

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 24th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

04/24/2020

Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for your patience, both in allowing us to move this to three o'clock today due to the White House VTC, which we'll come back to in a few minutes. But that today, I think a lot of good content, I think Judy and Pat would agree with me, but it ran a little bit long, so we apologize for the fact we're a little bit behind.

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, another guy who's increasingly in need of no introduction, Communicable Disease Service Medical Director in the Department of Health Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Judy and Ed, great to have you both. And the guy to my left, who definitely doesn't need an introduction, State Police Superintendent Colonel Pat Callahan. Pat. We're also joined by Jared Maples, Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, and soon by Chief Counsel Matt Platkin.

Let's begin with our daily update on the numbers and charts, and may these never just be numbers and charts. These are real lives we're talking about. First, today we're announcing an additional 3,047 positive test results, pushing our state total to 102,196. My monitor is out down here, Mahen, if somebody could get it plugged in, would be great.

But even as we crossed 100,000 we must keep in mind that there are tens of thousands of New Jerseyans who had tested positive over the past seven weeks and who have beaten COVID-19, Judy and Ed would agree with that. And sadly, we must report with the heaviest of hearts 253 additional lives lost, meaning that we have now lost a total of 5,617 of our blessed residents to COVID-19 related complications. Bless their hearts.

As we look at the curve of COVID-19 cases, it's still flat and again, these are positive tests. And as we have said, we could take some solace in this, in that the curve is flattening. And by the way, it's flattening, I think positivity are a ballpark around the same, Judy, and I know that what is not the same is we started from nothing, this country was not remotely prepared for testing and we're now into the 90s in terms of sites you can get tested. We've tested, I think, the fourth-highest amount of any state in America. But we also know that that isn't the complete view of the denominator. Absent universal testing, and Ed will correct the record if he sees that differently, we do not know the denominator, but that is gratifying, given the alternatives. And look at the curve as it was a month or so ago.

However, the map that we've been showing you, largely still good with our new color scheme. This map looks a little bit different than it did yesterday, and not in a good way. Several counties have slid backward and if you could see folks, the numbers in each county is the number of days it takes to double the infection universe in that county. And you've seen, unfortunately, a little bit of backsliding. We cannot let that happen, folks. We cannot let that happen. Our most important weapon, the biggest weapon we have, you and me and all of us, is our ability to social distance, to stay at home, to stay away from each other. And by doing so, we crack the back, not just of people who are infected, but we lower the hospitalizations, the ICUs, the ventilator use, and please God, the fatalities.

I cannot be more clear or more plain. Everyone has a role to play in slowing the spread of COVID-19. We have to work together to lighten this map. We cannot ease up one bit on our social distancing. I am not in a position yet to begin fully putting our state on the road back. We need to see more progress and more slowing before we can begin those considerations. Please and thank you. You've done an extraordinary job so far. Don't take your foot off the gas, please.

In our healthcare system as of 10:30 last night, there were 6,847 residents hospitalized for COVID-19. This is a decrease, Judy, from what we've been seeing, and I know you're going to get into this in more detail. Our field medical stations reported 98 patients. There were 1,933 patients in either critical or intensive care. That's about virtually unchanged, I think. Notably, ventilator use had a considerable one day dropped to 1,487 currently in use. Okay, you all can see how that chart works and again, the numbers at the top, 1,933 are folks in critical care and 1,487 are the number of folks who are on ventilators.

We saw 385 new hospitalizations yesterday. This chart shows how we've seen ups and downs over the past few days, but the three-day average trend line is generally moving in the right direction, which is down. And for the 24 hours preceding 10:00 p.m. last night, our hospitals reported 778 total discharges. Notably, if you look at the three-day average, we see discharges exceeding admittances. And again, the yellow line are the folks who are leaving and the orange line are the folks who are arriving, and the yellow line being meaningfully above the orange line is what we're what we're hoping for.

Sadly, of course, we know that there are those who are not being reunited with their families on the other end of COVID-19. The toll of this disease in terms of the loss of life remains staggering to all of us. So as we have been doing, I'd like to remember a few more of our neighbors who we have lost, and let none of us know ever think of those we have lost as mere numbers on a graph. They were real lives and they leave behind real families.

First up, here is, on the left, Gerry Genuino. For the past two decades, he served the families and children of Fairlawn, starting as a custodian at the Warren Point Elementary School, before becoming a well-known and beloved bus driver. If you need to know anything about Gerry's commitment to the community, consider this story. And I told his widow this morning that I remember this story from last fall. One day last October he was driving a group of students back to school from a field trip. On Route 208 in Wyckoff, he saw a truck that had caught fire. Jerry calmly pulled his bus over, extinguished the fire, got back in -- and by the way, the police hadn't even arrived yet -- and proceeded to get his students back to school safely and on time. You talk about

cool under pressure. Jerry was a star. God bless him. He leaves behind his wife, Mary Jane with whom I spoke this morning, two daughters, blessed daughters, and a community that loved him. God bless you, Gerry.

This is, God love him, and that that includes yours truly and legislative leaders and others in the background. I see the Attorney General there, Lieutenant Governor. This is Khristian Aviles. He was only a senior at William Paterson University, where he was a mainstay on the Dean's List. He was set to receive dual degrees in sociology and communications. He had a deep interest in public service, and had interned for both State Senator Nellie Poe -- and Nellie and I had an exchange this morning on Khristian -- and AFC Local 1796 President Susanna Tardi. He was also a talented artist and even had his work displayed, I think, courtesy of Congressman Bill Pascrell, in the US Capitol. He was a very bright light that has been extinguished far, far too early. In his honor and memory, William Paterson University President Richard Helldobler has already announced his intention to have Khristian's name added to the Student Memorial Tree on campus. Khristian leaves behind his mother Ana, with whom I had the honor of speaking this morning, and his two siblings Edwin and Angel. May God bless them all, and may God bless and watch over Khristian.

Finally, I wish to recognize James "Jimmy" LaBarbiera, the brother of one of my dear friends, the Mayor of Paramus Rich LaBarbiera. That's one of the reasons we should remember Jimmy, but certainly not the only one. We should remember him because he embodies the values of our New Jersey family: humor, decency, and love of family. His brother Rich called him simply "The salt of the earth." Jimmy leaves behind his wife Ula, again with whom I spoke this morning, and you can only imagine she is struggling, and his two sons Johnny and Michael. In addition to his brother Rich, he's mourned by his brothers Peter and Anthony, and sister Maria, among many nieces and nephews. Our prayers are with the entire LaBarbiera family. Jimmy joins his mom and dad in heaven. God bless them all.

Three more treasured members of our New Jersey family gone. Let us use their memories to find the strength that we need to win this war against COVID-19. For them, we need to continue our social distancing and protecting ourselves and others when we do go out. We have lost more New Jerseyans to COVID-19 than we have in some of our nation's wars and more than we lost on 9/11. And by the way, we remember every one of them with great reverence and prayerfully, and now we have thousands more for whom we will remember and pray for. Let's include every single person we have lost in the annals of our state's history. They cannot and will not be forgotten. For them, we will move forward, and we will come out of this unequivocally stronger than ever before. God bless them all.

Switching gears if I may. Number one, I had a very productive call this morning with Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin. That was a good call and it was a good sort of beginning of a meeting of minds. As I've mentioned to you, we've got big, big money issues. And one of them is the first step of the interpretation of the CARES Act that was signed, I think four weeks ago today. We have to make sure that we get what's rightfully ours. And I have mentioned to you the past couple of days that we had gotten assurances, but we couldn't find our way through from those assurances to the actual guidance that came out. And I want to give the Secretary a big shout out. We're not over the goal line yet, but we had a very productive call with senior members of each of our teams and I thank him for that. We will see when that comes out, but it was a very good step in the right direction and I thank him for that.

As I mentioned, Judy and Pat and I just came off of the video call with the White House led by Vice President Mike Pence. That was a good call, folks. I don't know about you all, but just a couple of highlights from our perspective, lots going on with testing. You heard from Rutgers yesterday, Brian Strom was with us and I think presented that case extremely well. Again, another sense from our call today that Rutgers is not just a big deal for us, potentially testing-wise in New Jersey, but as a national matter.

Secondly, I thank the Army Corps General Semonite who was here earlier this week, who's a rock star and his team, General Milhorn, Lieutenant Colonel Parks, gave them a much-deserved shout out, and I brought money up. I have to bring up money in every conversation because we're running out of it. So not only was the call with Secretary Mnuchin a very helpful one, and God willing that will be the first step toward a good resolution on the CARES Act, but I reiterated, as did several other governors, we need a big amount of direct cash assistance, directly to states. I thought the reception was a good one, but we have to be persistent and stay at this, because the choices, if we don't get it, are awful and almost beyond consideration.

I echo again what I've said, big shout out to Senator Bob Menendez for the bill that he and Senator Cassidy from Louisiana – Republican, by the way – have co-sponsored, which would envision \$500 billion of direct cash assistance. That's exactly what the doctor ordered and we will stay on top of that.

Today we're announcing new measures to help our renters and homeowners feel more secure as we continue our battle against COVID-19. We recognize the anxiety that so many feel about looming mortgage and rent payments, especially with May 1st a week away. I had a conversation, by the way, on this very topic this morning with another New Jersey icon, Steve Van Zandt, I want to give Steve a shout out because he was expressing enormous concern about matters such as the ones that I'm going to refer to now.

Throughout this emergency, we have been proactive in engaging stakeholder groups to seek solutions. We implemented prohibitions against anyone losing their homes to eviction or foreclosure. We have worked alongside mortgage lenders to implement a significant forbearance program. And we have worked through the housing and mortgage finance agency to protect 30,000 renters throughout the entire portfolio for rent increases, and we will continue to be proactive on housing relief.

Today, first, I'm signing an Executive Order allowing renters to direct their landlords to use their security deposits to pay their rents, whether that be to make up for a shortfall or to pay it in full. Remember now, this is money that had been paid up front to secure a lease, and during this emergency, renters should have the ability to tap this deposit to help them secure their place in their home. I wish to specifically acknowledge Assemblywoman Brittany Timberlake for her advocacy on this issue. Thank you, Brittany.

Second, we understand too many renters are confused about their rights, and some landlords need more information on how to best adhere to the orders that we have previously put in place. Through the Department of Community Affairs, led by the extraordinary Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, we are standing up a single online frequently asked questions section. You can see it there in small type. Mahen, maybe we could come back tomorrow and put this up in big Broadway lights, [covid19.nj.gov/renter](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/renter). That's the new section, and that will be a point of reference for both tenants and landlords as to their rights and responsibilities. Everyone will have access to the same information so there can be no more misunderstandings, and so everyone understands our expectations of them during this time.

As we work on these issues, I wish to thank the New Jersey Apartment Association for their support and assistance and for encouraging landlords to waive late fees in this emergency period. We are all in this together, tenants and landlords, and we can only emerge stronger when no one, and I mean no one, fears for their home or residence. For New Jerseyans fortunate enough to have the income to pay their rent or mortgage please do so, as that allows us to best help those who cannot.

And third, we are standing up an additional information page for homeowners taking advantage of our previously announced mortgage forbearance, and specifically we want to make it perfectly clear to the lenders that as part of our mortgage forbearance agreement, that our expectation is for them to tack the forbore payments on to the end of the loan. Again, at the end of the loan, not at the end of the 90-day forbearance period. Again, that page is on [covid19.nj.gov](https://www.covid19.nj.gov). We'll get you the specific name of that page post haste.

We recognize that federal rules allow for lenders to ask for skipped payments upfront, and we are pushing to have those rules changed, by the way. However, VA-backed mortgage loans are already having forbore payments moved to the end of the mortgage term, and this is the model that we should be pursuing for all homeowners.

And as a reminder, if you are a landlord who has requested mortgage forbearance from your lender, we fully expect that you extend that relief to your tenants as well. Make sure there's some symmetry here. Thank you.

On testing, I'll switch gears, we are now up to 95 locations across the state where residents can be tested for COVID-19, 30 publicly run or community-based testing sites can be found on our information hub at [covid19.nj.gov](https://www.covid19.nj.gov) and by scrolling down to the link for testing information. However, your primary care practitioner can direct you to one of the 65 other sites for testing. And as we noted yesterday, we are working diligently to continually expand testing across the state. We continue to press, as I mentioned earlier, our federal partners for the necessary waivers to open up testing for more individuals. We are working with great

partners, Rutgers University in a big way, and our private labs to bring new testing systems and fast-tracked test processing into broad use. And again, to remind everyone, having a robust testing program in place is key for our ability to begin getting our economy back running. It's a very simple equation.

And let me remind you, if I can, public health creates economic health. It is in that order. Public health creates economic health. The sooner that we have the testing that we need in place, the sooner we can give our residents the confidence that they will know that they will be safe once we begin down the road to that new normal.

I want to say thank you to some friends, Angelo and Tina Koo, who are donating 1 million surgical masks today. They are en route but we didn't want to sit on this news any longer. By the way, Tina and Angelo I met independently when I lived in Hong Kong. Tina, who worked for me and with me, is a Holmdel native. Angelo comes from a very successful and renowned business family in Taiwan, and then they met and have been married, I think for 20-plus years. Our global community has stepped forward like never before to help us and in this case, I think not just Angelo and Tina, I thank the people of Taiwan for their continued support.

The diversity of our state and our nation, for that matter, is one of our strongest assets. This is no time for folks to blame one group or another, especially our Asian brothers and sisters, who have stepped up tremendously. For those of you who follow geopolitics, I'm happy to say not only have folks in this country largely checked their partisan politics at the door, to fight on behalf, in this state, of every single one of our residents, and in this country on every single one of our residents, but you don't normally get the likes of Taiwan and the PRC and Japan and South Korea and others each, to their credit, answering our calls for help. I want to thank again, I want to thank the Koos for their help here.

Before I close, I'd like to give a few additional shout outs to some people across the state who have been doing great things in our communities. Over the past several days, I've reported on several young people who are really stepping up in their community so here's another young New Jerseyan who deserves our thanks. There he is, this is 14-year-old Josh Enberg, I've got a son named Josh, so he's automatically in the Hall of Fame. Every Friday, for the past 18 months, he has been volunteering with the Sparta Ecumenical Food Pantry, which serves over 3,000 families in Sussex County, up in your neck of the woods, Pat. Since many of the older volunteers who Josh works alongside had been taking, rightfully and smartly, extra precautions, the pantry has found itself shorthanded. But Josh has been stepping up his volunteering time to help fill the gaps. So to you, Josh, thank you for all you're doing to ensure that families who rely on the Sparta Ecumenical Food Pantry are being served. And I should note, and Pat knows this, that Josh's dad, Brian Enberg, is the State Search and Rescue Coordinator for the Office of Emergency Management, and has been part of the team helping us build out our hospital capacity. So we thank not just Josh, but his dad and all the other folks out there, stepping up in a big way.

Speaking of which, here are four students from the LEAP Academy in Camden, a school I know well. Senior Joshua Ramos, Junior Alexandra San Vicente, Sophomore Katherine Battista and another sophomore and sister of Alexandra, Heidi San Vicente. They are part of LEAP's Fab Lab, and using the school's 3D printers, they're on a mission to create 1,000 face shields for our frontline healthcare workers. They're assembling the face shields at home, using a kit developed by Fab Lab director Christopher McCrum and his colleagues Raphael Miranda and David Salas Delacruz. They're already 150 face shields deep into their project, with 100 of those going to Cooper University Hospital, and 50 to LEAP's own community health center. These students are going to keep going until the rest of their goal is met. So to everybody at the Fab Lab and to LEAP Academy founder, chair and a dear friend of mine, Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, New Jersey thanks you.

And finally, I'd like to give a personal shout out to a team who none of you see, but without whose work these daily briefings would not happen. That's our tradition, production and technology team, several of whom are behind the camera today. Here's my thanks to the team here at Trenton War Memorial, Bill Nutter, Mike Santoro, and Sidney Justice, and the folks from the Office of Information Technology, Jack Hensley, Sarah Casey, Roy Woods, Carol McKenna, and Chris Charkis.

And to every one of you who continues doing what you're doing to halt the spread of COVID-19 so we can come out on the other side, bless you and thank you. But remember, this is no time for us to give up. Let's keep at it and together we will win this.

I mentioned I think recently my dad used to say, my late father, he used to say remember the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. We've got a beginning and an end to share with you, before I turn things over to you, Judy, if that's all right. On the one hand, I'm proud to announce that our New Jersey family has grown. I received this picture from Kevin and Wendy Slavin. Kevin, of course, is the CEO of St. Joseph's Health and the Chairman of the New Jersey Hospital Association, a good friend of Judy's. Here are Kevin and Wendy's son Sean and daughter-in-law Emily with our newest New Jerseyan, Rosemary Slavin. Everyone is safe and healthy, thank God. Welcome to our New Jersey family, young Rosemary. God bless you.

But at the other end of the spectrum, and as I close, I must send my deepest condolences to a dear friend and a mentor of mine, our former Governor Tom Kean, who has lost his wife of 52 years, former First Lady Deborah Kean. As First Lady, Debby Kean did not let the trappings of politics nor the pressure from the media change who she was. Throughout governor Kean's administration, and for all the years frankly before and since, she remained a quiet public presence, but was a strong private presence as a wife, mother and lifelong friend. And even with all being Governor entailed, she remained focused on ensuring her husband did not forget that while he may have held our state's highest public office, his greatest responsibility was to his family. And that, in and of itself, is an extraordinary legacy.

I had the honor of speaking to both Governor Kean and his son, Senator Tom Kean earlier. God bless them both and God bless Mrs. Kean's memory. To the Governor, to their children, Tom Jr., Alexandra, and Reed, and grandchildren, all of our thoughts and prayers are with you. God bless her and her memory, and each and every one of you.

With that, please allow me to turn things over to the Commissioner of Health, a woman who needs no introduction, please help me welcome Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. While our hospitals are reporting 6,847 hospitalizations last night, that includes COVID-positive patients and persons under investigation, this is a 17% decrease from a high of 8,293 individuals hospitalized on April 14. There are 1,933 individuals in critical care. That is a 6.6% decrease from a high of 2,069 on April 13. The number of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation on ventilators has decreased 12.8% from a high of 1,705 on April 14, to 1,487 last evening. 77% of the ICU patients are on ventilators. Although this is down significantly, on April 10, 99% of these patients were on ventilators. As the Governor has said, we need everyone to continue to adhere to social distancing measures to ensure that these hospitalization numbers continue to go in the right direction.

Today we're reporting 3,047 new cases, for a total of over 102,000 cases in the state, and we continue to remove duplicate reports in the system, we continue to scrub the numbers and reconcile them not only with long-term care, reconciling them against the death certificates. Sometimes these numbers vary, but overall, we are still reporting significantly high numbers.

Sadly, 253 new deaths have been reported to the department for a total of 5,617 fatalities. The breakdown of deaths by race and ethnicity are as follows: White, 53.5%; Black, 20.1%, that is slightly down; Hispanic, 16.3%; Asian, 5.3%; other, 4.9%. There are now 452 long-term care facilities in the state with COVID-19 cases. Our survey teams are continuing to inspect long-term care facilities. The team has conducted 30 inspections since last Thursday. They have issued directed plans of correction to three facilities, requiring them to hire consultants for infection control, nursing and administrative oversight.

Testing has been completed at the Paramus Veterans Home and as you know, the VA is helping us with that. The positivity rate is 46%. The total census for all of the facilities in the veterans homes is 725. Of the 725, 244 residents have tested positive and 91 veterans have passed away. Additionally, today, in collaboration with Cooper University Health System, we will complete testing of 16 long-term care facilities in the southern part of the state.

In terms of lab reports arriving, according to data from this morning, of the seven labs that report to us, 185,329 individuals have been tested; 81,563 have tested positive, for a positivity rate of 44.1%.

Earlier this week, I covered the importance of safely using cleaning products because of the increases in calls that we were getting at the poison center. As a reminder, follow the products instructions closely. Wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect. Use EPA-registered household disinfectants and ensure proper

ventilation when cleaning. Keep these products away from children. And certainly, they should never be ingested or injected. When they're swallowed, many household products cause severe gastrointestinal symptoms. You may be repeatedly sick and even vomit. You may vomit blood. You may experience swelling of the tongue or lips, or have burns to the esophagus. You may have abdominal pain, and you may notice blood in your stools. Do not ingest or inject disinfectants.

As always, I thank you for staying home, maintaining social distancing, stay connected, stay safe and stay healthy. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for that and for that reminder, and for all. Just a quick follow up, counties in terms of positive tests remain the same group: Bergen, followed by Essex, Hudson, Union, Passaic and Middlesex. Those continue to be the six with the most positives and not surprising given that they're largely in that New York Metro reality. Thank you for that, and for all. Pat Callahan, anything on compliance, PPE, infrastructure, other matters. Thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Very briefly, overnight, Newark Police Department issued 83 EO violations and closed one business. In Clinton, three subjects were cited for playing golf on a closed golf course. In Elizabeth, seven subjects were charged for congregating, they'd been warned several times and continued to not socially distance and stay to location. In another incident, a subject who failed to disperse made a threat to shoot the police and was charged with terroristic threats as well as violating the EO. In Paterson, a barber shop owner was cited for remaining open. Also in Paterson, five subjects were cited who refused to disperse. And in Parsippany, a retail vape shop was open that did not sell other convenience store items that would allow them to stay open as essential, and that owner was subsequently cited as well.

And just a good story that I think with regard to equipment, Governor, and ventilators this morning. Before dawn, the Commissioner reached out to me. She had heard directly from a respiratory therapist at a hospital that was in dire need of ventilators, and specifically asked for non-invasive ventilators, the ones that you referenced yesterday, Governor, the 500, or both dual-purpose ventilators. Within a few hours, I was on the phone with that respiratory therapist and shortly after that, 10 of those were delivered to that hospital. So I just point it out as one, the Commissioner's accessibility. It's one thing to be accessible, but you have to act upon it, which I'm honored to be part of a team that is both accessible and able to act, because those are life-saving equipment, whether they be invasive or non-invasive. I defer to the medical experts to tell us that, but it was good to be part of something that came together so quickly with such effectiveness. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Pat, and amen to that. Thank you, Judy and thank you, Pat, both. We'll start over here with Brent. Before I do, just to say tomorrow, unless Mahen tells me otherwise, we'll be here at 1:00 p.m. tomorrow, so one o'clock tomorrow. Sunday we will communicate electronically, or so-called on paper, unless there's a reason for us to get with you either in person or telephonically, in which case we'll let you know. And Monday is to be determined. We had a White House VTC today, which is unusual for Friday. I'm not sure if that replaced yesterday's or Monday's, so bear with us. Our preferred timing is 1:00 p.m. but those video calls are important and we need to be a part of them, and they're important for New Jersey, that's why we do it. Please bear with us on that. But at a minimum, 1:00 p.m. tomorrow, thank you. Brent, you're up.

Q&A Session

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. There are far more many people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in group homes. Will they be tested too?

You put out a call for nursing home employees from other states or retirees to step up and help nursing homes here? Have they been deployed? And if so, how many?

The state website says there are 141 patients with COVID-19 at psychiatric facilities, but 373 staff members, which is more than double. How is that possible? That seems weird?

If one of the big reasons for the stay-at-home order was to flatten the curve, does that mean it's time to begin lifting orders, albeit gingerly?

And a new study shows more people hospitalized have underlying conditions much more than those who don't. What about just isolating them and letting others begin to reopen up?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, a couple of things, just on lifting orders. We're going to still, on Monday, discuss the broad principles of how we see, as I mentioned yesterday, how we see the steps that we need to take in terms of the so-called reopening. I read a couple of quotes saying that we were refusing to think about it or talk about it, which is ridiculous. Here's what we're refusing. We had 253 people died today. We saw the heat map go the wrong direction. Positive tests are still going up. They're not plateauing or going down. Hospitalizations, that's good news, that is going down. Although Judy reminded me today, the ICU percentage of those hospitalizations is higher than we'd like. So we're not out of the woods yet.

So with all due respect, and Brent, this is not directed in agitation towards you. It's a fair question to ask. We're not there yet. We're not there yet. Folks, this does not benefit me or any of us personally, to stand in the way if the facts suggest we should proceed. When the facts suggest we should proceed, we will proceed. I promise you. And by the way, we're spending an enormous amount of time, including gathering as many wise women and men we can, in the state and perhaps beyond the state, to give us the advice that we need. Not just from a health standpoint, Judy's and Ed's side of the house, but from an economic development and reality standpoint.

I think, Judy, these are largely, I mean, the group homes we addressed yesterday, I think, full frontally but you may want to repeat that. That's obviously a major focus of ours, but in terms of both group homes, nursing homes, and also the anomaly I think you're pointing out in psychiatric hospitals between the number, as I understood your question, number of positives among patients with a much bigger number of positives among staff. And then the other question, Judy, is, where's the underlying conditions reality stand now, relative to where it may have been stood recently?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We can start with the underlying conditions. I'm just looking for my sheet. But while I'm doing that, let's talk about what I call the vulnerable populations. We know we have 1,400 individuals in the psychiatric hospitals. We also know that some of the staff in the psychiatric hospitals move between hospitals, and we may be seeing some of the same phenomena as we've seen in the nursing homes.

However, we have not done wide-scale testing in the psychiatric hospitals. It is considered a vulnerable population and we do intend to do that. Same with the DD population, so that's 1,400 in psych. I think in our DD population, we have over 5,000. I know that the Department of Human Services, in collaboration with Rutgers University, you heard from Dr. Strom, they are developing a plan that may be rolled out as early as next week, to test, do wide-scale testing in the DD homes. And remember, long-term care, assisted living, probably about 75,000 individuals in New Jersey; over 100,000 individuals when you add in all types of group homes, but for long-term care and assisted living, it's probably around 70,000. We will be laying out plans, similar to the use case that we're doing in South Jersey to test all residents and employees.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, just for clarification, DD developmentally disabled?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Developmentally disabled, yes. I'm sorry.

Governor Phil Murphy: No, no, I meant to say this upfront before I throw it to you. Rutgers was very explicit about this yesterday, right? Brian was very explicit about testing those homes and I say the word homes, because in some cases, as we mentioned yesterday, not in some cases, in all cases, these are their homes, and in some cases for decades. I just want to add that point. You were going to hit underlying conditions?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, underlying conditions pretty much stayed the same. Cardiovascular disease, 58.4%; Diabetes mellitus, 42.5%; other chronic diseases, 31.4%; chronic lung disease, asthma, emphysema, COPD, 19.5%; chronic renal, 15.6%; neurological disability, 15.5%; other category, 13.7% and cancer, 11%.

Governor Phil Murphy: What did we miss there? Real quick, please.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Is it true that the majority of people who are hospitalized also have underlying conditions? And then there was the question about bringing other people in to help with nursing homes. Have they been deployed?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah. You know, depending what they're hospitalized for, that's not unusual for comorbid conditions. It would be something you would see every day. It's a matter of the extent.

Governor Phil Murphy: And then the Volunteer Army, the matchmaking process is in fact happening.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The matchmaking process goes on every day. We are looking for people and individuals that want to work in long-term care. That's our biggest push right now. We have some ideas about different populations of individuals that might want to do that. We'll be putting out a push next week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yet another push. I think it's [covid19.nj.gov/volunteer](https://www.nj.gov/volunteer), Mahen, right? That's the page. We want folks to go there. We'll travel over here if we could, Matt. Judy and Ed, tell me if you disagree with this. If you look at elderly, if you look at folks with comorbidities, and you look at folks in long-term care facilities, those are the three big blows to our state, overwhelmingly, that we've taken. We saw Khristian's picture, by the way earlier, 22 years old. There are, unfortunately, folks, no one is immune from this. There are overwhelming exceptions, but I think it's fair to say those are the three big parts of our society that have been crushed. Please, Ian.

Ian Elliott NJTV News: Governor, you said you are concerned about people of color and possibly Latinx people being overrepresented in COVID deaths in New Jersey. The Department of Health does not seem to have, or at least is not reporting, ethnic and racial data on the population tested. This is not required in the law you just signed, but shouldn't we just track this as well, so we can make sure the testing system is not biased against these populations?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? In a perfect world, the answer is yes. I don't know that we've got -- we're playing the hand we've been dealt. Ed, would you weigh in on that?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure. When the doctor orders a test and the lab runs it, the lab can only report back the information they get from the doctor. When the doctor orders that test, they're not reporting what the patient's ethnicity or race or anything, they're just reporting the patient's name and that sort of stuff. When the lab then reports that data to us, particularly all those negative ones, we don't have that information because the lab never had that information. We don't have any way to tie a name together with anybody's race or ethnicity. Further investigation is done on those who are positive, and that's why we can pick up race and ethnicity on those, and we especially prioritize those who've had worse outcomes, such as deaths, which is why we know more about those sorts of people. But as far as knowing the total race and ethnicity of everybody who had a test ordered, that's just something that unfortunately is not possible.

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me say this, as a conceptual matter, I love the point. And so if you could somehow find that nirvana where you could scale up testing, and have a rapid turnaround on the results and get that information, count me in. I just think it's going to be challenging. Let me ask Judy a quick question. Ed, thank you for that. I don't know that you've got it today, we know the profile, at least first cut of fatalities. You had at least a first cut. I think it was hospitalizations the other day in terms of -- do we have that updated since then or no?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm sure I have. I don't have it today, but I'm sure I have it. But I do want to respond to testing. Part of our plan is to make sure that underserved populations have access to testing, so we'll be calling in the FQHCs, we're looking at mobile testing into urban neighborhoods. You're absolutely correct. It is something we have to pay a lot of attention to and we plan to do that. When we put out our testing strategy, you will see that involved, no question.

Governor Phil Murphy: The point I want to repeat, which I know you agree with, is that we do know based on fatalities that the African American community is 50%, plus or minus, more representative in fatalities than in the overall society. We have not seen that number yet. And again, I remain suspicious in the number that Judy had mentioned the other day on hospitalizations, was at least beginning to square the circle with the New York City reality in terms of the Hispanic, the Latinx population. Something we're going to come back to you as we get this more refined and more robust.

By the way, one thing I think everyone has got at this point, it's not like testing will end sometime in May or June and we got through this. Testing is going to be with us for a long time. That's the bad news. The good news is, we'll be able to, over that long runway, to be able to make it much more robust and refine it. Elise, Good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. Two questions. On rentals, your Executive Order allows the use of security deposits. Does that mean that landlords must accept security deposits? Or are you simply encouraging the use of that? Secondly, have Operation Airbridge deliveries been a significant part of New Jersey's PPE supply?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to take the former with Matt Platkin and maybe Pat, you can take the latter. Is that okay with you? I think it's more in the category of encouraging and recommending as opposed to mandating, in terms of using the security deposit. Matt, would you correct the record or agree?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: There's currently a statutory bar on using security deposits to cover rent, so this removes that statutory bar. It does prevent them, if they accept a security deposit, from seeking another security deposit for at least six months after the end of the emergency, or the end of the lease agreement, whichever is later. That's how the order is written.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, do you want to hit the Airbridge.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I will. I think classified as significant might be a bit of an overstatement. But as we've said just about every day, that we will take everything we can get by any means we can get it, that we appreciate it and it still is an ongoing process. I think Pete Gaynor responded that there's been 73 National Airbridge missions so far in the last month or so. It's an ongoing process, Elise, and like I said, we appreciate every piece of PPE we get from it.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Colonel, do you have any idea how much you've received from Airbridge?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: You know, we do have that information and I could circle back with you on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Can we come back to you? Do you mind? Mahen, will you remember that? We'll come back and give you a specific count. John, you're going to close this out here, unless I missed anybody. Thank you.

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: On testing, how do you view the role of antibody testing and getting back to normal, both antibody testing in hospitals that would allow for, apparently, non-COVID and non-urgent care?

And Governor, this week you were talking about the long-term care facilities. You said the standards and protocols, the unevenness, is incredibly disappointing. Does that sentiment include the Paramus vets home that's run by the state?

And on the discharge data, do you include deaths in the hospital as part of the discharge data? That seems to be the cases from some of the data the health department has sent us? And if you are including deaths in that discharge data, is that a fair figure to show people? It gives people the assumption that things are getting better.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, so things are getting better but we slipped a little bit here, I have to say. So there's no question things are getting better when you look at hospitalizations, ICU, ventilators and admissions. I will certainly let Ed and Judy address the question on antibody testing, if that's all right, because I will just say I'm not qualified to answer that.

Listen, the VA has become a very good partner of ours over the past several weeks, and I think the jury is out. I'll come back to you on Paramus in terms of whether or not, again, I don't want to call out a particular facility but they're in there right now with our teams, not only surging staffing, but helping us figure out, fair to say, Judy, how we can cohort and all the things. I'm going to reserve the right, if I can, to come back to you because I'd like to get their independent assessment, which is part of the reason they're there. They're there to first and foremost surge our healthcare worker force in those homes, in Menlo Park as well. But as well to make an assessment. Did you want to say something Matt?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: I got a text that my last answer wasn't clear. By removing that statutory bar, tenants can instruct their landlords to use the security deposit, so it's not an option.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you all mind hitting antibody, Ed, do you mind?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure. When you're looking for something, like to try to decide if somebody has COVID or had COVID, there's two ways you can do it. One is you actually look for the virus, or pieces of it. That's that pharyngeal swab test or the Rutgers spit test, as far as that goes. If you get that back, you can be pretty sure that the person actually has COVID at that particular period of time.

Then what happens is your body begins to respond to the infection. The way that it responds to the infection is it creates antibodies. Antibodies come at a later time, and exactly when it comes can vary somewhat. Antibody tests become important to try to decide if somebody has had the disease before, much more important than trying to decide if they have it now, because they may not reflect that. Antibodies, when they're made, one of the things that you hope is that then they become protective, meaning you make antibodies, antibodies are one of the things that prevents you from getting an infection again. And if you've made antibodies, then you might assume that you're immune from getting that infection again.

When people talk about antibody tests, that's what they're talking about. They're saying, hey, can we have this test now that will show me whether any individual has had this disease in the past, and that they are therefore immune? And if they're immune, of course, they can go about their normal business and do everything else. That's what we would like the antibody tests to be able to tell us, and that's what some people believe that it is telling them.

Unfortunately, that's not actually the case. It's not actually the case for a variety of reasons. The antibody testing that's out there now comes from a whole variety of sources, and exactly how specific and sensitive that test is, is unclear. For example, it's not clear whether if you were infected with one of the more common circulating coronaviruses last year, because we do have those types of coronaviruses circulating all the time in the state, whether you might test positive for that one and think that you actually had COVID when instead you had something that was similar but much less deadly in the past.

We also don't know exactly how protective those antibodies are when they're formed. So we do not know for sure that just because the antibody test comes out positive, and you even really had COVID, that you are, in fact, immune. All these tests have a level of what's known as a false positive rate. What's commonly quoted is that they're about 95% specific. Basically what that means is, if I had a population where about 5 in 100 people actually had COVID, and I just tested all those people, while those five in 100 people might test positive, another 5 in 100 could also test positive. So if I tested positive, it would be roughly a 50-50 chance whether I actually had those antibodies or not, meaning they were true antibodies, as far as protection goes.

So for all these reasons, at this point certainly, no, we do not recommend serology testing to decide if any individual is immune and can go back to work.

Where it is useful is what just came out of New York City the other day and what New Jersey is trying to move forward with as well, which is looking at a broad population to get a sense on a broad population, how many people who we didn't know were sick before might have been sick? And get a better sense for what actually happened in the past.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tell me if you disagree with this, let me make sure I didn't miss this here. On discharge in relationship to deaths, the answer is yes, but there's an important footnote to that. I thought we had made this point earlier. And John, if we haven't, that's probably on me. When we say discharges between 10:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., we mean literally between 10:00 p.m. two nights ago and last night. The deaths that we report – first of all, the positive tests we report were probably submitted five to seven days ago. The deaths that we report may not be – and more than may not, certainly did not all come within the past 24 hours. This is a rolling number, folks. There's no hiding the pea, there's just a different time frame associated with these, and not everybody dies in a hospital, is another point that is worth noting. If you're going to ask me what the breakdown is, I don't have it. But the answer is yes. That does not take away from what we believe are significant stabilizations, particularly in the number of hospitalizations, as Judy has pointed to. Did I get that? Would you agree with that? So thank you.

And I think that's something we endeavor, including and I don't want to put Ed back on the spot, we are also going through a rigorous process to make sure that the fatality numbers are as accurate as possible, including presumptive cases that we're going to be constantly looking back and reassessing. Is that fair to say, folks?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I think it's important to note that there will be people that expire that have the symptoms of COVID-19 but for whatever reasons, they were not tested. Maybe they expired at home, maybe they're in the hospital, but the test had not been performed yet because of the lag. We're looking at every single one of those, Ed and his team, because I think it's fair to say that we should count the -- I don't know if you're using the word probable -- probable cases. If you want to explain that process, it's kind of laborious, but we definitely need those numbers.

Governor Phil Murphy: No question.

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: In very brief, we consider a confirmed case or confirmed death anybody that tested positive for it and has died. Those are relatively simple, because you know that somebody died and you know that they had a positive test, you put them together. The probable cases go into two broad categories, and they're tougher to tease out, we're getting there, but that's why we're not putting them out as fast.

The two broad categories are, as the Commissioner was just saying, those people who might have died at home or might have died in the hospital, or somewhere else where that test was never done so it was never reported that way. But on their death certificate, somebody was suspecting it, and a physician wrote COVID in it. We review those death certificates and that takes a while. They become a probable case.

The other way is in the long-term care facilities or other places where there's a known outbreak, again, if somebody were to die there and testing was not done, even if it was not written on a death certificate, the fact that they had symptoms that would suggest COVID and were in the middle of essentially an outbreak that was going on, that would end up being counted as a probable. And yes, we are working towards getting those numbers and we would like to be able to put them out quickly. The problem is that some of them were not as easy to tease out as it might sound like it is. So we'll get there, but it may take a little time.

Governor Phil Murphy: And we promised you that. I mean, it's not in our, particularly for those of you who wonder whether or not we're creating a scenario which is more or less dire than it needs to be, the fact of the matter is, we're basing everything on the facts and it's our job to give you all the facts, as best we can. I think a lot of other states, it's fair to say, are going through the exact same thing that we are. New York City has done this, Pennsylvania is doing it, we're doing it, and we'll be as accurate with folks as humanly possible.

I meant to say this earlier, this is completely unrelated. But I had a short conversation with John Waldron, who's the President of Goldman Sachs and I want to give them a shout out. They're putting \$10 million of loans to work for small businesses in New Jersey through the EDA, and I want to give them a big shout out. I had a short conversation with John earlier today to thank him for that. That will make a huge difference. There was a bill signed by the President and passed by Congress yesterday signed, I believe, while we were on the VTC earlier today, which is another big slug for small businesses, which God knows they need. We continue to plow through the enormous backlog of folks for claiming unemployment insurance. We know you're frustrated by that. We are getting through it. I know slower than a lot of you would like, but I want to give Rob Asaro-Angelo and his team a shout out, they are plussing up and doing everything they can to get through that as fast as possible.

As I remark, I want to thank Judy and Ed and all the brothers and sisters at the Department of Health for all that they're doing. Pat Callahan, to you and the State Police and all of your colleagues, Jared, Matt and others. Two things, very simply. We'll be back with you tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. in this room. And secondly, folks, please stay the course. It is working, but we've seen even in one day that we can't let our guard down. The weather is going to be better tomorrow. It's not very hospitable today. Please, please stay at home, stay away from each other. Keep the social distancing up and that's our most important weapon in the fight to beat this virus. Those hospitalization numbers show that it's working. Let's keep up the great work. Thanks, everybody. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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