled, with CVS holding 900, and one of these Walgreens 369; a total of 1,245 second clinics have been scheduled. And of these scheduled visits, 927 facilities have completed – not just scheduled but completed – their first clinics and 156 their second, with 113,275 total vaccinations already administered.

We will continue to work closely with, and monitor the progress at our long-term care facilities, which are the homes of some of our state's most vulnerable residents. I've got a call with the incoming CEO of CVS later this afternoon. As I may have mentioned already, we have a follow-up call with the Walgreens leadership on Monday. We spoke to Walgreens a week ago today – and again, it was a spirited but constructive conversation about the objectives and the sort of week-to-10-days they needed to have.

Now, when you blend CVS and Walgreens, the amount of doses they've received divided by the amount that they've put into arms, a week ago today as we were having that conversation with Walgreens, it was 12%. Today, it's 42%. So indeed, it's been a good week for both CVS and Walgreens and we thank them for that. There's still a long way to go. The doses that we control are much higher than that in terms of what percentage are administered but it's been progress, and we need to see them to continue to make that progress.

Let's go to the rest of the numbers, if we can. The positivity rate for the 65,709 PCS tests recorded on Monday was 8.37%. I've said many times, before we flip out of this, that the vaccination build out is, Pat, I think very similar to the testing build out reality that we went through in the early months of this pandemic. And who in March would have guessed that New Jersey would be testing 65,709 people on Monday of this week? I suspect no one did, but that was our objective all along. We got there and we're going to do the same thing with the vaccine.

Statewide rate of transmission has stayed below one, 0.91 and let's hope it keeps going lower.

In our hospitals last night, a total of 3,116 persons with COVID, 2,884 known and another 232 persons awaiting their test results. That number continues to go down, only by a few today versus yesterday, but it continues to go down and we need that to continue to happen. Of this amount, 548 patients were in intensive care and 378 were requiring a ventilator. Those numbers are also going down and we need them to continue going down.

On Thursday, yesterday, 363 live patients walked out; 361, however, walked in and at the risk of comparing apples and oranges because these are not confirmed, 59 blessed souls were lost in our hospitals. We can confirm, with a heavy heart, that today 83 confirmed COVID-related further deaths. That gives us a total of 19,254 confirmed and another 2,129 probable passings. We will remember three of those we have lost in a few moments but first, I want to go through a couple of quick announcements.

First of all, we continue to work with our partner states on maintaining the regional compact prohibiting interstate youth hockey, regardless of whether or not the multistate effort remains. We in New Jersey will continue to prohibit interstate youth indoor sports competitions within the four walls of New Jersey. We know that interstate travel and associated activities among teams are particularly risky, as these settings create opportunities for the virus to spread.

Next up, yesterday – this is good news – we extended the time for eligible uninsured residents to enroll in a health insurance plan through our new state marketplace at getcovered.nj.gov, or directly from a health insurance carrier through a COVID-19 special enrollment period that will run through May 15th. During the special enrollment period, if you enroll in health coverage by February 28th, your policy will take effect literally the next day on March 1st, and each month thereafter following. The policy you purchase will take effect on the first day of the subsequent month.

And a reminder that when you purchase through our state marketplace, you may qualify for subsidies and other financial assistance that could push your premiums even lower. We know many New Jerseyans have had their health coverage impacted by the economic turbulence caused by the pandemic and we want to ensure that as many families as possible are covered. Before you flip this, the enrollment period was to have expired this Sunday. This is now going to be extended, February, March, April and through May 15th. You may have seen the feds doing something similar as announced by President Biden yesterday.

Next up, to reiterate the numbers released yesterday from the Department of Labor, over the last week we saw a slight decrease of initial unemployment filings. This marks the second consecutive week of decline in the number of initial filings. Additionally, the department oversaw the distribution of the third week of the federally provided \$300 supplemental payment to nearly 600,000 workers currently receiving unemployment benefits in New Jersey.

Overall, since the pandemic hit last March, the department has received nearly 2 million applications for unemployment benefits and has distributed \$21.7 billion to eligible New Jersey workers. As always, we thank Commissioner Rob Asaro Angelo and his team for all their work to ensure that every eligible New Jersey worker receives the critical support they not only need, but deserve.

Next, to ensure that every eligible family has the ability to afford the childcare they need and that providers can maintain this essential service, the Department of Human Services is again extending several of its COVID-19-related childcare assistance programs for families and providers through the end of February. The department will also continue to waive copays in the state's childcare subsidy program for parents who request it due to impacts

from COVID-19. For more information, please visit our website, childcare.nj.gov and I thank Acting Commissioner of Human Services Sarah Adelman and her team for continuing to look out for New Jersey kids and families in need throughout this pandemic.

Next up, switching gears again, from State Treasurer Liz Muiio, today marks earned income tax credit or EITC Awareness Day. Since it was established in 1975, the EITC has often been regarded by officials, I might add on both sides of the aisle, as one of the most effective tools in fighting poverty and building up our middle class. Our administration believes strongly in the EITC and has worked to make more money available for more of our working families. We've increased the state EITC, now up to 40% of the federal level, and we've made more workers eligible by lowering the eligibility age to 21. Eligible taxpayers can get back anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars from the state credit alone, and that's in addition to the Federal Credit.

Yet – and I say yet – an estimated 25% of EITC eligible taxpayers don't apply, leaving their hard-earned cash on the table. So to learn if you are eligible for the New Jersey Earned Income Tax Credit, go to that website on the screen, njeitc.org. And if you are eligible, be sure to claim your credit when you file this year. This is your money and you've earned it. And to all our partners throughout government and community organizations across the state, please help us spread the word. Again, it's njeitc.org.

We're going to switch gears, Pat, yet again. While we're talking about helping our communities, let's share the word about the assistance of the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority and what they're providing to small businesses across communities in which it works, and this is a great one. This is Off The Hanger, a Newark-based fashion and furniture studio owned and operated by a veteran of New York's fashion scene, that woman to the right Lynette Ware. Lynette's goal for Off The Hanger was to create an experience for her customers by encouraging them to both dress up themselves and their homes with fashions and ideas for living that could start a conversation.

But even more importantly, she set out to make Off The Hanger a space that would create good jobs in Newark's retail sector and also foster new careers in the world of design through her dotcom fashion school, The Outfit Institute, which she hopes to see take off in a physical location.

Working with the Redevelopment Authority, Lynette received funding through the Small Business Lease Emergency Assistance Grant Program that has allowed her to keep Off The Hanger up to date and on its rent and expenses so she can look to a prosperous and creative future. She and I spoke on Wednesday, had a great conversation. You've got to go see these folks, 12 Linden Street in Newark. A hats off to you, Lynette and we are all grateful to the Redevelopment Authority and its great staff, led by its rocking President and CEO, Leslie Anderson, for their hard work protecting small businesses in our urban centers and downtowns.

Okay, now, as I mentioned before we continue, sadly, to lose cherished members of our New Jersey family to this pandemic. Let's end the week by remembering three more who have recently passed.

We begin today by celebrating the life of Union's Rachael Ghiretti. Rachael was 67 years old and had called Union home for all but seven of her years, and she also spent 20 years working at Union Imaging, also based in her hometown. I want to thank the guy in the back of the room, Sergeant Brian Murray, for bringing this one to our attention. Thank you, Sergeant. Rachael gave everything for her family and friends, especially if it revolved around a good meal or a Broadway show. She especially loved to cook, and given that Rachael was a huge fan of the celebrity chef Lidia Bastianich, we can only imagine the remarkable and memorable meals she put together.

Rachael is survived by her husband James, her sons Vincent – and I had the great honor of speaking with Vin on Wednesday – and Nicholas and their wives, Concepcion and Nicole, respectively. She is survived by her daughter Emily and her grandchildren Annabella, Leanna and Vincenzo. She also leaves her siblings, Louise and Frank, her best friend of 50 years, Dina Duffy, and many nieces, nephews and extended family and friends who counted as family. May God bless and watch over you, Rachael, and your family.

Next, we remember Hamilton Township's Lilah Gumbas. She was born in Trenton and was a lifelong resident of the Trenton-Hamilton area. For the past 21 years, Lilah worked for the State of New Jersey, most recently in the Department of Banking and Insurance, and previous to that with the Department of Labor. Like many in the area where she was raised and lived, when it came to sports she was an avid fan of the New York Yankees, but she broke with protocol when it came to football to cheer on her beloved Steel Curtain, the Pittsburgh Steelers. In her spare time, Lilah was her family's unofficial photographer and enjoyed spending time with them on a cruise or elsewhere. She also enjoyed taking in as many Luke Bryan concerts as she possibly could. I'm a Luke Bryan fan, so that one resonates.

She leaves behind her husband, John, with whom I had the great honor of speaking with on Wednesday, by the way. Talk about a family of state service here. He works at the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and they were married for 17 years. She also leaves behind her children Ben and Caitlin, as well as her mom Josephine. Josephine, by the way, worked at the Department of Labor, and Josephine's husband Felix. Lilah is also survived by her sister and brother-in-law Terry, also Department of Labor and Theo; her mother and father-in-law Carol and John, and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins. I'm sure I've missed a few. I believe, Terry told me that they were predeceased by a brother, also who worked at the Department of Labor.

And of course, Lilah leaves behind her friends and former colleagues of both DOBI and Labor. We thank her for her years of service to the State of New Jersey. She will be missed. God bless you and watch over you, Lilah.

And this week, finally, we recall Hilda Sorrel, otherwise known as Dally, of Camden. She was born in Vega Alta, Puerto Rico 74 years ago, and she came to the Mainland USA with her family in 1950. After receiving both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Hunter College in New York City, Hilda embarked on a long career in public education work; work that would take her from New York City Public Schools to the School District of Philadelphia, where she focused on early childhood education.

For the past 38 years, she called Camden home and helped lead efforts to empower residents in neighborhoods. She held numerous leadership positions on the board of directors of Puerto Rican Unity For Progress, a multiservice organization in Camden, with a special focus on education and youth programs, the things Dally spent her entire career focused on.

She now leaves behind, sadly, her husband Jose, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, and their two children; I also had the honor of speaking with Anna, who by the way is a registered nurse, and Michael, who I believe got a PhD and now lives in Lucerne, Switzerland. She also leaves behind her grandson, Elijah. She's also survived by her sisters Maria, Unis and Ellie, her brothers Juan and Joshua and many nieces and nephews. So for a career spent preparing our youngest learners to reach their individual stars, bless you, Hilda. Gracias Dios te bendiga.

I have to say before we flip into – please you're welcome to move over there. Not related to COVID, to the best of my knowledge, but as a former amateur actor I want to just pay respects to Cicely Tyson, an all-time great actress who, by the way, has a one of our great schools named after her in East Orange, and Cloris Leachman. I looked back, when did I first see them in something because they've been around forever? Cloris Leachman in The Last Picture Show in 1971, and I remember Cicely Tyson first from The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. But two giants, and hats off and deep thanks for all the incredible performances over the years.

So that's where we're going to end things for the last Friday in January. Again, we ask everyone to please stay patient as we await the increase in the vaccine doses we need. Repeating what we said here on Wednesday, we want to make sure that everyone who received their first dose is properly scheduled for their second. If you received your first vaccination dose through an appointment you made online at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine, your second-dose appointment has been automatically scheduled and you will receive an email confirmation regarding this by tomorrow.

If you received your first dose at the Gloucester County mega site but booked your appointment directly through the mega site and did not use our state website, the Gloucester County mega site will be reaching out directly to you this week to schedule your second dose. If you booked directly with a vaccine site for your first dose and did not book your second-dose appointment at the time of your first shot, then you need to contact the site where you received that first shot to schedule your second. And finally, if by the end of the weekend, you're still not certain how you will get your second-dose appointment, contact our vaccination call center and our operators, I think beginning on Sunday, will assist you with scheduling one. That number is the one on the screen, 855-56800545. That's 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., I believe, seven days a week, Mahen, unless you tell me otherwise, seven days a week.

With that, it's my pleasure to turn things over to the guy to my right, the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health for Public Health Services, Dr. David Adinaro.

Deputy Health Commissioner for Public Health Services Dr. David Adinaro: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As the Governor shared, the state's vaccination scheduling system experienced technical issues that caused double-booking appointments yesterday. Unfortunately, we need to cancel a number of appointments that were mistakenly double-booked. We will work with those cancelled on rescheduling their appointments at the nearest available time. We are sorry for the confusion this issue caused the impacted registrants. We are working with our vendor to ensure that this does not happen again.

We want to thank the team at the Gloucester County mega site for their exceptional work to vaccinate the unexpected individuals who showed up at that site yesterday. While dealing with challenging circumstances they went above and beyond to serve people.

For those who received their vaccination dose through an appointment you made via our information hub at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine, your second-dose appointment has been automatically scheduled and you will receive an email confirmation regarding this within the next several days. The department is working closely with all vaccination sites to ensure they are making second-dose appointments. We are reinforcing with sites that they should be making second-dose appointments when individuals receive the first dose.

Starting this weekend, the New Jersey COVID-19 vaccination call center will have operators available to assist individuals who have questions about second-dose appointments. We ask everyone to continue to be patient. There continues to be a tremendous imbalance between the demand and supply of vaccine across the country but we have been guaranteed adequate supply of booster doses to match initial doses.

We understand everyone is eager to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Employers, private physician practices, community-based organizations and churches have also reached out to the department to hold clinics for their employees, clients, membership and congregations. We appreciate their willingness to serve the public but at this time, there is not enough vaccination supply to support these efforts. The department is expecting to continue to see increases in allotment from the federal government and when vaccine is more plentiful, we look forward to these partnerships to reach more of our residents that are eligible for the vaccination.

Even with the rollout of vaccine, we still need everyone to double down on precautionary measures to stop the spread of the virus. The tools we have been using since the start of this pandemic -- masks and physical distancing, staying home when sick -- help reduce your chance of being exposed to or spreading the virus.

Today we are reporting three new cases of the B-117 variant, the variant that emerged in the UK, for a total of 11 cases in the state. Of the 11, two are in Essex County, one in Hudson County, one in Middlesex County, two in Morris County, four in Ocean County and one in Warren County. Two of the cases have known travel history.

Moving on to the department's daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 3,116 hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients and persons under investigation last evening. There are 548 individuals in critical care, 69 of those critical care patients are on ventilators.

There is one new report of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 84 cumulative cases in the state. The children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19 infection, had antibody tests that were positive for COVID-19 exposure, or COVID-19 exposure within four weeks prior to symptoms. In New Jersey, there are no deaths reported at this time. Two of these children are currently hospitalized. The breakdown of race ethnicity of these cases is: White 22%, Black 24%, Hispanic 41%, Asian 7%, other 7%.

At the state veteran homes, there has been one new positive case among a resident at the Vineland Home. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there has been one new positive patient at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital.

The daily percent positivity as of January 25th was 8.37% for all of New Jersey; 8.42% for the North, 8.27% for Central, and 8.42% for South. That concludes the department's daily report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, social distance, stay home when you are sick, get tested and download the COVID Alert NJ App. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: David, thank you. Thanks for the report, for the update and for the clarification on some of the steps on the vaccine front. Good to have you with us today. Pat, likewise, as always. I know you've got some compliance. Great seeing you this morning, and your colleagues, at the Bergen site. We've got some weather that looks like it could be nasty and looks like Monday now, not Sunday. Is that right? Over to you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's correct. Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon, everybody. With regards to compliance, ABC investigators went out last night in Monmouth County. They did 55 compliance inspections, citing five different establishments which are as follows with regards to EO violations: Howell Lanes in Howell, The Cabin in Freehold, Tommy's Tavern and tap, also in Freehold, Gabriella's Italian Steakhouse in Red Bank and Nicholas Barrel and Roost in Middletown.

With regard to the weather, as the Governor indicated, today we're dealing with the wind. Although it's been windy, we only have about 2,400 power outages right now, Gov, which is a pretty good spot to be in. But we're looking at both a continental low and a coastal low, which notoriously those coastal lows are tough to predict, even up to sometimes 12 hours out. But it looks like this could actually be a Sunday night all the way through until Tuesday storm, depending upon its track. We will be certainly with our DOT partners and BPU partners throughout the weekend. We are activating our State Emergency Operations Center Sunday and Monday.

As of right now, I've been on the phone several times with Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti already today. Also, just because we were talking about mega sites, we have emergency snow removal contracts in place with all of those sites to make sure that those ways in and out and the parking lots are clear. Also in conversation with DOT, making sure that those routes to those mega sites are clear, up to and including if we need to escort and make sure that the FedEx and UPS deliveries of the vaccines -- whether they're coming in from Newark or Philly airport -- that we get them there. Certainly we're going to be monitoring that all weekend but I would strongly recommend if citizens and motorists need to go out that they try and get that all done tomorrow, would be the recommendation.

And just lastly, just because we were there this morning up at the Meadowlands Racetrack, I was asked before you got there, Gov, could I ever have envisioned the racetrack being -- and I thought that the metaphor and the symbolism I likened it, I think we're on the backstretch, hoping to get to the homestretch, and certainly looking forward to hitting the wire in the months ahead. That's all I've got, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: I was asked the same question. It was kind of a surreal moment, I have to say. But boy, you talked about making -- and a hats off to you and your team and the National Guard and Bergen County and Hackensack Meridian, Bob Garrett and his team were there, and the volunteers for being creative to take that space. As you know, as you and I have seen up and down the state, they're really well laid out.

High winds today. I meant to say that, just crazy high winds; everybody, be careful. I'm shocked the power outages aren't higher than they are. So just to reiterate, possibly beginning Sunday night and the question is, is it one of these where we're on the fence between snow and rain? Or is this almost certainly going to be snow? Where does that look?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I think this is all going to – it's definitely going to be a snow event, but right now we're ranging anywhere from two up to a foot of snow. That track is what we're just going to make sure. We want to have high confidence in the forecast and I know we'll be on with National Weather Service throughout the weekend too, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great. Thank you for that. So, related to that, we will be virtual for the next couple of days. I'll bet you there's a good shot if we've got a snowstorm on Monday that we're going to be virtual, virtual in the sense of Facebook or some other way to communicate on Monday. And my guess is you and I may end up seeing each other at the STEMC in the forward section of Woodbridge, as we usually do in these storms.

But I think your piece of advice is a good one, folks. If you can get your errands and anything you need to do out of the way today and tomorrow, that's probably good advice and we'll take it from there. Again, assume tomorrow and Sunday we're with you electronically. We'll let you know on Monday. But if I had to guess, we'll be doing this via Facebook or some other means so as not to put people at risk to have to drag you into Trenton, but Mahen will promise to come back. I think either way, it'll be at one o'clock on Monday, so we'll be with you then.

We're going to start over here if we could. Sam, is that you? Nice to see you. Dante's got the microphone. Welcome.

Q&A Session

Sam Sutton, Politico: Thank you. Three questions for you. This upcoming election is going to be a referendum on your leadership over the course of the pandemic. In that respect, what do you view as weak spots in that response? Are there any aspects of the response that you think might be a political liability moving forward?

And then two quick ones, New York is reopening restaurants in the next couple of weeks. Are you planning any adjustments to indoor capacity limits at this point in time?

And one completely unrelated. As a former asset management person, what are your thoughts on the GameStop phenomenon, and do you think the market is prepared for similar disruptions moving forward?

Governor Phil Murphy: That is off topic. Sam, I'm not really thinking a whole lot about politics. I've declared I'm running for reelection. I'm proud of that. We spent a fair amount of money, particularly my wife and team raising money. We're trying to call balls and strikes every day, trying to get this as right as we can. This is a never-before-lived experience for any leader, any citizen, frankly, in this country, never mind in this state.

We every single day wake up, I know Pat, David, Tina, Judy, the rest of us wake up every day trying to get it as right as we can. You try to bat 1,000. Invariably, when you have a vendor that lets you down, as we had yesterday which really is annoying. Forget about me being annoyed, folks out there who were impacted by that, that's something that really drives us crazy when you see a week ago today, 12% of the doses for long-term care, actually having been put in people's arms, you've got to rattle some cages. We did and it's up to 42% and that number needs to keep going higher.

I mentioned testing. I think Rachel Maddow was interviewing me, it felt like 20 years ago but I think it was in April, and she kept showing a picture of lines, the Paramus testing site, Pat, where FEMA worked with us. You know, you looked at that and said, you know what? That'll never get better. Guess what? It got better. Some of this stuff takes time, so I don't think you can judge. When you look in the mirror, I think we're our hardest critics. When you look in the mirror, any given day of the week, you know, this is a movie we're living as opposed to a snapshot. I'll leave it at that.

I'm proud of the fact we were the last state in America to open up indoors. We opened up restaurants to 25% on Friday, September 4th. We have stayed at 25% indoors. By the way, we were never restricting outdoors and we still aren't. I'm proud of the fact that we never came off of that. I believe every other state in America has moved around within that five-month period and we haven't.

Having said that, Sam, I think if the numbers continue to get better – and obviously we'll defer to David, Tina, Judy and team – we'll be able to take some steps on the inside. There are things we clearly would like to do. We'd like to get more restaurant capacity. I'd love to see even a modest amount of fans, particularly senior families at sporting events, things like that. We're not there yet, but the numbers, if they keep going in the right direction, I'm hoping.

This GameStop phenomenon is crazy. I'm reminded of an old adage, when people who normally don't talk about the stock market start talking to you about it like they talk about "Hey, did you see the Giants game last night?" it's time to sell. Because when these things start dropping, it's like trying to catch a knife when they go down. Good luck, and by the way, it's bloody. I will just say things, at the end of the day, markets are not perfect, for sure but at the end of the day, it's sometimes a question of when or how, but they settle in at a level or their natural resting place. This craziness this week is clearly not a natural resting place. I think you saw some of that yesterday, GameStop was down 44% yesterday, after going up many double-digits percent.

I do think it's an interesting, some have likened it to more of a grassroots change in society. I'm not sure I'd go that far but it certainly is a wild week, without question. Thank you. Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon, Governor. On the problems with the double booking on the state vaccination system, how many people were affected? How will you reschedule them? Will it be automatic? I think you did touch on this. But there's, you know, some people were booked in different manners. Did it affect sites other than other than Gloucester? And if so, how many and which ones?

Governor, in the past week or so my colleagues and I have been inundated with emails and calls from people who have said they're unable to collect unemployment benefits for a variety of reasons. I've actually gotten two emails as I've been sitting here. They're not getting any clarity from DOL on their issues or how it can be fixed. They're not able to get anybody on the phone. I know that you've said, you know, people will get what they're owed but frankly, grocery stores don't take IOUs so these people are a bit frustrated. What's being done to help these folks? How can the state get in contact with them? And will you bring the Commissioner of DOL back to these meetings so we can get some questions answered?

Governor Phil Murphy: David, tell me if you see it – I believe the booking was specific with the vendor issue to Gloucester, or did it go beyond that?

Deputy Health Commissioner for Public Health Services Dr. David Adinaro: As far as we know, so far we've only seen it at Gloucester. We have not seen any other sites that had reported it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Mahen, could you and/or Parimal follow up? To the extent to which we think there's evidence that it was elsewhere, we'll come back to you but I've only heard from Gloucester.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Although it was very frustrating the way this incident management team worked yesterday and rallied and pulled resources, they still administered 2,400 vaccines yesterday at Gloucester which I think needs to be noted. As much as there was frustration, the folks that showed up were taken care of.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. I'm glad you said it and David said it earlier, they did a heck of a job under the circumstances. But we'll come back to you if it seeps beyond Gloucester, Matt.

Yeah, listen, your point about grocery stores not taking the IOU I think crystallizes the pain. The pain is enormous. I mean, when you talk about \$21.7 billion put on the street between our money and the Fed money for what is now about 2 million people in the past year who have claimed initial and were eligible to get unemployment. It's just breathtaking. So anybody who's out there not getting what they deserve, I've got nothing but complete sympathy.

Again, I think my answer is still going to be it is very much specific to the individual. So one of the things, if they're comfortable giving up their personal names and whatnot, Matt, I would love to get Mahen to get them from you.

And as it relates to getting Rob back here, I would welcome that. So Mahen, let's do that. He's just sent me a note saying, just remember the last time I came here, no one asked me any questions. So please, when he comes up, make sure you've got him teed up, Matt, but I think it's a good idea. It's a good suggestion. And again, anyone who's out there who's frustrated, who's in pain, we have nothing but sympathy for you. I know our team will work as hard as they can to get you what is rightfully yours. God bless you and hang in there. Do you have anything, sir? You're good? Okay. Please.

Reporter, NJ Spotlight: Good afternoon, Governor. When will people be able to appointments through the vaccine hotline? Will people be able to make both their first and second dose appointments over the phone? Are there any plans to expand the call center staffing to more than 250 agents to handle the high call volume?

What is the state doing to address allegations that some well-connected individuals, including those at Hunterdon County Hospital, have gotten vaccinated despite being ineligible under the current state guidelines? How is the state working to prevent preferential treatment and line jumping?

Governor Phil Murphy: The hotline will begin helping make appointments, Mahen, on Sunday, to the best of my knowledge. If that changes, we'll come back. Right now up, I think they've been just helping you preregister. I'm not certain as to whether or not it's both first and second but we'll come back to you on that as well.

But importantly, again, this is for everybody. I wanted to say this earlier. Your question triggers it, which I appreciate. When you get your first vaccination, do not leave that location until you have made an appointment for your second. I know that to be the case. My guess is that they won't do the second at the call center because they want to get you to the location and then have that happen on the spot but we'll come back to you.

I'm not sure about expanding it, David. I mean, we went from zero to 250 on Monday morning. As I said to you, I think the first hour 17,000 calls, Monday was going to be the biggest day of calls, and I believe I have been proven right that it's come down each day. I'm not sure yet whether or not we believe we need more bodies in there. But if we do, we'll put them in there.

And yeah, on the well connected, I'm sure the department and others are following up on the alleged abuse of the privilege by the Hunterdon Medical Center. But one thing I promise you we can do and I'll leave it to the Department of Health to go through the specifics is that will impact their future dosage, if that turns out to be true.

And again, it's one thing if there's a legitimate confusion, I mentioned this a few days ago when early on. This is now six weeks ago probably, there was a hospital where I think there was a legitimate, does that include our board? Does it include nonmedical members of our board? Understood, it was raised, it was dealt with. But to volitionally jump the line, if that's what happened, and everyone's innocent until proven guilty here. If that in fact happened that has consequences. I'll leave it to the Department of Health to go through what those are. But I guarantee you one on the list is fewer doses going forward. Thank you. Nikita.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. All of these are on Corrections. I'm wondering if you've spoken to any of the victims or their families from the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility. I'm also interested in knowing, what's your thinking behind not suspending Commissioner Hicks or the ombudsman or the administrator at the facility? I suspect I will have a follow-up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for the heads up. I've not spoken to the victims or their families. I'm outraged by what happened. I'm sick to my stomach but there are ongoing, both criminal and now independent investigation, which I've ordered, led by one of the smartest, toughest guys I know in the state. I've asked them to do it on an expedited basis. So let's get this played out.

The short answer is we need to know what happened. I might add since the incident, the number one and two person at that facility have been newly installed. There was a retirement in one case and there's been an administrative leave in the other case. The top two people there are already new faces. But I need to understand, we need to understand, exactly what happened. If anyone bears responsibility then there will be consequences, period.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: That does seem to be a little bit of a departure from how you handle dismissals for people like Chris Neuwirth and Marcellus Jackson. Is there something that's causing you to act differently here?

Governor Phil Murphy: They have nothing to do with each other. This is an independent investigation, which I've ordered by Matt Boxer, former state comptroller, as I say, one of the smartest, toughest guys I know. I'm outraged, sick to my stomach. Let's find out what happened, okay?

Thank you, folks. With that, we shall fold the tent. We will be, as I said, we will be with you on Monday but I would bet, given the weather forecast, that we're going to be doing it staring down at our laptops would be my guess, at this point. Again, on the weather front, get out and get what you need to get done at least before Sunday, it sounds like evening. Be safe, careful with the winds out there today.

I want to thank David, for coming in, great to have you. Tina, as always. Pat, Jared, Parimal, Mahen, the team. We wish Judy well and her colleague who tested positive. Again, folks, two asks, fairly simple. Number one, keep doing what you're doing, that you've been doing now going on 11 months, and doing it better than any other state. The basic stuff still matters here. And secondly, please have patience as we continue to aggressively roll out this vaccine. You know, I look in particular every time we do a quarter-of-a-million uptick. Last time we did it from 250 to 500 we did it in nine days. Looks like we're going to do this in seven to eight days. We all want to see that accelerate.

I'm particularly taken by the progress this week with our long-term care facilities. We need to see that continue. And again, folks, have patience. There is a huge supply-demand imbalance. But it will get worked through. You have my word, you have our word. And in particular for the folks who are impacted at Gloucester, hats off to you for your patience in particular and apologies on behalf of the vendor and everybody else who is involved in this. I promise you, everyone working with the Gloucester site we will get this fixed.

Take care, everybody, God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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