

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: November 18th, 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 on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, thank you both. To my left, the guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, Pat. Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples is with us, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg.

So, a number of items. Today, alongside six of my fellow governors in the region, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf, Delaware Governor John Carney, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo and Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, we are as a group urging all of our colleges and universities to make COVID testing available to all residential students before they leave for Thanksgiving break. Any student who tests positive will be encouraged to isolate on campus, or if they are to go home, to make arrangements for their safe travel home in coordination with local health officials. I'll ask Judy if it's okay to get into greater detail about this regional partnership in a few minutes.

There are, needless to say, many, many New Jersey students who attend school around the country, including by the way, among in these states, so ramping up testing for students prior to their departures home is a critical step for reducing the risk of transmission across our region. I don't think it's every school but it certainly is being strongly encouraged that when you get home from Thanksgiving, you're hopefully here through the end of January, at this point, and that is our hope.

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We must recognize, and we've said this many times but we have to keep saying that a large family Thanksgiving gathering, particularly among different age groups runs the risk of turning the dinner table into a COVID hotspot. Now our efforts at slowing the spread are not limited to our colleges and universities. Clearly, our local pre-K through 12 districts have also been working hard to protect their educational communities, as has been the case, I might add, since before the start of the current academic year.

Let's look at some updated numbers there. Over the past week there's been a total of five new in-school outbreaks that were confirmed. That led to 47 new cases of coronavirus infection. Since the beginning of our school year, we've seen a total of 239 cases of in school transmission, from 56 confirmed outbreak incidences. Let's stay on this just for a second. Again, the upper right number that's the cumulative total since the end of August, that's 56 different buildings out of over 3,000 over which the Department of Education sees impacting, and total cumulatively of 239 individuals.

In our schools, the majority continue to remain open to in-person instruction in one form or another, and you can see the numbers: 99 districts are currently fully open for in person instruction, 529 offering a hybrid of in-person and remote, meaning that there are some students in the school building at some point in the day; another 145 districts remain on full remote status, and there are 38 that are using a combination of plans across different buildings.

We knew going in that there would be cases in our schools, and the vast majority of the cases we see continued to be linked to out-of-school activities. We remain confident in the protocols in place to protect the health and safety of our schools and educational communities, protocols which are catching cases early and quickly to limit the spread within a school. None of this is to say, as I've mentioned several times over the past week, I think we all understand the stress that comes with this, whether it's the educators who are at the front lines, moms and dads, superintendents, administrators, the kids themselves. This is not a normal school year and I want to applaud the districts, the educators, all the stakeholders who are trying to balance that. Most importantly, safety and do this responsibly and safely but also do everything we can to deliver a high quality education and accept that all at the same time, equity has to be an element that not every family, not every district is created equally in terms of the latitudes on things like the extra room at home, the mom or dad who can afford to stay home, etc.

And, by the way, for those schools which remain either all remote or hybrid, the work to further close the digital divide continues. The Department of Education has updated its tracking statistics, and they are available online at nj.gov/education. As of today, 70.3% of districts have reported that they currently have no device or connectivity needs. This is an increase, a slight one, from last week of 0.3%. So if you recall back in the summer, we estimated that roughly 231,000 students lacked either the proper device or connectivity for remote learning. This week that has been reported at just over 35,000 students, which marks an almost 12% reduction since last week's update.

Districts which have identified a remaining need are continuing to bump up against issues related to either, in almost all cases – not entirely, but almost all cases – supply chain or delivery delays. To be sure, we are not going to let up on closing the remaining gap. 35,000 might be a lot less than 231,000, but it's still 35,000 too many.

The department continues its work in direct collaboration with districts to ensure the best use of resources, the accurate reporting of data and effective communication between districts and students and families at the local level.

With that, Judy, let's look at the overnight vital statistics and they're not pretty, as you well know. We're reporting an additional 4,063 cases. That brings our cumulative total to 289,562 since case 1 on March 4th. The positivity rate for all PCR tests recorded on Saturday, November 14th, was an unacceptably high 10.88%. The statewide rate of transmission continues to tick upward as well. Today it is at 1.43. In our hospitals, as of last night, there were 2,446 patients being treated, 2,196 of whom were confirmed COVID positives, 250 others persons under investigation, awaiting the return of their test results.

One of the realities, if you go back for one second, one of the realities you see with a total of 2,446 patients, Judy, the number of confirmed as a percentage of the total of a hospital has gone up dramatically over the past month or two and that is, I think, overwhelmingly due to the fact that we now have things like the Abbott

Binax NOW test. We will soon have the Cue Health tests where you can get a real quick turnaround, as opposed to the old days, a couple of months ago, where you had to wait overnight or a couple of days.

Of the 2,446, 461 were in our intensive care units and 223 patients were reported as requiring a ventilator. Now the good news is 288 patients were discharged yesterday, but 340 new COVID-positive patients were admitted. Recognizing it's apples to oranges, because these numbers are not in the confirmed numbers of the deceased, but 31 patients died in our hospitals yesterday. Again, subject to confirmation.

There is no way, if we take a quick timeout here, there is no way to sugarcoat any of these numbers. They are not good, and they are trending worse. The only way we can reverse these numbers is to wear masks, to social distance, to wash our hands frequently with soap and water, and to not attend any private gatherings outside of those with our immediate families within our own homes.

And today, with the heaviest of hearts, we report another 27 confirmed losses of life from COVID-related complications. That brings our statewide total confirmed to 14,843, with an additional – and this has been adjusted upward slightly, Judy, I believe – 1,812 probable deaths. As we do every time we come together, Pat, let's remember three more of the blessing souls we have lost.

We begin today by remembering Sister Ellen Margaret Staiger. For 67 years, she was a member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth. She was a Jersey gal through and through, born and raised in Jersey City and a graduate of Passaic County College. Sister Ellen Margaret was a licensed practical nurse, Judy, I say to another member of that august community, and she put that knowledge to use to help others through throughout a noted career in healthcare.

She started her career by caring for the children living at the St. Mary's Orphanage in Newark, and continued her service at St. Anne Villa, the former nursing facility for the retired Sisters of St. Elizabeth and Convent Station. I have to say that that's where my great aunt lived in her retirement, also a member of Sisters of the Charity of St. Elizabeth. She also worked at Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern, New York, and both Montclair Community and St. Mary's Hospitals back here in her home state.

Sister Ellen Margaret herself moved to St. Anne Villa following her retirement in 2010, where her kindness and compassion continued, and where she sang in the choir. The smile that comforted countless patients in her care never left. She was survived by the Sisters of Charity, and by her sister and brother-in-law Joan and Robert, and I had the great honor of speaking with Joan, and she is in the state of Pennsylvania. She's survived as well by her two nephews, Timothy and Robert, four grand-nieces, one grand-nephew, one great-grand-nephew and many cousins.

Sister Ellen Margaret lived a life dedicated to the betterment of others. There's a lot we all can learn from that. May God bless her and watch over her, and we thank the Sisters of Charity for allowing her to share her talents with us for all those years.

Next up, we go to Essex County and remember Anna Cariello. That's Anna on the left of the photo with the gentleman with his hands on her shoulders. She was a longtime resident of Newark, who called West Orange home for the past seven years. Anna was 83 years old. Anna spent a career in public service, starting with the former Division of Motor Vehicles before getting a job with the city of Newark as an emergency dispatcher with the Newark police. Eventually she moved over to the Auto Squad Division, where she proudly wore the nickname she earned from her coworkers and friends, "Auto Squad Annie". She retired in the year 2010. She loved every day she served alongside the women and men of the Newark Police Department and her pride shined through every St. Patrick's Day when she would open her home to her friends and colleagues for green bagels and hot coffee for the City's St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Anna is now reunited with her husband Pascal, who passed in 1981. She leaves behind her daughter's Tony-Ann, with whom I had the great honor of speaking earlier this week, and June-Mary, and their families, including her grandchildren, Lorianne, Robert and Brianna, among many others. We thank Anna for her years of service to her state and the Great City of Newark. May she be remembered fondly by all and may God bless and watch over her and her family.

Finally, today, we remember Theodore Nixon of Sicklerville in Camden County. Theodore was born and raised on the other side of the Delaware River in Philadelphia and spent seven years in service with the United States Navy. He was a member of Philadelphia's historic Mother Bethel AME Church and that is not just – to say that's historic is an understatement. I have visited Mother Bethel and that is ground zero for the AME faith in our country. It was there that he met the woman who he would marry in 1988 and spend the next 32 years alongside his Brenda. Upon his return home from his Navy duties, Theodore worked at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, but in 1988 – that was a big year for him, obviously – he won a position with SEPTA, the region's mass transit system and worked as a mechanic for a total of 32 years, repairing and inspecting everything right down to the street trolleys.

Brenda referred to him as a – and I quote her – “Grand Rail Mechanic”. Everyone else would say he was simply “Mr. Fixit”. While he loved working with his hands around his home too, Theodore also loved to read and collect comic books. He saved every one he had owned since childhood and he was a dyed in the wool Trekkie. He now leaves behind his Brenda and their two children, Eric and Morgan. I had the great honor of speaking with Eric earlier this week. By the way, Eric is a producer at WURD Talk Radio in Philadelphia. I said to Eric – this sounds like something a mom would say – I said to Eric, did he go by Ted? And he said, “Yeah, he did go by Ted too many, but my mother used to remind him, your name is Theodore.” That sounds like something my mom would say.

Theodore lived a rich and colorful life. He made sure our region worked and ran on time. We thank him for that and for his service to our nation, and may God bless and watch over him and those he left behind.

We remember Sister Ellen Margaret, Anna and Theodore as we remember all we have lost as names, faces, lives lived, lives lost, families left behind, not an abstract number. Each was a cherished member of our New Jersey family. For them and the 27 more passings that we announced today, we have to do everything we can to protect our families and our communities and to save lives.

Thanksgiving is one week from tomorrow. I urge you, this is not the year for the big family gathering. This is not the year to squeeze around a dinner table. I rarely go down to Mississippi for quotes of life, but I will do that in this case. The President of the Mississippi State Medical Association, Dr. Mark Horne, put it very succinctly recently, and I quote Dr. Horne, “We don't really want to see Mama at Thanksgiving and bury her by Christmas.” Pretty sobering, but pretty well said.

So please let that sink in well before the turkey defrosts. The limit on indoor gatherings has been reduced to no more than 10. We had to do this for a reason: to slow the second wave and to save lives, but we can't do either unless we all commit to honoring this limit on Thanksgiving. Folks, let's all do the right thing.

Switching gears, I want to briefly recognize the efforts of a very good friend of mine, Ritesh and Asha Shah, the owners of the Independent Ramtown Pharmacy in Howell. Ramtown was one of our essential businesses and Ritesh and Asha stayed open throughout this public health emergency to serve their customers. But even in staying open, the pandemic took a toll on business, and Ritesh and Asha worked with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to secure a grant that allowed them to continue covering their payroll so their employees would not have to worry. Ritesh is a leader, I've known him for many years, in New Jersey's independent pharmacy community and his civic spirit is something that has kept our state strong over the past eight months.

He wears a couple of hats here. He's also the CEO of the Legacy Pharmacy Group which represents the community pharmacy industry. Their website, check them out, is lgprx.us. He reminded me just as I was coming over here, that of the 40-plus Legacy Pharmacy members, they have administered over 60,000 COVID tests and we thank them for that.

Finally, before we turn things over to Judy, I want to acknowledge the recent passing of a giant in our labor family, W. Bernard Dudley, the Atlantic Coast district General Vice President of the International Longshoremen's Association. He was known by many as simply B, especially by his labor brothers and sisters. He passed away last Thursday, just 10 days shy of his 73rd birthday. From 2001 to 2019, he was president of the ILA Local 1233 at the Port of Newark, where he earned the respect of both his fellow longshoremen and women in management. Throughout his years in leadership, he expanded the ILA's membership and fought for and won fair contracts.

In addition to that, he served his nation with great distinction. He was a decorated Vietnam veteran and a recipient of the Bronze Star. He was also a champion of civil rights and he served in and his leadership was recognized by numerous charitable and community organizations over the years. When I heard that he had passed I reached out immediately to father and son Harold and Dennis Daggett. I was with Herbie Hall at the Port of Newark, another great distinguished colleague, and he and I both spoke to Bernard's passing at an event yesterday. I reached out this morning to his wife, Laverne. He was a giant. He leaves big shoes to be filled, and he will be sorely missed, certainly by his family, and his brothers and sisters in the ILA and the broader community in the struggle for civil rights in our state and beyond.

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

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Well, as the Governor mentioned, college students will be traveling home over the next week on Thanksgiving break. While it is exciting for both students and their families to reunite, we need everyone to work together to lower the risk of spreading the virus to one another. Students hopefully should be quarantining for 14 days before going home. If they haven't completed the 14-day quarantine, they can continue that quarantine period at home, but they must remain separate from their family. As much as possible, they should avoid contact with their family, they should wear a mask and maintain a distance of at least six feet.

Students who have family members that fall into a high-risk category, which includes those over 60 years of age, and those with chronic health conditions, should quarantine perhaps away from that home at another household or location with no high-risk members.

As the Governor mentioned, we are all urging colleges and universities to make COVID testing available to all residential students before they leave for the Thanksgiving break. Students should consider getting tested before leaving the campus and then five to seven days after any potentially high-risk activity, such as a party or social gathering. And remember that small gatherings are contributing to the rise in cases. Even if a returning student tests negative, they should plan to quarantine for a 14-day period, as symptoms can occur any time during that time period.

If a returning student tests positive, they should isolate from others for at least 10 days and be clear of symptoms for at least 24 hours. Anyone with symptoms or a positive test actually should avoid traveling home if possible.

If a student must travel, they should isolate in a separate space and avoid contact with others. To reduce the risk of transmission during the isolation or quarantine period, the students should eat meals in a private space or outdoors and at least six feet away from others. They should use a separate bathroom and if that is not possible, they need to disinfect the bathroom after every use. Until the isolation or quarantine period is completed, they should also use separate utensils, glasses, plates and other serving ware. Again, they should wear a mask and maintain a distance of at least six feet from others.

All of these steps will help to reduce their risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their households. I know families are eager to spend time with students returning from school and the public health guidance we are sharing is limiting some of those interactions. But these steps will keep your families safe. Please encourage your family, your friends and returning students to download the COVID Alert New Jersey app, get a flu shot and visit covid19.nj.gov to find a testing site near them.

Testing, contact tracing, social distancing, masking, washing hands frequently, these are the only tools we have. They're the tools that are available to us to protect one another so it is vital that we take these steps to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 2,446 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and those under investigation. 461 of those individuals are in critical care, 42% are on ventilators and that's the highest percent of individuals that we've had on ventilators for quite a long period of time. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. The breakdown is White 54.1%, Black 18.1, Hispanic 20.2, Asian 5.5, and other 2.1.

At the state veteran homes, one additional resident at the Vineland location has tested positive. At our state psychiatric hospitals, a resident at Anne Klein and a resident at Ancora hospital have tested positive. We have implemented weekly, full hospital testing and symptomatic testing immediately at our hospitals, and regular testing at the veteran homes.

The positivity rate as of November 14th is 10.88%, the Northern part of the state reports 11.13, the Central part of the state 10%, and the Southern part of the state 12.16%. That concludes my daily report. Stay safe, enjoy your holiday, but at a distance from one another, and for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, a couple of things. Just looking at our counties, this is up and down the state. I was on with Kevin O'Dowd earlier, who's both CEO of Cooper, as you know, and also coordinating for you in the southern region. 15 of the 21 counties today report triple-digit cases, and the biggest numbers are still in the Metro New York City counties. It's the big six that have been from the earliest on: Bergen, Essex, Passaic, Union, Hudson, Middlesex. But 15 counties in triple digits, including four in the South, Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, which has been getting slugged, and Gloucester again. This is up and down the state and as you're looking at an American map, it's all over the country: urban, suburban, rural.

Separately, as I mentioned on Monday, we had a White House VTC right afterward and the three of us and a few others participated. I thought it was a good discussion, overwhelmingly on vaccines. I think the complexity associated with this, I think we all reacted, is at another level relative to any other vaccine mission that we have pursued. We're going to need our federal partners both financially and logistically every step of the way. But I thought it was a good discussion, including the likes of Tony Fauci, who weighed in quite aggressively on it, and a three star army general, who is Gus Perna's deputy, and then we got some more good news on Pfizer today. That continues, largely speaking, to go in the right direction.

I'll perhaps preempt a question. Having said that, the fact that the Biden team and Vivek Murthy, our friend, who has been a great advisor, and the whole, his transition team are being blocked out of those discussions is putting lives at risk. Let there be no doubt about that. You can't – the complexity, I don't want to step over my grounds here, but the complexity to deliver a two jab, sub-zero vaccine to the broad population, never mind in New Jersey, across the United States of America, you just can't saunter in on January 20th and pick up the playbook and execute it. This is a national health matter and lives are at risk as a result. In any event, wanted to get that off my chest.

Thank you for everything, including for constantly reminding us of the racial disparities that this virus, whether it's the syndrome in kids or the fatalities or those who are sick, the awful inequities that it has unearthed.

Pat, the weather I think is colder than I probably would have predicted on Monday. I think I've got ahead of myself because I know Friday, Saturday and Sunday are going to be actually unseasonably warm, and that's a good thing that'll keep us outside. We were outside the past two nights and it was less than fun in a couple of moments. But anything you've got. I think weather is going in the right direction, but anything on compliance or other matters?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. A few Executive Order compliance issues to report. In Atlantic City, El Charro Restaurant and Bar was cited, as was B&B Saloon, as well as a party promoter. Those violations revolved around exceeding indoor capacity, as well as no facial coverings being worn or no social distancing in those establishments.

In Little Falls, I had reported Monday that Chelas had been cited. After a further deeper dive investigation, that owner was cited with two additional violations based upon previous dates, dating back a week or two.

To your point about the White House VTC, we do have a call with FEMA Region 2 this afternoon at three o'clock on Operation Warp Speed. It'll revolve entirely around vaccinations and how our Region 2, how we're going to work with our federal partners, in one of Tom Vanessa's last official acts before he's gone tomorrow.

And lastly, just because it's come up the past few days on that morning faith-based leaders call that I'm on statewide every day, I think there was some confusion and a few pastors had reached out, including Pastor Taylor from right here in Trenton, on that indoor gathering of 10 persons or less. That does not apply to houses of worship, and that still remains at 25% or 150 people, or whichever is lower of those two, and Pastor Taylor and a few others asked that I clarify that, just from this platform, to make sure that that the houses of worship realized that they were exempt from that 10 persons or less restriction, Governor. That's all I have. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a good reminder and that is exactly, and Parimal will correct us, it's the lesser of 150 people or 25% of capacity. That's a number we'd love to see higher but that's not realistically going anywhere. It certainly ain't going up anywhere anytime soon. That morning faith call which has been every single day, like clockwork, I know you've been on every one of them, which is pretty incredible. It's kept our communities of faith together. So it's been a spiritual benefit but it's also been a medium through which important messages have been delivered to our faith communities, and they have been force multipliers.

We've said this many times, if we bat 1,000, we still need folks outside of government to lead and do the right thing. There's no better example of that than our faith leaders, who overwhelmingly do the right thing. So at all those levels, thank you.

We'll start over here with Dave but before we do, just to say we're going to stay on the same rhythm this week. I'm not sure what we're doing yet for next week but we'll be back with you live, unless you hear otherwise, Friday at one o'clock. We will be with you virtually tomorrow. I can't recall if I've got any press availability but if I do, I've tried to work in, particularly on Thursdays, both COVID updates as well as unemployment updates. If we are public or if I'm public, I will try to do that. I don't think I am. But on Friday we'll be back here live. We will be virtual over the weekend and then back at you Monday. Assume it's at one o'clock unless you hear otherwise.

With that, Dave, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. I just wanted to give you a nod on the Trekkie hand maneuver that you accomplished.

Governor Phil Murphy: I hoped somebody noticed. Thank you, Dave. Next?

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Governor, in Newark and Irvington leaders are talking about a possible 24 hour or possibly a three-day lockdown to stop the COVID surge. Would you allow this, possibly, and if so, why? A lot of people are saying, you know, what's one day or even three days going to do? And if we have no cases increase in retail situations, there's no link? What's the logic?

Second question here, with cases rising so dramatically, especially lately, one would think the importance of contact tracing increases. But as Judy has been mentioning, 60% of New Jersey residents will not cooperate, they won't even take the call. How significant do you think this is, especially with the pandemic accelerating now? How does it impact your efforts to track down people who are positive, causing hotspots, and your ability to take effective action in response?

Final question, do we have stats on the ages of hospitalizations and/or deaths? Last week, the Commissioner was saying we can expect 2,000 to 3,000 new cases a day. However, that has now accelerated to more than 4,000 cases a day. Will this continue, do you think? What does it tell us? And what do we think the average death total is going to be a month or two months from now? Because at the rate we're going, it seems like it could be very scary. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep, all good questions. I have to correct the record. Mahen has just reminded me, we're going to do the presser on Friday at noon and I'll say why, if it's okay with Mahen, we're going to sign right after that just because of the schedules, Daniel's Law. I don't normally preview signing a law or comment on any law, but we will sign that on Friday, right after our press conference. And that is in the name of a young lad who was murdered, and this is a law that will address rightful privacy for federal judges and I am honored to sign that on Friday. So thanks for the Trekkie shout out. I'll give you my answers and then Judy should jump in and Tina on anything we miss.

Those are four outstanding mayors, by the way. I was with Mayor Baraka yesterday at Port Newark. He and Tony Vauss and Dwayne Warren and Ted Green are four, as good as it gets. They're up against it and I don't blame them for trying to turn over every stone, but I do have to reiterate the Executive Orders at the state level, or the Executive Orders that apply, period.

But remember, we did make an exception, which I think is a worthy one if you wanted to, instead of 10 o'clock closing your non-essential, you could move that earlier to eight; we're in constant touch with these folks, not just my teams, but me personally, and they're up against it. Who could blame them for trying to brainstorm here? But it is incredibly important, we have to note, and they are good examples of it, we are the densest state in the nation. We've got not just people on top of each other, but communities on top of each other, and we can't have a patchwork. We continue to work with them.

I think the need for contact tracing and better hit rates, Judy, only goes up as opposed to down. I think there's some school of thought that if it's everywhere, what good is it? We don't apply to that school of thought. I mean, if we had a higher batting average of folks answering the phone and cooperating, we'd have a better shot, I think, at cornering this thing, so I think the significance increases. I'll let the medical and science experts come in.

I think hospitalizations, Judy, we probably should throw one of our models up, or the handful of the models, Mahen, at some point in our upcoming, but you've got numbers that go up to what, 8,000 cases a day and a lot of people dying. I don't have a number off the top of my head but it gets up again into some significant numbers, triple-digit fatalities. I know Judy and Tina and their colleagues looked at a number of models as do we, the non-medical side, but they're scary.

And again, human nature can change and can bend the curve. We used to say that in March as a theoretical matter, because we were using Ebola and H1N1 as our guide. We now know it with COVID, because we did it. And so just because the model says this does not mean that it is within us to be able to push back on that. Anything you want to add on contact tracing or modeling, and how bad this could get?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think we, at some point, we will bring forth the models because we look at them regularly and look at new cases. We know after every opening, and I think I've explained this, a slight uptick. So at the end of the day, I think it's worth a presentation at some point.

As far as contact tracing, Dr. Tan has been working on this all weekend. So I'm going to let her.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: As we hit widespread activity with COVID, as we're seeing right now, we do recognize the importance of containment measures such as contact tracing, focus beginning with the case and then trying to contain around a particular case patient. But as we move toward more widespread activity, we have to shift the focus to community mitigation. And those all are encompassed by the different restrictions that are being reintroduced right now. Because it's really, you know, the layers of community mitigation, that constant reminder of masking up, that constant reminder of taking those precautions when you go back to your home from college, the community mitigation and the community layers, that's what really contributes, at this point, when you have widespread activity to really flattening that curve. Because again, we have to remember what had happened during the first wave of the pandemic when we started introducing all those restrictions and the mindfulness associated with community mitigation, that really was what stemmed activities, coupled with the traditional containment activities.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, I'll repeat as we move on here, cases matter, clearly, but comparing cases in November or December or what cases looked like in March and April, when you have a completely dramatically, utterly different testing capacity and regime, can be misleading. Hospitalizations, we know if somebody's in the hospital for COVID, we know that's a hard number. That's a hard case. So we'll stay on it. Sir.

Reporter: Can you comment on the tax and fee structure on the cannabis industry that's being reported? Have you reached an agreement with lawmakers?

Also, a virtual nurse and healthcare union HPAE have told NJ SPOTLIGHT news that Virtua is asking nurses who tested positive for COVID-19 to come into work if they haven't had a fever or other symptoms in 48 hours. HPAE says that it filed a complaint with the Department of Health over this staffing policy. Are you

aware of this policy, and what is your reaction?

Regarding the election, at one point you said you wanted half the normal number of polling locations in the county open, but then gave counties more leeway. One county had only a quarter of locations open; another had only a third open, which meant people had to travel much farther to vote. Did that place an undue burden on some people to get to the polls? In hindsight, should more have been open in some counties?

Are you confident all the counties will be able to finish counting and certify the results by the Friday deadline? And one of our livestream viewers wanted to know why the casinos are still open when Philadelphia closed theirs due to COVID, given the numbers that we're seeing.

Governor Phil Murphy: I will take this. We've made a lot of progress on the cannabis front and I'm optimistic but no further comment on that. I was not aware of the HPAE and Virtua situation, but Parimal and Mahen and I will follow up on that. Deb White, who is the outstanding leader of HPAE, I'm in pretty regular touch with but I've not heard about this. Judy, how do you react to that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We were notified. My understanding is we were notified yesterday of that complaint and it is under investigation.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, that's something that doesn't make me happy to hear. We would want to see more capacity, on the election front, that is. But again, we're still not yet certifying so I want to do a full post mortem, and we will. I am confident that all votes will be counted and we will be able to certify on time. The biggest burden, I believe, is the lack of in-person early voting. I'm a big believer and I hope we can get there. It requires an investment. One place per county that's open x days in advance of Election Day, in addition to all the other things that we've done to open up democracy, that to me is the biggest unburdening step we could take.

Again, while I'm not happy that there may not have been the capacity that we wanted, we also smashed the record for turnout, and that must be said. I'm highly confident it was a successful election, it will be successfully certified.

I don't have a comparison with Philadelphia, but just as an absolute matter, the casinos have had to comply with the closed restaurants and bars by 10:00 p.m. so there's no food and beverage other than room service, as I recall. And we believe, based on the evidence that we have, that they've been able to responsibly manage their casino floors, whether it's through PPE, whether it's through dividers, capacity management, temperature checks, review of symptoms, checks with people who go onto the floor, which is happening in all the casinos. It is, to the best of our knowledge, do you take on more risk when you are indoors conducting an activity? Yes, but that's the sort of risk Judy referred to a minute ago. There's a certain amount of risk we're prepared to take on. We have to be prepared, otherwise, the society shuts completely. So there is that, but there is not any evidence that there is either bad management of the floor, or that there is a big outbreak coming from participating on the floor. So thank you.

I think we'll go to Dustin then Alex, Matt and Elise, if that's okay. Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. We've had a lot of these new cases in the last two weeks or so but the rate of transmission hasn't moved significantly. Is that because of the formula or is there some other possible explanation? How many of the cases that we've added are outdated and is it possible to highlight on the dashboard for context how many new cases may actually be old?

Would you be willing to revise your Executive Order on travel restrictions and quarantining to allow for parental visitations if they live in different states? Meaning the child going back and forth would be exempt from quarantining?

On your meeting with the White House, did you or any other governors make the case that the Trump administration blocking out Joe Biden is putting lives at risk?

And lastly, from Politico, the Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee and Assemblyman Holley are still planning on going through with fundraisers, even as others cancel and postpone theirs. The committee has theirs the Monday after Thanksgiving and Assemblyman Holley's is a few days later. They say they'll both be

indoors and outdoors and following state guidelines. But given everything you said about Thanksgiving, do you think Democratic Assembly Members should go through with these fundraisers immediately after? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dante, stay close, because I apologize, Dustin on the first couple. You asked about the rate of transmission was your first one, could you give me that one more time?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Well, yeah, the rate of transmission hasn't gone up significantly.

Governor Phil Murphy: As dramatically as --

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Right, so I'm just curious, is it because of the formula or if there's any other reason?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep. And then right behind it, before you got to revising the travel ban, was there a second one related to that?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: No just on the travel ban, if you would consider revising it?

Governor Phil Murphy: No, I got that. Before that was rate of transmission and whether or not you thought it was stale?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Right, after that, is there any way to highlight, just for context, when you get these new cases, how many of them are old?

Governor Phil Murphy: How many are old?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Yeah, two weeks or three weeks, a month old.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, on new cases. Okay, so this is good. The first one is one that we get asked a lot. Spot positivity exploded. Rate of transmission has crept up. It's at an unacceptable level but it hasn't gotten remotely near the 5.31 that we had in March. And please God, it never does. Any color on that and any sense on the cases, how many are old?

I think there are very few, and you mean for the cases we announce each day, I think the very few of them are old. These are coming back pretty much real time. But, Tina, any comments on either of those?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: We do recognize that with the number of cases increasing that there is definitely a higher burden for local health departments to follow up on the case investigations. And to that end, we emphasize to the local health departments to try to look and prioritize their caseload and to prioritize case investigations. We do recognize that, on occasion, local health departments might get reports of cases that are old. Meaning that the data they report might exceed a week or two weeks or more. We encourage local health departments to prioritize more recent cases, because there's more of an immediate intervention, public health intervention, that you could do with isolation, contact tracing, quarantine, associated with that. So that's all part of the prioritization message that we had imparted to local health departments earlier this week.

Governor Phil Murphy: And Tina, now that you're on stage, please stay on center stage. Spot positivity explodes, rate of transmission creeps. Any color as to the gap there?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: We speak mainly to looking at our particular indicators that we look at all the time: positivity, the case rate, as well as our syndromic surveillance indicators, because they're all well associated. Whenever we see the indicators all kind of move in the same direction, we definitely are concerned that there might be trends upwards with the cases. We also recognize, because this question always comes up as well, the issue of hospitalizations and deaths. We have to remember that those are lagging indicators. We would not be surprised to see more hospitalizations, more deaths over time, as we see cases rise over time.

Governor Phil Murphy: That number is going to continue to go up, Dustin, I just think by nature of it, it doesn't go up quantum leap.

On the revise the travel restrictions, so we're up to now to 46 states. This is other than -- remember, there's always been and will continue to be a carve out for essential travel and transient travel. Essential travel is a business trip you have to make, transient travel is kind of a combo, if you're going to work across the Hudson or Delaware, and you're coming home at the end of the day.

Frankly, I don't want to speak for you, Judy, but when you're at 46 states, we're getting very quickly to what we've been saying for a while and make that in fact, we don't want you to travel, period. I think that's really where we're headed. And if it's a kid coming home for Thanksgiving, I think Judy's laid out exactly how that kid should behave.

Putting lives at risk did not come up on the White House call per se on Monday, but we are making that point strenuously and strongly through other channels and regularly, and we will continue to do that. Both here, using our bully pulpit, and other avenues.

I'm not aware of the Democratic Assembly, but we will follow up on that and Assemblyman Holley. Anything needs to abide by the rules of the road that would put forward, the 10-person indoor limit, the outdoor limit coming down as of Monday to 150. There is a First Amendment carve out, clearly, which we have been clear about. I'm not familiar with the specifics here, but we'll take a look at it and come back to you. Thank you. Alex.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Good afternoon. For Dr. Tan, just to clarify on Dustin's question, what benefit does -- I can understand when you talk about the local health departments want to be very complete in their recordkeeping, but what benefit does the public get in that number that we see every day at this briefing, having cases included that could be from as far back as May or April? How does that help the public?

And for the Commissioner, just an update, if you can, on the situation in the hospitals? Diverts, how we're looking as far as beds, because we see about 2,400 cases, but obviously there are people in hospital beds for other reasons. I also spoke to the Head of the Nurses Association, Judy Schmidt, and she said that there's an issue with PTSD with some nurses going through the second wave. How are you preparing for that?

And lastly, for Colonel Callahan, what's going to be your guidance to local police departments? How aggressive do you want them to be on Thanksgiving? Do you want them counting cars in driveways and looking in people's windows to see who's sitting at the Thanksgiving table?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Alex. Tina, do you want to start on the color on that first question, as to what is the value for the public at large?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: There's definitely a lot of value to monitoring these cases over time, because it helps us characterize the scope of illness in New Jersey. As you had alluded, the benefit of knowing the cases is to try to stem and contain additional disease transmission from that particular case. But in light of the fact that we have widespread transmission and that we're focusing now and shifting the mindset toward community mitigation and layering those, and the fact that public health departments are really busy trying to do that initial follow up with the case patients, there still has value in that because it still provides us the message to the public about the need to isolate. It provides us an indication that there's still disease that's circulating in the community, and that people cannot let down their guard, and to take those precautions. And it also, you know, confers a lot of benefit to those individuals who are impacted directly by the disease because they're reminded about taking the direct actions to protect others.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, thank you. Judy, hospitalizations, 2,446 are reporting, 461 of whom are in ICU. What are you seeing in terms of divert and other challenges?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Just to repeat what I've told you in the past that every day, and every day since March, we look at hospital capacity. Those 2,400 admissions, you know, are spread across 71 acute care hospitals. We have started comparing COVID-positive patients in the hospital and PUIs in the hospital, compared to where every hospital was at the peak. We actually have a bar chart that shows, over time, how that has grown. There is still significant capacity in our hospitals.

The hospitals, our four hospitals reported divert last evening, most of them were patient volume. And again, I'll remind you that that patient volume is not only patients with COVID, it's also patients that would normally be admitted to the hospital. Back in March and April, we had curtailed elective surgeries, there was only

emergency admissions. This is hospitals that are full because of all the patients that they're seeing. We are on calls with the CEOs every week. We go over these statistics. We're relying on them to keep a percentage of medical surgical beds and a percentage of their critical care beds open for a potential surge. We've stockpiled PPE.

On staffing. I've said repeatedly that's maybe our biggest problem, our biggest issue and PTSD is real. It is real. And it's not only nurses, it's everyone that worked in the hospital during March and April are having some issues with the anxiety related to what they went through. Many of our organizations and our universities have set up counseling centers and outreach services to those employees, appropriately so.

Governor Phil Murphy: I may live to regret this but I do not believe – and Judy and Pat have both been up to their eyeballs in this – I do not believe that we will plow through our formidable stockpile of PPE or ventilators or bed capacity. We need more testing capacity. We're at a high level. Some days we're over 70,000 but we were hungry for more. But it's the staffing piece, Judy, that you first started talking about a couple months ago. That is the one that I think keeps us up at night.

And we have to remind everybody in March in April, and to some extent into May, but in that period, it was a Metro New York explosion of this virus and we were able to appeal to folks in other parts of the country. And in fact, based on decisions that we took together with licensors, other parts of the world who were able to then come in and surge. When you look at an American map today, when you look at what's going on in Europe and elsewhere in the world, there is little or no capacity of healthcare workforce right now, anywhere. For the life of me, Florida, they're literally taking no steps and they're now printing 10,000 cases a day and please God, it takes a better turn but it appears to signal – or the Dakotas, which may be a lot smaller than we are and a lot denser, they're out of beds, they're out of workers. That to me, I think is our biggest, if I may say, our biggest prospective challenge.

Pat, are you going to show up in my living room or dining room on Thursday?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: If invited.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll have to make you sit in another room, but.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Real quick, Alex and thank you. Our law enforcement execs from around the state are regularly updated as those Executive Orders change, up to and including yesterday when the Attorney General's Office got on our morning call from the ROIC. I would say that residences offer a different challenge than public establishments and we're relying, as we have, I think, for the past several months to rely on families and individuals to take that responsibility very seriously. Whether it's Thanksgiving or not, to adhere to the 10 people or less restrictions. The guidance really comes from the Attorney General's Office, not me as the Colonel. That happens routinely, especially as this has evolved. Because no law enforcement in the past 100 years, to my knowledge, has been asked to take this type of enforcement and this type of role on in their own communities.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, remind us how many local communities does the State Police serve as the local law enforcement?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: We serve 89 as the actual service amongst –

Governor Phil Murphy: That's out of our 565 communities. So the burden of the State Police is not just at the state level and all the stuff you all do on our highways and byways, but it's also you're not just the frontline, you're the only police force in 89 communities in the state. I don't know how to – I don't know that I can predict Thanksgiving and we're going to move on because we're running out of time here.

But, you know, we had had experiences, you and I were involved and Parimal was involved in a Rutgers football watch party, and we're all in for RU football, but that was one where actually action was taken. I think it was either noise or cars or just visibly seeing a lot of bodies there. But you know, folks need to be on high alert. But there's nothing like personal responsibility. It's up to us, folks. If it comes down to needing law enforcement to be in your dining room in order to bend the curve, my guess is we've lost, that it's not bendable.

It's there, they will be there. That is a real threat. As you saw over the weekend, ABC went out with aggressive enforcement but we've got to do this ourselves, folks. It's got to come from us. With that Matt and then Elise, and we'll take it home. Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. The latest seven-day average is now the highest since the outbreak began and hospitals have tripled from where they were a month ago. Understanding the big caveat with the seven-day average in testing, do you remain confident that the recent strategic restrictions that you put in place will be enough to slow the increase in new cases in hospitalizations?

You mentioned elective surgeries, indoor dining and indoor sports as the next three steps on Monday. Are you considering more?

On testing, we're getting reports of people having to wait two to three days just to get an appointment for a test at a pharmacy urgent care center and that some people have been lining up for hours for walk-in testing. Are you concerned that there's stress on the testing system?

On modeling, Commissioner, are you able to at least just give a ballpark of what hospitalizations and daily case counts will look like when we hit that peak that we've discussed?

And from Dan Munoz, on Friday, the State's Department of Labor put out the first report on how many people filed private workplace complaints over COVID-19 safety violations. Dan is concerned, what's going on with those complaints? Have they been followed up on? Have any of them been investigated or resolved yet?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for those. First question is, are we confident that the steps we've taken will have an impact? I am confident that they will. So in other words, we don't do this, just sort of, hey, let's try this. We see transmission or outbreaks and I think Judy, beginning with Judy, tries to match our step up against where we're seeing it. So restricting indoor capacity is a big one, by example. Can we say for sure? I can't say for sure but if folks do what they need to do along with the real threat of compliance, God willing, it is at least a step in the right direction. That is the intended effect.

No more steps that we're about to announce today or tomorrow, but they all remain on the table. Judy mentioned, and I think characterized this very well on the question on diverts. In March, April and May, maybe I think even into June when the hospital is on divert, the denominator was completely COVID, or overwhelmingly COVID. You're only in a hospital in March, April, May, June. If you were in there because you had a heart – I mean, if it was non-COVID, it was very few reasons you were there.

I use my own example, I had a malignant tumor on a kidney and my doctor told me one more week, I would have been pushed off, I would have been viewed as elective, so that's a pretty broad definition. Right now, hospitals are running full bore. Healthcare, that is clearly an option that is on the table, but nothing at the moment.

There is – Listen, it's not just New Jersey, this happened when the flare ups began, Matt, in Florida and Arizona in May and June, the whole country's on fire, and that certainly tests are testing resources and the supply lines and the supply chains. Folks are waiting, you know, when you see the folks out line waiting to go in and get a test, we've got to fix that so we're doing everything we can to continue to bulk up our testing.

The Cue Health, I think there was a call on Cue Health yesterday with Judy and her team and our team as well. That's the one where you get the cartridge, you plug in, you get a 19-minute turnaround, high degree of reliability and the data goes right into our system, which makes it even more dear to us. But we need more capacity as a country, and we're no exception.

And by the way, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, we have had some days we're testing 75,000 people up from zero in March. We are in as good a shape as any state but it's not acceptable. If you're waiting in line for hours and you're upset about that, we don't blame you. We're doing everything we can to address that.

I'm going to come back to Judy and the modeling, I've got no color on the workplace complaints in terms of what actually has happened. But if you will bear with me, Parimal and Mahen will check in and come back to you with the details on what is actually happening. Judy, how high can we go here? I mean, assuming we don't bend the curve? I mean, I'm looking at models that say we could have 8,000 to 10,000 cases a day. Any more color on that, or on hospitalizations in terms of what you're looking at?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we look primarily at the hospitalizations. If we did nothing, we could be right back to March and April. On the other hand, the reason we were able to bring that curve down in March and April, and the predictive modeling showed this, that if individuals upheld all of the safeguarding 50% of the time, we would be successful, and we were. The average is 31% of the time. So everybody in New Jersey did a much better job than average. I personally, and you've heard me say this, they save lives, by their own personal responsibility. If we do that, again, we won't reach March and April. We will be able to bend that curve, but it is personal responsibility. Our biggest increases are coming from small social gatherings. That's behind your front door, so that's really tough. But if you do personal responsibility, I think we can do it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, and we've done it. Ron Klain is the one who, early on with Ebola, he said that I know what your models are telling you. You can bend the curve if you plead for personal responsibility and he was right, and we've just got to plead it again. There's no amount of law enforcement that can get behind private doors to enforce compliance. They're there and they will continue to do everything they can, and we have the best in the nation. But at the end of the day, it's on our shoulders. There's just no two ways about it, right? Elise, please take us home.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Three questions. You mentioned a model of 8,000 to 10,000 cases a day. Is that with current precautions in place?

Also regarding vaccinations, do you have an estimated cost of vaccinations for New Jersey? If the federal government doesn't come through, what's the plan to pay?

And also, New York City's MTA is warning of 40% subway service cuts and layoffs of about 9,300 employees. Has your administration been in touch with New York or MTA officials on this? How much of an impact would be felt in New Jersey? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Elise. The 8,000 to 10,000 a day were models that I looked at, Judy, that assumed current behavior, did not assume the personal responsibility or further steps that we could take. I think we think collectively that the steps we've just announced over the past couple of weeks already should have some sort of an impact on that.

I don't have a specific number on vaccine costs for New Jersey. Do you, Judy in terms of total dollars to deliver to broad society? I think we'll come back to you on that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're doing that modeling now. What we've identified, we've made some assumptions that 100%, for people with insurance, 100% would be reimbursable and we'll collect that. We've identified what it will cost to set up a vaccination site and to get the shot in the arm. We know the reimbursement level and we know there's a delta between what we need to vaccinate 70% of the population in a six-month period and what we expect to get by reimbursement. I think a future presser would be good to do on the whole vaccination and I can show you all of that, soup to nuts. I don't want to misquote the number, but there is a delta and it's in the millions.

Governor Phil Murphy: There's no real plan B, there is no plan B to the federal government not being there. There just isn't a plan B. This is too complex and too expensive. In fairness, the Trump administration folks, on Monday, were saying all the right things about their willingness to take on the burden, but you know, there's a devil in the details, where's the beef moment? But they were saying all the right things and I'm completely confident the Biden administration, when they get there, will step up and fill that responsibility.

I don't have color on the MTA piece, but I'm not shocked, Elise. This is not surprisingly, the MTA probably far more so even than NJ Transit, under the theory that you've had not just the work-from-home phenomenon take hold but you've had, by all accounts, an outward flight of people and therefore where their home is. So that even when they are going to work, they're probably crossing a river from a place like New Jersey. We've seen that in home sales and just the whole pattern of behavior.

For somebody who commutes from New Jersey into New York City and has to go from, say, Penn Station to a different destination for work, my guess is that will have an impact and it's no surprise the transit systems around the country are up against it and NJ Transit is no exception to that.

I hope someday we'll be able not just to emerge from this, but that we will have used our time wisely inside of our own systems, and be able to say listen, while capacities were down, as bad as it was, as challenging as it was, we were able to accomplish the following things, and I hope that we'll be able to say that.

So with that, I'm going to mask up. Again, we'll be back at noon. Forgive me for the misfire earlier, at noon on Friday. Judy, Tina, thank you. Pat, likewise, Parimal, we lost Jared, but Mahen, thank you for that. We'll follow up on a couple of these Department of Labor and other items that came up here.

Again, folks, this one is fairly simple. Our plea is do the right thing when you're behind closed doors. Limit the amount of people who are with you, particularly intergenerationally. Don't assume just because you're in your own home or a private home that you shouldn't social distance, that you shouldn't still try to be outside, that you shouldn't have a face covering. Please do the basic stuff. The vaccine development news is overwhelmingly positive by the day. I think we get more and more convinced that this is real, that there will be multiple options, that it will be safe and efficacious, but Judy and her team will make sure that or we won't stand up on its behalf. It's coming.

I think for our frontline vulnerable people it may be coming sooner than we thought. But for all of us, we're still a few months away, not a few years, not a few decades, a few months away between now, particularly with this cold weather. We've just got to do the right thing, folks. God bless you all and thank you.

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