

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: January 22nd, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, sorry to be a couple minutes behind. Joining me is the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, great to have you both here. The guy to my left who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Patrick Callahan. We have Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

Today I don't want to be political but I want to be very clear where we are. This is the 48th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, which established a woman's right to choose. We must ensure that choice remains between a woman and her doctor, not her and politicians in statehouses or in Washington DC.

We had -- by the way, not our first time together today, I might add -- Judy and Pat and I were in Burlington County this morning in Morristown, at a former Lord and Taylor, seeing one of our mega sites. I thought it was really impressive, really impressive. The emphasis was explicitly on giving confidence to communities of color that this vaccine is safe, it works. They can take it, some role models, a WWII Veteran, a 98-year-old veteran, a member of Reverend Charles Boyer's congregation, and Reverend Boyer was there with us. Riva Foster, the leader of the New Jersey Black Issues Convention got a shot, Senator Troy Singleton. Pretty special, they've got it really set up. We're in the "if you build it, they will come" mode. Now we just need them to come. We need the vaccine supplies to ramp up out of Washington, because we're really set up as a distribution matter around the state.

In fact, I got a question from the press. They said, "We hear there's some rumors that folks are coming over to Jersey from Pennsylvania, because you all have set it up so well." And I reiterated and I think you would want me to reiterate, Judy, that you can get vaccinated in New Jersey if you live here, if your work here, or your study here. Otherwise, we love our brothers and sisters in Pennsylvania, but we've got to stick to those guns and we will. So, it was a great way to get the day off and I appreciate you guys being there with us.

And then if that weren't enough, two days ago, our nation welcomed a new President, a new administration, and a new focus on the challenges we face as one nation. Tammy and I were incredibly honored to be invited to watch as President Biden and Vice President Harris took their oaths of office but we were equally honored to be able to visit with the members, the men and women of the New Jersey State Police. Actually, at least the group we were with were all guys, I believe. And then, as well as the men and women of the New Jersey National Guard on duty in our nation's capital, providing security for the inauguration.

So the picture at top is in the courtyard of the Department of Commerce, where our guardsmen and women were stationed -- I shouldn't say stationed, but where they were that day. And that includes not only Tammy and me on the left, but that's Congressman Donald Norcross and Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill who joined us, and that was pretty darn special. And below, that's not a picture of the one that we took, but we visited the troopers, Pat, we met with about half of the deployment. I think you had 46-ish down there. We met with about half of them in the Washington Hilton, and each of them were extraordinary. Our troopers and our troops represent the highest values of our state, country above self, and the safety and betterment of our communities before all else. I salute their service and with the inaugural festivities now over, our troopers returned home I think yesterday, right? And our Guard will soon, God willing, be on their way home to their families and friends.

And I must note, allow me to say this, that I was as angry as anyone at the pictures of women and guardsmen from across the country being relegated to sleeping on the floor of a parking garage. This is no way for our heroes to be treated. Thankfully, none of the New Jersey Guard were left to have to deal with such disrespect. We provided hotel accommodations for our Guard throughout their duties in Washington and will continue to do so. We made sure they always had a safe and warm place to recharge.

And some folks, irresponsibly, in the state put out statements without calling me up or asking one of us what the facts were. So I would say, you know what? Next time, give us a call and make sure you get your facts straight. And secondly, to the same folks, remember why they're there in the first place. They're there because there was an insurrection in our Capitol and they need to be there to protect our institutions of democracy and literally, to protect individuals. That was the sad part of the visit, I have to say, Pat. It's an armed camp in Washington, between folks in uniform, National Guardsmen in camo as well as police and troopers from all over the country. So folks, come on.

Next up, the Biden administration has looked to New Jersey to help fill some of the vital roles in Washington. New Jersey has had a big week, I have to say. Our former Commissioner of Human Services on the left, I miss her desperately already Judy, I know you do and the rest of us do, Carole Johnson is now helping to lead our nation's coronavirus response. We couldn't have anyone better in that position. We've spoken about Carol here many times and you've seen her many times.

One of our former counsels, and I referenced this last week, on the right Justin Dews is now Counsel to President Biden; again, an extraordinary talent, each of them.

On Wednesday, if that weren't enough, shortly after President Biden was sworn in, State Affairs Director Paul Rodriguez, right there, was announced as the new Deputy General Counsel to the US Department of Health and Human Services, and that's an incredibly important position.

You've seen Carole before, we've spoken about her. I spoke about Justin last week. I haven't said much about Paul on this forum, so you should know for the past nearly three years, Paul has been a strong and tireless advocate for our state's most vulnerable residents. His expertise has been crucial throughout the past 10-plus months of the pandemic. I'm extremely grateful for all Paul has done for our state and protecting our consumers. I know he will be a tremendous asset to the Biden administration.

Yesterday, if this weren't enough, my Chief Policy Advisor on Transportation Issues, the one and only Vinn White, there he is, was named as Senior Advisor for Implementation at the US Department of Transportation. He's actually returning to the department he served under President Obama when he was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy. So this is another guy we haven't spoken a whole lot about in this forum, so I wanted to spend a minute on Vinn. I can't put it any other way. The progress we have made in improving our transportation infrastructure and in turning around NJ Transit has all been, in large part, because of Vinn's work. He helped us get the new Portal Bridge Project through the final phases, for example, and he helped create NJ Transit's 10-year long-range plan. Our state's top infrastructure priority is getting the full gateway project approved, including the much-needed new rail tunnels under the Hudson River. Vinn knows this project and its advantages better than most anyone, and I look forward to his continued efforts on behalf of our state and our commuters.

So we're going to miss all of the above and there are big shoes to fill. I said it was a big week for New Jersey, so if that weren't enough, if you turned on the virtual parade, or if you turned on the Concert For America Wednesday night, it was oozing of Jersey. None other than Bruce Springsteen kicked off the concert at night. He was joined later by Ant Clemons of Willingboro, Jon Bon Jovi of Sayreville, Jon Stewart helped, I think, emcee and coordinate the virtual parade in the afternoon. There was an extraordinary sequence of Broadway stars and singers singing that incredible song from *Rent*, Ali Stroker who we've mentioned before, who was in *Oklahoma!* on Broadway last year. And Kim Ng were two of those stars, so Jersey was all over the place.

Now moving forward, I welcome President Biden's focus on a strong and truly national coronavirus response plan. The Executive Orders he signed yesterday committing his administration to this task is a sea change from where we had been, with a federal government that pretty much kept its hands off and left it up to the states to figure it out, sometimes putting us in direct competition with each other. That is no way to face a national pandemic. We've been needing real leadership out of Washington and finally, we have it.

From a commitment to masking up to help stem the spread of the virus, to using the powers of the *Defense Production Act* to get more vaccines in our communities, to a basic commitment to facts and science. And I for one, Judy I know you will join me in this, was pleased, relieved, I would say thrilled to see Tony Fauci back in the White House Briefing Room. This is, as I said, a sea change. As I've noted before, we have built the infrastructure we need from the ground up for an aggressive vaccination push. We saw one example of that in Morristown this morning. All we need are the millions of doses that we had been promised months ago. And I am much more confident today than I was on Tuesday that we'll get there.

And on the issue of vaccines, I want to make one thing clear about our vaccine administration. There are two separate categories for vaccines in New Jersey, and I want to make sure everyone understands that. The first category are the vaccines set aside for the federal administered pharmacy program and its partners, CVS and Walgreens. They administer the doses to residents and staff at our long-term care facilities, and other congregate living centers covered under the federal program. We do not control these vaccines. CVS and Walgreens do.

In total, more than 1,500 of these facilities statewide, serving hundreds of thousands of some of our most highly vulnerable residents are enrolled in this program. Our long-term care facilities have borne, as we all know, a tremendous burden during this pandemic in New Jersey, around the country, around the world and our first several hundred thousand doses were committed to them. Because we are committed to setting aside such a large number of our first doses for those at highest risk, it has further limited our initial supply that we can send elsewhere.

Remember, this now goes back into December. Judy, deliberately, with her team, did the work to submit to the feds the largest, broadest definition of long-term care and developmental and other centers of any American state. We already have the highest density of long-term care facilities and residents, and I presumed staff as a result, of any American state and to Judy's enormous credit, putting this onto the backs of the feds, that list is as broad in New Jersey as it is anywhere else in America.

The second category are the vaccines that we, as a state, do control the distribution of. These are the vaccines that go to our six mega sites, into the 130 community-based sites currently online. When it comes to these vaccines, the ones we control, we've been able to get between 50% to 70%, depending on the day that you look at, of these into the arms of residents already. When it comes to the vaccines distributed to our pharmacy partners, that first group, only a little more than 10% of those have been distributed. In fact, I've got a call this afternoon with the CEO of Walgreens with Judy, to get them to get more aggressive and faster in their distribution.

So when we see statewide statistics that blend these two programs, the federal program and our state-administered or overseen program, keep that in mind. We are working diligently to put out as many doses as we have control over to our vaccination centers.

As of midday today, we've just crossed a half-a-million, 1,500,222 doses. We've done that in a little more than a month. Our goal is to ensure that every New Jerseyan who raises their hand to be vaccinated, gets vaccinated. We are providing as much as possible the limited vaccine supply in our control to the sites with the largest capacity so they can ramp up and confidently open appointments for people waiting patiently for their turn. I was on with folks myself personally this morning from Passaic County and Hudson County, working through, with our team, how they can get more of the limited supply and get these into the arms of folks.

We are working every day to ensure effective and efficient allocation by monitoring inventory and throughput. We completely get, we completely understand the anxiety of so many residents who are waiting to be vaccinated. Frontline workers are literally going to work every day not knowing whether or not they're going to be exposed. Older residents, or those with chronic conditions who may have been living in isolation to protect themselves, foregoing the ability to be with their families and all the mental stresses goes with that, we need the doses for them.

But I cannot be any clearer. We have built a vaccine infrastructure that can handle this job. We need the doses. So far, more than 1.9 million New Jerseyans have preregistered through that website, covid19.nj.gov/vaccine, including, by the way, that 1.9, 1.4-plus million who are currently eligible for vaccination. Think about that for a second. That's a tip of the cap to New Jerseyans. That means over 500,000 New Jerseyans have preregistered and openly admitted they were not yet up to bat, but that they wanted to make sure when their group was up to bat, whether it was age or other definition, that they would be eligible to be notified.

I want to plea for patience. I'm going to read a phone number out that won't go live until Monday morning at eight o'clock, and I suspect, Judy, there will be a lot of people calling. I would just say right up front, if you call this number, please understand we've got good, trained, hardworking folks doing everything they can. And remember, this is a huge supply-demand imbalance in every respect. The number is 855-568-0545. Again, not until Monday morning.

I hope that all of what I've just said puts this disparity between supply and demand on full display. The Biden administration recognizes that this is a war and that we must be on a war footing. The administration recognizes that this vaccination push is one of the single greatest logistical challenges in American history. We stand with them

on both principles. I have complete faith that the Biden administration, by finally putting the full force of the federal government to bear into not just vaccine creation, but vaccine distribution and administration, will get us to where we need to be.

Meanwhile, we continue to do the best with an equitable distribution of the roughly 100,000 doses were getting weekly. Again, to remind you, as of midday today, 500,222 doses had been administered statewide. That grand total includes over 65,000 long-term care facility residents and staff.

If I can just remind folks, last Wednesday, so nine days ago, we had celebrated, we had cracked through 250,000. So you can see we are pushing forward as best we can with the limited resources we have been provided, and that number will only go up, I hope as fast as possible.

Onto other numbers. This morning we're also reporting an additional 4,437 positive test results. That breaks down between 3,694 PCR and 743 presumed positive antigen tests. You can see before you what the totals are since this began on March 4th.

The positivity rate for the 52,223 PCR tests recorded on Monday was just over 10%, and the statewide rate of transmission is currently at 1.04. That's come down a little bit the past couple of days, and let's hope it continues to go down.

In our hospitals we continue to move in a positive direction as the total count of patients in our hospitals last night was 3,328. That breaks down between 3,103 of confirmed and 225 awaiting test results. The number of patients of that group in ICU 638, and number on ventilators 445. Judy and Pat and I were having this discussion earlier. And Judy, if you see this differently, weigh in.

Hospital numbers coming down. Let's hope they continue to. ICU numbers, vent numbers, not really so far. And your point was that tells you that the folks who are getting hospitalized are really sick, more often than not, so the percentage of that number that's in an ICU bed is going up.

Throughout the day yesterday, and we like these days, not that we like the admission number but we like it when more come out than go in, 456 live patients left, 401 went in. Again at the risk of comparing apples to oranges, these are not confirmed, 59 deaths in our hospitals yesterday.

All of us up here continue to keep our fingers crossed that we have seen across our healthcare landscape over the past week as the beginning of a new trend for moderating case counts and lower total hospitalizations. I'm knocking on wood, and I'm channeling Winston Churchill when he said this is the beginning. I hope this is the beginning of the end.

At some point within the next couple of weeks our total number of vaccinations, I suspect by next week, in fact, will surpass the total number of residents who have tested positive, and that will be a good step forward. But in the meantime, as we continue to work with a tight supply of vaccines, we all must keep up with our social distancing, with wearing our masks, washing our hands frequently with soap and water, and using simple common sense.

Today, we also have the heavy responsibility to announce a further 118 confirmed losses of life from COVID-19 complications. A total of 18,754 confirmed New Jerseyans have died from this virus. And on Wednesday, the number of probable deaths was increased to 2,121, now well over 20,000. As we do each day, let's take a couple of minutes to remember three more of those who we have lost.

We'll begin this Friday by remembering former Commissioner William Shorty Eggers of Mount Ephraim Borough, who passed away January 4th at the age of 70. Shorty was a general foreman at the Philadelphia Naval Yard until its closing in 1996, then spent the rest of his career, right up until his passing, by the way, at the United States Mint in Philadelphia, where he served as machine room supervisor. I always wanted to meet somebody who worked at the Mint. God bless him. He spent 12 years as a Mount Ephraim Commissioner, and also dedicated many years to coaching multiple youth teams in the borough. Needless to say, because of his lifelong connection to the City of Brotherly Love, he was a diehard Philly sports fan.

Shorty was also a beloved family patriarch and few things brought him more joy than a summer day in Ocean City with his family. He leaves behind his wife Phyllis, who by the way, is recovering from COVID, please keep her in your prayers. They were high school sweethearts, and their children, Kelly with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, Jamie, Billy and Christie, son-in-law Ron and daughter-in-law Sabrina, and grandchildren Drew, Devin, Emily and Olivia. He's also survived by his sisters Joanne and her husband Lynn and Nancy and her husband Bobby and brothers Danny and his wife Oyle and Joey; niece Lindsay, along with numerous other nieces, nephews, great nieces, great nephews, cousins, and friends. I want to give a shout out to my friend Assemblywoman Gabby Mosquera, who brought Shorty's extraordinary life to our attention. So we thank you, Shorty, for your years of dedication to your community. May you rest in peace and may God bless and watch over you and your family.

Next up, I feel like I should do this one in German, we celebrate the life of Claus Fink, who had called Parsippany home for nearly 30 years and sadly, Claus passed away at the age of 75 on January 11th. He was born in Dusseldorf, Germany, he worked in Duisburg, those are two cities I know well, and he made New Jersey his home upon his immigration to the United States in 1985. He had lived in Washington Township and Hackettstown before settling in Parsippany, where he was a longtime resident manager of the Troy Garden Apartments for 27 years and a volunteer with the Parsippany Office of Emergency Management for the past 17 years. I want to thank another friend, Mayor Michael Soriano, for raising Claus' wonderful life with me.

He leaves behind his wife OT, with whom I spoke on Wednesday, she is Finnish by origin, after 30 years of marriage, and his son Unfree who remains in Germany. He's also survived by his sister Winnie, also back in his homeland.

We thank Claus for choosing to be part of our New Jersey family, for looking after his neighbors and for being an active member of his community. May God bless him and watch over him. OT said something to me which is very heavy and I want to make sure I respect both her's and Claus' life. She said to me, and I quote her, "Don't let your guard down. He did, and he paid with his life."

And finally for this week, we honor Thomas Lynch Sr., a longtime resident of Union Township and Spring Lake Heights, who we lost last week at the age of 74. Pat, pay attention on this one. Tom came to New Jersey in 1969 from his native Abbeyfield in County Limerick, Ireland, where he was already accomplished in both the rugby field and as a member of the first Abbeyfield Fire Brigade. Tom settled in Union Township to raise his family as he worked at the Anheuser Busch brewery in New York. And when he retired after 38 years, he moved to Spring Lake Heights.

While he was a proud American citizen, Tom remained an Irishman to the core and a 50-year member of the John F Cryan Association which honored him as their Man of the Year in 2014. That's our dear friend Senator Joe Cryan's dad, and in his memory organization. I have been to some of their events, and they are something to behold.

Tom was the kind of man who never had a bad word to say about anyone and of whom no one had a bad word to say. Everyone who knew Tom knew how good he was at golf, as you can see right there. Tom is survived by his beloved wife, Dora, her name Dora Murphy Lynch. I had the honor of speaking with Dora on Wednesday, with whom he would have celebrated 50 years of marriage this September.

He also leaves behind his son Tom Jr. and his wife, Gillian. Tom, I believe, worked for Joe Cryan when he was in the Assembly and I believe Gillian still does work for the Majority Office in the Assembly. His daughter Alyssa and son-in-law Jason and daughter Ashley, and his beloved grandchildren Avery, Logan, Finley and Pierce.

He also leaves behind his brothers, Tony, Noel, Patrick, and John Lynch and his sisters, Kathleen and Nora, and their families, among many other families both here in America and back home in Ireland. And on the American side of this it's a small world, but he was cousins with two very good friends of ours over the years, sister and brother Katie

and John Rustin. There are so many Irish blessings that I could recite now, but I think the words of the Lynch family stand alone, and I quote them. "Tom was the type of dad everyone wanted, and the husband most people could only dream of." How's that? That's as good as it gets, a true gentleman. Thank you, Tom. May God bless and watch over you and your family and may He hold you in the palm of his hand.

Now changing gears, over the past few months we've been highlighting many of the small businesses who have received truly lifesaving supports from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. But along with them, we haven't done this as much as we probably should have, many community-based nonprofits have also stepped forward to receive EDA grants that have allowed them to maintain their essential community missions.

One of those is the Howell Township Police Athletic League, which is run by the President and CEO, the guy on the right, Sergeant Christopher Hill. Like Pals across New Jersey, the Howell PAL's mission is to foster positive relationships among youth and police officers in our community through sports and education, something that has been going on at Howell since 1979. Even the Police Athletic League has felt the impact of the pandemic, and Sergeant Hill recognized the vital role it can play in ensuring recreational and extracurricular activities for the Township's kids.

Working with the EDA he was able to secure grant funding to keep the PAL's mission alive and going strong. I had the opportunity to chat with Sergeant Hill on Wednesday and thank him not only for what he and the Howell Police have done throughout the pandemic to keep residents safe, but for providing a safe outlet for Howell's youth.

But he also wanted me to say that they have a big reach, Pat, in the shore communities in both Monmouth and Ocean County. So they're not just a whole Howell operation, they've got a broader reach than that. So I want to take my hat off, I know Pat joins me, to the Howell Police Athletic League and all the PAL partners across the state who have stepped up to provide essential recreational and educational opportunities in their communities. By the way, check them out, their website is howellpal.org.

By the way, I mentioned I spoke to Sergeant Hill on Wednesday, the day that Joe Biden was sworn in as President of the United States and it was only fitting that he said to me, among other things, he works for the Beau Biden Foundation. So this is a guy and his team who are incredibly community driven.

Next up, I want to reiterate the news from the Department of Labor yesterday that the number of initial unemployment claims filed over the past week declined by more than 20% from the week prior, a drop of more than 5,000 initial claims. It's still too many, but thank God it went down. Additionally, the department reported that the \$300 in federal unemployment benefits approved by Congress and the former administration have hit the bank accounts of approximately 533,000 eligible New Jersey workers, and all claimants who were eligible for both weeks of benefits provided so far received that \$600 total in one sum. From now on, the process will be completed weekly. So to Commissioner Rob Asaro Angelo and his team at the Department of Labor who continue to meet every challenge, we thank you/ I know you're going to keep up the good work, the hard work, and the essential work, just as we all are going to do to keep up the hard work of getting the vaccine to every New Jerseyan who raises their hand. And to all of you, let's keep up the hard work of fighting this pandemic. We will beat this.

Finally today, I wasn't planning on talking about this but sadly, I want to acknowledge the passing this morning of baseball great Hank Aaron, who died at the age of 86, just two weeks shy of his birthday. Two weeks ago, he publicly received his COVID vaccination in the hopes it would lead more people to trust it. He was more than a legendary ballplayer. an ambassador of the game, he was a champion for civil rights, who day in and day out over a 23-year career that he undertook without bravado broke down barriers. He would spend many of his later years working on charitable endeavors to provide scholarships and opportunities for countless urban youth, among many other pursuits.

He brought millions of Americans together as he chased and then passed Babe Ruth's homerun record. When he did in Atlanta, only six years after the assassination of Dr. King, the iconic broadcaster Vince Scully summed it up this way and I quote, Vin: "What a marvelous moment for baseball. What a marvelous moment for Atlanta and the State of Georgia. What a marvelous moment for the country and the world. Hank Aaron stood as a reminder that what brings us together as a nation is always greater than what drives us apart. Although as Dan Brian reminded me earlier, he received up to 3,000 letters a day, most of it hate mail, because he had replaced a white icon as the king of the hill, Babe Ruth. God bless Hank Aaron and thank him for everything he did on the ball field and maybe more importantly, off of it; one of the all-time greats.

Willie Mays is the oldest-living member of the Hall of Fame when Lasorda died a couple of weeks ago. Willie is 89, Hank Aaron would have been 87 in a couple of weeks. They are from a generation of giants. God rest his soul. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. This morning, we had the opportunity to visit the mega site in the Morristown Mall in Burlington County. This site has been open a week today, and the workers there are working hard to get as many people vaccinated as possible. The remaining two state-supported mega sites also open today. Hackensack Meridian Health is partnering with Bergen County officials to run the mega site at the racetrack at the Meadowlands, and AtlantiCare is partnering with the Atlantic county officials to open the site at the Atlantic City Convention Center.

When vaccination supply increases, these mega sites will be able to accommodate large numbers of people daily, as many as 3,000 to 5,000. Given the operational and logistical considerations, in addition to storage requirements of vaccines, appointments are required at virtually all of our vaccination sites at this time. That's to accommodate all individuals currently eligible for the vaccine.

As you know, there are currently many more people seeking vaccination and eligible to be vaccinated, than there are appointments available across the state. Our hope is that as the manufacturing supply chain increases, and additional new vaccines receive emergency use authorizations, the supply will start to support the demand.

As we work to vaccinate eligible New Jersey residents, we are still seeing community spread of COVID-19 across our state. We are closely monitoring that and we encourage you all to continue safeguarding.

Today, we are reporting that two confirmed COVID-19 variant cases involving the B117, or the UK variant, have been identified in New Jersey. The first case, which involves an Ocean County resident in his 60s, had no travel history or a clear exposure to others who were ill. The man developed symptoms compatible with COVID-19 on December 29th and was tested with a PCR test on January 6th at a commercial lab. The individual's PCR results showed results suggestive of the variant and the sample was sent on to another lab for sequencing. That lab confirmed the UK variant. The man's symptoms have since resolved. He was never hospitalized. The department's Communicable Disease Services was working with the local health department to complete that investigation.

New Jersey was also notified of a variant case in a young traveler who was staying in northern New Jersey. The child, who was tested on January 11th in New York City, is asymptomatic. The local health department is working to further investigate this case, along with our Communicable Disease Service.

As you know, viruses constantly change through mutation and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. While the variant may spread more easily and more quickly than previous strains, at this time, there is no evidence that infections by this variant cause more severe disease, according to the CDC. It is also reported that the current vaccines are effective against the variant.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 3,328 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation. There are 638 individuals in critical care, 70% on ventilators.

We are reporting five new cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are now 81 cases in our state. The children affected have either tested positive for COVID-19 or had antibodies suggesting they were positive for COVID-19 exposure within four weeks prior to symptoms. Luckily, in New Jersey, fortunately, there are no new deaths reported at this time. None of those children are currently hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 55.6%, Black 16.8, Hispanic 19.2, Asian 5.2, other 3.2.

Our state veteran homes cases remain the same and at the state psychiatric hospitals, there have been five new cases among patients at the Ancora hospital.

Our state positivity as of January 18th is 10.10%. The Northern part of the state reports 9.72, the Central part of the state 10.33, and the Southern part of the state 10.75.

That concludes my report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, social distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ App. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you, as always, for everything. Again, it was great being with you this morning. I assume, and we've been saying this for weeks, neither you or Tina are surprised that we've got evidence now of the strain in New Jersey. We've been operating under the assumption that it's here and this is confirmation of that, and that number is only going to go up, I would think. And again, to repeat for folks, it's incomplete data and it's early, but transmission of this variant higher but in terms of symptoms and reality of getting it not more lethal, at least no evidence of that. Thank you.

Pat, a few things. Weather is back on the chart, potentially for Monday. We'd love to get your color there. Compliance, again, hats off to the troopers everywhere, but the troopers that I especially saw this week that we had the chance to meet with in Washington. And you reminded us earlier, we established our COVID-19 Coronavirus All-of-State Commission chaired by the two of you, which as we sit here today, remains a Standing Commission just under a year ago, and I think we were having the conversation earlier that right around today was when we had our first intense conversations about not just the theoretical virus which we had been already having, but about specific - I think it was a passenger at Newark Airport, as you mentioned, right? Not the sort of anniversary that any of us are thrilled about remembering.

With that, Pat, great to have you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Just one Executive Order compliance violation report. That was the owner of the Flat Iron Tavern in Perth Amboy, who was cited for operating after hours, no social distancing, and no face coverings.

To your point about the weather, Governor, we are probably looking at a midday Monday into midday Tuesday storm. The models at this point vary a little bit. We will have improved confidence in those precipitation forecasts, probably over the next couple days, from the National Weather Service. Right now it looks like one of those typical north of Interstate 78, a little bit probably more intense. Below that, a mix of rain but we'll certainly keep everybody up to date with regards to that.

Hard to believe it's been a year, but I thought we walked away, I think, from the Burlington mega site today a different vibe in field medical stations, a different vibe than obviously Mortuary Affairs in that although obviously with more vaccines on the way, just a sense of relief and hope, which I thought it was good to walk away with that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen to that. We talk about the supply-demand imbalance, which right now because of the lack of supply from the feds is stark, to say the least. And we know there are folks who are frustrated and we're going to go live with that phone number on Monday. Hopefully that'll help, especially our seniors. But when you're there and you see it in action, and we weren't just seeing it constructed, we were watching real-life people getting vaccinations. The observation area had a several dozen folks at least and there was, to your point, a good spirit in the air. And so we start getting more of the supply - and I don't think unfortunately, that's not going to be a tomorrow event. I think this is going to be slogging through over the next number of weeks. But I think when we do get it, we're going to have, without question, the distribution, the manpower at the ready to deliver the goods, to deliver those doses into people's arms.

We will stay with, unless you hear otherwise from Dan Bryan who is with us today, unless you hear otherwise we will be virtual tomorrow and Sunday, and we'll be back here on the Monday/Wednesday/Friday rhythm. Unless you hear otherwise it's Monday at 1:00.

Again, Judy, Pat or I have not yet heard from the White House in terms of any cadence of video or other communications. We're on with these folks constantly. I know our team was on with Jeff Zients, the COVID Czar, yesterday morning. But in terms of the other sort of Governor group sessions, we have no word yet so that could change the schedule.

Lastly, I think there were 12 governors at the inauguration, and I think it was particularly notable that half of them were Republican governors. I thought that was a really good statement and I want to tip my hat to guys like Pete Ricketts in Nebraska, Doug Ducey in Arizona, who didn't just go around the corner like we did from New Jersey and could go in and out, but really had to make a conscious - Doug Burgum of North Dakota, they had to take a lot of logistics to be there and they were there. I take my hat off to them, because that was the spirit of the day, that we're all in this together.

With that, let's start over here if we can. Welcome back again.

Q&A Session

Alejandro Roubian, NJ2AS: Thank you, Alejandro Roubian. Obviously you're aware that due to COVID, gun sales have skyrocketed. I was interviewing an instructor that stated that over the past six months, his training facility has skyrocketed and he's trained over 4,000 new gun owners. Last year, the federal government, to prioritize gun stores and gun instructors in the industry as essential, would you advocate because of the spike in gun training for these individuals to be classified as essential to get a priority in COVID vaccines?

Governor Phil Murphy: Unless Parimal tells me otherwise, we also prioritize gun stores, am I right? We mimic the federal government.

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yes, so when we had a distinction between essential retail and non-essential retail, we eventually classified firearm stores.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think you know, we included it as essential.

Alejandro Roubian, NJ2AS: Would you give them priority? Because obviously, one instructor saw over 4,000 new gun owner students,

Governor Phil Murphy: I mean, they're going to be on the list. There's a lot of folks on that similar list.

Alejandro Roubian, NJ2AS: And in regard to that also, you've advocated and been a champion of gun safety and commonsense gun laws. It's come to my attention when I was interviewing these instructors in these gun safety schools that banks are now denying them access to their bank accounts, and people cannot pay for their gun safety classes online, and closing their accounts. I have two letters here from PayPal, from Stripe, and several other banks that said they will no longer do business with these individuals. Isn't it kind of contradictory and hypocritical that these banks and the government advocating for gun safety, but now they're closing these individuals' accounts so now people cannot pay for gun safety classes? Wouldn't that be something you'd investigate?

Governor Phil Murphy: That's the first I am hearing of it and we'll look at it. That's not our decision, that's someone else's. Can we get a copy of those letters? One more comment, if you could, please?

Alejandro Roubian, NJ2AS: Do you condone or condemn these actions by the banks? I

Governor Phil Murphy: I have no opinion. I'd like to look at them first, because I'm hearing about it for the first time. Good to see. Are you still well?

Alejandro Roubian, NJ2AS: Yeah, feeling much better.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good. Let's go to Matt. Thank you.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Commissioner or the Governor, how many of the counties are now using the state site to make appointments? Some counties that were using their own registration systems have since switched to using the state website. Do we have an updated count?

And the state has said that vaccine sites should be giving out appointments for second doses once the first dose is administered. But we've spoken to many people who go to get their shots, specifically at the Gloucester mega site which is run by the state, and they were given no guidance. They said that they have tried to book through the state's website without success. I would like to know, how are these people able to get their second dose and get it in time? Will they have to compete with people getting their first dose making that appointment online?

Lastly, from Karen Yi, do you know how many vaccine doses have been thrown out? Does the state require vaccination sites to report vaccine waste?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, you'll want to come in here but I should have said this. I'm getting mixed up when I had this conversation. I had a good conversation with Brad Smith, who's the President of Microsoft yesterday morning, because we need more support from them to help us with this extraordinary, not just demand for vaccines, but extraordinary number of people. As I mentioned, just under 2 million, it's probably over 2 million at this point, signed up. How many counties are doing it on their own in terms of registrations versus using the state? I don't know that. We'll get that for you.

Second vaccination, that should not – we'll have to look at the specifics on the Gloucester site, but the first and the second should not be in competition. These are in separate, discrete batches. You asked not only are they in competition, but also difficulty in getting the appointment scheduled. I don't have any more color on that.

And, Judy, I'm not sure how you track any waste but as we've mentioned, there's always going to be a cracked vial or something at the edge. We cannot be throwing anything out right now and that just can't happen. These doses, as long as they're stored properly, have a significant shelf life. There is no reason whatsoever to do that.

And in fact, this is a silver lining and I don't want folks to say "Oh, wait, wait a minute, you didn't do it for that reason" and we didn't but when you've opened it up to healthcare, long-term care, admittedly in a different channel, police, fire, over 65, under 65 with chronic conditions, one of the silver linings of that, you obviously add to the supply demand, is you get a lot of people who are eligible for a vaccine. So if you're running at the end of the day and you've got a couple leftover, you've got a lot of people to choose from right now in New Jersey.

Judy, any color on trouble signing up for the second dose? We saw it today, you couldn't leave the Morristown Mall without going to the desk to actually get your second appointment today. So you couldn't get checked out unless you had that done. Any other comments?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Just on the second dose, we do have allocated doses for the second doses. Because there's been a lot of talk that there's a shortage, where is my second dose? We have allocated with the federal government those doses put aside. We are asking every point of dispensing to make the appointment for the second dose when the person leaves after the first dose. I know some people are falling through the cracks because I get those emails myself, and we follow up on every one of them.

I think I've said in the past some wastage is inevitable. You want to keep that really low, but we do track every vial, every lot number, and the PODs are required to report to us. And at this point, it's well under 1%. Wastage. You know a couple of things like broken vials, you open up the tray and a vial is broken, that's reportable. We check all of that.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll follow up. Where's Dan? I want to make sure we follow up on the Gloucester mega site in particular, okay? Thank you for that. Mike, is that you? How are you?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good afternoon, Governor. Thank you. I just wanted to follow up on some of the information that you gave out today. You mentioned the vaccines that the state controls and the ones that are controlled by the federal partners, the pharmacies. Can you explain why 50% to 70% of the vaccines the state controls are going into people's arms? Why is it just that percentage? Why is it not closer to 100? Maybe there's an explanation?

Do you have any idea, you mentioned you're going to talk to Walgreens. Do you have any idea why the pharmacies are just at 10%?

And then the vaccines that aren't being used, what's happening to those? Are they put up for grabs for people who don't have an appointment or who are standing in line?

And then you mentioned that the state gets about 100,000 vaccines a week. How is that split between the state controlled and the federal controlled? Is it 50-50 or is it some other percentage breakdown?

And then I think finally, I think the President is talking about FEMA vaccination sites. I'm curious whether you are in favor of that, if you've spoken to anyone in the administration about New Jersey hosting one of those and what the status of those might be? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: First question, why 50%, 60%, 70% and not 100%? Over time, that is going to be 100. That is largely dependent on when the shipment comes in, what day of the week, and then you're chopping through people who have appointments. That's sort of the average of a rolling, think of this as a rolling supply up against a rolling demand. That number will, in the fullness of time, that the percentages will shrink in the right direction.

I believe, so think about the Walgreens/CVS reality this way. They schedule your grandmother's nursing home. They know how many people live there, how many staff are there, they get the allocation and they put that to the side in cold-chain storage. That part appears to be working. I think we've said this publicly, Judy, it's probably now over 90% of long-term care facilities in the state have been scheduled, so that part is working. What I've said up until now is working.

I believe this is a question of manpower. That is not the issue with the state or the community organizations. I believe it is the issue with the CVS and Walgreens folks. So the good news is your grandmother's nursing home is scheduled, but it might be scheduled for February 25. It ought to be scheduled for January 25. That's going to be -- that has already been, just because I'm speaking to the CEO of Walgreens today, trust me, we're on with them every day. Judy and team and others are on with them. I believe that's the best explanation. They're not getting wasted. They're not going unused, but they need to put more urgency and more manpower into this.

Extras are going, to the best of my knowledge, Judy, to the people who are eligible, right? If you've got extras, I mean, we mentioned this a couple weeks ago, the hospitals had been in a closed architecture up until a number of weeks ago. I'm using my terminology, which is not a healthcare-approved terminology, but they began going and Judy

allowed it some number of weeks ago to open architecture. So in other words, it was first and foremost for their workers and then they realized, you know what? We've got more doses than we need, let's open this thing up. That's a typical reality that's happening in a lot of places right now.

I'm going to jump to FEMA and then you've got the state versus federal. The FEMA, our team is regularly in discussions. Pat, do you want to jump in on that?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Sure. The Acting FEMA Administrator, Bob Fenton, did activate the National Response Coordination Center in every FEMA Region, including Region 2. I've been in touch with the Acting Region 2 Administrator in the process of forming response teams for those FEMA-supported or federally supported vaccination sites. So we, you know, we wanted to be first in line and I've had positive feedback from FEMA Region 2 that New Jersey is poised to support one of those federally supported vaccination – similar to what we did with those community-based testing sites back in the spring. We are in the queue with that.

Governor Phil Murphy: It gives me the opportunity to thank Pete Gaynor who ran FEMA, and then with eight days ago in the administration, was asked to run the Department of Homeland Security. Each of Pat, Jared and I reached out to him and to his credit, he ran through the tape.

Having said that, I endorse everything Pat said. The issue for us right now is not that we need more distribution locations. We need more doses. So if those locations come with doses, count us all in, but we frankly don't need more distribution locations right now. We need more doses and staff, obviously that would come with it. But I'm more optimistic on staff than I am on, you know, locations, staff, doses in terms of increasing levels of urgency. Anything on any of the above you want to add, including how the 100 breaks down between the federal program and the state program, Judy?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, this gets kind of complicated and this is just round numbers but we get 53,000 doses of Pfizer a week and 53,000 doses of Moderna. Pfizer, because of the ultra-cold chain is relegated to two points of dispensing: hospitals who have ultra-cold chain and the pharmacies that are working with the federal partnership.

To this point, now, we don't touch any doses at the state. It goes right from the feds to the point of dispensing. We have no stockpile. Right now total, 450,000 doses have been put aside at the federal government for the long-term care, congregate setting, federal partnership.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is the CVS/Walgreens program?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's the CVS/Walgreens program. So of the 700 – and again, round numbers – of the 750,000 doses that we've received over time, and those that we expect to receive, 400,000 is put aside over time for long-term care and then we get the 100,000 every week. I don't have the exact number so I don't want to give it. I'll have to get that for you. I don't want to give the number but I'll tell you how much every week goes directly to long term care.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Please. Good afternoon.

Reporter: Good afternoon. Should the government consider paying incentives or pay people to get COVID vaccines? That's one.

Governor Phil Murphy: To pay people to incentivize them to get vaccines? Okay.

Reporter: One of President Biden's Executive Orders gives states the authority to use the National Guard to help with COVID-19 response and have that fully funded by FEMA. Do you plan to take advantage of this? And if so, how will you expand the work of the National Guard in New Jersey's COVID response?

Governor, on the vaccine rollout in nursing homes, does the state have any real power to enforce or alter the terms of the contract with Walgreens and CVS to increase the pace of immunizations other than the public pressure you've been putting on these companies?

And for the Commissioner, we've seen debates in two states about using second doses as first doses if there's an immediate shortage. Given the surging demand here, would New Jersey consider that as an option? And any concerns that people are not getting the second dose as recommended?

Two questions from viewers. Governor, what are your thoughts on Comcast putting limits on data amounts with everyone at home streaming for work and school? They're apparently making everybody pay an extra \$30 a month.

And finally, where to college professors and students fit in the vaccine priority schedule?

Governor Phil Murphy: We have no plans to pay people to incent them to take the vaccine, and particularly when you've got 2 million people signed up to preregister. We've already put 500,000 shots in the arm; we've got to get to 4.7 million within six months. Not only do we not have the money, we don't think we need to.

National Guard, the answer is yes, particularly if FEMA and the feds are going to be at 100-nothing pay split. We've been digging out from the last administration. We never got north of 75-25. The answer is yes but we're not waiting for that. I don't know, how many National Guard members were there this morning, would you say? 50? A good 50? So they're already in the mix. We would welcome the opportunity if there's a way to fund that more aggressively, that would be great. We will certainly pursue that.

I'll come back to you in terms of what else we could do with the two big chains and their pace. I think the big move on the board they need to make is putting more bodies on the task. And again, remember we are, in terms of long-term care facilities' residents and I assume staff, because we've got high staffing ratios thanks to laws that I signed recently, we've got the highest per capita reality of any American state. This is not just like an average state in terms of long-term care. I suspect it is manpower and bodies.

I'm going to skip your fourth one because I forget it.

I don't have any insight on Comcast other than to say this is a time I think we all need to be giving each other a break, because these are extraordinary moments. I don't have any color on the program that that you referred to. I also missed your second viewer question, so come on back if you could, sir.

Reporter: Sure. The second viewer question was where do college professors and students fit in with the vaccine priority schedule?

Governor Phil Murphy: And what was your last one?

Reporter: The other one, I believe, was we've seen debate in other states about using second doses as first doses if there's an immediate shortage.

Governor Phil Murphy: There's no debate. As Judy said a minute ago, unless there's a debate I'm not aware of, the point here is this doesn't get to 95% effectiveness unless you do both the first dose and the booster shot and we're going to stick with that. I believe one of the states you're referring to is in Florida, where there's a lot of press today that there's folks, I think they said 44,000 people, who have already gone past their window. We will do everything we can to avoid that here.

College professors and students, I've got two of those at home and I know each of the schools, in my family's case, have their own protocols. I think I want to come back to that. I don't have a crisp answer for you.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: All education is certainly on our list of essential individuals. It's just that we have no vaccine, so we can't pull anyone up at this point and make more people eligible.

Governor Phil Murphy: My answer, I'll go on the record and if we need to be corrected, Dan, we'll follow up. I think college professors and students are going to be in the same pocket as educators and students from pre-K through 12. We want to get there ASAP. Believe me, we want to get there.

It is also a fact that different universities are pursuing a very specific plan for their own campuses. I know that for a fact because we're going through that at home right now. We'll come back to you if there is anything. Nikita, take us home.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Okay, so I have a few, a couple of them on Cabinet appointments. I know you've referred to, I guess --

Governor Phil Murphy: Biden or ours?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Yours, just yours. So I know that you've referred to Dr. Hou as the acting Military and Veterans Affairs Commissioner. I'm wondering, is she a candidate for a permanent nomination or are you still looking at other candidates? Is there a timetable on that?

Further, are replacements or successors for Paul Rodriguez and Vinn White in place?

And then these last ones are political. Assemblyman Gordon Johnson and Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri-Huttler are currently lobbying party leaders for endorsements for Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg's seat. I know that Johnson was one of the first Democrats to endorse you way back in 2016, before the gubernatorial field had cleared. I'm wondering if you wanted to make an endorsement in that contest?

Separately, Assemblyman Webber has called on you to quarantine after your trip down to the inauguration. I would just like to see if you have a reaction on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not going to talk about specific personnel matters in terms of where we are in the process. I would say this: Lisa is doing an outstanding job. You work with her, you work with her, and she's doing an outstanding job. And it doesn't hurt, I think, Judy, that she's got a medical background at this particular moment in time, but she was also doing a darn good job -- and her colleagues, by the way, are doing a great job, including in the deployment to Washington, which is ongoing for the Guard. Again, troopers back yesterday, Guard are still down there. I don't have a date at which they will returned.

Paul and Vinn, this is literally hot off the press over the past couple of days so the team that's on the field will try to back and fill. They're both big losses, there's no question about it. Carol is a big loss. Justin is a big loss. We've been blessed with a great team and those teammates, for the time being at least, will step up. And it's always possible that somebody who's already in the mix could be a candidate. You know, we lost Catherine McCabe at the Department of Environmental Protection to retirement, outstanding job; Shawn LaTourette, outstanding leader right now as another example.

No endorsement, so I appreciate your asking but I'm a big fan of both of them. We work very closely with each. You're absolutely right, Gordon was the first elected official, I believe, to endorse my candidacy and I'll never forget that. Val and we have worked together on a whole range of policy matters and they're both outstanding. I don't know if anyone else is going to get in that race or not but if you're looking for a strong democracy, one of the definitions is, do you have a good set of choices? You couldn't have better choices. And again, there may well be others that get involved in that.

Assemblyman Webber, I had not seen that. He should look carefully at what the rules of the road are, not included in quarantining. By the way, I get tested literally all the time, including had to get tested Tuesday in Washington, in order to go Wednesday, and I had already been tested by a complete coincidence in New Jersey on Monday. There are two explicit carve outs, and one is transit. You're down and back, you're doing something, you're coming back and the other is essential work. I would argue, I think without much controversy that a Governor has every right to be present at the inauguration of the President of the United States. So I'd say with all due respect to Assemblyman Webber we see it differently and that's based on the facts. Thank you.

I'm going to mask up. We're good, sir. You can follow up with Dan, if you'd like. Good to see you all. Judy and Tina, thank you as always. Twice blessed today, thank you. Tina, good to have you back. Pat, likewise, two times in the day. Jared, Parimal, Dan. Again, we will be virtual tomorrow and Sunday, unless you hear otherwise, and we will be back live at one o'clock on Monday. And really again, the only potential wrinkle in that could be if the White House picks up some sort of a rhythm of the governor VTCs that were frankly very productive for us, I think, over the past 10 months. I suspect we'll see more of that.

Folks stay at it. Please, please, I would just ask two things. Please keep doing a good job. I read a very frightening article today by David Leonhardt, who had to get his mother to Colorado to get a test. The more frightening part was not even that he had to go to Colorado to get the test from Washington DC, by the way, not from New Jersey but he drove out and he had a sister from Denver meet him in St. Louis, I think, and he gave mom to his sister and she took her that way and he went back to Washington. He said he went into motels, restaurants, gas stations and he said the lack of mask wearing, social distancing, doing the basics, he said was shocking.

And I have to say, for the most part, that is not true in New Jersey. That is not true, and that's partly why the hospitalizations have not just leveled now, but have begun -- let's hope it stays that way -- to come down a bit. The first ask is, please keep doing what you're doing, folks, and you're doing an extraordinary job. And not just to the millions of you but to the proprietors, the ones who can say you know what? You're not coming in here to the convenience store or the restaurant or the lobby, because you're not wearing a face covering, enforcing that.

The second favor we've got to ask is, please have patience on the vaccine. We're over half a million. It was only nine days ago we were at 250,000. God willing, the next 250,000 increment is faster. We will get there. We need the feds, they inherited an empty warehouse, quite apparently. It's going to take time. I continue to believe and by the way, Tony Fauci, Judy, said this yesterday, quite clearly. The President's aspiration of 100 million vaccinations in 100 days is still within the realm of possibility. We had talked about 4.7 million adults within six months. We still think we can get that done, assuming the feds get there. I do think it'll be middle to back loaded in terms of in that time period, and we have to remember, and Pat maybe this gets back to the FEMA question on distribution points. If we get a ton of these all at once, we have to make sure that the distribution points are all well-staffed and are punching at their capacity. That's where we may well need the FEMA help.

I think if FEMA dropped a lot of people in today without doses or new locations, we're thankful for it, they have been extraordinary partners. That doesn't really changed our reality. But if we do then begin to get to production and it's coming in all at once, that help may well be a game changer. Keep doing what you're doing, folks. Please have patience. There's an extraordinary supply-demand imbalance. It will go away. It will cure itself but it will take time. Thank you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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