

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Alongside me as usual to my right the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, to her right another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have you both. To my far left another person who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, but we're also joined today, and we welcome her back, by the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families, Christine Norbut Beyer. We also have Chief Counsel Parimal Garg and a real treat to have First Lady Tammy Murphy in the house.

Back to Christine. I've asked Christine to join us today as we know that numerous children and families continue to live under tremendous stress caused by the past 19 months. We know that even while COVID itself is a real threat to physical health driven by a highly transmissible virus, the pandemic has also set in motion myriad social factors that have greatly impacted many residents' mental health. These mental health challenges are impacting New Jerseyans of every age of every race, and in every socioeconomic group, and in every community, and we know, too, that these challenges are particularly jarring for our kids who in some cases may not only be more susceptible to social isolation or other factors and who are themselves going through a stressful period with their return to school during a time of a continued global pandemic but who may not also have the tools to combat what they are feeling.

The Department of Children and Families has seen a recent increase in the numbers of calls received by its Children's System of Care hotline. These calls are covering a whole host of mental health issues and triggers, but unsurprisingly, many of these calls are coming early in the morning from parents concerned with the

signs of stress their kids are exhibiting as they prepare for their school day. With Christine here with us, we want to make sure that every child and parent and every educator who also sees these impacts daily knows that help is available. Let's start with a simple truth. It is okay to not be okay. We have put together a new page on our COVID information hub with a wealth of mental health support resources for youth, for parents, and for educators. This all can be found at that website, covid19.nj.gov/youthhelp, covid19.nj.gov/youthhelp. Moreover, and as a whole, our administration has invested more than \$100 million into the Children's System of Care network. There are multiple resources available, and I've asked Christine to be here to talk us through all that the Department and its partners can provide. To you, Christine, and to your entire team, I thank you on behalf of all of us for all that you have done to help protect our kids and their families over the past 19 months and the job is not over, but it has been exceptionally well done, and again, thank you for being with us.

Moving on, let's get to today's numbers. We'll start with the latest vaccination totals and over the past several days, we've noticed an uptick in the number – bottom number of Pfizer shots for additional doses and boosters. This correlates with the start of booster eligibility for certain residents. Let's put this back up – this is from the other day – on the screen as a reminder that as of now, boosters are available for all Pfizer recipients who completed their initial two-shot course at least six months ago and who are ages 65 and over, individuals ages 18 and older who have underlying medical conditions which may make them more susceptible to the virus, and those – or whose employment situation may also put them at higher risk, including first responders and healthcare workers, educators and daycare employees, correctional facility workers, those whose jobs are along our public transit system, food and agricultural workers including grocery store employees, manufacturing workers, and correction workers. If you are eligible for a Pfizer booster, and again you've had to have received the Pfizer vaccine as your initial vaccination, you can find a vaccination site near you by going to covid19.nj.gov/finder. Again, covid19.nj.gov/finder.

Additionally, our Gloucester County megasite is now back up and running, this time at the Gloucester County public works complex in Clayton. We are working through the logistics to open two other sites, and we'll have information on those when it is final and available. I want to give Bob Damminger and his team in Gloucester County a shout-out They run that place incredibly well, and I want to thank them. We've worked closely with – and directly with county health officials and our healthcare networks to – no pun intended – boost capacity statewide.

Now back to the numbers. These are the new – newly reported positive test results. It's good to see the rate of transmission back below one, but let's all keep – work to keep it there. I should note that yesterday we crossed the threshold of one million positive PCR tests going back to March of 2020. That's roughly one in nine New Jerseyans. I don't think any one of us could've imagined hitting that number back 19 months ago, but here we are, and reaching it should be a reminder of the importance of not just getting vaccinated and reducing your overall chances of contracting the coronavirus but also the importance of continuing to keep up the practices that have so far gotten us through this pandemic including masking, keeping social distancing, and just using our common sense.

Additionally, we have an update on the number of cases traced to in-school and in-classroom activities. This update runs through this past Monday, September 27th. Today we are reporting a total of 39 outbreaks statewide amounting to a total of 219 cases, 37 among educators and other school staff, and 182 students. These outbreaks are in 38 communities across 16 counties. I want to make two footnotes to this. I should note that there is one outlier this week, and that is an outbreak in Passaic County that has impacted 50 students, but Judy, as far as I know, zero staff. This one outbreak accounts for 27% of all student cases, and secondly, as Judy may refer to as well, there's a lot going on right now in Toms River, and Judy and her team and trying – working with the local health folks to get more clarity on exactly the source of what appears to be a fairly large-scale outbreak in school, out of school, combination of each. Again, Judy may have more on that. We continue to work with all of our educational communities and local health partners to identify instances of in-school transmission to minimize the impact and keep our schools safe spaces for learning.

Going back to the numbers, here is yesterday's hospital data. These numbers have been holding pretty much steady over the past number of days across all metrics. We know hospitalizations is a trailing indicator of the virus's activities given the lag time between contracting the virus and the point where an individual feels they

need to enter a hospital, but seeing these number beginning to level off and even slowly decline over the past week or so is a positive indicator. Here are the newly confirmed deaths that we are reporting today with the heaviest of hearts, and now as is our practice, let's remember three more of those we have lost.

We'll start along the Jersey shore in Spring Lake, which was home for 63 years to this guy, Dr. Urie Parkhill. He passed away on January 19th. He would've turned 99 years old in April. An Illinois native, he was a member of our greatest generation. A graduate of the Fourth Infantry Regiment Parachute School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and an army small arms instructor, he eventually served in Europe at the Supreme Allied Headquarters for the allied expeditionary force, which was under the command of General Dwight David Eisenhower. He went to medical school after the war. Spending a year of residency at what is now Jersey Shore University Medical Center, he would return there six years later to become an attending surgeon and worked his way up to being vice president of medical staff. He was a member of the numerous medical societies, both professional and honorary. He was also a member of the Spring Lake Golf Club where he spent many of his retirement days with friends.

Urie was predeceased by his beloved wife of 68 years Mildred in 2018 and wouldn't you know it, she was a nurse, and also by a son John, who died at a young age of a heart attack. He is survived by his and Mildred's remaining children, Ann, Mary Pat, and Michael, and I had the great honor of speaking with Michael on Monday, and their families, including grandchildren, Becky, Margaret, Michelle, Kimi, Jack. He's also survived by John's children, his grandchildren, John, Gabrielle, and Victoria. Urie also leaves four great-grandchildren. We thank Urie for his service to our nation and for all he did for the health of the countless people he tended to throughout his career. May he be remembered fondly, and may God bless and watch over his memory and the family he leaves behind.

Next up, we remember a member of the family at the New Jersey Department of Labor, this guy Tim Mindek, who we lost two weeks ago on September 14th at the age of just 47. A resident right down the block of Hamilton right here in Mercer County, Tim spent 22 years with the Department's Division of Workers' Compensation, a constant presence who stood tall through myriad changes. He was a founding member of the division's technical support unit, a creator of the case tracking system, and one of the folks whose job it was to keep critical information networks up and running. He was not just respected by his colleagues for his expertise. He was loved by them for everything he brought to their lives. Tim was a talented artist who found beauty in pretty much everything he saw. He often carried a pencil to sketch whatever struck him whether it be wildlife on a walk or a classic car on the street. His greatest joy, though, came from his family, who he leaves behind. His wife Heather, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and his four children, Ariana, 17, Tamarya, 16, Isabel, 15, and Job, 12. Please keep them in your prayers as well. Tim, thank you for everything you did across more than two decades in service to the people of New Jersey and may God bless you and the family you leave behind.

Finally for this Wednesday we honor the life of Sea Girt's John Loosen. He passed away on February 1st at the age of 72. John was a decorated half-miler on the track at St. Augustine High School in New York City, and he turned down college track and field college scholarship offers to enlist in the army, and he served in Vietnam. A paratrooper and long-range reconnaissance patrol within the 101st airborne division, he was severely wounded in combat, and his injuries led to the amputation of his left leg. He was awarded the purple heart, bronze star, and combat infantry man badge, but John never let his injury slow him down. He got a degree in business from St. John's University and had a long career with the veteran's administration helping countless soldiers in his role as chief of prosthetics in the New York and New Jersey region, and he never forgot his track roots. John passed on his love of running to future generation as the head girls' track and cross-country coach right by us at St. John Vianney High School in Holmdel. He is forever remembered in the hall of fame at both St. John Vianney and St. Augustine.

John was active with and a leader of numerous organizations serving veterans, but as important as this calling was, he was at his happiest in the company of family and good friends, surrounded by good food and his two old English sheepdogs. John is survived by his wife Noreen, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and their three children, Elizabeth, Sean, and Katharine. His legacy will be carried on by his four grandchildren, Madison, Mikayla, Maren, and Morgan. We are thankful to John for a career of service to our nation and those who similarly gave of themselves. May God bless and watch over him and the family that he leaves behind. We remember every life that has been lost throughout this pandemic.

Let's switch gears if I can to recognize another small business that is open today thanks in part of the supports offered by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. Back in 2012, friends Jason or Jay Devino and Sam Chung on the right opened a Korean inspired taco stand on the Asbury Park Boardwalk called MOGO. Their idea took off, and today MOGO can be found on Cookman Avenue off the boardwalk and in downtown Asbury Park, but Jason and Sam also have a MOGO food truck and a presence at the Asbury Park Food Collective. Despite the depths of the pandemic, MOGO saw the greater need for food in the community, so they partnered with the EDA through the Sustain and Serve NJ Initiative and provided more than 18,500 meals to local non-profits which were delivered to families facing food insecurity. Through the EDA, Jay and Sam were also able to receive grant funding that allowed them to keep MOGO's lights on and to support their 30 staff members by keeping them on the payroll. Today MOGO is focused on being part of Asbury Park's continued revival and in bringing traditional Korean flavors to their customers both loyal and new. One taco at a time. I had the opportunity to check in with Jay and Sam on Monday and to thank them for their leadership in Asbury Park's tremendous small business and food community. Check them out. Their website eatmogo.com, eatmogo.com.

One final note from the Economic Development Authority, that the first round of supports for small businesses impacted by the recent floods is getting approvals today. That these first approvals under the Ida/Henri Business Assistance Program are being granted less than a month after the remnants Hurricane Ida flooded downtowns and wreaked havoc across most of New Jersey is a testament to the EDA's commitment to our small businesses. These won't be the only approvals as additional grant awards will be forthcoming as the EDA staff works to get assistance into the hands of deserving business owners. To Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan and his team, we say thank you. That is a bit of good news to end on. It is now my pleasure to turn things over to the woman on my left, the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families. Please help me welcome Christine Norbut Beyer.

Department of Children & Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer: Good afternoon, Governor and thank you for inviting me to participate in today's briefing and for your continued leadership during this difficult time in our state. As you mentioned in your remarks, the pandemic has certainly raised our collective awareness of and attentiveness to our own mental health and that of our children. To the parents watching today's briefing and as a parent myself, please know that we recognize the transition from children – for children back to pre-COVID routines isn't necessarily quick or easy. Getting adjusted to something as simple as waking up on time and taking the bus after not having to have done it for a year can be a struggle, and that transition can be further hindered and complicated by feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear.

From a child well-being standpoint, we knew that this was coming. I've spoken about it as a parallel epidemic, one of youth emotional health challenges. Knowing this was expected, however, doesn't make it easier when you watch your own child struggling. While the COVID-19 public health emergency has created new and unprecedented challenges to our safety net, we planned for this in the budget. Thanks to the Governor's support and that of the legislature, our provider network of youth behavioral health services has the resources, the skill, and the capacity to help youth and their families when it's needed. Our Children's System of Care provides a wide range of services to meet a wide range of behavioral health challenges. These services are based in the community, local, and convenient to families with many offering telehealth options.

As we near the end of the first month back in school for the 2021-22 academic year, we know that some children are having a hard time transitioning back to in-person education, and many are experiencing emotional and behavioral challenges. As the Governor reference, call volume to the Children's System of Care hotline for the first few weeks of September 2021 has increased over the same period from 2020. The greatest percentage of calls are being made by parents while we are seeing a slight decline in contacts from other caller types, such as healthcare professionals and law enforcement. Mobile response and stabilization services dispatch volume is at a level that we typically see in October rather than September. It's actually a 30% increase over usual demand in September. Again, as the Governor mentioned, we're receiving more calls in the morning with parents indicating an increase in school refusal or avoidant behavior. Typically we see this data trend in October focused more on challenges occurring during or after school hours or related to behavior in school.

The good news is that parents are reaching out or being connected to help. We know that many of the challenges being reported can likely be attributed to feelings of stress, anxiety, and grief caused by the pandemic. As the Governor said, it's okay not to be okay, but we want parents to know if they don't already that help is available and it's a phone call away. If your child is experiencing prolonged stress and anxiety, parents can call the New Jersey Children's System of Care at 1-877-652-7624 and ask for help, specifically some of the signs of more serious behavioral health challenges may include prolonged or recurring opposition and aggression, property damage and disrespect, feelings of anxiety or depression, a pattern or prolonged lying or fighting, stealing or substance use, or running away, or engaging in acts of self-harm.

In addition to our existing resources, we're excited to join with our partners in state government to announce a one-stop web tool for parents, for youth, and for educators to walk them through the resources available and de-stigmatize the need to seek help. If you're feeling overwhelmed, please know that you can ask for help. The 2NDFLOOR program provides options for youth to reach out themselves through phone, text message, or online messaging board. When they feel they need to connect with someone about their problems or worries. Tweens, teens, and young adults ages 10 to – sorry – 10 to 24 can call 888-222-2228 or visit 2ndfloor.org. You can also text NJ to 741741 to access the crisis text line. Again, services are available 24/7 and counselors are ready to assist you whenever you need. Together, we'll get through the crisis stronger than before. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Christine, thank you. Again, great work. In addition to those two ways to get help, covid19-nj.gov/youthhelp is a one stop shop. I'm proud particularly to say with the first lady here that we are along with 180 turning lives around the founders of the 2NDFLOOR, although we no longer are involved, but it's changed and saved an enormous amount of lives, so Christine thank you for everything you do and your team. Please help me welcome the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. As I have said during these briefings, vaccination is the most critical tool we have to fight this virus which has already had such an unprecedented impact on our state. More than one million positive PCR tests of COVID-19 have been reported in New Jersey since March 4, 2020. Unlike earlier in the pandemic when New Jersey got hit first and very hard, we now have an effective tool to reduce the spread of the virus in our state. The signs could not be clearer. Vaccines work. They are the path out of this pandemic. 83% of eligible New Jersey residents 12 years and older have received at least one dose and 60.1% of 12- to 17-year-olds have gotten a shot. Some counties are reaching higher rates than the state average. For example, in Hudson County, 82% of 12- to 17-year-olds have received at least one shot, and here in Mercer County, that rate is 73%. We must all take a concerted effort to get more young people vaccinated. Approximately 219 cases have been linked to 39 outbreaks in our schools. I urge parents to schedule an appointment for their children. As the Governor said, at one high school in Passaic County, where a large number of students are unvaccinated, there are 50 cases among students. That's nearly a quarter of student cases associated with school outbreaks.

As the Governor explained on Monday, these data track the number of outbreaks and cases which have been traced back to in-school and in-classroom activities. We are aware of additional cases among students and staff that are still under investigation. For example, in Toms River School District, they are reporting 218 confirmed cases among students and 33 cases among staff since the beginning of the school year, and they are reporting that 864 students are in quarantine. These cases are still being reviewed and the local health department is working with the school district to determine mitigation efforts. Again, high vaccination rates among those 12 to 17 years of age and school staff are vital to keeping our schools safe and open.

We know from the low percentage of breakthrough cases that the virus spreads faster and causes more severe disease among the unvaccinated. If we really focus on vaccination, whether it's the two-shot primary series, a third shot for the immunocompromised, or a booster shot, we can avoid the scenes that are playing out throughout the United States right now where shortages of staff with hospitals implementing crisis standards of care and hospital bed capacity waning because of the large number of unvaccinated individuals having severe disease and requiring hospitalization. Getting vaccinated is free and convenient with more than 1,600 vaccination sites across the state, including more than 1,000 which offer the Pfizer vaccine. Many have walk-in availability and evening hours. If you are having trouble locating a vaccination site near you, please call the DOH Vaccine Call Center at 1-855-568-0545 or visit covid19.nj.gov/finder.

More than 1.1 million residents who received their primary Pfizer series through the end of March are eligible today for their booster. That includes those 65 years and older, those with underlying medical conditions at high risk for severe COVID, and those who work in a job that places them at higher risk, including 650,000 healthcare workers, grocery store workers, public transit workers, education staff, including teachers and support staff, and daycare workers, first responders, including firefighters and police, transit workers, food and agricultural workers, and US postal service workers. The department is still awaiting guidance from the federal government on the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson boosters, so when we have that information, we will certainly share it with you. As a reminder, it is also important to protect yourself against the flu by getting the flu vaccine, which you can get at the same time as your COVID-19 vaccine.

Moving on to my daily report as the Governor shared the hospital reported 1,066 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children and at the state veteran's homes, there are no new cases among residents of the homes. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there is one new case at Ancora. The positivity as of September 25th in New Jersey is 6.1%: the northern part of the state reports 4.87%; the central part of the state, 6.96%; and the southern part of the state, 7.99%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe, get vaccinated to protect yourselves, our family, friends, and our children. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, a quick question and a – I want to underscore a point you made. The rate of transmission is now below 1, thankfully, at 0.97. Any idea what the standard is? Does it indicate we may be going a little bit lower?

Health Department Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I think it's 0.88 today.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, that's a good sign. Hopefully it stays that direction. Boosters, we're open for business, folks. Our infrastructure for distribution will be over the next 10 to 14 days, amped up, as we've indicated. Gloucester County leading the way as they've done. Again, if you're 65 and older – again, it has to be Pfizer, six months since your second shot. That's the price of admission, right? Sixty-five years or older, period, you're eligible. Eighteen old or older, if you've got some medical compromised medical situation, and eighteen years and older if you work in one of the industries that I listed and Judy listed. That's a lot of people who are eligible, so we need to get folks to get out there and get your boosters. We're going to continue to pound away on that.

We had a good call with – between the National Governors' Association, of which I'm vice-chair, and the White House yesterday. I made the point – and the White House and the NGA are going to work on this – we could use some real good messaging coming in over the top reminding everybody at a regular cadence of what I just said here, that – and what you've just said. We are open for business on boosters for a lot of people in this state. We need you to get out there and get them, so thank you for all.

Pat, any update? Good to have you, as always. Any update on FEMA? You and I had talked about another virtual town hall. The first one was very successful. You got a pretty special event coming up this weekend. The weather looks good. I hope it stays that way. Anything you got on any or all those topics?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Yes, since I know the first virtual town hall we did with regards to the Ida recovery efforts was good, so we are having another one October 4th at 5:15. That's this coming Monday at 5:15 to register for that. The website is bit.ly/idadowntownhall, all one word. I'll give it to you again: B-I-T-dot-L-Y-slash-idadowntownhall, and we're hoping as many New Jersey residents can sign up for that and have the opportunity to talk directly to the Governor, to Patrick Hornville who's the Federal Coordinating Officer, questions about SDA, individual assistance. Really phenomenal resource and opportunity to ask questions about your community and/or your own personal situation.

This morning, it was good to be back together again at the McTouchin Blue Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral. We hadn't had one of those in a while for obvious reasons. Bishop Checchio – it was just a beautiful service to have women and men in law enforcement at that cathedral and to see the kids associated with that Catholic school, all in masks, by the way. I could tell that they were smiling behind them, from kindergartners on up as they clapped as the officers went down the street. It was pretty special.

Yes, this coming weekend as we get into this last quarter of 2021, we will be at the Hard Rock celebrating our 100th anniversary with a gala. A lot of history in our past 100 years with the city of Atlantic City. We had our 50th anniversary at the Traymore, which is no longer in existence, but a cool way to reconnect and always stay connected with Atlantic City, which is a special place for the state police and certainly for the state of New Jersey.

That's all I have, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Any truth to the rumor that Joe Fiordaliso hosted the 50th at the Traymore?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Possible.

Governor Phil Murphy: Possible. Actually Tammy and I will be with y'all on Saturday night at the front-end of that. We're very excited. Again, bit.ly/idadtownhall, Monday, 5:15. We'll probably have at least one member of our federal delegation with us as well. Please give Bishop Checchio, who's a good friend and a great leader, my best. With two other quick points with Tammy here, I want to reiterate that the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund continues to do extraordinary work, njprf.org.

Judy, I meant to say one other comment. Back to your comments about Hudson and Mercer and their great work with youth, remember early on folks were saying gosh, Hudson and Mercer were examples of folks – they said they weren't punching at the weight they wanted to. The fact of the matter is this is a long game, and I think it's a really special testament to both of those counties and their leadership, Tom DeGise Geese in Hudson, Brian Hughes in Mercer, that they're putting those sorts of numbers up. It's very impressive.

Again, back to Christine, covid19.nj.gov/youthhelp, please go there for any mental health issues as it relates to parents, kids, educators.

We will be – Jameel's got the mic. We're going to start over here with Matt. We're going to stay in the cadence that we've been in, at least for the next couple of weeks, which is a Monday/Friday here live. If that changes, some combination of Alex Altman or Dan Bryant or others will get ahold of you.

Q&A Section

With that, Matt, welcome.

Matt Arco, NJ.com: Good afternoon, Governor. You mentioned the outliers in reporting school data, and we know that there are hundreds of cases among students and staff in Toms River where the dashboard doesn't show a single outbreak or single case in Ocean City. We continue to see similar examples in other parts of the state and not just the ones you mentioned today. Candidly, what is the value of this incomplete information and how can the state be more transparent on this important information? I think as Dr. Tan said on Monday, it's not just the schools and the parents; it's also the community that probably want to know this information.

Couple of quick ones from Brenda Flanagan. Do you have any update on Afghan evacuees at the joint base? How are they now? Excuse me, how many are they are now? Have any been resettled yet and if so, where? More than 500 people are expected to settle in New Jersey. Is that still possible in light of housing shortages following Ida?

Governor Phil Murphy: On – I'll start here and Judy and Tina should come in. We believe strongly that the data is of value, but we also are of the strong practice and opinion that we're not going to post data that we're not completely 100% confident in. Therefore, we're going to be better to be safe than sorry. Toms River in particular, there are a few outliers, as you rightfully point out. Toms River is a significantly sized one, and that's one we want to get working with the local health authorities. We want to get it as right as we can. By the very fact that we're talking about it, we want to make sure folks know that we're aware and that we are doing everything we can. I'll let Judy and/or Tina come back on that, but the information has value but we also are not going to put incomplete information up.

I think we owe – I don't know; I've lost Dan. I'm not sure where he is but Alex, I think we owe an Afghan refugee update in a more comprehensive way. There are many thousands, and I think it's – right now in the 8- to 9,000 range. The numbers are not going up any longer, and I would expect they would not go up any longer. The numbers of resettlement – I think it's been made public by the Department of Homeland Security, was in

the 5 to 600 range. I think there's been very little progress on that actually happening yet, but I think we'll come back to you if we can either offline or maybe at this table but at some point soon to give a comprehensive update, if I could ask Alex. Again, this is a federal operation with our strong partnership and assistance. Judy and her team have been extremely closely involved working with the Department of Homeland Security at the federal level, obviously the Defense Department, and the leadership at the joint base.

Any reaction to the question of value of the information, anything you want to add, either of you? You good? Okay, we'll leave it at that.

Dave, this is an unusual spot to have you. You can thank Tammy for evicting you that you're second up to bat here.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Yes, Governor. Thank you. We were not holding Tammy Murphy responsible. Matt and I will be filing a formal complaint with the Attorney General's office. I know there's been some talk already this morning or this afternoon, Governor, about all of these different cases in the schools. Apparently the first report from Toms River was way overblown. They're not saying 1100 now, but it's more like 217, I believe, but it's still a lot. The Toms River schools' officials are saying this is because of the excessive heat at the beginning of September, but they didn't go back to full-time masking until, I believe, September the 20th. Does this raise questions? Are you concerned that some school districts may be using this whole business with the excessive heat as an excuse or just getting lax with this whole issue? What, if anything, can you do about it? I know to this point, we've talked about they've got to make the call and we got to trust them. If we see this accelerating trend continuing with more schools reporting outbreaks, more kids becoming either quarantined or positive for COVID, are we going to get to a point, do you think, where we may have to go to remote learning? I know you've not been thrilled with that idea before, Governor, but are we going to reach a point where that's going to be something that we have to do?

Will all state offices open by October 8th as originally discussed and would that include the satellite unemployment offices in each county? We've discussed previously that some people are more comfortable going in person versus doing it online. Christine, could you flush out the issues of – I know you mentioned a couple things – what parents are calling about, the biggest issues that they're dealing with with their kids?

Governor, especially today, you and Judy have been plugging booster shots. Initially the concern was there would be a supply/demand imbalance. We wouldn't be able to get to everybody right away. Are we seeing the opposite situation where booster shots are being available but people are not making appointments? I know we checked yesterday and all over the state, appointments were wide open at a number of locations. If this is, in fact, what you understand is happening, is this concerning? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dave. I will make some comments and ask both Christine and Judy to weigh in. On the Toms River specific case, bear with us because we're still trying to get our arms around it working with the local health authorities. Any kid who's sick we need to keep in our prayers regardless of whether or not folks – districts were or were not playing fast and loose with masking policies. Most importantly, please God, these precious little kids get well and get well fast. Again, these are not specific to Toms River, but the evidence is overwhelming that masking – and you saw this the other day. The CDC, the study in Arizona, three and a half more likely to stay safe and healthy if you're wearing – by the way, it brings us no joy to require this, but it is quite clear it's needed and it keeps kids and the educators and staff healthy. We're going to stay on top of that. Again, those comments are general, not specific to Toms River because I don't want to give half information here.

Before I continue, Alex reminds me that I misspoke and said Monday and Friday. I meant Monday and Wednesday. We're going to stay with the same cadence next week of Monday and Wednesday at 1 o'clock.

Remote learning, back to the educational, that is a last resort. We just don't – the learning loss, we know, is overwhelming. The mental health impacts we know were overwhelming. We do that only as a last resort because we believe – again, the great news is we have – the bad news is we have over 600 districts; the good news is we have over 600 districts. We're able to make moves depending, as Tina said the other day, what it looks like in that community that say, a New York City, cannot do. I'll invite Judy and Tina to come in behind – on anything on that.

You said October 8th; I believe state offices, it's October 18, not the 8th. Will it include the regional unemployment offices as well?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: October 18th is the date by which all state workers will be working in person, but I'll defer to the MVC on specific locations.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you on that. By the way, many are already there. That's the latest by which date. I'll come back to Christine in a second. I think the way you framed your question on boosters is accurate. We do not have enough demand right now relative to who's eligible. We have more supply than demand, and that's got to change. It needs to change. The CDC would not have recommended this unless it felt strongly that this was the right public health step to take, which is why I raised with the White House, as I mentioned yesterday, we need help. We're going to be working on this, but we need over the top national help that would impact us clearly with the messaging as to who's eligible and why you need to do this and why it makes sense. Do you concur with that, Madam Commissioner?

Christine – actually, before we go to Christine, anything else you'd say on the schools front? Tina, we got to get your money's worth here, please.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: It's definitely our goal in public health to keep the schools open as well and to keep children in school the whole host of reasons that have been emphasized again and again on these pressers. It's a real testament to our school nurses, to our local health departments that when they do identify cases in schools that they work really diligently in terms of identifying contacts and isolating and doing what we've typically done.

Just wanted to make a plug to try to help the school nurses and local health departments, that it's really important as parents to please cooperate. Please have your students cooperate with the school nurses, with the local health departments, because their goal is not to try to keep people out. Their goal is to try to identify where there might be some risks. There is some flexibility in terms of identifying options for how to implement different mitigation measures within these schools that don't necessarily have to require tons of kids being quarantined. Please, encourage parents. Students, please cooperate with your school nurses. Cooperate with your local health departments, because that makes everything much easier.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well said. Judy, you good? Christine, what sorts of issues are coming in on the phone?

Department of Children & Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer: As we see an uptick in the calls, we start digging into our data to see if there's any patterns or things that we need to be addressing that we're not. We are seeing greater call volume in the morning, a lot more mobile response dispatches out to homes at that time of the morning. It's something that has not happened to this extreme before. The specific reasons why that's happening, I don't have answers on that. I can tell you that we do know that mornings and dinnertime are high activity times in homes, and so there's a lot more stress when people are trying to get their kids up and out the door to get on the bus or as they're eating breakfast. I think a lot of families have not been in that routine for a long time because of the remote learning. Now we are seeing increases in anxiety and depression in young people. Some of that I think we can attribute to them having been home in isolation. Now having them to try and get back into school and restart those patterns – I think we're just seeing some challenges.

Governor Phil Murphy: I wonder if we could, Alex, put the slide back up that had some of the signs that Christine talked to. Can you all find that? Just everyone take a quick look at this list here. This is in the vein of a kid themselves, a parent, an educator may not know for sure that there is a mental health source issue with a child, but this behavior, Christine, can give them a sense as to a reason to raise their hand and make a call.

Department of Children & Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer: That's right, and I think what's important also is when we're thinking about what's on this list here that it's prolonged, that it becomes a pattern. We're not talking about children who have a difficult time getting up one morning or just tired and they don't want to – they were up late the night before, or even that parents have a conflict. Some kids don't like to get up and get on the bus early, but if it's prolonged, if you're seeing significant changes in your child's

behavior, you're starting to believe that maybe they're lying more, they're fighting, they're having more conflicts with peers or with siblings, starting to just do things that would be out of character or extending for long periods of time.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well said. Thank you for asking. We go back to the base slide. Joey, good afternoon.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. Really quickly before my main questions, I just want a clarification. You said 1 million positive PCR tests means that 1 in 9 New Jerseyans has gotten COVID. Does that mean that the positive PCR positive test number doesn't include people who tested positive multiple times, like who got COVID multiple times or tested positive multiple times during one bout? Do you happen to have that?

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you, but I think it probably does include that. We'll come back to you.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Okay, cool.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: So then longer questions, you signed a ballot question this summer legalizing college sports betting. A poll this morning showed it narrowly losing. What is your current stance on that question and do you plan on campaigning for or against it at all?

Governor Phil Murphy: The poll this morning said what?

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: It showed it narrowly losing like 45 to 40, the ballot question With early voting fast approaching, are all the proper systems, workers, and logistics in place? Do you have complete confidence that early voting will work? Finally, I'm going to press you on something I asked you yesterday. How firm is your pledge against new taxes? If a bill were to come to your desk full of policies you support but includes a tax increase, would you sign it? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I have no insight on the college sports betting poll. Parimal's a big gambler. He may.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Just a quick clarification; that question went directly on the ballot. The Governor didn't have to sign it because it was done through a legislative resolution.

Governor Phil Murphy: But no insight on that. Early voting, I think we feel – Secretary of State Tahesha Way, the 21 county clerks, our respective teams – feel good. It starts on October 23rd. This is a big thing for New Jersey. I'm glad you asked it because this is the first time we've ever had it, nine straight days, October 23rd through the 31st. Parimal, anything you want to add to that? You good? Okay.

Yeah, I'll leave [inaudible 50:01] what I said last night where I left it, and it's not the first time. I don't think I had used the word pledge before, because that's the way it was asked, but I said we're done with new taxes. What I didn't say last night is I hope taxes go down. Not only do I pledge no new taxes; I want them to go down. One big example is getting the darn cap on the salt deduction lifted, which we will continue to fight until we get it lifted. Thank you.

On the poll front, we'll come back to you. We may want to do that – that's another update that we may want to do for folks as well. I think a quick sense of where things stand I think would be good because we want to get – I don't care what party you're in; I don't care who you vote for. Getting as many people enthused about that October 23rd date is a good thing for democracy. Thank you.

Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon, Governor. For Dr. Tan and Commissioner Persichilli, so do you not have any evidence that the outbreak in Toms River was caused by the lack of masking? Do you just not know, or is there no evidence to support that as of yet? How many schools are affected by all these cases? Are all the cases at one school or another? Commissioner, I'll ask you, do you believe that that district used the excessive heat exemption in good faith, or do you believe they were trying to find a loophole around your rules?

For Commissioner Beyer, I'd like to know where you come down on whether or not masks affect social development in children. Do you believe it's appropriate to mask two year olds like Governor Murphy's order for daycares?

For you, Governor, I have an unemployment question. I talked to DJ Brendon O'Neil. He was doing pretty well before the pandemic; obviously things got shut down once the pandemic hit. When he applied for unemployment, he was classified as a gig worker and got a \$250 per week benefit. Is this an issue? Is this something that has happened to other gig workers, because that was a fairly small amount for him, and it was really difficult for him to get by. He wants to know is there any compensation for folks like him, folks who tried to work during the pandemic, worked when they could? You announced the Turn and Earn program earlier this week. Is there going to be any sort of benefit for employees or employers for folks who kept working through the pandemic as opposed to were laid off or not entering the workforce?

Then finally, I just want to ask you – you said that you're not going to raise taxes. You made that pledge during the debate. You said you want to lower taxes. What are you doing right now to lower taxes in New Jersey?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think, Judy, with your blessing, we're still trying to get to the ground in the Toms River experience. I want to defer on that. I don't want to just willy-nilly call – the most important things here, it sounds like there are a bunch of kids who are sick, so that's – most importantly, let's get them healthy. Keep them in your prayers. We know masking has a big impact on the general public health reality, but I don't – we – I don't think we have any evidence on any of the questions you asked, whether it was – yet; I should say yet. I don't want to – I think it would be wrong of us to get into a half-baked discussion. You okay with that? Let's come back to you, Alex. I promise you – obviously this is a big school district, and it's something that we're very focused on, all of us, including yours truly.

I'll let – Christine will bat clean-up again, but I'll bet you masking probably is part of this. It's a new thing for all of us, but that doesn't mean we can stop doing it if we know it's going to keep people healthy and alive, but I'll let Christine answer that.

I think what I'd like to do is get his details. I'm going to ask that Rob Asaro-Angelo – if he's comfortable giving it to our team, because I don't want to make a blanket statement that may or may not be applicable to him. It sounds like he may've been classified as a gig worker when in fact he wasn't, and the compensation benefit he got was a lot less than it would've been otherwise. With your blessing, I'd like to follow up on the specifics of that.

Listen, if you are right now a – this is going to sound like well, of course it's the case, but it wasn't the case in the prior Administration. I don't say this – this is not about politics; this is a fact. The lower 40% income earners in this state now pay a lower tax rate than the upper portion of taxpayers pay in this state. That was not the case before we got here. If you're a working family, you're paying less across the board in income taxes, for childcare, for healthcare, for college. You're not paying anymore for NJ Transit. We've increased the earned income tax credit. We've put a lot into property tax relief. I'd like to see more go into that. We have fully funded or we're in the process of fully funding the school funding formula. That's a direct impact on your property taxes, 63% on average of your property tax bill. The so-called millionaire's tax allowed us to take money and put it directly – either directly into people's pockets or to find more resources, for example, to fund school funding formula more fully. We want to do all of what I've just said but more so. The key will be to continue to grow the economy. The more we grow the economy, the more we can keep the state right-sized. We still, as I sit here today, have fewer employees than the day I put my hand on the Bible. Run the place lean and responsibly and grow the economy. That's the formula for our ability to have more latitude to deliver more tax relief to the middle class.

Christine, masks? I assume it's got to be part of it, right? Wouldn't you think?

Department of Children & Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer: Yeah, I mean, I think there are many young people who also want to wear a mask for their protection. When we talk about stress and anxiety, it's not just about social isolation or being isolated from peers or having their routines disrupted. It's also fear of contracting a virus. Many of our young people in the state have lost family members, lost friends to the virus. I think for as many young people as maybe don't want to wear a mask, there are just as many who do, maybe more. I can speak from my own 15 year old. He wears a mask at times when no one else in

our house does when we go out different places. He is vaccinated, but that's what he chooses. I think that we have to treat our young people – that they do have a mind and they need to be – they know what's right for them, what makes them comfortable. I think it's on both sides, wearing it or not, impacts their mental health.

Then you asked a question also about masking two year olds. I would say I appreciate the question because I do think it's an important topic. We're following CDC recommendations. Children under the age of 12 cannot be vaccinated in the state; we know that. We need to use the tools that are available to us to help mitigate spread, to help protect those children and the teachers and their family members, because they're coming in and out of the schools. We have been communicating with the childcare providers across the state and with the various trade organizations, answering questions that they have, working to reduce the stress that is related to enforcement. We're asking our childcare providers to handle masking the way that they do all other things with children, that it's age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate, and keeping it positive. In some ways, it's like managing a toddler who refuses to wear pants or a child who keeps wanting to take their diaper off. It's reinforcing that but not being forceful and not being punitive. It's not what we're looking to do. It's not okay for centers to completely ignore the directive but at the same time, we know there are challenges with masking two year olds or toddlers. We're doing everything we can to be able to have them follow the directive, but also we do think it keeps them and their family safe.

Governor Phil Murphy: Alex, I don't know if it was you, but in our pre-discussion, one of the mothers in our discussion said my kid – I can't keep them to keep their shoes on, so we know this is another item on that list. Thank you for that.

Daniel, you're going to close us out.

Daniel Munoz, NJ BIZ: Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Daniel Munoz, NJ BIZ : With the wage subsidies, which industries are you expecting people to enter as a result of what the Return and Earn that is? We've seen lackluster response from a lot of the industries, retail, restaurant, hotel, with bonuses so far. How would just more cash draw more people into the sectors? On Monday you mentioned this example of – I'm quoting you – people who are now – right now washing dishes for \$12 an hour who are saying wait a minute. I can go down the street and get 18 bucks an hour. Would the restaurant in this case still be suffering the labor shortage? It seems like jobs that people don't want to fill depend on a steady pool of the lower paying menial labor. How does the Return and Earn address that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Daniel, could you get the microphone closer to Daniel?

Daniel Munoz, NJ BIZ: Okay, do you need me to repeat anything? Regarding your no new taxes promise at the debate yesterday, how can you be certain nothing will happen in these next four years that will require a tax increase, some kind of natural disaster or another pandemic? Lastly with the \$109 million tax break that was awarded – the announcement came out earlier today. Is it appropriate to announce such massive tax break? It seems like these kinds of transactions were very routinely criticized? Wonder from [inaudible 51:50] what the task force that you put together That's it. thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Daniel. Good seeing you last night, and many of you, in fact, last night. I'll be brief Which industries? To be determined. We think cash on the barrel alone would have a lesser impact than the incentive to add a workforce development upskill training element to the package, which is why we're going to – which is why we like this model. We're also – I use the word pilot. We're going to see how this works. We want to make sure that we don't overshoot this and think it's going to have a much bigger impact than it does. I'd rather see proof of concept before we get – before we open this up at a larger level. I'll leave aside which industries, but I would hope it's overwhelmingly – by definition it will be, but this is a small business writ large, by definition a hundred or fewer employees.

You're absolutely right; that dishwasher who says that and leaves their job without having that next job but with a confidence that the market will bear a higher wage and maybe a higher skill, higher value-added skill to that job. That creates a shortage, without a question. The question is can we – I believe this works its way

out over time. I've said that for – since the beginning of the recovery that we saw in earnest in the late Spring. We knew this was going to happen. The seasonal piece of it added an extra element of challenge, but I believe ultimately we get through this. Let's see how this program goes.

Nothing new to add on the no new taxes. It is what I said last night and what I have been saying. We're done with that. That shows – that should show a confidence that we have really bright days in front of us. Very big deal announcement related to that, your last question. I'm going to have a lot more to say about that tomorrow, so bear with me.

On behalf of all of us, Judy and Tina, thank you, as always, Pat, as always. Christine, it was a real treat to have you here. Parimal, Alex, Jameel, everybody, well done. Again, I misspoke earlier We'll be back with you Monday and Wednesday unless you hear otherwise. I think we'll keep it that way. Bear with us as we run some of these school district cases to the ground to make sure we get this exactly right. We do know what works.

The tragedy of a year and a half ago was this thing came out of nowhere and clobbered the world, including New Jersey. The tragedy was we had no playbook. We were scrambling to develop that playbook each and every minute of every day. The tragedy of someone getting sick today or God forbid, passing is a different one. We have the playbook. We know exactly what works. We know that vaccinations work. We now know that under the circumstances, if you're eligible, boosters work. We know that face masks in schools work. We know that face masks on planes, trains, buses, hospitals, long-term care, other vulnerable settings work. We know that if you're inside and particularly if you're tightly packed – I'm not talking about having dinner with your husband or wife at your table. I'm talking about being packed in on each other, and you're not confident that you know the vaccination status of the people that you're around.

You have, I think, two choices, Judy and Tina. One is put one of these on or two, leave and do it outside. We still have – we talked – a number of questions about the heat carve-out for schools. Listen, we just hope everyone's doing the right thing and when folks did that, it was legitimate. We want to believe that it was legitimate. This is both good news and bad news. Mother Nature is moving on here. We're going to have very few, if any more, heat carve-out days in calendar 2021. My bigger concern, Judy and Tina, is going to be we're now all going to go back inside. That's a concern that we still have in our – the numbers are beginning to look better, but we're also still largely outside in life, and that's going to change in the next number of weeks.

To the millions of you who have and continue to do the right thing, we bow down in respect and thanks. In the meantime, God bless y'all.

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