

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry to be a couple minutes behind. Lots of moving parts today. With me to my right is the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have you both. To my left another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Chief Counsel Parimal Garg, and a cast of thousands.

We do have several announcements to lead with, so let's get right at it. First today I am announcing that my executive order from last August 13th, which has allowed school districts to provide remote instruction under certain circumstances during the 2020/2021 academic year will expire at the end of this current schoolyear. Through this action, we are declaring that all students will be back in school for full-time in-person instruction come the start of the 2021/2022 schoolyear. Further, this announcement also includes the removal of the full-time remote learning option for families. Next year, parents will not be enabled to broad scale opt their child out of in-person instruction as was allowed during this schoolyear. We are facing a much different world than one year ago when we had to begin planning for this schoolyear. We know much more about this virus and how it spreads. We have much more on the ground experience in fighting it, and we have a robust vaccination program that now reaches adolescents as young as 12. My guess, Judy and Tina, that the vaccinations that are in trial, we're going to see those – that age limit go down even further over time, hopefully sooner than later.

As time moves forward, we will gain more knowledge and more tools. I echo the words of Randi Weingarten, a friend, President of the American Federation of Teachers who over the weekend said her union was, and I quote her, all in. She also said, and I quote Randi, the United States will not be fully back until we are fully back in school. We know that we can't get back fully in-person safely with the – we know that we can, rather, get back fully in-person safely with the right protocols in place, and that is what we should all be planning to do. Of course, we will continue as we have from the get-go to follow the science, and should there be a localized outbreak or other emergency, we will act accordingly. Otherwise, buildings will be fully open. This decision will have no impact on summer school programs. Summer school programs have never been part of that executive order. They remain outside, and we've put out guidance on that already.

Next, two other quick announcements. First, effective today, we are lifting our travel advisory. There will no longer be required periods for quarantine for either out of state travelers coming to New Jersey or for New Jerseyans returning home from trips elsewhere. However, we do encourage everyone to continue to exercise common sense when traveling domestically, and to follow all local health and safety protocols wherever you are traveling to. If your goal is international travel, recognize that the COVID reality in many nations is much different than here, and adhere to the travel guidance and advisories posted by the US Department of State. Also, as it was reported on Friday, I extended the current public health emergency for what should be the final time. Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin and I along with our teams are working toward a legislative solution that will allow the public health emergency, which I first declared, Judy, on March 9th, 2020, several lifetimes ago, it feels like – this will allow it to expire next month while at the same time providing a path forward to ensure that we maintain the necessary tools to protect the public's health and safety for the duration of the pandemic.

Finally, before we get to the numbers, I do want to address at this table our decision to retain our requirement that everyone in New Jersey continue to mask up when in an indoor public space, whether it be a store, a restaurant, a coffee shop, a diner or what have you. To be sure, the CDC guidance is clear that fully vaccinated people are much safer to engage in everyday life than unvaccinated people. This is even more reason for every eligible New Jerseyan to make the decision to get vaccinated as soon as possible. The CDC said that vaccinated people don't need to wear masks at small, private gatherings. We have always stated that reducing the spread of COVID in private settings comes down to personal responsibility.

The CDC has also said that mask mandates remain a local decision, and you may have seen that Dr. Tony Fauci has cautioned – even after the CDC's announcement, I might add – that premature widespread removal of mask mandates, especially indoors, could reignite the virus. Again, as a reminder, New Jersey has never had a general outdoor mask requirement in situations without crowds. Our policy has been from the get-go that masks should be worn by everyone only when social distancing was impossible to maintain outside.

Even though those who are unvaccinated should continue to exercise caution, today I will sign an executive order, which we previewed on Friday, eliminating the outdoor mask mandate altogether in settings open to the public. However, there remains a simple reason why the indoor mask requirement will remain in effect. While we have made tremendous progress, we are not out of the woods yet. The majority of New Jerseyans are still unvaccinated, and we're not checking anyone's vaccine status at the door when you go to the supermarket or to a hardware store, for instance. I don't know how we can expect workers to tell who is vaccinated from who isn't, and it is unfair to put the burden on businessowners and frontline employees to police every patron. Certain high-risk settings, like

correctional facilities and long-term care facilities and activities involving infants and children like childcare and summer school will continue to require or strongly encourage masks for all individuals given the vulnerable nature of the populations, and that is supported by the updated CDC guidance.

The best thing we can do for now – and this is not forever and always, folks. We just need more time on the clock – is to keep our indoor mask mandate in place in public settings to protect you, your family, the workers, and the entire community. I was proud to see the support from my – another dear friend Mark Perrone, head of the National United Food and Commercial Workers' union in support of our decision to keep our indoor mask policy in place for the time being. Again, not forever and always. Additionally, I would turn to the words of the Chicago restaurateur Rick Bayless who recently said, and I quote him, "I've visited virtually every table mask on. It's okay. We're vaccinated, some of our guest without masks tell me. I am too, I say. We hope everyone here is, but we don't know, so we're asking you to wear the masks – wear masks as a measure of respect for everyone in here tonight." Good words of wisdom, Pat, from Rick, who I don't know, but I respect.

I think that the way we have to – I think that's the way that we have to look at this. As I've said time and again, we've gotten as far as we have because we all recognize that the pandemic required us to be a little bit more selfless and a little less selfish, and this is one of those times. Again, this is not forever and always. We have this thing on the run. You're going to see from the numbers that we put out, this virus is on the run. That is thanks to each and very one of you. A little bit longer here, and we accelerate our ability to drive this virus into the ground, and we're making at the same time tremendous strides in our vaccination program.

Over the weekend, the CDC's count of New Jersey adults aged 18 and over who have received at least their first dose topped 70% of our adult population. Our in-house count is a little bit more conservative, but no less pointing in the right direction. Additionally, not that I'd know, but our Shot and a Beer vaccine incentive program continues to successfully move forward, and we are delighted by the many other incentives that business owners are coming up with independently. Our team is also working with statewide business associations on some new incentives we hope to be able to roll out in the coming days.

Here's what it boils down to. We are going to be able to take off our masks indoors in the not so distance future as more and more people complete their vaccination courses. We just can't yet because we need to know unequivocally that doing so will not lead to a backslide in our progress. Again, we have this virus on the run thanks to the millions of you out there. Remember, we have been at the epicenter of this pandemic twice. We have crushed the curve twice. We are determined to make sure that there is not a third time.

With that, let's take a look at the latest numbers for further proof of the progress we are making with our masks on indoors. First, as of this morning's count, we are reporting a total of 3,867,148 people being fully vaccinated. You could see how that breaks down because – between what we've done in-state and what we know that has been done in other states. I think, Judy, that's where the CDC gap in their numbers versus ours exists. That is either federally run programs or vaccinations administered out of state to New Jerseyans is at least that number. My guess is it's even more.

Starting on Thursday, we received reports of lines, in fact, at some sites including our megasites as the first tranche of the 12- to 15-year-old group arrived with their parents and guardians to get their first doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Judy, I was told that the Meadowlands megasite alone, over the weekend, 1302 12- to 15-year-olds were vaccinated. Friday, Judy and I were joined by Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, first lady Tammy Murphy, and the woman there on the right, dear friend, New Jersey icon Whoopie Goldberg, Essex County Executive the one and only Joe DiVincenzo, and local officials in East Orange for a highly successful vaccination event as part of our Fraternal for the Shot outreach effort.

Again, Grateful for the Shot is a derivative of the well-known Souls to the Polls, and in that respect, I also want to thank Reverend Melvin Wilson of St. Matthew AME church for this partnership and leadership, and if that weren't enough, he celebrated this weekend his 40th anniversary of ministry. On Saturday, I want to give Adrian Mapp and our friends in Plainfield a shout-out. Adolescents and teens in Plainfield were able to get their vaccinations at a clinic hosted by Plainfield High School, and again, I want to thank everyone in that city for working together.

We're reporting another 556 additional positive cases today from both PCR and presumed positive antigen tests. The statewide rate of transmission is now at .59. As Judy and I noted last week, we expected our rate to once again moderate as the statistical noise from the rebalancing of our total case counts that occurred over the prior weeks would no longer influence the RT, which is based on a seven-day rolling average. We're going to show you a series of graphs today we have not shown in a while. The graph you see there shows the change in RT over the past eight months. Let's remind ourselves and look back beginning – since the beginning of the pandemic. Look at that. We forget. Back in March of 2020, the RT was nearly six. Today it is one tenth of that level. Folks, we have done this. You have done this together.

The positivity rate for the 33,479 PCR tests recorded last Thursday, 2.73%. Again, let's take a look at the positivity rate over the past 14 months. This graph is a little bit different format, but look at this. Interestingly enough, you can see how it ebbed and flowed in the first versus the second wave, but again, we'll put ourselves in an extraordinary position for our recovery. The gray bars, by the way, that's the amount of daily tests on average, and you can still see, even though we've broken the back of the second wave, there are still a lot of folks getting tested out there.

This story also tracks along the other key metrics in our hospital. As of last night, 827 patients being treated. That's the lowest level since October, but let's look at this over the long haul. Look at that. We forget how bad it was. 8270 was the peak in the middle of April last year. ICU count last night, 188. That's the near-term graph. Here's the 14-month look at ICU patients. Number of ventilators in use last night, 125. Let's look at the long haul on that one as well. Unbelievable. The second wave in any measure was not as bad as the first wave, but it was bad. Throughout the day yesterday, 111 live patients walked out, 70 COVID positive patients were admitted. Not yet confirmed, 18 losses of life over the past 24 hours. Let those last two numbers, by the way, admitted and deaths, be reminders that we are still – that there are still unvaccinated people falling ill enough that they're requiring hospitalization and sadly in some cases dying.

All of these metrics together show one thing, that at this moment, we are as good if not better than any state in America in winning this war. Let's not forget that we are the nation's densest state. While in many respects that's a huge positive, it has been a huge challenge in battling this virus, but look how far we've come. We still have more to do. We have to keep doing it together. All 9.3 million of us, so let's show that respect we have for our fellow New Jerseyans and keep up with wearing our masks indoors just a little bit longer. Today we also must report with the heaviest of hearts, another 13 losses of life from confirmed COVID-19 complications. Total number of confirmed losses of life, you can see it, and then the probable numbers, unfathomable totals of now 26,000. Extraordinary numbers.

Let's now take a few moments to recall three more members of our extraordinary family who we have lost. We begin with this guy, Robert Colello from the Morganville section of Marlboro in my home county of Monmouth. Born and raised in Jersey City, he served our nation as an active-duty soldier in the United States army from 1955 to 1957 and remained a member of the army reserves for another six years, earning an honorable discharge in 1963. Bob was a master plumber and proud 60-year member of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the US and Canada. Closer to home, we worked out of Local 24 in North Jersey. That's a local I know well.

While he was committed to his union family, he was even more dedicated to his immediate family. Working alongside his wife and children on any number of home projects or gatherings around the barbecue. He leaves them now. His wife right there of almost six decades, Florence, bless her. His daughter Doris, with whom I had the great honor of speaking last Wednesday, who is by the way, Judy, a registered nurse of 34 years, and three sons, Wayne,

Robert, and Dean, each of whom share the same twin sister Dorothy and several nieces and nephews. Bob was 84 years old. We thank him for his service to our nation and to the men and women of organized labor, and may God bless and watch over his memory and his family.

Next up, we honor this guy, Ocean City's Ronald Grunstra. He too was 84 years old when he passed. Ron was born and raised in Clifton and enlisted in the air force following his graduation from Clifton High in 1954. He would serve in active duty on an air base in Guam. Following his honorable discharge, he came home to further his education thanks to the GI bill, earning a bachelor's degree in education from William Paterson University and a master's degree from Seton Hall University. He started his career in education in the classroom, teaching English and History at Parsippany High and coaching the baseball and football teams, my Lord. He eventually rose to be Parsippany's assistant principal. He would move to South Jersey, however, to assume the role of principal at Absegami High when that school opened in Galloway Township in Atlantic County. When he retired from education, Ron found a second career. This guy did not like putting his feet up, I can tell you that much, right? He found a second career as a realtor in Ocean County. Given his leadership abilities, it's no surprise that he would become president of the Ocean City Board of Realtors. I think I said Ocean County when I meant Ocean City.

An avid golfer, Ron was a three-time member – Pat, you ready for this? I'm not a golfer, but you got to respect this, of the Shoot Your Age Club. His last time achieving that came in the summer, last summer 2020, when he shot an 84, including a hole-in-one. He leaves behind his blessed wife, Midge, to whom he enjoyed 36 years of marriage, and he leaves two stepsons, Dean and Dave, and their spouses, and four grandchildren, Dan, Jack, Rob, and Sara. He is also survived by his sister, Joan. I had the great honor to speak both with Midge, his wife, and his stepson, Dave, last Wednesday. What a guy. We thank Ronald for his service to our nation and to his years as a leader in public education and in business. I hope he's found a golf course with wide fairways and fair greens. May God bless and watch over him.

And finally today, we remember Madhukar Choksi, born in Ahmedabad, India, a city I've been to, I might add. He came to the United States in 1965 and would eventually call Jersey City his home. Look at that smile, huh? He earned his master's degree in engineering from Stanford University. Across a 40-year career in the construction industry, he rose to become a senior partner at the India-based KBM Constructions.

He always enjoyed the engineering challenges posed by building industrial structures, and he was equally committed to passing his passion to the next generation of engineers and building folks, serving on the faculty at the School of Building Science and Technology in his native India. Learning was Madhukar's other lifelong passion, and he gleaned everything he could from his frequent travels or from the numerous books he picked up. He was a true renaissance man. Madhukar leaves behind his wife, Krishna, and their children, their son, Kushal and daughter, Ruti, and their families, including his two beloved grandchildren, Shlok [ph] and Shawn [ph].

Madhukar was 78 years old. I had the great honor of speaking with his wife, Krishna, there by his side and son, Kushal, last Wednesday. Following Madhukar's passing, Krishna started a plants business called Madhuban to help ease her grief. By the way, Madhuban translates into enchanted garden. Now with the global pandemic centered on India, she is giving back, donating all of her profits to support the public health workers on the subcontinent. We are grateful for her humanity and kindness. We are grateful that Madhukar chose New Jersey to call his home. His legacy will live on through the brick, and concrete, and steel that will outlast many of us and certainly, will live on in his blessed family.

Together we must make sure we outlast this virus with as many members of our New Jersey family with us as we can hold. To do that folks, please get vaccinated to protect yourself and your family. Keep masking up indoors as a sign of respect for and solidarity with your fellow New Jerseyans, again not forever and always, but a little bit longer. Together, folks, we will finish this job.

By the way, we'll also finish this job because of the great work of numerous nonprofit organizations, who have spent the past year keeping our state strong and focused. One of these great organizations is Millburn-based, the Opportunity Project Clubhouse, which supports more than 630 individuals recovering from severe brain injuries and their families, working with them, to regain their independence and productivity. This is something this organization has been doing since 1994.

Over the past year, the Opportunity Project and its executive director, that woman, Rebecca Gallanter, have partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to keep its programs running for its clients. The EDA provided vital grant support that has ensured that all current staff have remained in place. Because of the stability, not only has the Opportunity Project met the challenge of the past year, but it is also looking to add additional staff and new programs for those it serves, including remote and onsite hybrid programs. I caught up with Rebecca last Wednesday to thank her for the tremendous work that she and her team at the Opportunity Project do. The Opportunity Project is proof that every member of our New Jersey family has something to give back to us all. Check them out, opportunityproject.org.

For the rest of us, we still have to work together to give a little of ourselves to make sure we win the fight against COVID once and for all. Let's keep it up just a little bit longer. Please get vaccinated. Keep masking up indoors. Let's be respectful and compassionate to one another. We are very close. As I said, we've got this thing on the run. With every shot, we get closer. Every time you put your mask on when walking indoors, we get closer. Keep it up, and we'll get there even faster.

With that, please help me welcome, the woman on my right, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As the governor shared, the state is moving in the right direction, but we do have reasons to remain vigilant. Our deaths remain in double digits, and that is troubling. New Jersey is ranked second in the nation in term of deaths per 100,000. It reaffirms that we need to still be cautious. One in 500 New Jerseyans have died from COVID-19. This is a serious and unrelenting virus. Cases are declining, but we are still seeing approximately 1,000 infections per day, even with the vaccine. Last summer, we saw case numbers as low as 200 to 300 per day. We know we can drive these numbers down even further.

The variants of this disease are also a cause of concern. We need to remain vigilant as information about variants is evolving, and we don't yet know how effective the vaccine is against any particular variant. Currently, we have 4,128 variant cases of concern in our state. While the situation in New Jersey has improved, the indoor mask requirement will remain in effect. Masks work by being a simple barrier that helps to prevent respiratory droplets that are formed when someone breathes, talks, coughs, or sneezes from reaching others. They reduce the chance of both transmitting and catching the coronavirus. Masks have been shown in studies to reduce the spread of coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Vaccines are the most critical tool we have to fight this virus. Vaccine coverage across New Jersey is increasing, but there are pockets and groups with lower rates of vaccinations. The COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective, but not 100%. Now to correct the record, last week, when I was making a point about the need to remain vigilant because of the variants, I said the vaccine is 95% effective. That does not mean that you have a 5% chance of getting the disease. However, we don't yet know how effective the vaccine is against any particular variant. It also depends on how much COVID-19 there is in the community. Across the United States, about .02% of everyone vaccinated has gotten COVID. You have greater than 99% chance if you are vaccinated of not getting COVID-19.

As more residents get vaccinated, we take another step forward to beating this virus. Thankfully, so far, 21,964 12 to 15-year-olds have already received their first dose of vaccine. That's among the 457,000 in that age group or about 4.6% of that age group have started their vaccinations. We're seeing progress among all age groups with 86% of

those 65 and older receiving at least one dose, 71% 50 to 64, 57% 30 to 49 years of age, 44% of those 18 to 29, and 28% of those 16 and 17 years of age.

Although we are doing well overall, we do need vaccination uptake to increase in our state. As the Governor has outlined, we are employing a number of strategies to make it easier for residents to get vaccinated and build confidence in the vaccines. In the last two weeks. The COVID-19 Community Corps have been in Newark, East Orange, Perth Amboy, New Brunswick, Passaic, and this week, they will be in Trenton. They're going out to underserved communities to provide education, help with registration, and access to vaccination sites.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 827 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation last evening. This is trending in the right direction but as I've referenced in the past, last August, we saw hospitalizations about half that amount, or 400 hospitalizations, a year ago. There are 4,128 reports of the CDC variants of concern; 3,814 of those are the UK variant, B-117. Additionally, we have 145 reports of the Brazilian variant, 11 reports of the South African, and 158 reports of the California variant.

Today we're reporting five new cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are now 121 cumulative cases in our state, and one of these children are currently hospitalized. At the state veterans' homes, there's been one new positive case among residents in Menlo Park and at the state psychiatric hospitals, there's been three positive cases among patients at Greystone.

The daily percent positivity as of May 13th for New Jersey as a state is 2.73; northern part of the state, 2.8; central, 2.41, southern, 3.05. That concludes my daily report. As always, stay safe, mask up, socially distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested, and let's get vaccinated thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. Dan, can we call up the long form of total hospitalizations chart? Would you mind doing that just to – I want to underscore our point that Judy just said here. This is the total hospitalizations beginning in March of last year through yesterday. This is an important point you're making, Judy. We made great progress over the past number of weeks, and we got that number down, but it's still double what it was in the summer of last year, right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: In August.

Governor Phil Murphy: Clearly we did not have a vaccine last August, so before everyone jumps down my throat, it would never have occurred to us to take off the indoor masking guidelines last August even with half the amount of hospitalizations. We will do it; there's no question about that. Let's remember, for as much progress we're making, the good news is we're a fraction – literally – how about this? We're 10% of the peak, because it was 8270. That's the good news. The more challenging news, it's still double what it was last summer. Again, with vaccines, we're in a dramatically different place. Thank you, Dan, for pulling that up.

Pat, you're doing great on the weather, so great you for that. I looked at the forecast for this week. I can't recall another week where we had as good a forecast. However, that also means it's not hospitable for the forest fire reality. I know you've got an update on that. I had the opportunity to speak with friend, an Ocean County Commissioner Director Gary Quinn, a short while ago to check in with him, make sure he knew that we were here. I also had an exchange with Little Egg Harbor Township Mayor John Kim on the same topic. Any update you've got on that front, or compliance, or other matters? Great to have you.

State Superintendent of Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. No EO violations reported to the ROIC since we last met. Our Emergency Response Bureau is monitoring the forest fire as well in Little Egg Harbor, a real – the recognition goes to the New Jersey State Forest Fire Service, who their response and what they've done, as Chief Rich Busby noted, saved homes there. There were about a hundred homes there that were being threatened and as of right now, I'll knock on wood like you, Governor, they've not lost any property down there. It is just over 600 acres and as of about an hour or so ago still remains about 40% contained, but phenomenal effort down there but to your point, Gov, when the weather gets nice and warm and a little windy, it doesn't make for conducive forest-fighting efforts, but they're doing a phenomenal job down there. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. It's in the category of if it's not one thing or another, beautiful weather like this, great for the pandemic, challenging and fighting fires. As I understood it, the number of structures that were threatened is down from 100 down to 30.

State Superintendent of Police Col. Pat Callahan: That's correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: Still no loss of any structures. Is that your understanding?

State Superintendent of Police Col. Pat Callahan: That is correct, yes, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll keep them in your prayers. Again, they're doing – they know what they're doing because sadly, they've had to deal with this before. We're going to be – we'll start over here with Dustin. We are I think going to mix it up a little bit. I don't know where Dan is; I've lost him. I think we're going to mix it up this week. We're going to be virtual tomorrow, and I think we're going to be on the road on Wednesday, so stay tuned. We'll give you more details and we got a few things baking which hopefully will be consistent with the reasons why we're on the road. We'll leave it at that. Is that fair to say?

With that, Dustin, good afternoon.

Q&A Section

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Couple mask questions: what data or science are you looking at that differs from the CDC and nearby states, and what benchmarks do you need to see to decide it's safe for vaccinated people to stop wearing masks indoors and public places? Isn't there a risk of sending a message to unvaccinated people that affirms their skepticism that the vaccines are not effective? You may see some people defiant about this, so will there be any consequences to people who don't wear masks indoors? If so, what? What necessary tools do you need to keep the public health emergency, once it's over, and why would they be necessary if the emergency would then be over? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Keep the mic handy because I want to make sure I understood this. The first part of it was what are we looking at to make the decisions we're making? Is that right?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: The second piece is about unvaccinated people. I missed that.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Don't you run the risk of sending a message to people who are not vaccinated, has the hesitancy, that would just affirm their skepticism? Vaccines don't work; I still have to wear a mask anyway. That may be a train of thought.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I don't see it that way, obviously. Again, I'll repeat this and Judy and Tina should weigh in here. First principle, the CDC's announcement reaffirmed – I think this gets to your second question, Dustin, that overwhelmingly, life's a lot safer and better for folks who are vaccinated than those who are unvaccinated. That's probably the biggest ah-ha. Secondly, there really isn't much of a difference in our protocols as it relates to folks outdoors. We basically have said from the get-go if you could socially distance outside, you don't need to wear the mask. We're basically codifying that and saying you don't need to wear masks outside at this point, but that's not a big move on the needle.

Thirdly, I'm leaving the travel – cutting the travel restrictions. Thirdly, indoor private settings – again, we haven't said this in a long time. I remember last October, November, December with Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's Eve, we were saying the overwhelming evidence was from private gatherings, but we didn't – I don't think we vaccinated our first person until December 15th, as I recall.

What we're saying, and we agree with the CDC, as of now that if you're at an indoor private gathering, the chances are overwhelming that you're in with a bubble that you've been with. It's just that we think we had this thing on the run, and as it relates to public places we're just not there yet. We're putting an enormous burden on the retail employee or the maitre d' or you pick your – the guy at the hardware store to make them become the adjudicator between prove to me that you're vaccinated or not. That's an incredibly unfair position for them to be in. For a whole host of reasons – we're going to get there, but we haven't said this in a while, either. Again, the experts to my right will either support this or correct the record. When you've got it going in the right direction as we have it going now, the more time you can put on the clock, the higher the chances are that you're going to drive this thing permanently into the ground. That is, in fact, where we are.

I think the opposite on your second question, Dustin. I'm not trying to be argumentative. I think this is overwhelmingly an incentive to get vaccinated. We're going to come up with some more programs and approaches to that over the next few days to encourage as many folks as possible. I wrote the word tools down for your third question, but I forget what the question was. I apologize.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: On the public health emergency, once you let that expire, what are the tools that you're going to need?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep, there's a bunch of them. We can probably get into this in more detail. Every time I've asked for a memo, Parimal, it's five or six pages. It's underpinning our vaccine efforts, the requirements we make of our hospitals, our testing protocols. There's a whole range of things. Do either of you want to comment on CDC guidance or what we still need even in the absence of the public health emergency?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Just about everything we do with our hospitals at all the points of dispensing are reliant on the public health emergency, particularly all the waivers we have in place to allow the hospitals to move their licensed bed complement to meet the need of their community. If they need more critical care beds, that's in place. If they need to reciprocally bring in nurses or even for long-term care, CNAs from other states, that's part of our waivers. It's really how we're managing our pandemic response from beginning to hopefully some end at some point in time. We want to keep those waivers in place so that we can be nimble and agile as we follow this virus around.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't think every state has enjoyed the extremely constructive from moment one engagement we've had with legislative leadership. It just didn't happen on Friday when we put the announcement out but over the past really couple of months, there's been a really good spirit of cooperation. I want to get the Senate President and Speaker a big shout-out and their teams. We're working together, Parimal, in our office and Judy and her team are working with them to get the right legislation in place that will allow us to take that step responsibly and safely. I thank them for that. Thank you.

Brent, good afternoon.

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Good afternoon. You just talked last week about the importance of states coordinating together, so why are you the holdout in the area on mask – I understand why you're keeping the mask mandates. What the heck happened to working with New York and Connecticut? Are they just not talking to you guys? Isn't there a concern people will just cross into New York and then come back throwing their mask into the Hudson River? What safety measures should parents expect in the schools in the fall? Will mask and social distancing still be required? When will you lift the ban on people being able to return household items at stores?

Governor Phil Murphy: That first question was rather dramatic, Brent. Don't you agree? Just to give you a little bit of a visual, okay. We still – I think I've said this. Probably you're sick of hearing it from me. Thematically at least, we still have a very high degree of cooperation and engagement and in many respects, coordination. This is, I think, going to ultimately be at the end of the day – my guess is more than anything else – a question of timing. I just don't want to get burned. I don't want to go back. We're the only state in America that has not gone back once, and I don't want to start now. We've got this thing on the run. If we could save one more life by leaving more time on the clock, it will have been worth it. I can't speak for our neighbors; they've been great partners, I have to say. On this one, we feel quite strongly. Again, this is not forever and always but a little bit more time on the clock we think is a big help for us.

We put out – Judy, Department of Education with your input and your team's input put out a very significant document on back-to-school protocols last June. I think you should expect a similar timing this year, Brent. Sometime in June would be my guess when you'll get the whole catechism in terms of what the protocols are. Even then, because the virus – we've said this a lot. The virus dictates the terms, not us. Even then, we amended it over the course of the summer.

Returning of household goods, I want to get that on the books. Parimal's not allowing me to do this. Parimal, explain why this is still on because I think this is one we should be addressing.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, so that ban is codified in a statute that's tied to the existence of a public health emergency. Even if the legislature could act to change the statute and send us a bill that we could sign or when the public emergency lapses, then that ban would expire.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think that's a different way of putting it that I think we'll see that – one of those eventualities occur because I think we are all in broad agreement on that. Thank you.

Mike, is that you? Good afternoon.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Yep, good afternoon, Governor. I was just wondering if you – you look at the percentages of fully vaccinated. The country's at about 37%. New Jersey's at 44%. Is your decision on indoor mask mandates – is that another way of saying that you don't think the CDC – that they acted too soon, that they should've waited until there was a higher percentage of people fully vaccinated?

Governor Phil Murphy: That they should've waited? Is that what you're saying?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Yeah, that they should've waited like New Jersey is, like you are. Another question: some states are deciding to do away with the \$300 supplemental unemployment benefit from the federal government saying that that's an impediment to people getting hired. I think you said before that New Jersey's not going to do that. Any change on that? Is there any plan to require job searching in order to get the \$300 benefit? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: On the second question, no plans to get rid of it. I've been asked a fair amount, and I've tried to study this myself. Is the \$300 supplemental the reason why we didn't see a bigger jump in employment last week? My – based on everything I've seen and our team has seen, it is a contributing factor potentially, but I think there's a general consensus as well that this – there's a broader set of factors here; access to childcare, schools not being full-time in, maybe some nervousness about going back in. You're starting to see entities pay more to get the workforce we need. We predicted that would happen. My guess is there may be a little bit of a lead lag associated with that. We have no plans on that.

I believe I said this last week Parimal or Dan will correct me if I did not. This – there is a requirement that we have had in place that's always been in place, that you have to verify that you did not turn down suitable employment I believe is the phrase that is used. That's been there from the get-go in New Jersey and it will continue to be.

I can't speak for the CDC as they're seeing that we may not be seeing. I think again to repeat what we said a few minutes ago – Tina, we got to pull you in from the bullpen. I took the overwhelming reaction of that, forget the timing, is there's a bright line between if you're vaccinated versus not vaccinated. That to me is the big takeaway. Again, more time on the clock – when you've got numbers going in the right direction, when you've got the virus on the run is a good thing, and that's where we're going to be at least for a little bit longer. Tina, any thoughts.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Well, again, we can't speculate on what CDC's intent was, but we do know that CDC has stated that the reason why they wanted to get the guidance updated was because they had more evidence and information related to the fact that fully vaccinated people don't transmit diseases much, that the vaccines are more than 90% effective. They also are pretty good against the variants as well, and they just wanted to reiterate that kind of as a continued carrot to getting vaccinated. We have to keep in mind that these masks considerations namely are to protect those who are unvaccinated. We want to be able to emphasize these are the things that you can resume once you get vaccinated, and that's really the carrot.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would just say we announced, Judy and Tina, that 70 people were admitted to the hospital yesterday and 18 – sadly, 18 folks died. I don't know this, but I believe we can assume the overwhelming amount of them were unvaccinated because these vaccines – each profess to have 100% efficacy against severe illness and death. Now is it possible someone in there could've been vaccinated? I suppose, but we don't have any proof of that. I think Tina's point – I'm using that as a data point to make the point. Ironically this is to protect the folks who are not yet vaccinated.

Brent, I didn't answer one part of your question. I would just plead with people to do the right thing here. If there's a period of time where it's a little bit different across the Hudson or across the Delaware, let's not tempt fate. Let's not be irresponsible in our behavior. I meant to address that earlier. Again, this is not a forever and always. Thank you.

Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, New 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon. Commissioner Persichilli, for you, what specifically would be a metric that you could name that would indicate the state is ready for the removal of the indoor mask mandate for vaccinated people? Can you talk about an RT, a case number, anything like that? Similarly, you mentioned just a few moments ago that part of the reason we are where we are in terms of fighting the pandemic are the double-digit deaths. Well, the Governor's been saying for months that deaths are a lagging indicator. What's a current indicator that you or the Governor could point to and tell us why we cannot proceed with the CDC guidance at this point?

Similarly, Governor, do you feel like at this point, you are essentially giving people a choice, telling them either get vaccinated or I keep the mandates in place? Is that form of coercion for people? I'd like to ask about your talks with Senate President Sweeney and Speaker Coughlin. Why does the New Jersey governorship, which is one of the most powerful in the nation, need more power? Will you keep the public health emergency in place if those talks do not produce a bill that you're happy with? Finally, you said earlier – you quoted Dr. Fauci talking about indoor spaces. Dr. Fauci also said Sunday that vaccinated people are “dead ends” for the virus.

Governor Phil Murphy: Are what, sorry?

Alex Zdan, New 12 New Jersey: They're dead ends for the virus. That's what Dr. Fauci said yesterday.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dead ends, yeah.

Alex Adan, News 12 New Jersey: Why is Dr. Fauci right when he agrees with you and wrong when he disagrees with you? Essentially as you were pointing out during the Trump Administration, why are the experts correct when they contradict Donald Trump but wrong when they contradict you?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. I'll give you one data point on your second question if I'm keeping track here. Eighteen people died at our hospitals yesterday. That's one data point. That was yesterday. Judy, I assume – I'll go through and give you a few answers to your questions and then ask Judy and Tina to come in. As always, it's going to be a range of data. We look at the whole range of data. That's the stuff you hear us talking about, spot positivity, hospitalizations, intensive care. Rate of transmission, a little bit of a variation because it's a seven-day rolling average. You look at the variants. I mean, there's a whole – positivity, I mentioned. It's not going to be one – unless we – it's not having one piece of data; it'll be a range of data.

Is it – if I understand my notes here, are we saying either get vaccinated or stick with the indoor masks. I don't think it's that black and white. I think this is – if you add up how many adults are vaccinated, how many now adolescents, and that pace is pretty significant, plus you add to that folks who have already gotten COVID-19 and you look at the wholes of the universe and you're trying to get some sense of the community. A little bit longer on the clock – these are my words – gets you from the gal or the guy at the front of the hardware store having to figure out who's vaccinated versus who's not to a place – I hope sooner than later – where – again, these are my words – it's much more – it's flu season is much more of a okay, we know at some small level it is still among us, but we feel like we can responsibly go into places and not have to worry about who's got it and who doesn't. Again, my words.

Listen, the – I'm not concerned at all that we're not going to get to a good place in the legislation. The conversations at a very specific level – and Parimal will correct me if he sees this differently – have been very good. I don't anticipate that will happen.

I'm going to suggest that I can both – on both sides, Dr. Fauci, as usual, I think has got this right in the following sense. You could say at the same time mask-wearing indoors is still an important prophylactic against the spread of the virus. I think to quite him as I understand it. At the same time, if you've been vaccinated, it is a dead end for the virus simply because you don't know if everyone is vaccinated indoors. That's the fact. Until you have some better conviction on that – in other words, both of those statements can be true and until you have more conviction on that first statement, we think it – again, more time on the clock here helps us.

Judy, Tina, other thoughts you want to add to what you're looking at to get yourself to the level of comfort you need to get to.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Well, just to comment about perhaps what Dr. Fauci meant, I didn't see the quote. I'm guessing that what is meant by vaccinated – fully vaccinated individuals being a “dead end” is that we know that people who are fully vaccinated, their ability to transmit asymptomatic illness is virtually not there. However, on the other hand, unvaccinated individuals we know very much how much asymptomatic spread did play a role in this pandemic during the entire course of the last year and a half. We also have to remember and keep in mind that even though COVID-19 vaccine is really effective, it's not 100% effective. The reality is that you still might have individual, for example, people with weakened immune systems who might be fully vaccinated who simply won't have as much protection as other folks like our hardy Commissioner, for example, or other individuals who would have a better response from the vaccine.

Governor Phil Murphy: I notice you didn't talk about your hardy Governor or hardy Superintendent.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: I meant to say that, too. I apologize.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat and I recognize that. Thank you. Sir, you good? Give us one sec.

Reporter: Question from Michigan. New York has developed an app which allows people to store digital proof of vaccine status. Entertainment venues, stadiums, etc. can use it as a way to justify – to verify entry. Is New Jersey working on something similar and if so, how will it work and when will it be available? Also on New York's app, there's an expiration date listed on each pass. The date is calculated six months after your last COVID-19 shot. Do you think this is because we are likely going to need a booster shot down the line? Are you getting word on when if

that is the case? Questions from Lelo Singh, the disconnect between the CDC's latest mask guidance for vaccinated individuals and state requirements is creating significant public confusion. What steps are you taking to clarify the situation for New Jersey residents? What metrics are keeping you from accepting CDC guidance as the New Jersey standard now? What is your response to criticism that you're making a mistake in not following the CDC's guidance by still requiring masks indoors and that it creates confusion and forces retail workers to police people to wear masks or check for vaccination status? From Colleen O'Day, you used to report vaccines given to non-New Jersey residents on the dashboard; that has stopped. Why? Will you add that info again? Without knowing how many out-of-state residents are getting shots, you can't accurately say how close New Jersey is to meeting its vaccination goal. The vaccination breakdown by age has not been updated in more than a week; why? Will you keep that updated so the public can continue to see how well we are meeting our vaccine goals?

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you have a PowerPoint presentation that goes along with these questions?

Reporter: They did not give me one.

Governor Phil Murphy: One more and that's it; how's that?

Reporter: Copy that. While slow, the number of long-term care residents getting COVID does keep rising. Given all or nearly all of those residents are vaccinated, are these all considered breakthrough infections? Will you provide data as some other states are doing on breakthrough infections, hospitalizations, and deaths in New Jersey soon? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, so I'm going to be very quick because the clock is not our friend here. As it relates to anything that smacks of a passport, which your first two questions relate to, we're not there yet. Judy talks every day about Latino and black penetration of the vaccine. It's a work in progress, and I have to say as long as it's a work in progress, I'm uncomfortable personally with that. That's not to say we won't get there. I'm just going to buzz through these. If you disagree, please don't be bashful. The six-month question on the sell-by date on the New York app I assume is an acknowledgment that the answer to that question is not known by anyone. In other words, it's just a once-a-year flu shot? Is this a once every ten-year, once in a lifetime? I assume New York is leaving that option open.

I think I've already addressed the data as to why we are where we are with indoor masking. I don't think, with all due respect – first of all, if we can – with all – this notion of confusion or other people taking shots at us, with all due respect, if we could save one life by leaving this in place a little bit longer, then at the end of the day, that's our responsibility. The confusion to me is a lot higher with that guy in the hardware store who's working there having to determine whether or not you're vaccinated or I'm vaccinated. That, to me, is much more challenging than listen, do me a favor. Keep these on as long as you're in a public place for a little while longer and we will get there.

I don't have any – we will come back to you on the non-New Jersey residents on the dashboard. Dan, help me out to follow up on that as well as by age. Judy, you went through that by age pretty clearly. The extent to which we're getting long-term care numbers, at least the last time I asked you, which I think was the last time we were together, is largely staff-related. The numbers of residents who have been vaccinated is in the 80-something percent but the staff number is still a work in progress. Is that fair to say? Yeah, so that's – if we think there's another underlying reason for that, we will come back.

Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. With regard to the asking people to please hang in a little longer with the indoor masks, I know that Brent had referenced people throwing the masks in the Hudson River. Can you just give us a little more color on what people need to keep in mind? I did notice myself over the weekend a couple people brazenly walking around with no masks and a look on their face like screw you if you don't like it. With regard to the indoor masks and restaurants, has there been any thought about – you had said originally if the CDC changes the six foot between tables idea that we would certainly look at it and possibly take action at that point. Now they've said for vaccinated people, no physical distancing. If we're all going to keep masks on for a while longer indoors, would you think about making six feet to three feet to give restaurants indoors more opportunity to exist?

Commissioner, with regard to the kids getting vaccinated, do we have a sense how many children in New Jersey between 12 and 15 we have? Is there a vaccination target? We have, for the adults – and I guess those down to 16, our target is 4.7 million. Last question: the COVID Alert NJ app's still showing 2281 deaths. Is there a reason why that's not being updated anymore? I'm sorry, not deaths; 2281 hospitalizations, I believe. Is there a reason why that's not being updated. I know the app asks you to give suggestions about how can we improve this app. Several people have told me they've said put in the correct numbers and it doesn't seem to be happening. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think on the dashboard, can we come back to Dave on that? We're going to come back to you; I'm not sure what that is. Dan, will you – both of these questions on data. More color? I'm not sure I've got more color as to why we are where we are, but we know the virus – and I'm going to repeat a couple of first principles here. The virus is a lot more lethal indoors than outdoors, which is why we have, as of today – and this was not a huge step because we were largely there – outdoors, you don't have to wear a mask. Again, that's largely been the case unless you couldn't social distance until today.

We know that our vaccine program is a work in progress. It's getting there. It's a combination of those two things, really, that we've got a lot of unvaccinated people. We know that for sure. We've got a virus that's a lot more lethal indoors than outdoors. Any more time on the clock allows us to get more people vaccinated and frankly, this week allows us to be outside more than inside That's a significant breakthrough in the positive sense.

Yeah, the brazenness, we were at a – Tammy and I were at a restaurant over the weekend. I think some guy literally having seen that I was there, went out of his way to make a big deal going to the restroom and back without wearing his mask. Okay, buddy, thank you, really appreciate you doing that, but there's going to be some of that, right? Again, this is not a forever and for always.

I have been hoping personally that the next move on the chess board by the CDC was exactly what you asked about, reducing the six foot to three. If you speak to a restaurateur, and we do all the time, that's the game-changer. Having to be the vaccine police on who's wearing a mask or who's – that's just another burden on these folks. What they really need is more capacity. Are we going to do this without the CDC? I would really strongly prefer not to. I would like to think that we've got a national move on that chess board. To me, that is a move that I hope they can get to sooner than later.

The 12 to 15 universe is 400-something thousand. Does that sound right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: 457,000.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you want to – yeah.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Twelve to fifteen is 457,820. We've not set a marker for them yet. We want to see how the uptake is and determine further activities with them to increase uptake.

Reporter: You say the trend is positive?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, the trend's positive but it's only been three days, right?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Yeah, the trend is positive. It's only been, like the Governor said, three days. Kids are lining up. We actually have one example of a child, a 14 year old, telling their mother, "You better come with me. You need to get vaccinated." Kids are smart.

Governor Phil Murphy: As I mentioned earlier, we don't have any insight but we read the journals and we read the press generally. Trials for kids younger than 12 are clearly ongoing. They appear to be in the so far, so good category without knowing what the data is. If you look at time frames, you get directed toward the fall, which is – all that is good. Thank you, Dave.

Let's go. Sam, is that you? Let's go to Sam and then Nikita will close it out.

Sam Sutton, Politico: Two more quick mask questions. First one is just were you surprised by the CDC's guidance when it was issued a couple days ago? What's your reaction to – Republican reaction to your continuation of mandating masks indoor in public places? Then the second, just wanted to see if you had any comment on the US Supreme Court's taking up a challenge for Roe v. Wade.

Governor Phil Murphy: Is this the Mississippi case?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Yeah, I believe so.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep. I think I've said this already. Gratiified that they're making the distinction to the CDC so starkly between vaccinated persons and non-vaccinated persons. Please, folks, get vaccinated. I think I alluded to this in the questions – one of the questions that Dave asked. I had expected the six-foot relaxation was going to come first. There was a poll of epidemiologists, Christina. I'm not sure if you were polled or not, but it was highlighted in the – this is an important – this is a serious point, but I hope you were consulted. They did a poll and they asked the epidemiologist community how long they expected the mask mandate to be in place. It was a range, but it was all a lot longer than now, meaningfully longer, like in some cases measured in years. I have to say personally, I thought they were going to do the six-foot move first.

I mean, this is the political fallout of this one way or the other is of zero interest to me. I would just – it's easy to be in the third deck of the cheap seats and color commentary-ing on what we should do. The end of the day, somebody dies. That's a – or gets really sick. That's what we're trying to do every single day to prevent that from happening. The politics of this are of zero interest to me. At the end of the day, we've got to call this as best as we can and keeping people alive is our obsession.

I would just say this, and I'm glad you asked it. Again, I don't want to get into politics here but it's why we need to put a belt and suspenders on reproductive rights in New Jersey, that we've got a Supreme Court which regardless of which side you're on is clearly biased against women's reproductive rights and their ability to make the decisions. I'm going to have, I think, Thursday, along with Loretta Wineburg, Alexis Magill-Johnson, who is the global CEO of Planned Parenthood will be with me reiterating – I think it's Thursday, reiterating the need that we need and must take action in New Jersey because we cannot rely on this federal Supreme Court for that. Thank you.

Nikita, last but not least, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. Jared Maples is in his final few weeks as Director of the State Department of Homeland Security.

Governor Phil Murphy: I noticed he's not here today.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Indeed you are correct. Do you intend to nominate a new director before his departure and will Deputy Director Andrew Campy be named acting director until a new head is nominated or confirmed? Senator Scutari on Saturday said that he was not guaranteeing a hearing for Rachel Wainer before September 1st. What are you doing to ensure her confirmation and do you agree with the Senator that there's no harm in waiting beyond September 1st? I've asked you this question previously over the last couple of years, but will employees of your reelection campaign and the Democratic state committees coordinate a campaign to unionize? Finally, what will New Jerseyans notice when they begin to ride NJ Transit in greater numbers again?

Governor Phil Murphy: Was that third question unionize, did you say?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: On Jared, who's done a terrific job as the Director of Homeland Security and Preparedness, no news on that front, but I promise we will let you know as soon as we do. Obviously that's a – every part of government, it's important to make sure you've got a smoothly running operation, even in transition but when it comes to homeland security, the standards are exceedingly high, as Pat knows very well. Making sure that's handed as smoothly and seamlessly as possible.

Listen, Nick Scutari has been a great partner to deal with across the whole range of interests including judicial nominations. Rachel, I'm incredibly proud and honored to have nominated her and I look forward to that process moving forward on the right time frame and right basis.

I've never said no on the union front, I have to say. I don't have an updated answer for you, but I like the notion. It's the reason why – Molly Benato is our campaign manager. She's done a great job but put the politics of it aside, it is – it's got a really important central nervous system as it relates to human resources, personnel, workplace behavior, that's really impressive, I have to say. I take my hat off to her.

I think on NJ Transit, it's a good question. We have not addressed that in a while. I think you're going to start to see, particularly when moves get made on masking and whatnot, you're going to start to see ridership – and we're already seeing the early stages of that tick upward. I hope you're going to see a greener NJ Transit. We're beginning to order, whether it's on the rail or the bus side, environmental-friendly equipment. You're going to see a safe system having achieved the positive train control. You're going to see a system that has a sufficient amount of engineers that allows us to avoid the stuff – particularly as you'll recall, we saw a lot of in the summers past somebody decides to take, which is their right, a Friday off or a Monday off and you got to – you have to take down an entire line for the day. I think you're going to see – I can't say it's going to be gone completely. I hope it is, but you're going to see a lot less of that. A lot of investment into customer-friendly technology and just the customer interface. I think the hygiene levels, which have been high during the pandemic, will remain high.

I feel good about what they've – how they've used their time over the past 14 months to get themselves to a place that would probably have taken a lot longer to get to. The investment right now in NJ Transit is as high as it's been. I would just say lastly, what they won't see yet are two new tunnels under the Hudson, which we desperately need. Hopefully we'll get that out of an infrastructure bill in Congress. You'll start to see work done on the port at North Bridge, so slowly but surely, this thing is going to reclaim its space. It used to be not that long ago the number one public transit system in America, and I have personally no less of an objective that they reclaim that title.

With that, one mask today, Judy, not two. Judy, Tina, thank you, as always, Pat, likewise, Parimal, Dan, team. Matt, Councilman, sorry to not acknowledge you earlier. Folks, keep it up. If you're indoors, please still do the right thing, please get vaccinated. Memorial Day weekend is right around the proverbial corner. Two weeks from today is Memorial Day. Let's have this the summer of our lives. Operation Jersey Summer is well in action. My guess, Dan, we're going to do a little bit more, add a few more programs to that, I hope. Sooner than later, you got to get vaccinated. The more folks get vaccinated, the faster they get vaccinated, the more we can open up and get back to doing the stuff we want to do. Thank y'all. God bless.

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