

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: February 17th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. Joining me today is the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the state's former epidemiologist and current COVID-19 Response Medical Advisor, Dr. Eddy Bresnitz. Eddy's with us most Wednesdays these days; great to have you both, as always. The guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent – I was going to call you Commissioner there, Pat – The Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Jared Maples, Director the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness; Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel and a cast of thousands.

Before we get in today, a couple of notes to the side: number one, I want to give a shout out to a very dear friend and an old friend and former colleague Mario Draghi, who has formed a government and is now the Prime Minister of Italy. I think he's, if I may say so, the exact right guy at the right time for that great country.

Secondly, we did a couple of events over the past 24 hours or so that I think have huge impact potential, in some cases in the here and now and in some cases over time, to different parts of communities in New Jersey. One is yesterday, we announced that we had taken \$94 million that came back to New Jersey from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative – \$94 million – plus another \$45 million from the Volkswagen settlement that was New Jersey's and basically bought a ton of municipal big equipment, all of which is electric. And then if that weren't enough, put some money on the street to invest in charging infrastructure.

So we were in Newark yesterday with the great Mayor Ras Baraka, and we had a huge electric garbage truck right behind us, as an example. You can go on the nj.gov website, Mahan, I believe that's it, nj.gov, and you can find the list of the amount of equipment and the number of communities that are getting electric heavy duty equipment and electric charging infrastructure. A really, really special announcement.

And then separately this morning, thrilled to be in Camden, announcing with the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti and elected officials – Mayor Frank Moran, Senate President Sweeney, Congressman Donald Norcross, many others – that NJ Transit and the state are going to invest \$250 million into the Walter Rand Transit Center, which is a really important center because it's basically the gateway to South Jersey. It's got about two dozen bus lines that go in and out of there every day. It's got the River Line, which is the light rail, an important line from Trenton down to Camden. It's got the PATCO connection into Philadelphia, and there's enormous potential.

Walter Rand was a big deal. A Camden native, Assemblyman, Senator, really one of the fathers of infrastructure and the Transportation Trust Fund. This is going to transform the infrastructure in and around this transportation hub and Camden will be a big winner. The region, frankly, will be a big winner. So I just want to get those thoughts off my chest.

I want to give a shout out, a quick shout out if I can, to all the schools who worked so hard to safely welcome parents back into your gyms and rinks to cheer on their student athletes. Based on the evidence that we have, which is largely anecdotal, I don't think you've gotten to the contrary, we had a very good first weekend of competitions and I'm confident that school leaders and athletic directors and their teams will continue to ensure that parents can safely attend these sporting events. I don't know how many tweets we got, but we got a lot of tweets at us, photographs of custodial and other staff, athletic director staff, putting the protocols in place and it was really encouraging.

Another note to start our day today, I'm signing an Executive Order extending the public health emergency for another 30 days. As we have noted many times before, unless it's extended, these emergencies expire actually after 30 days. I want to in particular on this extension emphasize, Judy, you want me to do this, that among other important measures, the Department of Health's ability to regulate the distribution of the vaccine is linked to the declaration of a public health emergency. Failing to extend the public health emergency risks compromising the department's ability to prioritize high risk individuals, promote adequate staffing and vaccination sites, and ensure that residents are receiving the correct second dose of their vaccine, among other important steps. So today's action means that we can continue our ongoing COVID-19 mitigation efforts, while also vaccinating New Jersey residents as quickly and as safely as possible.

And before we move to the numbers, including vaccine numbers, I want to acknowledge the news from the Biden administration that it will rescind the policy instituted under the Trump administration that had made it more difficult for local partners like New Jersey to fund large infrastructure projects, like those included in the Gateway Program. Unfortunately, the Hudson Tunnel Project, which is really the biggest piece right at the center of the Gateway Program, it languished over the past four years, as the Trump administration refused to accept the commitment to the project made by President Obama, that federal loans taken by local partners would contribute to the local share for the project.

I recently raised this issue directly on a new Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and I'm pleased to see this action taken as a result. And frankly, I'm not surprised. Pete, who I've known for many years, got this immediately. Think about this: if I borrow money and I use the proceeds to be part of my local commitment, and I have to pay the money back, that's real money. That's money good. And the fact that that was denied for four years under the prior administration is really frustrating. But this is a good result, at least in the here and now.

So yesterday's action will provide much needed flexibility for the financing of the Gateway Program and other Northeast Corridor projects, including for the construction of the sorely needed two new tunnels under the Hudson River. Now that this impediment to progress is removed, I look forward to working with Secretary Buttigieg and his team, and with the Biden administration to finally get the Hudson Tunnel Project back on track. We need these new tunnels. Our economy needs it, our commuters need it, our entire region needs it. And by the way, they will spend thousands of good-paying union jobs, among other benefits.

Now moving to our vaccination efforts, the dashboard is showing, Judy, I've got 1,470,941 administered doses as of this morning. So far, of that amount, just about 1,060,000 New Jerseyans have received at least their first dose. Cracking the 1 million dose threshold was a significant accomplishment. And as of this morning, more than 412,000 New Jersey residents have also received their second doses and are now fully vaccinated. Each day these numbers move upward by several tens of thousands. It is consistent progress. I know there remain, we know there remain, many, many residents who want to be included in these numbers but aren't yet because of the scarcity of appointments due to the scarcity of vaccines.

We hear you and we understand your anxiety. We remain committed to doing everything we can to improve the platforms available for scheduling your vaccination appointment, and we remain committed to working with the federal government to receiving every single dose we can and then maximizing those doses. We will get there. There's just no question in my mind, I think collectively in our minds. Every single New Jersey and who wants to be vaccinated will be vaccinated. But at the moment, with only two approved vaccines currently on an emergency use basis at our disposal, we all need to continue to be patient as doses continue to roll out. And again, we will get there.

I spoke to a union leader this morning, a dear friend of mine. We haven't heard one bad case for why certain populations that are not currently up to bat should be up to bat, so everyone is making a very credible case on behalf of their colleagues, regardless of who you might be or which community you might be in. Remember one thing that I think, Judy, slips beneath the cracks too often. If you're under 65 and you have a chronic health condition, you are right now up to bat. You are eligible to get a vaccine. Whether you're an educator, a transit worker, a longshoreman, a retail worker, regardless of who you are, if you've got a chronic condition, you are eligible right now.

So in the meantime, in addition to getting more and more vaccine supply and getting more and more administered and shots in arms, we must encourage everyone to continue to practice social distancing, to keep wearing their face masks. I have now graduated to two, especially when I'm inside. And by the way, face masks, period, especially when you're indoors where it is required, except when you're either eating or drinking. And we want folks also to continue to use common sense. I know it's the basic stuff that we've been preaching from day one. But the basic stuff is still the hand we've been dealt. Remember, we cracked the back of the curve in the first wave without a vaccine because we did that basic stuff by the millions in the state. We need to continue to do that and then if that weren't enough, we've got the vaccine. And that's going to help us crack this even further.

And even if you have, by the way recently -- Eddy, unless you disagree -- even if you have recently received a vaccine, it is still just as vital that you continue to do these basic things as well, as it takes time for your body to build up the defenses and to work with the vaccine. As we noted here last week, we continue to encourage residents to get tested. Testing remains a vital tool at our disposal, just as vital in many respects as the vaccines, to helping us get the data we need so we can make fully educated decisions on reopenings and potentially relaxing other restrictions or even where we may need to head in to stamp out a potential hotspot.

And aside from testing and following the routines that we have all made part of our daily lives, we would encourage you to download the COVID Alert NJ smartphone app, which has just received a significant update. In addition to more efficient data presentations within the app, the app is now also available in 10 languages beyond its initial rollout in English and Spanish, and is now more accessible for speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Gujarati, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian and Tagalog, all languages we hear across our state. So again, we ask you to download the COVID Alert NJ app and add your smartphone to our fight against the virus.

One more reminder before we get to the overnight numbers, and that is that the application window for small businesses to apply for the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's small and micro business PPE Access Program is now open, and this is for businesses with up to 100 employees. Through the PPE discount program, participating small businesses can save up to 70% on purchases of personal protective equipment for their employees and customers from participating vendors. In the PPE discount programs initial run, roughly 9,000 small businesses collectively saved more than \$7.6 million. We want to ensure that more small businesses avail themselves to these savings. And again, if you participated in the prior PPE discount program, you don't have to do a thing to rejoin. You're automatically eligible for this round of savings. Business owners who need to apply should visit that website, [covid19.nj.gov/PPEaccess](https://covid19.nj.gov/PPEaccess). And once your business is approved, the discount will automatically apply to your online order, so there was no need to keep receipts or submit paperwork.

The PPE discount program is just one of the ways the EDA has stepped forward to help our small businesses weather the pandemic. It has also released hundreds of millions of dollars in direct grants and loans to literally tens of thousands of small businesses and nonprofit organizations. Let me give you an example. One of the beneficiaries is the Camden-based -- this is a very cool organization by the way -- Symphony in C, which has been a part of South Jersey's cultural landscape since its founding as the Haddonfield Symphony in 1952. Symphony in C is just one of three professional training orchestras in the entire United States, ensembles which prepare musicians and conductors for careers in the fine arts through performance, educational research and professional development programs. Pat is a graduate. That's not true, I just want to make sure you're paying attention.

This mission, preparing tomorrow's musical leaders has been Symphony in C's core mission since 1987. Needless to say, the pandemic hit our arts community especially hard, and Symphony in C has received two grants from the EDA that have allowed it to keep up with the payroll. But the Symphony continues to face continued challenges and we remain committed to helping in any way we can. I had the great honor, I think last Friday, of speaking with that woman, the President Pamela Brant. I also would encourage each of you watching, if this grabs you, if you have the means to support their mission of arts education through music, go to their website there, [symphonyinc.org](https://symphonyinc.org). New Jersey has a long and storied history in the fine arts. Let's keep it strong for future generations.

With that, Judy, let's go to the overnight numbers. We'll begin with a case update, 4,495 positive test results. These break down into 3,786 positive PCR tests and 709 presumed positive rapid tests. The percent positivity, this was a low day in the number of tests, 18,835 recorded on Saturday was 10.8%. Again, we tend to have a lower number of tests in the weekend. We think folks are getting tested on the weekend for a reason, maybe that they've been exposed or they're symptomatic. Either way, that positivity rate, which had been really hovering in the 7% to 8% range for the past number of days is up a little bit. Rate of transmission 0.91, also up slightly.

In our hospitals as of last night's reports, a total of 2,370 were being treated. 2,203 of them were known COVID positive, 167 were awaiting their test results. Intensive care, 411 beds filled, 309 ventilators in use. These numbers, it's unmistakable all continue the recent downward trend, which is a very promising sign. I know you're going to talk about variants, but obviously that's a wild card that we're watching like a hawk.

Yesterday, 301 live patients were discharged, 353 were admitted. And at the risk of comparing apples to oranges because they're not confirmed, 42 in-house fatalities. But we can say, with the heavy heart that we are reporting another 92 confirmed losses from our extraordinary New Jersey family due to COVID. Our total confirmed, as you

can see, is 20,343 and we must also include the 2,289 probable deaths. When you add that up, it's a staggering 22,632 losses of life. To ensure that none of those we have lost ever becomes a mere number, let's honor the lives of three more of the proud New Jerseyans who we've recently lost.

We want to begin today by remembering Michael "Mickey" Beard, a resident of Kearney and Waretown. Mickey, as he was known, was a gifted athlete who was a four sport varsity letterman at Kearney High, a sporting legacy that earned him induction into the Kearney High School Hall of Fame in 1994 for soccer. After earning a degree in Public Health from Montclair State University, Mickey embarked on a career as a sanitation and environmental technician with the Kearney Health Department, a job he remained dedicated until his retirement in 2008.

Mickey leaves behind that woman right there, his wife, Diane. I had the honor of speaking with Diane on Friday. She also was COVID positive but had a much milder case. And by the way, I believe I'm right, she'll correct me if I'm wrong, that picture is from their renewal of vows in 2009. They were married for 39 years. Mickey also leaves behind his daughter Caitlin and her husband Mark, and Diane and Mickey tragically lost their son Ryan in the year 2016. We now know that dad and son are reunited. Mickey is also survived by brothers Jack and Billy and their families and also by his mother-in-law Rosemary. He was a Jersey original. His last words to Diane, as she was leaving, were literally and I quote, "Don't be knuckleheads." Don't be knuckleheads. Bless him. We thank Mickey for a lifetime committed to his hometown and to our state. May God bless and watch over him and his family.

Next up, we recall Kevin Brophy, who passed away on February 3rd at the age of 73. He was a Queens native who called New Jersey home for the past 46 years. Why Jersey, you may ask? The reason for leaving New York for our side of the Hudson was his marriage to his wife Mary in December of 1974, which led to their move to Clifton to start their family. After nearly 20 years in Clifton and another 17 in nearby Wayne, Kevin and Mary retired to Manasquan in 2006. Only fitting that it was Manasquan. They first met in Manasquan, so theirs was a true Jersey Shore love story that came full circle.

Kevin was a successful businessman in the field of healthcare finance, but among his family and friends, he'll always be remembered for his Catholic faith and his Irish warmth and wit, his love of the New York Yankees and the New York Football Giants. He was a Giants season ticket holder for many years, and his love of family, especially his grandchildren. He is survived by his wife, Mary. I had the great honor of speaking with her again on Friday. Judy, she's a nurse, you'll be happy to know. She also had COVID, but again, much milder. He's also survived by their three sons Daniel, I think is in Ridgewood, who's in technology. Thomas is a lawyer at the Port Authority, and Matthew is an electrician. And by the way, they're all in Jersey, and their families, by the way, including Kevin's five beloved grandkids, Leah, Jack, Grace, Alexandra, and Kevin. He also leaves his sisters Marianne, Teresa and Agnes, as well as numerous nieces and nephews and countless friends. May God bless and watch over you, Kevin, and the family that you leave behind.

Finally for today, we honor this guy, a giant, Eugene Marsh of Pennington. Eugene was born and raised in South Carolina. He was the first Black student to integrate his all-white high school. Think about that courage. He was a decorated Vietnam veteran, earning the distinguished Vietnam Medal, Army Commendation and the Bronze Star Medal for valor in combat. His life eventually brought him to New Jersey, where he started his construction management firm, where he also met his future wife, Elaine in 1995. In 2012, another milestone here, his company was the first Black-owned firm selected by the federal government to work on renovations at the Statue of Liberty.

But even with a successful business, Eugene went back to school to pursue the college degree he had never attained and an entirely new field, by the way, as well, one that would get him working with his fellow veterans. At Rider University, he would earn both his bachelor's and master's degree in clinical mental health counseling. Isn't that extraordinary? In 2014 and 2018, respectively. But he wasn't done and at the time of his passing, Eugene was studying again at Rider toward a doctorate in educational leadership. His focus again was on mental health disparities among veterans. I want to thank our friends at Rider, by the way, for bringing Eugene's extraordinary life and passing to our attention.

Even though the pandemic cut short his ultimate dream, Eugene had already left a tremendous mark, as he was the 2018 recipient of Johnson & Johnson's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Award for his work and engagement with vulnerable populations. He leaves behind his beloved Elaine with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Friday, as well as his siblings, Charles, Michael, James, Francesca, Esther and Susan and his foster siblings, Jeffrey, Kendall, Maylene, and Jackie, among a tremendous list of nephews and nieces, cousins, in-laws and friends.

We thank Eugene not only for service to our nation, but to our state and particularly to our veterans. His story should be an inspiration to all that you are never too old to keep learning. Eugene was 71 years old. God bless you and watch over you, my friend.

Three more of the lives lost to this horrible pandemic. We are all optimistic, let there be no doubt, for better days ahead. But it is always important to remember those who will not be with us to celebrate those days. We will never forget Mickey, Kevin, or Eugene or any of those we have lost.

And finally today, unrelated to COVID, I would be remiss if I did not note a passing from among our family in the Governor's Office. early today we lost Edwina Davis, that woman on the left, who had served for nearly 30 years on the administrative staff within the Governor's and the Counsel's Office. She joined state service in 1992 after a career that included stops as an educator, and in the hospitality and public relations industries. She was hired in the administration of Governor Jim Florio, and while the names on the doors changed every few years, Edwina's didn't. She worked under not just Governor Florio but under Governors Whitman, DiFrancesco, McGreevey, Codey, Corzine, Christie and yours truly.

I think it's fair to say that there's not anyone who worked in the front office in any of the eight administrations she served who doesn't have an Edwina story to tell. She took on the role of Ambassador of the Governor's Office. She was an institution within the institution. Even during the pandemic and even at the age of 82, Edwina did not want to sit still or sit this out. We are keeping her husband Warren and her children Laurie -- so this is first lady Tammy Murphy hanging with Edwina on the left and her daughter Laurie on the right, also her daughter Wendy and son Michael. We're keeping them all in our prayers today. Edwina was an extraordinary and amazing spirit. We miss her deeply. Thank you for all that you did, Edwina, and may God bless and watch over you. We'll handle things as best we can from here.

And 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. As the Governor shared, the number of vaccine doses administered in the state continues to increase. The six mega sites reached a new milestone yesterday, administering 201,872 vaccine doses. The Gloucester County mega site alone has administered more than 60,000 doses to date. Yesterday, the sites also reached a new single-day high, administering more than 13,000 doses in one day. These sites are playing an essential role in supporting our goal of vaccinating 70% of the eligible adult population. They are doing their work in collaboration with our major hospital systems Hackensack Meridian, Atlantic Health, Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas, Atlantic Care, Virtua, and one of our universities, Rowan of South Jersey.

As vaccinations are underway, there have been some challenges due to the weather affecting the country. Vaccine shipments this week have been delayed due to the storms that are moving through the United States. We're closely monitoring the information coming from the CDC on our shipments. Most vaccination sites in our state have been using inventory on hand to ensure that appointments are kept. All vaccination sites, however, are expected to have plans in place for rescheduling appointments should they not have sufficient inventory. Additionally, with bad weather coming tomorrow, all sites have contingency plans in case they need to reschedule appointments.

As we have said before, getting as many vaccinated as possible is vital to our fight against COVID-19. And this is particularly important given the concerns about the increasing number of mutations being seen in the virus. Viruses constantly change or mutate, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. Sometimes new variants emerge and disappear. Other times, new variants emerge and persist. Currently, the only variant identified in New Jersey is the B-117 variant, the variant which emerged in the United Kingdom. There are a total of 50 cases of this variant in New Jersey.

The department's Public Health and Environmental Lab is doing sequencing for all virus variants. The lab continues to increase its testing capacity, and is also working with public and private partners to increase testing for variants. Additionally, the department participates in the CDC Surveillance Program, where specimens from New Jersey residents are randomly selected and sent to the CDC for sequencing. Sequencing is done in collaboration with local state and federal health partners on outbreaks with atypical transmission patterns; cases with international travel to areas where variants are prevalent, for example, Brazil and South Africa; and random samples of COVID-19 positive cases from the Northern part of the state, the Central part of the state and the Southern part of the state.

The department also receives specimens from some commercial labs when their routine testing is suggestive of a variant. Other commercial labs are working with CDC and there are other labs in our state that are doing sequencing including Princeton University, Hackensack Meridian, Health Right Now and Rutgers University. We pay attention to any changes that may increase transmissibility, increase severity, or show resistance to the vaccines. That is why we work to identify and track variants. When variant cases are confirmed, local and state public health officials perform a public health investigation, and that includes contact tracing. Contacts are notified and advised to quarantine. So far, studies suggest that antibodies generated through vaccination with the currently authorized vaccines will continue to prevent serious illness and slow the spread of the virus. Impact of vaccine on new variants is being closely investigated and more studies are underway in this regard.

The variants seemed to spread more easily and quickly than other variants, some variants, which may lead to more cases of COVID-19, which is why it is vital that we continue to practice the public health measures that are proven to reduce the spread of the virus. Mask up, physically distance. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. Stay home if you're sick, and get tested.

As a reminder, correct and consistent masking is an important step everyone should take to prevent getting and spreading the virus. Make sure your mask fits snugly against your face. Gaps can let air with respiratory droplets leak in and around the edges of the mask. Pick a mask with layers to keep your respiratory droplets in and others out. A mask with layers will stop more respiratory droplets getting inside your mask or escaping from your mask. Use a cloth mask that has multiple layers of fabric. Wear one disposable mask underneath your cloth mask. The second mask should push the edges of the inner mask against your face for a tight fit.

Another important tool for controlling the spread of COVID-19 is contact tracing. If a contact tracer calls you, please take their call, answer their questions to help protect yourself, your loved ones and your community.

As the Governor shared, the updated version of COVID Alert NJ app is now available. If you haven't already, please take the time to download the app. It is now available in 10 new languages. The more individuals who have the app on their phone, the more valuable the app is in our fight against COVID-19.

So moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 2,370 hospitalizations, with 411 of those individuals in critical care, 75% of the critical care patients are on ventilators. This is the lowest census we have had since mid-November.

There are no reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children since the 15th. On the 15th, we reported four new positive cases. There are 92 cumulative cases in the state, and the children affected have either tested positive for COVID-19 or have had antibody tests that were positive for COVID-19 exposure within four weeks prior to their symptoms. One of these children is currently hospitalized. Fortunately, there have been no deaths. The breakdown of race and ethnicity of these cases is as follows: White 23%, Black 24%, Hispanic 41%, Asian 5% and other 7%.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 55.6, Black 16.6, Hispanic 18.9, Asian 5.1 and other 3.8.

At the state veteran homes, there are no new cases among our residents. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there are no new cases among patients. However, and sadly, there has been one death related to COVID-19 complications amongst staff. That individual had not been working since December 21st.

The percent positivity in the state as of February 13th is 10.8; the Northern part of the state 11.57%, the Central part of the state 10.07, and the Southern part of the state 9.95. So that concludes my daily report. Stay safe, continue to mask up, double mask, social distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested. 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. One minor point and a question I'd love to throw to you and Eddy. First of all, folks, don't travel to Brazil and South Africa right now. I couldn't be clearer about this. Frankly, don't travel, but don't go to those two countries. Please, there should be no travel to or from Brazil or South Africa right now. I'm sure someone will yell at me for that for, the Consul Generals from either of those countries who are good friends.

Eddy or Judy, I was in Camden this morning, as I mentioned, having a very good conversation about COVID vaccine progress, etc., and I didn't make this sort of a definitive statement, but I said to a couple of the folks down there but for the variant, I think we would be planning right now, a much more, I'm going to use the word aggressive, but a much more fulsome series of steps to reopen over the next few weeks, but the variant sort of hangs over our head. We know it's more easily transmitted. We know the vaccines still work against, to your words earlier, I think, against severe illness and death but they work less well than they do against the main virus. And, the science is incomplete. It's not just a question of we don't have clarity. I don't think anyone in America does right now on how much hold it will take and its impact, but also the science associated with it continues to be incomplete. Would you quibble with any of those observations, or Eddy or Judy, would you add anything to that?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** No, I think that's accurate. I think the difficulty here is making policy decisions when you don't really know what's coming. And when I say what's coming, I'm talking about the incidents of disease, the burden of disease on the healthcare system and on everyone. So the trajectory has been really tremendous in the last month. It continues to go down in terms of cases reported, in terms of hospitalizations, ICUs and everything. And even with the increasing prevalence of the variant, particularly the one that we're seeing in New Jersey and mostly in this country, which is the B-117, which seems to be actually perfectly resistant, if you will, or sensitive to the vaccine. We're not really seeing that the vaccine is less effective against that. As long as we continue to do everything we've been emphasizing over the last year, Judy mentioned them in her remarks, and at the same time increasing our vaccination rates, were going to continue heading in the same direction.

I think at some point, those decisions about loosening the restrictions still have to be made, even though we're concerned about the variants. As long as we're monitoring them, as long as our surveillance system is robust and we continue to do the testing and the sequencing, at the same time being ready to stop and reverse course if necessary, which is really what you've done over the last year.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Going backward is something we've tried to avoid like the plague, no pun intended here, and we want to continue to try to avoid going backward. If we had to, we would, obviously. We've frozen steps. Remember, we were going to open indoor dining sometime in late June, as I recall, and we had to unfortunately hold

that back until September 4th. So, well said. Again, that echoes what Tony Fauci advised us, in private and in public, keep doing the basic stuff, keep your vaccine rollout going and ultimately, this is going to sort its way through. But between now and then, of course, is something that we've got to manage.

Pat, we've got more weather coming. I know ABC was out there aggressively. But I have to take a moment of personal privilege here. I learned something last night from my colleague in Texas, I think he was on Sean Hannity on Fox. Because we looked down and they had, I think, 3 million outages, something like that in Texas; we had 13,000. Clearly the storm was less brutal here. And by the way, we don't wish any ill will to the great folks in Texas. In fact, we've got relatives in Texas, so we wish them nothing but the best.

But I'd stupidly, since I've been in this position, all along have thought that it was, why do you get power outages? I thought it was overgrown vegetation, it was ice and snow and high wind. Come to learn last night from my colleague in Texas, it's actually due to solar power, wind power and the Green New Deal, which I had missed that. So it just goes to show you, you can learn something no matter how many times you've been around the block. So with that, Pat, over to you with a little outlook on weather, compliance and other matters.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. ABC was out over the weekend. They were down in Cape May as well as in Middlesex County. They did not come across any violations in Cape May, but the following seven establishments in Middlesex were Riverside Sports Bar in Perth Amboy, Bagoda's Place in Perth Amboy, Passions Nightclub in Perth Amboy, Courthouse Inn in Perth Amboy, Portuguese Manor Restaurant in Perth Amboy, Yuyi Sushi in Woodbridge and Cafe Luna in Old Bridge. And those were basically a combination of no facial coverings, over the 35% capacity, no social distancing and sitting in a bar, a combination of all those things. I also note that ABC is also issuing charges against the Luba Lounge in West Orange seeking to revoke their liquor license. I went through them this morning, that establishment has been cited 28 times for EO violations. Because of that establishment's repeated non-compliance, and egregious behavior, ABC is seeking to revoke their liquor license.

With regard to the weather, you know, here we go again. I'll be on a call with the National Weather Service and our county and state partners this afternoon. It looks like that typical Jersey storm and that rain/snow line is north of the center of the state, upwards of eight inches; some models are calling for a little bit more. And then below, a wintry mix somewhere from the one to four inches. It's going to be a sticky commute from what I understand, from the timing, Governor. It looks like the commute is going to be upwards of an inch falling per hour tomorrow morning. We're on top of it. I was on with Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti just right before I walked in here. We'll be ready for it and just another weekday in Jersey, Gov. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Pat. Don't forget what causes power outages.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** That's right.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Those damn windmills. A couple of things. ABC, and they don't telegraph when they're going or which county but it's pretty clear by the list, and we've heard this before in Monmouth and Burlington, I know. They basically do a county strategy, right? When they go out and blitz it, they do it in a compact, which allows them to hit more places more easily. That's number one. And folks, please, come on. I mean, most folks in most establishments are really doing the right things. We just need everybody to do it, and 28 EEO violations ain't the way to get from here to there.

And then lastly on weather, I think we're almost for our brothers and sisters in the press, I'll be very surprised if we're not, tomorrow morning at the SMC in the Fords section of Woodbridge with Diane and you and Jared and me and probably Joe Fiordaliso. We'll probably be, tomorrow, in a virtual mindset and my guess is we'll be doing something first thing in the morning. The commute tomorrow looks like it's going to be messy, and your point is we've got this Route 195, sort of almost magical delineation in the state. Stay safe, folks. Ready.nj.gov continues to be the best all-encompassing website. And if you're taking a bus or a train on NJ Transit, I would go to njtransit.com to get your specific line implications.

The other thing about this storm, it doesn't feel remotely as intense or as big as the one we had a couple of weeks ago but it does share, at least at the moment -- and I know you're going to get an update this afternoon -- the characteristic of being a long storm, so tomorrow morning through sort of midday Friday. Is that fair?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** That's correct, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah. And that's an exposure that, just by its nature, if you're on the line and it tilts more snow than rain, that's a pretty significant exposure. So in any event, stay tuned. My guess is we'll be gathering at the Storm Management Center tomorrow morning. My guess is, if I had to predict, it'll be around nine o'clock if I had to put a fine point on it.

We'll be back here, again somewhat depending on the storm. We're going to stay with our Monday, Wednesday, Friday routine. This is somewhat related to weather but assuming weather provides, we'll be back here at one o'clock in person on Friday.

Let's start in the back. Let's go relatively quickly because we've got a full house here today. Please, ma'am.

**Lilo Stainton, NJ Spotlight News:** Hi, Lilo Stainton from NJ Spotlight News. Thank you for remembering Edwina. She was a special person. Three questions related to the vaccine. Yesterday, Dr. Fauci told CNN that Johnson & Johnson will have considerably fewer doses available by April than they thought, meaning the general public won't have access until mid-May or June, possibly even July, President Biden said. How does that affect your plans to deploy that vaccine, particularly to harder to reach communities?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Was that Johnson & Johnson you said? Okay.

**Lilo Stainton, NJ Spotlight News:** Yep, J&J. Second question, on call with governors, the Biden administration said that they anticipated only a few million doses of the J&J vaccine when it is approved or gets the EUA, so fewer upfront, and fewer and later, and a delay in delivery on the end. Can you provide some more details on that?

Third question. Are you concerned about changes in the timeline adding to people's frustration, and the sense that perhaps public expectations around the vaccine rollout and supply were set too high? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thanks for what you said about Edwina. I don't know that we've got a whole lot more insight. I mean, the feds are the ones that are dealing directly with Johnson & Johnson. Obviously, we're proud of the fact that they're an iconic New Jersey institution. We had set out -- and, Judy, if I get any of this wrong, as I'm sure I will, you'll come in and correct the record. We had said our aspiration was 70% of our adult population within six months, which translates into 4.7 million people vaccinated. I think we've said here a number of times, even putting aside the J&J reality, that the prior federal administration had left the cupboard a lot barer than they had indicated. The Biden team was making great progress, which is still very much the case, but that six-month window still felt plus or minus, right? I mean, I'm not sure we'd want to be held to a day, but it clearly feels like it's much more middle to back end loaded, especially when you add the J&J reality on top of Moderna and Pfizer already.

As these folks, the experts to my right will tell you, a more even cadence in that six-month period is preferable, particularly when you get the two-shot vaccines where you've got to track that. But I don't know that we've gotten -- and I'll defer to Judy, if she's got more insights on this. I don't think the public expectation in New Jersey is too high, because I still feel like we're plus or minus. We still think we'll get there. Is there a window that really is realistically Memorial Day into the Fourth of July until we get to the many millions more? Perhaps, but we're going to do everything we can and find every dose that we can, as soon as we can.

I don't think the expectations are too high. There's no question there's a supply/demand imbalance. People who are getting their vaccines overwhelmingly come to us and say it was an extraordinary experience. It just runs like a Swiss watch. You hear all these great stories. The problem is getting in the door, and that remains a problem. There's no question about it. Anything you want to add?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I think it's important to note that we have about over a million people that have gotten their first doses. We have two-and-a-half million people preregistered to get in line. So if you give us vaccine, with the number of points of dispensing in New Jersey, we could easily get up to three-and-a-half million people vaccinated in a short period of time, if we had the vaccine. And remember, the 70% is 4.7 million. So we would be pretty far along on our journey.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You're in the neighborhood. And I think one of the points, back to what Eddy said earlier, you've got a number of curves here that are going to begin to crash on each other: better weather, the epidemiological curve, the variant wildcard, vaccines racing to get out ahead of any variant fallout. I'm going to predict April to June, a lot of stuff is going to come into real clear vision. Thank you for that. Real quick, ma'am.

**Lilo Stainton, NJ Spotlight News:** When you say six-month period, when is your timeline starting?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think we've been in the – we started sort of December. So I think it's Memorial Day, Fourth of July window would be my guess. Eddy, please?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** I mean, it goes back and forth but really, it's hard to say how many doses we'll have. I think it's fair to say, though, that we haven't been counting our doses from the J&J vaccine because we really haven't known what's going to be available at the time that there's likely to be an emergency use authorization. They are meeting next week. All the data that we've seen so far has been from J&J's press release, so we actually haven't seen the granularity of the actual scientific data, and we're anxiously waiting to see that. It will be a week from Friday, we expect to actually see the data posted online maybe Wednesday. And then I'm sure around that time J&J will actually come out and tell us, with the government, how many doses will actually be available and when, because they haven't said when they will start to ship as well. But we never expected a lot of vaccine to begin with from J&J.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** One of you asked this and we didn't answer it but tell me if you all disagree with this, and we've got to keep moving here. J&J, if it is approved, if it is as safe and efficacious as the early indications or claims are, is a one-shot vaccine with regular refrigeration. That does afford an enormous amount of flexibility for us collectively to get into hard-to-reach places, because you don't have to worry about this cold chain storage or scheduling the second appointment. That gives you a nimbleness that right now the system doesn't really have.

We've got a massive distribution system that needs a lot more supply, but it's sort of a metronome. You've got to be very careful on how the first and second doses are scheduled, administered, etc. Again, it's an if, Eddy, if J&J comes out the way they think it will, that is an element of flexibility that we don't have at the moment. Is that fair? Okay. Thank you. Dustin, good afternoon.

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** Good afternoon. Why are cases and hospitalizations going down but the RT is going back up? Could that be reflective of the more contagious variant?

Is the Labor Department having problems again getting the 11-week unemployment extension out? And if so, what's the issue and when can people expect that to be resolved?

Governor, what was your understanding of the visa arrangements Sky Blue had with Global Premier Soccer, and were you aware that they could potentially be illegal?

And lastly, can somebody just explain how the administration calculates what qualifies as a nursing home death? Specifically, how are nursing home residents who die at a hospital classified and how can the public be assured that the administration is not undercounting? Thanks.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I will defer to Eddy and Judy. I'm glad you asked it, because this is one we get a lot. Hospital rate going down, RT rate has really still been in a range, but it's starting to creep up a little bit. I think part of the reason is a look back over a seven-day period and hospitalizations are what they are last night.

But Labor Department, I've got no insight on that. If I can come back to you on that. I'm not aware of that. Do you have anything on that, Parimal? If we can come back to you, we will.

As it relates to the SkyBlue, I saw the same press as you all did. This was a program, as I understand it, that was recommended to teams by advisors to the league. If I read the article right, I think seven teams ultimately participated in it. I don't have a whole lot beyond that to add. I think either the team has or will put out a statement. I do want to reiterate, the reason why we went into this is the reason why we're still in women's soccer today. That is, you know, when our daughter was younger, not that I think she ever had an aspiration to be a pro soccer player, but it was notable that the young boys, including our sons, could look up to pro soccer athletes in the US at a major league level and you couldn't if you were a young girl, which was made even crazier, because we were the number one national team and continue to be top couple in the entire world. That's why we went into it and that's why we stay in it.

I noted this morning, I think it was this morning I saw that there's a Washington franchise which is getting stood up with some really cool people, Jenna Bush, Chelsea Clinton, who we hosted for the Women's World Cup in Germany, Briana Scurry former national goalkeeper, also we hosted in Germany for a clinic. I hope that's a sign of a trend that the girls can continue to look up and see women playing professional soccer, standing with great pride alongside the men.

Any other observations on either hospitalizations coming down, RT up a little bit? I think it's due to timing lag. But also the last question Dustin asks, categorization of nursing home deaths. You know, one of the things that I think we take great pride in, we have been as upfront and as explicit about losses of life, including the over a couple of thousand probable deaths from COVID-19 and we've never wavered from that and we never will. But the specific question of how is that characterized? I assume this is the question, someone's in a nursing home, they get sick, they need hospitalization. They go. Sadly, God forbid but they pass. Are they counted as a hospital death versus a nursing home death?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** The deaths are categorized by residence, so they are definitely categorized as a nursing home death, and they're captured both in the lab confirmed and the probables.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Anything, Eddy, on RT up a little bit and hospitalizations coming down?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Yeah, I agree with you on that. The timing is important. The other thing is that we have been more and more using monoclonals in the state. We have a dedicated program in the department that's basically coordinating the use of the monoclonals around the state and distributing it from the federal government. Now, what the extent of the impact is hard to really measure, but the use of the monoclonals are to prevent hospitalizations. That's going to contribute to some extent.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that. And as usual, Rob Asaro Angelo is watching so Dustin, here's the answer he just gave to me and I will give you the verbatim. "There are no problems with the 11-week extension getting out. Certainly there are people who got the 11-week extension added to their claim that had some other issue." Thank you for that. Thank you, Rob. Brent, good afternoon.

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** Good afternoon. Will you close any of the mega sites tomorrow because of the storm, and how would appointments be rescheduled? And what about rescheduling appointments at other locations that close?

A new Pew study says all but seven states have seen tax revenue drop because of the pandemic and six of the 10 with the biggest drop have Republican governors. What does that say about the need for the \$350 billion in state aid and the Republican claims of a blue state bailout?

And lastly, what is the county-by-county breakdown for the new variant cases?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** On Mega sites, I don't think we've made any determinations yet, unless Judy or Pat correct.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** I do know that Burlington and Morris are going to be closed tomorrow, Brent, and that the Somerset community-based site is also going to be closed. Other than that monster storm, we've kind of deferred to the site coordinators to make that determination. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that. Hot off the press. I think folks should go to the website, covid19.nj.gov/vaccine if there's any question about whether a site is open or appointments.

Brent, did someone on my team slip you something to ask the question about the Republican governors states? You said of the seven that went down, the most, six of them were Republican governors?

**Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger:** Of the 10 that went down, six are Republican.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Six are Republican. Listen, this is not to pick on them or not, but we've said from moment one that the need for state and local aid has nothing whatsoever to do with blue state, red state, legacy issues. It's keeping frontline workers employed, delivering the services that we desperately need in this hour of need. You know, firefighters, police, educators, health care, EMS, you name it. I don't have anything beyond that other than to say it's an American state challenge and it's not purview to one party or another.

Judy, I believe you do have the county by county breakdown, is that right?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** The breakdown, it's all B-117 variants. Total reports: Atlantic 1, Burlington 4, Essex 7, Hudson 2, Mercer 4, Middlesex 4, Monmouth 4, Morris 4, Ocean 14, Passaic 2, Union 2, and Warren 2.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I should know this. Is that on our website?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I should know that but I don't.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That's probably something, Mahen, at some point in time, I hope it doesn't grow to a number that we feel that we have to but that's probably something we should have up there. Thank you for that. Sir, good afternoon.

**Reporter:** A couple from News 12's Alex Zdan. Governor, as the data seems to be improving, what kind of reopening steps are you anticipating and when? What hospital admission, RT or new case numbers are required to expand indoor dining, lift gathering requirements or relax mask mandates?

Finally, what is your reaction to the possibility of impeachment proceedings against Corrections Commissioner Marcus Hicks being introduced by the end of the week? If there is an impeachment trial in the Senate, will your Chief Counsel defend Commissioner Hicks if he will have to hire private counsel? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. On the first two, I think we've addressed this to some extent. I think if we continue to see, Judy or Eddy should correct the record here, but if we continue to see especially hospitalizations continue to drop, there's no question we'll take more steps to open up. I don't know what they are or when they are but I will repeat what I said a short while ago: I think we'll be more cautious than we otherwise would have been absent the variants. I think, you know, I would hope that we could take some steps sooner if we continue to see that. There's no one data stream that we look at. I think Judy and Eddy would back me up on this. This is a collection of data that we look at.

By the way, some folks have rightfully raised, could you do it in one part of the state versus another? We do that, to some extent. I was with Kevin O'Dowd this morning, CEO of Cooper University, he coordinates from a hospital standpoint. He not only looks out over Cooper, but he coordinates the South. So Judy has broken that down into regions. In fact, we've broken it down into sub regions for that. We clearly do that on school districts, where 99.9% of kids who are in public school go to school in their town, so obviously there's a regional piece to that.

I will tell you I don't see, in the near future, maybe foreseeable future, I do not see a step that we'll take that will lift mask mandates indoors. That is not in the cards anytime soon, unless you all see otherwise. I just don't see it. Obviously, you've got to take a mask off to eat or drink, which is why capacities matter in restaurants. I'll leave it at that.

I've got nothing new to add on the last question as it relates to Commissioner Hicks. I know there are some really good, outstanding public servants who have stood on the right side of history, who are passionate about this and I respect them completely. But there are, if I may repeat, two ongoing, real investigations. One of them is a criminal investigation overseen by the Attorney General. They've already made three indictments in that process, but they cautioned that it was ongoing. Separately, we have our own independent investigation, and that's run by a guy I know who is as smart and tough as anyone I know, Matt Boxer, the former comptroller for the state. We need to get to the bottom of exactly what happened, and that's what we're committed to. Thank you. Andy, is that you?

**Reporter:** It is. We've heard from officers of the Burlington County Farm Fair and the New Jersey AG Fair Association that they are in desperate need of guidance as to whether they can open this summer, as now is the time that they plan for these events. When might your office be releasing that guidance? Could you preview what that might look like? Give them sort of an idea? Will you consider an ombudsman to the New Jersey AG Fair Association in representation of the 21 AG Fair Associations?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Listen, we are going to get to that point. I'm not sure if we need an ombudsman, but I'll defer to Chief Counsel Parimal Garg can follow up with you, Andy on what that might look like. I've never been asked that before. I don't know that we need that. These are incredibly important organizations and events in the year. I don't know when – this is the first question I've been asked about the summer. I don't know when this will all begin to come to a head. We recognize things like ag fairs, county fairs, summer camps, you can't turn on a dime; there's a runway, there's a leading up to that process. But I've got no news to report at the moment.

I would be very surprised and very disappointed if we don't have a much better reality, you know, June, July, August than we do, than we've had in the dead of winter. But what that means in terms of steps that we can responsibly take I think it's too early to tell. But very happy to communicate. Mahen, you may want to weigh in here as well, very happy to communicate with them, be as forthright and transparent as we can be in terms of answering their questions, and stay in touch. Is that fair to say? Thank you. Mike, is that you?

**Mike Catalini, Associated Press:** Good afternoon, Governor. Thank you. I wonder if you can give an update on the federal CVS/Walgreens vaccination program, how they've been doing? Can you say how many first and second vaccines have been administered in the state's nursing homes? And then what percentage of the population at those homes has been complete?

And on Edna Mahan, I know you just answered a question about that. Sort of separate from that, I'm curious if you have any information about, there were a handful of changes the DOC said they would make after the Justice Department report came out last year. I wonder if you know whether they have all been implemented and if not, why have they not been? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll start with the latter. I'll incorporate my prior answer by reference. But as I understand it, and Parimal will correct the record if I don't get this right. When the Justice Department comes in and does an assessment like that, it is very typical that there's a back-and-forth process that goes on for a significant amount of time. And not bureaucratic reasons as much as back and forth, comparing notes, etc. Some folks have, and I don't blame them for asking, hey, will you release the final agreement? There is no final agreement. This is something that is in process. When we have news to report on that front, we will get back to you.

Judy, I'm going to say the progress has been substantial. This is what I've got. Again, this is the federal partnership only, Michael. Total doses allocated, 269,100; total doses administered 188,222. That's 70%. That's compared today with the stuff that we directly control. We're at 83% administered, so they're still behind but it was several Fridays ago, not many Fridays, like three ago, they were 12%. I show, Judy, that they've completed 1,110 first clinics. I don't have information on second and third. Do you happen to have that by chance, Judy?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** CVS has completed 751 first clinics, 576 second clinics, 63 third clinics. Walgreens has completed 359 first clinics, 232 second clinics, and 26 third clinics. So we're moving pretty quickly through the first and second clinics, and then the third clinic is always the catch-up clinic.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And that basically is, am I right in saying they've each committed to three clinics per residence. And secondly, the third one is typically to go in and mop up somebody who might have been COVID positive or was out that day or whatever? Is that fair?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Given some of the snow days and some of the slowdown, some are now also scheduling fourth clinics. CVS has scheduled six fourth clinics and Walgreens two, and they will continue until they make sure that the people they have dosed with primary doses get their secondary doses.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Again, I think very good progress. It still has a ways to go. We're not declaring any victory but when I mentioned the allocation administered literally, I think it was three weeks ago this coming Friday, so two-and-a-half weeks ago, they were at 12%. CVS was always out ahead of Walgreens. We had some spirited conversations with both, especially with Walgreens and to their credit, they threw the bodies on it that they needed to throw on it from the first place, and they made a lot of progress. Thank you for that. Nikita.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** So if you win reelection, you'll have the opportunity in your next term to nominate at least four justices.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** This is off topic, right?

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Yeah, of course. I was wondering if you are ready at this point to commit to nominating at least three Republican justices, or keeping at least three Republican seats on the high court as the tradition has been in the state since 1947?

Past that, and I'm not expecting you to comment on the specifics of the case, but I do want to know whether or not you feel it's okay for your administration to enter into settlement agreements with people who have committed crimes, and that allow those people to continue drawing millions annually, or over \$1 million annually from public entities and contracts.

And then lastly, the Senate Judiciary Committee yesterday advanced a bill on mandatory minimums. It's different than the old one, but it still includes official misconduct. I'm wondering if you're thinking on that issue has changed at all?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Putting aside that I don't presume and assume getting reelected for one second, I always hope for the best and prepare for the worst, and work my tail off, and I know the team will. Put that aside for a second. I don't have any comment about the four justices, therefore I don't have any comment about the future. But I think if you look at our behavior in our first three years and the way we've treated the tradition of the Supreme Court, you can expect that that approach will continue if we are lucky enough to get reelected.

I've got no comment on the settlement question. I literally don't have any comment on that. Parimal and you may want to have a conversation about that.

I haven't had a chance to read the Senate Judiciary Bill and as you know, I don't like to comment and stuff that is either not on our desk or we have not made a decision on. My basic place is still where it's been, with great respect. I had a very good conversation with Parimal and former Chief Justice Debbie Poritz a couple of weeks ago. We stood that commission up on sentencing reform. It was a broad, stakeholder-based commission. I thought they did an outstanding job. I still want to pursue the legislation. Some of it was executive action and order that we have already pursued, some of it legislation. I still want to pursue the legislation, based on the recommendations and the spirit of the recommendations that came from that commission. Thank you. Dave, last but not least.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Hi, Governor. So you have now become a two-mask guy. I believe, Judy, you came in with two masks as well. You talked at length about a second mask. First of all, Governor, would you recommend that New Jersey residents now begin to wear two masks, and possibly goggles, because I know that COVID-19, you can become infected through your eyes.

Judy, just to clarify, what is your official recommendation for New Jersey residents? Is this something that they really should be doing at this point? Why is it just the variants? Is there anything else going on?

Governor, a lot of the schools now have started allowing the parents back for the sports activities, but many schools are not letting their kids go into the clubs other than sports. And if you're not athletic, you know, you may not have your outlet, whether it's a club or whatever kind of activity it is

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I thought you meant nightclubs, by the way.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** That would be the comment for Pat Callahan, so I'll hold off on that. But this would be for school activities and clubs. Would you recommend that the schools, you know, take another look at this and perhaps allow some of those kinds of situations to go forward?

Finally, last week we talked about the variants and the answer that we got was, well, there's only about 30-some-odd, and they're all the UK and we're watching it, but it's not a big deal. A week later, you guys are now coming in double masked and there's more concern being voiced about the variants. Can we get a specific breakdown? How many variant tests a day are we doing in the state lab? How many other labs in New Jersey, or institutions, health groups are doing testing and how many tests a day are they checking to see if this variant from UK or the South African has come to New Jersey? We know that already they had a case in Connecticut, so a lot of people are assuming it probably is here. But it's unclear in terms of the amount of testing we're doing. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'm going to be a little bit quicker only because our clock is running out on us. My answer on the two, I'm not anticipating goggles. I'll probably show up, Pat will show up Monday with a set of goggles. But the two masks are pretty explicit CDC recommendation from a few days ago. I don't think it's only variant specific. I think it's variant but it's also best practices, what we've learned in the pandemic. And again, I'll have Judy and Eddy come in if they want to add anything.

The clubs is a very good question. We've said that there's a huge mental health plus if you can get kids together responsibly. We've spent most of our time when we talk about that admittedly on sports. It's a good question. I want to give you a crisper answer than just some blanket. But I think if we can get kids together and we can do it responsibly, I think we should want that, we should root for that.

There's less, usually, of a parent involvement which is why I wasn't sure where we were headed because the basketball game was going to happen whether mom and dad were there or not, it was already happening, in fact. Now we're allowing mom and dad to come in. I think yours is a broader, can you allow them to congregate for the activity? I did a lot of drama in middle school and high school, for instance. And so the question is, I think some of that's happening, but I want to give you a crisper answer. Parimal or Mahen can get back to Dave with that.

I don't have an answer on the amount of tests and the specifics of the variants but I do want to reiterate as I turn things over to Judy and Eddy, that it is not just the variants that we're doubling up here. It's because CDC guidance as a general matter for COVID-19. Variants certainly makes this a little less certain in terms of projections and a little bit of a wild card, but it's not just for that reason. Any thoughts? Please, Eddy.

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** First on the masks, the CDC guidance is first thing wear at least one good mask. And if you want some extra protection then wear two masks appropriately, so not wearing two disposable masks, for example. If you're going to wear two masks, it's one that's disposable and one's a cloth mask. But I'm wearing an N-95 masks and you are not supposed to put two disposable masks over this, and it's only going to be a little bit more protection because you can't get a whole lot better than 95. So having a really good first mask is the key, and then for some added protection, you can wear the second.

The other thing is I think you said that last week we said the variants were no big deal. I don't believe we said that last week. I think we said we were concerned about that, and we are concerned about that both in New Jersey and nationally as well. The Commissioner mentioned in her comments, sort of the indications on when we would look to do sequencing. I can tell you that to date in our laboratory, in the public health laboratory, we've done 107 sequences to date. We only started this up about three weeks ago, and we have 64 pending this week. We've also, since November, sent 111 specimens to the CDC, approximately 16 per week.

Now, the CDC surveillance program is taking samples from all the states. They're not going to basically overburden themselves. I can't give you the numbers on any private labs that are doing sequencing, so that's an unknown factor. They're doing some, as the Commissioner mentioned. So there's a reasonable sampling that's being done of sequencing within New Jersey. You can't sequence everything. When there's some suspicion, as indicated, and there's a memo that's actually gone out around the state just yesterday or today indicating what the procedures are for submitting specimens to the Public Health Laboratory, we can provide that to you if you'd like.

And so we are paying attention to it. We do think it's a big deal. We are doing what we think is appropriate.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'm going to mask up as I wave off of this, and just say that I think what we've said from the get-go is we assume the worst; hope for the best and assume the worst. And so the assumption is that these variants are in the state, even though it's the UK, so called, is the only one that has been verified.

By the way, did you notice the mask I am wearing, Pat, here? Thank you for that. And thank you all. Judy, and Eddy, thank you, as always. We'll stay on this. I think the spirit is it's the same playbook that works, regardless of which variant you're dealing with. We've just got to make sure we use that playbook: social distancing, face coverings, wash hands with soap and water, take yourself off the field, get tested. And God willing, when we get the supply demand imbalance solved, get vaccinated. That combination gets us to the promised land.

So Judy and Eddy, thank you. Pat, thank you. Don't forget what causes power outages, Pat, as you're thinking about this. Jared, Parimal, Mahen. Everybody, thank you. Again, thank you for everything you're doing on COVID. Keep doing that. We're going to get there, folks. In the more immediate sense, the next 48 hours are probably going to be rough on the weather front, particularly if you're on the roads. Tomorrow morning's commute is the one that has us the most concerned.

Please, please be careful. If you don't have to go out in the morning, don't go out. If you do go out, please be careful. Please allow the equipment to clear the roads. Don't try to jump them or get in their way.

All kidding aside, if your power goes out, don't assume somebody else called it in. Please call it in. And if you see a downed power line, don't go near it. Thank God this has not been the case the past couple of winters, but our first winter together, I know at least there were two losses of life. A car that drove over and someone who picked up a line. That is the absolute last thing you should be doing, folks.

Ready.nj.gov is the best all-encompassing website. And if you're an NJ Transit person, bus or rail, njtransit.com. We also should say 211 if you need a warming center, 211.org I believe is the website, 211 is the phone number. It's going to be cold here as well. Even after the snow, it's going to be a cold few days here. Everybody for all of the above, stay safe, be well. God bless.

## Governor Phil Murphy

## Statewide

Home (/governor/)	Key Initiatives	Social	NJ Home
Administration	Economy & Jobs	Facebook	(//www.nj.gov)
Governor Phil Murphy	(/governor/initiatives/#Economy)	(https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/)	Services A to Z
(/governor/admin/about/)	Education	Twitter	(//www.nj.gov/njgov/njgov/alphaserv.html)
Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver	(/governor/initiatives/#Education)	(https://twitter.com/GovMurphy)	Departments/Agencies
(/governor/admin/lt/)	Environment	Instagram	(//www.nj.gov/njgov/deptserv/)
First Lady Tammy Snyder	(/governor/initiatives/#Environment)	(https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/)	FAQs
Murphy	Health	Snapchat	(//www.nj.gov/faqs/)
(/governor/admin/fl/)	(/governor/initiatives/#Health)	(https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy)	Contact Us
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Boards, Commissions &	(/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contact-live.shtml)	(//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html)	Accessibility Statement
Authorities	Photos		
(/governor/admin/bca/)	(https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy)		

Internship Opportunities      Public Addresses  
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Governor's Residence -      Executive Orders  
Drumthwacket      (/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo\_archive.html)

(http://drumthwacket.org/)      Administrative Orders  
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