

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: July 29th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I'm honored to be joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of 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, another guy who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. Director of the Office of Homeland Security and preparedness Jared Maples is with us. Again, good afternoon.

I want to start today, if I can, by revisiting an issue that we have had to speak to about several times, especially in the past week, but – which is getting more worrisome, and that is the increasing number of cases that are being traced to indoor house parties. Let me say at the outset, by the way, I get it. We get it. We've all had our routines turned upside down for the past four months and we want to blow off some steam with friends. I can't fault – none of us can fault anyone for having that notion. And with the weather we've been having on top of that, I understand the desire to escape the heat and head into the air conditioning. But folks, we cannot – we simply cannot continue to have crowded house parties. They are not safe, period. They are how coronavirus gets passed around more efficiently. They put the hard work we've all undertaken together, the millions of us, since March at risk of being undone.

Last week, and we've spoken to it this week, there was not one, by the way, but a series, apparently, of house parties attended by teens in Middletown having just gotten an update from the leadership there, and I comment them for their leadership. It's now been linked, these several house parties, to more than 50 new, 5-0 new, positive cases of coronavirus in attendees, and the age range is now between 14 and 19. There was a party, we referred to this, on Long Beach Island which has now sidelined nearly three dozen lifeguards from

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Harvey Cedars in Surf City who have tested positive. And we spoke about this on Monday: there was the massive house party in Jackson that had an estimated 700 people in which took nearly the entire Jackson Township police force plus help from state police and other jurisdictions to break up. And we don't even know yet how many coronavirus cases may ultimately be the outcome of that out-of-control party but Judy, you think many, I believe, right?

So yes, it's hot. Yes, it's summer. Yes, we all want and in many cases need to blow off some steam, but this is no time for anyone to be vying for induction into the knucklehead hall of fame. And unfortunately, all of the above instances qualify. We know that this virus is more easily transmitted indoors. That's why we've been so deliberate and methodical in our restart and recovery strategy to take extra precautions for anything happening indoors, and it's why we've begun by allowing as many outdoor activities as possible. Because we know that social distances are more easily kept and that people are at a lower risk for contracting coronavirus.

This is the reason why we have had to hit pause on expanding the restart of more indoor activities like dining and health clubs where people are more likely to be indoors for a longer amount of time not wearing masks and more likely to be in one place for a longer amount of time. I'm not going to say that indoor dining is like a house party because it isn't, but when one party in an air conditioned house leads to dozens of new cases, it should give us all pause.

And again, remember this: just because you are younger and hopefully less susceptible to the ravages of COVID-19 is not an excuse to let your guard down. You are not immune. Do not become the person who unknowingly contracts coronavirus at a party and then spreads it to your parents or your grandparents or other loved ones who may be more susceptible due to their age or underlying health challenges. Again, just because it is summer does not mean that we give up common sense or personal responsibility. We can have an enjoyable summer. We can gather together with our friends but only in small groups and hopefully only outdoors.

But when there are hundreds of people crammed into a house where the air conditioning system is simply blowing the air around and where people are not wearing face coverings, you have also invited coronavirus to your party. We all need to be smart and be safe. We need to wear our masks if we can't keep social distances. Over the past four months, we have crushed the curve but folks, this is sobering. Over the past four days, we have reported roughly 2,000 new positive coronavirus test results. We are now back plus or minus to where we were a month ago in the daily number of new cases. We can't go backwards. We can't afford to go backwards. So let's get back to using the common sense. Let's get back to remembering the need for personal responsibility. Let's get back to working as one New Jersey family to defeat COVID-19 together.

Next, yesterday the list of states from which travelers to New Jersey or New Jerseyans returning from travel are being advised to observe a 14-day self-quarantine period was updated with Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico being added. Again, the states on the list have – and Judy will correct me if I'm wrong here – over a seven-day rolling average either more than 10 new cases of coronavirus per 100,000 residents or a daily positivity greater than 10%. So visit, if you could, COVID19.NJ.gov/travel for the complete list of states and to learn whether you should be self-quarantining. If you are arriving from one of these states, use your smartphone to fill out the travel survey which is available through the same page.

We continue to ask everyone who's been in contact with one of these impacted states to practice self-responsibility and good citizenship by complying with our travel advisories. When you're coming to New Jersey, please go online and use the Department of Health's online travel survey. This goes equally – as I mentioned, whether you are a visitor to our state or a New Jersey resident returning from one of these states, and we encourage everyone, residents and visitors alike, to get tested and to know whether or not you may be carrying this coronavirus, especially if you are a younger person more likely to be an asymptomatic carrier. Please, again, take a moment and go to COVID19.NJ.gov/testing to find a testing site nearest to you. Then go out and get tested. If we stay here for one second, I want to say I mentioned the states that were added, Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, and then in addition of that, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. No states were taken off the list. So as an American matter, this is going in the wrong direction. We've got to do everything we can to build a wall, a virtual wall, around our state and our region.

Next, we know that there continues to be some long wait times and numerous motor vehicle commission agencies and Chief Administrator Sue Fulton and her team continue to do everything they can to mitigate these delays and expedite customer transactions. To be sure, the MVC is working hard and in fact has, in the span of less than a month, worked through more than half of the backlog created by the agency's over three-month closure. That's more than 355,000 transactions.

Again, we urge everyone with business before the Motor Vehicle Commission to check online to see if your transaction can be done from the comfort of your air conditioned home. If so, skip the trip entirely. If you must go, the MVC home page lists all offices which may have already reached their daily capacity so you know before you go and perhaps you'll find another agency not far away that is still accepting customers. Also, the MVC has automatically extended – remember, the deadlines for numerous documents, so that's the website, NJMVC.gov. Go there to see how that affects you. If you don't need to go today, then let those that have pressing business take care of their transactions. Again, I think – by the way, if you're frustrated, we get it. We don't blame you. We are too.

But I will say this: the backlog that was built up over – well over three months of transactions, they've gone through about half of that backlog in about four weeks. That backlog was a lot longer than four weeks of transactions, so they're making progress. They will catch this; the dog will catch the car, no pun intended here. They will get there; they are getting there.

Again, if you're frustrated, I don't blame you; we don't blame you. Please exercise patience. Please go online and see if you can do your business online. We will get through this together.

With all of that out of the way, let's visit the overnight numbers. Today, we're reporting an additional 489 new positive Coronavirus test results bringing the statewide cumulative total to 180,766. Daily positivity is up a bit, 2.42%. Rate of transmission stays where it was yesterday, Judy, at 1.14, above 1, which we don't like. In our hospitals, we had 361 patients as of last night's report who were known COVID-19 positive and another 400 listed as persons under investigation. That total is 761. Of that amount, 116 were intensive care and 49 ventilators were in use.

All of the metrics in our healthcare system continue to trend positively. We are seeing our standing in the national rankings continuing to improve; however, that does not change anything I said earlier. We are not out of the woods yet by any means. Think of it this way. Every new positive test is a person who could potentially end up in the hospital, or worse yet, an intensive care, and please God not lose their lives. Every new positive test is also a person who could spread this disease even unwittingly to others and push our transmission rate even higher.

Again, this is so much about personal responsibility and common sense. By the way, not to jump on this again, but house parties are neither anything about with personal responsibility or common sense; they are at odds with both of those. You've been incredible, folks. We've just got to continue to be incredible going forward. We're not out of the woods.

Sadly, we report another 18 deaths statewide who have now been confirmed to have been COVID-19 related causes. Of these, by the way, nine occurred in the past five days. As of the latest hospital data, and Judy has more color on this, there were five deaths reported over the last 24 hours. Again, that's apples to oranges deliberately to make sure we're making folks aware of a different dimension here. Those have yet to be lab-confirmed. Those will show up at some point down the road. The total number of lab-confirmed COVID-19 deaths currently stands at 13,923 lost lives, bless each and every one of them. The count of probable deaths has been updated and lowered somewhat to 1,875.

As we do every day, let's remember three more of the New Jerseyans who we have lost to this pandemic. I want to begin in Hudson County to remember a great couple, Kenneth and Maureen Ciolek, who called Bayonne home for more than 50 years. They each passed away from COVID-19 approximately two and a half weeks apart. Ken was a proud US Army veteran and had worked for the Bayonne based accounting firm, Graziano and Company for the past 15 years.

For the past decade, Maureen had served the people of her hometown in Bayonne City Hall, working in the Mayor's office, the Municipal Court, and the Health Department throughout her time there. According to my dear friend and our dear friend, Mayor Jimmy Davis, and I quote him, "Nobody, and I mean nobody, said hello to more people during the workday than Maureen did. Every single hello from here was accompanied by a

warm smile and a friendly wave or nod of the head.” Jimmy Davis could not have put that better. As much as they loved Bayonne, Ken and Maureen loved spending time with their family, especially their grandchildren, even more. Ken and Maureen leave behind their daughter Jennifer with whom I had the great honor of speaking the other day and their beloved grandchildren, Jackson and Jordan. If my math is right, they are five years and two years old respectively. Maureen also leaves behind her brothers Dennis, Michael, and her sisters, Marie and Michelle. Ken is survived by his brothers Robert and Ronald and his sister Janet. In addition to their grandchildren, Ken and Maureen also leave behind many nieces, nephews, and countless friends. We thank them for their service to their nation and to their community. May God bless and watch over each of them and their family.

Today, we remember David Bennett of Metuchen and a lifelong resident of Middlesex County. David was born and raised in Perth Amboy, but he called Metuchen home for the past 42 years. He was a lawyer having earned degrees in history and political science from the University of Delaware before attaining his Juris Doctorate from Seton Hall Law School. He opened his law practice in Metuchen and he never left. David is remembered as a gentle, generous, and spiritual man. He remained a lifelong member of Temple Beth Mordecai in Perth Amboy.

His brother Bryce with whom I had the honor of speaking – and by the way, Bryce is a landscape architect who over the years has volunteered his time at Island Beach State Park. His brother Bryce summed up his big brother simply as a mensch, always ready to help others, whether it be winning justice for a client or simply helping to care for his late mother. For many, there’s no better way to be remembered. David was also a true sports fan, especially of his beloved New York Mets. He sadly missed them beating up on my Red Sox the past couple of nights, not just following the games, but also constantly adding to his knowledge of history and statistics.

In addition to his little brother Bryce, David leaves behind his sister-in-law, Maggie, and his beloved niece and nephew, Rachel and Samuel. He is also survived by his Uncle Marv and Aunt Marci and many cousins. Of course, he leaves behind a wide circle of friends who will miss his presence and his sense of humor. He dedicated his life to seeking justice for others. May David’s memory be a blessing to all who remember him. Three more lives that COVID-19 has taken away and three more reminders of why we cannot become complacent in our battle against this virus. Think of how the thousands upon thousands of families who have now lost a loved one to COVID-19 feel. That’s just in our state. Think of how you would feel if your own family was among them. Think about that before you go to a crowded house party.

Now, switching gears, a couple of quick ones. The Last Dance World Series continues tonight. These are the regional finals or as a state matter the semi-finals. We congratulate and salute all the teams that have participated but, in particular, the Final Four. Bergen Catholic is facing off against Cranford tonight at TD Bank Park in Bridgewater at 7:00. In the southern region, Bishop Eustace is facing off against the Jackson Jags at FirstEnergy Field in Lakewood at 7:00. The winner of tonight’s games will meet right here in town, Friday night, 7:00, Arm & Hammer Park right here in Trenton. We’ll get a winner of the Last Dance World Series.

You know what? There’s another wrinkle which I learned about last night, Judy and Tina. Bergen County is sponsoring something. They’re called the One More Swing Series. It’s a group of Bergen County high school girl softball coaches got together. The leader of the pack is Erin Kirkby, coach at Pascack Hills. They’ve got 85 seniors, Pat, from all of the Bergen County schools, 85 young women. They’ve virtually got all of the seniors in the entire county who play softball. Only very few missed it.

They’ve split them up into six all-star teams. There are three games back to back to back today in Wood-Ridge hosted graciously by our dear friend, Senator Paul Sarlo and Mayor of Wood-Ridge. Tonight, you’ve got a lot of really good sports going on in New Jersey, both from young men and young women. We wish all of them the very best win, lose, or draw. I think both the One More Swing is a phenomenal idea and the Last Dance as I said is likewise a phenomenal idea. Hats off to everybody, especially the organizers and the folks who came up with this.

Switching gears again, yesterday, we announced that through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, we’re investing an additional \$15 million into the Small Business Emergency Assistance Grant Program that has already helped thousands of enterprises throughout this pandemic. With this latest investment, we will have now put a total of \$70 million into direct assistance for our small business community. I look forward to seeing this funding go out and directly into the accounts of the small businesses we’ll be relying upon in the months to come as we slowly but surely get back on our feet. One of these businesses we need to be full throttle is SuzyQue’s BBQ & Bar in West Orange, a neighborhood fixture since 2011. Founder Susan Hoffberg’s – there she is right there. Her dream has always been to provide the

best barbecue and drinks to her community. SuzyQue's is the manifestation of that dream. In fact, Susan and her team have won best barbecue in Essex County for nine years. Throughout this pandemic with SuzyQue's closed to indoor dining, Susan has found other ways to give back, whether it be providing discounts to town residents, donating gift cards to local charities, and providing meals to frontline workers at Newark Beth Israel Hospital. Because of a \$10,000 grant from the EDA that allowed them to pay bills and expand their outdoor dining capabilities, Susan and SuzyQue's continues to keep working.

I had the pleasure to speaking with Susan on Monday and the chance to thank her for keeping her community spirits up over these past months. The next time – I told her I may – I think I may have been there once already a few years ago, but I said the next time I'm in West Orange, I hope to stop by and thank her personally and her staff for all they're doing every day and maybe pick up a little barbecue while I'm there. Judy, I may get a takeout order for you as well.

So in addition to thanking Suzy and her team, I also thank each of you for all you're doing every day to help us defeat COVID-19. So please don't let up. Please keep wearing your masks and practicing social distancing. Keep washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and please don't attend any crowded house parties where we know coronavirus spreads. We need to keep working at this together. I know it's been a long four months. I know we want to kick back and blow off steam. Who could blame us? But again, we cannot become complacent and we can't take irresponsible risks that put our families, and communities, and friends at risk. We have worked so hard to get to where we are now. We can't slide backward, so keep it up.

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

Department of Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, as the Governor mentioned, we have had several circumstances where indoor and outdoor gatherings in our state have led to community clusters of COVID-19. As he shared, another large outbreak occurred as the result of a graduation party held in Cape May County at the end of June. That party led to 46 COVID-19 cases among New Jersey and Pennsylvania residents between the ages of 16 to 23. Even smaller gatherings can lead to cases. For example, a Father's Day celebration held in Essex County was linked to three cases. There's been an outbreak among Rutgers's football players with 15 of them currently testing positive.

As the Governor shared, in Middletown 55 cases of COVID-19 among 14 to 19 year old residents took place. Social gatherings among lifeguards in LVI resulted in 35 cases, and a graduation party in Westfield resulted in 17 cases. These examples that we've shared today account for more than 125 new cases of COVID-19 in our state. Every single one of those cases has the potential to infect other people; their grandparents, their parents, siblings, friends, loved ones. And if any of their contacts have underlying conditions like cardiovascular disease or diabetes mellitus, the result could be fatal.

As we have said previously, the percentage of our cases that fall between the ages of 18 to 29 continues to increase. For the first three we Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, as the Governor mentioned, we have had several circumstances where indoor and outdoor gatherings in our state have led to community clusters of COVID-19. As he shared, another large outbreak occurred as the result of a graduation party held in Cape May County at the end of June. That party led to 46 COVID-19 cases among New Jersey and Pennsylvania residents between the ages of 16 to 23. Even smaller gatherings can lead to cases. For example, a Father's Day celebration held in Essex County was linked to three cases. There's been an outbreak among Rutgers's football players with 15 of them currently testing positive.

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As we have said previously, the percentage of our cases that fall between the ages of 18 to 29 continues to increase. For the first three weeks in July, the percentage of case among 18 to 29 ranged from 24 to 33% compared to 12% in April and 22% in June. On gathering of individuals outside of their household, no matter the size of the group, it is essentially that residents take precautions. We understand that everyone among 18

to 29 ranged from 24 to 33% compared to 12% in April and 22% in June. On gathering of individuals outside of their household, no matter the size of the group, it is essential that residents take precautions. We understand that everyone wants to spend time with family and friends, especially young people who haven't had the ability to socialize because schools and colleges have been physically close. But we must gather safely, for the sake of your own health and that of your community.

If you are having a gathering, please host it outside. Arrange tables and chairs to allow for social distancing. Being outdoor does not eliminate the need to wear a mask or to social distance. Remind invited guests to stay at home if they've been exposed to the virus in the last 14 days, are showing COVID-19 symptoms, or have been in a state that has a widespread community spread. Ask guests to wear face coverings. Make hand sanitizer available for your guests. Limit the number of people handling or serving food. For example, consider identifying one person to serve all the food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils. Remind guests to wash their hands before serving or eating food. Use single-use hand towels or paper towels for drying hands so guests do not share. Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and any shared items between use when feasible. And consider keeping a list of guests who attended for potential future contact tracing needs. And if someone tests positive, please take the call for each other. For us all, take the call. The contact tracers will be calling, so please cooperate. These steps can help reduce risk of transmission of the virus while we enjoy the company of family and friends.

Moving on to the daily report as the Governor shared, 761 hospitalizations of COVID-19 and positive patients and persons under investigation are in our hospitals with 116 individuals in critical care, one of our lowest numbers, with only 42% of them on ventilators. There are, fortunately, no new cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children.

One previous report was removed from the total because after further investigation, the time frame for prior exposure was incorrect. So right now, there are 54 total cases, not 55, 54 total cases in the state. The children affected, as I have shared, have either tested positive for active COVID-19 or have had positive antibody tests. The ages of the children remain from 1 to 18. Two children are currently hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: white, 54.1%; black, 18.3; Hispanic, 20.3; Asian, 5.6; and other, 1.8. Of the 18 newly reported deaths, only one reported death dates back to June. Seventeen are from July, and our hospitals reported five deaths within the last 24 hours ending 10 PM last evening.

The State Veterans Homes numbers remain the same as do our psych hospital numbers. The overall New Jersey percent positivity is 2.42. The northern part of the state reports 1.32; the central part, 2.01; and the south, 4.08. So that concludes my daily report. Stay connected. Stay safe. Stay healthy. Get tested. Mask up and for each other and for us all, please, take the call. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for that and for everything but that last point, I think I was too kind on the progress that I had indicated that contact tracing was making in terms of folks taking the call the other day. It's not where it needs to be. It's quite clear it's not where it needs to be. We have too much – and it's largely anecdotal, in fairness, but too many anecdotal pieces of evidence that folks are still not taking the call and cooperating at the extent they should. Again, we do not and never will condone illegal behavior, and that includes underage drinking. That is not what this is about. This is about a pandemic, a public health crisis that has the – that we're in the midst of a risk that could spread wildly. You're seeing it spread elsewhere in the country, frankly the world. You saw how it spread here. We need folks to take the call, cooperate. We listed the questions I think on Monday, what you're going to get asked. It has nothing to do with whatever other behavior you are pursuing, which we don't condone, but that's not what this is about, so I appreciate your raising that.

Pat, anything on the compliance or general front? I know you had a, as you regularly do, a summit, a virtual summit with the OEM county folks. Any color you got on that front? And thank you for everything.

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

Nothing to report with regards to the last two nights with regard to executive order compliance. And yes, Governor, with regards to the virtual meeting we had yesterday with all 21 county OEM coordinators beyond our preparedness, response, recovery efforts with COVID-19, we also touched upon hurricane preparedness,

which I know I've spoken about a few times. The best place to go is ready.nj.gov. The time to prepare is not when a hurricane's hitting the Jersey shore, whether that's building an emergency kit for your car, for your house, making sure you're able to support yourselves and your families for an extended period of time without power. And I also point out for you or any family or friends that have any special needs that New Jersey's Special Needs Registry for Disaster Planning is disasterready.nj.gov, which is a tremendous resources. So really, just a commercial with regard to preparedness and making sure that you have a communications plan, understanding that sometimes we're not all together with our families when that happens, and it's important because you do not, as I said, want to be scrambling and preparing as something's hitting off of our east coast. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: And Pat, one more time on the special needs website? Do you mind?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yes, that's registerready.nj.gov and the overall OEM site is ready.nj.gov where you can get not only weather updates but certainly survival guides, emergency kit recommendations, just about everything you need, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: We haven't discussed the heat yet today, folks, but needless to say, that continues to also be a challenge that I think we're all dealing with and cooling centers, you find them at 211. Is that correct? So folks should keep that in mind and again, Judy said this several times over the past couple weeks. Call an elderly neighbor or relative or someone who you think is vulnerable just to check in on them to make sure they've got the air conditioning, that they know what they need to do in order to get to a cool spot. So let's make sure we're doing that.

I think we'll start over here. Brandon's got the mic today. I think we will be – Mahen will be again virtual tomorrow, and then we'll be live with you on Friday at 1 PM unless we find a need to connect with you in some other form between now and then. And with that, Matt, we'll start with you.

Matt Arco, The Star-Ledger: Governor, the CARES Act, which protected tenants from living in homes with federal-backed mortgages from being evicted expired recently. Even though New Jersey residents are protected from being forced out of their home until at least October 5, do you fear that there will be a surge in eviction filings next month, and what's being done to prepare to deal with all these filings that are building up in landlord/tenant court? Also, we've heard from readers who say they're dealing with landlords shutting off utilities and doing other intimidating tactics to try to force them out. The residents say they call 211 but don't ever hear back. How can people report landlords who are being bad actors, and do you know of any landlords that have been penalized for breaking your executive order? And also just curious to get your take on legislation that was introduced that would effectively ban in-person learning at schools this fall.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to ask Matt Platkin with us to potentially come in here on your first couple of questions, Matt. Yeah, I worry. I do worry. I mean, you've given me another opportunity, which I appreciate, by the way, to reiterate that the federal government plays an existential unique role in even regular, normal times but in a time like this, there's nobody else that can play the role the federal government can play. And that includes cash on the barrel for entities and individuals who need it the most and to backstop with programs that protect folks, particularly in their deepest, darkest hour of need, and that's people who are potentially on the verge of getting tossed out of their homes. I'm proud of all the steps we've taken to make sure that doesn't happen, but we need the federal government along with us as a partner, and I do worry about it.

I don't have a specific accounting of bad actors for you, but we can follow up on that with you. My advice is go to this website, covid19.nj.gov and there is a – Mahen, you can help me out with what the page is actually called. For lack of a better word, a complaint page. We need to know about those situations. And by the way, if you or any other member of the press are aware of specific situations – we've said this about unemployment insurance – I'd certainly extend it to this in terms of people who are being tossed out or highlighting bad actor landlords. And by the way, as usual, most landlords are good actors, so I don't want to overstate and damn an entire community, but I would say go into covid19.nj.gov. Mahen will tell me if I've got the right name of the page before we break.

No comment on specific legislation, as usual, but just to reiterate the principles that are guiding us on schools right now – by the way, it's higher ed. I just had a really good meeting with Rutgers's new president Jonathan Holloway, who's a star and is going to do great things on behalf of Rutgers and our higher

education community. And by the way, more broadly, the throw-weight of that institution has that office has – that he personally has I think will change the state for the good over the years he's with us, and I hope there are many.

The principles on the pre-K through 12 that guide us are one, let's all accept this is not going to be a normal school year. This is going to be unusual no matter how we slice it. Secondly, as we did with the remote learning announcement at the end of the week, flexibility is a key watchword here, giving parents, school districts, educators flexibility to allow if remote learning makes sense. Then that's something we want to make sure that flexibility exists. And by the way, that frees up capacity in the classroom, and I know that's something that educators rightfully feel strongly about.

Beyond that, the guiding lights for us will be health and safety of kids, educators, administrators, families. Secondly, to try to achieve the very best educational outcomes, we can. We know this unequivocally, that in-person education dwarfs any remote learning in terms of the efficacy and the richness of that experience. And thirdly, equity. One size does not fit all here. Not everybody's got the luxury to hire a tutor or have a separate room in the house to put Johnny or Sally in to do their remote learning. Now we have solved a big piece of the equity challenge through the steps we're taking to close the digital divide, and we're proud of that, and we are – that's a huge element that allowed us to offer that remote flexibility, but not everybody can take up that option and especially in communities of color. There is a much higher reliance on in-person education as the only viable option. And so it's health, education, equity. Those are the three principles that will continue to guide us and I hope will guide all the districts as they're putting their finishing touches on their plans. And as we said many times, just as when we closed, we asked each district to give – as we gave the broad parameters, they gave us the plans and one by one, we reviewed them and approved them through the Department of Education with a big dose of input from the Department of Health. That's the same process we'll go through in reopening. Thank you.

Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. So election officials still want to know whether the general election is going to be held entirely through vote-by-mail ballots or whether there's going to be in-person voting again. Where's your head at on that issue now and have you consulted with legislative leadership on it? Separately from that, do you have any plans to institute in-person early voting for the general election? And then the two-day window for late-arriving mail-in ballots that was used for the May races, then we had ballot rejections in the double-digits, sometimes in the 20s. But the week-long grace period seems to have dropped that to about 2%. Do you think that that should be extended into the future maybe for the general, and would you consider a longer period? And I got one last one for you, which is do you still plan to go to Milwaukee for the convention?

Governor Phil Murphy: As it relates to the first three questions, I think you and David should consider applying for a position at the Secretary of State's office because you know more about this than I do. So all kidding aside, not going to Milwaukee. I can say that definitively, at least as of everything I know right now, although very excited. I know the DNC has not put their plans out completely but based on what we know, it should be an exciting largely virtual event. We have not made a decision yet on the general election, but Matt will correct me if he disagrees. That's a decision we want to make I think probably at latest by the middle of August, and that is as much – by the way, we continue to see the election on July 7th as largely if not overwhelmingly successful, although we are still doing our after action work, as you can imagine. And we want to get this right.

I would say if anything, the in-person side of the equation is the side that needed more robust attention and a longer runway. So the urgency – ironically, I didn't think I'd be saying this to get a decision by the middle of August is actually as much for the in-person – it's more, I think, for the in-person side to make sure we've got that – assuming we went – as you know, our aspiration was 50% capacity by county, was at least one polling location per municipality. We want to make sure that that's not just words, that that actually happens if that's the route that we end up going.

I'm a huge believer in early voting, period. I need legislation. We've not, for whatever reason, been able to get it in this state, and I think it makes complete states. Just think about that for a second. If you're a senior, if you're vulnerable, if you – for whatever reason, you're working 80 hours a week and if you knew that it wasn't

just vote-by-mail, which is a huge flexibility that takes some steam off of the – takes some steam out of the challenge, but if you think of not just having one day to vote but you had one place per county that was open for 30 days, say, before the election, and you knew you had that option and it wasn't reliant of the fact you had to work on election day or the weather was unforgiving. I continue to love it as an option.

Too early to tell on the seven days. As you rightfully point out, we extended it from – it's got to be postmarked by – your mail-in ballot's got to be postmarked by election day but to your good question, we extended the amount of days by which it could be counted because of all the challenges at the US Postal Service and again, we were pounding away on that front all that time. It clearly made a difference. Should we go out further? To be determined. Don't have a crisp answer but obviously that's a list of considerations. Matt, do you want to add anything?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Just yeah, two quick things. One is, as the Governor mentioned, we're doing after action, so we're engaging directly with the clerks, the county board of elections, Secretary of State's office, as well. Just yeah, two quick things. One is, as the Governor mentioned, we're doing after action, so we're engaging directly with the clerks, the county boards of elections, Secretary of State's office, as well as taking incoming from the various campaigns that saw how things played out on the ground. I think the general feedback is that July was largely successful, still obviously need to identify some areas where we can improve. Governor identified one, working through those issues and hope to have guidance out as soon as we can and as soon as the Governor can make a decision.

Then, Gov, just wanted to add one thing to Matt's question earlier. Matt, as you know, the Governor signed a law and a subsequent executive order that implemented an eviction moratorium that extends as long – extends past the point when the public health emergency would extend to, and then we've been actively working with the legislature on a bill that would provide extended periods of time for repayment for back-rent. Working very cooperatively on the legislature on that bill and we're hoping to get it to the Governor's desk soon so we can provide relief for renters.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. You okay on that or you have something else? Real quick.

Matt Arco, The Star-Ledger: So I don't know if I heard your answer to whether or not you've spoken to legislative leaders about what November will look like in terms of those races.

Governor Phil Murphy: We've had general conversations. I don't recall a specific one. I spoke to the Senate President yesterday and the Speaker the night before, but they weren't – it wasn't on what voting will look like.

Matt Arco, The Star-Ledger: Then the last one is –

Governor Phil Murphy: But we will, obviously, as we did before the primary.

Matt Arco, The Star-Ledger: Election officials also tell us that there's a pretty significant difference between August 1st and August 15th for a decision. Does that move you towards an earlier decision in any way or are you still going with mid-August?

Governor Phil Murphy: Different months, same question. Mid-August is plenty. Thank you. Alex, back to you. Oh, sorry, before I go on, Matt Arco, back to you. Covid19.nj.gov/renter is the place you should go, slash-renter. Pardon me.

Reporter: Thank you, Governor. On the travel advisory, 36 states are on it right now. What point does travel advisory become, for lack of a better word, ridiculous if most of the country is on it and you're basically telling New Jerseyans never to leave the state? I wanted to ask both you and the Health Commissioner about those higher spot positivity levels in South Jersey. How concerning are they and could they be because there's a large amount of commerce and travel in South Jersey between Delaware and Pennsylvania, more so than in northern parts of the state? And just along those lines, Governor, would you at any point decide to put a travel advisory in place for Pennsylvania? And if so, how disruptive do you feel that would be?

Governor Phil Murphy: How what would it be?

Reporter: How disruptive?

Governor Phil Murphy: Disruptive, okay. Judy, I'll jump in and then can you come in behind me? Yeah, you're – the premise of your question's a good one. You got 36 states. There are only 50 plus you've got Washington, DC and Puerto Rico on that list. Having said that, there's still an enormous amount of travel of New Jerseyans historically among the states that are not on the list, which are almost entirely at this point – not entirely but there's a whole bunch of contiguous ones right up through New England. So it's New Jersey – it's Pennsylvania, New Jersey, obviously, New York, and then the six New England states. So it's still meaningful because there's an enormous amount of natural travel, vacation or otherwise, schools that would go on.

I'll jump to the last question. Delaware is on that list. It brings me no joy that they're on the list. I know Governor Carney has – I love the guy and he's not thrilled about that, and he's made that known. It's a moneyball decision. So this is not a subjective decision. This is a decision that New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut take together based on a formula. It's a seven-day average, 10 new positives per 100,000 residents or 10% or more spot positivity. I do think that Judy and her health commissioner colleagues in those states constantly look at to make sure they still think the formula is the right formula. And for the foreseeable, unless you hear otherwise, it is. Any restriction of travel or – shouldn't say restriction but advisory with a quarantine from a neighbor is not easy. We've seen it with Delaware, and so I'm sure there would be some disruption. But again, it's not a subjective call. I worry about any increase in positivity, but I'm not a medical expert. We're up a little bit over yesterday. Yesterday, we were below two. We've been hovering. If you read the past – may I? The past seven days, I'm going to being today and go backward: 2.42, 187, 172, 237, 192, 236, 288, so today's reporting, these are tests as of July 25, second highest in the seven-day period. And as Judy noted, the north and central number is basically one and a half to two and you got a higher number in the south. I assume there's a big shore activity piece of this, I would think. Any thoughts you've got on that?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: First, I'm on a call weekly now with the commissioners from New York and Connecticut. I was on a call last evening and one of the things we're tracking is the impact of travel on our states. We did identify in New Jersey one case from travel from Delaware. However, we have had no other travel-related cases. And Connecticut reports the same. I'm not sure about New York.

We talk about the casual shopping trip, whether it's to Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, and the impact that that might have. We set our parameters the same. Last night, our discussion was on the two criteria that we're looking at right now. And Tina will be getting a call because the conclusion was that we're going to get the epidemiologists from the three states and look again at the criteria and determine if we should add or change them. At this point, we don't think we should. That was a decision we made last night, so it's a constant discussion.

How do you move kids into school? If a kid comes into school, to a college campus and comes from a state that's on the list, does that student have to quarantine? The answer's yes, and we're communicating with higher ed with some of those decisions, and that will be the same in New York and Connecticut. So it's a constant discussion on this one.

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

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. On the increased cases, are you certain that a good proportion of that isn't because of the technical issues you had last week and now those numbers are being reflected late? On schools, do you expect any more guidance in the next several days or couple weeks given the concerns and proposals to delay the school year and begin it remotely? And how do you square the logic of letting students and teachers back into schools, particularly ones like STA districts with poor ventilation while keeping other indoor activities closed because they also don't have good ventilation? At least one school district has presented the Department of Education with a plan for all remote learning starting in September. Will the department consider that or will it reject all remote-only plans? Do you have any update on where you're at with distributing technology to students? And then on prison inmates, there's continued concern that your order allowing at-risk inmates to go home during the pandemic has not been meaningfully carried out because just a few hundred people have gone home. Do you consider the order a success and has it accomplished what you had hoped? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. There may be some technical noise around the numbers, but the numbers I think we think are largely these people – these are positive tests in New Jersey and as I said, over the past four days, Judy, over 2,000. There's just no denying it. Brandon, before you run away, I missed your second question about school. Do we expect guidance? Is that what you said?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Any other guidance under consideration given the fact that you have these concerns and you have these proposals to delay opening a school.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, so there's no – I don't know when we'll have any further guidance but obviously the clock is ticking here for the school year, so we'll be talking about it a lot over the next couple of weeks. I've got nothing specific on that.

Listen, these calls are really hard, so you ask a fair question about students and teachers indoors. Hopefully with all the parameters that we've talked about – capacity management, social distancing, face covering, hyper hygiene of surfaces, of hands, and so all of that and then you have to think of the alternative. And I think that's the thing that we have to keep in mind. It's health, it's education, it's equity. And we have many places up and down this state, too many places, where there's no other choice. And so the choice – and by the way, it's easy for me to say this in late July, and I admit that. If you can't dine indoors, you have the choice to eat outdoors. That exists. You can eat at home. You can do takeout. We have too many kids where the second choice either doesn't exist or it's so far inferior that gathering them safely and responsibly – that's not ignoring the health realities. Again, the order is health, education, equity. We want to get all three of them. There's no real Plan B, and so we just have to keep that in mind. Again, this is not a normal school year. Anybody who thinks that or walks into that with their mindset is not paying attention.

I won't comment on any district. We take all the inputs and reports on how they want to reopen seriously, so – and we'll take – I don't want to speak for the Department of Education or for Judy, but we'll look at each one of these plans and look at the dimensions around that particular district and how their plan fits in. As I mentioned many times, we have mentioned many times, no two school districts are alike. I've got no new update on the distribution of technology to students but Mahen, can you follow up with Dustin and if there is an update on that front?

And in terms of the amount of folks who are in our criminal justice system who have gone home, I think it's more than a few hundred, Matt. We can get you an exact number. Dustin, I don't have it right in front of me. It's a significant amount. It's been a vulnerable community. We talked about it a lot in the first couple of months, Judy, right? In terms of the spread of the virus and there has been loss of life both in the inmate community as well as the staff community. Thank God it has improved in the first couple of months, Judy, right? In terms of the spread of the virus and there has been loss of life both in the inmate community as well as the staff community. Thank God it has improved meaningfully and I can't give you, as they say, a specific number, but we'll get that to you. But I think an element of that improvement has been the reduction in capacity. So we're going to look back on all of this and do post-mortems, trust me, on what worked and what didn't work. But balancing the public safety issues, Pat, on the one hand, we've spoke to some specific issues here a month or so ago that involve the state police. But balancing public safety with public health, based on what I know, I think it has contributed positively to the reality. We'll get you the numbers later.

Sir, do you have anything? You're good?

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. Couple for you and then one for the Commissioner. First off, is there any timeline on reopening the state's unemployment offices for in-person appointments? Why are they still closed if agencies like the MVC have already opened? Couple on education: we know that you don't comment on pending legislation but the date in the assembly education committee's plan is only to have remote virtual instruction until October 31st. With concerns only heightening among families and educators, how firm are you that in-person instruction will start in September? Also, has the state considered providing any subsidies for working parents who will have to pay for childcare, in some cases significantly higher monthly costs when schools reopen with the hybrid model? Additionally for the Commissioner, last week you mentioned that federal funding for New Jersey to create a statewide public/private model for testing. Can you describe more detail about the statewide model? Will this help us eliminate backlogs that are a result of the nationwide surge? How else will the statewide model benefit New Jersey's fight against COVID? Was it difficult to secure the funding for this as other states experience surges and need similar support?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, want me to start and then hand over to you? Unlike other agencies – and MVC is a good example of this – there's really no difference in what an unemployment claimant can do in person versus over the phone. So in terms of where our resources and manpower are, opening in-person actually we believe would lead to less, not more claimants being served, and that's why we've taken that decision.

Again, I'm not going to comment on the legislation because we don't comment on it. You said with a rising chorus. With all due respect, there's a strong chorus on both sides of this. I'll focus my answer specifically on the equity piece where – and I'm not going to name any districts that can probably far more easily have the extra room in the house or afford the tutor or have maybe more than one device that works. But there are lots of communities in our state that don't look like that and where in-person education is not only a richer experience but it is an essential experience with no other alternative. So I would say with all due respect to whether it's legislation or interests that are making their voices known, including, by the way, which we respect parents and educators and in some cases superintendents, in some cases kids. There's no one-size-fits-all here, and I cannot say that strongly enough.

Yeah, I mean, listen, I wish I had – childcare is part of the equity point, right? So you got a lot of families in this state where both mom and dad – either both mom and dad or you got a single parent and they have no choice but to work. and so therefore, if you don't provide them that alternative, they're cornered in terms of having to find some way to take care of their child if their child is not in physical – in a physical classroom. And that's a real issue. Now we're not sitting on a pile of money, I promise you, which you've heard from us many times. It is another opportunity for me to say if Congress could come across the goal line with a big slug of federal cash and the President were to sign that, that could make a difference on something like that. We could make a much bigger difference for unemployed folks or small businesses or in the healthcare arena and be even more robust, begin much more aggressively addressing the inequities in the healthcare reality that we're facing. So it's a good question and we can't forget that if you make – the hip bone is connected to the thigh bone. You make a decision about education here. You trigger other decisions and other needs over there.

Judy, the last question, please.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Sure, the RFP for the public/private partnership was posted at the end of last week. Our goal is to increase capacity, increase our testing, and decrease the turnaround time that we're seeing not only in our state but nationally. The funding is coming from the CDC. Dr. Tom Kern who is the head of our labs is in charge of the selection process with a group in the Department of Health. He's done a wonderful job putting out the RFP and our hope is that our hospitals will increase their capacity, new equipment, more manpower, and have the ability to decrease – rely on ourselves, decrease the turnaround time, and reach out into the community not only doing their own inpatients and outpatients but reach out into the community and provide testing for our vulnerable populations.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. Thank you, sir. Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Hi, good afternoon. On the transmission rate, how much a difference is there between, say, 1 and 1.14, or for that matter, 1 and 1.5? I understand that anything above one is cause for concern, but what's the perspective on the tenth and hundredths of a percentage increase? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: I will say, as if I had to say this, I am not the most qualified person to answer that question. But there is some logarithmic element to this, so it's not – I will put – Tina's going to have to address this on behalf of all of us, but going – my supposition is 0.9 to 1 is not the same as 1 to 1.1. Tina, please.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Again, the RT refers to for every one case that you have, the number then refers to the number of possible other individuals who might potentially get infected. I think again, we have to remember that the RT is based on a model and models have a lot of assumptions behind them. There are other elements that might impact whether the RT actually translates to what you actually see in reality. For example, in our epidemic curves that we see a number of cases over time because again, the assumptions are based on a certain point in time. It is based on whether or not certain precautions are already taking place such as the distancing, the level of compliance with face coverings, the level of compliance with social distancing, the level of compliance with not going to house parties, for example, and

the like. So that's why, again, getting back to looking at a lot of other metrics like the hospitalizations, like looking at the cases over time, like looking at the positivity, like looking at our [inaudible 1:02:13] surveillance about COVID-like illnesses showing up in our EDs. That's what we look at in combination.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is a non-medical answer, admittedly. I just feel like if we don't get out and get ahold of it and yank it back in, it could get away from us. Do you have the chart of the RT handy? Is that possible? Just to remind folks of – look at how bad it was in late March, 5.31. I mean, it's just hard to – and at one point, that feels like yesterday. At another point, it feels like 20 years ago, but again, I'm saying this as a non-medical fact. We just – and I think we all – with expertise to my right and for Pat and me and the rest of us, it's just – it's nothing but the facts moneyball, and the reality is we know – this was Tina's last point. This is good news. We know exactly what needs to be done to go out, grab it, and pull it back, so we know that, some of which are habits that are happening that can't continue to happen – indoor, close congregation, house parties with no face covering. Others are things we know have worked to chop it down from 5x to 1-ish. Face coverings, social distancing, and I'd say thirdly the way we have both closed and reopened the state. And so we just – that number getting under one is both psychologically and literally scientifically a big hurdle for us. And let's please God get back to it.

Welcome back.

Reporter: Thanks for having me. Governor, Princeton, Monmouth, they've cancelled all fall sports. Yesterday, New Jersey Athletic Conference cancelled all fall sports. If you had to take a guess right now, do you see this trend being duplicated on the high school level here in New Jersey this coming fall? Do you see a lot of that happening?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it?

Reporter: That's all I got for you.

Governor Phil Murphy: As I sit here on July – what is it, 29? I lean no, that I don't see it happening, and I say that for two reasons, and this is clearly subject to reassessment as we go forward. So I'm saying this as of this day and this is not necessarily a forever and for always. A big element – so the big moving parts on sports in my humble opinion have been do you have fans or not? We made the statement both with the Jets, Giants, with Rutgers, with any other school that may have fall sports, that our outdoor gathering number is not going up for the foreseeable future. So that's 500 people socially distant. These Last Dance, World Series games, you can't get into the stadium without a face covering, and the compliance is 100% or you get tossed or asked to put it on. So we know one moving part was fans congregating.

Another moving part is where do you live and what does that circumstance look like? And the third one – these are the big ones, at least I think. And the third one is are you traveling? Are they either coming to visit you or you going to them? And again, as was mentioned, Alex is gone but 36 states on the watchlist. So I think it's – again, I'm not a commissioner of a professional league, but it's why I believe at least MLS, NWSL, WNBA, NBA, by locating even in the case of some of them in a hotspot community, and three of those four were in Florida, that they were able to control not just attendance but travel and where they're living.

So as I see high school sports – first of all, you're seeing a good run around the track of the Last Dance. Two teams, to the best of my knowledge, dropped. One of them was in Middletown. I forget the second out of 222. So 220 teams were able to play however long they were able to stay alive in the tournament. We're seeing the last swing tonight. That's a much more smaller back-to-back series of softball games. You can't control unless you're at a private boarding school where somebody lives. In high school, they're living with their family, so we have to keep asking for personal responsibility and for the most part, that's been good. These house parties are not good but for the most part, that's been good. We're limiting attendance and asking folks to wear face coverings. And there's no out-of-state travel. So it's a long-winded answer but for all those reasons, as I sit here today, I think it's more likely than not we have fall high school sports.

Real quick.

Reporter: A follow-up. So if there's no in-school teaching, how are they going to have practices at the school? I mean, I guess it's – don't they go hand-in-hand?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, that's a hypothetical, which I won't answer because that's not where I am and that's not the parameters we put out are health, education, equity, and that's where we'll stay. But in the narrow question right now on this day do I see it, I more likely than not do see it. Outdoors, by the way, outdoors. I think it's going to be harder when we turn to the winter. Please, God, this virus has been beaten to the ground, that we've got national policies, that are mentioned, that we're not relying only on the weakest link among us but when we turn inside for wrestling, or basketball, or gymnastics, or hockey or whatever it might be, that's going to be a lift, and we all have to accept that.

Thank you. I'm going to speak on the face coverings, throw it on. Judy and Tina, thank you for everything, as always. Pat, likewise. Jared, Matt, Mahen, the team. We'll be back unless you hear otherwise from us at 1 o'clock on Friday, virtually tomorrow. Again, the overwhelming great behavior, compliance – we kind of knew this. Pat, we've talked about this and this is why the compliance assessment gets more complicated. We went into this with our eyes open, Judy, that when you don't allow indoor bars, which we know has been a huge source of infection in many states across the country and in countries around the world. To some extent, we knew that some of this stuff would go underground. The rate and just pure volume of that going underground is completely unacceptable right now. I can't speak for law enforcement, but I know Pat joins me that that's something that we're not going to allow to continue to be out there, whether it's at the state level, county, or local level. We'll have no choice but to take steps on that front because again, you have a party with 700 people, you're not giving law enforcement a choice at that point.

But folks, for the most part, overwhelmingly great behavior. We got to shake that bad habit out of our system immediately. Indoor gatherings with close proximity, no face coverings have got to come to an end if we want to get to the things that we all want to get to, which are the indoor dining experience with parameters, to get back to going to movie theaters, whatever it might be, to ensure that we do have high school sports in the fall. If we don't shake this bad habit out of the system, we put all of that in peril. Thank you all. God bless you.

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