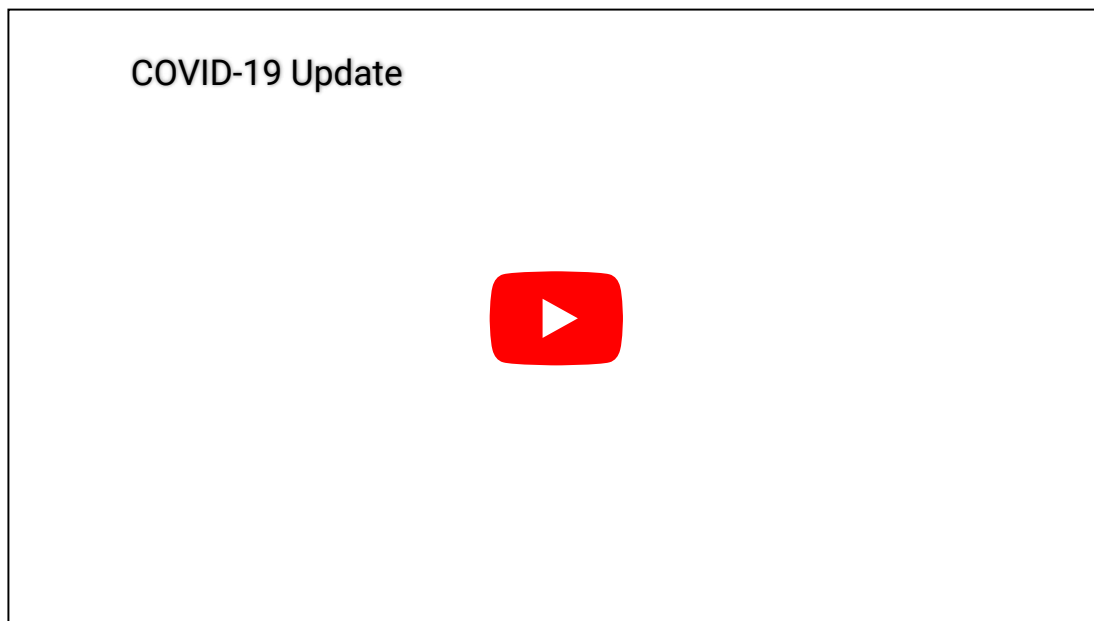


Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: March 19th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

03/19/2020



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody. As you can see, we've moved venues, because we want to practice what we preach, and that is giving you all enough personal space but also giving ourselves up here enough personal space. So I don't want anyone to think that I've had a falling out with Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth. Chris is with us on stage right and he's available for any questions that you may have. Honored to be joined, and by the way, Sheila Oliver I want to give a big shout out to. She and I determined overnight that we're probably better to divide and conquer, and we have a lot of balls in the air, as you can imagine. So she sends her best wishes and I want to give her a huge, huge shout out in absentia. Up on the dais with me to my right, again, the woman who needs no introduction, our Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli. To her right, our state's Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan. To my immediate left, the Hackensack Meridian Health CEO and dear friend, Bob Garrett. Bob, great to have you with us. And to his left, again, another man who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan.

So to Judy, who herself is an Italian American, and whose late husband, Tony, was an Italian American, I want to say to you and all the Italian Americans up and down the great state of New Jersey, Happy St. Joseph's Day. This is a big day in the Italian American calendar every year, and I want to give a shout out to all of our Italian American brothers and sisters up and down the state.

So several things. Oh, by the way, I'm sorry, I forgot. I skipped over an important player here today and I

 Back
to top

apologize. Our Secretary of State Tahesha Way is in the house. Tahesha, thank you so much for joining us. And there's a particular reason why you're here, as you know, but I apologize for that and it's great to have you.

So a couple of things. Number one, I had a conference call yesterday afternoon, as I think I had said yesterday that I would, with leaders in our healthcare systems, both CEOs and labor representatives. And I expressed, among other things to them, our gratitude for their continued hard work and selflessness. We know this crisis is putting an enormous strain on their resources, and we're all working together to make sure that our frontline health responders have what they need to not only save lives, but to keep safe themselves. So Bob is one of the leaders of one of our biggest systems. I greatly appreciate your time to be here to give us, today, a much-needed perspective.

And we had a really good back-and-forth discussion. Topics that came up, consistent approach to things like training and equipment across all of our health systems. In fact, there's a working group that came out of the call yesterday to make sure there was that consistency. And access to equipment, daycare, which has become a big item, other sources of anxiety. And I don't know where we would be without our healthcare systems and without our healthcare workers right now.

I separately had a call with representatives from up and down the state, representatives of our educator community and just walked through the rationale that we had applied to closing the public and private schools in the state, some of the thought that went into that, some of the things that we're looking at in terms of execution of that plan. Particularly, as I've mentioned many times, to those who have food insecurity, to those questions related to remote learning, daycare, etc. And I also asked the educators, as I have asked in each of these sessions, to make sure our young people realize that they're not immune. That they themselves, and I think sadly, Judy, if I'm not wrong, and Christina, the data shows around the world that young people are getting a little bit more sick from this than had been the case a week or two ago. But even more importantly, even if you're the picture of health, you could unwittingly pass this to an older generation member, including in your family. So we had a good call.

Our Director of the Office of Homeland Security Jared Maples is here. I previewed yesterday that Jared would chair an Interfaith Advisory Council call this morning. I'm happy to say that took place and I think it was a wild success in terms of sort of going through our approach and answering questions. And again, I want to thank you. It's got 3,500 members, any idea how many were on the call? Several hundred were on the call, which is a nice hit rate from up and down the state. I also want to acknowledge that Dan Kelly is here from my office, who is responsible for Emergency Preparedness and Response. Dan will join me and others, Pat Callahan, I assume Jared and Judy and others, later today at The Rock, first for a VTC with at least the Vice President and perhaps the President and their teams, to get an update from the White House, and then immediately after that an in-person meeting with the leadership of the Army Corps of Engineers. Thank you in advance for that.

As I mentioned, for the reason that Secretary Tahesha Way is with us, I've just signed an executive order pertaining to upcoming elections and ensuring that our democratic process works throughout this crisis, which I'll outline in a moment, and I know Tahesha will add some detail to that.

So first, since yesterday, we have received 318 new positive test results, six of those through the DOH labs and the other 312 through our private sector and healthcare provider networks. Our statewide total is 742. If you added yesterday's to 318, you might get a different number and that's just going to be the case, folks. We're going to have duplicates, we're going to have folks who may have been out-of-staters who got tested in New Jersey for whatever reason. The official number is now 742. Those numbers will be released as soon as they're available. As I said to you yesterday, because of the VTC that we have with the White House, we're doing this press gathering earlier in the day, which means it's a little bit more of a scramble for Judy and her team to get the right numbers, although we've got them, she'll go through those numbers by counties.

Let me just say as clearly as I can, we have expected these numbers. As you combine a reality of at least some community spread with an aggressive expansion of testing -- more on that later -- we knew the number

of positive results would go up. And I will tell you right now, as I sit here on March 19, these numbers will, I am certain sooner than later, go into the many thousands. And I want to make sure folks out there listening today, as we've said all along, we expect that to happen.

We expect it to happen for a couple of reasons. As I mentioned already, some amount of community spread and I'll let the experts address that. And then separately, we are aggressively expanding testing. A lot more people will get tests at Hackensack, in the private, in the drive-throughs which we'll talk about in a minute, in other locations. We have believed since day one and this goes back to conversations our team had in January, and then we established our statewide task force, whole of government task force on February 2. We have believed that the extent to which we could get the equipment, the personnel, the PPE, in addition to the swabs and that we had testing capacity, we were completely supportive and remain completely supportive of folks getting tested.

Judy will get into this. Folks with symptoms are the highest priority. And within that group, health care workers are the even higher priority, and Judy will get to that in a few moments. So folks, we expected this. These numbers are going to go up. They're going to go up, one person's opinion, into the many thousands. Again, we are doing everything we can to break the back of that curve, flatten it, spread this out, take pressure off the healthcare system as a result, save lives as a result. And by the way, by the insurance policy as we're doing with the Army Corps of Engineers, expand our capacity on the healthcare side, assuming we need that, maybe perhaps in advance of our success in flattening the curve. So I want there to be no, no doubt about this.

There are sadly four additional fatalities that we can report, bringing the total to date to nine. Commissioner Persichilli will have details on those individuals. And I join her and all of us in sending our deepest condolences to their families.

There are multiple testing locations currently, and opening across the state. And again, Judy and her team could speak to these, particularly the opening tomorrow up in Bergen County. We anticipate, speaking of which, the FEMA-backed testing location at Bergen County College will be up and running, Chris, tomorrow, you'll be good to go? And I plan to visit this site, and our daily briefing tomorrow, in fact, will be held at Bergen County College, and more details on that in a moment.

Additionally, I am ordering effective 8:00 p.m. tonight the closure of all personal care businesses which cannot comply with social distancing guidelines. That includes barbershops and hair salons, spas, nail and eyelash salons, tattoo parlors, among others, and social clubs until further notice. Again, those will be closed this evening beginning at 8:00 p.m. We are as aggressive as any American state in the steps that we've taken but we reserve the right, as I've just announced to each and every day, if not each and every hour, to revisit the steps we've taken and to assess, at least at this point, whether or not we should take further steps. So watch that space.

Now, as I mentioned, I've signed an executive order unrelated to what I just said, although related in the bigger sense, an executive order regarding upcoming elections. Under this order, in addition to in-person submission of candidate petitions, the Secretary of State will allow candidate petitions to be submitted electronically. The Secretary of State's office will also be creating an online petition form through which voters may submit signatures for candidate petitions by the March 30th deadline. And again, Tahesha, tell me if I'm wrong, but the operative website is elections.nj.gov.

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: That is correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: And you'll hear from Tahesha in a few moments. Let me be clear, the March 30 petition deadline remains intact and this online platform will be shared with county and municipal clerks. No one, however, no one should be out gathering signatures physically. We want to see all signature collection moving to the online platforms that will be opened. Candidates with already completed petition forms should turn those in by March 30. Those will count. Now they should be focusing completely and exclusively on collecting any remaining signatures online.

As for the elections themselves, the March 21st special election in the Fire District of Old Bridge; the March 31st special elections in both Atlantic City and West Amwell Township; and all April 21st school elections, all of those elections I've just mentioned, will be moved to Tuesday, May 12th, the same day as regularly scheduled nonpartisan municipal elections. Additionally these elections, these elections specifically, will all be conducted through vote by mail only. Again, let me repeat this.

The March 21st special election in the Fire District of Old Bridge; the March 31st special elections in both Atlantic City and West Amwell Township; and all of the April 21st school elections will be moved to Tuesday, May 12th, the same day as the regularly scheduled nonpartisan municipal elections, and all of the above will be conducted through vote by mail only.

At this time, there are no changes being announced for our scheduled June 2nd primary elections, aside from the changes to the petition procedures I just announced. However, we will not hesitate to act if this emergency requires us to do so. Again, at this moment, no changes to the June 2nd elections. There is no greater right in a democracy than the right to vote. Over the years, people have quite literally given their lives for their right to vote. But given the current emergency, we want to make sure everyone is safe in voting. As I mentioned, I will ask Secretary Way, in a few moments, to speak to her office's efforts on this.

As we know, as you likely know, the State Senate is in session today, working on legislation aimed at aiding our emergency response. We intend to swiftly review these bills, as we have and are doing as it relates to what's come to us from the Assembly, as they come to us. I thank explicitly Senate President Steve Sweeney, and Speaker Craig Coughlin and their members for their partnership and their efforts in this historic time in our state's and nation's history.

One of these measures would give the governor the explicit authority through Executive Order to suspend the removal of individuals pursuant to foreclosures or eviction proceedings. So I will depart from my norm of not commenting on bills that have not yet come to my desk and say that I will be signing both this bill the moment it comes to my desk this afternoon, and moments later, an Executive Order pursuant to this law that will immediately suspend all removal of individuals as a result of evictions or foreclosures. And in doing so, New Jersey's residents and families will have protections as expansive as any state in the United States. No one and I repeat, no one in New Jersey should fear being kicked out of their home in this emergency.

These actions come on the heels of yesterday's announcements by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development that it is suspending all evictions and foreclosures on HUD-backed properties for 60 days, and by both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, that they are suspending all foreclosures and evictions for at least 60 days for their mortgage holders. Along these same lines, I will reiterate my words from Tuesday, and urge in the strongest possible terms, banks and lenders to do what they can for their mortgage customers to make loan repayment much more flexible in the coming weeks and months. We simply cannot have families already anxious over their health anxious about whether they're going to lose a roof over their heads.

I and we are particularly cognizant of the very real economic anxiety being felt by workers in the hardest hit sectors, those who work by the hour, or those who are working in the gig economy. Last night, we received Dan Kelly in particular received word that the Small Business Administration had approved our application for small businesses to apply for federal disaster loans. Now Dan oversaw our state's response to Superstorm Sandy, so this is not abstract for Dan and his team. They have lived this, so this caution comes from experience. This is certainly good news. But – and this is a but – I would urge all but the hardest hit businesses, those who are facing literally life and death decisions right now, to take a step back if at all possible. This is actually a lesson we learned in the wake of Superstorm Sandy when homeowners and small businesses were pushed to apply for disaster loans, only to learn later that they could have been eligible for grants that were made available later on.

We're going to fight alongside our federal delegation, and they're doing an extraordinary job by the way, and those from our neighboring states. And again, the more strength we have in terms of numbers, the higher the likelihood we will get success in some of the big asks we have. We're going to continue to fight for stimulus

packages that includes small business grants, and in that we will fight to ensure that any loans provided now could be paid down by grant funds later on. If anybody's got in particular questions after we break today, Dan Kelly's your man off to stage left.

As I said Tuesday, we hope to be able to stand up a state business assistance program shortly. The Economic Development Authority is able to help guide small businesses in making these decisions. And I encourage any business owners with questions to go to the New Jersey Business Action Center's COVID-19 information page, which is cv.business.nj.gov. I also want to say that our economics team and the Economic Development Authority are working on what I would call a Jobs NJ, which we announced earlier this year, as an initiative to better marry more seamlessly employers with employees. They're actually working on an emergency COVID-19 version of Jobs NJ in the sort of here and now. What's available, who's out of work, and we've got a lot of folks out of work, and those numbers are going up and not down. How can we best and most quickly match those two communities?

I started banging the table yesterday, and I want to reiterate that we're in conversations with our neighboring states, in particular New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, to make an explicit, multi-state plea with the administration, beginning with the President, as well as the leadership in Congress, for a massive block grant program. So if you're a state like ours right now, where you've got enormous devastation in the worker community, in the small business community, New Jersey is at the frontlines doing everything we can, but the meter is running and it's running in a big way. We need back and fill from the federal government. No one state, never mind New Jersey, has enough money to continue to do what we're doing. So I want to pound the table, that the best, most effective, quickest way we can stay in the game for our workers, for our small businesses, is to get federal block grants, which requires Congress to pass that and for a President to sign it.

You know, we were doing some math last night. We think across the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, what's that number look like? I think it's at least \$100 billion, with a B, US dollars. But that's the best money any state can get right now, because it allows us to stay right at the point of attack, not worry about the back end meter that is running right now in New Jersey, but to be there for our people and our businesses.

I also want to add that NJ Transit just submitted a letter to our Congressional Delegation with a very crisp estimate of the huge shortfall they will be facing between now, and I think they went out to the end of fiscal 2021. That number is \$1.25 billion for NJ Transit alone. So these are initiatives that you should assume we will continue to be quite aggressive on.

I want to close with a few words before I turn things over to Judy, a few words to the people of New Jersey. First, again, if you have questions, you've got a couple of different places to go. You can go to 211, which is up and running. You can go to 1-800-962-1253, or visit nj.gov/health. To receive updates by text, please text NJ COVID to 898-211 and if you need live assistance, text your zip code to 898-211.

Additionally, I urge residents not to hoard food or other supplies and to resist the urge to overcrowd grocery stores. I know the anxiety you feel and we feel. We understand it. When you see news reports showing empty shelves, when you look at numbers of folks testing positive, but we are closely monitoring, in fact aggressively monitoring the supply chain. We are confident in the ability of food and other grocery items to get to store shelves in a timely manner.

To everybody, we deeply appreciate the cooperation we are seeing with our efforts to promote social distancing, and we know it's not easy to be cooped up in a house. But this is what we all need to do to get through this together, and we will get through this together. And I repeat, especially to our younger residents, we're seeing that more and more of you are not immune. Everything we say and urge applies to you as well both for your own health, as well as for the potential of your passing on unknowingly, unwittingly, the virus to someone in an older generation. I cannot say it enough. We are one family. We don't always agree but we always look out for each other.

I also again tip my hat, in particular, to everybody who's working on the frontlines of our responses.

Regardless of the job you do, you're doing an incredible job. We cannot make it through this without your selfless efforts. I ask everyone to stay safe, to keep doing the basics, washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, coughing or sneezing into your sleeve. Don't touch your face. If you don't feel well, stay home. Frankly, we want everybody staying home at this point. We will flatten this curve together and we will emerge stronger than ever before.

And remember the two, to the hip bone and the thigh bone here, right? Over here, we're cracking the back of the curve. Flattening that curve. Doing everything we can to isolate ourselves. You heard me take more steps today. We reserve the right to take even more steps. And we need it, by the way. We will enforce these steps. In fact, I have a statewide conference call tomorrow at noon with the Attorney General of Law Enforcement up and down the state as we go into a weekend, we mean business. When we say no more gatherings over X people, when we say this is closed, that you can't do this, we mean it and we will enforce it.

The reason is so that we can take the pressure off over here, the healthcare system, and God willing as a result, save lives and keep more people healthy. But again, this is an and/both effort. We are doing everything over here but we're not meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers for fun. Judy will tell you, we are aggressively pursuing more capacity over here, just in case the timing of these two actions don't sync up as nicely as we would like or we would hope.

Again, I say this unequivocally. If each of us does our job, beginning with yours truly, there is no doubt in my mind -- not unscathed, not without mistake -- but we will get through this together, stronger than ever before. With that, please help me welcome the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. Happy St. Joseph's Day.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As I'm sure you know, the CDC released preliminary data on the US cases yesterday, and it provides insight into COVID-19 and how it's affecting our population here in our country. It demonstrates that risk for serious disease and death of COVID-19 among people in the US increases with age, not surprisingly. However, it also indicates severe illness leading to hospitalization, including intensive care unit admissions and death can occur in adults of any age.

This data did reinforce that most of the serious outcomes occurred among adults 65 and older, with them having hospitalizations of about 45%, 53% ICU admissions, 80% of the deaths occurred among this population. So this information is similar to what we're seeing in China, indicating that more than 80% of deaths occurred among people 60 years and older. In contrast, individuals 19 and younger appear to have milder COVID-19 illness, with almost no hospitalizations or deaths. That's 19 years and younger.

In New Jersey, we're still examining the data and similar to the national trend, information on outcomes is somewhat limited at this time. The median age for our cases is a little bit younger, it's 52. Of the 139 cases for which we have outcome data, nearly half of them have been hospitalized. So although the median age of our cases is younger than those in the highest risk category, we are still very much focused on those individuals 60 years and older.

I've spoken repeatedly about our concern for individuals who reside in long-term care facilities, especially our nursing homes. On March 6, I held a conference call with more than 400 facilities to discuss about the COVID-19 preparedness for this vulnerable population. Last week, we sent guidance requiring them to restrict all visitors and also screen all staff as they enter the facility, and all medical staff professionals, including physicians, physical therapists, hospice workers. They were to be screened and are being screened for respiratory virus symptoms, contact with COVID-19 cases, and travel to any of the impacted countries, or where community-based spread is occurring. We've also sent information to them on how to handle positive COVID-19 cases in long-term care settings.

The department has identified positive cases of COVID-19 in six nursing home, assisted living facilities. Last night, I ordered curtailing admissions, all admissions, to those facilities. In addition, we are requiring them to use infection preventionists to assess their infection control practices, and they must conduct thorough

cleaning not only daily, but frequently during the day. We checked the screening of all of their employees and every vendor that is dropping off or coming past the front doors of their facilities.

We understand that these vulnerable individuals require protection. We also understand that the healthcare workers in these facilities are under a significant amount of strain right now, due to the presence of COVID-19 amongst them. We're working to make sure that the symptomatic residents get tested, isolated, quarantined within the facilities, cohorted, you'll hear all of those words, and that every individual long-term care facility is taking the precautions necessary.

On another note, I want you to know that tomorrow the testing site at Bergen County Community College will open. Individuals experience respiratory illness symptoms such as cough, fever, shortness of breath, are eligible for testing. If the individuals don't have respiratory illness, they will not be tested tomorrow. So individuals should also bring proof of New Jersey residency with them. This site has the capacity to collect 2,500 specimens a week.

As the Governor shared, today we're reporting four new deaths in the state for a total of nine deaths: Monmouth County female in her 70s; an Ocean County male in his 70s; an Essex County male in his 60s; and a Bergen County male in his 30s. Today we're also announcing 318 new cases, for a total of 742 cases in New Jersey. In the total of nine deaths, we have confirmed that three appear to be associated with a long-term care facility. The 318 new cases are Bergen, 80; Burlington, 4; Camden, 6; Cape May, 1; Essex, 17; Gloucester, 1; Hudson, 20; Hunterdon, 2; Mercer, 5; Middlesex, 20; Monmouth, 13; Morris, 7; Ocean, 25; Passaic, 18; Somerset, 4; Sussex, 2; Union, 7; and Warren, 2.

We are still gathering detail on 84 of the cases as to their county of origin. Our age ranges are confirmed as young as three to as high as 95 years of age. We do expect cases to continue to rise for some time, and we expect them to rise exponentially as we improve our testing. The social distancing measures we've been asking you to follow are critical to flatten the curve of COVID-19 cases. By flattening the curve, we're decompressing the peak of the outbreak, and spreading the cases over time to conserve healthcare resources. The goal is to slow the spread of the virus so that fewer people need to seek treatment at any given time. The same number of people may get infected, but it will be over a longer period of time.

We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to follow social distancing steps and practice good health habits. Stay home when you're sick. Wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Avoid contact with people who are sick. Cover coughs and sneezes. Avoid touching your eyes, your nose and your mouth. And clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

NJ 211 continues to be a great resource for the public to get information. Since being activated yesterday, they've handled more than 400 calls, for more than 8,000 people have opted-in to receiving information by text or telephone. This is in addition to the more than 8,500 calls handled by the call centers. So please continue to call or text to get updated information. We need to all work together to slow the spread of novel coronavirus. Thank you,

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. As I do my math here, I think we're now up to 19 of the 21 counties, Salem and Cumberland being the only exceptions so far.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: And it will be in all. I just want everyone to know that. It will be in all.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. And the numbers are going up, and they're going up meaningfully. And a big reason is we're going to be testing a lot more people. So any more color, Chris or Judy, on the Bergen drive up, what the actual address is? Do you have to call ahead of time and make an appointment? Do you need a doctor's permission slip? Any more color on that, if you could?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: Certainly, Governor. The operations will be from 8:00 to 4:00 at Bergen County Community College. There will be no preregistration required, and individuals are

expected to come with identification to prove their residency.

Governor Phil Murphy: And do they need to prove their symptoms?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: To the extent possible. I mean, when they arrive, they will be screened for symptoms of fever, shortness of breath or cough and individuals who are otherwise asymptomatic will be turned away.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. And I think we determined, I don't want to speak for you, we determined that was easier to deal with than making someone get a permission slip from a healthcare provider. Our technical folks will make an assessment on the spot.

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: That's correct. If individuals have a physician's order, please bring that. If you do not, you can still receive a specimen collection.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, assuming you've got symptoms.

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: Assuming you are symptomatic, correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: So this is not, I want to repeat this. This is not for the worried well. And we're giving again, Judy, Chris and Christina, if I get this wrong, we're giving priority explicitly for healthcare workers?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: For the two FEMA sites, the prioritization has been set up so that all specimens are prioritized for immediate transmittal to the laboratory for testing.

Governor Phil Murphy: And we would expect, so Bergen County College is going to open at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. We would hope and expect, and Pat Callahan can comment on this at some point further if need be. Again, I want to give FEMA Region 2 a shout out because they've helped us set this up. They're also helping us set up another site at the PNC Bank Arts Center in Holmdel, New Jersey, down in my county of Monmouth, so thank you for that. We can take any more questions in a bit. Thank you, Judy. Again, Happy St. Joseph's.

It's an honor to have somebody who's at the front line in a different respect with us today. We'd love to ask a dear friend and leading healthcare light in our state, the CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health, Bob Garrett, to say a few words. Bob, great to have you.

CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health Bob Garrett: Thank you, Governor. Thanks for having me today. And I want to start by really commending the Governor for his leadership and the actions that you have taken, particularly on the mitigation strategies that really will make a difference for our healthcare system. And I want everybody know the Governor has been checking in with myself and my colleagues around the state on a regular basis which really gives us great comfort. He understands some of the activities going on, on the front lines, and it also gives me an opportunity to share his best wishes with our frontline caregivers, so thank you for that important reach out.

I also want to commend the Commissioner for her efforts. The communication, the collaboration, the responsiveness have been amazing and I could not think of a better person to be our Health Commissioner at this very, very difficult time. So thank you, Judy, for that.

I've been a healthcare leader for 35 years, although the last few weeks have felt like 35 years in themselves. But I have to say that I've never seen anything like this. This pandemic is by far the most disruptive force that I've ever seen in our healthcare system. We are literally engaged in a global war with the COVID-19 coronavirus. Healthcare workers, as the Governor said before, are on the front line of everything that's happening. They are truly our heroes here in New Jersey.

We must understand that we're in this for the long haul. This will tax our clinical and human resources like

we've never seen them tested before. In our network at Hackensack Meridian, which is New Jersey's largest with 17 hospitals, we have already seen 121 positive patients, 78 are currently at our hospitals as inpatients. We also have another 500 patients currently, right now as I speak, that are awaiting test results that very well could turn into positive COVID patients. At Hackensack University Medical Center, which is our flagship hospital alone, we have treated over 60 COVID-19 patients to date, and that number is growing.

So I want to talk a moment about preparedness and potential challenges. There are extraordinary efforts underway in hospitals across New Jersey, and for that matter across the nation, to fortify operations. Capacity issues will continue to be a problem, and that's not just in terms of total number of beds, it's also about ICU bed capacity as this crisis continues to grow.

Health systems throughout New Jersey are postponing nonemergency surgery and procedures. Hackensack Meridian has also done the same. This is actually increasing our capacity by about 20%, so that's a significant move that the hospital systems have been making. And if you think about it, it allows us to redeploy staff like, as an example, OR nurses that were in these surgery settings now can get redeployed to the emergency department or to an ICU or to a patient floor where they're needed to take care of patients.

Hospital systems are working to coordinate resources and room availability. This is really important. As we all know, and we heard from both the Governor and the Commissioner, that we expect an increase of cases as more testing becomes available. When I spoke to one of our ER chiefs at one of our hospitals, he put it this way. All hands are in. We are prepared and laser focused. We are holding the line. So I want everybody to know the spirit at the frontlines is still good and people are determined to fight this common enemy.

Beyond the heroes that are in scrubs, the command centers in hospitals across New Jersey have an army of experts that are working literally 24/7. Epidemiologists, internists, supply chain experts, and people coordinating closely with the Department of Health and the CDC. They are marshaling resources from hospital to hospital, updating staff on protective gear and closely tracking cases and capacity. They are marshaling resources, as I said.

It really comes down to this. In hospitals today, there are only two jobs. The people who are directly taking care of patients and the rest of us, who are taking care of those people. Our health systems in New Jersey are seeing staffing shortages due to the significant number of doctors and nurses being quarantined due to potential exposure. At Hackensack Meridian, as I speak to you now, there are about 150 healthcare professionals that are in a quarantine situation.

Significant supply shortages are anticipated as well, including personal protective equipment and ventilators. I do applaud the President for his invoking of the Defense Production Act to ramp up manufacturing capacity. We need this national call to action to dramatically increase manufacturing capacity to provide the amount of PPE that are necessary to support our frontline team members. The decisions and investments that we're making today will absolutely save lives over the coming weeks as we see a steady rise in cases.

I'd also like to commend the Governor again for his efforts in New Jersey to flatten the curve and urge people to stay home as much as possible. That's going to make a huge difference in this crisis. If we can really flatten that curve and spread out the number of cases, we have a fighting chance. I've been in touch with professionals, healthcare professionals, doctors in China and in Italy, and it's heartbreaking to hear the stories, particularly in Italy, of what's happened when there was a huge surge of patients, patients literally dying outside the doors of hospitals. We don't want that to happen in New Jersey and I applaud you, Governor, for the actions you're taking to help us avoid that.

I'm really heartened to hear that the Governor and Commissioner Persichilli announced yesterday that the state is working to bring 500 additional beds online. They will be needed. I've also received calls from heads of many of our colleges and universities offering their campus to support our efforts, which may include temporary housing for nurses that may be traveling from out of state that we're going to need to bring in to the state of New Jersey. It's also vital that we rapidly expand testing. We're gratified to hear today about the Bergen Community College and the PNC Art Center that will be opening soon, because that's going to be

important to really collect specimens within our state.

However, I must emphasize the need for better testing turnaround time from laboratories across the country. This is important because we can confirm and isolate patients as soon as possible, which limits the number of staff exposed and thereby allowing us to get more usage out of the limited supplies of personal protective gear. Our network, as you heard before, launched our own test. A combination, I think, what I would call it the best of two worlds, a combination of the CDC test, and a test that was developed in a laboratory in Germany that's been endorsed by the World Health Organization. We are testing, on average, 50 people a day and we can have results very quickly, within four to six hours. Like many networks, we are contracting with several laboratories, national laboratories, to get more results and faster results.

So in conclusion, with all of our challenges, I could not be more proud of our hospitals and our healthcare workers throughout the state of New Jersey. We'll continue to deliver for our communities, even in this unprecedented storm. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Bob, thank you, and thank you for your remarks and your leadership of our biggest healthcare system. We need you now more than ever before, so thank you for everything. I also want to thank our folks who are doing the sign language. I meant to thank you earlier, so I want to thank them for that.

Again, Bergen County Community College tomorrow, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Day one, Lots B and C, 400 Paramus Road, Lots B and C in the parking lot at 400 Paramus Road, and tomorrow is day one, as I said. I don't want to marry myself to a day yet on Holmdel and the PNC, but Pat, I think it's sooner than later. Is that fair to say?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's correct, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Fantastic. Thank you all, and Bob, thank you again. We're going to switch gears mightily for a second. I want to applaud our Secretary of State who has a lot of things, a lot of balls in the air right now. She and I and our teams had a conversation yesterday, the day before, about the census which is upon us in the midst of this crisis. I mentioned, and certainly she oversees elections in our state. I mentioned some of the steps earlier that we are taking and would love to ask our distinguished Secretary of State Tahesha Way to please give us a little bit more color on that. Tahesha, thank you for everything.

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Good afternoon and thank you, Governor Murphy, Commissioner Persichilli and Colonel Callahan. I am truly proud and grateful for your leadership during this challenging time. As the Governor notes, I do oversee elections, the Division of Elections, which works closely with county and local election officials, our colleagues in state government, federal government partners like the Department of Homeland Security, and now, the Centers for Disease Control to ensure that voters, elections and infrastructure are safe, whether from malicious actors, natural disasters, or emergency situations, including public health crises, like the one New Jersey faces today.

Make no mistake, COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge but we are fortunate to have the tools and teams at our disposal to protect public health and uphold our fundamental right to vote. Now, if I may take the opportunity to elaborate upon what the Governor's Executive Order means for New Jersey's voters and our upcoming elections.

First, as it relates to the upcoming March 30th deadline for accepting candidate and delegate petitions, we recognize the credible risks that canvassing for petition signatures poses to candidates, delegates, supporters and voters alike. Therefore, to ensure fair access to democracy, while also protecting public health and safety, the Division of Elections, as our Governor has noted, has created an online form to allow candidates to continue accepting petition signatures virtually. Now this form and all of the respective instructions will be online at our website, and I do want to repeat it if I may, which is elections.nj.gov. Additionally, as noted, petitions will be accepted via email, fax, regular mail and by hand delivery. While we will still observe the appropriate social distancing and do note that several of my election staff will routinely come in should the petitions get delivered by hand in person, or even by mail, just to check on those.

Secondly, at a time when certain voters, including the elderly and those with preexisting conditions or chronic illnesses, are at particular risk for contracting COVID-19, we cannot allow them or any voter to have to make the choice between their personal wellbeing and moving democracy forward. Therefore, in order to provide state, county and municipal election officials the time we need to ensure that every eligible New Jerseyan can vote, as the Governor has also noted, several of the upcoming elections are postponed until May 12th.

To repeat, the March 21st Fire District election in Old Bridge; the March 31st elections in West Amwell and Atlantic City, as well as the school board elections scheduled for April 21st. Moreover, all elections, as stated, scheduled for May 12th will be conducted solely by vote by mail. Moving these upcoming elections to coincide with the previously scheduled May 12th elections will afford our election officials across the state the additional necessary time to produce and process vote by mail ballots, which in turn will ensure all New Jersey voters have access to the ballot box without risk to their health or safety.

Conducting elections in this manner also protects the wellbeing of those who serve as poll workers, many of whom are over the age of 60. We are fortunate in New Jersey to already have no excuse, vote by mail. So as we face this new challenge, all voters will receive a vote by mail ballot, saving them the step of requesting one and safeguarding health. So if you are a registered voter in New Jersey, whether you have voted recently or not, do know that you will be sent a mail-in ballot for the May 12th elections if occurring in your community. To ensure full and broad access to our democracy, we are also providing that every ballot include a return envelope with prepaid postage.

Thirdly, in order to properly process the vote by mail ballots in a manner that protects the health of election workers, we will continue to work collaboratively with our colleagues at the State Department of Health to provide the appropriate health and safety guidelines for ballot processing, counting and canvassing.

To close, I appreciate the leadership of Governor Murphy, his administration, the hard work of my staff, the guidance and support of our federal partners, and most importantly, those on the front lines of elections, our county and local election officials who we will continue to have urgent conversations and discussions to move this process forward.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tahesha, thank you for your remarks and for your leadership in these extraordinary times.

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you very much. I think with that, the only other clarification that Chris and I had a sidebar on is the Bergen County College testing site is 8:00 to 4:00 as long as we've got enough equipment and bodies and PPEs, seven days a week. So it'll be tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, and that'll be a seven day a week reality, Lots B and C at 400 Paramus Road. I will be up there with my own eyes to see it tomorrow, and we'll do our press briefing tomorrow at two o'clock at the County College. Thank you. Let's take a few questions. Why don't I just go right to left, if that's okay. And then if we come back, I promise you we'll do it in reverse order the other way. Please, John.

Q&A Session:

Reporter: Can you get into some specifics on the Bergen testing center as well as Monmouth? how can it handle the expected numbers of people traffic-wise, some of the specifics? If people are going to go there who are feeling symptoms if they go, how can you screen them with that? And also on today's numbers, can you speak a bit more to the fatalities, whether underlying medical conditions? We're asking about particularly people who are younger, and also the long-term care facility deaths. And we also now have reports of a county corrections officer testing positive, and also in Lakewood, 40 cases there. Can you speak to isolated, incarcerated and closed communities and testing right now?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Let me start with the testing site question and Judy, you can come back and

fill on the cases. Pat and Chris, could you take this together in terms of how this is actually going to work, how it's going to flow? And again, I want to give our friends at FEMA a big shout out because they've been very, very supportive and helpful.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I think, and you stressed it earlier, Governor, I think the fact that the people have to be symptomatic, the worried well should not be coming to Bergen County tomorrow morning. It also speaks to the limited number of testing kits. We need to be testing people that are symptomatic that are displaying those and that we think have it. To, I'll use the word waste, to waste a testing kit on somebody who's just worried is not going to benefit us, nor is it going to help us with traffic. It is a concern. We do have the DOT, I think, gave us 1,000 traffic cones. We have the National Guard and State Police personnel will be on location in order to mitigate that, to the extent we can. I think we will have a good sense by tomorrow morning. I do envision some long lines, but we are going to be working through that process, especially because it's the first time, to my knowledge, that we've ever done this in the history of New Jersey.

Governor Phil Murphy: I want to get Chris to jump in here. I would ask you to please give us a little patience in the sense that we're doing something we've never done before. Chris, could you add to Pat's? And also, who's actually going to be taking the specimens at the car window?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: So as the colonel had mentioned, you know, this is unprecedented. And so we've been working with FEMA, State OEM and so forth to put together an operational plan that we expect will allow for the timely and efficient specimen collection of those that arrive. We do expect there to be long lines. We do expect there to be some hiccups along the way, recognizing this as the first operation. We are going to be assessing as we go and adjusting accordingly so that as we continue down this path, the operation becomes even more efficient and timely. We are strongly encouraging folks that they need to be symptomatic. They need to come with identification, so that we don't end up having individuals who are asymptomatic causing additional delays for those that do need the testing. The specimen collections will be completed by healthcare workers, part of my team. We have worked out with FEMA that the specimen collections will be transmitted twice a day to the lab. And individuals can expect the specimens to be processed and results to be transmitted to individuals within two to five days following the collection.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you.

Reporter: Well, there's some confusion. You said 2,400 tests. Is that 2,400 people or can 2,400 tests handle how many people who show up to give a specimen?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: So FEMA has provided for each site, Bergen and Monmouth, 2,500 tests for each site that are expected to be replenished weekly. We recognize that 2,500 specimens would not be collected on any individual day in an eight-hour period. But again, we will ensure that those that arrive that need testing up to the limit of either the hours of the day or 2,500 are collected. And then each week that cache will be replenished and we'll be able to continue operations seven days a week.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I also say, to make an obvious point, folks, there's pent-up demand. So again, bear with us in the sense not only have we not done this before but we've got an imbalance between supply and demand. Thank you, Chris. And Christine, I didn't mean to evict you there from the end of the table. Judy, could you comment a little bit more on the fatalities, underlying health questions, any of the other questions John raised?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: As we've reported, we have a total of nine fatalities. We had two yesterday and four today. Of the six yesterday and today, we know that three individuals had comorbid conditions that may or may not have exacerbated their illness. There are three that we have no background on as yet. But I think we have to assume those individuals that are transferred from a long-term care facility to a hospital and test positive for COVID-19 more than likely, they have some underlying preexisting issues. That's the information I have right now.

Governor Phil Murphy: Anything on Lakewood that you want to offer?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Are you talking about the family?

Governor Phil Murphy: No, no, this was, I think in the Lakewood community. I don't know that we have got any insight. I don't want to put you on the spot.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We had a conference call with the Lakewood community generally, where there was a rumor that 100 people had been exposed and were being tested. We can't confirm that.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would just say this. Ocean County has a total of 33, 25 of them came in overnight. I think it's fair to say we have no insight as to whether those are Lakewood or night, but that's just a fact to make sure you know, 33 in total, 25 of them were overnight. Nikita.

Reporter: So you've decided now on the preprimary elections. Do you have any sort of timeline for when you'll decide on the June elections? And then also, will the state be helping the county officials with costs associated with reprinting ballots or with running elections entirely through mail-in votes?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll let Tahesha answer the second question. On the first question, we have no timetable to make any assessment on the June 2nd election, but obviously it's in top of mind and if we need to act and adjust that in any way, we will do so on a timely basis. Tahesha, any comment on working with county officials, reimbursement or otherwise, for ballots that were already printed?

Secretary of State Tahesha Way: Thank you, Governor, and thank you for your question. At this present time, our office is diligently exploring the utilization of perhaps our federal funds that we've received, the HAVA dollars. And once we can get, you know, more of an answer to that, we could advise everyone accordingly. I could also note that by moving to vote by mail only, there are some cost savings, I should say, to the counties and the locals because there won't be any cause for, let's say two things: polling places and also the poll workers. And poll workers, I believe they receive \$200 a day for their work and we have in our repertoire, I believe, an estimated 26,000 statewide poll workers.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. May I use this opportunity for a public service announcement and commercial? I still want early in-person voting in New Jersey. I think there's no reason we shouldn't have it 30 days in advance, one location per county, likely the county seat, Monday through Friday, 9:00 to 5:00, 8:00 to 4:00. I still think that's a good idea. We'll go back and then come down.

Reporter: Any change in thinking on daycare and childcare centers? As you know, there's been some--

Governor Phil Murphy: Not since yesterday, no. We understand here we're trying to balance a lot of different challenges. You know, one of the conversations or one of the points of conversation yesterday with the healthcare workers and the healthcare systems was the enormous pressure on childcare. There's an enormous -- bless you, I hope you're coughing and sneezing in your sleeve back there. There's an enormous overlap between, in particular, obviously, healthcare workers who have kids in school, single parents with kids in school, but for the time being, no. Elise, did you have anything? Please.

Reporter: The nursing homes, I believe you said that there's evidence of coronavirus in six of them. Does that involve employees or patients or both? And if it involves any patients, are they among the fatalities?

Governor Phil Murphy: Did you hear that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, I didn't.

Governor Phil Murphy: This microphone, which is terrific, helps us with our live stream, but it doesn't do a

thing for us up here.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm sorry, Elise. I didn't hear your question.

Reporter: Am I correct that six nursing homes or long-term care facilities have been affected? Are those cases, do they involve employees or patients? And if they involve patients, were any of them among the fatalities?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, they definitely, only involve employees to the fact that the employees are taking care of the patients. It's the patients who have tested positive for COVID-19. Those patients are being isolated. The employees are using the appropriate PPE, the appropriate precautions. And I can tell you that I've spoken with the administrators of all of the nursing home facilities that currently have a positive case and they are working overtime to protect the patients and also the employees. Some of the employees are home on quarantine. They, you know, we talk a lot about the hospitals. The long-term care facilities have requirements for healthcare workers as well. And when they get exposed and they're home on quarantine, the pressure is even more acute because there's such a fewer pool of individuals to pull from. Some of them are in real stressful situations right now.

Governor Phil Murphy: And Judy, fatalities from long-term care facilities, of the nine, how many of them?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're doing the full review, but we believe three are associated. What that means is they came from a long-term care facility. We need to look in how long they have been in that facility and who visited them while they were there. That kind of analysis is not complete yet.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Matt.

Matt: Governor, on this same topic, can you reiterate and I know you said it before, but just can you reiterate what your order is about limiting people that are going in, or renaming the facilities or the counties that they're in? And lastly on the deaths, we reported that three people of the same family have died. Is that something that you're willing to discuss? I understand privacy concerns, but weigh in on?

Governor Phil Murphy: So on the last point, the answer is we are prepared to discuss it because I actually put a post out while we're in this meeting, I think, in this presser, that there were three members of a family and God rest their souls. And it's the same family that was written about today in the New York Times. In terms of mandating, I mandated a series of things through Executive Order as it relates to nonessential services: barber shops, nail salons, tattoo parlors, etc. I think it's Judy who's put the word out in terms of restrictions on visitations to long-term care facilities. Do you mind reiterating what that mandate was?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Absolutely. We put that out, I believe it was last Friday, that no visitors can enter a long-term care facility. The only exception is end of life situations. And all vendors that are even dropping something off cannot go past the front door. If they have to go past the front door, they will be checked for symptoms and their temperature will also be tested. And, all employees, because we have found based on the Washington State experience that employees of long-term care facilities work at several facilities, and all employees at this point also need to be checked at the door, screened for symptoms and temperature check.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Please.

Reporter: With regard to the situation I know you said you didn't have specific information about, we have heard 40 people had tested positive in Lakewood. But in a greater sense for the whole state, Governor, you have repeatedly asked people to please get with the program here and let's do social distancing and no crowds. I know they broke up two weddings in Lakewood. I'm sure it's happened in other parts of the state as well. Perhaps you and the colonel could comment on, pardon my language, but let's cut the crap here. People really have to follow this.

Governor Phil Murphy: I couldn't have said it better myself.

Reporter: And if not, will police departments and the state police be brought in to make sure that people get this message? Because it seems like it's the crucial point in this crucial message here.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm glad you asked that. I'll give you my perspective. And Pat, I'd like you to come in behind me if you don't mind. First of all, let me just reiterate a comment, something we've said at every one of our pressers, and I don't know why this one should be the exception. We have a lot more insight into the Department of Health testing and the demographics and the realities and underlying health conditions than we do into the private sector. And as we had predicted all along, when the numbers of testing exploded, when the number of positives therefore explodes, it's overwhelmingly outside of the Department of Health. I think of the 318 today, 312 of the positives are outside of the Department of Health. So that's something not really to your question, but that's something I'll repeat.

The second gap we have, there's an enormous amount flying around on social media that is not tied down. Not all of it, in fairness, but there's a fair amount that is not tied down to the actual facts. We had one situation, without getting into the details earlier, where there was a lot of social media about a fatality. I happen to know the case. I went to a source and they actually said, actually, the person is alive and stable. So the noise relative to the facts, I think, Judy, Pat, all of us would agree. Bob, you live this every day. There's a gap.

Thirdly, to the genesis of your question. Yes, it is time to cut the crap and I like the way you put it. And it's part of the reason why I've got a call with Pat and the Attorney General with law enforcement up and down the state tomorrow at noon, particularly going into a weekend. We simply cannot have this. My team told me I was too kind the other day when someone asked me, what about a funeral that's more than 50 people? And I feel awful about it, but the fact of the matter is we've got to ensure compliance no matter what it is. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, you name it, it's 50 people at most. And by the way, if you want a little foreshadowing, if anything, that number is going down, not up. And it has to be enforced. It will be enforced aggressively. We're going to get, I think, particularly ornery about this. In fact, I think we already have. And again, we mean business. And it's not because we're trying to be jerks. We just know that if we flatten the curve over here, we will lessen the pressure on the healthcare system over there and save lives and have a healthier New Jersey as a result. And particularly I'm pleading with young people who have parties go underground at homes, and moms and dads, to make sure that doesn't happen. Pat Callahan, please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: On a real personal level, and I'll share this because I think it speaks to the Governor's point and the seriousness. Two days ago we lost Lieutenant Bill Fearon's mom. Bill Fearon died from 9/11 cancer a couple years ago. She lost her battle on the 17th to brain cancer as well. And before I walked in here, I was on the phone with her family, apologizing for the fact that we were not going to have hundreds of troopers there, apologizing for the fact that I would not be there. That's how serious this is and the fact that the chiefs of police in the call tomorrow, I think will speak to this. We have assistant prosecutors in all 21 counties ready to be contacted with regard to the guidance that the attorney general put out into the charging manual that we would use. I know we were asked a few days ago, I think early on, when we get into the let's break it up warning stage, I think we're going to move rapidly beyond that if people don't pay heed to what we're trying to do in this state and country. Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen, Pat. Brian, anything for you?

Reporter: Can Dr. Tan please, could you go into please a little bit more about the family from Freehold as to the dynamic of what happens when they get together like that? And why in this case, so many people became so critical? I think the story that you referenced, Governor, said two more family members are critical. Can you describe the disease a little bit more as to how it can ravage a family, A? And B, what families who do have somebody who is in self-quarantine at home, because they are positive, should do?

Governor Phil Murphy: I assume we're going to be careful as to specifics of a given family. Brian, you'll appreciate that. But as a general matter, look, Christina or Judy, any reaction to Brian's very good question?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Thanks for that question. Unfortunately, we can't speak to the specifics about any particular family cluster. But the important thing to take away from this is that we recognize that sometimes there are different factors that are going on right now. There's the matter of more intense exposures because of the close family contacts. But then we also have to consider for the risk of developing serious complications, death, illness, that's related to the host factor, to the individual who might become ill with the virus that causes COVID-19. So there are, again, two different aspects here. One is probably the intensity of the interactions in a family that might promote close contact, prolonged close contact. And the second as far as how ultimately they manifest their illness, it's related to individual person factors. Again, underlying illness. You know, who knows? Again, we can't speak to those specifics.

Governor Phil Murphy: Is it possible -- by the way, I asked as a non-expert -- is it possible we have different levels of strains as part of this broad virus?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: According to the CDC information a little bit earlier this week, while there might be some information circulating right now about different strains, the preliminary information on the molecular differences from the novel coronavirus still isn't exactly well defined, so we can't really comment on that at this point.

Governor Phil Murphy: Got it. Thank you.

Reporter: If a family has a positive patient, self-quarantining at home?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The first thing is I want to encourage everyone to go either on the Department of Health website or the CDC website. And there is specific guidance for individuals who have a family member who is on quarantine or isolation at home. It identifies what the definition of close contact is. It identifies that the patient should be in their own room, if possible, or if they're sharing a room, that there should be distance between the inhabitants of the room. It talks about patients that perhaps are symptomatic with mild or moderate symptoms, who are allowed to be home should not be mixing with anyone else in the home. Food should be delivered carefully. It even suggests that food is left outside the closed door to be picked up by the person that is in isolation, and that you do that for the prescribed period of time. If they're in isolation for 14 days, you should be doing that for 14 days.

There's also the indication that you should double-bag any waste. There should be, if possible, the ability to have a bathroom designated for the person who is in isolation. Again, these are for symptomatic positive individuals who do not need to be hospitalized. It does suggest that you can do the laundry according to the disinfectants that you're currently using to do your laundry, that would be fine. But to be careful in touching and disposing of trash and even collecting your laundry carefully to be able to launder the clothing or bed linens.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. Mike.

Reporter: Thanks, Governor. Commissioner, can you just, I know you talked about this a couple of times, but the three people from the nursing homes who died, they were residents of the nursing homes? And then, where are those nursing homes located? Which counties? And do you know what percentage or what number of the new cases today were people from facilities like those?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, I don't know the second part. The first part, the nursing homes that we've identified were Essex and Hudson. At least that's the county. The specific nursing homes, it's not in front of me but we obviously, through the Local Health Officers, are working with the nursing homes. I just happened this morning to call six nursing homes where there are pending results or we know that there's a positive result of someone that's in the hospital. The three deaths, again, Essex and Hudson. What was your other question?

Reporter: Were they patients?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Oh yeah, they're all coming from, their residence is the nursing home and that's how we know, traced it into the hospital of death.

Reporter: And that's Hudson and Essex?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Reporter: Thank you for that.

Reporter: [Inaudible 01:19:14]

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No. Three deaths at this point, two nursing homes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Apologies for being -- I promise you next time I'll go left to right.

Reporter: That's all good. There's a situation in Camden County. County officials are setting up a drive-through testing site at Camden County College. Their tent is set up, but one of the freeholders is saying they're having trouble getting a hold of testing kits. Is the state involved in this situation? Any chance that FEMA might start coming into South Jersey to do similar to what's happening in North Jersey? Also, Commissioner, you had mentioned yesterday about Underwood Memorial Hospital reopening. Any timetable on when that might happen?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me just give you a general comment on both and Judy will give you the right answer. I had conversations personally, actually, with folks in Camden County yesterday. Our hope is to have, as we've said all along, to have multiple drive-through testing sites up and down the state. Whether or not FEMA will be involved with more than the two we're doing, I can't predict that. I also can't predict exactly the details of what it will look like in South Jersey. I don't think it's unique to them that getting access to swabs, etc., is not unique to them. That's a challenge that is among us and it's not unique to New Jersey, so I don't have any specifics beyond that. But obviously, the more access to testing we have, particularly for folks who are symptomatic, the better off we will all be. They will certainly be better off but we'll be stronger as a state. I think I had overstated how long it would take to get that hospital back up on its feet and I'll give Judy and Pat the opportunity to correct the record from my comment later yesterday. Please.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, first of all, I acknowledge John DeAngelo, who is the CEO of Inspira, he keeps texting me every time I say Underwood that they've spent a lot of money to get it changed to Inspira. So I want you to know it's Inspira Hospital in Woodbury.

Governor Phil Murphy: Known to many as Underwood.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have a meeting this afternoon, starting to lay out the particulars of how you reopen a hospital. It's not an easy task. The first part is for Mr. DeAngelo and his team to move out the existing individuals who are inhabiting that location. There's a number of, from what I understand, office-type people, revenue cycle management people, I believe. And also, there's some mental health services that have to be relocated. Obviously, we're waiving all of the requirements for physical space and certificate of need to move those services. We're working on that today. I told him his task was to empty out the facility. Our task is to then work as a team to bring it back up.

Governor Phil Murphy: How quickly?

Reporter: Weeks, months? Any ideas?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I hope it's not months. We're hoping three to four weeks. But just to give you an indication, we have to do engineering and physical plant inspection, total decontamination. We need to put in a nurse information system, a nurse call light system. We need to hook up all the medical

gases that we know are behind the walls, which is a good thing. We have to make sure the HVAC is working correctly. And I just gave you the top end. There's so many more layers.

Governor Phil Murphy: So an interesting point that we had discussed, the group of us earlier. This is one that Judy and her team, and Pat and his team, and others can handle without the Army Corps. That's an important point. So we have a meeting this afternoon in person at The Rock with the Army Corps. That will be focused on other facilities in the state, not on Underwood. Now we're going to go back very quickly here. Do you have another one you'd like to throw in?

Reporter: Oh, yeah. Do we know how many people are in quarantine in the State of New Jersey.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I ask you a question? Why all of a sudden is that microphone showing amplification?

Reporter: We swapped them out.

Governor Phil Murphy: A new microphone, okay. Thank you for that. That's a big boost for us, by the way.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, we track that. I don't have it in front of me. I don't have the number.

Governor Phil Murphy: If we can get the number, we will get it to you, but I don't think we've got it off the top. Anybody coming back? If they could be buzzer round, just because we've got to go do a call with the White House.

Reporter: Sure, Governor. Can you, Governor, talk about how concerning it is that the virus is now in at least six nursing homes? You said that you expected many more thousands of cases. Are you surprised by this development? And how worried are you about that?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not a medical professional, so I can't say whether or not my being surprised or not is relevant, but it's a concern. And I think what we saw in the State of Washington, which went through this before any of us again, we've been talking about corona since January. I established our whole of government task force under Judy's leadership on February 2nd. This is an eventuality that we, I don't know if we expected it, but we were prepared for it. And it's concerning, clearly. Anything like that is concerning. I don't know if you want to add any color to that, Judy.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, we anticipated that it would hit nursing homes just by the mere description of the patients.

Governor Phil Murphy: Brian, anything, or are you good?

Reporter: Yes, please. Commissioner, as far as the nursing homes are concerned, with two deaths, are there any other cases in that nursing home that you know of? And what special precautions are being taken in that nursing home as opposed to anyplace else? Also, the other question I would have is, if somebody has been around someone who has tested positive, what is the policy? Is it self-quarantine for the person who has been around? Or is it just to monitor? What's the difference?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, let me first start about the nursing homes. We've been working with the nursing homes, as you all know, for quite some time. So whatever restrictions we're putting in the nursing homes that we know that have had a positive case, we are now moving through all the nursing homes. So as we're sitting here at noon with the New Jersey Hospital Association and all the nursing homes in New Jersey, we have advised all of them to amplify the restrictions that we put in last week and to include curtailing admissions. If they have anyone in their nursing home that is showing any signs of a respiratory illness, and that's not an unusual thing that happens in nursing homes, respiratory illnesses. We track them as a regular course of action through communicable disease, but we're asking them to be vigilant and curtail,

screen. No communal eating or activities. We have a whole list of restrictions.

Reporter: Nursing homes two deaths, is everybody in self-quarantine? Is everybody being kept away from each other?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Individuals are kept away from each other and those that are showing any respiratory symptoms are basically cohorted and isolated.

Reporter: And if you could also answer, please, the question about whether somebody should be in self-quarantine if they've been around somebody who's positive, or simply monitor them?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Sure, for clarification about the term self-quarantine and self-monitoring, while individuals who are recommended for self-quarantine, for example, contacts of known confirmed cases, you're going to be self-monitoring for symptoms during that 14-day window.

Reporter: [Inaudible 01:27:43]

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Yes.

Reporter: [Inaudible 01:27:46]

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: For close contacts of cases, absolutely. Yes. So, you know, again, it depends on how individuals are assessed for their risk of their exposure to individuals. You know, you're walking down the street, you might pass somebody who you don't know might have a COVID-19 case. That's not a prolonged close contact that would necessarily be as concerning, as opposed to say a family member who they share a household. No matter, they try their best in the household to try to keep social distancing. But invariably, that type of contact might be more risky.

Governor Phil Murphy: Please.

Reporter: Grocery stores and other areas, you see people now wearing gloves because they're concerned about touching stuff. If you touch it with your hand, then it's a surface that's been contaminated with COVID-19, presumably you could infect yourself, but wouldn't the same situation be true with a glove? Just because it's a glove, wouldn't the virus stay on the glove? And that being the case, I've been told there are specific ways to take off a glove. Could you talk a little bit about this issue? If people want to try to safeguard their own health and they decide that they want to not touch anything with their own hands, they're using gloves, how do you remove the glove? Do the gloves need to be washed? Does this help to stop the transmission of this virus?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me just say before the experts answer this, this is no time, with a glove or without a glove, to be sampling multiple apples at the grocery store. So let me just say that unequivocally. Please.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're looking at one another. I'm going to do the easy part. There is a way to take off gloves, I learned that in nursing school, but you do turn them inside out when you take them off.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: And it's a very important reminder that you always need to be washing your hands. That part can't be stressed enough. And just to mention that, again, we have to be careful. It's not only just COVID-19 that you're potentially concerned about. It's also a lot of other viruses that might be circulating, too.

Reporter: What should you do and how should you take the glove off? Is there any benefit to wearing a glove versus your own hands and then just washing your hands?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think you just heard from Judy how you take it off, from the top to the bottom, inside out, and throw it away.

Reporter: But then if you're doing that with the other hand, so then how do you...?

Governor Phil Murphy: That's above my pay grade.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I mean you do, you turn them inside out. I think the real question here, and the one that we always struggle with answering is COVID-19, and I'm going to look at Dr. Tan because she's our medical expert, is a droplet infection. And the droplets spray and then they drop to the floor or surfaces that are touched frequently. And how long do they stay active on inanimate objects? That's really the question, I think, that we need to answer at some point. We're telling people to clean frequently touched surfaces a lot, because we're not quite sure, I think, Dr. Tan, on that timeframe.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: So what we do know right now about SARS COVID-2, which is the virus that causes COVID-19 illness, is that it can remain viable on surfaces for hours to days. But it's not known right now how that translates to whether that's a good way of transmitting the virus to individuals and for getting ill. But that said, washing your hands, if you don't have access to a hand washing station, use the alcohol rubs.

Governor Phil Murphy: Anybody from stage right? Matt, anything? You good? Elise? Nikita?

Reporter: 2,400 or 2,500 tests. Does that mean 2,500 people being tested?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: Yes.

Reporter: And Governor, you said if anything, on the gatherings of 50 or more, if anything that number is going to go down, not up. Does that mean you're considering dropping that number to 25 or less? Any other prevention measures like more restrictions on traveling and bans?

Governor Phil Murphy: We're looking at everything. The extent to which we get enforcement helps us get more comfortable. We're measuring both inputs and outputs here and so we're looking. I wouldn't marry myself to a specific step or a specific number, but we are constantly reconsidering. And let me repeat, I said this about an hour-and-a-half ago. Again, just for folks if they missed it, through Executive Order, I'm ordering effective at 8:00 p.m. tonight the closure of all personal care businesses which cannot comply with social distancing guidelines. That includes barber shops, hair salons, spas, nail and eyelash salons, tattoo parlors, among others, and social clubs until further notice. Please.

Reporter: Yeah, just asking about schools. Any developments today? I know Newark had the food situation yesterday. Was that better today?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know, actually.

Reporter: Actually, it was. What I was told afterwards is the reverse 911 system was utilized and that got an additional 2,000 meals out. So that's just an example of another messaging strategy that helped us deliver an additional 2,000 meals. And I know there was an issue in Lakewood that the Department of Education team was down there this morning. That was one of those kinks, I'll use that word, on the first day of handing out both supplies and food. From my understanding, that went dramatically better today.

Reporter: Have there been other challenges statewide and other guidance around assessment or other issues like that that are getting closer?

Governor Phil Murphy: No guidance, no further guidance on assessment. I meant to say that, so I'm glad you asked that. No, we're all trying to get used to a new way of life here and that includes our educators, parents, kids, administrative staff, educational support professionals. It's part of the reason I had the call

yesterday with leaders of our educator community, but we'll have more on that when we have it. Just to repeat, first of all, thank you all for all you're doing because it's essential that the word gets out. Again, we're going to get through this. We won't be unscathed. We've already seen that. But we will get through this stronger than ever before, but we all have to do our part. And social distancing, good hygiene are at the top of the list.

I want to thank my colleagues. Judy, to you and your team, Christina and Chris, thank you for everything you're doing. Bob Garrett, a real treat to have you here. Thank you for everything you're doing day in and day out. Tahesha, thanks for not just being here but overseeing our elections and for the decisions you've made. And Pat, for everything you do, deep appreciation. Again tomorrow, we will be with you at Bergen at two o'clock. I'll make an appearance at the testing site before then. We'll be together at Bergen Community College at two o'clock. Again, I'd ask everyone to bear with us tomorrow morning as we go live. A, we've never done it before and B, there's pent-up demand. So let's hope we get this as smoothly executed as possible. Thank you all.

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