

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: December 7th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: So before as we get settled here, I want to say Pat and I are each wearing matching masks in honor of Luke Homeijer, the state police recruit who passed, a member of the 161st training class. Pat and I both were at his memorial yesterday in Boonton, pretty emotional as you can imagine, an incredible human being. And each of us, everyone who arrived there yesterday, got one of these masks in his memory and in his honor. I would ask you to keep his memory and his family in your prayers. Give us a sec here if you could.

Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry to be a couple of minutes behind. I'm joined by the guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. The guy to my right, the Department of Health, another familiar face known to many, the Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz; Ed. The Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, is with us. As is Chief Counsel Parimal Garg. We anticipate the woman who needs no introduction, Commissioner of Health Judy Persichilli, being with us on Wednesday, and I know that we are all looking forward to getting the whole band back together again.

I don't want to establish a precedent every time we speak, but I do want to start by reporting on a very good conversation I had Saturday evening with President-Elect Joe Biden. I'm honored to have called the President-Elect a friend for many, many years, and I'm certainly looking forward to working with him once he takes the reins of the federal government on January 20th, which is by my math, 44 days from now.

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On a side note, I want to make sure I have the number right. Dan Bryan just sent this to me. This morning, Secretary of State Tahesha Way and the Board of State Canvassers certified New Jersey's election results, and later today, I will sign the Certificate of Ascertainment in advance of our presidential electors meeting and voting next Monday in person on December 14th. I have to give Tahesha a shout-out because not only did that happen this morning, but it is her birthday, and she is married into the New York football Giants family. Her husband is Charles Way, former star fullback, so it's a big 24 hours for the Way family. And the total number of votes cast and certified, 4,635,000 – 4,635,000. The previous record was 3.9-ish million votes, which was set four years ago. Not only was the record broken, it was shattered. The President-Elect and I covered a number of topics and focused on really three main areas. First, of course, was the pandemic, second was the need for federal stimulus, and the third was moving forward on infrastructure and specifically, on gateway. Certainly, as it relates to the pandemic, the President-Elect has put together a tremendously talented and experienced team of experts to guide thinking, and policy making, and the news that he has asked Dr. Anthony Fauci to stay on as well was a double shot of good news. That pun was partially intended because we also discussed the need to ensure the continued smooth roll-out of vaccines as that process is going to be handed off from the current administration to the incoming one. I have every confidence in the President-Elect and his team to ensure this process continues without disruption.

We have had extraordinary cooperation and partnership, it must be said, with the current Administration throughout this pandemic from the near weekly video conferences with Vice-President Mike Pence and his team, to private conversations along the way, too many to recount, to the strong receptions we've received from the Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and his team, Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie, and many others. I know we will continue to have a good working relationship with them over the next 6-plus weeks, and I would be remiss if I did not thank them for all they have done to help our state.

Our state and our residents also need more help from Washington, and that is why I was pleased to discuss the need for a comprehensive stimulus package to get through the next Congress and to the President-Elect's desk. I told the President-Elect that while we would certainly welcome every penny of assistance in the bipartisan plan currently being negotiated, that more is needed, and that history would not dismiss us for going big and bold at this time. As it relates specifically to the subject of state and local aid, the President-Elect himself brought that up in our conversation, which I was happy to hear. History will, however, judge us if we fail to ensure that the many needs of our states and people are adequately met.

Finally, we discussed the need for a robust federal investment in safe and moderate infrastructure to help secure our economic future, and for us, here, that means principally getting the Gateway project prioritized and funded. I'm extremely hopeful that this project will move under President Biden's Administration and I offer my and our Administration's partnership in any way as needed to get COVID off the drawing board and into reality. It is simply passed time. Aside from my conversation with the President-Elect, our team continues to have regular contact with the President-Elect's team, and these include a variety of folks with whom we are in regular touch. That begins with, by the way, the chiefs of staff for each of the President-Elect and Vice President-Elect, Ron Klain, who we've had an over 20-year relationship with and in the Vice President-Elect's case, Tina Flournoy, who is an old friend and colleague from the DNC and someone we've known for a long time. The needs of New Jersey are being put front and center for the incoming Administration and we look forward to a fruitful partnership for our state and for our residents regardless of what your political persuasion is. We are in the business of looking out for all 9 million of us.

Next up, Pat, I know you'll talk about this in a little bit. I want to acknowledge the efforts of Paterson law enforcement officials, who shut down two speakeasys over the weekend – I feel like it's 1932 – two clubs that were illegally operating and selling alcohol past 10 p.m. Again, as we have said here on Friday, there are countless – the overwhelming amount of restaurant owners who are doing things the right way and following the rules to ensure that our communities stay safe. Every day countless restaurants and businesses are doing everything that this moment requires to protect their staffs and patrons. That kind of spirit is admirable and deeply, deeply appreciated. We simply will not tolerate those who think the rules are for everyone else but them. And if you think that we will shut you down as these two speakeasys were shut down this weekend, you are correct. You may think this is a game of cat and mouse, that it's kind of cute, but let's be honest: it can be deadly. By the way, when you act like a knucklehead, you show your true self. You show you don't care about your community. You show you don't care about your customers or your employees. You prove that you only care about yourself. Yes, we could begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. That is for sure. But the

only thing that's going to get us there as one is all of us pulling together for a couple of more months. We have to do this, folks, and we can do this. To those of you who still think you can make up your own rules, I have an unwelcome reality for you. We will shut you down.

With that, let's move to a full report of today's vital numbers. We are today reporting an additional 3,573 positive PCR test results, which pushes our statewide total over the past nine months to 371,579. The positivity rate for all PCR tests recorded on Thursday, December 3rd was 11.4%, and that is based on that day on a total of 37,839 tests. The statewide rate of transmission today is 1.05. Remember the rate of transmission as we talked on Friday is based on a seven-day rolling average in this case ending on Saturday. We should expect that the increase in cases we experienced during the end of last week and through the weekend will push the RT up in the coming days. My guess is it gets up into the 1.2-plus range sooner than later.

This is a proper time to also give an update on our contact tracing program. There's good news and bad news here. The good news is that we continue to build out the capabilities of our community contact tracing corp, and we can now report that we now have on the ground more than 30 contact tracers for every 100,000 residents statewide, and in all but three counties, Bergen, Camden, and Monmouth have now exceeded that level as well. We have identified an urgent need for contact tracers with Spanish language proficiency, so we are currently engaged in filling that need.

However, on the other side of the coin, the rate of noncooperation with our contact tracers is now up to a whopping 74% of cases. Quite frankly, this is unacceptable and we need folks to turn that around. It is extremely critical for contact tracers to get in touch with the close contacts of those who test positive to help us stop the spread of this virus. You may think you'll just call your contacts yourself, but this is a task that is best left to a trained public health professional, a contact tracer in fact, who can answer questions about access to testing or social supports that they may need to safely quarantine or isolate. Our contact tracers are our fellow New Jerseyans and we are committed to continuing to hire New Jerseyans for this important work. These are people from within our own communities, stepping forward to protect their very neighbors. Through their commitment, we are beating our benchmarks. We're holding up our end of this battle. We urge you folks to please work with us. Remember, our contact tracers are not on a witch hunt. They are only concerned with stopping the spread of this virus. We urge you, please work with our contact tracers, and do your part to end this pandemic. The more people who cooperate, the sooner we can slow the spread and crush the curve, the sooner we can emerge from this pandemic. We cannot thank enough those of you who have answered the call and cooperated in providing our contact tracers the information they need to protect your loved ones, your neighbors, your family, your friends, your community. While you're at it, if you have not yet done so, please download the COVID alert NJ app to your smartphone and add your phone to the more than 440,000, which are now part of our fight to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Now back to the numbers, if we can. In our hospitals last night, there were 3,110 COVID-positive patients being treated along with another 236 patients awaiting the test results for a total hospitalizations of 3,346. Of these, 637 patients were requiring intensive care, and 391 of them were requiring the use of a ventilator. Overall, the numbers in our hospitals were relatively stable throughout the weekend. However, we must remain extra vigilant. With the increase in positive tests on Friday and through the weekend, we have to expect that some percentage will eventually require hospitalization. Here is our first hint. Throughout the day yesterday, 269 COVID patients were discharged, which is great news, while 417 new COVID-positive patients were admitted. Remember, we reported at least 5,300 new positives on each of Friday, Saturday, and yesterday, and yesterday was an all-time high, over 6,000. There were, in the past 24 hours – these are not confirmed, apples to oranges – 55 reported in-hospital deaths. On this Wednesday as we previewed last week, we will be providing you with a more detailed discussion of the models for the weeks and months ahead. The near term, I will tell you right now, is not pretty. Sadly, we continue to lose members of our New Jersey family to this virus. Even though the numbers are not what they were in the spring, they are no less sobering. What we must also remember is that these proud New Jerseyans contracted this virus one way or another. When you fail to wear your mask or social distance, you risk unknowingly passing COVID onto someone you love.

Today, we're reporting with a heavy heart an additional 17 confirmed COVID-related deaths. That gives us a total of 15,550 confirmed deaths with 1,836 probable deaths. Let's do as we do every day, let's remember three more of these blessed souls who we have lost. Let's begin in Livingston, one of New Jersey's great communities. There is Howard Zimmerman, a native of New York, and a proud US Army veteran who served in Rome. Howard ran his own manufacturing business for 30 years, there's several of them, alongside one of his daughters. Howard and his wife, Barbara, had called Livingston home since moving there in 1962 to raise their family. This upcoming February would have marked 66 years of marriage. He now leaves behind Barbara, bless her. She was COVID-positive. Keep her in your prayers. Their children, daughters Diane, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Friday, Lauren, and Debbie, and their son, David, passed away four years ago. Please keep his memory in your prayers as well. Howard is also survived by their families, his daughters' families including his grandchildren, Jared, Sidney, and Alex. He also leaves his sister, Ellen, among countless friends. So Diane, with whom I spoke, she was the daughter who followed her dad into manufacturing. She summed up her dad this way, and I quote her. "He was the warmest, kindest, loving soul one could meet, a soft-spoken, reserved man, with a huge heart." Those sentiments had a theme carried throughout other remembrances of him and that in and of itself is reason enough to know that this was a life well lived. May Howard's memory be a blessing. We thank him for his service to our nation, and to his commitment to his community, and most importantly, his family.

Next up, we recall Toby Robinson – how about that smile – a long-time resident of Lawrenceville, right here in Mercer County. Toby was a nurse and used those skills in countless roles as a camp nurse, operating room scrub nurse, and as a nurse in a private pediatric practice. She championed women's issues and women's health, and dedicated 20 years of her career to the Planned Parenthood Association of the Mercer County area, eventually serving as its medical director. She was also active in the League of Women Voters. Sadly, over the past several years, dementia began to rob Toby of her gifts but not her zeal for life. She leaves behind her husband, Paul. I believe Paul was also COVID-positive and by the way, he turned 90 two days before they lost Toby. She also leaves behind her children, Julie and Cliff, and their families including her granddaughters, Cat and Brenna, who I am sure she will especially watch over. I spoke with Julie, by the way. I had the great honor of speaking with Julie on Friday. You can't make this up either. Julie not only lost her mom but on September 22nd, Julie lost her own husband to cancer. What a year. Toby also leaves behind her twin brother, Alan, and his family and many other cousins and extended family and friends. We thank Toby for a lifetime dedicated to the well-being of others. May her legacy of service be an inspiration and may God bless and watch over her and her family.

Finally, today we remember Rutherford's Thomas Twist, a lifelong resident of Rutherford. Tom was a proud veteran in the United States Navy and went on to have a 30-year career in sales, but his legacy was built on his decades as a proud member of the Rutherford Fire Department. He was first appointed to Engine Company Number 4 in the fall of 1966. That was the start of a volunteer career that would see him serve in numerous capacities with the company and department-wide including serving as chief of the Rutherford Fire Department in 1987. Little wonder then that 30 years later in 2017, the Rutherford Irish American Association – Pat, make sure you're paying attention here – chose him to march in their inaugural parade as their Firefighter of the Year. One of Tom's passions was maintaining Rutherford's Firemen's Park. Another was sports. He was a die-hard fan for the Mets, the Rangers, and two winners this weekend, the New York football Giants – they beat Seattle yesterday, I think maybe the biggest upset of the NFL season, 17-12 – and Manchester United football club. They came back to beat West Ham United, 3-1 over the weekend. Tom lost his wife, Sharon, ten years ago. He is survived by their son, Thomas III, and I had the great honor of speaking with him on Friday, and daughter-in-law, Erica, and grandchildren, Victoria and Spencer. He also leaves behind his sisters, Muriel and Vanda, and his long-time personal dear friend, Christopher Seidler. Thomas's life and loss was brought to my attention by a dear friend, Stephanie McGowan, and she reminded me, and I've heard this from all corners that Tom leaves behind a grateful Rutherford who will long remember his lifetime of dedication to that community, one of New Jersey's finest. Thank you, Tom, for your service to our nation, to your hometown. God bless you and watch over you and your family.

We've lost Howard, Toby, and Tom in the second wave. Their passings, by the way, all came within the past six weeks. Do not think that the worst of this pandemic is in the past. There are families who are just now experiencing the very worst. We know that we're just months away from pulling ourselves out of the

darkness, and our optimism for that new day grows every day as we inch closer and closer but we can't let up yet, not now when this virus is still as deadly as ever.

Switching gears briefly, as we noted on Friday, the deadline for businesses with 100 or fewer employees to register for the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's PPE discount program is this Thursday, December 10th. Participation, by the way, can mean discounts of up to 70% off the purchase of personal protective equipment. If you are the owner of a small business and have not yet registered for this discount program, I urge you to visit covid19.nj.gov/ppeaccess. The PPE discount program is just one of the ways that the EDA has been stepping up to help tens of thousands of small businesses get through this pandemic, in addition to the grants, loans, and capital guarantees it has put forward for small businesses up and down our state.

One of those small businesses is Stumpy's Hatchet House of Green Brook, home of new councilman-elect, our colleague, Matt Stanisci, in Somerset County run by Monica. You can see Monica right there – and Mark Milan. They preemptively closed Stumpy's Hatchet House in the spring and secured a grant from the EDA to cover payroll while they undertook upgrades to ventilation and sanitization systems to make Stumpy's Hatchet House a safe place for people to “let go and get their stress out.” Right now, I know there are a lot of us who could use the chance to let off a little steam, Ed, in a safe environment. That's exactly what Monica and Mark are providing their customers. I had the opportunity to catch up on Friday with Monica and to thank her and Mark for all they're doing. They exemplify the spirit of our small businesses and I'm really happy they found a partner in the EDA. By the way, check them out, stumpysgreenbrook.com.

Finally, it is December 7th, the 79th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor that launched our nation into World War II. Today, we remember all those who lost their lives and whose memories we will not allow to be lost to time. For the next four years, the greatest generation would answer every call, fight on every front, and help deliver an allied victory. The number of those who remain from our World War II generation are dwindling and we honor every single one of them. The entire nation was engaged in that fight. No one shirked their responsibilities or duties.

Just as that is how World War II was won, it is how we will win this fight against COVID-19, a fight – get this, folks. Think about this for a minute. A fight that has now claimed nearly 5,000 more New Jerseyans in just nine months than the 12,565 blessed World War II souls claimed across four years of fighting from those who hailed from New Jersey. So folks, let's keep up that fight. We know that victory is just a few months away if we all continue to do the things that have sustained our fight so far: social distancing, face masks, washing our hands with soap and water, using our common sense.

I'll leave you with this: the day following the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt stood before Congress and stirred our nation with the following call. “With the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph so help us God.” Let us resolve the same on December 7, 2020. Let's win this war.

With that, please help me welcome Dr. Ed Lifshitz.

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Good afternoon and thank you, Governor. New Jersey reported a new high of more than 6,000 cases yesterday. We believe but cannot yet definitively determine that some of this increase is directly related to the Thanksgiving holiday. Holidays disrupt the normal flow of individuals seeking, providers offering, and laboratories analyzing tests, making direct comparisons of case counts between days difficult. Given the lag between infection, illness onset, testing, and reporting of results, full effects as it relates to case counts would not be expected to be known for several days. However, it is clear that New Jersey's cases continue to trend up. As our cases increase, it becomes even more important for New Jerseyans to remain vigilant.

The department continues to urge caution during the upcoming December holidays. Indoor holiday gatherings should be limited to immediate household members, if possible, and inter-generational gatherings should be avoided also whenever possible. If hosting a small holiday gathering, limit people touching common items such as serving utensils. Avoid the phase entering stations, and seating arrangements should encourage social distancing. Clean commonly touched areas often and guests should wear masks when not eating or drinking. We recognize that sharing celebrations with family and friends are important holiday

traditions, and connections that are strengthened and memories that are made are integral to who we are. Unfortunately, the virus will not cooperate and this year will be a holiday like no other. We call on all New Jerseyans to celebrate safely and responsibly to ensure healthy holidays.

I'll say this: I'm really not crazy about wearing a mask, and I certainly don't like what this pandemic has done to my children and their athletic, academic, social and professional lives. I really don't like what it's doing to my neighbors and community, the disruption of family and social life, especially during this holiday season, and the economic pain that is apparent as businesses falter. But what I really hate is thinking about the families of more than 15,000 New Jerseyans have died. I'm sorry that I won't be able to see my friends and extended family this holiday season. I will miss them, but it is temporary. For the Zimmerman, Robinson, and Twitch families and 15,000 more like them, the loss is permanent. This is important what we do now.

As for the department's daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 3,346 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation last evening. There are 637 individuals in critical care. Sixty-two percent of those critical care patients are on ventilators. There are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 63 total cases in the state. One of these children is currently hospitalized; fortunately in New Jersey, there are no deaths reported at this time.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported. In terms of death, the breakdown of deaths by race and ethnicity is as follows: white, 54.3%; black, 17.8%; Hispanic, 20.2%; Asian, 5.4%; other, 2.3%. Since our last press briefing, there's been one new positive among residents at Menlo Park, one new positive resident at the Vineland Home, and sadly, an additional death of a resident at Menlo Park home. This resident spent almost three weeks in the hospital before succumbing to COVID pneumonia and other medical complications. The total communal of cases among residents is 410, and there have been 147 deaths among residents across these facilities.

At our state psychiatric hospitals, there have been two additional positive residents at Ann Klein, and one new positive resident at Trenton Psychiatric. There is a cumulative total of 266 cases among residents across the four hospitals. Our positivity based upon December 3rd remains high with 15.08% in the south, 10.15% central, 10.84% north, overall, 11.4%. This concludes our daily report. Stay safe. Please continue to mask up. Social distance. Stay home when sick. Download the COVID alert New Jersey app, and exercise caution in this holiday season. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, well done, as always. Your personal plea and the impact that it's had on so many. I've looked through my notes. I've said this now for months that I write 62,813 of the fatalities in Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland respectively confirmed from COVID-19, and sadly, this is the first time in exactly 180 days that it's now 63,813 with that fatality at Menlo Park. God rest the soul of that person who passed who put up an incredible fight. We are going to stay in that fight with those three locations and all the other long-term care facilities around the state. Thank you, Ed, for your report and for your leadership.

Pat, a tough afternoon yesterday for – I know far more for you and your colleagues but just to be there and witness the emotion was extraordinary. God bless Luke Homeijer. We had some fairly active compliance activity over the weekend for those. We got through the weather reasonably Friday night into Saturday. Over to you and thank you for your leadership.

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. The Governor touched upon the two from Paterson. Those were quality of life details that the Paterson Police Department were conducting. That was to establishments that were cited for illegal sales of alcohol and maintaining a nuisance. In Stratford, police responded to a noise complaint and found more than 50 people inside where social distancing was not possible and no one was wearing a mask. That subject was cited also for maintaining a public nuisance as well as EO violation and in Metuchen in The Brown Stone back on Thanksgiving was over capacity at the bar but over the weekend were ultimately finally cited for the EO violation, Governor.

I'll just make one point. I'm not going to share names, but in the past few days I've talked to two very young, healthy Jersey troopers that are in the hospital with COVID and struggling, low oxygen levels, as one explained it to me. Doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, and just phenomenal model of health and he explained to me how hard it was for him to catch his breath. I know we've been sitting here nine months talking about vulnerable populations and those of us who think we're invincible but these are two very healthy Jersey

troopers, one of which is still in the hospital, one that just got released two days ago. I just – I'll reiterate it, and I don't know if we can re-echo it enough how serious this is, and that was made certainly clear to me, once again, by talking to those two troopers this week, Governor.

Once again, thank you for your presence and remarks at Luke's service yesterday.

Governor Phil Murphy: The very least I could do. Is the trooper in the hospital going to be okay?

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: That goes to show you, right? You're not a trooper by definition if you're not a picture of health. I'm looking out at Sergeant Moreem and there's the folks with us every day here, yourself. I mean, by the very virtue of the profession, you've pursued. You've got to pass an annual fitness reality. By definition, you're in good shape to begin with. It's pretty frightening. Thank you for that, and we'll keep them in our prayers as well.

We'll start over here. I think we'll stay on the Monday/Wednesday/Friday rhythm this week Dan Bryant is with us and unless you hear otherwise, we'll be virtual tomorrow and Wednesday at 1 o'clock here. Friday, we're still trying to construct, so I'm not sure exactly the timing on Friday, but we'll come back to you on that front. Did I get that right, Dan?

Okay, Nikita, we're going to start with you today. Good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. Do you plan to issue any pardons or clemency orders between now and the end of the year? If you do, will those include ones for people convicted of low-level cannabis offenses? Separately, dozens of municipalities have fire district commissioner elections scheduled for Saturday, February 20. The filing deadline is about five weeks from now. I'm wondering, do you anticipate in-person voting for those races or should election officials expect those to be all DVM races as well? On a similar note, you've touted the success of these all-DVM elections and we saw a much higher turnout for the May nonpartisans than we have in past years. With or without the pandemic, do you think those smaller, traditionally low turnout elections should go back to being all in person?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't have anything, really. Don't get mad at me here. I don't have anything to update you on on much of what you've asked. Clemency and pardons, no news to report. On the in-person voting, tell me again what was the – what's the date, the second question?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: February 20.

Governor Phil Murphy: February 20? I think too early to tell. Parimal is here. Too early to tell, so we'll come back to you on that. Anything you want to add to that?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yeah, the fire district elections are on our radar, and we'll report back when we have a decision there.

Governor Phil Murphy: Nothing new to report on that. As a general matter, I would love to add in-person early voting and I would love to add getting back to machines, and that requires an investment to do that. So you'd still have a robust mail-in piece. I'm not sure I have a different opinion as to what a May nonpartisan would look like versus a June primary or a November general, but that's still, conceptually at least, what we want to try to get to, I hope sooner than later. Thank you.

Matt, good afternoon.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Governor, today Governor Cuomo announced that if after five days a region's hospitalization rate has not stabilized, indoor dining will either be reduced or shut down completely. Have you been considering such a measure here in New Jersey and if not, what would it take for you to consider this restriction or other restrictions with the state's hospitalization rate? What benchmark are you looking for there? You mentioned aid to Washington. We know you've been speaking about it for a while, about how urgent it is for Congress to pass a stimulus bill including the state and local relief, before Christmas, but is this something – how badly is it needed now as opposed to waiting for the next Administration to handle this?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? So I was just – literally as I was walking in here, Dan just gave me a heads up that Governor Cuomo had said it. That is not, right now, on the table for us, and I say that for a couple of reasons. First of all, if we saw explicit waves of transmission coming out of the indoor dining experience, obviously we'd have a different approach. Again, I have to reiterate something. You take a higher risk – you take on higher risk when you conduct more activities indoors, whether that's indoor dining, a gym, indoor entertainment, whatever it might be, and increasingly in private settings, but we knew that. Saying you're taking on more risk is different than saying you're going into Path's Restaurant where we just heard that there were 30 confirmed positives. Those are completely different realities. We are still in the mode where we can surgically strike; we will strike. We did that with indoor dining after 10 o'clock. We did it with bar seating, and we watch it. We continue to watch it like a hawk.

I also want to hearken back to the spring. We were about to run out of hospital beds, ventilators, PPE. We were at the edge, and the fact of the matter is we spent the past – I guess of the nine months, probably the past six to seven months rebuilding those capacities. We do have hospitalizations that are up meaningfully, and I guess my guess is that they're going to go higher, but they're still about 5,000 beds shy of the peak in the spring. We have plus or minus – Pat, I think plus or minus over 100 million pieces of PPE. We have in the state supply alone 2600 ventilators, never mind what's in the hospital systems, and we have right now – Ed, if my numbers are right – just under 400 ventilators in use.

I'm saying really two things. If we see transmission in particular, if we see habits, we will strike surgically is our preference. Secondly, we have capacities and a knowledge of this, and we'll talk about modeling on Wednesday, not only knowledge of the virus but knowledge also of the range of where it could be headed. We will continue to do that.

Two other quick points: Number one, I get concerned and others have raised this concern; it's a rightful concern. If you shutter something completely, you're driving this into underground activity behind closed doors, private settings. We already have an issue with that. Frankly, if we think we can control that manageable risk in an enforceable space such as a restaurant as opposed to Ed's living room, that is our preference. Lastly, the – this will get to your second question on federal stimulus. How bad is it? Boy, I'll tell you, it's bad. Look no further than somebody's who's unemployed or in – to the question you asked, Matt, a restaurant where we've got no lifeline to throw these folks right now. We'd better darn be sure if we're going to shut something that it's based on transmission; it's based on the facts. If we do right now in the absence of that stimulus, these folks are going on the rocks. They're out of business. They're not just shuttered for a few weeks; they're out of business.

This gets to the second question. We need it badly. I was on the phone not just with the President-Elect but with others this weekend including members of Congress, going through all of the various mouths we need to feed, especially unemployed, small business, restaurant, state and local budgets. That's not – should not be abstract; that's to allow us to continue to employ the front-line workers delivering the services that are being delivered in our hour of need.

Last comment, and I'm sorry to go on. Last comment, I'm grateful that there's real discussion about a deal that looks, right now, plus or minus around \$900 billion. I think the need in the fullness of time, and the fullness of time is measured in a few months here at most, is probably two to three times that, maybe even four times that. This is plus or minus, in my opinion, a three-ish plus trillion dollar moment. And as I've said before, I don't think history will be unkind if we overshoot. I think it'll be devastatingly unkind, in particular to individuals and to small businesses if we undershoot. Thank you for that.

Dustin, good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Can you clarify the reasoning why New Jersey's supposed to get 76,000 doses of the vaccine instead of 130,000 in the first shipment? There was a story in *The Washington Post* over the weekend that there was an issue with supply that forced the Trump Administration to lower its delivery plans, so I just wanted to see if that had any effect on that. And with that limited amount, you'll only be able to vaccinate a fraction of healthcare workers, so how will the health department decide the allocation of the vaccine? Is the nursing home supply, which is supposed to be delivered through CVS and Walgreen's, included in that 76,000 number, or is that separate? Would you

consider taking executive action to collect and public hospital outbreak data since a bill requiring that is idling in the State House? And can you give any insight into what the President-Elect said about Gateway and whether he gave any indication that his Administration would support it? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. The 76,000 – and if I get this counter to what your understanding is – 76,000 isn't necessarily a reduction in an allocation. The numbers I have been speaking to a couple of weeks ago were about the December allocation in total. The numbers ramp up. Again, the timing on this is a matter of days. This is emergency use authorization, and then it has to go through one other board. The acronym, Ed, I always forget but you'll tell me. What is it?

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: ACIP.

Governor Phil Murphy: ACIP?

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: After the – so this is all going to happen, God willing, in a matter of days. I'm guessing we're getting this first batch out of Pfizer's allocation by plus or minus a week from today. And the 1A groups are split between healthcare workers and long-term care, and there's a specific split, which I don't have in front of me, but we can get that to you. Importantly, and this is probably even more important than making that observation is that each successive week, the numbers coming out of Pfizer and then Moderna is on a week – one-week beat behind, Ed, as I understand it in terms of their authorization. Their ramp-up numbers are even steeper, and so I've used a range of 3 to 500,000 doses into New Jersey this month. I think that's a very realistic, I think potentially conservative, range. Again, the allocation will be – in that first wave, it'll be split between healthcare workers and long-term care. I would just say this: I'm not going to address the specifics of which hospitals are in this first round, but this is going to get to a much broader within only a matter of weeks, many more hospital systems, pharmacy chains. My guess is January, you're looking at large perhaps regional sites for distribution that are up. I'm getting a little ahead of myself, but that's a real possibility This is going to ramp up pretty dramatically. That's one and two.

The hospital outbreak did – would I be in favor of transparency around that? Yes, hundred percent.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: [0:44:30].

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, listen, we're making – we're actually working on this as we speak. I can't promise you the executive action, but Parimal and I were in a meeting just before coming here. He's been on the phone since then. That's something we're very seriously looking at. Folks have a right to know what's going on.

I don't want to put words in the President-Elect's mouth but both in the conversation on Saturday night as well as in conversations with him over the years and with his team members, they are all gateway all the time. Again, I don't want to put words in his mouth, but this is a huge priority for them. It's a huge priority for us, and we're looking – listen, we've been able to get good progress. I'm looking at you, Dante. We're going to move over here. We've been able to get good progress even with the Trump Administration on the Portal North Bridge, as an example. I'm very excited about the potential enormous step, quantum step we could take with the Biden Administration. Thank you for that.

Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. On the 74% noncompliance rate for working with contact tracers, to quote you, Governor, "Come on, man. Really?" I mean, in all seriousness, that's shocking. The message that you and the health department has been sending out about this is obviously not working. What's the frigging problem, to quote somebody else here? And perhaps can you rephrase the message that you want to get out to New Jersey residents on this? I mean, three out of four not cooperating with contact tracers. That just seems shocking.

On testing, could we review the total number of tests that we're doing on an average day? Are the rapid tests included in this daily data update? I believe the BinaxNOW, the Abbott Lab test, is not being counted. If not, why not? The Q Test, are we starting to get that yet, and is that counted in the total? Then finally on this issue,

could we compare the – we're way up now. We had 6,000 positives yesterday, but we're doing so much more testings, in some instances on some days four and five times as much testing as we were doing in the spring, so could you give us some perspective on this. Perhaps Ed could also comment on this, Governor.

Final question: nursing home cases along with everything else in New Jersey are up for COVID. Is this a concern, or is it just part of the general trend that we're seeing? The population in nursing homes is obviously the most vulnerable. What are we doing to prevent a big spike up in this area, and are you confident we won't have a similar kind of surge that we saw in the spring? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. On the first question, yeah, come on, man. It's unacceptable, and the number, frankly, shocked me as I went over it this morning in terms of the latest data. Completely unacceptable and there's no other – there's going to be a block of folks who are not going to – for whatever reason, have viewed this as a political – like wearing a mask, they're going to view this as some kind of invasion of privacy. I completely disagree with them, but there's some amount of folks who are not cooperating. I'm fearful we'll – that that block will be sturdy and I'm not sure how many that is, but it certainly isn't 70%. I think the huge bulk of the balance are folks who continue to believe that we're trying to uncover something that we're not trying to uncover. That's the evidence that I have, that they don't want to feel guilty themselves that they did something in their own home or that their kid hosted a party that they shouldn't have. It's just really, really frustrating

Do I have any good ideas as to how to get at it? You'd think when we talk about people who've died every day that that would get people's attention, including Pat's point, thank God, not dying but two healthy troopers getting sick from COVID. If you have any good ideas after the fact, I will take them.

Yeah, real quick on your testing, I mentioned today the testing – the positivity was based on just under 38,000 tests, and that was on December 3rd. The numbers have been bouncing high 30s into mid-50s, thousands a day. Those are PCR tests only. They do not include the BinaxNOW nor the Q Health tests. Judy and Ed and team are working feverishly to try to – we want to make sure the data is accurate. It's particularly challenging with the BinaxNOW because it's sort of a self-reporting reality. The Q Health syncs up automatically, but we want to include those in our numbers. And we are – I know Ed, and Judy, and team are actually keeping a shadow book, but you should assume those numbers are higher, so our testing numbers are even higher than what they are.

Ed, I would ask you – first of all, you asked me to compare it to the spring: night and day, which is why the total number of positives we care about but it's very hard to compare the total number of positives today to March/April/May. We had a fraction of the testing capacity then. Spot positivities were through the roof, 50-something percent at one point, a very small – like all of America, very small capacity then, a very big capacity now. The numbers that – the hard numbers are the ones that really do matter and that's the folks who are getting admitted to hospitals, who are in hospitals that are getting discharged, please God, in intensive care on ventilators.

Ed, here's a question for you. Dave did not ask it, but it's one that I know there's a lot of debate around. Let's assume we get to the point, sooner than later, and we're including the BinaxNOW and/or the Q Health tests. What's your guess on the impact on spot positivity? I'd create both sides of this argument Number one, I'll bet you one side suggests it's higher because if you're a school nurse, you're not – by definition, you're not testing the kid unless the kid has symptoms. On the other hand, as Parimal reminded me, you're probably not taking a PCR test, in some cases, unless you had a positive on the BinaxNOW or the Q Health test, so you could argue both ways. What's your gut tell you?

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I could argue both ways as well. I don't think it'll be dramatically different once we really settle in and are able to get all the antigen testing. As far as positivities, do have questions about getting all those reportings and – but I think the current positivity that we're seeing in PCR probably accurately reflects what's going on out there in the community.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, that's where I come out, that you could argue one side or the other. Your last question on long-term care, how concerned are we? We're very concerned, which is why Judy and Ed have been trying to wrestle together the quick turnaround, the BinaxNOW, the Q Health test that you know your answer in 15 or 20 minutes to actually test you at the door. Judy was on the phone with us earlier today, and they're sort of trial ballooning this, and they found in one location over a course of two days where they're

testing everybody coming in, so this is staff, loved ones, anyone coming in the building. They found six asymptomatic positives, and so that's going to be the key, whether or not we can get you at the door, put you off into the waiting room, 15 or 20 minutes turnaround, but that requires an enormous amount of testing capacity. Good news is per the questions earlier, the vaccines are coming here and they're going to be first and foremost healthcare workers and long-term care, so thank you.

John, welcome back. I didn't mean to make you wait, but I figured you had waited five or six months. You wouldn't be mad to wait a few more minutes. Good to have you back.

Reporter: Thank you. Speaking of waiting, vaccines – can you talk about – do you plan some kind of public information campaign to let people know who's getting vaccines, how it's being distributed? Who's monitoring – with the Pfizer, it's 21-day or 28-day in between each dose. Who's monitoring who gets the second dose and how that's worked out? You've said often about kicking the tires in the vaccine by the FDA. Have you done that? If you haven't, what are you looking for? What in this would give you pause to say hey, let's hold off on this?

On another Q1 testing, are you aware of this FBI-raided Infinity Diagnostics in Ventnor? Any details on that and if so, is the state doing anything to help people get retested that were apparently the victims of fraudulent tests there?

On marijuana, you announced the agreement on Friday. What specifically did you want in that agreement? What did you get? Also, that the Senate President is still saying he's going to go ahead and push for a Constitutional amendment to dedicate all revenue toward social justice issue. Any thoughts on that?

Finally, there's a lot of – New Jersey transit advocates are out there pushing for some reforms again and they're saying it's a conflict of interest for the DOT Commissioner, whose job is to be responsible for highways to handle – to be the top person at NJ Transit. Do you see any value in that argument?

Governor Phil Murphy: Was that your last question? John, for a minute there, I thought you were going to – you felt like you had a six-month free pass to just ask all the questions that you would've asked had you been here. Public information campaign, yes, in particular to reiterate – assuming it gets through all the approvals – that this thing is safe, that it does work, and you should feel confident taking that. I have said this already: I will have no qualms whatsoever about taking this. My only concern is I don't want to take it at the front of the line away from a healthcare worker or long-term care resident.

The monitoring of the 21 versus 28 days is done, I assume, Ed, by the proving entity. Is that correct?

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: It's correct, that all doses are also entered into the NJIIS, the state's immunization tracking system so that also works to track as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's part of the reason why we signed the executive order last week. The fault now is an opt-in into our database as opposed to if you were born before 1998 and opt out. You can still opt out when the public health emergency's over within 30 days, but we need everyone's data in.

Ed, you may want to just spend a second. We talked about kicking the tires based on everything we've seen. We like what we see on both Pfizer and Moderna but any other color you want to add to the New Jersey belt and suspenders?

Communicable Disease Service Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: I agree. Basically everything that we've seen so far, I have no reason to doubt that these vaccines won't be safe and effective. The problem we have, to some extent, is the same problems the FDA and the ACIP has is that the final data that's come through the process has not yet been shown. Yes, I'd like to see that data when it's available, but I very much trust those career scientists at the FDA and at the ACIP that they're looking at the same things that I'd be looking at and if they say that it's safe to go ahead – and we should be hearing that this week – I fully expect that I would agree.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would just – I don't want to put words in your mouth, but as compared to, say, maybe August or September when there was a lot of political noise around this discussion, that's literally gone to ground zero for the past couple of months and the professionals have been in charge of this, which is very gratifying.

I don't have a specific answer in terms of what we'll do, folks. Dan Bryan, let's follow up, and Parimal, with John and this Ventnor situation, but they rightfully were taken to task. This was a pinprick – a blood test which does not tell you whether or not you have the virus right now, even though it sounds like that's what they were claiming. I'm not sure I've got a particular recourse that I'm – that I can say definitively to the folks that did take those tests but let's get back to John on that.

Listen, we had a very constructive meeting on adult-use cannabis Friday afternoon. I asked the Senate President and the Speaker to come on over. They came with a spirit of really – of goodwill as I think we had as well. We pretty quickly got to a good place. I'll leave it at that, as I would normally do. I want to give Senator Nick Scutari a big shout-out. He wasn't in the room, but he was there in spirit, and he's been a great leader on this, again, the Senate President, Speaker. Regardless of the specifics of the Constitutional amendment or how we – how it is done, the direction – and then we discussed this as well. The direction that that heads is a direction we all like. How we get it done most effectively, I'll leave for now.

I'll tell you something. Anybody – and this is not directed at you, but anybody who is claiming that Diane Scaccetti is not the right person to not only be the DOT Commissioner but also the Chair of NJ Transit Board is not paying attention. She is an absolute game-changer. I deal with her on a lot of fronts. Pat and I deal with her usually in bad weather, which I'm happy to say. Now I'm going to say this: we'll be jinxed, but we haven't had that of late. She is an absolute star, and NJ Transit was literally wrecked over the eight years before we got here, literally wrecked, whether it's PTC, whether it's on-time performance, investment in capital as well as operating budgets, absence of a master plan at all, a capital plan. She has been a game-changer, again, both as a DOT Commissioner as well as the Chair of the NJ Transit Board. She is exactly where she need to be and I am thankful every single day for her service to our state.

So with that, Pat, I want to make sure I get this. I know one of our friends had this upside down yesterday, so I'm good, right? Again, God bless Luke Homeijer. Ed, thank you for being here and for your leadership, Pat. Same to you. Keep the faith, Jared, Parimal, Dan the rest of the team. Again, we'll be virtual tomorrow. We'll be with you unless you hear otherwise at 1 o'clock on Wednesday, probably virtual Thursday, and bear with us as to what we end up doing on Friday. Again, folks, help is on the way. It is real. We're now talking about a matter of days before we get a first shipment, so what does that tell me? Don't let your hair down. Don't be the last person who died in the war or the last person who got infected. Keep your guard up. It's going to take several months. Remember the analogy we used last week was not a light switch where we go all of a sudden from black to light or dark to light, but it's a dimmer that will continue to get lighter and lighter and lighter that begins very, very soon. Having said that, it's cold. We are indoors. The holiday season is right here; we're in the middle of it. You got to stay strong, folks, and if you stay strong, we can see the end zone. We will get there, God willing, and save as many lives as we collectively can. We'll be in a far, far different and better place as a state and as a nation in a very few short months. God bless.

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