

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: September 21st, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. I'm honored to be joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz, another familiar face, great to have you both. To my left, the father of the groom, otherwise known as Superintendent Colonel Pat Callahan; again, name and person known to everybody. Jared Maples, Director of Homeland Security and Preparedness is with us. Good afternoon.

So, our flags fly today at half-staff in memory of the late Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who passed away on Friday evening. They will remain, by the way, at half-staff until her burial later this week at Arlington National Cemetery. As a member of the Supreme Court for the past 27 years, Justice Ginsburg set herself apart as one of our nation's most influential jurists, not just of our era, but of any era, one whose dissents were often considered as historic and meaningful as the majority and concurring opinions she wrote. She was a forceful and thoughtful judge and was an icon in the legal field long before she became an icon in popular culture.

For us in New Jersey, we remember the special role our state played in her life. From 1963 to 1972, Justice Ginsburg was a sought-after professor at the Rutgers Newark School of Law, as well as an advisor to the Women's Rights Law Review. Following her tenure at Rutgers, she was the first director of the Women's Rights Project of the ACLU, which has led many fights for gender equality and equity, and those fights educated many of Justice Ginsburg's own opinions. Last year, I had an incredible and distinct honor of presenting Justice Ginsburg with the Golden Pea Award from the German organization, MARCHENLAND Berlin. It was a

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small ceremony held at the Supreme Court. The First Lady accompanied me that day, along with our daughter, Emma, there on the right, Second from the left, by the way, is the German Ambassador to the United States of America, Dr. Emily Hopper.

Justice Ginsburg was extraordinarily generous with her time. She gave us a literally 30-plus minute portrait-by-portrait tour of the chambers after the ceremony had taken place, which she had every right to have gone back to her office, she insisted on staying, and she was extraordinary. She went through each of the portraits of Supreme Court justices, explained who they were, their history, their tendencies. It was an extraordinary history lesson, it was an extraordinary moment and I can tell you, we will never forget that day. She was small in stature, as you could see from the photo, but she was a giant in her field and in our nation's history. No doubt her reasoned and sharp opinions will be quoted and required for generations to come, and may her memory be a blessing.

And with that, may the posturing that has already commenced be a cautionary tale of how our national politics has careened off the rails over the past four years. The rank hypocrisy of those like Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is showing. They want to ram a nominee through six weeks before a presidential election, when just four years ago they refused to offer even a hearing to a nominee whose name was put forward eight months before an election. "Let the people decide", they screamed in 2016. But today, they're thumbing their noses at the people in the name of a narrow political ideology. How many Senate Republicans will have the guts to stand up and demand that the process be put on hold until after the nation chooses its next president? That's really a rhetorical question, as so few have shown any guts over the past four years. Please, God, can four of these people channel the likes of John McCain and others who went before them.

But for them, this isn't about the nation's future. It's about reasoned jurisprudence. It's a blatant power grab by those whose mission is to undo decades of civil rights progress, protect polluters over the environment, gut healthcare for millions of Americans and deny a woman the right to make her own medical and reproductive decisions. And right now, our attention and the attention of the President and Congress should be focused on the pressing issue of getting ahead of COVID-19 and ensuring a comprehensive national response and recovery.

We cannot be distracted from that goal. I think I know what Justice Ginsburg's opinion would be on the matter, and there would be no lack of Americans who would concur in that opinion. And it's only rightful, I might add, that tomorrow is National Voter Registration Vote. So whichever side of this you're on, get registered and get out and vote.

Next, switching gears completely, I'd like to highlight two announcements from the Department of Human Services, and especially and specifically from our outstanding Commissioner Carol Johnson. First, the department is providing the opioid overdose reverse drug Naloxone, commonly called Narcan, free of charge to residents with no need for a name, appointment or prescription for three days, this Thursday through Saturday, September 24th through 26th. To receive free Narcan, you can visit any of more than 300 pharmacies statewide, including participating locations of Acme, CVS, Rite Aid, SaveOn, ShopRite, Stop and Shop, Walgreens, Walmart and Weis Markets, along with numerous independent pharmacies. For a complete list of locations, look at that website at the bottom, [nj.gov/humanservices/stopoverdoses](https://nj.gov/humanservices/stopoverdoses). This is by the way, our second annual Naloxone giveaway, and last year we distributed more than 32,000 free doses to residents. We were so encouraged to see New Jerseyans from across the state participate and be a part of the fight to combat the opioid epidemic. I urge everyone to get your free Narcan this year so you, too, can help us save lives and get folks on the path to treatment and recovery.

Even as we have been battling the COVID-19 pandemic, our efforts to curb our opioid epidemic have not stopped. And again, I thank Commissioner Johnson and all of our partners for their effort to make this second giveaway possible. In everything we do, it is about saving every life we can.

Also today, the Department of Human Services – and by the way, Pat, you and your colleagues in law enforcement know what Narcan can do, and how many lives have been reversed and brought back, and you and your colleagues live this every single day. Again, today the Department of Human Services has opened up the window for families with children ages 5 through 13 to apply for our new COVID-19 Childcare Tuition Assistance Program. We know this is of particular importance to working parents whose children are currently learning remotely. Families with incomes up to \$75,000 a year can apply online and you can see it

there, [childcare.nj.gov](https://childcare.nj.gov). Again, that's [childcare.nj.gov](https://childcare.nj.gov), and all you will need is a proof of income and a remote learning notice or announcement from your child's school. Tuition Assistance will be available to eligible residents through December 30th. A total of \$150 million has been set aside to support this program, and it is part of the broader \$250 million plan we announced last month to ensure that more working families have access to the childcare supports they need, and to support our vital childcare providers. And again, I want to thank Commissioner Carol Johnson, who is outstanding, and her equally outstanding team.

With that, Judy, can we go to the overnights, if that's all right? We had an additional 396 positive test results and we have broken through 200,000, it is now 200,154 since our first case on March 4th. For the tests recorded on September 17th, the positivity was 1.81%. We'll stop here for one second. So 396 positive test results, big numbers over the weekend as well, Judy. Spot positivity has come down. It was over two, in fact, almost three at certain points last week. Folks ask us all the time, hey gosh, I think we've said this at almost every session we've been here for the past several months. Yes, we test per capita as much as virtually any state in America. The team up here on either side of me and others behind the scenes, went through hell and back to go from nothing, a peashooter as a nation, never mind a state, to one of the most robust testing capacities anywhere in the United States of America.

So yes, some of this, when we print 400 or 500, or in today's case 396 positives, some of that is due to the fact we've got big testing capacity. The good news is, you're getting tested. There was a period, you probably may have forgotten this but a few months ago, we were begging folks to go out and get tested. We had built the capacity. We had the supply, but the demand wasn't keeping up with that. But some of this is also community spread. Judy's been going through, we had a long call today to go over. We're challenged right now in Monmouth and Ocean Counties, to be specific. We owe you the facts, folks, and that's why we go through this every day. I think we've been very clear, when you're around 2% and you've got around 400 cases, you can multiply that by 50, plus or minus, to get some sense of the amount of people who got tested that day. In this case, it's probably just about that, about 20,000 back from that day. I wanted to get that off my chest.

We're going to flip, the statewide rate of transmission sits at 1.12. It's been hovering, Judy, a little bit below and a little bit above 1.1. Based on those tests, particularly the 400 or 500 test days we got, I think you've been of the opinion for a while, it's going to be there for a bit.

Our hospitals as of last night, 185 confirmed COVID-19 patients, another 164 persons under investigation awaiting confirmation for a test. That's a total of 349, 87 of whom were intensive care, 32 ventilators were in use. We're reporting, with a heavy heart, two additional confirmed deaths, bringing our total to 14,278. Our number of probable deaths remains at 1,791. Again, apples to oranges, but for a spot look, our hospitals reported, Judy, my number has six in hospitals yesterday. Again, those are not part of these confirmed numbers, but just to give you a sense of what it looks like on the front in the here and now.

As we do every day, let's take a couple of minutes to remember three more of the members of our New Jersey family who have been lost to COVID-19. We'll begin in Bergen County, the lifelong home of Donald Landzettel, that is a German name. He was born and raised in Fairlawn, the Landzettels hail from Darmstadt, a city in Germany that I know personally quite well. Donald attended Fair Lawn High and graduated then from Dartmouth College. He got married to his wife Gail on the right, and he joined the army, retiring in 1969 at the rank of captain.

In his private sector career, Don was vice president and retail manager for the Fairlawn-based and family-owned paint company Landzettel and Sons Lazon Paints, but service was a calling. After Don and Gail settled in Allendale, he served as a leader of Boy Scout Troop 252 and was an active parishioner of the Archer United Methodist Church. He founded Allendale's Annual Community Christmas Concert, and Don was also a member of AA and sponsored many others in their journeys. He was a member and former president of the Foundation Board for New Bridge Medical Center, which not only presented him with his Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his service, but also rededicated its interfaith chapel in his honor.

Don leaves behind Gail, again on the right and I had the great honor of speaking with her on Friday, after 59 years of marriage. He also leaves his daughter Susan in New Hampshire, and Laurie and Jackson and his sons-in-law, Paul and Patrick respectively, and his four beloved grandchildren's Corrine, Brandon Tyler, and

Kiersten. We thank Don for his lifetime of service to our nation and to his community. God bless and watch over him.

Next, we remember Estelle Kestenbaum, a longtime resident of Leonia, who we lost at the age of 91. And we have put up now hundreds of pictures. This one is my finalist for the best picture of anyone we've memorialized since we started this six months ago. Look at that shot. She was born and raised in Maryland, graduated from Duke University – think about that for a minute. She passed at the age of 91. You can roll the clock back, and I'll bet you there weren't a whole lot of women on the campus at Duke University when Estelle was there. And also, she called Baltimore and New York City home before settling in Leonia in 1969 with her late husband Alfred to raise their family.

Three decades ago, at the age of 60, she began working as a secretary to support Superior Court Judge Edwin Stern of the Appellate Division. For the next 20 years she would make the drive from her home in Leonia to Judge Stern's chambers in Morristown, retiring at the age of 80 after two decades of not only of service to our courts, but after serving as a mentor to many of Judge Stern's clerks. She was a lifetime volunteer with the League of Women Voters and also always believed in the importance of voting. Again, tomorrow National Voter Registration Day, she would want me to say that.

Sadly before COVID-19, Estelle was diagnosed with Alzheimer's which slowly robbed her of her life's memories. She leaves behind her children, daughters Janice who is in Washington, DC and Nancy in New York City, and I had the honor of speaking with each of them on Friday, and Nancy's husband David, and Estelle's son Ken, who lives in Long Island and daughter-in-law Meghan, along with her grandchildren, Rebecca, Ben, Connor and Caitlin. She is also survived by her nephews, Robert, Ronald and Bernard and many, many friends. We are honored that Estelle chose to make her life in New Jersey, and may her memory be a blessing.

And finally, today, we remember John Tone Jr. of Randolph. He was born in Orange and raised in West Orange, graduating from West Orange High School before proudly serving in the United States Marine Corps, achieving the rank of sergeant and earning accolades for his marksmanship. With his military days behind him, he returned to New Jersey with his wife Thelma to earn his degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University. He then began a career that took him from the entry level job of clerk to his retirement as Vice President of Operations at Kyocera. Golfing with friends was a pleasure of his for many years, especially with buddies whose friendships spanned more than 50 years.

Above all, however, John took enjoyment in his family, especially his grandchildren, Andrew, Caitlin, and Joelle and great-granddaughter Violet, to whom he was Poppy. He is also survived by Thelma, after 52 years of marriage, as well as by his daughter, Donna and son-in-law Don. I had the great honor of speaking with Donna on Friday. Thelma, Donna and Don at least, it may have been more, each of them had COVID and it was not kind of them, so keep them in your prayers. He's also survived by son John and his wife Faith. He's also survived by sister Janice and brother Gary and their families, his nieces and nephews, along with many cousins and friends. May God bless and watch over John, and all who knew him.

So Don, Estelle and John are among the more than 16,000 who have now passed away because of COVID-19, whether confirmed or probable. None of those who have passed deserves to be a number. And for them, we cannot give up on everything we've done over the past six months to save lives. This pandemic isn't over and as we know, it is all too easy for the numbers to go back up. So even though I know that we're all a bit fatigued – more than a bit fatigued – we must remain vigilant and we have to keep up with our social distancing and masking, especially as the weather cools and we're drawn back indoors, where we know this virus is even more dangerous.

Before we hand the ball over to Judy, let's change gears once more to acknowledge another of the organizations partnering with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to ensure that we emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever. Today we recognize the Youth Development Clinic of Newark which has, for the past 60 years, serve the children and families in Newark and in the surrounding areas who struggled with mental health issues, poverty and other challenges. At the core of their mission is their community mental health clinic that provides essential care and services to roughly 200 clients every week, and which complements its school-based counseling and support services.

With the onset of remote learning, YDC had to quickly make the move to telehealth services. Executive Director Dr. Mark Kitzie, with whom I spoke on Friday and there he is on the right, worked through the EDA to receive a loan that has allowed his team to expand community outreach, including purchasing new technology for telehealth services and to keep key staff on the payroll. Because of this partnership, YDC continues to meet the needs of the children and families it serves. I thank Dr. Kitzie and everyone at the Youth Development Clinic for their commitment and dedication. Check them out at ydcnj.org or call them at 973-623-5080.

And finally for today, a program note that this Thursday morning I will be hosting a Facebook Live chat about our fight against the coronavirus with Dr. Anthony Fauci. That live stream will be available on my Facebook page, so go to facebook.com/GovernorPhilMurphy, and join us at 11:15 a.m. this Thursday, September 24th.

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

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. The COVID-19 public health emergency has taken a toll on the mental health and the emotional wellbeing of our residents. All of us have experienced a significant disruption in our day-to-day lives. We've been separated from loved ones, friends and colleagues. Some of us have lost those closest to us from the illness. Many of those who have recovered from the illness still struggle with long-term health effects, and many families have been financially devastated. Grief, uncertainty, isolation and lack of socialization with colleagues and friends has impacted all of us. Restrictions on our lives such as limits on social gatherings like weddings and funerals have changed how we mark important milestones, and we know that these restrictions must continue for a while.

We've been working together for more than six months to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our state. We know that this new normal will persist for the foreseeable future, and all these factors are causing what is called pandemic fatigue. Pandemic fatigue is a feeling of exhaustion from the effects of COVID-19 health emergency on our lives. The key sign of pandemic fatigue is weariness. People may also feel helpless, sad and irritable. Those experiencing this fatigue may have trouble focusing or may have trouble with eating, or they may be sleeping less, or more than usual or lack motivation and become withdrawn.

While we may be feeling burned out, it's important that we take steps to care for our physical and mental health. Work on getting more sleep and eating nutritious foods. Unplug from social media and the news. Go for walks, read a book, try another activity that can help calm your mind. Connect with others by a phone call or video chat. Social support is vital to mitigating stress. As tired as we all are from battling of the pandemic, we have to continue to take precautions such as wearing face coverings and social distancing because this virus is still circulating and we need to stay the course in this fight. It's like running a marathon. It's a long race and we are all going to get to the finish line, but it's going to take time and perseverance.

We know that when individuals are dealing with mental health stressors, some may turn to alcohol and drugs to cope. This May, New Jersey saw the highest number of suspected drug-related deaths seen in any month, not just for 2020 but for 2019 and for 2018 as well. Overall, the state has seen a 12% increase in suspected drug-related deaths from January to July 2020 when compared to the same period last year.

Initiatives to get Narcan, Naloxone, into the hands of more residents are vital for battling this epidemic right now. I encourage New Jerseyans to visit a participating pharmacy and to get this overdose reversal drug for free, so that we are all ready to help save lives. Earlier this month, as the Governor shared, the Department of Health, Department of Human Services partnered to deliver more than 11,000 free doses of Naloxone to 179 Emergency Medical Services teams throughout New Jersey, EMS clinicians have been responding to an increase in overdoses in the state, and we wanted to ensure that they have the tools they need to care for their patients.

The department is also expanding our Five Minutes to Help training. This is an initiative for EMS to improve connections to care for non-fatal overdose victims. The program has helped to train more than 100 responders on how to interact with patients after they have been treated for a suspected opioid overdose. This training includes how to link patients to resources they need, so they can reduce the number of repeat overdose patients.

For individuals who are struggling with substance use, they can call the 1-844 Reach New Jersey Helpline to speak with live, trained, addiction treatment counselors and to get connected to treatment, regardless of insurance status. For those who are dealing with stress, anxiety or depression, they can call the New Jersey Mental Healthcare's helpline at 866-202-HELP.

Now moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 349 hospitalizations, and there are 87 individuals in critical care with 37% on ventilators. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. The children affected, as you know, have either tested positive for active COVID-19 or have had antibody tests that were positive for COVID-19.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 54.1%, Black 18.3%, Hispanic 20.3%, Asian 5.5% and other 1.9%.

At the state's veterans homes and the psychiatric homes, our numbers remain the same. The daily percent positivity statewide is 1.81%. The Northern part of the state 1.30%, the Central part of the state 2.15%, and the southern part of the state 2.51%. That concludes my daily update. Stay safe and remember, for each other, for us all, please take the call. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you and your words regarding mental health, opioid addiction, alcohol use, etc., are extremely well taken and timely, sadly. Thank you for raising it in addition to everything else you and your team do. Pat, I was very happy to see on the compliance report no reference to the wedding in the family on Friday, so that was a relief. Again, congratulations to Ryan and Megan and to you and Linda and her parents. Great to have you back. Please.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor, good afternoon. With regards to compliance, we did have Central Park Restaurant in Roselle, a report of overcrowding. Police did respond and issue not only the owner but the manager for the EO violation. And also, Island Dragway which is up in Independence Township in Warren County, the owner there was cited. Police responded to traffic and there was over 1,000 patrons there, so that owner was also cited for an EO violation. And beyond that, Governor, it's been quiet.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** The weather, Pat, this week looks to be glorious throughout the entire week on the weather front.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Perfect and the first day of fall is tomorrow morning, it starts at 9:30 so it's going to be cool.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Well said. Before we start, Dante, we'll start over here with Matt, and Matt Platkin has joined us. Matt, good to have you. We'll be on the schedule this week which has been our typical schedule, unless Dan tells me otherwise. We'll be here Monday, Wednesday, Friday, at one o'clock each day unless you hear otherwise, virtual tomorrow and Thursday, and we have a White House call right after this, so we'll post if we hear anything on that, either real time or at latest on Wednesday. If we could keep things moving along fairly crisply, as a result of that or because of that, that would be great. Dante, let's start here. Matt, good afternoon.

#### Q&A Session

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Good afternoon, Governor. The increase in the average daily cases and the steady increase in the rate of transmission to the highest levels in seven weeks, is this any early ripples of a potential second wave, especially considering the first day of fall is tomorrow and colder temperatures are on the way?

You mentioned in your opening remarks Ocean and Monmouth Counties. Those two counties are currently responsible for about 30% of the new cases in the past two days. Curious if you can point to any specific activities that are linked to the uptake in those two counties?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Both good questions. Judy, you and Ed should address both. Is this indicative of a second wave? And separately, what's the nature, in general terms, of what we're seeing in Ocean and Monmouth? I do know house parties, or at least a house party, is still on the list, unfortunately. That's a Monmouth data point. I would think Ed, Judy that a second wave would, among other things, evidence in a

much higher positivity rate than we have. As the amateur here, I'm personally of the opinion this is part of the ebb and flow and partly explainable by specific events, and partly explainable by a lot of testing capacity. But with that, Judy, do you want to chime in, and/or Ed?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** We remain vigilant every day throughout the whole state, looking at what we would call a second wave. We know internationally that many other countries are seeing what they consider a surge in cases. Israel, as an example, has gone down into another lockdown of the country as a result. But I don't think we're seeing anything specific. I'm going to look at Ed and he has eyes on this every minute of every single day. I'm going to let him share his thoughts on it.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And Ed specifically, is one indicator, am I right or off base here, you'd see a higher positivity rate. Is that accurate?

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** We would expect to see a number of different things. Certainly positivity, assuming we were testing enough, would be one of the early things that we'd expect to see. We'd look at number of new cases, look at visits to emergency departments and so forth. I'm going to agree with what both people said. I do not yet see a second wave. I'm always paying attention for the feeling of that undertow that might be suggesting that a wave is coming. Certainly any increase in numbers catches our attention and rightly increases our response to that area. But right now, I would not say it's a wave.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, how about Monmouth and Ocean, any general color there?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** We know some social gatherings, particularly in Monmouth, were responsible for increases. And generally, in Lakewood, we're just seeing a general increase in cases. I don't think we've been able to identify any specific cause right now. But again, we're remaining very vigilant because Lakewood has been a hotspot in the past and we want to make sure it doesn't happen again.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And it's fair to say, I don't want to put words in your mouth, we're probably a little bit delayed on tracking down because of the religious --

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yes, we have redeployed additional contact tracers into Ocean County, particularly to track down the cases in Lakewood, but the religious holidays, we were somewhat delayed in getting calls to the individuals.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. Thank you, Matt. Dustin, good afternoon.

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** Good afternoon. Senate President Sweeney said today that baby bonds won't be included in the next budget, and the Star-Ledger reported that you agreed that tax increases on cigarettes, guns, boat sales, limousine rides, and opioid manufacturers are also out. Any reaction to that and can you explain your apparent willingness to back off on a bunch of tax increases?

What details do you know about the network connection issue that led to more delays at Motor Vehicles today, and left the agency unable to finish transactions, and do you know what's being done to fix it and when?

And is NJ Transit's proposed Transit Grid project in Kearny subject to the new environmental justice law you signed? If so, has this been communicated to NJ Transit? And what's next now that the project has gotten federal approval to move forward? Thanks.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. Again, don't go down my throat but I'm not going to have any more to say on the budget. The committee hearings are tomorrow and I believe the budget will be, assuming it gets out of committee in the respective chambers, I believe the full vote would be on Thursday. Again, the spirit of common ground teamwork has been exceptional. And the one piece of this that we were very happy to unveil was the millionaire's tax, so it'll be a part of it. Beyond that, stay tuned.

I'm told just literally real time, Dustin, that all locations at MVC are back up except Edison. That is hot off the press. I can't tell you what the reasons were other than it was a system breakdown.

Matt Platkin may want to correct me if I'm wrong on Kearny. This is something that our team is clearly looking at, not just in light of the environmental justice legislation, but that's a project that we've been reviewing and will continue to review. Anything you want to add there or you good? Okay. Thank you. Nikita, how are you?

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** I'm well, Governor, thank you. I just have two for you today.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I should keep this in mind on future days, right.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Yeah. You talked earlier about the death of Justice Ginsburg and I was wondering, this has become an issue on the national level but in New Jersey, would you support barring judicial nominations in the last year of a gubernatorial term?

And then separately, there's a controversial ad running in the Seventh Congressional District put up by the National Republican Congressional Committee. I was just wondering what your take on that ad was?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I've not seen the ad. Can I come back to you on that, and I've not thought about that. It's a very good question in terms of barring judicial appointments in the last year. I have tended to be, so I don't want to speak out of both sides of my mouth, but I was pretty clear and on the record that I thought it was a miscarriage to not hear Judge Garland's candidacy in 2016, particularly eight months out.

I'd secondly say you can't have it one way one year and a different way, when frankly, the facts have not only really changed, but they're much more acute in this case. But it's a good question. I've not given it thought and I will do that and I'll come back to you. Dan, on the ad, I've not seen it. Perhaps you and I can watch it after this and we'll give you a reaction to it. Thank you. Sir, please.

**Reporter:** A question for Judy Persichilli. Commissioner, can you bring us up to date with the progress of the contact tracing app that's been deployed on college campuses this week? And then also a question for you, Governor. What's your reaction to the CDC posting over the weekend that the coronavirus spreads mainly through aerosols, and the reversal on that finding today? Does this change anything for state guidelines generally, and specifically for in-school education? And if anybody on stage would like, it'd be great if you could reiterate how COVID-19 spreads, so we can clarify for the people listening.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I appreciate your asking me that question but I will defer. I will say this. By the way, the Motor Vehicles Administrator, Sue Fulton's come in. Vendor software issue caused interruption of network connections, online transactions were not affected. We, meaning MVC and OIT, worked with vendor to fix the problem. And by the way, it is already fully back up and operational. That's the hot off the press answer to that.

I will say this. What concerns me, the experts will answer the question in terms of how it's transmitted and the specifics, but the notion of injecting politics into institutions that have historically, through administrations on both sides of the aisle, been beyond reproach in terms of their independence is really discouraging. And we have tried, I will say, I'm not patting ourselves on the back, we have tried at every single step of the way, even when the news was really bad, even when folks did not want to hear it, even when we didn't like what we saw, we have been upfront and called balls and strikes as best we can. I'll let the experts answer the specifics. But the sort of back and forth on the guidance, and the evidence of emails that are showing enormous political pressure should be completely and utterly unacceptable to the American public, and certainly to the 9 million of us here in New Jersey. Judy and Ed.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I'll talk about the digital app. I don't have a full report. It was reported to me this morning that they're working out some bugs and we hope within the next two weeks to deploy it throughout New Jersey, but I'll give a full report at our next presser on how it's going, or I can get back to you.

I'm going to let Ed talk about, first of all, we have great respect for CDC and we have great respect, and MWR has been around for as long as I've been around, great respect for that publication. Maybe Ed, you could give some color on that.

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** When we talk about how the virus is spread, what we're really talking about is this: when people say droplets, they're saying that these are the larger particles that tend to come out when you cough, when you sneeze. They don't travel very far, they fall to the ground quickly. That's why we talk about six feet distance and so forth.

When we talk about aerosols, we're seeing that these are smaller and lighter particles that can float in the air, and because they can float in the air, they have the ability to conceivably go longer distances or stay in the air for longer periods of time and then infect more people.

It's really often not one or the other. It's often somewhat of a continuum, meaning when you speak, when you cough, when you do those sorts of things, you're not producing either just the smaller particles or just the bigger particles, you're producing a mixture of both. How much the virus hangs on to each of those and how much each of those plays a role is still something that isn't completely understood.

So basically what you're hearing the discussions go back and forth on is basically how much we think that those viruses can be in those smaller particles and can go longer periods, further away. This is something that we are still learning. Certainly, we pay attention to everything that the CDC says, we read and pay attention to things other scientists are saying, that the World Health Organization and other people are saying, as well as evidence ourselves that we get. As far as specifically the CDC changing its guidance right here, again we pay close attention to it, but it hasn't directly impacted what we're doing day to day.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I would just also, I mentioned earlier, when Pat was speaking that we have a great week of weather ahead of us, I think the more all of us can be outside and the longer we can do that, the better. I would say secondly, we have to live our lives, right? We have to get back into school, we want to get back into gyms and dining, both in and out. I'm personally, again I'm the amateur on this one by a longshot, I think you assume the worst and hope for the best. Just be smart. Assume that it's around us and behave as though it is and again, balance that with living our lives. God willing, that's a balance we can strike. Thank you. Dave, good afternoon.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Hi, Governor. I think Matt was referencing this earlier, the statistics from last week show the 22% increase in COVID cases according to the covid19.nj dashboard. You've talked, Governor, about the fact that it seems like large gatherings, especially with younger people, is basically responsible for this. Is that still the case? And is there anything else going on? And if it is the case, is there anything we can do? Because so far, it seems like nothing seems to register with these younger folks.

Also, Judy, if you'd be kind enough to expand on your pandemic fatigue comments beyond increased alcohol and drug abuse? I mean, what are some of the signs and symptoms of COVID fatigue? Would you include the mask droop syndrome as part of this? One personal note, I did notice this again and I have been thinking – I've not done it yet and I told Dr. Ed this – I've been considering announcing myself as a representative of the health department when telling people they're required to wear the mask over their nose. I have not done that yet. But I mean, what's going on here? Is this part of this COVID fatigue, the sloppiness where people it's like, they're too tired to do it or something? How do we try to respond to that?

Last question, nursing homes have many of them the rapid COVID-19 test, but my understanding is the health department does not want them to use it and will not accept these tests. Could you explain what's going on with that and whether any of these tests are more accurate than others? And wouldn't that be helpful to try to spot this kind of stuff at the long-term facilities quicker? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Dave, a point of personal privilege. Before I begin the answers, I want Pat to add a little bit of color. This gets to the pandemic fatigue, opioid challenges we have. Pat just came up with a fascinating statistic.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Just because the ROIC monitors, we have a drug monitoring initiative to make sure we track not only accidental overdoses but also Narcan deployments. And just to put it in perspective, law enforcement and EMS personnel so far in 2020 have issued Narcan 10,155 times, which is about 40 a day. So to the Governor's opening remarks and the points that it's a life-saving drug, I have it in my truck. Every trooper has it, law enforcement throughout the state have it. That's why

citizens should take advantage of that giveaway, because it is a disease that has killed over 50,000 people in America last year, and we need to save as many lives as we can and hopefully get those folks to recovery coaches and into programs that ultimately save their lives in the long run.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Pat presumably you don't have it at your fingertips, perhaps but presumably that number is up this year over last year, would you guess?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Yes, I believe it is, Governor. I can come back on that later in the week too.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that. I wouldn't say, Dave, it's only kids but there is a disproportionate amount of what you're tracking of sources of this with younger folks. Judy, I don't want to put words in your mouth but we had, as we always do, have a warm-up call. No evidence, as we sit here of in-school transmission. No evidence that it's related to playing sports, and yet you've got kids on sports teams who have it, we believe at the moment, for collateral reasons and obviously that's something that we're tracking down. Gathering to worship is another potential source, services of kind of kinds, whether it's funerals, weddings inside, so it's not entirely kids.

What else can we do is a good question. We're going to continue to test the heck out of the state, continue to enforce, and by the way, the compliance is overwhelmingly in a good place as it relates to places that we can influence and enforce. So gyms, restaurants, overwhelmingly are doing the right thing, to pick two. Houses of worship are overwhelmingly doing the right thing.

Again, I think this is an ebb and flow reality. And again, we're in as good a shape as any state in America but I think it is with us. The question is, we have to collectively continue to mitigate what "with us" means. I appreciate your willingness to walk up to somebody and claim membership on Judy's team from the Department of Health on mask covering. I assume it is that. I mean, Judy, I assume people, as I said earlier, people are fatigued. And then lastly, you've got a very specific answer, I know, on the nursing home rapid antigen test, so please.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** And just on the pandemic fatigue, I think that the overwhelming feeling of helplessness and wanting this to end is different than willful ignorance of wearing a mask when you think you're invincible, if you're young. You'd say, well, my friend had it, he or she just got a little sick. I can do that, no problem. I think that's a different issue. The issue we were talking about is true, the emotional wellbeing of people really being affected by such a change in our normal day-to-day lives.

As far as the antigen testing, I'm gonna let Ed talk about the analysis that we keep ahead of on the antigen testing and the utility of it, not only in nursing homes, but generally.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** By the way, Judy and Ed, this is not specific to New Jersey either. This is a debate that's national, is that fair to say? Yeah.

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** So when we look to diagnose the virus, there are two tests, basically, that can be done. One is the old PCR test, which could be done in a lot of different ways and it has the advantage that it is the most specific and sensitive. It can pick up tiny amounts of virus and the reason it can do that is because it works like a copying machine where keeps on replicating the virus until it gets to be enough that it can measure.

The big disadvantage to it is that it's slower, it can almost only be done at major laboratories. It means the turnaround times are hours into days and occasionally it's gotten as long as weeks, although we're seeing it much better now as far as the turnaround time goes, and it's also a much more expensive test to use. So people are continually looking for faster, quicker tests that could take its place or that could work together with it.

That's where antigen testing is coming in. Antigen tests have been used for different things. If you've gone to the doctor and you've had a test for strep tests, for example, for strep throat, that is an antigen test. They have the advantage that they're quick, they can be done with little or no machinery, they can be done in places like doctors' offices or in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, certainly in many of them, and they are relatively cheap.

The trade-off for that is because they don't work like that copy machine and they don't keep on replicating that virus, they can't be as sensitive, meaning they can miss and will miss people that will turn positive on a PCR test. And they also tend not to be as specific, meaning you are more likely to get a false positive on them than on that PCR test.

So it's always that balance of yes, we certainly think it plays a role because it is quick, it is cheap, it is something that you can do relatively frequently. You can do it right then and there, although only one at a time, but it is not as accurate. So exactly how do you use those two tests? How do you work them together? We're still working to that but there's certainly places that we think it will be used and should be used, and other places where we're less confident.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Ed, thank you. For the time being, I think the guidance is you want them to do both, right? Not just to rely on antigen alone?

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** For now the guidance is basically the PCR test is the test of record, meaning that's the test that we're going to most believe.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Ed. Thank you, Judy. Daniel, you'll take us home.

**Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ:** Hi, Governor. Jumping off the prior question of the second wave, it's been over two weeks since we've had indoor dining in gyms and theaters. What has the data shown? Are these increases of new cases and transmission in positivity coming from that? I mean, you had said that the owners are doing a pretty good job with sanitization and social distancing and face coverings.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** A very good job, for the most part.

**Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ:** Okay. And I guess the second question, with the younger people getting it, are these parties and social gatherings the only source of these new surges? Is it also that they're back at universities? I know there's a piece from National Geographic last week that many of these younger people are doing retail and food service jobs where there's a higher risk to get it. So is there any other source of the surge that the data is showing? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll give you my thoughts, but would love you two to come in, Judy and Ed. I don't think we have evidence at this point that leads outbreaks back to any restaurant or gym or indoor entertainment or movie theater behavior, right? We do have house parties, other gatherings. But again, I don't want to overstep. We don't have in-school transmission, and there will be, by the way, right? So this is, given the amount of kids we have in school, people who go out to dinner, people who go to gyms, but we do not have that at the moment. And there could be. I would just say there could be some connection back to folks who are younger folks. I didn't see the article, but your point is you've got maybe a disproportionate representation of essential workers, food, retail, whatever it might be. Perhaps, but again, I don't know that we'll get data that supports that. Colleges, certainly we've seen some hotspots in off-campus housing, we've seen it through athletic programs. Again, no evidence that it's specific to playing athletics, but in ancillary or tangential activities. We'll let the experts weigh in here.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, I just want to talk a little bit about case investigation and contact tracing. You've heard us bring it up over and over and over again. Well, there's a reason for that. Without really good contact tracing, we won't be able to answer the questions to a higher degree of certainty that you just asked. You know, we want to be able to contact trace, identify, who were you in contact with? How are those individuals doing? Is there a particular outbreak amongst a cohort of individuals that have been in each other's company for a longer period of time?

So again, you know, answer the call. If you test positive, please share the information so that we can answer these questions and share with the public to a greater degree of certainty what type of transmission we're seeing.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** It's a great point. It's a great a tee up, Daniel, to make that commercial. Answer the call. And again, we don't condone, and never will, illegal behaviors, we certainly don't condone underage drinking, but to use the house party example, it's not what the call is about. The call is about public health. It's getting better, but it's still not where it needs to be.

And so with that, thank you. I'm going to mask up and have a couple of thoughts here as we depart. First of all, Judy and Ed, thank you, as always. Pat, likewise, Jared, Matt Platkin, Dan Bryan. Again, tomorrow virtual, Wednesday one o'clock in person. Again, White House call this afternoon. Those have become less frequent. This looks like it's sort of in every other week mode at the moment but we'll all be on it. If we get anything, and some of you have asked some questions, whether it's CDC or antigen testing that we may well get some more color.

Again, I just ask folks to not only keep doing what you've been doing, both individuals as well as folks who run establishments. I did a quick spot check into a gym health club on Saturday and it was impeccable, based on my anecdotal quick inspection. I'm going to hit a school this week, trying to sort of go around. We continue to dine, I've stayed outside so far because the weather's been with us, but based on the evidence we've got, folks are overwhelmingly doing the right thing. And Judy, the only exception is probably the last point you raised.

We need more of you to pick up the phone and answer the call and just be straight. This is what I know. This is who we're in touch with. The folks who do this are from your community. They've got no agenda other than the public health agenda. They're trained, they know that confidentiality is important and so please, please, please, take their call. Many thanks. God bless.

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