

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: December 18th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone and thank you for sticking around later than usual on a Friday. Before we go further, 233 years ago today, December 18th, 1787, New Jersey ratified the Constitution and became our nation's third state. Happy Birthday, New Jersey. I'm joined, as I almost always am, by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To my left another person who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. Jared Maples, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness is here. Chief Counsel Parimal Garg. And also joining us today, as we kind of intimated on Monday, is the COVID-19 Response Medical Advisor and the state's former epidemiologist, the guy who's been with us before, but not for a while. It's a great honor to have Dr. Eddy Bresnitz with us today. Eddy, thank you. Good to have you back.

We have a bunch of things we want to cover. First thing, earlier today I lifted the state of emergency which I had declared in advance of the winter storm that hit us across Wednesday and Thursday. While our roads are open and power restored, we are still in for another frigid night, I believe, Pat. It is going to get cold tonight again, so refreezing and black ice on our roads and sidewalks are very possible, so please stay safe when venturing out.

Switch gears, on Tuesday and this was pretty incredible and Judy, there you are, right in the middle, we witnessed the first vaccinations for COVID-19 as our healthcare heroes at hospitals across the state began stepping forward to lead our way forward. I was extremely honored to join the team at University Hospital in Newark with Judy and First Lady Tammy Murphy. Yesterday, Judy and I were visiting Robert Wood Johnson

University Hospital in New Brunswick. Tammy was stopping by Atlantic Health in Morristown Medical Center, and this morning Judy and I made a stop at Hackensack Meridian Health, Hackensack University Medical Center in Hackensack, not surprisingly.

At each hospital, we have thanked every one of the frontline health care workers not only for the jobs they've been doing since March, but also for the example they're setting by showing their confidence in the safety of the vaccine we now have in our toolbox, and for the ones we hope to have just a few days. Each day this week the number of vaccinated New Jerseyans has grown, but it is still a drop in a very big bucket. For us to get to the point where we know there is broad statewide protection against this virus, we need millions of you to step forward and raise your sleeves.

This is going to take a concerted effort not just in building confidence in the safety and efficacy of these vaccines, but also in building out a statewide network of vaccination sites. To that end, Judy and her team including Dr. Bresnitz and Deputy Commissioner for Public Health, David Adinaro are already deep into that work. The goal is simple as we move forward with vaccinations and as each eligible group is able to step into the queue, we will be ready for them. And Pat, you and your team have been all over this as well, I know. So we're on schedule to open six vaccine mega sites across the state in early January. The six mega sites will be located in, and I'll move from north to south, Bergen County at the Meadowlands complex; at the Rockaway Town's Square Mall in Morris County; in Middlesex County at the New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center; at the Morristown Mall in Burlington County; at Rowan College of South Jersey and Gloucester County; and in Atlantic County at the Atlantic City Convention Center.

These sites will be in position to vaccinate frontline health care workers who are part of the so-called 1A category. We anticipate them also being able to accommodate the 1B category of essential workers before moving to the 1C category of adults over the age of 65 and those with high risk medical conditions. With each successive wave, we will get closer to being able to open our vaccination sites to the general public. I know Judy is going to provide a lot greater detail on vaccinations generally and on the planning going into these mega sites and beyond.

We can go beyond this. We're also currently working to open more than 200 satellite vaccination sites, which will ultimately include our individual hospitals, federally qualified health centers, urgent care centers, and chain pharmacies, along with localized sites created in coordination with county and local health departments. We are in the final preparations for administration of vaccines at our long-term care facilities, inclusive of both staff and residents.

New Jersey, along with our federal agency partners, have teamed up with both CVS and Walgreens to provide end-to-end management of a long-term care vaccination program, including storage, administering vaccines and reporting through the pharmacy partnership for the long-term care program. CVS and Walgreens will coordinate with enrolled facilities to begin onsite clinics beginning December 28th. We will start at our veterans homes and skilled nursing facilities, and then move to assisted living residences, among other long-term congregate settings.

Suffice it to say, as each successive group of New Jerseyans becomes eligible to be vaccinated as we move from 1A to 1B to 1C and beyond, we will have the infrastructure in place to administer to every resident in those groups who wishes to be vaccinated. We will be ready and we hope you will be as well. Getting ourselves to the 70% level of vaccination we aspire to will take time. It will take, in fact, months. It will take a concerted effort of those of us up here and many, many more around the state to show our confidence in the safety and efficacy of these vaccines.

Seeing ourselves through this pandemic will also take a concerted effort to maintain the practices that we have been relying upon to keep our families and communities as healthy as we possibly can: social distancing, wearing our face masks, washing our hands and using common sense. Yes, the first vaccine is here, and we expect another to join it in the coming days. I think Moderna is up for their last check out tonight, I believe, once the FDA grants emergency use authorization. But as we've said before, the vaccine's mere presence in our state is not enough to move the needle. We will need to embrace it and we will need to keep up with our other practices. Everything together is how will ultimately defeat this virus. So to you Judy and Eddy and to everyone else working with you, thank you.

Next up, since we were preempted on Wednesday by the winter storm, let's take a look at the metrics we're following from our schools. For last week, we had a total of 10 new in-school outbreaks that were confirmed. Again, an outbreak is two or more cases epidemiologically linked to in-school activity with a total of 40 subsequent new cases of coronavirus infection. That's 40 more people, for a cumulative total of 98 outbreaks impacting 428 individuals, again, through in-school transmission.

As we note every week, these are the cases which are directly linked, as I said, to in-school activities. We know that there are students, faculty and staff who contract coronavirus during out-of-school activities. Our efforts have been on preventing those from getting through the schoolhouse doors and when compared to the broader rates of infection, those efforts are proving largely successful. I have to say, we will keep it here for a second, let's repeat something. This does not mean that it's a normal school year. It doesn't mean that it is a stress-free school year for educators, for parents, for kids, administrators, staff. People are doing heroic work. Let's keep at it folks and again, let's keep at it safely and responsibly.

Before we run through the overnight numbers, I'm pleased to announce that earlier today, the New Jersey Hospital Association voted to require its members to report, on a daily basis, the number of COVID positive cases among their healthcare workers. This is something we've talked about on a number of occasions up here. This reporting, which will start the week of December 28th, will be done through the existing NJHA portal and will be available to the public. I want to thank especially NJHA President Kathy Bennett for working with Judy and the Department of Health to take this important step.

Now to today's full numbers. 3,975 new positives, a cumulative total of 423,226 since March 4th. The positivity rate 10.08%. That's based on tests that were done on Monday, and there were, should you ask, 48,661 of them done on Monday. The rate of transmission is currently at 1.03, so our RT level has leveled off over the past several days and is beginning now to drop. But let's not forget, 3,975 new cases today, and we've been recording similar numbers of new cases over the past week. So these are still big numbers and they prove without any doubt how far we are still away from being out of this tunnel.

The numbers in our hospitals tell a similar story. As of last night, there were a total of 3,582 patients being treated. Of that group, 3,375 were known COVID positive, 207 were awaiting test results. Of that group, 715 were in ICUs, 480 of whom were on ventilators. 461 live patients were discharged yesterday while another 397 COVID positive patients were admitted. For the past couple of days, these numbers have begun moving in the right direction, which is down, but we'll keep watch as two days certainly do not make a trend. And we should also add, again at the risk of comparing apples to oranges, 71 other patients were discharged, unfortunately, in a different category. They died in our hospitals over the past 24 hours and those numbers are not yet in the confirmed losses of life.

I have to stop here, Judy, and just make the note that for two days in a row our hospitalizations are down. Again, that does not make a trend. This is the second day in a row that we discharged more people than we admitted, today by a wider margin than yesterday. Please God, this is the beginning of something. I don't know that it is, by the way but we'll take those two days. But even in those two days, in the last 24 hours 71 people dying in our hospitals.

The vaccines are here at a time when we absolutely need them and we're doing everything we can see that they are put to work to protect public health and to move us forward. But this week was just the start. Sadly, though, we know that we will still be moving forward without a significant part of our New Jersey family. Today we have the obligation, with a heavy heart, to report another 44 confirmed deaths from COVID-19. That brings our total to 16,216, along with 1,908 probable deaths. 21 of the 44 deaths are reported, actually, from the past three days.

Let's put that into a little context, the total number of losses of life so far. That many deaths would be like erasing the entire population of Rutherford Borough in Bergen County, or Madison in Morris County or Hopewell Township in Mercer County, or Cinnaminson in Burlington County, or Hammington in Atlantic County, or the entirety of any of 417 other communities in our state. So many families know the ultimate pain of this virus, and some families have had that pain magnified many times over.

This is one such family. Ahmad Shivdaya and Jerry Seeraj were brothers-in-law and Altaf Seeraj was Jerry's son. All three would pass from COVID-19. They were proud Guyanese immigrants who came to the United States more than 40 years ago. Ahmad and Jerry met while working at the former Nhanes Metal Finishing

Company in Newark, a workplace by the way that hired many Guyanese immigrants and where they felt at home. Jerry would actually end up marrying Ahmad's sister, Misha. Nhanes Metal would close its doors in 1994. Ahmad would find work as a truck driver to support his wife, Gemma and their two daughters, Sophie and Betty. Jerry went on to work at Flextronics in Parsippany until his retirement in 2004. Jerry and Misha grew a family of their own with nine children, Rahana, Araf, Nazam, Afsal otherwise known as Mike, Gerald, Maureen, Jenny, Janet and Altaf. I had the great honor of speaking with Misha and Afsal or Mike earlier this week. Altaf, the ninth of their kids, was just 10 years old when the family left Guyana for New Jersey. He was a special needs student as a child, but he grew to be an active and most importantly, kind adult. That's him on the lower left, by the way.

Within a span of 12 days, Ahmad Jerry and Altaf would each pass away from COVID-19. Ahmad was 67 years old, Jerry was 79, Altaf was just 51. One family. Together they show New Jersey is indeed the place where the American dreams of countless immigrants are realized. We thank them for being proud members of our family, and may God bless each of them and watch over them and their families that they now leave behind.

Switching gears, yesterday the Department of Labor released the latest unemployment figures for last week and the number of new initial unemployment claims were nearly level from the prior week at just over 16,000 and overall New Jersey workers impacted by the pandemic have now received a total of more than \$20 billion in unemployment benefits. That number alone shows the unprecedented scale of this pandemic on our economy and on our own state's workforce, and points once again on the urgency for the federal government to enact a new stimulus bill before federal unemployment benefits expire for an estimated half a million New Jerseyans on December 26th. I want to again thank Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro Angelo and his entire team who continue to do all that they can to reach every eligible worker to ensure they receive every penny of benefits to which they're entitled.

In that vein, the Labor Department is planning to process another round of FEMA lost wages assistance payments tonight, which will deliver payments to an estimated 10,000 newly eligible claimants just in time for Christmas.

Next up, shifting gears, on Wednesday, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority inaugurated its new \$2 million sustain and serve NJ Grant Program. Under Sustain and Serve, organizations that purchase meals from participating eligible New Jersey restaurants for distribution to residents will receive direct support to pay those food expenses. Through Sustain and Serve, these organizations will have a direct incentive to support impacted restaurants within their communities who could use a few more customers to secure their own futures. Sustain and Serve NJ will help to get people back to work in restaurant kitchens doing what they love. For more information on becoming part of the Sustain and Serve program, either as a purchaser or as a restaurant provider, please visit that website, [business.nj.gov/COVID](https://business.nj.gov/COVID). Sustain and Serve, by the way, is just one of the numerous programs stood up by the EDA to support New Jersey small business community, in addition to direct grant loan programs. So far, the EDA has helped, are you ready for this, nearly 55,000 New Jersey businesses stay strong through the pandemic.

One of those the EDA has partnered with is Hearts For You, a bridal boutique over in my neck of the woods in Manalapan. Run by the mother-daughter duo of Lucy and Nicole Altman, that's the two on the left, and which also includes husband/dad Lee and daughter/sister Brianna there on the right, Hearts For You has been a mainstay in the community for more than three decades and employs a staff of eight. Lucy and Nicole worked with the EDA to secure a direct grant that allowed them to refurbish Hearts For You, setting it up for long-term success. I had the opportunity to check in with the entire Altman clan earlier this week, I spoke to all four of them, by the way, at once, and to thank them for keeping their faith through these challenging times. I'm proud that they found a partner in the EDA. I forgot to write down the website, I believe it's [HeartsForYou.com](https://HeartsForYou.com). Mahen, you could actually check that while I'm talking. If it's something different, I will give them a shout.

So that's as good a place to end as anywhere for Friday. This has been a tremendous week in our fight against COVID. The first vaccine is here, and another will likely be on its way within just a few days. We are ready for this moment. We have been waiting for this moment. But let's not forget that just because vaccines are here doesn't mean that we can become lax; quite the opposite. Now is the time for us to double down on the practices that have sustained us over the past nine months. The stuff you're probably sick of hearing but it's the hand that we can play: social distancing, face masks, washing hands, using common sense, take

yourself off the field if you don't feel well or you got exposed to somebody who's COVID positive. Wait the number of days that Judy would want you to wait and then go get tested. That's basic stuff, but it's the stuff we know works.

We saw a picture of her earlier. On Tuesday, Judy, you and I and Tammy were standing there when University Hospital nurse, and it was her birthday, which is still hard to believe, Marissa Benitez, became the first New Jerseyan to be vaccinated and she said, I'll quote Marissa, "I can see that light at the end of the tunnel." Every day we stay strong against this pandemic is a day we allow that light to grow just a little bit brighter. We're still in this for several months, but we've already gotten through nine. So folks, just a few more. And every New Jerseyan who puts their confidence in science and medicine by rolling up their sleeve to get vaccinated will also allow that light to grow a little bit brighter. Let's get to the end of this tunnel.

And speaking of tunnels, I was incredibly honored today to announce with both federal representatives, New Jersey Transit, Amtrak, private sector representatives that we had at long last achieved the goal of positive train control, which will make our NJ Transit trains and all the trains that run on other lines through New Jersey that much safer. Mahen is pointing to his machine, which means, it's actually HeartsForYouBridal.com.

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

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. New Jersey will roll out COVID-19 vaccines in phases to serve all who live, work and study in the state. Our goal is to vaccinate 70% of the eligible adult population within six months. This is a huge undertaking, as it could represent as many as 4.7 million individuals. As I have reported in the past, we expect that the demand for the vaccine will outpace the supply, so we will need to initiate vaccine sites in phases to ensure equitable distribution. Currently, vaccines are available to those who are in the 1A category which includes paid and unpaid persons, serving in healthcare settings, who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials, and also long-term care residents and staff.

There are approximately 650,000 healthcare workers in New Jersey. The health and safety of our frontline healthcare workers is our current priority because we need them on the job to care for the increasing number of patients in our hospitals. I am pleased to report that as of today, in our preposition sites, 2,149 healthcare workers have received dose 1 of their vaccine. This week the hospitals will be the only point of dispensing, and their responsibility will be to vaccinate the paid and unpaid individuals serving in their facilities. Vaccinations of long-term care residents and workforce will begin on December 28th through a partnership with the CDC, CVS and Walgreens.

Non-hospital healthcare workers in the 1A category will also have an opportunity to be vaccinated in the coming weeks at community sites throughout the state. We will be distributing information on those sites and hours of operation next week, and how these individuals in the 1A category can access the sites for appointments. There will also be walk-up availability.

Once the vaccine availability expands, essential workers which fall into category 1B will be able to get vaccinated. The next category after 1B is 1C, and they are adults 65 and over with underlying medical conditions. After these phases are complete, then the general population will be eligible for vaccination. The timing of the progression among the groups depends on the supply of vaccine to our state. We expect that 1A individuals will be vaccinated throughout January and February. As you may know, the information about anticipated doses and shipments of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine keeps changing. The previously expected second tranche of Pfizer doses for next week was expected to be 86,775. Now, based on what is entered into the federal Tiberius platform, we see we are expecting only 53,625. That's a reduction of 38%. The previously anticipated total Pfizer doses in December was expected to be 273,375 based on CDC guidance. Now, based on what has been entered again into the federal Tiberius system, the revised expectation from CDC is 183,300 doses, a change of 33% decrease.

Separately, we also received updated guidance on Moderna. For total Pfizer and Moderna for this month, the previously expected amount was 492,075 doses. Now based on what is entered into the Tiberius system, the number is 392,800. This represents a reduction of approximately 20%. The department will be

communicating with groups targeted for vaccine, and we will be communicating continuously with the public on the timing of this phased implementation plan and also the amount of vaccine that will be delivered weekly to New Jersey.

There will be a network of sites to get vaccinated, which will increase over time. The Governor outlined the mega sites located throughout New Jersey that will serve as vaccination hubs phased by our priority groups. The goal is to be able to vaccinate up to 2,400 individuals a day at the mega sites. The six state-supported sites, which are regionally located, are expected to begin operating beginning mid-January through to mid-February. They will be available for healthcare workers in category 1A. We are also working with providers to ensure there is a wide network of sites available. Currently, 215 sites have registered to be providers of vaccines in New Jersey. Those sites will actually increase over time as more vaccines become available. These sites will include county and local sites, federally qualified health centers, select retail pharmacies, primary care practices and urgent care centers, and the list will continue to expand as we move through the phases.

There's a process that a vaccine provider must go through in order to become a distribution site. The provider must sign an agreement with the CDC to attest that they will adhere to all of the requirements as a provider. They must register with the department through the New Jersey Immunization Information System. They must have the appropriate storage, refrigeration and handling specific to the vaccine allotment that they are receiving. They must monitor storage unit temperatures at all times, using equipment and practices that comply with the guidance. COVID-19 vaccination providers must document every vaccine administered in their medical record systems within 24 hours of administration. The providers must be able to have accurate data tracking to ensure that they can recall individuals back for their second dose.

This is an example of the work and preparation it takes to establish a site. As the availability of vaccine increases, the priority populations are served, information on signups for the general public will be made available. As I said, our expectation is to vaccinate 70% of the eligible adult population in New Jersey in a six-month period. Yes, that is aggressive and yes, it is aspirational. But it's what we need to do so that this virus has no place to go.

There have been no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 65 total cases in our state. Moving on to the statistics as the Governor shared, 3,582 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and PUIs are in our state, in our hospitals, with 715 individuals in critical care, 67% on ventilators.

It is my pleasure today also that we are joined by Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, a familiar person to many of us in public health in New Jersey. Dr. Bresnitz is a former state epidemiologist who joined the vaccine team at Merck after his tenure at the Department of Health. He is our leader of our Professional Advisory Committee that has been meeting weekly since March. He maintains vigilance over the work of the advisory committees to the FDA and the CDC, and his insights have been invaluable. He's here to answer any of your in-depth questions on the vaccine process.

The percent positivity in the state is 10.08%. That's on December 14th. The Northern part of the state reports 10.32, Central part of the state 9.5, the Southern part of the state 11.26. That concludes my report. Stay safe. Remember, for each other, for us all, please take the call, download the COVID alert New Jersey app, wash your hands frequently, mask up, socially distance and enjoy the holidays in small groups. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, on the vaccine numbers, I'd say two other comments, in fact, three comments. Number one, I don't think we've gotten a satisfactory reason why. I know you and I have spoken about that. Secondly, it's nothing personal. Apparently every American state has received a smaller, or expectation of a smaller allocation. There was at least, I'm going back to yesterday, I guess, there was at least some sense that they were trying to smooth out the numbers, giving us more predictability but at the same time lowering it. I'm not sure that's still the case. I have to say, I spoke with Pfizer. I believe Pfizer has said this now publicly. I spoke at the very senior levels of Pfizer yesterday, and they have no idea why this has been done. I've not spoken to Stefan Bhansali, the CEO of Moderna, so I can't speak for the Moderna side of the house but Pfizer said to me personally, we want you to know this is not us. We've got a White House VTC on Monday, so I suspect we'll learn more, although I know you and George and others are trying to get more information between now and then.

As I said earlier today at another press event, we will not -- I know you, I know Eddy, I know the rest of the team, we will not leave any stone unturned to get as much of those doses into New Jersey as fast as possible. Thank you for all.

Pat, weather is better. Thank you for that. Any update on either that front, compliance, anything as it relates to the mega sites? You guys at OEM are all over this as usual. I think playing, in many respects, a similar role to the role you played when we were setting up the testing sites early on. Thank you.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. With regards to compliance, since we last met there was six EO violations issued. In Paterson, police issued a citation to the Busan Cafe. Social distancing, issues way over capacity. In Newark, police responded to and cited Style 268 Hair Studio. Also in Newark, Crown Fried Chicken was cited for an EO violation. Saber Restaurant in Newark cited, La Rouge Restaurant in Newark and in Gloucester City, Nero's Pub on Broadway was cited.

And to your point about that all hazards incident management team, that is the same team that supported the build out of the field medical stations, those alternate care facilities if you recall, as well as the testing sites. They are a phenomenal group that support the Department of Health wherever there's capacity or capability issues, this team steps up. I'll just go beyond the State Police and OEM, its Corrections, it's the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Office of Information Technology. In this case, with regards to mega sites, Gloucester County OEM, Scotch Plains OEM, Cedar Grove Fire Department, as well as Inspira Hospital's Mobile Intensive Care Unit. And just to give you a small sense of what they're planning, logistics and management is, their operational support includes ordering tracking and managing resources, managing personnel hours, ensuring adequate personnel accountability, ensuring personnel safety and welfare, maintaining contracts, and MOUs, and managing communication processes and equipment. So a monumental task, but a team that has so much experience in large events, whether it was going to Puerto Rico, whether it was supporting Georgia and Florida in the wake of hurricanes, they are professionals. I just wanted to take a moment to thank them for their role in this critical time as we enter 2021, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll tell you, everything from Judy and Eddy's team and their colleagues, to you and yours and all the other organizations you listed, there are unsung heroes in our state by the thousands who are just doing extraordinary work, probably tens of thousands, who you don't see up here with us every day but are right now laying it all on the field for the rest of us, so hats off to every one of them.

We have Sarah today with the microphone for the first time, so welcome, Sarah, number one. Number two, we'll be with you virtually tomorrow and Sunday. We're going to be a little bit earlier on Monday, 12:30 on Monday, and that's because we've got that White House video conference at 2:30 and we're going to not waste any time. We're not going to let any grass grow between today and 2:30 on Monday, I promise you, trying to figure out what the forecast looks like for vaccine dosage deliveries. We will be with you because of that 30 minutes earlier on Monday. Anybody behind the cameras have any questions? You guys are you good? You're good. Okay, Sarah, we are going to come all the way over to Brent over here. Give us a sec, Brent.

Q&A Session

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** Hello, everyone. So some states are starting vaccinations for nursing homes on Monday. Why is New Jersey starting a week later? Why do you think Republicans in Congress don't want state aid, are fighting even FEMA funding in the stimulus bill, and won't extend the December 31st deadline to states to spend money they've already received?

This is from Karen Yi of WNYC. You built strong support among progressive advocates across the state when you pushed for reform to the state's tax incentives program, but now they're upset and furious that the new bill is being rushed and some of the things that are included in it. Did you misjudge how much opposition there would be and are you concerned you've alienated a core part of your base going into an election year?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** So with those questions, I'm going to answer them and then I'm going to ask Eddy a question because Eddy, we can't drag you here and not ask you something. We've got to make sure we all get our money's worth from having you here.

Well, I just said we would start nursing homes actually administering with the cooperation of the CVS Walgreens channel a week from Monday. I guess the question, Judy, is there any color as to why not earlier than that?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, in order to start on the 21st there was a deadline of the 7th for input of all the registered skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, of which we have over 650. We missed that date by a day and we asked to be able to start on the 21st and they said no, you'll start on the 28th. It's as simple as that.

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** And why the date was missed?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** It was just the volume of information that had to be inputted, nothing more than that.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I can't get inside the heads of senators or members of the Republican party as to why they would be either opposed to state aid, or to your caveat on that, even through the FEMA channel. History will be extraordinarily unkind to these people, particularly McConnell, because obviously he is running the Senate Republican Caucus. It's just clear as day and it shouldn't be partisan, it just shouldn't be partisan. We need a big moment to match this pandemic moment. And again, I think the number is \$3 trillion to \$4 trillion and they're spending an enormous amount of time making sure it is under \$1 trillion. I'm not sure what they're worried about. All these myths that it was blue state or that was legacy issues. None of that's true. It's every state and it has nothing to do with legacy issues.

There are plenty of ways to make sure that it wouldn't go against legacy issues so that's not even accurate. I think it's an incredible abrogation of responsibility at a time of desperate need in our nation. And I think reputationally those folks will pay a big price.

I would just say as it relates to your last question, please just as it relates to the premise, please look at the growing and very long list of folks who have either testified or put statements out in support of this. And it's an overwhelming and long list. I think the advocates who have been with us every step of the way, from day one, when it was cold, dark and lonely, to stand with us on a complete revamping of the incentive programs in the state and all of the stuff that we all believe in. Every bit of that is inside of these bills and then some.

The only thing really that has changed, I was thinking today, it's a little bit like we're describing a painting that we're painting and we've finally unveiled the painting. The only thing I can say is, it's probably a larger painting than we would have predicted a year ago. Guess what? We're in an economic reality comparable only to the 1930s and the 1860s so it better be bigger, but it's everything we said it would be and then some. It's capped. It has an inspector general so it's going to be monitored like a hawk. Huge impact in monies and by the way, not just overall caps, program caps within the caps. Monies toward neighborhoods that have historically been ignored. Main Street, small business, food deserts important to so many, I know the Speaker and others. It will be rocket fuel for the innovation economy.

The painting has been unveiled. Other than it being a little bit bigger, it is exactly what we had hoped for and then some. So I would just say, I thank the folks, even folks who for whatever reason are not seeing it that way right now. I thank them for standing with us at every step of the way, advocating for the very changes that this bill happily includes. I think particularly given we're going to be coming out of a pandemic, it's going to have an enormous impact, positive impact, on rebuilding our economy as we crawl out of this.

Eddy, let me ask you this, if I may. So thank you, Brent. You've been with us from moment one, obviously. Walk us through for a couple of minutes, what it's been like over the past nine months as you and your independent advisory colleagues have looked in particular at the vaccine development. How you've seen, just a brief sort of tour de force from beginning in March through to where we are today. Where do you expect this to be headed over the next number of months? And thank you for all your help.

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Thank you, Governor. Well, as you can imagine, early in the pandemic in March, the focus was actually not on vaccines by anyone throughout the country, not just in New Jersey. And at that time, as you recall, with the rapid rise of the number of cases in New Jersey, particularly in the north, but then throughout the state, there was a lot of concern about resources, in particular ventilators. So the focus of the professional advisory committee early on was really allocation of scarce resources, in particular ventilators.

We developed an allocation policy that was equitable and accounted for potential shortages. The good news is that during that process, the state got a lot more ventilators and the hospitals, through the Hospital Association, collaborated with regional hospital centers to coordinate the availability of ventilators and moving patients. There was never an instance that we knew that, in fact, someone you know, couldn't get a ventilator when they needed it. That was really the focus early on.

And then as we improved in the state, I'd say around June we began to say, okay, because the federal government was beginning to, and the CDC was beginning to talk to the states about, you need to start preparing for this. And so in June, we began to talk, Judy and I had a conversation about that. We expanded the Professional Advisory Committee I would say throughout the summer, and then really, we began to talk about it. We understood what vaccines were in development in the state. There were a lot. Operation Warp Speed was established and we understood what that was doing. That was a tremendous effort. It really was and it led to success. We now have two vaccines, one being utilized and one very soon to be utilized.

The Professional Advisory Committee, you know, part of the process was to educate a lot of the folks about vaccines, you know, because not everybody was necessarily a vaccine expert. We had a very multidisciplinary, diverse committee of people, health professionals, but not all health professionals. We had other individuals, a judge, an ethicist and others. We followed what was happening at the federal level with the National Academy of Sciences on framework for allocation of vaccines, the CDC framework. We adopted some of theirs. The underpinning of our discussion were ethical principles about maximizing benefits and minimizing harms and equity and justice and transparency. Those were the foundations of our discussions.

A lot of our discussions really, in many ways, were informed by those federal activities and guidance. We used those to frame our discussions, get input from everyone. We went back and forth, we had meetings a couple times a week, an hour-and-a-half each week. People would put things forward, they would email us but you know, some people are quiet, and they don't necessarily speak up but they're happy to email you and give you their ideas. I would get on the phone with folks and talk to them about that. And I said, well, what do you mean by this, and let's talk this through. And eventually we got to a consensus around certainly on the Phase 1A prioritization, and right now we're working on phase 1B. We're not quite there yet. This Sunday, we will be meeting to discuss 1B and 1C recommendations and guidance and we will use what they say to inform our final recommendation, which then goes up to Judy and ultimately to you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** This was really the initial germ of the idea that Judy and I had to have you here. If somebody is watching right now and they're on the fence about whether or not they can safely take this vaccine or the Moderna, which we expect approval for tonight, what would you say to them, Eddy?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** I would say that the scientific review process and the development of vaccines has been, you know, excellent. There have been no corners that have been cut. People don't understand how many independent review committees have looked at this data. The clinical trials themselves have a data safety monitoring board that are independent and look at the data, you know, as the trials are going on and then they make a recommendation to the manufacturer. There's a Federal Advisory Committee to the Food and Drug Administration, they met yesterday for Moderna, last week for the Pfizer product. Also independent scientists and there are public members as well. They made a recommendation, looking at the data and making an independent recommendation. The CDC has an advisory committee that does exactly the same thing. They're meeting tomorrow, actually, to review the Moderna data. And then even our Professional Advisory Committee, after the meetings, I review the data with the Professional Advisory Committee and they give their blessing on the data.

So there are a lot of independent people who have you know, the only skin they have in the game is to basically ensure that these vaccines have efficacy, have a good and favorable safety profile. Ultimately, to make sure that people have confidence in the vaccine and that they get vaccinated. That's the next challenge. It's the challenge of getting people who are hesitant, you know, people who want to stick their arms out, you don't have to convince them. And people who never want to get vaccinated, you're not necessarily going to convince them. It's the folks in the middle that are a challenge.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** We had two challenges, probably three, actually. We are now down one. If you roll the clock back, we weren't sure whether or not we'd have a vaccine at this point. The good news is we have one, about to be two. I hope more, by the way, I hope more over the next number of months. So that one has

been, that's been solved and ironically, I think that we probably all thought six months ago, that was the hardest to solve, to get a vaccine inside of nine months. We now have the logistics of distributing it, which are incredibly complex. And then Eddy, to your last point, we've got to overcome inertia, skepticism, whatever might be out there and convince people that it works and it's safe.

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Yeah, when I worked at Merck, I was in vaccines there as well and it took years to develop a vaccine, even a vaccine that was already licensed, to get a new indication for the vaccine would take years. I was there when there were vaccines that failed. So to go from not having any disease in this country in January to having to available vaccines before the year is out is remarkable.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** To repeat for everybody, the exempt persons right now are pregnant women, folks with allergies, and kids, right?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Kids for sure, under the age of 16. Actually, pregnant women are not necessarily contraindicated. The emergency use authorization, we haven't seen one for Moderna but we don't expect it to be much different. It doesn't actually, there's no contraindication for pregnant women to get vaccinated. And in fact, the CDC guidance is that they basically say that there's no reason why they can't get vaccinated. There's no data to really support that, there's no efficacy and safety data to speak of. But it's not contraindicated and it's really about shared clinical decision making with their healthcare provider. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology have exactly the same position.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** So basically go see --

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Talk to your provider. And that's true for immunocompromised patients as well. But children we are a little bit ways away from that.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I've got allergies, which I know is one category. How is that defined?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Well, there's a whole range of you know, allergic reactions, and people, for example, have food or pet or pollen allergies, there's no contraindication for them. If they've had a severe allergic reaction, let's say, to some other vaccine or some other product, then they need to talk to their doctors. The observation period post-vaccination is 15 minutes on a routine basis. For those individuals, it's a 30-minute basis. If you have an analogy to sort of an oral drug like penicillin, for example, you can still get vaccine. The one case where you shouldn't get it is after the first dose, you have a severe anaphylactic reaction, don't get the second dose.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Don't go for round 2. So Judy, and I've seen this in action now, the three of us have done University Hospital together, Hackensack this morning, RWJ University yesterday, I guess. Each of the setups unique in their own way, but each of the setups have had a very specific area where you spend your 15 minutes in your cooling off period.

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** The guidance from the CDC, Judy had mentioned all the sites that we're going to have, they all have to be prepared to manage an anaphylaxis reaction.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** So folks, you just heard and Eddy, next time we invite you, you'll say okay, it was worth my while last time, I'll come back.

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** It is always worth my while.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** But listen, folks, you just heard safe, it works. You know, if you're pregnant, consult your OB/GYN and make that decision on a bilateral basis. Remember when you take it, everyone has said this too Judy, you can barely feel it. It's a very thin needle, you can barely feel it. You sit for 15 minutes. If you've got some sort of allergy history, you sit for 30 minutes for an observation period afterward. I think the other thing, Eddy, you're saying if you had some reaction to dose number one, don't go in for round number 2.

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** No, no, no. I want to be clear here. If you had an anaphylaxis reaction, real severe. But everyone, there's going to be a lot of -- the majority of folks are going to have a local injection site reaction or some systemic reaction, like chills or muscle aches. You've got to come back for that second dose.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Your point on that stuff, that's similar to other vaccinations, flu or otherwise. But something severe, how would you describe -- what level is severe?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Shock, blood pressure drop, tightening where you can't breathe. If you developed hives or swelling throughout your body, that kind of stuff.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Really helpful. Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, thank you for being here. Judy, as always. I'm going to mask up. Thank you each, Pat as always, Jared, Parimal, Mahen again. We will be virtual tomorrow and Sunday, 12:30 on Monday unless you hear otherwise. And stay at it, folks. We're in the winter here so we're not going to be able to be as outside as we want to be or as we were a few months ago, so do the right thing when you're inside. Keep up the great work. God bless.

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