

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: September 4th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I want to thank everyone for their patience. We're starting a little bit late, but there's a good reason for that. I'll get to that a second. Joining me is the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, great to have you both here. To my left, the guy who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Pat Callahan. He's off camera, but he's here most days, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples.

I'm very proudly wearing this today. It is my face mask and the reason why we're a couple minutes behind. I was honored to attended, at Pat Callahan's invitation, the graduation of the 160th Class of New Jersey State Troopers today, at I guess it's called Arm and Hammer Stadium, which is where the Trenton Thunder play. And Pat, that was an extraordinary experience, 165 graduates out of a group that came in a total of 209. They went through the most extraordinary training of any State Trooper class ever. They're probably only, Pat, you've forgot more about this than I know, but they're probably only going to be viewed in a similar league with the classes that were right after 9/11, which I think, was that 127, 128? Just unbelievable.

And a lot of states, I believe this is right, disbanded the training and we stuck to it, thanks to this guy. And it was an extraordinary, extraordinary ceremony, including a guy who used to play little league with my oldest guy, so that was pretty cool. And so to each every one of those graduates, God bless you all, stay safe and thank you for your service to our state.



Another milestone, hard to believe this, this is not one, Judy, that we celebrate with any joy but six months ago today, although it feels like 60 years ago, we received confirmation of our first case of Coronavirus in New Jersey. We've experienced a lot together, folks, over these past six months and we still have a long road to travel.

We've got a lot to cover today before we break for the long holiday weekend, so please allow me to jump right into it. All of us should take tremendous pride, and I'm going to explain this in a second, in the ranking by the anti-poverty organization, Oxfam, which places New Jersey second in the nation when it comes to three vital things to protect our families from the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout: worker protections, health care protections, and unemployment support. Again, we are second in the nation only behind the State of Washington.

Throughout this pandemic, we have protected tenants from the threat of eviction, and worked with our utilities to prevent service disruptions and shut-offs. We have expanded food support and supports for childcare, especially for essential workers. And some of the steps that earned us this placement are ones we took several years ago, and not because we ever thought of their value in a global pandemic, but simply because they were the right thing to do, including things like guaranteed paid sick days for all and expanded paid family leave.

We've also taken tremendous steps to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for more residents, and our state level health exchange will go on online this fall on November 1st as scheduled. So this ranking, by the way, we're not spiking any footballs, but this comes with a lot of gratification and satisfaction that we're at least going in the right direction. This ranking proves what so many of us already know that New Jersey is among the very best states in which to work, live and raise a family. And by the way, we just again were ranked a couple of days ago as the number one state in America for public education. We take care of everyone who calls this state home, and we do it with compassion and empathy. And Pat, you used a word today which I'll never forget, and your remarks are extraordinary to these now troopers, dignity. We respect people's dignity in the state, and that's what it means to be stronger and fairer. And this is a special point of pride not just for us up here, who have been guided by science and facts to take the necessary steps to help our families and our communities but it should be a source of pride for every single one of you out there, all 9 million of us.

So we're going to switch a lot of gears today. Switching gears, I want to quickly update everyone on the school reopening plans being reviewed and finalized through the Department of Education. As of yesterday's count, the department had received 804 reopening plans from districts, charter schools and schools for students with disabilities and others. Of these 804, 607 plans were complete, 180 had been returned for revision, and 17 have not yet been reviewed. And to be clear, on the plans returned to the districts for revisions, this is not a binary, okay, we got it, now you got it, we'll speak to you in a while. The department has kept an open, active line of communication with those districts to ensure that these plans end up where they need to be.

So of the 607 finalized plans, 354 are reopening with hybrid in person. Sorry, 59 with an all in-person learning, 172 are all remote, and 22 are some combination of all of the above through their facility. Someone asked me about this the other day. It is possible within a district to have one school or one set of schools to be hybrid, and another set at the same time to be either all in-person or all remote. I know Commissioner Kevin Deemer and his team are pushing to get every plan approved on time and I have every confidence that our school year will get off to a safe start.

Again, it's a school year unlike any other, please know folks. Don't expect normalcy, or at least an old normalcy. Let's all bear with each other on this, and that includes what happens if we get COVID positives, and Judy will go into that in some detail in a bit.

Again, switching gears, I want to highlight the news yesterday from the Office of Attorney General Gurbir Grewal who was with us this morning, and also gave outstanding remarks, that it has revoked the liquor license of the restaurant Il Portico in Burlington City for a variety of Executive Order violations stemming from a large and unruly July 4th gathering that exceeded 500 people. We have been very clear that the restrictions we have put in place are there to protect public health and to save lives, and that goes whether it pertains to a restaurant or a gym, or frankly, any business. And when a selfish owner or manager flagrantly violates these

orders, they not only put in danger the progress we've made, they give a black eye to many more business owners who continue to play by the rules. When I say many more, the overwhelming amount of business owners who continue to play by the rules. I'm grateful to Attorney General Gurbir Grewal and his team, and the team at the Division of Alcohol Beverage Control for their work in this action.

And with the resumption today as of 6:00 a.m. of indoor dining, let this be a warning to everybody out there. The limits we have placed on capacities and the public health protocols we have put in place are not kind suggestions. They are mandated, they are required. We will not tolerate any violations and we will not be afraid to come down hard and make an example of those who think the rules don't apply to them. We want you to welcome your customers back inside, but that must be done safely and in accordance with the rules.

There is nothing more that I would like, nor I suspect my colleagues to do, than to eventually expand restaurant capacities. But I cannot and we will not be able to do that if this weekend or the weeks that follow see a slew of restaurant owners and managers flagrantly violating the rules that are in place. And again overwhelmingly, folks have been doing the right things. And for as much pain as this pandemic of six months has put on restaurant owners, on gyms, to pick two categories, the overwhelming amount of the owners and managers and proprietors have been doing the right thing. So let's all work together for a safe return of indoor dining, and we can ensure that there will be better days ahead.

And on a related note, I am also announcing, so we're going to switch a modest gear, that we will take administrative action to prohibit smoking in indoor casinos. We have looked closely at the science and agree with the experts who have concluded that allowing smoking is too big a risk to take.

Switching gears yet again, this week we continue to build our community contact tracing corps with the addition of another 66 contact tracers, bringing the total number of tracers to 1,769. We can see from this eye chart that we now are at a statewide average of 19.9 tracers per 100,000 people, so we've passed our first objective of 15 per, and we're well on our way to our goal of 30 per 100,000. Only one county, Atlantic, and I'm sure they'll get there soon, has yet to reach our initial benchmark of 15 per 100,000 residents.

However -- and Judy, this is the however that you and I come back to -- more than half of the people our contact tracers get in touch with continue to refuse to cooperate and provide context for follow up. I really cannot put it any clearer. Our contact tracers only care about protecting public health and about protecting you and your family and your friends and neighbors. We cannot get ahead of this virus if you don't work with our contact tracers. And if we do not get ahead of this virus, then the steps we have taken this week to reopen our restaurants and theaters and gyms, for example, may be in jeopardy. So please take the call. Work with them. They're not on a witch hunt. None of us condone illegal behavior. We don't condone underage drinking. But that's not what these calls are about.

Moving on, switching gears again to another topic, I want to give a quick update on our continued progress in responding to the 2020 census. We are well on our path to exceeding our 2010 response rate, which is critically important because we know we were dramatically undercounted last time and because we were, it has cost us billions and billions and billions, literally, of dollars in federal aid.

Now, on top of our always growing self-response rate, which is currently at 67.3%, and I believe the final number in 2010 was 67.4%, census takers are going door to door in the community to count those who have not yet responded. And this is the first time we'll say this number, all totaled, more than 84% of New Jerseyans have now been counted. That includes both the self-response crowd which is the overwhelming majority of that number, as well as the door-to-door crowd. And with only 26 days to go until the census ends on September 30th, it is more important than ever that everyone be counted. So go to 2020census.gov and self-respond.

Then a census taker, by the way, if you self-respond, won't come and knock on your door. But if a census taker does knock, answer the door and get counted. Census takers are members of your own community, and the responses you give are safe and secure under federal law and cannot be used against you in any way. Getting counted is quick, it's important, it's your civic duty, and we need you to do it. So let's close out the 2020 census in a big way, and let's make sure New Jersey is completely and fully counted.

Finally, again, one more gear before we get to the overnight numbers. I need to once again call out Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell for his – I don't know if it's unwillingness or unreasonableness –stalling on providing any direction assistance to states in the next federal coronavirus aid bill being negotiated, or not being negotiated, as the case may be. Senator McConnell, if you're watching, this is not about politics. It's about the survival of the programs that millions of Americans, including in your home state of Kentucky, are relying upon for their survival.

My fellow governors and I, both Republicans and Democrats, have had to take painful and unprecedented actions to save lives and protect public health. We put so much on the line, it has cost our states dearly. Washington must step up to meet this challenge. Washington must step up to help us all pull through. Please, folks, stop playing politics with the recovery. Our states need help. Our people need help, or our recovery as a nation will be even more stalled, and when that happens, it is on you. So please, Senator and Leader McConnell, sit down with Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Secretary of the Treasury Mnuchin get this done.

With that, Judy, let's look at the overnight numbers. And I think we should remember, you and I were just on the phone a few minutes ago, we've talked about the ebb and flow, the notion that this virus is sort of undulating, comes and goes, and I think we're living that with the numbers this week and especially today. We're reporting 478 positive tests, cumulative total of 193,422. Spot positivity rate, and these are from tests taken on August 31st, 1.81%, that's back under 2%, which means you can plus or minus, multiply 478 positives by 50 or more to get the amount of people we're testing. Part of the reality here is that we have an enormous testing capacity, almost unlike any other state per capita, and folks are going out and getting tested.

Our rate of transmission has crept up slightly over one, 1.03, and I'll let Judy and Tina speak for themselves. I don't think there's any one event or any one part of the state that is of a particular concern, but this is sort of the way this virus goes. And by the way, positive test results contributes to the calculation of the rate of transmission.

Our hospitals, there were 249 COVID-positive patients, another 217 under investigation, pending return of their tests for a total of 466; 95 of these were in intensive care, 40 ventilators were in use. Today, with a heavy heart, we're reporting an additional seven deaths that have been confirmed to be from COVID-19, bringing our statewide total to an unfathomable 14,195. The number of probable deaths remains at 1,783. Judy, of the seven – unless you've got it differently – three are from September 2nd, so that's two days ago, one is from August 29th, and the remaining four occurred in the month of June.

Now on the other side, in our hospitals, and again, risking apples to oranges, these numbers are not in the confirmed totals. There were yesterday 13 reported deaths. Those are not yet lab confirmed, not in the numbers, but this is a number of days in a row with double-digit deaths in our hospitals. So if anybody out there thinks, as some apparently do, that we can just flip the switch and get on with life, they are not paying attention. So with that, let's take a couple of minutes to remember three more of the extraordinary lives we've lost.

We'll start in Saddle Brook in Bergen County, and again, this is another husband and wife and two fatalities in one family. We remember George and Katherine, who went largely by Karine, Job. They both passed mere days before they would have celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary and they spent 57 of those years in Saddle Brook.

George grew up in Weehawken and fought on the front line of the Korean War as a young man He was wounded in combat three times for which he was awarded not one, not two, but three Purple Hearts. He was awarded as well the Good Conduct Medal, the Combat Infantry Badge, and the National Defense medal. What courage.

Professionally, George owned the State Parcel Service Trucking Company for 25 years, and he also drove a leisure line charter bus to Atlantic City. I think I found myself on one of those buses over the years, Pat, but I'm not sure. I should get into that. But it was his wartime service that left the most indelible mark on his life. George never forgot his brothers in arms and was a proud member of the Korean War Veterans Association Tayshaun Chapter 170 in Saddle Brook, and every night before going to bed, George would recite the 23rd Psalm for those who never returned from Korea.

George's great loves were in order: his family, his country and his cars. He had a particular affinity for Cadillacs. He also was a big New York Yankees fan, and I don't know how he would have reacted to their past 14 or so games, and he was also a big fan of lobster, a man of impeccable tastes and good humor. Sadly Katherine, known as I said by many as Karine, lost her battle with COVID-19 only eight days after we lost George. She was North Bergen born and raised, the youngest of six. Karine a passion for the arts, working as a photographer alongside her brother in youth, and becoming an organ teacher later in life, as in playing the organ. Her family was her rock and she loved few things more than to take a drive into the country with George to take in the fall colors.

George and Karine are survived by their four children, Kathleen, George, Ramona with whom I had the honor of speaking a couple of days ago, and Rosemary. And by the way, Ramona reminded me that both Rosemary and her husband were both COVID positive, I believe both hospitalized, but at a minimum, both COVID positive. I believe they're okay now. George and Karine are also survived by their nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild and not one, not two, but three more on the way. George and Karine were respectively 91 and 94 years old. Both Georgia and Karine were united in their deep Catholic faith and the knowledge that one day they would be together in heaven. They are buried beside each other at the Brigadier General Doyle Veterans Cemetery. May God bless them both, watch over their family, and thank you for your service to our nation.

Next, we remember Shafqat Khan of Jersey City, an organizer and advocate within our proud Pakistani American community. Shafqat came to the United States in the 1980s on a student visa to attend a computer certification course offered at NYU, but a job he was promised never came to be, and the family endured years of hardship. Determined to stay and to become an American citizen, he worked long days at a convenience store in Brooklyn, and he did earn his citizenship. Those experiences drove him to make helping other immigrants his life's calling. He helped them to obtain their green cards and naturalization papers, to register to vote or to obtain healthcare, among so many other issues, through the nonprofit organization he founded, very simply, Pakistanis for America.

His original vision for Pakistanis for America was to increase voter registration and turnout. But following the September 11th attacks, he broadened its mission to be one of changing perceptions of our immigrant communities, especially our Muslim community, and promoting tolerance and understanding. Shafqat leaves behind his wife Syita, and they would have been married 50 years this October, and their three children, daughter Sebelah, and I had the honor of speaking with Sebelah a couple of days ago, and their sons Subahat and Safat, as well as seven grandchildren. He also leaves a legacy that is measured in countless immigrants he helped throughout his time as a member of our New Jersey family. May God bless Shafqat and his work to bridge the divides in our society, and may his legacy live on.

Three great lives led through faith, different faiths, but in all three cases, through faith. We mourn them as we mourn every life we have lost. At some point during this long holiday weekend, I hope you'll take a moment and reflect on the lives we have lost. Those who we have honored here and the many more we haven't yet gotten to.

Again, I'll switch gears if you'll permit me. I want to put the spotlight on another of the small businesses that the New Jersey Economic Development Authority has partnered with to keep the lights on and keep our economy moving. Today we're heading to Woodbridge, where Meeta Kalawadia owns and operates The Learning Experience, an early education academy that helps prepare children, spanning from six weeks to six years in age, for a strong education. COVID-19 has required Meeta and her team to do things differently to protect the health and safety of not just their students and themselves, but the families who they work with every day. New hygiene and cleaning protocols meant unexpected costs, and working with the EDA Meeta was able to receive a small business loan to support the costs of keeping The Learning Experience's doors open.

I had the pleasure of checking in with Meeta the other day, and she not only is in Woodbridge, by the way, she reminded me they're also in Sayreville, so two great Middlesex County towns. Their average attendance daily, Judy, was 200 before COVID-19. When they reopened and they were allowed to reopen, they reopened with 25. Happily though, the other day they passed 100. So they're now again in the triple digits, on their way, slowly but surely, to getting back on their feet.

So I had, again, the great pleasure of speaking with her on Wednesday I know that as we continue our road back, she and her team are going to be even more important to families getting back to work, and I thank her for being a great member of our small business community.

Next, before I close, I want to acknowledge the passing on Wednesday of an American hero, Tom Seaver to complications of both Lewy Body Dementia and COVID-19, and Lewy Body Dementia gets more and more attention these days. That's what killed Robin Williams, or afflicted Robin Williams, Casey Kasem, among others, and it's something that we need to speak about now. Tom Seaver, as far as I know, did not live in New Jersey ever, but to thousands upon thousands, I know Brent to you and all your fellow Mets family in New Jersey who watched him in his prime with the Mets, and to all the Mets fans frankly everywhere, his loss almost feels like a loss in the family.

Think about this for a second. Even 53 years after his rookie season, Tom Terrific still holds the Mets single season records for wins, strikeouts and complete games, and he's still the Mets all-time record holder in wins, earned run average, complete games, shutouts, innings pitched and strikeouts. A Hall of Famer in every respect, he even has the respect of some Yankee fans who have finally gotten over him winning his 300th career game at Yankee Stadium. If that was a bad enough, Pat, it was on Phil Rizzuto Day, in 1985, when he was pitching for the Chicago White Sox. He was a legend and we're still waiting to see the likes of him ever again, with his knees scraping the ground during his delivery.

By the way, Tom Seaver, as Mets fans know, was a part of three World Series teams. The first with the Mets, the Amazings, the Miracle Mets 1969, beating the heavily favored Baltimore Orioles in five games. Then in 1973, "You've Got to Believe" Mets Tug McGraw, otherwise known as Tim McGraw's father, coming within a whisker of beating the Oakland A's and losing in game seven. But fewer folks know that he was in the dugout for another game seven World Series, and I know that Mets fans everywhere will recoil at this, but he was in the Red Sox dugout in Shea Stadium when they lost the 1986 World Series to the New York Mets. A giant in so many respects. God bless you, Terrific Tom.

Two non-COVID passings. One, I want to give a shout out to our friends in Montville in Bergen County. We lost Joe Quaid, who was 97 on August 26th, a giant in Montville. I spoke to his wife Suzanne the other day, they were married for 58 years. He was also a member of our Greatest Generation, a World War II vet and among other honors, not the winner of one or two, but three Bronze Stars. God bless you Joe Quaid, and thank you for your service to our nation.

And then only a couple of days ago, we lost John Thomas at the age of 93 on September 2nd, which was Wednesday. John was a giant in political circles in our state. I spoke to his daughter Pam, who is a good friend, this morning. He was a big supporter of mine, for which I will forever remain thankful and humbled. He was a big and important member of the Frank Lautenberg family, and there are many of us who are in the Frank Lautenberg tree. And again, he was a giant. He passed on Wednesday. Please keep John's memory and Pam and her family in your prayers.

So on Monday, may I ask you a favor? Take a moment to reflect on the true meaning of Labor Day. Let's remember the women and men of organized labor who have fought and continue to fight for fairness, respect and justice; for fair wages, affordable health care, and safe workplaces. Organized labor built, quite literally, the doors through which generations of New Jersey workers and families have walked through to enter the middle class. We owe them a debt of gratitude. I happily was back and forth with a member of our Restart and Recovery Commission when Oxfam came out with their ranking of New Jersey as number two in the nation with none other than Rich Trumka, a dear friend and the president of the AFLCIO, and just talking about the importance, back and forth and a note to each other, how important it is to stand up and to stand on the side of our workers and their families.

And by the way, as we do that, let's not forget that New Jersey is the home and final resting place of, speaking of Rich Trumka, Peter McGuire, a founder of both the Carpenters and the father of Labor Day. So I was back and forth this morning with Bob Schiavinato, a dear friend who was the South New Jersey Labor Council President and they had their ceremony this morning. I would normally have been there with him as I've been there for many of the past several with Bob and his colleagues in labor. But we were together, Pat, happily attending the graduation ceremony of the 160th Trooper Class, but Bob went out of his way to show me a picture that he quite appropriately went over to Peter McGuire's statue and put a mask on Peter

Maguire, just to keep with the times. So everybody out there, God bless our brothers and sisters in labor. Have a safe weekend, everyone. Let's keep doing everything we've done over the past six months to crush the curves and put us in a position to move forward.

Please be safe, please be responsible, please keep doing, as we celebrate labor, as we celebrate a great American holiday, as we celebrate the end of summer and as we turn the page to go back to school and we're getting indoors to dine, and we're getting into gyms to work out, please continue to do the right thing. 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. Good afternoon. Well, as the Governor mentioned, we continue to build up our contact tracing workforce to ensure that we are not only able to meet our immediate needs, but continue to build capacity for the future. With schools, gyms, restaurants and other reopenings occurring, having a strong network of contact tracers is more important than ever to contain the spread of COVID-19. The success of all of our efforts to break the chain of transmission depends on everyone's participation. If a contact tracer calls, do the right thing. Answer the call, help them with the information they need to help to protect you, your family and your community.

Thank you to the 71% of individuals who talked with a contact tracer, which is up from 61% at the start of August. However, the number of people who do not answer the call has consistently hovered around 20%. And more disappointing, the number of people who have refused to provide contacts of potential cases to follow up has risen to 53%.

Sharing information on who you might have been around helps protect not only those people, but also their families. Once those individuals are notified, they can take steps to get tested and quarantine themselves from household members who may be elderly or have underlying medical conditions. You owe it to them to help to keep them safe as well. We understand there may be concerns over privacy, or fear that identifying someone may have consequences for their job. If you express that concern, a contact tracer will be able to provide or connect you with information on job protection, food assistance, and other social services to help you or your friends if you need to isolate.

All information given to the contact tracer remains confidential. They will never ask for financial information or social security number or immigration status. If you are unsure of the call, call your local health department to verify. Enjoying a good meal inside a restaurant, being able to go back to the movies or having your child attend school in person, or just enjoying everyday life depends on all of us working together to stay safe. It starts with answering the call from a contact tracer and doing your part.

As we discussed on Wednesday, the department has issued COVID-19 recommendations for schools that cover steps to take to respond to cases and outbreaks in schools. Much of these decisions would be based on what the local public health investigation finds, but we have developed a short matrix to help guide the decision making. If there's one confirmed case in school, the school can remain open. Any students or staff in close contact with that case should be excluded from the school for 14 days. If there are two or more cases in the same classroom, or what we would say is an outbreak linked to one cohort, the school can remain open. Any students or staff or close contacts of that case are excluded from the school for 14 days. The local health officials would make recommendations, based on their investigation, whether the entire classroom should be considered exposed.

If there are two or more cases within 14 days linked to an exposure outside of the school setting, or what we would call an alternate exposure, the school can remain open. Any close contacts of the case are excluded from the school for 14 days. If there are two or more cases within that two-week period or 14 days, linked together by a school activity but in different classrooms, that would be considered an outbreak including multiple cohorts. Local health officials will make recommendations on whether to close the school based on that investigation.

If a significant community outbreak is impacting multiple staff, students and families served by the school, closure of the school for 14 days should be considered. And if there are two or more cases within a two-week period that occur across multiple classrooms, and a clear connection between those cases cannot be easily

identified, it's recommended to close the school for 14 days. And if a school falls in a region that is very high risk, or red on our map, according to the department's activity level report, the school should be closed until the transmission decreases.

The guidance and regional risk levels are tools that the local health departments and schools can use when assessing COVID-19 risks. Local health departments have additional knowledge of COVID-19 in their jurisdictions that can inform local planning and response actions. School closures is a local decision that should be made by school administrators in consultation with local public health officials.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, we're reporting 466 hospitalizations, 95 individuals in intensive care, with 42% of them on ventilators. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. The number remains at 57. At the state veterans homes the numbers remain the same, as they do at our psychiatric hospitals. The percent positivity as the Governor shared, as of August 31st in New Jersey as a whole is 1.81%. The Northern part of the state is reporting 1.45, the Central part of the state 1.58, and the southern part of the state 3.31.

As we head into the Labor Day weekend, I urge everyone to please take precautions while celebrating. If you are gathering with others, stay outside. Practice social distancing. Wear a face covering, wash your hands frequently, and use hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol. The cost of attending a barbecue or enjoying a drink with friends should not be a deadly virus. Please do your part to stop COVID-19.

That concludes my daily report. Have a safe and healthy weekend. And remember, for each other, for us all, please take the call. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. May I ask a question? And Mahen, this is as much for you. The matrix that you've just gone through, that's on our covid19.nj.gov page and also on the Department of Health?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: It's on Department of Health.

Governor Phil Murphy: If you look at your maps right now, Judy, the only place that's not green, and you and I talked about this earlier, is sort of West Central. Any sense of what's going on there, Tina?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: We have to recognize that the color of the region is reflective on three different indicators. So it's based on the case rate, number of cases per 100,000, the percent positivity as well as looking at the COVID-like illness, visits to emergency departments. So it could be, you know, any one of those indicators that could kind of tip something in one direction.

But when we look at our trends over time, we don't see anything in particular that looks particularly unusual. The good news is that we're all green and yellow right now.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, I'm not trying to rattle anybody. Yellow is not a bad thing compared to some other places in the country. It's also gratifying. Judy, one more for both of you, is that the shore counties are green, notwithstanding the enormous amount of traffic that they normally have, but even more so this year, so thank you for that and always.

Two things, Pat, other than to say it was an extraordinary moment this morning, and thank you for allowing me to share it with you. Two things, one serious and one a little lighter. I transposed Montvale and Montville and my friends from Morris County are lighting me up. Joe Quaid was actually from Morris County's Montville, as opposed to Montvale in Bergen County, so forgive me for that. And I mentioned this to you all earlier. We've got knucklehead, the silver medal winner was wingnut, and I want to propose a third flavor for the folks who just no matter what we say or do, just don't do the right thing. This is from Germany, by the way, and this went to court, whether or not someone could call someone this, and the new nominee I want to put into the category of knucklehead and wingnut is covidiot. Covidiot. So please, put that into consideration to the jury. With that Pat, bless you, and thank you, over to you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Well, I'm glad to report that we have none of those three aforementioned nicknames, none today, which is good. And just a minute about the class. It was about mid-May in the back of this war memorial with Commissioner Persichilli, and I asked her, how do we keep 193 State Police recruits and their training going forward? And the commissioner said, you have to bring them into one spot, you have to test them all and you have to never let them go home. And this

class came into TCNJ, who we partnered with, and they got tested on June 5th, and today is the first time they've seen their families in person in more than three months. So I just wanted to thank the Commissioner for her recommendations, for her guidance, because while, to the Governor's point, academies were closing down around the country, 165 new Troopers took their oath today because of Commissioner Persichilli and her guidance, so I wanted to thank you, Judy.

Governor Phil Murphy: Major League Baseball should have called her.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: That's right. That's all I've got, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, let me just say this. It was extraordinary. And this point, by the way, the families were in the stands and obviously we had to abide by our 500-person principle guideposts, but you could just feel it, especially when it ended and everybody got out of their formations and ran over to the stands, and it was just extraordinary. Again, TCNJ deserves a shout out. Mercer County deserves a shout out, the Prosecutor Angelo Onofri. And I think they allowed to use the gun range, right? Was it Mercer County Corrections? So hats off to them as well.

Before we start over Charlie, with you, before we take a few questions, we'll be with you virtually over the weekend. And that will include Saturday, Sunday and Monday. We're going to break the chain a little bit next week because Monday is a national holiday. We'll be with you on Tuesday, unless you hear otherwise, we'll be back here Tuesday at 1:00 and then we'll give you a sense of where we go from there. I think we'll be on with the White House on Wednesday. And clearly, the reason why we're picking Tuesday, this is a big weekend. We've had a big week of openings. We've got a big week next week with school. So we want to come in right out of the chute, so we'll be with you, unless you hear otherwise, Tuesday at one o'clock. So with that, Charlie, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Good afternoon, Governor. Happy Labor Day.

Governor Phil Murphy: Likewise.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: And congratulations on six months since your successful surgery.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, man.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: With indoor dining and gyms now open, do you think it's time for cities and towns to reopen their municipal government buildings to the public?

The head football coach at Rutgers has a \$4 million annual salary in his contract. He's taken a 10% pay cut, which puts it at \$3.6 million. Do you think that's a fair salary, considering the fiscal situation at Rutgers and the fact that there's no games scheduled yet for the team?

And then finally on the transparency of the data that the DOH is putting out, it was said that there would be a new zip code data dashboard scheduled to launch August 10th. It's still not live. The data available on the web is from June 8th, almost three months old. I'm told the raw data will be posted tomorrow but it appears that 70.6% of the zip codes have their data suppressed. So I'd like to know, what's the name of the Privacy Officer at DOH who made that decision? Why are they insisting on suppressing so much of the data? And how does this compare to COVID data released in other states?

Governor Phil Murphy: I love the premise of the question, it's a little bit like, does your mother know you beat your dog? It's kind of hard to dig out of the premise of that one. Let me just say this on indoor dining and gyms and again, everybody, we're thrilled we've gotten to where we are, please do it responsibly, do it right. Please play by the rules, but enjoy it. Do the right thing.

You know, we still have, if you can work from home, we want you to work from home. So I'm not opposed, Charlie, to the notion of municipal government buildings getting back into business, but only if we feel like they have to. Matt Platkin is with us. Anything you want to add to that? Nothing sort of visceral about it other than, again, if you can work from home and you can do that same function from home.

I've got nothing on Coach Schiano other than I'm thrilled that he's in New Jersey, and I think he's doing an incredible job.

I have nothing for you on the transparency of the data, including the privacy officer. But, Judy, do you have anything to add to that? I know the zip codes. I just want to say this. We're the ultimate Home Rule state, so when you cut off a population size, we have a disproportionate amount of communities that fall below that line and I think we've said that before. I'm not sure we're unique, but we're virtually unique in that respect in terms of the percentage of our communities that fall below the percentage of our population that fall below. There's an article today, Newark and Jersey City are trying to figure out what's going to be the largest population community in our state. If you put them together, you still wouldn't have Boston in terms of -- so that that's not who we are. We're not a one big city state like a Massachusetts is or an Illinois is, etc. But Judy, anything you want to add to that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure, we've had this discussion before. And you know, Department of Health wants to be as transparent as we can be with the data, but the standard of suppressing data under 20,000 has been with us a long time to protect the privacy of individuals. We do look at all of our data through that lens, as you know, and we'll continue to do so. If there's a situation where we would need to provide more granular data for the protection and a public health action, I'm sure we would do it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Brent, good afternoon.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Thanks for the Tom Seaver comments. Will you, Governor, be dining indoors this weekend? With numbers undulating, especially the transmission rate in recent days, do you anticipate having to shut down indoor dining, gyms, movie theaters in the coming days or whenever?

Can we get the names of the 180 districts that had their school reopening plans returned for revision? And will those districts still be able to reopen if their plans are not approved by Tuesday?

Some businesses that have offices say they're still waiting for more guidance from you if it's safe to return to work in an office environment. What's the latest on that?

Are you keeping track of false positive tests? Have false positives affected the daily numbers much?

Readers keep asking, will the state increase the capacities at childcare, which haven't changed despite other states increasing theirs?

And last question for Colonel Callahan, from our AG reporter. When talking about the rise in State Police pursuits, you noted that some drivers might have only faced a written warning or motor vehicle summons if they had stopped when asked. Since AG guidelines say pursuits should generally only take place if the driver poses an immediate threat, could you clarify how drivers who initially may have only faced a written warning were also immediate threats?

Governor Phil Murphy: Brent I'll start -- is that okay, Pat, and then we'll go to you? Judy may want to come in. I will not be dining indoors. I'm going to be dining out. I think twice I'll be outdoors, assuming Mother Nature cooperates. And that's not because I've got some issue, but I love being outside. The fact of the matter is we've got restaurants up and down the state that have allowed really creatively, and their municipalities have been their partners in allowing you to dine outside. I won't be able to say that in December, so I'm going to take advantage of it while we've got it.

I don't think we've been putting forward the names of the schools. I think what we have been willing to do is put the names out of the districts where the plans have been finalized, and I don't think it's fair because it's real time, going back and forth, on the ones that have been returned. But I have not heard anything from the Department of Education that suggests that schools will not be allowed to be open for business when they want to. Did I miss one in between those two?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: With the numbers, I think you said undulating, do you foresee having to pull back indoor dining, movie theaters or gyms?

Governor Phil Murphy: I do not. I mean, we took that step the last Monday in June with a heavy heart that we pulled back from a prospective opening of indoor dining. Judy and Tina and their colleagues will tell us, if we see things getting out of hand, we absolutely reserve that right, but we're not doing this anticipating that that's going to happen.

Businesses and offices, safe to return, Matt, anything you want to add to that? I mean, again from Charlie's question, if you can do this from home, we want you to continue to do it from home. But if you have to go in, we accept the fact you have to go in, but do it intelligently. Capacity management, social distancing, face coverings, Plexiglas, one-way arrows in the halls, etc. Any more on that? Matt is saying no. False positives, anything? We're not sensing any issue with that.

Childcare capacity. So your question is, are we doing anything about childcare capacity?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: There's someone on Twitter who literally asks me every day saying, when will you increase the capacity past 10?

Governor Phil Murphy: Well I was in McCutcheon a week ago yesterday and we talked about \$150 million of help to get more childcare locations open, to help subsidize those locations, and specifically to help subsidize families most need. And the whole reason for that is to expand capacity. So we can't make them open but we believe we're putting the pieces in place that will allow many more to open. I think I've been told since then many more, in fact, are opening. I think 4,000 was the number as of a couple of weeks ago that had not reopened, and I think by the time it got to the end of the week, 1,500 of them already had plans to open.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Can you have more than 10 kids in a childcare facility? I think that's what people are asking, when can they have 12 or 13 or 15?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: It's 10 per classroom and the guidance has been put out by the Department and the Department of Children and Families and it's based on the best public health guidelines we have. The Governor's point about putting more money out to expand access to childcare is how we're addressing this now. I defer to the Commissioner, but I think daycares have been open since the middle of June. It's been a very successful program.

Governor Phil Murphy: I mean, we've had daycare since June. Although again, we haven't had enough of them open and hopefully the monies that we put in play that we announced eight days ago will get more of them open and the evidence is yes. And I want to refer also to Judy's comment, I think on Wednesday, that we had an overwhelmingly, I think summer camp season is over so I'm going to knock on wood, but I believe it's over. We had an overwhelmingly positive experience with a handful of outbreaks and that gives us a lot of confidence kicking into the fall. You good with that? Okay, Pat on pursuits, please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We have a policy that is, if you haven't seen it, very strict with regards to pursuits. Traffic conditions, light/heavy speed of the motorist, an imminent threat by a motorist traveling in excess of 100, we would say that'd be a threat. The other things we'd take into consideration, do we have the license plate of the car? Can the trooper identify the driver? And in most cases when it's motor vehicle that those pursuits are terminated by the supervisor. Again, the first notion that if somebody comes by you at, let's say it's 110 miles an hour, if they had stopped, they may have received a summons or a warning, but to keep going at 110, 120 and then people argue, well, if the trooper didn't pursue them, they probably would have slowed down to 80 and you could probably have that discussion all day long. I hope I answered your question.

Governor Phil Murphy: A fairly light crowd today from the Fourth Estate, but we're honored always to have you here. Bear with me a second. I'm going to mask up happily, Pat. I'll wear it later as well. Again, happily wearing this mask and again, God bless the women and men of the 160th Class of State Troopers, which by the way, I believe Pat, you suggested was an all-time high or near an all-time high for both gender diversity and diversity more broadly. That was really special to see every corner of the state represented. Judy and Tina, thank you and we wish you a Happy Labor Day. Pat, likewise, Jared, Matt, Mahen, the whole team.

Again, we'll be with you virtually over the weekend. We'll be with you in person on Tuesday at one o'clock unless you hear otherwise. And folks as we've got gyms open, indoor amusement, dining, theatres, celebrating an American iconic weekend, whether you're Bob Schiavinato, Rich Trumka or any of the millions of members of organized labor in this country or in this state, we salute you. And then you've got school opening beginning already this week, but overwhelmingly next week. Thank you for everything you've done,

folks, these past six months. Please continue to do the right thing. Please continue to behave responsibly. And if we do that together, we will get to the other side of this, I know sooner than later, and stronger than ever before. God bless you all and thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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