

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 5th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

04/5/2021



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody. I am joined by the woman on my right 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 left, a guy who needs no introduction as well, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Jared Maples, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Chief Counsel, Parimal Garg, a cast of thousands. Thank you very much for your patience folks in allowing us to start a little bit later today. I attended the incredibly moving memorial for Middlesex County Commissioner Kenny Armwood in Piscataway, and it was an incredible tribute to an incredible guy, so God rest his soul.

I believe, if I'm not mistaken, the Mets finally start their season tonight in Philadelphia, so we have most of New Jersey other than the Yankee fans focused on that one, so we wish the Mets well in the north and the Phillies well in the south. I hope everybody had a nice Easter weekend and had the chance to get outside to enjoy the good weather. As the weather continues to warm, we can look to more outside activities where we know we can gather more safely. Today, Judy, marks the beginning of National Public Health Week, so there. We salute the ongoing efforts of all who work in the public health space to ensure the health and safety of us all from our local health officers to the men and women in our healthcare system, their efforts have never been so needed or appreciated, and that includes our state health colleagues, two of whom are to my right.

Today's vaccine eligibility expands with individuals in the following groups. You can see on the slide. I don't think I need to read this. Now eligible to make appointments and get vaccinated. The biggest move on that chessboard is 55 and up. I'm somewhat self-interested because that now includes me and my wife, so we're going to be pursuing. I think a even bigger piece of news, which we're breaking today, is we are also going to make our most aggressive push yet to meet our vaccination goals, and I'm announcing that effective two weeks from today, so this is April 19th, all New Jerseyans age 16 and over will be eligible for vaccination. That's about 12 days ahead of our initial target that had been May 1st, but given the trajectory we are on, we believe this is the right time to put our program into higher gear. Before we flip off of this, again, I want to remind everyone of an analogy that someone had given to me when you board the airplane. We're not suggesting that everyone who wants one has got one, but we want to make sure we continue these overlapping waves, and we believe we can responsibly move that date up from May 1st to April 19th and at that point make this available to anyone who – anyone 16 and over.

To track our ongoing progress, we also have a new vaccine tracker live on our information hub at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine, which as of last look – and this is a couple of hours stale – before we headed over here was counting a total of 1,796,798 fully vaccinated New Jerseyans. That is 38% of our goal of 4.7 million fully vaccinated adults by the end of June. This is the number that we'll be reporting to you every day going forward. Yes, we still on the one hand have roughly three million people to go to meet our initial goal, but here are a couple of numbers to put our progress in better perspective, which, again, allows us to take the step that we're announcing today. Two months ago today on February 5th, we reported roughly 180,000 fully vaccinated individuals. One month later or one month ago today on March 5th, we reported 789,500 or that's nearly 610,000 in one month. Over the past month, more than one million people have received their second dose of either Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or their single shot from Johnson & Johnson and are now fully vaccinated. Not only are we getting more shots in arms on a daily basis, but we have made the vaccines more accessible even with the ongoing supply/demand challenge, and it continues. We know that.

We're proud to report that between all of our many points of vaccine distribution, 98.7% of all New Jersey residents live within five miles of where they can be vaccinated. I got asked on *Ask the Governor* last week, I think, by someone who asked me about rural residents, which I thought was a very fair question, because we've got some parts of the state in the northwest and in the very south where the density – we're the densest state in the nation for population, but you'd never know it if you were in some of those counties, and the fact that we're within 98% of all New Jerseyans are within five miles I think is a great data point. We want to get that to a hundred, obviously. Our goal is to ensure even greater access. Switching from rural now into our urban areas and to have vaccination centers within a 15-minute walk of all residents, and we continue to work toward that goal. Again, that's for our urban communities. As I've said many times before, our goal is to have the most accessible and equitable vaccine program in the nation, and I am proud that we are delivering on that promise.

Today, more news, Judy. The Department of Health is updating its travel and quarantine guidelines to reflect the new recommendations from the CDC. New Jersey's no longer advising fully vaccinating individuals who travel domestically to self-quarantine after their trip or to get tested before or after travel. The federal requirement for testing upon return to the United States following international air travel stands. Judy will speak to this in greater detail, but as we see, our tracker increase daily with the number of fully vaccinated New Jerseyans, it will mean many more degrees of freedom.

Now let's go ahead and look at the rest of today's numbers. As our schools begin returning to instruction time today following their respective spring breaks, some 123,673 students across 156 schools or districts are reopening for full-time in-person instruction. Another almost 750,000 are in 495 schools or districts currently working on a hybrid schedule that has students and educators in their classrooms at least one day a week. 42 districts remain on a combination of all in-person, hybrid, and all-remote across all buildings, and this impacts some almost 122,000. Just under 362,000 students in 118 schools or districts remain in an all-remote learning pattern.

Since we last looked at these numbers 12 days ago, there has been some fluctuation between categories, but we are seeing definite movement as we return from spring break to more students going back to full-time in-person instruction, and I want to give a big shout-out, a particular shout-out, to Newark mayor Ras Baraka, Newark Superintendent of Schools Roger Leon, and Newark Teacher's Union President John Abeigon on their collaborative efforts that will see the city's schools reopen for a hybrid schedule next Monday, a week from today, on April 12th. Needless to say, that will move a lot of numbers in a meaningful way because that's our state's largest school district.

As we look to our case count today, we are reporting an additional 2,984 positives, either PCR or presumed positive antigens. For the 49,335 PCR tests recorded last Thursday, the positivity rate was 9.14%. Still too high. Rate of transmission today is 1.07, down a hair, Judy, over the past couple of days. It had been at 1.08 I think for four or five days in a row there. In our hospitals' last night's census had a total of 2,292. 2,182 were known COVID positive. Our intensive care units were treating a total of 454 patients, and 233 of those were on ventilators. Throughout the day yesterday, 238 live individuals were discharged from our hospitals, yet 268 COVID positive patients were admitted, and as you can see, our hospitals reported not yet confirmed 19 in-hospital deaths.

When we were last together on Wednesday, we ran through the four-month models for moderate and high cases – high case scenarios. In response to a question, I wanted to spend a brief moment looking at our best-case scenario. Under the Department of Health's best-case scenario, we are assuming everything we need to work in our favor does just that. We would want to see an 85% confirmation rate among the persons under investigation in our hospitals. We'd want to assume a similar rate of new cases coming out of major holiday weekends like the one that just passed that we had seen from prior holiday weekends, and we want to see a 95% efficacy rate among all vaccines against variants in an assumption that our vaccination efforts begin to take a firm hold on keeping down spread. Using these assumptions, this is the graph we would anticipate with all four key factors: reported cases, hospitalizations, ICU counts, and ventilator use remaining relatively steady for the next few weeks until April 18th and then falling consistently throughout the summer. Please God, let's hope that's what we get.

Now let's put these numbers from all three scenarios side by side by side. Here you can see what that looks like. Under the best-case, the high number of daily reported cases would be 4,344 as opposed to – as you can see – 5,445 moderate-, over 8,000 in the worst-case. Likewise, total hospitalizations you can see what each of these cases look like. In our worst-case outlook, by the way, our hospitalizations don't peak until mid-May, and as you can see, they peak at a much higher rate. ICU numbers in our best-case scenario, you can see what that looks like compared to the moderate- and worst-case. Finally, ventilator use, and you can see across all three scenarios. Certainly, we are not going to prepare ourselves for the best-case scenario. We hope for the best but prepare for the worst. We're going to continue to keep ourselves on a footing that ensures that if in fact the worst does emerge over the coming weeks that we are fully prepared.

However, those preparations do not mean in any sense that we think we can't push ourselves down to the best-case scenario. We would love nothing more than to be over-prepared. To do that will require all of us to redouble our efforts when it comes to overcoming our pandemic fatigue, and I get it. We are all quite tired after a year of social distancing and face masks. You are. Trust me, so are we. Never forget, as we mentioned last Wednesday, the power to end this pandemic rests on our collective shoulders, all nine million of us. The decisions each of you and we make as individuals to get vaccinated, to properly wear a mask, to stay home when not feeling well, to cooperate with contact tracers, these individual decisions protect you, your family, and our community.

If we can do all of these things, we can get our state closer to this best-case model on the left, which would also mean that we can get back to increasing business and gathering capacities. As I said Wednesday, we have already outperformed our models and crushed the curves twice before so, folks, let's do it a third and hopefully final time. If we do these, we will also save countless more lives and to drive home the need for us to do that today we must report with the heaviest of hearts another 15 confirmed deaths due to COVID-19 complications, and let's do as we do every day. Let's take a minute to remember three more of those we have recently lost.

We'll begin with two of them in one family, Avis and Eva Byfield. They were mother and daughter and lived together in Dover in Morris County. They passed away within two weeks of each other. Eva was the first to be taken away from the virus – from us by the virus on December 1st and at the age of just 32 years old. Avis, again on the left, an immigrant from Jamaica worked at Howmet Aerospace, and she would lose her battle from COVID-19 on December 15, and she was just 59 years old. They leave behind their beloved husband and father Winston Byfield, Sr. Also surviving them are Avis's daughter and Eva's sister Hephzibah, and I had the great honor of speaking with Hephzibah Thursday of last week, and you can only imagine what that family is going through. They also leave behind respectively son and brother, Winston, Jr. Avis leaves behind as well her sister and two brothers, Eva's aunt and uncles, Amanda, Cecil, and Noel Hudson. Not only is it a tragedy to lose a mother and daughter, that both were so young, we need to remember that this virus does not care about age or anything else. Our hearts are with the Byfield family and their friends, and may God bless both Avis and Eva.

Today we also remember Benn Meistrich, and that's Benn on the left who spent his legal career fighting to protect the rights of others and was a long-time staff attorney with the New Jersey division of civil rights. Benn was just 61 years old. He grew up in Paramus and earned his first degree in business at Syracuse University, and after working corporate offices and owning his own commercial sign business, he chose to pursue a law degree at Seton Hall Law. With his law degree in hand, he started his own practice but soon answered the call to public service and joined the team at the division of consumer affairs ultimately working at the division of civil rights. He is remembered fondly by those he worked with and supported across his legal career.

He served on the board of Planned Parenthood, and they ran a massive one-page – full-page advertisement in his memory. He was among the founders of our state's first LGBTQ+ pride festival, Jersey Pride. He served on numerous other boards and supported countless other organizations. Benn's commitment to the causes to which he dedicated his life can be best summed by the remembrances, as I said, of his Planned Parenthood family who recalled how during a time when a health clinic was facing a litany of violent threats, he traveled to sit with the staff one evening. His reasoning was simple, and I'll quote Benn. "They should know that the board is proud of their work and their courage." That in itself says a lot. Benn leaves behind his husband, the guy on the right, of 25 years, Dr. Shaw Condiotte. I had the great honor of speaking with Shaw last week as well. He also leaves his brother Matthew and sister-in-law Tracy and other sister-in-law Samantha and numerous other family and, of course, countless friends and former colleagues. We thank Benn for all he did to advance the rights of all New Jerseyans, and may his memory be a blessing to all who knew and loved him. May the memories of all we have lost over the past 13 months bring comfort to those left behind.

Before I pass the baton to Judy, I want to acknowledge the efforts again of the Department of Community Affairs under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor and Commissioner Sheila Oliver in partnering with communities to deliver much needed grant funding that is allowing some of our historic downtowns to remain active and vibrant. We cannot forget the importance of the arts in the life of a community, and that brings us to Hammonton today. Through the DCA's Neighborhood Preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant Program, Hammonton's downtown has received funding to help protect both businesses and visitors, and the DCA's program has also provided direct support to a leader in Hammonton's downtown art scenes, the Paul Morris DanceXplosion Studio on Bellevue

Avenue. The owners Paul Morris on the left and Patrick Azera on the right and their team of dance professionals not only teach the art of movement to their students but help them build confidence, poise, and discipline in a fun and safe learning environment.

The pandemic has limited the number of students Paul and Patrick can welcome at one time, but it has not limited their enthusiasm for spreading the art of dance in Hammonton, and the DCA's partnership has allowed them to keep their door open. I had the chance to check in with both Paul and Patrick last Wednesday. I, by the way, reminded them, Pat, that I learned how to tap dance in high school for the show *No, No, Nanette*, which for a lot of reasons was a game changer in those next few years that followed. I also called them to thank them for all they do to promote the arts in one of South Jersey's downtown gems, and I know they're looking forward to being able to welcome back all of their students.

I know we all want them to as well, but to do that, we need to bear down and keep our focus on getting our numbers to meet or even come in below the best-case scenario we discussed a few minutes ago. I know we can do this. Why? Because we've done it already twice. We've done so much together across the past 13 months. Let's keep it going just a little bit longer. Get vaccinated as soon as you're eligible. Today thousands more have entered the queue. Keep wearing your face coverings and face masks. Keep up with keeping a social distance. Wash your hands with soap and water.

Take yourself off the field if you don't feel well or you've been exposed. Get tested at the right point. The warm weather can be both an escape and a good influence for our efforts. Let's get all of this done together. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. Well, today marks the start of National Public Health Week where we reflect on the important role our local and county public health professionals play in keeping us all safe and healthy. These individuals are truly the unsung heroes of this pandemic. Public health officials are the boots on the ground that are making a difference and really saving lives. They work every day to investigate cases of disease, conduct contact tracing, and stem outbreaks, whether it is COVID-19 or measles or another communicable disease.

On top of these efforts, local health departments are also working to help meet our goal of getting 70% of adults vaccinated in our state. We owe them all a tremendous gratitude for their service, especially over the past year where we know they have made great personal sacrifices to battle this pandemic. As the Governor mentioned, the pace of the vaccine rollout continues to ramp up in our state. About 74% of those 65 to 79 have received at least one dose of vaccine, and 70% of those 80 and older have received at least one dose of vaccine.

The race and ethnicity breakdown of individuals who have received at least one dose of vaccine is white, 56.9%; Hispanic/Latino, 9.18%, that is up about four points from the beginning of February; black, 5.76%, that's up about 2.4 points from the beginning of February; and Asian, 8.61%, which is up 3 points from February. Other category is 10.5. In unknown or otherwise not specific is 8.99%. While we are seeing slight increases among our minority populations getting vaccinated, we still have some work to do to build up those percentages.

Demand is still high for vaccines, and we continue to see large turnouts of individuals at the mega sites in our FEMA Community Vaccination Center. We have seen increasing supplies of vaccine. This week we expect approximately 550,000 doses; 131,600 of J&J, 241,000 of Pfizer, and 179,000 of Moderna. Coupled together, this has better positioned our state to be able to expand eligibility through our over 770 vaccine sites.

With the protection of the vaccine, more individuals can get back to much of what we have missed over the past year, and that includes travel. On Friday, CDC updated its travel guidance for fully vaccinated individuals. As a reminder, a person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the last recommended dose of the vaccine. Fully vaccinated people can travel within the United States without the need to get tested or self-quarantined as long as they continue to take COVID-19 precautions while traveling; wearing a mask, avoiding crowds, physically distancing, and washing their hands frequently.

International travel poses additional risks and even fully vaccinated travelers are at increased risk for getting and possibly spreading new COVID-19 variance. Fully vaccinated travelers do not need to get tested before leaving the United States unless it is required by their destination. The federal government requires fully vaccinated air travelers coming to the US from abroad to have a negative COVID-19 viral test within 3 days of travel or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 in the past 3 months before they board a flight to the United States. These travelers should be tested for COVID-19 3 to 5 days after travel. Fully vaccinated travelers do not need to self-quarantine following international travel. Dr. Tan's team is working to update our guidance in the United States for travel.

The recommendations for unvaccinated individuals have not changed. They should defer travel until fully vaccinated. If they must travel, they should get tested with a viral test one to three days before the trip and get tested three to five days after travel. It is recommended that they stay home and self-quarantine for a full seven days after travel, even if the post travel test is negative. If they are not tested after travel, they should stay home and self-quarantine for ten days after travel.

Moving onto my daily report, there thankfully are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 111 cumulative cases in our state. There are a total of 645 reports of CDC variance of concern. Six hundred and twenty-seven of these reports are the UK variant, which has been found in every county in our state.

Additionally, we have 8 reports of the Brazilian variant P.1, 2 reports of the South African variant B.1.351, and 8 reports of the California variance B.1.427, and 2 reports of B.1.429. At the state's veteran's homes there are no new cases among residents. At the state psychiatric hospitals there are no new cases among patients; however, there are six new positive cases among employees at the veterans' homes.

In New Jersey, our percent positivity as of April 1st is 9.14%, the northern part of the state 9.09, the central part of the state 9.59, and the southern part of the state 8.53. That concludes my daily report. I want to remind everyone that COVID-19 health-related questions, the NJPIES call center is still operational at 1-800-962-1253. This weekend they surpassed 100,000 calls answered. Trained healthcare professionals at the call center have been available to the public since January of last year.

We certainly appreciate their continued work to answering New Jersey residents' questions. Stay safe, continue to mask up, socially distance, stay home when you're not feeling well, get tested, get vaccinated when it's your turn, and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything. Good Easter? Fantastic. Happy belated Easter. Thank you for that and for everything. Pat, a thought; just because we spoke earlier, compliance is in a good place, which is a good thing. The weather, perhaps, is in a better place, a little windier than we'd like.

Kenny Armwood's memorial was outdoors on the field at Piscataway High. It was an incredible memorial to an incredible guy, again, under beautiful sunny skies. I suspect you and I are on the same boat with both of those items basically off the table. We need more young men and young women to sign up to become New Jersey state troopers. Could you give us another pitch in that direction?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's right. I could and thank you. Good afternoon. To the Governor's point, we've had our online application process open now for just over a week. The numbers are probably at a historical low as far as what we're seeing.

We need to be until April 23rd. David, I appreciate you pushing the message for us. We need, to the Governor's point, qualified men and women to consider this. We have seven career nights done virtually where we talk about the initial application, the initial training, the medical exam, the written, the interview, what the background investigation looks like.

I really just challenge those young men and women that are thinking about a career in law enforcement, not only what's it like to be a Jersey trooper on our highways and byways and covering the almost 90 towns that we have primary responsibility for but beyond that, the 120 different career paths, one of the most diverse state police agencies in the entire country, and it's a phenomenal profession, tremendously rewarding, and you'll work with some of the best men and women at all levels of federal, state, county, and municipal government in service, as I said, entering our next century of service to New Jersey. That is njtrooper.com where everything from salary, benefits, and everything that I just talked about, njtrooper.com. Come out and be proud to be a Jersey trooper.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. I can say one other thing because I'm with Jersey troopers every day of my life, literally, and for now three and a half years. I'll tell you one other point that I can say because I'm not a trooper but I can say it as an observation They're across the board incredibly happy with the career they have chosen. It's one thing that it pays well. It's got good benefits. It's obviously – you're putting yourself in potentially harm's way, but for all of us, the metrics as to why you want to do it, the fact of the matter is once folks have made the decision and they cross that bridge and become a trooper, they're incredibly happy with the career they've chosen. What's the website one more time?

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: It's njtrooper.com. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: I probably could've figured that one out. We're going to start, Dave, with you today, which is breaking the string of probably a month going right to left. We're going to be virtual tomorrow. You're going to be with me – we're going to be in Elizabeth tomorrow, right? That's going to be cool. We'll be on the road. Pat, you're welcome to join us, Tina. Then we'll be back here unless someone, Dan Bryant, tell me otherwise Wednesday at 1 o'clock, and my guess is we'll be in a similar mode of virtual on Thursday and then somewhere in the state at a vaccine site on Friday. I think that's it. Dave, good afternoon.

Q&A Section

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor, thank you. Commissioner, you had mentioned, I believe, 74% of folks 65 and older have had at least one dose of the vaccine. Do we have the numbers on how many people in New Jersey are fully vaccinated and for you, Commissioner, and the Governor, and maybe Dr. Tan, if you'd like to remind us, people are like okay, so you get fully vaccinated, and now we're still being told you have to wear a mask; you have to social distance; you should frequently wash your hands. Some people are like why get vaccinated, and how long is this going to go on? Forever or for a year? Then the only other question Governor Baylor and Gonzaga tonight, it's a very tight game. What's your call on that? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, so I'm writing down hoops here. Bear with me because we've got the fully vaccinated number here. Judy? I show 1,796,798 fully vaccinated New Jerseyans, and that's of all age – those are obviously all adults because – and I think the progress particularly among seniors is impressive, and we have, as Judy says that every day, we have – we're on a journey. We have a lot more work to do on the equity front, particularly in communities of color. Tina, you should weigh in and make sure you get your money's worth for showing up on this bright, beautiful Monday, some of which I suspect to Dave's second question is not known yet, right? It is not knowable. Again, we haven't said this in a while. Is this an annual vaccine? Is it a once every ten years? Is it a once in a lifetime? There's no one on the planet who knows the answer to that. Tina, any color you have on why – I guess the – I'll say this as a glass half empty question. Hey, wait a minute, I went through all the work to get a vaccine appointment, and I finally went and I got my darn vaccine. Now you're telling me I still got to wear these things? What's going on?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: As long as there's SARS-CoV-2 virus circulating in the community, unfortunately no one is going to be completely protected from getting COVID-19. While the efficaciousness and the effectiveness of the vaccine is really tremendous, the fact is it's not 100% effective all the time. Two, the point that the Governor had mentioned is that we simply don't know about every single population. For example, how well does the vaccine protect immuno-compromised individuals, for example, who might not be as protected, for example. In light of all these new evidence that we're finding about the benefits of vaccine and the fact that we're able to be making these terrific recommendations to allow some – more benefit for those who are fully vaccinated to consider travel, to visit with other individuals who are vaccinated, for example, it's a weighing of the risks and the benefits. That's why we have to still stick in there because you know what? We're still not even there. Today, the CDC Director, for example, said that probably about 18% of the adult population is fully vaccinated, so we have a ways to go.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy mentioned in her remarks – thank you, Tina – that we know the variants are in all counties in the state and notwithstanding the numbers we report, we're assuming they're widespread. They're not just here and there. I look at total hospitalizations and I'm adjusting yesterday upward because we had three hospitals that did not report, so I'm taking their numbers from the day before and adding. Do I have blessing to do that?

The past – now this is basically eight days. I'm going back eight days, 2,225, 2,329, 2,363, 292, 295, 307, 240, which I'm adjusting, 292. To me, that says, first of all, there's still over 2,000 people in the hospital with COVID-19 but on the other hand, knowing how easily transmissible these variants are, the vaccines, from my way of thinking, are clearly having an impact. I assume we're also going to look to see some of those numbers, positivity rates – if you get backed down to, I would think, 1 or 2% positivity rates and 3 or 400 people in the hospital, then that's a different conversation in terms of the masking and all the other stuff we have to do.

Listen, first of all, I will say this. The second game Saturday night, top three, top five best college game ever, extraordinary. I have a friend who's a UCLA grad and he said, "I have a favor to ask. If UCLA wins, will you wear a UCLA cap or sweater to the press conference on Monday?" I readily agreed assuming they'd lose by 30. Then as the game went into overtime, I realized I did not have a UCLA cap or sweater. I was going to have to go out and find one on the open market. I think you got to say Gonzaga is favored. We've got a little family happens. It so happens my son Sam and I have Baylor and my wife and daughter have Gonzaga, so we'll see. I assume the Zags – Parimal, you're not going to show up for work tomorrow if Gonzaga loses, I know. Thank you for that.

Alex, good afternoon.

Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey: Good afternoon. Dr. Tan, can you explain the concept of illness onset and how it's used to update the epi-curve on the DOH website? Can you talk a little bit more about how an illness onset date is determined, and can you tell us if there's a certain percentage – you told me before that it's roughly the same amount each week of cases that are traced back to an infection that could've taken place weeks or months ago. For you, Governor, I butchered the question last week, so I'm going to start by reading a sentence from the Department of Health. They said in a statement, "The cases we report every day are new and that the department was just notified of them within the past 24 hours. It is also correct that investigation may subsequently determine that they were old and that symptoms may've begun long before the test result was received." Were you aware of this? Does this affect your confidence in the data that you use to make your decisions? Can the residents be confident that – with some cases being traced back to not recent infections, the 3% PCR to antigen that you mentioned last week and cases coming in from out of state, can the residents be confident that they're receiving the best and most up-to-date information possible?

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, do you want to start with that first one, and Judy, to weigh in on either of those?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: So illness onset is exactly that, the date in which an individual might've become ill or started experiencing symptoms of the COVID illness. What happens is that there's a little bit of a lag between the number of reports that we get on a given day, so for example, we reported 2400 new PCR tests today when we actually then go back and take a look at these reports. They shake out over the last past several days. Sometimes there might be a little bit more of a delay between the onset date of the illness and the actual date of the report because we get a lot of our reports through electronic laboratory reporting and sometimes there might be issues with delays with the commercial laboratory reporting to us, for example.

Usually for epidemic curves, we look at the illness onset over time. That's why when we actually do our epidemic curve on the website, it's a little bit different from what we hear on a day-to-day basis for the number of reports, if that makes sense.

Governor Phil Murphy: The genesis of that question, which is why I was perplexed by last week, is as you and I both know is a political genesis. I'm not saying you are being political but the genesis of it is, without question, political. It is a conspiracy theory, and you know this, which is claiming that for whatever reason we're making this look worse than it is by taking cases from the past and moving them forward. Find another state in this union that is more transparent with data as it relates to COVID-19. Find another state. I'm completely confident in the data we report.

Sam?

Sam Sutton, Politico: Thanks, Governor. Two questions for you. First one's a little bit long. Based on the model in your reporting, do you think it's worth your visiting some of the criminal and civil liability protections that were conferred on hospitals, clinicians, and long-term care facilities? I understand that both the EEO and the accompanying legislation did not include cases of gross negligence or willful misconduct but also by the same token, it doesn't seem like personnel and PPE shortages are having as much of an effect in these facilities at this stage. Wonder if you could describe the utility of these protections moving forward. Then the second question is for the Commissioner. A couple weeks ago, you said that only around 50% of long-term care staff had been vaccinated. Just curious if there's an update on those figures, if that's gotten better.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sam, on the first, I don't have anything new to add to that, but I will ask Parimal, do you have anything you want to add to that? If not, can we get back to you?

Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: The immunity protections that you mentioned are currently codified in law. If there's a desire to revisit them, we'll talk to the legislature about that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Secondly, I wrote down something I have no idea – I don't know what I wrote myself here. Long-term care staff, do you have an update on the vaccination percentages of long-term care staff.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're actually sending out a survey this week to the long-term care to get the actual numbers of their vaccinated employees. Last week, we know that between 70% and 95% of residents have been vaccinated, and it's reported that about 40 to 50% of employees, but we're going to update that data this week, so should have something more for you next week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Matt, let's go to you.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM: Good afternoon.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon.

Matt Arco, NJ.COM: Good afternoon, excuse me. Commissioner, is the state still using CALI report to determine reopening day programs for people with developmental disabilities and for family members to visit them at facilities? Governor, I understand why you and health officials would obviously want to plan for the worst case or even the moderate case scenario, but is the one you laid out, the best case, even feasible given, for example, current hospitalization or already exceed what that model says it would in two weeks? Is that even on the table as feasible? Finally, from NJ Spotlight, when will the state's three mobile vaccination vehicles be ready to deploy? Given the lengthy timelines to get them up and running, why did the state purchase new vehicles rather than partnering with hospitals or other providers to use their vans or convert existing state vehicles?

Governor Phil Murphy: I saw the headline. It must've been the report. Did they write something about this? Yeah, yeah, so this is not directed – you're just the messenger. I thought to myself, there's a culture of – can't we celebrate some success at some point? I mean, you got to be kidding me. Anyway, that's not directed at you. Listen, on the best case scenario, Matt, I think the thing that concerns me the most – we said this last Wednesday. Judy, I think you were in agreement here. The length of the worst case scenario as opposed to necessarily the numbers. If you look at those numbers, we should probably put a similar chart on Wednesday that just has dates. What are your peaks in the four metrics? That, to me, is the biggest concern. Therefore, I get back to the best – so in other words, I look at the best case, the worst case. Neither of them are remotely close. I'll just pick hospitalizations. They're probably – the worst case is probably half of what we were at last spring, so that part of it does not worry me. It's the length of the thing that really gets me. I'm less focused, honestly, Matt, about the fact that we're already seeing the numbers in the best case scenario than I am on how long it would be. I think that's maybe a chart, Dan, if you could help me out, let's show on Wednesday. That, to me, would capture the big concern, which is hyper-fatigue about this.

I know there's a lot – back to your first question. There's a lot of very rightful concern. I know your team, Judy, is reviewing the developmental disability visitation realities, and I know you're going to start to consider factoring in vaccination levels as part of that. Any comments you've got on that. Then secondly, any more news on the triplets?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Let's first start with CALI scores. I mean, we really do use the CALI scores. They tell you what is going on in the community, and we should all be concerned when the CALI score definitely is red and when it's bright orange. We should be concerned that we can impact that by our own personal behaviors and moving it down as we did to yellow just a month or six weeks ago. We do rely on the CALI scores, but they are used as a guide for the Department of Human Services who actually develop the plans for the disability population. We work in concert with them, but the CALI score definitely points us in a direction to be more conservative or more protective than not.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think we all acknowledge the overwhelming mental health and general stress that everybody has suffered but particularly vulnerable communities and their families, and this is an example of this vulnerable community we have in the state. Any update on the vans?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure, the vans are awaiting for the license transfer from the manufacturer to Department of Health and then to be licensed under a health system in New Jersey. That process should not take much longer, two weeks at the most. Staff have been hired, and they will be trained up at the Morris County megasite. We're working with Atlantic Health System in that regard. Why didn't we use other vans? The vans had to be a certain size to be able to do what is considered a medical intervention, which is giving a shot in the arm. We had to make sure there was ability to refrigerate and to manage a medical intervention, which would be the vaccination.

Governor Phil Murphy: I guess it goes without saying, when we own them, we control everything about them, who's staffing them, where they're going and – okay, thank you. Mike, how are you?

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Good, Governor, thank you. Good afternoon. Given that New Jersey continues to have a higher per capita of COVID case numbers than other states, among the top in the nation, I'm curious; have you made the case to the President or to a federal official that New Jersey should be getting more vaccines than it

is? If so, what are you talking to? Who are you talking to? What has their response been? If not, do you think that's something you should be considering that you should be doing? Just one other question about – did you have any data yet or is it too early to know about people who are refusing to take the vaccine for any reason? Is that knowable yet or do we just have to wait until some date in the future to know whether people are declining to take it? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. We speak to the White House all the time, Judy, our team. I spoke to Jeff Zients, who is the, I guess, COVID czar. Is that – I'm not sure what his exact title is, a guy we've known a long time and doing a great job. I spoke to him on Saturday afternoon and we're constantly – and by the way, I think the numbers – what are you showing for next week again, Judy, for total?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: About four doses [48:52].

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, we got over – we are going up. We constantly – in fairness to your question, we constantly look at okay, we know we're going up, but are we going up per capita at the rate we should be particularly given the amount of cases that we've gotten? Again, I think it's worth – it's a good reminder to, via your question, to reiterate why do we think we've got the cases we've got? I would suggest it's density. It's not just the densest state, the densest region in the country. We're a cold weather state in the winter. We're only now – I went to a restaurant Saturday night. They had tented to allow them – I didn't go inside and check, but to allow them to have a bigger denominator for their 50% capacity. The sides were closed, so they weren't tenting to clean. That was outdoor dining. It was basically to expand their capacity, and I think they've done a very good job. There was one table outside that was truly outside, and it was ours. The fact of the matter is a month from now, maybe even a couple of days from now, that's a dramatically different reality. You can see the sides of that tent gone. You could see it really being counted as outdoor dining and a lot more people just literally outside, and that's what we desperately need. Then you add to that the vaccine dissemination. The density is not going to change. In fact, if anything, we're getting denser. People want to come here.

Judy, critique this. The naysayers are less – I'd say meaningfully less than we feared when we started on this journey. We started on a six-month journey in mid-December. Our goal is 4.7 million adults by the end of June, which is plus or minus six months. That's not to say people are out there – that they don't exist, but they're not at the levels we feared. Is that fair?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, we do – every two weeks, we do a survey of about 1500 individuals, and we've seen the hesitancy decrease significantly. The number of people that have said that they are more than likely to get a vaccine has grown up towards 70% from 40 to 50% to 70%. People really want to get vaccinated. I think our numbers show that in the demand. The demand is certainly there and I think when we have fully supply, we'll be surprised how fast it goes.

Governor Phil Murphy: I also think we've said this before, but it's worth reiterating. We opened up a bunch more groups today. Can we pull that slide up? The eligibility, please, for today just to use an example. I'm just going to pick librarians, which are open for business today. We saw this with healthcare workers in December. Within communities, skepticism starts at a higher level than where it shakes out. We think for the simple reason is of – let's say there are ten librarians. Eight of them get their vaccine and they get their booster shot, and nothing happens to them. The other two of the ten realize you know what? Judy, and Tina, and Pat are okay. I guess it's okay for me to go in. That's one of the benefits we've had when we've opened up by communities because there's a much denser experience of what other people are going through, and that's helped us, I think, in the – pushing back on the skepticism. More than you wanted on that.

I'm going to mask up here. Thank you, everybody. Again, Judy and Tina, blessings and thanks. Again, we'll be on the road. Details to be determined, but I'll see you on the road tomorrow. Tina, again, great to have you back. Pat, likewise, njtrooper, single or plural?

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Njtrooper, singular.

Governor Phil Murphy: Njtrooper.com, check it out, folks. It's an extraordinary career. Pat, thank you, Dan, Jared, Mahan, everybody, God bless you all. Stay strong. We got a couple of great days of weather coming up here. Let's one – specifically, let's try to live as much of our life outdoors as possible. Let's hope for a great national title game tonight. Thanks, everybody. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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