

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 17th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I am joined by the woman on my right, who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another person who needs no introduction at this point, State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan. Thank you, ladies. And to my left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan.

Let's get right to the numbers, as we have been doing. We are reporting today 3,250 new positive test results, which brings the cumulative total of New Jerseyans who have now tested positive to 78,467. According to our online dashboard, and Judy will correct me if I get this wrong, accessible through covid19.nj.gov, as of 10:00 p.m. last evening, 8,011 residents were reported hospitalized, of whom 1,961 were listed in critical or intensive care and 1,594 ventilators were in use. 90 patients are at one of our field medical stations, and for the 24-hour period ending at 10:00 p.m. last evening, 787 residents were discharged from our hospitals, and that's good news.

This is not good news. With the heaviest of hearts, we also report the loss of another 323 blessed New Jerseyans, brothers and sisters, due to COVID-19 related complications. Our statewide total of fatalities now sits at 3,840. This is now more than five times the number of New Jerseyans we lost on 9/11 and we continue to mourn and keep the souls we lost on 9/11 in our hearts and prayers and thoughts, and we have 3,840 more lost souls with whom to do the same. We mourn with each family who has been directly impacted in the worst way by this pandemic. , and we are incredibly grateful to those who allow us to

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remember their loved ones here in this platform. Telling these stories is never easy, but I do hope that by sharing them and putting human faces to the numbers, we can all gain a little extra perspective on why we have been so aggressive in our actions to halt the spread of COVID-19.

Here are a few more lives for us to reflect upon. Alicja Czykier-Kuna. She went by Alice, by the name. Look at that. She came to this country in 1981 from Poland without knowing one word of English. Her story is the American story. It is the New Jersey story. She got her first job on the night shift at a Dunkin Donuts in Kearny while her first husband looked after their three children, including a son with special needs. Eventually she was hired as a bank teller, the only one able to help the Polish-speaking customers, and soon became an advocate and resource for the Polish community across Wallington, Passaic, and Garfield. She rose up the ladder to become a bank manager, and after becoming suddenly widowed at the age of 42, she went back to school and became a certified tax collector and worked for the Borough of Wellington for 10 years, and then as Tax Collector, Chief Financial Officer and School Treasurer in Bergenfield.

Alice suffered a stroke in 2011 and fought her way back to keep working, but her light was forever dimmed by COVID-19 on Monday. She leaves her husband Marian, her three children and three grandchildren and a fourth on the way, more on that in a moment, and she has passed along her belief in public service, as two of her children currently work as a public school speech therapist and an assistant prosecutor, respectively. I spoke with her daughter, Maggie. We reminisced about her mom. Maggie is the one who's pregnant. She's got a son due on August 15, which I reminded her, as a Catholic, is a Holy Day of Obligation. I think that would be only appropriate and just. God bless you, Alice. You will be missed by your family, for sure, and by the rest of us in New Jersey.

Robert Webber. There he is, God bless him, was a 15-year veteran firefighter with the Port Monmouth Fire Company in my hometown of Middletown, in Monmouth County. He did more than just fight fires though, and also served as a member of both the Middletown First Aid and Rescue Squad and the Middletown Fire Department's Air Unit. It probably wasn't a surprise that he chose this line of work, as Rob's family has retold their memories of him as a child chasing after fire trucks. Not everyone gets to live their dream, but Rob obviously did his. To honor him in the only way they could at this time, local responders organized a motor procession last night that headed out from the Port Monmouth Fire Department.

To his wife Danielle, with whom I spoke this morning, and needless to say, she is incredibly brokenhearted, and the entire Webber family, and the Middletown firefighting family, and the broader Middletown family of which I am a member, I thank Robert for his service to his community. His soul and memories are in our thoughts and prayers. We will not forget him.

And here is Quentin Wiest, lower right. When this photo was taken last Father's Day, Quentin was only 106 years old. When COVID-19 took him earlier this week, he had reached 107. He was born on October 29, 1912, only a couple of months before my dad was born. And yes, he survived the flu pandemic of 1918. He earned a degree in engineering from the George Washington University in Washington, DC, and embarked on a career that would see him rise through the ranks in the telecommunications industry with the Western Electric Company, the manufacturing side of the former Bell Telephone System.

Along the way, he married his wife of 56 years, Myrtle, with whom he is now reunited. They lived all over the country but settled in Ridgewood in 1975 and he called New Jersey home for the rest of his life. He was, among other things, an expert bridge player, even garnering a mention in the New York Times. He was an avid bowler and played golf right up until age 100. I suspect he would not have been happy with the fact that we have our golf courses shut, had he been still playing. He volunteered for the Red Cross and in a local nursing home.

He is survived by his and Myrtle's three children, daughters Myrtle Ann Cassover of Pompton Lakes, Paula K. Wiest of Manhattan, and son, Quentin Wiest of Ridgewood. I spoke with Quentin earlier today and we talked about his dad. Pretty extraordinary, at all levels. His dad also leaves five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren with another on the way, who is undoubtedly going to learn some great stories. Young Quentin, that's him in this photo, with his own son Quentin and his son Theodore, so four generations of Wiests in that photo. Young Quentin with whom I spoke, shared this summation and I quote him. "When it came to life, he left nothing on the table; a remarkable life and a remarkable man." Amen.

Just coming in here, I read that my friend Benjie Wimberly, Assemblyman from Patterson, cousin passed. I put two and two together realized it was Councilwoman Ruby Cotton's husband, Ed, who also passed. I spoke to Ruby on the phone just before coming over here, I want to also give her and her late husband Ed, a shout out from us to say that his memory, and she and Benji and the whole family are in our prayers and will remain so.

Every life we mourn was of a remarkable person. We've been able to only bring a few of their stories forward, but each one leaves a legacy worth celebrating and protecting. And protecting them we will, by continuing to wage our war against this disease that took these tremendous people from us. And in that, we must all come together, stay together and keep working together.

Every day I share this map, Mahen, let's get it up there, which shows how far we've come in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Again, the lighter the color of this map, the better. That means it's taking longer for the virus to spread. The darker it is, the worse it is. Just a few weeks back, the number of cases in each county were doubling within only a couple of short days, and it was deep red and dark orange. But because we -- and I mean, we all of us -- have been aggressive in our social distancing, and making the tough decisions we've had to make to cancel public gatherings, close non-essential businesses, close our schools and require us to all wear face coverings. And again, we all do that. We only take them off when we're speaking with you. Among all the other steps we've taken, those rates of increase have dropped dramatically.

This is what we've been working toward and what we must keep doing. I know it's hard. I know it's not fun. I know it's going to be for a few more weeks, at least. If you want to be mad at me or find someone to blame, go ahead. It's on me. But my number one goal, my entire focus is on defeating this virus and getting our state back to where we can responsibly reopen it.

I gave an interview the other night and a very dear friend of mine reached out and he said, "You know, you're missing something here. You talk about you close the state." And I quote my friend, he said, "COVID-19 closed the state. You just organized it." He's a restaurateur, and he said ask any restaurateur how business was for the two weeks before we officially closed. Ask a theater owner how sales were. New York City restaurants, it was announced before New York City closed down that restaurants couldn't go over 50% capacity. He said that there were literally zero people coming to those restaurants. The restaurateurs laughed at this edict because they couldn't even get to 20%, because people were scared, literally, to death. I'm quoting my friend, "Zero people would come to the restaurant tomorrow if you allow them to go out."

And his point is a very good point. We need to have confidence that we've broken the back of this virus, that we have healthcare infrastructure in place as we begin to open our state back up. That will give people the confidence to say, you know what? It's okay to get back in. It's okay to go out again. It's okay to do the things that are being allowed. And again, we will not back off of breaking the back of this virus. And again, that's the order of events here. Break the back of the virus, have a full or as close to full healthcare recovery as possible, and only on the back of that can we have the economic recovery that we all so desperately want, including yours truly.

I take solace and guidance in the words of one of my heroes, Vice President and Senator Hubert Humphrey. And I quote him, "The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped." Those are words to guide us indeed. I want to give my dear friend Luce Delotto a shout out. He and I are co-chairs of the Hubert Humphrey Fan Club in New Jersey, I think.

This is a moral test for us all. The last thing we can do is relax and get complacent. If we do, then that map before us will get bright red once again. And if that happens, our healthcare system, no matter how great a job Judy and Christina and their team do, their system will be swamped and countless people will die. It's really as simple as that. We pound that infection curve down, we pound down the number of hospitalizations, we pound down the number of folks who require intensive care. Thank God, please God, we pound down the amount of fatalities.

Switching gears before we turn things over to Judy, we had a good video conference with the President and Vice President and their teams yesterday, talking about how they're seeing the reopening of the American economy. There's an enormous amount of responsibility given to Governors and latitude given to Governors. We are still sort of parsing through the recommendations and steps that they have put forward. I spoke

privately with the President after that video call. In fact, it was the President and it turns out the Vice President and Secretary Mnuchin also joined us. Again, we will continue with the order of events that we have laid out and continue to take advice and the best guidance we can from best practices around the country and around the world.

Today, I am proud to announce that the Attorney General's Office, through the Division of Consumer Affairs, will begin issuing temporary emergency licenses to foreign-licensed physicians. In doing this, New Jersey is the first state to begin fully tapping the tremendous wealth of international knowledge and experience to help us on our own frontlines. It is entirely fitting that we're the first state to do this. This is a state where the immigrant experience is writ large in our collective history. This is a state where people from all over the world have come to build a new life and to live the American dream. Look at Alice's story if you need any examples. These are tremendous and often unheralded members of our unique, diverse and strong New Jersey family. This family is now coming together, as it has in few times before in our common history, and every member of our New Jersey family has a role to play.

Even as we begin issuing these licenses, we continue to look for experienced volunteers to work alongside our current healthcare teams in fighting COVID-19. In particular, Judy will correct me if I get this wrong, we have a need for anyone with qualifications as a respiratory therapist and for physicians, nurses and emergency medical technicians. If you have prior experience in any of these fields, please go to covid19.nj.gov/volunteer to sign up and our team will work to match you with a location and need that could use you. Already more than 22,000 of you have raised your hands and many have already been sent out to help, but this army can always use more reinforcements.

Today we launched a new page for all of you who are not medical professionals, but wish to volunteer your time and efforts in other ways. Simply go to covid19.nj.gov/help and click on Volunteer in Your Community. Our most immediate needs are for people who help deliver meals to elderly or otherwise vulnerable residents, and to assist us at our food pantries. I thank the Governor's Office of Volunteerism within the Department of State, the New Jersey Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, and the Office of Emergency Management under Pat's supervision for their partnership in identifying these opportunities.

On testing across the state, there are now 70 sites at which you can receive a COVID-19 test if you are exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illnesses. Two dozen of them are publicly accessible and you can find a complete list at covid19.nj.gov/testing. But there are many more privately run sites that your primary care practitioner can direct you to if you need to be tested. On this, we continue to pursue every possible avenue for expanding our testing capabilities. Getting this in place is a key component for our future decision making. As once we get through this emergency, our charge will be to aggressively attack any future cases to prevent another outbreak. I want to also acknowledge the Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples is with us, and Deputy Counsel Parimal Garg. Thanks for being with us, guys.

Before I hand things over to Judy, I want to highlight, as we have been doing over the past couple of weeks, the tremendous work that ordinary New Jerseyans have undertaken to help get us through these extraordinary times. You've shared many of these stories online by using that #NJThanksYou and each one has been a little bright spot during our days. Please keep sharing your stories, keep forwarding them.

First, I want to give a shout out to the Montclair Drifters, and with a special credit to my partner in government, the extraordinary Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver for sending us this story. The Montclair Drifters first formed in 1964 and for 56 years, this group of dynamic and service-driven African American women has dedicated itself to bettering their community. This week they got together to donate 40 hot meals to the frontline medical team at Mountainside Hospital in Montclair. You can see some of the team members right there. A huge shout out to the Montclair Drifters, who continue to build upon their already tremendous 50-plus year history and legacy.

Then back down in my county, Monmouth County, there's Georgetown University freshman Liam Marshall. There is Liam, from Seeger. He's obviously back home from the hilltop and wanted to help out in between his online classes. He had the idea to begin an online campaign to support, Feed The Frontline, which is providing meals to the healthcare workers at Monmouth County's area hospitals. Liam used to social media presence to ask people to donate \$15 in exchange for a yard sign, there's one of them right there, to show

support for every frontline healthcare worker working hard. So far, he's had to produce, are you ready for this? Close to 800 signs. Obviously this got bigger than just Liam, so he enlisted his parents and his brother and a whole squad of friends to help him deliver signs to front lawns all over the Monmouth Shore area. By the way, Liam is a business major, something tells me he has a tremendous future ahead of him. To you, Liam, and your family. I know you're watching. I hope you never give up your spirit of giving back. Kudos to you, and even though I didn't go to Georgetown, I say Hoya Saxa. I think this is a positive way, and the guy, the Villanova grad to my left, I think probably had mixed emotions about that chant. I think this is a positive way to end today.

To the millions of New Jerseyans who are with us in channeling our deep New Jersey values to defeat COVID-19, keep up the good work. I know it has not been easy. It has not been fun, and it's not going to get any easier or any more fun. But it is absolutely essential to our success. We have come a long way already. We're flattening the curve. There's no doubt about it. But we cannot let up until we've ridden the curve down the other side. We can do this. After all, we are New Jersey. There's nothing else that needs to be said.

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. As you know, we've seen extreme vulnerability of long-term care facilities in New Jersey and nationally with the pandemic of COVID-19. We continue to be vigilant and do everything in our power to assist these facilities, from shipping personal protective equipment, to connecting facilities with staffing support to replace the certified nursing assistants who are either ill or who have not reported to work.

There are 384 long-term care facilities in the state reporting COVID-19 cases, for a total of 9,094 cases. Tragically, 1,530 COVID-19 deaths have been reported in these facilities. Today I'm going to give you a breakdown by county and this will be added to the Department of Health dashboard later today.

- In Atlantic County, eight of their long-term care facilities are reporting 53 COVID-19 cases and six deaths.
- In Bergen County, 51 facilities are affected, reporting 1,831 cases and 352 deaths.
- In Burlington County, 15 facilities are affected, reporting 310 cases and 32 deaths.
- In Camden County, 14 facilities are affected, reporting 281 cases and 48 deaths.
- In Cape May County, four facilities are affected, reporting 30 cases and two deaths.
- In Cumberland County, two facilities are reporting three cases and no deaths.
- In Essex County, 38 facilities are reporting 969 cases and 204 deaths.
- In Gloucester County, seven facilities reporting 47 cases and eight deaths.
- In Hudson County, 12 facilities are reporting 361 cases and 57 deaths.
- In Hunterdon County, four facilities are reporting 143 cases and 20 deaths.
- Mercer County, 19 facilities reporting 344 cases and 38 deaths.
- In Middlesex County, 35 facilities reporting 832 cases and 162 deaths.
- Monmouth County, 40 facilities reporting 782 cases and 114 deaths.
- Maurice County, 32 facilities reporting 829 cases and 150 deaths.
- Ocean County, 32 facilities reporting 543 cases and 43 deaths.
- Passaic County, 18 facilities reporting 460 cases and 76 deaths.
- Salem County, two facilities, 18 cases and one death.
- Somerset County, 24 facilities with 456 cases and 58 deaths.
- Sussex County, five facilities reporting 161 cases and 45 deaths.
- Union County, 26 facilities reporting 472 cases and 91 deaths.
- Warren County, six facilities affected reporting 169 cases and 23 deaths.

I have received calls and have talked with a number of elected officials of these counties and municipalities, as they are responding to the concerns of their constituents. Federal surveyors are on site in Andover, as reported yesterday, along with our state surveyor and our state surveyors are making site visits today to

several long-term care facilities. They will be working today and through the weekend, visiting selected facilities based on the reporting of their statistics.

The New Jersey veterans home census today is 782; 145 of our veterans have tested positive for COVID-19, 32 are hospitalized. They are reporting 57 deaths. Out of a staff of 1,331, 70 of their employees have tested positive. Our state psych hospitals are reporting an additional death today for a total of seven deaths from their population of 1,400. Currently, 111 of our long-term care facilities have reported that they are no longer admitting residents because they are unable to cohort and appropriately care for more individuals.

As the Governor shared last evening, our hospitals reported 8,011 hospitalizations, which includes patients with COVID-19 and persons under investigation. This is a 2% decrease from our daily growth rate of the past two days. There are now 1,961 individuals in critical care, of which 1,594 of those individuals are on ventilators. That is 81% of our intensive care patients are on ventilators, significantly down from a high of 97% within the past week.

Before I got in the car to come here, I got a call from Kevin Slaven, who you know is CEO of St. Joseph's, and also Head of the Board of the New Jersey Hospital Association. He shared with me that Peter Banko, CEO of Centura Health in Colorado, Peter Banko is a New Jersey fellow. I worked with him when I was at St. Peter's in New Brunswick, and Kevin hired him up at St. Joseph many years ago. He is sending 25 nurses on United, Sunday, to New Jersey to work at St. Joseph's, St. Peter's and Trinitas. So a shout out to Peter Banko, a New Jersey fellow.

As the Governor mentioned, our field medical stations have a current census of 90. The Secaucus site has 64, Edison has 26. Additionally, 17 individuals are being served at the Marriott in Secaucus. All in, 168 individuals have been served at these sites and 79 have been successfully discharged home.

Today we're reporting 3,250 new cases for total of 78,467. Sadly, 323 new cases, new deaths have been reported to the department. As the Governor shared, that is a total of 3,840 fatalities in our state. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families. According to the data from this morning, of the laboratories sending us COVID-19 results 143,450 tests have been performed, 64,468 have returned positive for a positivity rate holding at about 44.9%.

Lastly, I want to thank all of you who are staying home. I know as time goes on, it gets tougher. But the best way to protect yourselves and others are by staying home, staying safe, but staying connected. Each one of us are making a difference and helping to stop the spread of this virus. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for that. I just wrote a note to myself to call Peter Banko and tell him how much we appreciate that. A couple of things. Counties, as we say every day, the top six remain the counties with the most amount of cases, and that really hasn't shifted in now weeks. Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Union, Passaic and Middlesex.

Secondly, on veterans, Judy, is it still the case, I don't have my veterans daily in front of me. The fatalities, God bless our veterans period, and God bless those who have passed due to COVID-19. Is Vineland still at zero?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: So these are all fatalities in either Paramus or Menlo Park, sadly. Race and/or comorbidities, do you mind just quickly hitting that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. Of the 2,717 cases that we've investigated totally, 50.3% are white, 22.3% are black, 16.6% Hispanic, 5.4% Asian non-Hispanic, and 5.4% other. Underlying conditions are holding about the same, 60.8% cardiovascular disease; 39.1% Diabetes mellitus; 29.6% other chronic diseases; 20.5% chronic lung disease, that's like asthma, emphysema, COPD; 15.8% chronic renal disease; 15% neurologic disability; 13.3% other, and 11% cancer.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. As we've said before, a couple things. One, we've said this, I think even yesterday or the day before, if you add up all the comorbidities, you'll get about 200%. The reason is, of course, you've got folks with more than one condition. Secondly, the African American representation in the fatalities continues to concern us. It looks, again, it's staying in at around 50% above the representation of the

African American community in the broader society in New Jersey. Thirdly, this is something we haven't said in a few days. The deaths, the awful deaths that we're reporting are probably folks, Christina, who were infected, it could be as long as several weeks ago at this point, right?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Right, deaths are considered a lagging indicator. A lot of times, individuals become, you know, their onset of illness is several days, it could be weeks before they actually, potentially die.

Governor Phil Murphy: And the positive test results, we had a back and forth yesterday during the White House call. And Judy, I don't want to put words in your mouth. You think the labs have partly caught up, but these are probably still five to seven days, specimens taken about five to seven days ago. Is that fair to say? So for everybody out there who's wondering, sort of what's the timing on this, this is something again, I'm going to go out a little bit over my skis, but I do want to reiterate this. There's nothing behind this other than the obvious point.

We had the opportunity, when we announced the balance of the school year, the extent to which this was going to continue to be remote learning and for how long? Do we do this for a number of weeks versus the entirety of the balance of the school year? We quite deliberately picked what is now four weeks from today. That was with the input from Judy and Christina and their teams, obviously the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Repollet. Pat and his team and other experts looking at our best guess as to data and science.

That was done deliberately. I want to not just say for the folks who are impacted by our decision on schools, in particular to the seniors out there, and particularly the seniors who play sports or have other activities, the seniors who want to find some way to acknowledge and commemorate their graduation. You know, we know that you're probably the most impacted of the school communities, including your folks and your families. But we also did that deliberately because we hope to know a whole lot more as we now know versus four weeks ago, we hope to know a whole lot more as we round into May 15. And if we keep doing what we're doing, that whole lot more we know has the potential to be meaningfully more positive.

So keep at it folks. Please, please keep at it. I know it's not fun. I know people are stir-crazy. I don't blame you, I get it. But we are cracking the back of a once-a-century killer here. This is the fight of our lives and we are winning it but we have to stay at it. We have to stay at it. And if we do, my gut tells me the news gets better, and it gets better over that that four-week period that we're talking about.

With that for any updates on compliance, PPE, other infrastructure matters. I just got a note while I was making a note to thank Mr. Banko, I got a note from General Milhorn saying he's looking forward to seeing the three of us next week in Atlantic City. With that, Pat, over to you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Compliance, especially as it pertains to those large gatherings has been, I would say phenomenal over the last few nights. A few outliers, which I'll go through briefly. In Patterson, a subject was cited for operating a carwash. He was cited for an EO violation. Newark issued 90 EO violations and closed seven businesses. In Morristown, three male subjects were charged for EO violation, they were actually fighting during a small social gathering. In South Brunswick, a woman was cited for driving under the influence and as well as endangering the welfare of children. She had two small children in the car, and her alcohol test revealed she was a 0.26 BAC. In Elizabeth, seven were cited having been previously warned to disperse. They were cited for EO violations. And in Upper Township, a subject was cited for driving under the influence with a 0.33 blood alcohol concentration.

With regard to PPE, I just thought I'd note since this began a few weeks back that we have, as a state, ordered and/or received over 53.3 million items as it pertains mostly about PPE, but that runs from vents, hospital beds, thermometers, but mostly in the PPE world. With regard to the two FEMA supported sites, the one in Bergen and PNC, once today ends, they would have completed over 12,000 tests since March 20. So it hasn't even been up and running a month just yet and over 12,000 tests at those two sites alone.

Lastly, with regard to the National Ambulance Contract that I speak of now and again, they've just increased their hours to 24/7. In order to do that, we're bringing in an additional 75 personnel. It was really only a six-hour gap that they weren't operating but now they'll be able to operate 24/7. In those 100 additional ambulances, 50 basic life support and 50 advanced life support, are due to be in Jersey come Monday morning. That's it, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you for that and for everything. Just before we go, we'll start with Charlie here to my right. But before we start, just to say on testing again, to repeat, I think we're number four in the country in terms of total tests. We're the 11th largest state population wise, so at one level, we've punched above our weight. But from moment one, we haven't had the materials and the scale in testing that we would remotely need to do a universal regime. We're going to need something that looks a whole lot more like that before we can responsibly and with confidence, and my friend the restaurateur, forget about what I think or Judy or Pat thinks. If you're thinking, okay, do I feel I'm ready to go out and have dinner or see a movie or go to a ballgame or whatever it is, you're going to want and we understand this and we don't blame you, you're going to want to have confidence that we've got a healthcare infrastructure in place that is doing everything it can to identify any re-ignition of this virus. And that it's an infrastructure that can deal aggressively and quickly with any potential re-ignition. That's what we are going to need.

Now, there's a lot of promise with a lot of developments. Judy and Christina, have forgotten more about this than I'll ever know. The Rutgers saliva test is one example we've been using, right? The notion of being able to not just make it easier to submit your test with a lot less reliance on healthcare workers, PPE, etc. but you get an answer back very quickly. That's what we need. We then need contact tracing, probably a combination of humans and technology. We're in the stages of trying to figure out what that might look like. Once we can track down, okay, this person has tested positive and these are the people they were in touch with. What's the plan then? What's the quarantine? What's the isolation plan? And to have that completely vetted, that will give you all and will give us the confidence that we need to begin turning that dimmer up on the light switch. It's not going to be a flip, it's going to be bringing, think of that a dimmer up on a light.

And so just to say that on testing 12,000 in those two sites alone, I'm not sure there are two sites in the country combined that have done 12,000 in the past couple of months. I'll bet you there aren't. But we're going to need that nimble, scaled, quick turnaround, testing reality and we're working hard on that, as you can imagine. That was a discussion explicitly with the White House yesterday, and I explained when it was my part of the program, it was focused on getting federal money to help us, which is an old theme that we've been hitting, which we desperately need. Secondly, working with the White House and the administration, which we are absolutely overwhelmingly interested in doing to actually further that reality of a testing approach in our state that will allow us, you and us, the confidence we're going to need to get that dimmer on the light switch back up again. With that, Charlie.

Q&A Session

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Good afternoon, Governor. I've been asked to pass along –

Governor Phil Murphy: When we're at the mic, I just want to make sure we've got no required dental work by the mic distance there today. Thank you.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: Thank you. I've been asked to pass along a few questions from the Associated Press for you, Governor. What is your reaction to the reopening booklet issued by the White House? Is there anything in it you're pushing back on? And if so, why? How close is New Jersey to starting phase one? Do you want me to let you answer those now –

Governor Phil Murphy: No, give me yours as well, if you could.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: These are my questions. I wanted to ask for some clarification on your Order, EO 122 about essential versus non-essential construction. I know in New Brunswick, we've got some developers of private, expensive housing that are moving forward, using item 2(g) as a loophole, which says that any construction involving a unit, where there's a lease for somebody to occupy it can continue. They're saying even though it's a huge building, they say we have a few leases, so we want to keep going, and the city has allowed that to go on. I wanted to ask for your clarification on whether that was your intent for those types of projects to be essential.

How about the SRL pipeline? That has been self-described as a transmission redundancy project. How on earth can that be essential if it's redundant?

I also wanted to ask for your statement on the bill you signed giving civil and criminal immunity to certain healthcare professionals and facilities. What's your response to the people who voted against that and the concerns that have been raised about that? What would you say to families who are concerned that their loved ones may be victims of malpractice and they would lose their ability to challenge that and to have legal recourse in civil and criminal court?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Let me begin with the AP questions. I thought it was a good discussion with the White House. We're still trying to go through the booklet. I don't have it with me, Judy and Pat were with me. I thought it was a good discussion. The most gratifying part of it is that they're basically saying the Governors are the ones who determine a lot of this, and we agree with that. I don't say that as a hostile statement, I just think it's a reality. I've said this before, I think there were three rings of responsibility here and you all should come in if you see it differently.

One is, we have to do what's right for the 9 million folks inside the four walls of New Jersey. Number one, job number one. Second ring out is to do that in a very tightly coordinated way with our neighbors. We did that well as we were closing, let's do that as we are reopening, including some of the healthcare infrastructure, potentially, that I talked about. Rich Besser is as good as it comes as it relates to healthcare abilities. Judy's known him a long time. He's one of our representatives. We couldn't have a better person alongside Jeh Johnson, who is equally extraordinarily talented.

And then thirdly, cooperation with the White House. So it's got to work for us, our neighbors, and there's nothing to replace the existential reality of the federal government. I thought it was a decent discussion. Was there anything I'd be pushing back on? The only thing I would push back on is if there was a requirement on timing, and there was not. That's a good thing, because we're not ready. Again, don't confuse my extreme desire to want to open things up based on the data and the inputs that we have, my assessment at the moment whether or not we're ready for that.

I think I've gotten into the other pieces of this. Is this Mike who is asking? Yeah, I mean, I think I've gotten into it a minute ago. We need to break the back of the virus, have the healthcare infrastructure, in particular in place, testing, contact tracing are the big pillars of that, I think, and then you could begin to put your roles not just in place but in action. What's a restaurant look like? What's a retail shop look like? What's a warehouse or a manufacturing floor? Anything, Judy or Pat, you'd add to that?

It was a good discussion. The one thing that we would have recoiled on would have been, you must do this by this date, because we're just not there. This will slightly, and I want to say that I'm taking a shot at myself here, this will slightly understate the depth of my knowledge about Item 2(g) when I say that I know it follows 2(f). With that, Parimal, could you please talk about non-essential and essential construction, including the one that Charlie's described in New Brunswick, as well as anything you want to say on the pipeline?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Sure. The provision that you referenced in paragraph 2(g) refers to particular units for which a tenant has a lease agreement to move in by a particular date. That's just designed to ensure that tenants who have to vacate their current residence and have to move somewhere else have a place to go, but the construction should be limited to those specific units. And on the pipeline that you mentioned, our Executive Order takes a sector-based approach, so it's not about particular projects but pipelines are part of the utility exception in that Order.

Governor Phil Murphy: Now that you're on deck Parimal, anything you want to add on the bill related to civil and criminal immunity?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Sure. The civil immunity provisions in that bill only apply to simple negligence, so the types of malpractice that you're referencing that include willful conduct or gross misconduct, they wouldn't be covered. The criminal immunity provisions in that bill, they only apply to situations in which there's a shortage of ventilators and hospitals have to make decisions involving triage.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, anything you want to add to that last piece?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: It does not take away a person's right to assert a claim if they feel that they've been wronged in some way, and then it'll be adjudicated in the courts. Am I right, Counselor?

Governor Phil Murphy: We're good, Charlie? Very quickly.

Charlie Kratovil, New Brunswick Today: For 2(g) is that for new construction, or are we only talking about buildings that are just renovating a unit?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: It does apply to both new construction and existing construction of those specific units.

Governor Phil Murphy: You're good? Thank you. Before we go to Elise, anyone in the back? Do you guys got a question, either of you? You guys good? Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. Did the White House say to states that they must acquire their own test kits? What did the White House say is their testing solution? Were you promised any test kits? How will New Jersey and the other states make good on this testing and tracing idea?

Also, you mentioned a Secaucus Marriott. Are patients being treated there or are workers being housed there?

And a question from Tom Davis from Patch. Do you expect that when patients return to school they'll have to wear masks?

Governor Phil Murphy: Sorry, when kids return to school?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Do you expect that when students return to school, they'll have to wear masks?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Thank you for those. On testing, I don't know that there was a big discussion as to who's getting what in terms of testing. I do know this, that we are in constant communication with the White House on trying to work with them to get the right testing infrastructure and regime in place. Do you recall any discussion as to, either of you? No. I don't have a lot of clarity in terms of – are we okay here one the – there we go. There we are. All I can say is we are aggressively taking the lead on that and hoping to do that in some concert. The depth of that concert, I can't tell you yet because it's not knowable yet, but I want to do that as much as possible with the White House and with the federal government.

I've mentioned one example, Elise, a lot, but it's this sort of, you know, Judy and Christina and their teams doing a lot of tire kicking with the Rutgers saliva test is the one example that I think we've talked about most. We will make sure that that is in – I will tell you this definitively, regardless of how we do it, or where we get them, we will not be reopening unless there's confidence by the group of us up here and our teams that we have got a testing regime in place that meets the standards that we're going to need and a contact tracing regime in place that meets the standards that we're going to need.

I'm going to skip to the last one and give you my personal opinion, and then I'll defer to the experts on both what's going to go on in Secaucus and masks, but I would bet the answer is yes, that we will be masked when kids go back to school. That will be my personal guess. But, Judy, over to you. Do you want to talk about that and/or Secaucus?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'll talk about Secaucus. That's for individuals that are in convalescent care, for instance, need very little actual care but need to sit out a quarantine period of time and cannot return to their homes, if they have one. It could be for homeless as well. And additionally, there's rooms set aside for healthcare workers who are doing shift upon shifts and want to crash for a while, or if they've tested positive and are in quarantine and do not want to sit out that quarantine at home or isolation at home. It's for both, but no actual care.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm giving you a personal opinion on the kids wearing masks, but that would be my guess and that's an opinion, not a mandate. Secondly, again, I repeat something I said earlier. We have deliberately bought ourselves another window of four weeks. That's my answer today based on what we all know today. But let's see what that looks like when we make any other decisions. If but again, schools are remote learning, at least, at least until May 15. I want to repeat that. We've not made the decision that we're going back to school on the 15th or the 18th or whenever that is, they are remote until at least the 15th. You good? I would think anybody and anybody, yes, I would think so. Yes. Again, one guy's opinion. Do I have any violent disagreement down here or not? Okay. Thank you. Sir, in the back, do you have one? Hold on. I haven't missed anybody here, right? You guys are good?

Reporter: Governor, I have a question from Colleen at NJ Spotlight, a multiple part but related question. Can you give us an update on furloughs of inmates from prison? Has it started yet or when will it start? Do you have a number that you're aiming for? Will people be eligible for release if they have medical conditions but are in a location, i.e. a halfway house without any known cases?

Governor Phil Murphy: Without what, sorry?

Reporter: Without any known cases?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Do you have other anything for yourself?

Reporter: That's it. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: The review process is underway. There is a tiering and Parimal will correct me if I'm wrong here. There is a tiering of most at-risk patients. I think I said this the other day, one tier is age. Another one is underlying health concerns. Another tier is eligible within a certain window for parole or release. There's another tier, I think, of folks who are denied parole. So they're batching these. It's in process. No one has been adjudicated to the best of my knowledge yet, Parimal. My guess is this is at least next week for a first batch of those folks. I don't have a number for you yet because they're going through it as we speak. As it relates to someone with medical issues in a halfway house, Parimal, what's your color on that?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Those decisions about release and where individuals would be released to, they would be made by the emergency review committee.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, including folks from the halfway house.

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: I believe that's correct, yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Are you good with that? Thank you. Brent, nice to see you.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: It's been a few days, any update on peak, either in cases or hospitalizations? We still haven't seen that yet, right? Two, a month ago is when the lockdown started on March 17th is when the first wave started. Is that having any effect on numbers or is it still too soon yet? Last question -- only three today. Gas owners are calling for self-serve gas. They sent you a letter, apparently. Do you plan on temporarily lifting the ban?

Governor Phil Murphy: Nothing new to report on self-service gas. Secondly, Judy, these really are, are we seeing -- I'm going to give you a couple thoughts, but I have to defer to the experts. That map shows that we're making an enormous difference. Again, I've got to thank, Pat said this earlier, overwhelmingly, people are playing ball. We will never forget that, all of us will never forget that, because that's how we're going to beat this thing. That map would not be the color it is if the lockdown were not having a real impact. The positive curve, the curve and the positive tests is showing that.

The anecdotal, more than anecdotal but the statistical and anecdotal evidence that we're hearing out of the hospital systems, there's the map. And again, my only comment on peak, this is within our control, folks. So far again, Judy and Christina are looking, and we all are, at multiple models that have sort of this shape to them. This is the bad, worst case, infections which leads to hospitalizations. This is the best case. Let's remember that while we're talking about really good progress and signs of really good daylight, I think it's fair to say again, I'll turn this over to Judy, it's within our hands to either keep it that way, or please God, don't do this, let your guard down. If we let our guard down, you then have to reassess peak, how bad this is, worst case versus best case, you then potentially swamp the system.

Again, folks, we're still in the war. In every war known to man, I believe this is true, somebody got killed on the last day. Let's just stay the course. Please stay at home. Keep your distance. Keep us getting the map that looks lighter and lighter every time we pull it up. With that, Judy will correct the record.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I think that as we look at the hospitalizations, we are seeing some flattening. We separate out the state into North, Central and South. We actually are seeing the progression, or I should say the transmission of the disease, moving down the state. But overall, we are seeing a flattening. That was the consensus of the group that met this morning and looked at these trends. So we are optimistically hopeful, cautiously optimistic.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Nothing new on peak numbers, and two, why no decision on gas even though I like having my gas pumped?

Governor Phil Murphy: I appreciate that. Because I've got nothing new on it. Judy, let me ask you a question. Cautiously optimistic, it's still in our control folks, to either keep it optimistic or please God, don't let your guard down. When you look at the models that you look at and I walk in, we all look at it, we're sort of in, I would define the peak not as a day in time right now, but a period of time. It feels like we're still in the thick of it.

I said the other day, I mean, tell me if you disagree, April is going to be our toughest period, assuming we keep doing what we're doing. May will be somewhat better. We just don't know how much better. Please God, again, if you keep doing what you're doing, and then, you know, we're hoping that we can have the healthcare infrastructure in place and that we can begin to responsibly begin to open things up in the warm months.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we look at three models, best case, worst case, and we expect to be still very busy through April and into the beginning of May, depending on what model you look at. It's from now until May 12, and that changes every day. But we're cautiously optimistic and hopefully optimistic that we're leveling off, but we still expect it to be pretty high.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nothing else on self-serve gas, by the way.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: I want to be clear, so I don't write the wrong thing. We have not seen the peak in either hospitalizations or cases yet, right?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't think we know, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I would think in the North we have seen the peak and we have not seen it in Central and South. And it's coming.

Governor Phil Murphy: You good? And again, everybody, I hate to be a broken record. This is within our control. Best case versus worst, when it comes, what it looks like when it comes. It's up to us. We keep doing what we're doing, this is going in the right direction. There's no question about it. We let our guard down, all bets are off. Is that fair to say? Everybody?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Absolutely.

Governor Phil Murphy: So please don't let your guard down. I know it's not fun. It's not fun for any of us, trust me, but it is working. Keep at it folks. John, you get to bat cleanup today.

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: On the nursing homes, is there a way, is there a method for the state or the federal government to take over operations at a place like Andover Subacute? You've already sent investigators there. If operations are deemed so insufficient, can you guys take over operating at a place like that and are you considering that? Are you tracking staffing at the nursing homes, particularly nursing care? Help put some sort of perspective on these nursing home numbers. Testing is not widespread necessarily in some of these places, so that might be an undercount of the positive cases, as well as many of the residents have DNRs and do not intubate orders in place. Would that inflate the number of deaths that we're seeing there, and especially given the population? Just try to help put some of those numbers in perspective, especially given the raw numbers of total deaths in nursing homes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I'll say a couple of general things and then turn it to you. John, it was good doing the Facebook Live with you and Ashley earlier. Thanks for having me. I would just say this. The good news, I don't want to sound like others may have sounded in this crisis, but we have wide-ranging authority. But I would just say in this particular case, let's leave it where we've said it already, which is the Attorney General is all over this. The feds from CMS, Judy are all over. Judy's own team at the Department of Health is all over it. I think we'll leave it at that for the time being, but our authority is significant.

And then I think the rest of these, so you've got tracking staffing at long-term care, because of perhaps not the robust enough testing regime, is it possible it's under-counted on the one hand, and your DNR point on the other hand, is it possible that it may be inflated on the other hand, opposite that.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, on the testing, almost all of the long-term care facilities are doing testing, but we're counting positives and PUIs and assuming that the PUIs are positive. That's how we're cohorting patients. We do track PPE, we check staffing. We track whether they can cohort, that's the physical plant limitations in addition to the staffing limitations. That's how we know 111 are not able to admit or readmit. We expect them to call us if they are having staffing shortages that do not allow them to take care of the activities of daily living, first and foremost, of the residents that are there. And that's feeding and bathing and changing and making sure that the basic needs are taken care of. We're sending in names and leads from our volunteer portal.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll just say a couple of things before we break. We've talked about the national and New Jersey post-mortem that we're all going to need to go through here, so this is not helping put the fire out right now. But it's quite clear both nationally, as well as in our own state, that long-term care is going to be a particular focus. Hard to ignore that. I read an article this morning, I don't know if Judy you heard me on our call earlier. I forget what newspaper it was in, but there's not in New Jersey, thank God, but a nursing home with 150 patients and two members of staff on duty. This is sobering, as sobering as it gets, both in New Jersey, around the country and frankly around the world.

Something that I said on your Facebook Live session, John, earlier, which I think and again, correct me if I'm wrong if you all see this differently, you're in one of these facilities to begin with, in an otherwise benign world for a reason, right? It's due to age, it's due to a particular underlying condition, a disability, for some combination of things. You then add a deadly virus to this mix, meaning it ignites in particular in that community that I've just described. I think that's fair, right?

And then added to that, there are expectations of conduct by the operators of these facilities. We had this awful Wanaque tragedy in October of 2018 and we put in place the requirement, and Judy with team has done an extraordinary job to make sure these folks have an emergency response plan, which they were due to give us and did, I think in most, if not all cases in February. There's a conduct, there's a code of conduct here of behavior. You've got a vulnerable population, a deadly virus and if that weren't enough, you've got some folks who aren't doing what they need to do or should be doing. I mean, this Andover thing is a complete outrage. Folks out there have loved ones and they're upset about this. We don't blame you. We're taking it you know, we've got the feds, the Attorney General, your team and inspectors are up there.

And to other actors out there that better be listening to this, we expect them to adhere to the code of conduct that you have signed on to. We expect it certainly in the midst of an enormous healthcare crisis like this. We expect that as a minimum standard, a minimum standard of care, communication, etc. And by the way, we don't hold this against the workers, by the way. Who could blame the workers who are sick, trying to not infect others, heroically trying to go in wave after wave? It's the operators in particular, we expect a standard of care here and we will not relent on that.

With that, thank you, Commissioner Judy Persichilli, Dr. Christina Tan, State Epidemiologist. Thank you, Colonel Pat Callahan, Superintendent, Jared, Parimal and the whole team. A couple of housekeeping matters. We will all put our masks on as we do. You'll forgive us here. This literally happened to me earlier today I will show you exactly what I tried to do in my office. I've now made a fool of myself in public after I had done it in my office earlier. We will be with you tomorrow in the same room, Mahen, at 1:00 p.m. We will likely again, as we have the past few Sundays, communicate with you electronically, quote-unquote, by paper on Sunday, unless there is a reason to be with you either telephonically or in person. In which case, we'll make that decision, I'll probably make that myself. Monday we have a White House VTC and therefore will gather at 2:00 p.m. in this room on Monday. We may be a little bit moving things around Tuesday and Wednesday. I think Tuesday we're looking at potentially visiting the Atlantic City field medical station. That may impact our timing. I think we want to also look at some of the work that's been done not just the field medical station, but some of the work that's been done in places like New Bridge or in East Orange, where there's been opening up of wings and/or capacity at existing healthcare facilities. Bear with us. We may be a little bit on the move next week more than we have the past couple.

God bless you all folks, keep doing what you're doing. It is working. Stay at it. Don't relent. We know it's not fun but it is working, and together as one New Jersey family, we will win this war. We will beat this virus and we will be together again. Bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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