

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Seated alongside me today 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 Department's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz; great to have you both. To my left, a guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Parimal Garg and a cast of thousands.

This is the 213th time we've sat down at this table to update you on our progress against the pandemic. Some days have had more good news than bad. Some days, it's been the opposite. But regardless of the numbers, we have always come with a sense of optimism that if we all pull together and do the things we all need to do, we will emerge stronger and more resilient than ever, and this is one of those times.

The Delta variant is now working its way across our state, as we expected, and we are seeing the impact, overwhelmingly, I might add, the impact among unvaccinated. Today we are announcing that all works in a range of healthcare facilities and other high-risk congregate settings are required to either complete a full vaccination course or undergo regular testing at a minimum of once to twice each week. All impacted facilities, which I will list in a minute, are to be in full compliance by September 7th, no exceptions and no extensions. To be clear, this standard is the absolute floor. We are reviewing all available resources to set aggressive testing standards as quickly as possible in the state's high-risk settings. To be clear, we retain the ability and the authority to go further if we do not see significant increases in vaccination rates within this worker population.

This mandate will apply to all staff entering a healthcare facility or congregate living setting. This includes the Ancora Greystone Park and Trenton Psychiatric Hospitals, the Ann Kline Forensic Center, the veterans' homes in Paramus, Menlo Park, and Vineland, all state developmental centers, state correctional and juvenile justice facilities, and county-run correctional facilities, long-term care and assisted living facilities, acute care and specialty hospitals, short-term and

post-acute inpatient rehabilitation facilities, and licensed behavioral health facilities. Private sector employers are equally and fully empowered to work on a more ambitious timeline or to require either a more rigorous testing regime or eliminate that option completely and require all employees to be vaccinated as a matter of their continued employment.

Now some of these impacted settings are already in motion. Our veterans' homes, for example, are already testing unvaccinated folks three times a week. Our state correctional facilities, psychiatric hospitals, and developmental centers have also already instituted testing regimes. University Hospital in Newark has already mandated vaccination for all of its employees with no testing opt-out. We are aware that the Port Authority has announced a testing program for all of its unvaccinated employees. We have been in communication with relevant stakeholders regarding our policy including our union partners across both the public and private sectors, officials within impacted industries and locations, local officials, and members of our Cabinet. We will continue to work on finalizing all the details of this policy prior to the September 7th effective date of this mandate.

As I mentioned, this mandate is at current the floor. I want to make perfectly clear as well if we do not see significant increases in vaccination rates among the employees in these settings, we are ready and willing to require all staff to be vaccinated as a condition of their employment. Today, the clock starts ticking to the September 7th date to come into full compliance. While this policy specifically impacts the healthcare facilities and congregate living settings listed, there is nothing stopping any employer from implementing at least a rigorous a policy.

The spread of the Delta variant and its widespread impacts are no longer something that we can look at casually. Almost every day, we are receiving some new research that shows this variant to be even more contagious and more lethal than previously thought.

We also know that the surest way to end this pandemic is through vaccination. Last spring, we had to push back hard against the misinformation that COVID was no worse than the flu. The fact that we have lost more New Jerseyans to COVID in 16 months than we did to the flu over the 18 years from 2002 to 2019 combined proves this. The vaccines can't make the coronavirus go away. This virus is with us and likely will be for some time, but the vaccines are proving, convincingly, that they make the likelihood of a minor COVID illness that much greater and the chance of hospitalization or death that much less. In other words, the vaccines can turn COVID into an illness on par with the flu.

The numbers from Ed's team at the Communicable Disease Service tracking the rates of COVID infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from among the fully vaccinated further bear this out. Through July 19, there were 4,909,743 fully vaccinated New Jerseyans; that is people who were 14 days past the date of their final vaccine dose. In all of these individuals, only 6,381 have received a positive PCR, or presumed positive antigen coronavirus test result. That's 0.13%, and in only roughly half of these cases did an individual even show any COVID symptoms. Moreover, when the entire universe of the fully vaccinated is looked at, only 0.004% have acquired a case of COVID requiring hospitalization, and just 50 or 0.001% of the fully vaccinated have passed due to COVID-related complications.

Now yes, we are not immune to the nationwide trend of seeing the number of fully vaccinated people who go on to test positive increase. Still, roughly 80% of all positive PCR, or presumed positive antigen tests, log between a more recent period, July 12th to July 19th, were of people who were unvaccinated or not yet fully vaccinated. However, it bears repeating that the vaccine's power is in turning COVID into an illness that does not lead to hospitalization. On those same dates between July 12th and July 19th, 95% of all new hospitalizations because of COVID were of people who were either unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated, meaning that they had enhanced vulnerabilities. That's, I believe, 282 out of 298 COVID hospitalizations were of folks who were either unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated.

While we do not have a breakdown of these individuals, if we extrapolate from the data that we've seen over the longer term, the majority of these fully vaccinated folks – the fully vaccinated folks would be those who retained an advanced vulnerability to the virus due likely to age or some other underlying health condition; that is the 16 people who are in the hospital who had been fully vaccinated. By the way, during that same week, July 12th to July 19th, we reported 20 deaths to you over that period. All 20 of those folks, sadly, God rest their souls, were either unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated.

To put all this in perspective, the vaccines greatly enhance your protection from the virus. The vaccines greatly increase your likelihood that even if you test positive, you won't require hospitalization, and the vaccines make it even more likely that if you do end up in the hospital, you will make it back to your family alive. The vaccines are safe, they're effective, and they're free.

Now let's look at our usual lineup of daily numbers. The total universe of individuals who have now received their full vaccination course is, as of this morning, 5,309,373. There are an additional, by the way, 674,203 folks who have received their first dose of either Pfizer or Moderna but not yet their second. We continue to bat at a high batting average relative to other American states but it needs to stay that level, not get stronger. Reporting an additional 937 positive PCRs, 215 presumed positive antigens. Over the entirety of the past week, we reported 6,456 PCR and 2,254 positives – presumed positives from antigen.

The positivity rate for all PCR tests recorded over the last period of time between July 22nd and July 28th was 4.6%. It's a little bit lower than that today. Statewide rate of transmission is 1.43. That has come down a little bit, which is good, but it's not as low as it needs to be, Judy, right? Still more work to do. The metrics in our hospitals are similarly following this trend. As of last night, there were 463 COVID-positive patients along with 77 persons who were under investigation. More distressing, however, is that 95 of these COVID-positive patients were in our ICUs. That's more than one in every five patients being treated for COVID, and 40 of those were hooked up to a ventilator. That number has crept up only slightly.

Another 91 COVID-positive patients entered our hospitals yesterday. That's our highest intake since May 19th, while 51 happily live patients were discharged. Not yet confirmed, but our hospitals confirmed four deaths over the past 24 hours. Today, we're adding one other confirmed COVID-related death to our statewide total. Over the past seven days since our last briefing, the confirmed death toll has risen by 34. There is no net change in the number of probably deaths; that remains, as you can see, at 2,719.

One of those recently lost was a pretty remarkable guy, Onofrio Nolan Russo, a long-time resident of both the Pottersville section of Bedminster Township and the Beach Haven Park area of Long Beach on LBI. Nolan passed away two weeks ago after battling COVID since last November. He was 75 years old. He was born and raised in Brooklyn and had a possible big league baseball career with the Braves, but that got cut short when he had to return home at the age of 18 following the death of his dad. Instead of a career on the diamond, he made it his own way. Nearly 40 years ago, he founded Capital Printing Corporation in Middlesex Borough and served as its CEO for more than 30 years before his retirement. Though baseball remained his love and he remained a fan of the Yankees throughout his life – he would've enjoyed this weekend, Pat – his love of thoroughbreds led him to a second calling as a racehorse owner and breeder.

He left behind his wife Linda, who I had the great honor of speaking with last week. She was also COVID-positive. She's doing better, thank God, and he leaves her behind after 43 years of marriage. He also leaves behind his children, his sons Joseph, Nolan, Brett, and their spouses, and his grandchildren Renna, Mave, Elan, James, and two Nolans. He's also survived by his brothers Frank, Joseph, and Phillip, and numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins. May God bless his memory and his incredible family that he leaves behind.

We also remember this guy, Thomas Kraus, a life-long resident of Norwood who passed away on New Year's Eve. Following in his father's law enforcement footsteps – by the way, as the guy to my left did as well – he joined the Norwood Police Department in 1965 and served until the year 2000, retiring at the rank of lieutenant. He was also a member of the Norwood Ambulance Squad. He loved every part of his community, including his church, Immaculate Conception, where he was a devoted parishioner Tom is survived by his wife of 49 years, Marcello, whom I had the great honor of speaking last week. He's survived by his children, Thomas, Jr., Jennifer, Michael, and Janet, along with their families, which include his grandchildren, Kristie, Courtney, Nicole, Thomas, III, Adeline, Henry, Maria, Christopher, and Anna Rose. We are grateful to Tom for a career spent in the service of his community. He lived our values and we know that he has been blessed and is looking down on those he left behind.

Finally, we honor the life of this woman, Sewell's Mary Jane Milich, who was 87 when she lost her battle with COVID this past January. Born and raised in Los Angeles, she found her way across the continent to New Jersey and made a long career in the South Jersey glass-making industry, most notably with Corning, Owens Illinois, and Anchor Hawking in Vineland. Away from work, Mary loved music and was an accomplished pianist. By the way, she had performed in her youth, Judy, at the Hollywood Bowl. She was an avid traveler joining her late husband John and her late daughter Tracy Lynn, and Tracy Lynn passed in 2006 due to breast cancer. She would join them on multiple worldwide excursions. She's now reunited with both of them.

Mary is survived by multiple nieces and nephews and their families, but her niece Lisa, with whom I had the great honor of speaking last week, and her husband John and her great-nephew John Paul and great-niece Clare, all took especially great care for their aunt Mary in her later years. She also leaves several brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. We are grateful that the winds brought Mary across the continent our way. May God bless and watch over her memory.

All three, Nolan, Tom, and Mary, fell ill with COVID before the vaccines were available to them, but they are available to everybody ages 12 and up. Getting vaccinated provides tremendous protection against the severe illness that could lead you to losing your life. Please recognize that and please get vaccinated.

Let's also put the spotlight on one of the great small business owners who's going to help lead our economy back to strength, thanks to the efforts of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. Frank Jackson – that is a great shot of Frank there on the left – is the owner of Shutterbug Photo Booth in Jersey City. Frank had just expanded Shutterbug's capabilities and offerings when the pandemic hit, leading the cancellation or long-term postponement of the weddings, the birthday parties, and other events his business relies upon. Instead, he had to retool his business to provide livestreams of funerals and memorial services honoring those who the pandemic had taken. Through the EDA, Frank was able to qualify for and receive emergency grants that allowed him to keep Shutterbug alive and ready for the return of happier times. Today he and his team are at the ready.

I had the opportunity to check in with Frank last week, great guy. I know he shares our optimism for the future, and I am so pleased that his future is a little brighter because of what we could do to help him and his business survive. Check him out, by the way, shutterbugphotobooth.com. Should not surprise us that that's the website given the name of the company, shutterbugphotobooth.com.

Finally, with a heavy heart before I turn things over to Judy, I want to acknowledge a loss that Pat and his family at the New Jersey State Police suffered last week. Look at this guy, Lieutenant Matt Razukas, passed away last Tuesday. Matt was a trooper for more than 20 years, a proud member of the 122nd trooper class. I believe there's a new one convening this morning, Pat, right? Matt's class graduated in May of 2001. He worked largely in the field and was a recognized expert in crash reconstructions. A native of Brooklyn and a graduate of John Jay College, he lived in Galloway Township and served most recently with Troop D based in Cranberry. We send our condolences to his wife, Lizette – she and I were going back and forth last week – and to his children, Megan, Ryan, Kyle, and Rylee, as well as to his mom, Elizabeth, and his family. To Pat, through you, we send our condolences to the entire New Jersey State Police family. Our thoughts are with all who served alongside Lieutenant Razukas and especially the troopers he mentored and learned from him. May he rest in peace and may his legacy live on through the tremendous work of our dedicated troopers. I will end on that note.

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

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, as the Governor shared, vaccines are our most powerful tool that we have to end this pandemic. High vaccination coverage is necessary to protect the residence of our state. In New Jersey, over 5 million – 5.3 million individuals are fully vaccinated. The highly transmissible Delta variant is the predominant variant in our state. It is helping to drive increasing cases, hospitalizations, and the outbreaks that we are seeing.

We are also seeing a rise in hospitalizations among those under the age of 18. Currently there are 19 individuals in our hospitals under the age of 18. Thirteen have been found to have positive COVID tests and six are persons under investigation. The trend is also affecting our long-term care facilities which, as you know, are home to our most vulnerable residents. Outbreaks have dropped dramatically since the winter, but they have been rising again in the past two weeks. Today, we are reporting 38 active outbreaks in these facilities. Two weeks ago, it was down to eighteen active outbreaks. While the percentage of vaccinated staff in our long-term care facilities overall has risen to 71%, in some facilities the percentage is as low as 33%. We know that congregate settings such as long-term care facilities are at greater risk for COVID-19 infections. The mandates related to vaccination or testing that the Governor announced today are an important step to reduce the risk to nursing home residents, hospitalized patients, and vulnerable New Jerseyans overall. None of us would want our vulnerable loved ones put in danger due to their caregiver or a healthcare provider. As a nurse, I know our healthcare providers, given what they experienced over the past 18 months, do not want to expose those they care for to any unnecessary risk. Ensuring these individuals are fully vaccinated or have been tested will help protect those who live in congregate settings or need hospital care.

The Delta variant, again, demonstrates how unrelenting this virus is. It's estimated that it is much more infectious as the original strain of COVID-19. Last week, CDC released data showing that the Delta infection resulted in similarly high SARS CoV-2 viral loads in vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. High viral loads suggest an increased risk of transmission and raises concern that unlike other variants, vaccinated people infected with Delta can transmit the virus. This data informed CDC's updated recommendation that everyone should wear a mask in indoor public settings in areas of substantial and high transmission regardless of your vaccination status. Once again, we strongly encourage you to mask up.

In July 2021 following multiple large public events in Provincetown, Massachusetts, 469 COVID-19 cases were identified among individuals who had traveled to the town during July 3rd to July 17th. Nearly three-quarters of the cases occurred in those who were fully vaccinated. Testing identified the Delta variant in 90% of the 19 reported attending densely packed indoor and outdoor events at venues that included bars, restaurants, guest houses, and rental homes.

These findings are somewhat concerning as are the trends of the metrics here in our state. We need to remain vigilant. I strongly encourage all individuals regardless of vaccination status to wear a mask in indoor settings that are crowded or if you don't know the vaccination status of those who you're with. Masking up adds another layer of protection against the virus and it's particularly important when an individual is immunocompromised or at increased risk for severe disease.

Individuals should practice physical distancing, especially when they are unaware of the vaccination status of others and as always, practice good health hygiene. Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds, and please stay home if you're sick. If you have any symptoms, get tested so you know your COVID-19 status. We need to all work together to increase vaccination rates. Vaccination is shown to decrease severe disease and hospitalizations. Please encourage

your friends, neighbors, and loved ones to get vaccinated to protect their health and the health of others. If you haven't gotten vaccinated yet, please get vaccinated. Visit covid19.nj.gov/finder or call 855-568-0545 to schedule an appointment.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals are reporting 540 hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients and persons under investigation, and 95 of those individuals are in ICU and 40 are on ventilators. As you know, these numbers have been increasing. Fortunately, there are no new cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children and there are no new cases among our residents in our vet homes and no new cases in our patients at our psych hospitals.

The daily percent positivity as of July 29th is 4.05%; the northern part of the state, 3.63%; central, 4.51%; and southern part of the state, 4.35%. That concludes my daily report. Continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, our friends, and our children, and enjoy a safe, healthy summer.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. I meant to ask you this earlier. Do you have or Ed have the standard IT off the top of your head?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Let me look for it. Don't think I do but let me check.

Governor Phil Murphy: It came down a couple – come down a little bit in the past few days.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: It came down a little bit. I do not. I only have the –

Governor Phil Murphy: No worries. The other observation someone – a journalist put together a series of realities associated with this pandemic over the past 16 months that have no explanation. I think it's a good reminder that we try to get out in front of this. We try to give you our best judgment I know you and Ed and your colleagues do, as accurate as we possibly can. We've said this many times, but I bears repeating. The virus dictates the terms here, not us, including, by the way, potential good news because Delta looked like it was going to the moon in UK and India. All of a sudden, it started to fall off the table. Please God that happens here sooner than later. Any event, thank you, as always.

Pat, we had some crazy weather last week. Anything on that? I mentioned we got a new trooper class. God bless Lieutenant Razukas. What else do you have? Great to have you?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. With regard to last week's weather, we did have five confirmed tornadoes. They were confirmed by the National Weather Service Two of those were in Mercer County in Hopewell and the other in that Windsor Robins area in Ocean County. There was one confirmed in Cedar Bridge as well as Long Beach Township and one by National Weather Service in Upton which confirmed one in Essex County in Verona. Those teams from the National Weather Service are still out in Burlington and Ocean so we may see an increase in what's confirmed. Our Emergency Management folks are waiting for the impacted counties to submit their initial damage assessments as we work through that process with FEMA.

Yes, to your point, we had 195 recruits report to Sea Girt this morning. They are members of the 162nd state police class so thank you, Governor, for your support of more Jersey troopers coming into the ranks. They will not have a particularly easy run, as you well know, but they are expected to graduate on January 14th. I once again thank the Commissioner and her team for always giving us the guidance as far as testings and vaccines. What we're trying to do again is get another state police class through. In closing, thank you two for your support of the Razukas family. It was not an easy visit, but I saw nothing but a strong persevering family when I sat down with his wife and four children. Although we are a devastated family, we will rally around them only forever, as I assured his wife. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless them, and he will be laid to rest tomorrow, I believe, right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Yes, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: Keep them in your prayers, everybody. We'll start with Elise. Brendon's got the microphone. I think we'll be in the mode that we've been in of late, so we will see you here a week from today at 1 o'clock, and we'll be on the road for one reason or another over the course of the next number of days. We'll communicate when we can on the road and otherwise, we'll be with you virtually. Depending on where the variant goes, I hope we don't have to do this but if we have to turn up the frequency of these gatherings, we will do so if we think by being more frequent we can get more information to you on a timely basis. We won't do that for the time being, but who knows; we may have to.

Q&A Section

With that, Elise, good afternoon.

Elise: Good afternoon. The CDC is recommending masking in areas of high or substantial risk, categories that apply to all but one New Jersey county as of Saturday. You're running for reelection. Are you holding off on mandates for fear that they will turn off voters who are fed up with the pandemic? One other question: Governor Cuomo ordered mass transit workers including those for the Port Authority to vaccinate or get tested. Will you do the same for Port Authority workers who are New Jerseyans and also for New Jersey Transit employees? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Elise. I can assure you politics is not part of the equation. We've, including today, made some pretty strong – recommended some pretty strong medicine which is not popular in all quarters, I promise you. Politics has nothing to do with it. It's the CDC's recommendation, actually, so we're not taking a mandate of theirs and watering it down. Judy and I put a statement out last week that we strongly recommend and if need be, if it turns to needing to mandate it, we will, and we said that in our statement. Politics is not in the cards on either of those.

Yeah, the Port Authority and NJ Transit are two organizations that we're looking at seriously. I don't have any news to break for you right now. I mentioned this last week a couple of times when I was on the road and was asked this. We wanted to focus, as you can see from the places that we highlighted today, what we deem to be and Judy and her team to be the most vulnerable in healthcare settings, so we want to start there and then we – you should expect us that we would likely take more steps and broaden out the universe over time. Thank you.

Let's come across the front to Dustin here if we could. Hold on one second, Dustin. There you go. Good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. On this new mandate, do you know how many employees would be affected by this, meaning they aren't vaccinated? What percentage is already vaccinated, and has this been negotiated with the unions? Will you follow New York's lead and give workers \$100 or some form of money, time off to get the vaccine, or any other incentive? The *New York Times* reported that New Jersey threw away 53,000 vaccinations that expired. Is that true, and how many are on the cusp of being wasted? Have the circumstances with the variant changed enough for you to consider vaccine passports? One final question: there is a legal challenge at the Supreme Court that argues your administration has not spent enough on schools in SDA districts to meet its obligations of a thorough and efficient education and that conditions in some schools are deplorable. Do you have any response to that? Do you think it's acceptable for students and staff in these districts to return full-time to schools with mold, leaky roofs, poor ventilation and overcrowding? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. On how many employees does this impact, I don't have an answer for you. Remember, this is stuff both that's under our control and things that are in the private sector. Do you happen to have a number off the top of your head? It's many thousands; I know that.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Many thousands, yeah. It's a lot.

Governor Phil Murphy: We can – Mahen, help me follow up on that. Discussions with unions have been very constructive, and I thank them for that; frankly with all parties associated with the steps we're taking today. We're looking at – I think you mentioned the \$100 program. We're looking at a lot of different potential programs in addition to the daily drumbeat of the door-to-door campaign that is in, I think, several dozen communities.

I have no insight on vaccines that have been thrown away. Judy, anything you want to add to that?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: We monitor that. We know that our percentages are less than the national percentage. We're more concerned about getting vaccine doses in individuals' arms so if we have to open up a vial, puncture a vial, and there's some wastage as a result because we gave three doses out, not five, it's okay. Our wastage percentages are low. I don't know if you have them, Ed. I mean, it's – we get a report on that every week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nothing – thank you. Nothing new on vaccine passports. I continue to be in the category of open-minded but I also continue to be very concerned even if inadvertently we are discriminating against communities, particularly black and brown communities where we're making progress Judy went through with us this morning. We're making some good progress as it relates to equity, but we're not yet where we need to be.

No comment on any legal challenges, per se, but no administration has come close to the amount of money we've put into schools. We have a significant chunk in the dead avoidance bucket in our budget for school buildings and if there's mold or something like that, we're not happy with that, obviously. We want to get at that as best we can and as quickly as we can. Schools will be in-person Monday through Friday as we have said. Thank you. Anything you want to add or you good with that? Okay.

Daniel, good afternoon.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hi, Governor, good afternoon. You had been pushing to fully vaccinate 70% of the adult population by June 30th. What's going on? Why wasn't that threshold effective in preventing the resurgence that we're seeing right now? Whenever you're asked about what restrictions or reopenings are next, you frequently say "all options

are on the table” or that “it’s a collection of data points that determines when to enact or relax restrictions.” Doesn’t that kind of opaqueness and vacuum of any solid answers breed conspiracies and inaccurate speculation from the public? Why not be more transparent and say we will do X, Y, and Z if A, B, and C happens, I guess for example, what specific data points figured into today’s announcement? What requirements would you increase if the FDA does give full approval for the J&J, Pfizer, and Moderna? Would you have a vaccinate passport in that case? If the recommendations on masking and if these vaccine requirements do have an impact on COVID metrics, how long would it take for those metrics to show up on the state and state data? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I’m not sure I understood everything Ed, maybe you can answer the first one, which is a good one. We had 70% as our target. As Judy now I think says, that’s the floor of our aspirations. We want to keep going, and I think we’ve previewed this. We’d really like to get to 80 or 85% of everybody. That really is where we want to end up. Seventy percent was to get us over the goal line. I mean, Ed, if I – make sure you get your money’s worth here joining us on this Monday. I think it’s a pandemic of the unvaccinated, as I’ve gone through in fairly gory detail as has Judy. This is a very transmittable, more lethal variant. I think it’s that, the combination of those two. The pull of the most vulnerable and exposed shrinks every day when we put up 8, 10, 12,000 new first-dose people. The pool continues to shrink, which is a great thing, but the variant is probably more aggressive in its pace than the pace of the pool shrinking Ed, please.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure. The goals haven’t changed; the virus has changed. I mean, the goal has always been to get to enough people who are immune the virus can’t easily spread from person to person and propagate itself over time, what people sometimes call herd immunity. There is no single, exact number that you can say 70% is good, 72% is better. Well, 72% is better than 70%, but there’s no single exact number that you can put at it but the more infectious the virus is, the more people need to be immune to keep it from spreading around. As the Delta variant virus is more infectious, you need to have a higher percentage of people who are immune to keep it from spreading from person to person.

Governor Phil Murphy: Daniel, I view the question about opaqueness exactly opposite as you do. We talk about the data that we look at every single day we’re here, and we’ve said time and time again that there’s no one data point that drives us. It’s a collection of data points that we look at. It’s the trend in those data. As Ed said, the virus has changed, so you could even argue furthermore that the environment in which decisions are taken has changed from where we were. If it were some other way, if there was some magic number we’ve got hidden somewhere, we’d be straight up with people, but that’s just not how it works. I know folks want certainty. I’m among the folks who want certainty, but I mentioned after Judy spoke earlier it is quite – it’s a sobering reminder that this virus dictates the terms. We will do everything we can to stay out ahead of it, make the right decisions, but that is a fact.

I don’t know that I understand your last question. Could you give that to me again? If they drop the emergency use and it’s a fully authorized vaccine, is that what you’re asking?

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Yeah, would you – what restrictions – I’m sorry, not restrictions. What vaccine requirements would you enact or increase versus what we have now, fully authorized people in the private sector or the public sector.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I – tell me if you all disagree. There’s a general school of thought out there. I know the White House believes this in deliberations with them, that if the emergency use words are dropped and this is fully authorized, there’s an expectation that there will be a bump in the number of folks that are willing to get vaccinated. I don’t think there’s really any hard agreement on how big that bump would be, but does that sound fair? Ed, would you agree with that?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I would hope.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, you’d hope. Apparently there are some folks that need that conviction in order to get them vaccinated.

Katherine, is that you?

Katherine Landergan, Politico: Hi, yes, hi.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Katherine Landergan, Politico: Good afternoon. I’m curious, what’s the level of increase in vaccinations in these settings that you would need to see to not make vaccinations a condition of employment? Unions have been saying that such a mandate needs to come through bargaining. How can you do that without their sign-off? Employers have been under-staffed in this state. Do you have any concerns that these requirements could contribute to the worker shortage? Then a final related question, I was at a press conference last week where business owners along the Jersey Shore said they’re struggling to hire workers. What further steps will you take to try to get workers back to work? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I think – Judy, you tell me if you see this differently. I think we need to see the level of vaccination in these settings at least at the level that we're seeing statewide if not higher. In fact, they should be higher because these are, by definition, either healthcare workers or congregate living settings. Is that a fair... So I'd say whatever we – whatever benchmarks we have for the state, if we – I mentioned a couple minutes ago that I would hope we could get – I think you'd share this hope that we'd get to 80 or 85% of folks vaccinated. There's no reason to conclude otherwise here, and we have a long way to go.

I believe – again, I want to give a shout-out to the unions because they've been very good partners, as has everyone. I believe the comments about being part of collective bargaining was related to mandates that don't have a testing opt-out. If you said literally vaccination is a condition of employment, I believe that's where those comments were.

Could this contribute to worker shortages? Yeah, it might. We don't have any choice. I mean, this is – worker shortages versus keeping people alive, it's a tough reality. I think the worker shortages have been far more acute – I'll get to your last question in a second – in the small business settings, but there is no question you've got some workers who rightfully may be afraid about going back to an indoor work environment and a healthcare setting. I think it's fair to say we have no choice.

I did see – I didn't see your reporting, forgive me, but I did see there was this discussion and I'm having discussions, as you can imagine, and our team with businesses all the time. One of the big things we can do is put cash on the barrel, and we have done that. I'm very proud to say it came out last week that New Jersey is the third most total dollars, not adjusting for per capita, size of state, number of small businesses, number three in American behind California. We have 9.3 million people; they have 40 million people – and New York that has 19 million people. You pretty much can assume the correlation between population size of the small business community holds fairly consistently. I would expect that number's going to go up and I lastly believe this is due to a number of factors. There was a big amount of belief a few months ago that it was the \$300 extra benefit. I said all along I thought it might be a contributor, but it was one of many contributors to this challenge. Research would suggest it perhaps isn't a factor. I think it still has had some fact. I think it's a number of different factors, one of which – and this is just the reality. If you have an economy that's sinking, folks leave the workforce for a negative reason. When an economy – if you read the economists that talk about an economy that is taking off as the one we're in right now, folks leave because they have a confidence that they can up-sell themselves, up-skill themselves to a more value-added, higher paying job. I believe you're seeing a lot of that right now. There are probably a number of ways to get at that, but paying people more and then passing that on to the consumer that we've been saying for several months – the expectation that inflation rates would go up at least a little bit I think is a reasonable one, and we're seeing it.

We'll continue to support the small businesses as best we can. By the way, the labor shortage is not some phantom reality. This is real. I speak to small businesses, restaurants, bars all the time. The condition is 100% real. I think there's a healthy debate as to why it is what it is and what would be the best move on the chess board to address the condition. Thank you.

Sir, give us a sec.

Reporter: Good afternoon. Does your data regarding breakthrough infections and hospitalizations show whether one vaccine is more or less effective than the others in terms of preventing breakthrough cases? Will New Jersey follow the federal government, New York City, and New York state and require COVID-19 vaccinations for state employees? Have you or health officials noticed any increase in masking since you recommended everyone, including the vaccinated, wear a mask indoors in many circumstances? Finally, you just said that between July 12th and July 19th, 282 of 298 hospitalizations, or 16, were of those either unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated. When we subtract the unvaccinated hospitalization data you gave us today from the number you reported last week, that's an increase of 61, not 16. What is the actual number of new hospitalizations over the last week of the unvaccinated? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I got to come back to you on that last one, but the numbers today I'm reporting in the July 12th to July 19th is 16 people who were fully vaccinated who were in the hospital. By the way, if you look at the lived experience of the 5-ish million folks over that six month or seven month period, the numbers are a little bit better and that's not surprising, because Delta variant we know is far more transmittable than the blended average transmission over that period. Mahen, help me out. We'll come back on the numbers.

I'm going backward; not sure why but I am. Masks indoors, I don't know how you all feel. Anecdotally, I see more of it, no question about it. Would you agree with that, Parimal, Pat, Judy, Ed? There's no question you see more of it but probably not still at the level that it needs to be. Again, I mentioned this last week. First of all, I'm doing a lot of activity outside. At a dinner tonight that'll be deliberately outdoors but in a restaurant last week indoors with a couple that we know were vaccinated, our table sufficiently socially distant. We wore the masks to the table and when we got there, we took them off and put them back on again when we left. You're seeing a fair amount of that, as well. So anecdotally, higher uptake but not yet where it needs to be.

On state employees, you've seen us take a step. We've been previewing this last week. We're going to start with the most vulnerable, the most logical communities, and then we'll see how that goes. I mentioned that as it relates to the Port Authority and NJ Transit.

Ed, you should weigh in here. It's my understanding that there is no difference in the efficacy of these vaccines in terms of breakthrough cases, but please.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: In New Jersey, we're seeing much of the same thing that the rest of the country is seeing, and that is all three vaccines are tremendously effective and they're all doing incredibly excellent, if that's a word, an incredible job, particularly when it comes to preventing hospitalizations and deaths. We do see very minor differences, just like the rest of the country. The mRNA vaccines, Pfizer and Moderna, seem to do somewhat better at preventing symptomatic illness but overall like I said, they are all doing an excellent job.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for those. Cat, is that you? How are you? I knew it was you because of the mask.

Reporter: I figured you would recognize me with the...

Governor Phil Murphy: My favorite.

Reporter: One – I have three questions overall, just want to get the housekeeping question out of the way. This mandate you announced today is for state facilities or state-contracted facilities? The second question actually comes from one of my Twitter followers. They wanted to know about a vaccine mandate for college students in this state. He says each of the state schools have a different policy. Roan, for example, vaccine is optional while Stockton is requiring it for all students and faculty. He wanted to know will there be a universal mandate for state schools? Then the third question is how have you been navigating these decisions? I know you touched on it earlier saying politics has nothing to do with it. I would imagine it's kind of difficult between the fast-moving variant and then a whole different political party ready to jump on you for whatever decision you make in relation to best shepherding the state through the pandemic.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not sure I understood your first question. You said housekeeping. The mandate is what?

Reporter: Are you – the mandate, that's for the facilities that are under state control or they're contracted through the state?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, the ones that we had up on the board are the ones, yeah. That's the universe right now. I mentioned earlier that it is quite possible that that universe grows over time. We want to start with the places both in our control and in the state that are not in our control that have the most vulnerable populations, healthcare, etc. That work?

Reporter: Okay, yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Potentially on the universality of the requirements for college kids, up until now at least, we have allowed the entities themselves to make their decisions. Rutgers was the first in the country. Met with President Holloway last week. They feel – I don't want to put words in his mouth. I think they think that it is progressing well, but that is certainly an option. At the moment, we allow each of them to make their own call.

Again, forgive me, on the political question, you're –

Reporter: I'll just say it frankly. How are you balancing making the decisions and not worrying about the people who are saying that you're basing it on politics?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not worried about the people who think I'm basing it on politics because we're not. There's a lot of noise out there. You can't pay attention to a lot of stuff that has no basis in reality, and that's what this would be. This is not – these are not popular steps, trust me. It's the opposite if that were a consideration. We're just going to continue to do what we think is the right thing to do. Again, I think the humbling part is not politics because that doesn't matter to us. Judy's not running for reelection. Ed's not running for reelection. Pat's not running for reelection. None of the people who work with them are. They're trying to call balls and strikes as best they can and so am I.

I think the more humbling part of this is that piece I referred to earlier. I think it was David Leonhardt in the *New York Times*, to the best of my recollection. Just listed about ten different realities associated with this pandemic over the past 16 months. Everybody thought X and Y happened, both on the good side and the bad side of this. That's the part we got to all – we're doing the best we can based on the information we have, but let's not forget for one second that the virus dictates the terms here, not us. Thank you. Good to see you.

Let's go to Brent and then we'll go to David to clear it out. Take us home, rather. Brent?

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: If the CDC's guidance for masking remains the same by the state of the school year, would you require masks in classrooms? When will the state have updated school guidance with classes just a few weeks away? Why have we not seen daily deaths rise? Is that because of the high vaccination rate in the state?

Governor Phil Murphy: Daily what, sorry?

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Why have we not seen daily deaths rise like we've seen cases and now hospitalizations start to go up? Are we just not there yet, or is that because the vaccination rate is high? Why doesn't the state provide daily breakdowns of how many new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are of fully vaccinated people? I get 15 emails a day from readers being like, "How many of those new cases are vaccinated people?" Is that not something you have right away?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it?

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Oh, my Lord. Listen, the school piece of this respect what the CDC came out with last week. End of July, school is a plus or minus Labor Day event. We're taking that guidance very seriously. My guess is we will not wait until the last minute to make the call on masking in schools but more information is a benefit to us in our ability for Judy, Angelica Allen-McMillan, and their teams to make the most fully informed decision they can.

The last two, I'll turn to the experts. Daily deaths, thank God, have not spiked. Any color around that? I assume it's largely due to the vaccination rate being as high as it is in the state. The data that I went through, July 12th to July 19th, I guess your question is can you get that on a daily basis. Who was vaccinated? Who's not vaccinated? I suspect if we could, we would but let me turn to Judy and Ed on both of those.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: First on the daily deaths, we look at that from two lens; one, the confirmed deaths and that's Ed and his team, look at that every day. Then we get a 24-hour report on deaths in our hospitals. It's a lagging indicator, so as we see cases go up, it's going to be really important to monitor the impact on deaths. So far, we've been pretty low relatively speaking with the cases going up, over 1,000 a day over the last couple of weeks. On vax versus unvaxxed, there's a reporting mechanism through the New Jersey Hospital Association. We met with them last week and we'll be adding more questions that will have to be reported by 10 p.m. every night. I expect in a couple of weeks, we'll have more specificity on all of the patients, vaxxed and unvaxxed.

Governor Phil Murphy: By the way, you mentioned you're getting a bunch of emails a day. That's something that a lot of folks are coming to us on as well. We're having the same experience. People say listen, I did the – I got vaccinated. I did what you told me to do. Please, just give me a real-time sense of what that looks like and how protected I am, so completely understandable. I think what I'm hearing, Judy – I don't want to put words in your mouth – over time, our – the data that we present will get more robust as we can get it, right, as the Hospital Association can deliver the information we need? Thank you.

Dave, good afternoon. Take us home.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. On requiring the healthcare workers to get the vaccine and all the other groups that you listed today, the release that your office has put out says that they'll have to be – if they don't get vaccinated, get tested once or twice a week.

Governor Phil Murphy: At a minimum.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: At a minimum, so who's going to figure out if it's once or twice? Also, will they have to take off their own time to go get vaccinated, or will there be centers set up where they can get vaccinated and the results will be reported? With regard to requiring other state workers to get vaccinated and/or tested as well, how are those negotiations going? The CWA says that they look forward to having cooperative discussions with you to ensure public health. You said earlier today that you'll likely take more steps soon, I believe.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm not sure I said soon, but we're looking at – we wanted to make sure we got this up and running first.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: I think you're correct, actually, and the soon was a question mark.

Governor Phil Murphy: It must've been politics.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Maybe, but how are those going? Obviously you're talking to the unions about this and it's something that you're actively considering. Final question for Ed, could you please explain, Doctor, vaccinated people in some instances have been shown to be getting infected. They may actually have high viral loads, so they're considered to be as contagious as people who are not vaccinated and yet a lot of these people are asymptomatic. How do you – how is it that there's a high viral load and a lot of these people aren't even sick at all? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: All good questions. I mentioned in my remarks that the full program needed to be fleshed out, up and running by September 7th, and your first couple of questions are elements of that, so bear with us. I think you should assume that the entity will make the call, with our input, if it's not a state entity on the once versus twice or more often on the testing. I mentioned – I believe I mentioned this, that our veterans' homes are testing three times a week already on non-vaccinated individuals

On their own time – we – I can tell you at the state level, it will not be – they will not be made to do it on their own time and I don't think that'll be the case. We'll strongly discourage that in the private sector as well. How we actually do that in terms of making it available at the location, some of these are no-brainers. They're hospitals. Others may be more complicated but again, that's on the list of details to be fleshed out.

Other state workers and in what sequence? To be determined and the interactions with the public sector unions have been outstanding. I give them enormous credit. Again, I think at least one of them has made a distinction between vax plus testing, opt-out versus vax only, and that's understandable. That's something we'll want to follow up on but very good discussions. Folks want to do the right thing.

We do think having said that where we started – and I think Judy and Ed would agree. Where we've started we think is the right, most easily executed plan and the one we can execute the quickest, which is both vax and testing opt-out. We want this number to get up as much as it can but let's just get this up and running in these more vulnerable healthcare communities.

The last question, which Ed should comment on and Judy may want to weigh in on, is a big one, especially since last week I want to take one minute on this because I got a heads up in my not just Governor of New Jersey but national governors capacity that this was coming just before it hit. Governor Asa Hutchinson and I had conversations with the White House, but it was not – at that moment, the CDC had acted quite quickly. They did not have the information at least publicly available that they then later in the week came out with. This is to the outbreak that Judy referred to.

I love the fact you've asked this because it's one we're getting a lot. Wait a minute. I got vaccinated, but it turns out based on the Provincetown outbreak the viral load that I've got versus someone who's unvaccinated is about equal, about the same. Yet we know that if you're vaccinated, the chances of your having symptoms and your question included some of these folks being asymptomatic. Your chances of having symptoms is less and your chances of going to the hospital and dying are a lot less. Wait a minute. How's that work? How can I infect someone else at the same level that somebody who's unvaccinated can infect them? Yet my own personality reality and reaction to the virus is dramatically different than that same unvaccinated person. That's the big question. Ed, take it away.

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you. Let me start by saying again that the vaccines work very well. Most people who are exposed to unvaccinated do not become sick. You're much, much less likely to become infected if you're vaccinated than if you're not vaccinated. What you're referring to and the Governor was talking about is this large outbreak in Provincetown, Massachusetts When they examined nasal swabs, which is where you're doing the testing from, and those vaccinated people who tested positive, they had viral loads very similar to the unvaccinated population. There is a lot about this that we still don't know, so what I'm about to say is partly known and partly educated guessing, and that is this: That's where they're measuring. They're measuring in the nose. The nose is also the part of the body where if you go ahead and you're sneezing, you're breathing, your coughing, it's also usually in your mouth as well. You're going to be infectious so if you have large viral loads up here, you're going to tend to be much more likely to be more infectious, which is what they were finding and which is what is concerning.

What they're not measuring is how much of that virus is actually getting deeper into the body to the lungs and other parts of the places that cause symptoms such as coughing, and fever, and other things There is reason to suspect that the host immune built up because of the vaccine prevents the virus from penetrating more deeply. That's at least the general supposition is that it's able to replicate locally, externally in the nose, but isn't able to penetrate as deeply in the types of numbers that it would take to make you sicker. Your body responds faster to it, produces antibodies. It helps protect the core functions of the body in that way.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that, and thanks, everybody No one asked it today but is it fair to say there's still no guidance, federal guidance, on the so-called booster shot? We still await that. You've seen some places take steps, Israel being the most, and I suspect – I've not asked the experts, but I suspect if it is recommended, whenever it's recommended, I bet you that we'll end up doing it like Israel has, which is go to the seniors and most vulnerable first. Is it fair to say there's no firm guidance on this yet? That's an important one because as long as we got them – as long as the vaccine has the strength in the immune system, we stay in a very good place at preventing hospitalization or death.

With that, Judy and Ed, thank you. Pat, thank you. Mahen, Parimal, rest of the team, cast of thousands – again, we'll be with you a week from today in person at this time. We'll be on the road a little bit, and we'll keep you updated as we go through the week. My guess is this gets worse before it gets better. Judy and I were hand gesturing. It has crested, and

it's starting to drop fairly dramatically in the UK and India, which is a hopeful sign after having torn through each of those locations. God willing that happens here sooner than later, but we are not there yet, for sure. That's why masking up indoors is a smart thing to do, again, particularly if you're in a crowded setting and/or you're in a setting with – you just don't – you can't tell people's vaccination status. In the meantime, please get vaccinated. It's the one thing – I think we've beaten this one to death here today. It's the one thing we know you can do that gives you a huge amount of protection against this virus. Take care, everybody. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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