

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 28th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. To our Jewish brothers and sisters, we wish you a happy and blessed Shavuot. With me today, to my immediate right, the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Great to have you both here. Guy to my left who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, Pat. Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness is with us. Matt Platkin will join us in a bit.

This morning, we received the weekly data from the Department of Labor. Unfortunately, due to a personal commitment, Labor Commissioner Rob Asaro-Angelo can't be with us today. He sends his best. Last week, we saw the continued decline in the number of new claims being filed. Last week, that number was roughly 34,400; still a staggering amount by the way, but a decrease of about 8,000 or about 20% from the prior week. This continues the trend that we've seen for the past three weeks.

However, this does not take away from the fact that we have roughly 1.17 million New Jerseyans who have filed unemployment claims since this emergency began. As Rob has noted, this is nothing less than unprecedented. As of this past Saturday, so this is now five days ago, of that 1.17 million, 911,000 of these claims have been fulfilled, and residents are receiving their benefits. Since the department implemented new programming to expedite claims, more than 345,000 of those claims have been cleared. The number of claims in the queue continues to shrink and roughly 208,000 additional claims have been removed from pending status and are now being paid out.



As you can see, during this emergency, the unemployment system has paid out a total of \$4.3 billion in benefits. That includes \$1.6 billion from the State UI Trust Fund, and with the \$600 weekly federal benefit and assistance to workers who don't normally qualify for unemployment, more than \$2.7 billion in federal funds have also been paid out.

Quite simply, you all have paid into the system to protect you in times like this, and the UI system is there to help see you through. As the Commissioner has noted each time he's been here, the Labor Department, the staff at the Labor Department, the staff continues its hard work to clear claims to ensure that every New Jerseyan who qualifies for unemployment benefits receives every single penny to which they are entitled. No one will lose any part of their benefit because of a time lag.

We recognize, too, that the stress our unemployment system has felt is not just a New Jersey thing either, it is truly national in scope. The ferocity in which this emergency took hold has been felt in every single state, and we are not alone in pushing hard against record levels of new claims. The federal system, as the Commissioner has noted, has its own flaws, which sometimes slows things down. But together, we're working through them to provide the financial relief and support our residents need, and I thank everyone at the department for their continued hard work, and I thank each and every one of you, particularly if you're out there, still we haven't gotten to you, for your extraordinary patience through this extraordinary 500-year flood, tsunami, whatever way we want to put it.

Turning to the overnight numbers, yesterday we received an additional 1,261 positive test results for a current statewide cumulative total of 157,815, all since March 4, which is day one of our first positive test. Here's the trend line of new cases. Before I go to the spot positivity, Judy, you'd want me to remind everybody, yes, while the positives are up a little bit today, our capacities have gone up to test dramatically. We'll get to that a little bit later, but our capacity to get people testing is now almost exploding.

Here's the daily spot positivity. These are from samples taken on May 24, which was Sunday, and that's 6%. Looking to our long-term care facilities, we continue to see some fluctuations in the trends of new cases being confirmed. This is a particular challenge that we continue to focus on, alongside many, including the National Guardswomen and men, and the Strike Force teams from the federal Veterans Administration who are working hand in hand with the staffs at our residential facilities to keep people safe. As you can see, 31,312 of our positives are coming out of long-term care facilities. Meanwhile, the numbers of lab-confirmed deaths associated with our long-term care facilities continues its decrease from the peak, but let's not make any light of this. This is 4,949 blessed souls who we have lost in long-term care facilities.

In our hospitals, the number of patients currently being treated for COVID-19 ticked up a hair yesterday slightly to 2,797 and our field medical stations reported 24 patients. This is a breakdown of hospitalizations across regions, but the number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care decreased again to 740. The number of ventilators in use decreased as well, to 564.

Now, to something which is a little bit troubling and I think it's fair to say Judy, Ed and their team are going to try to dig in on this, as we all are, there were 365 new hospitalizations yesterday, while 287 live residents left our hospitals. These are each the biggest numbers we've seen respectively in a week. And here are those numbers charted across the regions. As you can see, the big bulk of these were up north, both those going in and those coming out. As I mentioned yesterday, we have expected this increase in new hospitalizations given the weekend, but we are going to watch these numbers closely over the coming days to see if there may be a deeper meaning to them, and I want to pause there for a second.

I don't mean the weekend in that we were worried that activity took place on the weekend that led to this, although that could be the case. I mean also, and I think Judy is digging in on this, is whether or not we've had some lag reporting in the data. I know the hospitals, I believe are in the better to be safe than sorry category. I think, Judy, when somebody walks in the door with pneumonia on the margin, they're going to assume the worst in terms of what the cause of that is. But this is something, folks, we've got to keep an eye on. And I promise you, we will keep an eye on, but for everybody who says open the thing up tomorrow, let's turn all the lights on, let's get back to normal. You've got 300 and what do we have here? 365 folks going in the hospital yesterday. We've got to make sure we are watching this like a hawk.

Again, so overall the trajectory remains largely positive. The key metrics that we're tracking continue to move in the right direction and as you can see, continue to be way down from the peak. And especially over the past couple of weeks, even though we've seen some days with spikes, we remain confident in our overall direction. You can see this confidence in each region as the metrics generally follow each other across the state. Again, upper left is where Judy, Ed and their teams, and I certainly can speak for myself, that's what we're focused on. It's also why, again, I repeat that we look at three and seven-day rolling averages because you could have a distortion from one day to the next. A green ball means things went down, that's good. Red ball means it went up. Again, when you've got holiday weekends, weekends generally, we need to smooth the data, but new hospitalizations is something that we are very much looking at.

Again, if you want to be a little bit more sober, compare us to our peers. We continue to lead where we don't want to. This is a reminder that we not only are not out of the woods, but also that we must continue to practice social distancing. I'm now becoming every day I see you an even bigger believer in face coverings, washing hands with soap. We added on this chart today, for the first time, where we rank nationally. So you can see new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 residents. This is per capita. We're 10th in the country. Patients in the hospital per 100,000, we are number one in the United States, and new deaths per 100,000 we continue to be number two in the country. So we are clearly digging out of this.

And folks, it's all because of you. You did everything we asked of you. You flattened the curves, you stayed home, you kept away from each other, you covered your face, you washed your hands with soap and water, you allowed the healthcare system to stay functioning. You did an extraordinary job, but having said all of that, we're the densest state in America. We continue to be part of the dense ground zero metro New York City reality of this awful virus. We are still digging out of this. We've made an enormous amount of progress, but we are still digging out.

Today we must announce, with heavy hearts, another 66 of our fellow New Jerseyans have passed due to COVID-19 related complications, and our statewide total stands at what is now an almost unfathomable 11,401 lives lost. Let's take a couple of minutes to remember a few of those we have lost.

I want to begin with Richard "Dick" Hogan. There's a face, huh? Dick lived his whole life in Neptune Township. He was a highly respected attorney, recognized as a leader within numerous community and charitable organizations. He was, by any measure, bigger than life. He was raised to know the value of work, being by the side of his parents in their restaurants in the Ocean Grove South End concessions. He graduated from Wagner College but even more important than his degree, he met his wife of 52 years there, Erica, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday.

After finishing law school in 1970, he started his legal career in Asbury Park then moved his practice to Ocean Grove's Main Avenue where he stayed. And in addition to his regular clients, he offered pro bono services to many across the Shore communities. Dick was a past president of the Shore area YMCA, a member of the Lions Club, former board member of Jersey Shore Medical Center, Monmouth County Blood Bank President, and served as President of the Monmouth Park Charity Fund. He was also a member of the vestry at Asbury Park's Trinity Episcopal Church. Dick was 75 years old. And by the way, I did not know Dick, but I'm a Monmouth County guy, and he was a legend in Monmouth County.

He leaves, as I mentioned, his wife Erica with whom I had the great honor of speaking, their three sons Richard, Jeffrey, Kelly and their families, including five grandchildren, and many nephews, nieces and cousins. He leaves behind a legendary ornate law office, and Erica and I agreed that assuming we get this virus out of the New Jersey system, I would have the honor of touring that with her. God bless you, Dick and God rest your soul.

Next up is Linden's Martin "Marty" Kennedy. There's a look, huh? I believe he's Irish, Pat. Marty was a skilled machinist for Hyatt Roller Bearing in Clark for many years before taking a job with General Motors in Linden, which he held for 20 years before his retirement in 2006. He was a proud member of UAW's Local 595 and enjoyed attending monthly meetings and organizing lunches alongside former colleagues, who had become by then lifelong friends. He loved to golf and to spend his summers in Harvey Cedars on Long Beach Island, one of the great little communities in our state. Cars weren't just his vocation either, by the way, but also his hobby. He was often seen at car shows and cruise nights, driving and showing off his cars, including a 1958 Chevy Bel Air. It was hard to go anywhere without running into someone who knew Marty. He is survived by

his daughters Lori and Janet, and I had the great honor of speaking with the two of them yesterday, and Lori's husband Jim, and Janet and her husband Matt, and his grandson, Griffin, his former wife Joanne, with whom he remained close all these years, along with many close cousins and friends. Marty, God bless you, God rest your soul. He was 78 years old. You hang in there.

Finally, today, we remember Asha Pritam Badlani of Hasbrouck Heights in Bergen County. And this was a particularly tough one. This family has been rocked, to say the very least. For 28 years, and that's her right in the center stage there. For 28 years, she worked for the US Postal Service, a well-known clerk and a fixture in the West Caldwell Post Office. She retired only three years ago. She was a spiritual woman for whom family came first, especially if it meant spending time with her granddaughters. Asha loved to cook for others as well. Her son Ashish said he'll remember his mother as, and I quote him, "Gracious, full of joy and a humble person who always welcomed everyone."

Asha leaves behind her husband, Pritam, who by the way himself is currently in the hospital for an underlying condition, and please keep him in your prayers, along with her children. Her son, Ashish, who I mentioned. By the way, he's in Elmwood Park. He was hospitalized from this awful disease. Mohit, who is in Hoboken, and her daughter Serena, with whom I had the great honor of speaking who hails from Paramus, she herself had tested positive. Also Serena's husband, Notic and Asha's beloved granddaughters, Sahana and Naya. This is a family, by the way, that was incredibly close, remains incredibly close, and has been rocked by COVID-19. Please keep all of them, especially Asha's memory, in your prayers.

Three more tremendous members of our unique and diverse family lost. Three more families left mourning, and we mourn with them as if they were our own because in every way, in fact, they are. We are one state, one people, we rise and we fall as one. And as we move forward together in the days ahead in our restart and recovery, we cannot forget the tremendous toll that COVID-19 has had on our family, and we cannot forget those who will not be with us as we, individually and as a state, rise again.

Switching gears, a couple of developments since yesterday. We had a very good, I thought, exchange, about 45 or 50 minutes, with Legislators from both sides of the aisle, Judy and Pat joined me. I thought the conversation was a good one. The questions were good. A lot on things like youth sports, small businesses, dining, outdoor especially. We're going to be giving a whole lot of guidance both tomorrow and in the coming days on where we're headed, but I thought that was a really good exchange. And again, I want to salute members of both sides of the aisle for being as responsible and helpful as they've been.

I had a couple of good conversations with union leaders this morning. The conversation started out with a different objective, but they came back in each case to a theme that you've heard from us almost every day, and that is the need, the absolute overwhelming need, to keep firefighters, police, educators, EMS, healthcare workers employed at the frontlines when we need them the most, for federal direct cash assistance. I was on with Lee Saunders, who runs AFSME globally, as well as Terry O'Sullivan, who runs the Laborers. They come at this from different perspectives, right? So Lee's got a huge dose of municipal, county and municipal workers, as well as obviously some for the state. Terry comes at it from the laborers side but also, by the way, has 50,000 members who work in the Postal Service. Not the letter carriers, not the folks behind the windows, but the ones in the warehouses who are sorting through the gobs of packages and mail that we deal with as a country every day. That federal cash assistance is needed. It's not just New Jersey, it's not just blue states, it's not to deal with legacy issues. It's for the here and now, for red and blue, for American states, and to keep our folks employed at the point of attack.

Switching gears, over the past several weeks, we have highlighted the need for every New Jersey resident to answer the 2020 census. The more residents who respond online means the fewer residents who may have to receive a knock on the door later this fall. But as we have noted, the census is not just a count, it's about much more than numbers or drawing federal, Congressional or state Legislative district maps. The Census determines whether or not New Jersey will receive billions of dollars in much-needed federal funding, as I just mentioned. And if you don't get counted, it means that we leave money on the table that will go to some other state.

We know for a fact that we were undercounted in 2010. And because we were, we lost out on literally tens of billions of dollars in federal aid and grants. As we begin our restart and recovery, that's a hole we have to work even harder to pull ourselves out of. So first and foremost, if you have not yet, go to 2020census.gov

and be counted. And then please, do me another favor, go and reach out to five family members or friends or neighbors. Check in, first of all, to make sure that they're safe and healthy, and then urge them to be counted as well. You are their most trusted voices, they'll believe you. And you can help us spread the message that the census is about strengthening our communities and being able to provide for our families.

It's about your neighborhood. It's about your children or your grandchildren or your nieces or nephews schools. And as Judy can attest, it's about being able to provide healthcare and basic needs for healthy families. We're doing a pretty decent job, I have to say. In New Jersey, bless you, bless us all right now, we're at 62.2% already responded, and that's a full two points higher than the national average, but we're still trailing 20 of our peer states. We know we can be number one. I've set an objective to at least be in the top 10, if not to lead the nation,

And across the entire Northeast and Puerto Rico, by the way, the top four reporting counties are all in New Jersey; Hunterdon, Morris, Burlington and Somerset, and by the way, Gloucester County is right there at number 11. That's huge. Those are all badges of honor. But we need every county to get on this list. There's no reason we can't hold the top 21 spots in all of our counties. So again, take a few minutes and go to 2020census.gov to be counted, then make sure your family and friends are counted as well. An accurate count is absolutely vital for our state and our communities. Remember, the Census is not just a number, it's about our ability to keep our New Jersey family strong.

Next, I want to go back briefly to what we discussed yesterday about testing. Over the coming days, as I've noted, we are preparing to keep moving confidently on our restart and recovery. And the reason we're able to do so is because we're getting the data we need to determine the dates when we could take specific steps. Our hospital data, for the most part -- not entirely, but for the most part -- is strong. But we also get tremendous data from testing. So I reiterate what I said yesterday. Go out and get tested. The more data we have, the more confidence we can have that it's time to move forward.

We were back above 20,000 tests, as I think I alluded to this off the cuff yesterday, recorded on Tuesday; over 24,000 in fact, to be exact. That's a strong way to start back from a long holiday weekend. Because of this, we now rank third in the entire nation in terms of tests per capita, in this case tests per 100,000 residents. We've worked really hard to get our testing program to where it needs to be and we're going to continue to work to make it even stronger and more accessible.

Whether it be at our federally partnered sites, or a county or locally run one, or at a Rite Aid, a CVS, a Walmart, as of tomorrow, there will be 208 sites open to get a test. I encourage you to go to covid19.nj.gov/testing to find a location near you and to go out and get tested.

Now before I close and turn things over to Judy, I want to recognize one more young person who deserves to be in the spotlight. This is 10-year-old Isabella Raju from North Caldwell. She already knew that she loved to run and decided a month ago that she was going to set a goal to run 100 miles in four weeks to raise money for the first responders in her hometown. Isabella completed her run a week early. Admittedly the last miles were a little different, as she got an escort to her finish line at the West Caldwell Municipal Building from the West Caldwell police, fire and first aid departments and apparently Batman there on the left. Isabella has raised more than \$3,000 with more still coming in. So to you, Isabella, thank you for your determination and community spirit, and congratulations.

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, the Governor has outlined just how important a complete and accurate census count is for the future of our state. Today I want to emphasize how important the census is on the health of our state. Census data informs the number of community health centers built, and the location of hospital facilities and resources for improvements, how many children can access health services. When communities are not accurately counted, that means less federal funding for healthcare services and nutrition and health programs.

For example, community health center program investments depend on census-driven indicators to determine which areas are underserved. Family planning funding levels are driven by population counts from the census. Funding support and voucher prices for our New Jersey WIC program, which provides nutritious

food for low or moderate-income pregnant women, new mothers and children younger than five years of age, is impacted by the census. And census data also affects federal substance abuse treatment grants that the state receives.

In 2017, New Jersey received over \$45 billion in federal funding for 55 federal programs based on our 2010 census. That included more than \$9 billion for Medicaid, nearly \$3 billion for Medicare, over \$400,000 for children's health insurance, nearly \$80 million for community healthcare centers, and over \$18 million for elder programs, including nutrition. This type of support is going to be more important than ever, given the health, social and economic impacts caused by COVID-19 pandemic. If you haven't already done so, please complete your census questionnaire and encourage others to submit their responses as well.

For my daily report, last evening, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 2,797 hospitalizations with 740 individuals in critical care and 76% of them on ventilators. There are a total of 26 cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children reported in our state. No new cases were reported from yesterday. There are no deaths reported. The ages of the children range from 1 to 18; 18 of the 26 have tested positive for COVID-19 and six are currently still hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: White, 53.3%, Black 18.5%, Hispanic 19.4%, Asian 5.5% and other 3.4%. At the state veterans homes, the numbers remain the same. Among a census of 654, there have been 384 residents tested positive and a total of 144 deaths, and the statistics for our state psychiatric hospitals remain the same as well.

As the Governor shared, our overall New Jersey positivity rate as of May 24 is 6%. In the North, it is 4%, Central Jersey 6%, Southern 8%. That concludes my daily statistical report. Stay connected, stay safe and stay healthy. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, we discussed earlier, I'd love to get Ed to comment. I think you and I both thought it was a good idea. There's been a fair amount over the past 24 hours on the airborne nature of this virus and how it spreads. It's another reason that I'm becoming increasingly a disciple for the proper face covering. But the one that really struck me, and I know you've said from day one, as has Dr. Tan and certainly Judy, that there's still a lot more we need to learn about this. We're all, all of us, not just in the state but around the world, are evolving in our knowledge.

But the one – there were two things that jumped out at me in the reporting, at least. Number one, when someone asked what is airborne, you know, can you put that into English? And it was when you can smell someone smoking or smell a barbecue, that's sort of what you're talking about, which means this sort of is beyond the six-foot dimension.

And then secondly, I can't recall if was in the same reporting or not that the chances of risk of, at least whether it's infection, or at least a droplet hitting you are 19 times higher indoors than they are out of doors. Which is another reason, by the way folks, that we're trying to be very, very careful. Not that we're not going to get there, we'll get there, God willing, if the numbers keep going in the right direction, but we've got to be exceedingly careful on indoor sedentary, lacking ventilation, close proximity realities. But Ed, do you want to, if you could, comment on any of that?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Sure, thank you. Briefly, this is what has to happen in order for somebody to become sick. Somebody who has that virus that lives in their nose or the back of the throat or down into their lungs has to put that out in the environment in such a way that you can come into contact with it. Some of those ways are very obvious that somebody goes and sneezes or coughs. They're spewing out these big particles, you can see these particles. They are spewing them out and they're traveling a certain distance, almost always less than six feet, which is where that six-foot rule comes from. But smaller particles are also coming out. They're coming out every time anybody speaks. They're coming out more so if you're singing or shouting. They're also coming out, to some extent, even just from your breathing.

Now those bigger particles, they land to the ground pretty quickly, they end up on surfaces. That's why we say be careful about touching surfaces, wash your hands and so forth if you do touch surfaces, and that's what's known as droplets. You don't see them all, but their big and they're relatively heavy and they come out of the

air pretty quickly.

However, some of those smaller particles, particularly ones that tend to be generated from things like speaking or other things, may last in the air for longer periods of time and may be able to float in the air longer. Exactly how much of that happens with the virus that causes COVID versus other viruses isn't known for sure. We still believe that the major means of transmission is those bigger droplets, but it is believed that at least some of this illness is likely caused by some of these viruses that are floating in the air for longer periods of time.

And as the Governor mentioned, that becomes more of an issue the closer people are together, and particularly in places like indoors where the air isn't circulating. I mean, the best way to get rid of the virus is to have a breeze or something blow it away. It's why it becomes even more important to try to maintain social distancing and as he said, many, many times to continue to wear the face coverings whenever you are around other people who might potentially become infected by you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, well said. It's another reason, by the way, I want to get gyms opened as much as anybody in this state, if not this planet, but there's a difference between the way I'm speaking right now and as you suggested, singing, shouting, breathing heavily, grunting, whatever it might be associated with running on a treadmill or lifting weights or whatever. This is not, we're not making this stuff up. This is real.

I was gonna make news on this tomorrow, and Mahen will remind me to put this in more detail, but it looks like President Trump has already tweeted that we were granted a Title 32 extension, which is a huge deal. And for those of you who aren't living with what Title 32 is, that's federal funding of the National Guard. It looks like through at least deep into August. That's a big game changer for us. And again, more details on this tomorrow. When you look at where the National Guard is, Judy reminds us almost every day they are all over our long-term care facilities, in particular. We have them stretched out up and down the state, the FEMA testing sites remain staffed by them, and there's a lot of different places they are right now. I want to thank the President and the Trump administration for granting that extension. It was not just for New Jersey, but we had our National Guard as deployed fully as I think any American state. I want to say thank you.

Pat, over to you for compliance and other matters.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. I'm extremely glad to report that there are zero compliance issues on the overnight, which I think might be the first time in, I don't know 77 press conferences, so I appreciate that. I'll just add that this morning, I was on a webinar, an international webinar, hosted by International Association of Chiefs of Police, Rutgers University, Miller Center and the University of Ottawa with law enforcement executives from as far away as Sweden and New Zealand. It was 3:30 in the morning for New Zealand, but you don't realize how many eyes were on New Jersey. The block that I was on, I represented not only New Jersey, but the entire nation in discussing policing from the epicenter of a pandemic, and how much people were learning for how we were doing things, what we were doing well with regards to public health, including protecting our communities and our law enforcement and first responder community.

So, just take a moment to step back and realize it was a tremendous source of pride for the state to realize that not only people around the country but around the world were looking to New Jersey to say, how is New Jersey doing it? And that's a special place to be, and it's because of that collective team that you, Governor, have put together and that I'm humbled to be a part of. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen, and we're humbled to have -- I'm humbled to have the group that I have up here with me every day and the literally thousands behind them. We're going to start over this side, Matt. Don't pull a hamstring as you go across here. I'll give you a minute. A couple of things. We'll be together tomorrow at one o'clock unless you hear otherwise. Mahen, I believe that's correct. We're going to, I'd say in the next couple of days beginning tomorrow, we are going to begin to signal where we're headed. And again, this is subject to making sure Judy, in particular, and her team are comfortable with things like that new hospitalization data. There's a lot of comfort that we're seeing in the data, things like positivity rate at 6% is certainly high on that list. Decrease in ICU beds and ventilators, high on that list. People getting discharged, high on that list, but we've got to make sure that things are in fact going in the direction that we want to go in.

We've been on a one-way street folks, and we don't want to have to turn the car around and go back the other direction, so let's keep it that way. So one o'clock tomorrow, but again, beginning tomorrow, I think the Lieutenant Governor is going to be with us tomorrow, importantly for some specific announcements that she's been incredible with us every single day, even though she hasn't been up here in a bit, but she's been extraordinary, and her team. And so bear with us as we begin, and in some cases we'll be very specific. In other cases, we're going to point you directionally where we're headed with some of the details to be filled in at a later point. And again, one o'clock tomorrow.

With that, Brent, we'll start with you and if you all could help us skim through this relatively quickly, we will never forget it.

Q&A Session

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: We have not spoken to a single person who has been told they can certify for extended unemployment benefits, which were supposed to start March 24. Has anyone been told they can certify, and is there a new delay for these claimants?

Many school districts have planned drive-in ceremonies in June for graduation, but now the new guidance said that's not allowed until after July 6th. Can you clarify? And if the outdoor limit on gatherings is now 25 people, how high would you expect the number to go by July 6th?

Cuomo said today that he will sign an order saying businesses can turn away people if they don't wear masks. Will you order the same in New Jersey?

Whatever happened to the Rutgers saliva tests? Are those tests being conducted and counted in the state totals?

Governor Phil Murphy: One more, please.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: What guidance can we expect tomorrow? What is the order of priority here? Daycare, camps, sports, outdoor dining, small businesses?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. Let me go from the back to the front. Guidance, bear with us. You're going to start hearing that tomorrow on some of the things, in fact, you just alluded to. Saliva tests are going on. They're happening. We can come back and give you a sense of what that looks like.

Requiring masks in businesses, the answer is going to be yes. We do that now with essential and I don't think we're going to change for non-essential, unless you hear otherwise. July, I think I mentioned this the other day, Brent, we know that folks are going to need to know what the maximum is going to look like, if you've got a high school that's very large, you need to know whether or not you could do it in one ceremony versus multiple. We've promised to give folks some notice, but today, whatever today is, May 28th, I'm not prepared to give you notice on what it should look like on July 6th, but we have promised to give you notice ahead of time.

Drive-in and drive-through is still okay, that hasn't changed. What our Executive Order on graduations, or the tweak in graduations was physical standing/sitting on a football field. There's nothing that's changed as it relates to drive-in or drive-through.

I don't have any insights on unemployment benefits other than I believe it is happening, Matt, and we can come back to you on that. You may not have spoken to anybody, but I believe as of the 24th it was, but anything you want to add to that?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Just on drive-ins, Brent, we'll clarify for you. There's an administration challenge with having different types of ceremonies, so they've standardized it. They want to do all their events after July 6th, this is based on DOE's guidance, drive-in, congregating at a school, as well as in-person events, and that was based on guidance that was issued last night. We can go over it with you. The events that a lot of districts have planned, which Pat has worked with them on, you know, like drive-through events, those would still be okay. You know, the drive-through parades.

Governor Phil Murphy: But Brent, remember the drive-through is you're not getting out of your car. So I think what you're talking about is you get a combination of drive-through, Matt, and then you also get out of your car. That is July 6th. We will come back to you. Mahen will come back on the unemployment benefits. I'm not sure why you're hearing that, but we will definitely come back to you on that. Thank you. We'll go back to Dustin. Good afternoon.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Two weeks ago, the Legislature sent you a bill called the 2020 New Jersey Emergency Rental Assistance Program, appropriating \$100 million for people who need help paying rent. Will you sign it? Do you have any concerns with the bill? Can you explain any cause for delay?

And as far as the guidelines on the next phases go, there's a lot of business owners who would fall into the categories of phase two or phase three, who really don't have a good idea of when they're going to be open and what restrictions are going to be in place. Will you be getting into specifics like that, so people have a better idea of what to expect and when?

I understand that the Commissioner floated an idea with you to establish a nonprofit similar to a Public Health Institute that some states have, which can raise money and work around some of the government bureaucracy associated with procurement of supplies. What was your response to that, and is it something that's on the table?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'd be curious to know how you learned that, by the way. I like the idea, and Judy knows that. To say this is a five-alarm fire I think would be the understatement of the century, in terms of getting the house fire out, but I like the idea and I think it's an idea that has worked particularly well in some other states.

Dustin, on the second point, I'm going back to front here. On the second point on guidelines on retail, bear with us in the next couple of days. I'm not sure it's going to be tomorrow, but sometime in the next few days, I think we're going to clarify pretty much the answer to that question.

And as it relates to a bill that's come our way, as is our custom, overwhelmingly, I won't comment on the specifics of the bill. But I will say the reason the Lieutenant Governor is here tomorrow is to talk about rental assistance and rental programs. If you could bear with us and hear what she has to say tomorrow. So thank you for that. Let's come back down to Dave here. Dave, nice to see you with the green mask.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Thank you, Governor. I know you love it, so I wore it.

Governor Phil Murphy: I appreciate that.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: I got it. Governor, you talk a lot about the importance of face coverings. You have said you're a big mask guy, but more and more we're seeing in New Jersey something that we're calling mask droop syndrome, where people are wearing the mask under their nose. This sounds ridiculous, but it's true. I was in a convenience store the other day, everybody had a mask on. Four out of the five people had them below the nose.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: I made one comment, I said, you know, that's not the right way to do it, and the response I got was –

Governor Phil Murphy: And they slugged you.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Well, almost. They said, you know, I can't stand it. It's hot. It's annoying, and so this is what I'm doing. So if you'd be kind enough to not just the face covering, but specifically this droop problem, to comment on that and perhaps Dr. Ed, who is a walking encyclopedia, apparently, on many subjects, could spell out for us whether it's of any value at all to wear a mask but not have it covering your nose and why it would be important to do that?

As you're aware, I believe, Governor, a group of about 200 salons and gyms say they're going to open June 1 whether they're allowed to or not. Are you concerned that this could sort of spark other businesses to sort of say, well, we're going to do what we have to do to survive otherwise we're going to go under? You know,

what's your feeling about this? Are you worried about it at all?

And last one, if I may, the Department of Ed's guidance on the commencement ceremonies that Brent had referenced earlier, right now the number is 25 for in-person gatherings. How can high schools plan if they don't have any idea where they're going to go on this? And again, I go back to the question we posed last week, I believe, you know, what's the difference between if you're standing on a football field, having a bunch of people social distance wearing masks, and people on a beach doing the same thing? Because people just don't understand the difference.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep. I'll say a few words and then maybe Ed could talk about the epidemiology, but it's a half a loaf, I would think, at best. If it's dropped below your nose, you are covering your mouth, and that's where a lot of these particles come from, but they also come out of your nose. And so it's not good enough. I would just say to folks watching, I'll do it later, but you've got to do the whole shooting match here. You've got to make sure it's over the nose and it comes in under your chin. And in fact, in the same reporting that I referred to earlier that Ed commented on, there was even some criticism for the straight down, which some on Sundays I've worn, where it goes straight down as opposed to cup in, because you've got particles that can come out or come in. And I would just say to everybody, it really is important when you're out to cover your face, and that includes your nose.

Listen, salons and gyms, first of all let me say something that Matt would want me to say. The compliance has been overwhelming, not just by the individuals who have stayed home, worked from home, done the face coverings, washed their hands with soap, we wouldn't be where we are if it hadn't been an extraordinary individual effort. But it's also been extraordinary compliance by the business community, particularly the small business community. So for every one owner who wants to do X, there are a gazillion multiples of those who are doing Y and doing the right thing.

I can't speak to this specific group. I hope folks will understand the rationale, what Ed discussed earlier, the intensity of the potential of infection indoors and the steps that have to be taken. I would just say to folks, you're playing with fire. That doesn't mean you can't do it. But it has to be done the right way and at the right time, and I think we're going to, if you bear with us over the next few days, we'll give some more guidance on that.

And again, I repeat what I said to Brent. We know that it's 25 today, but if my math is right, it's 39 days until July 6th, so somewhere between now and a reasonable amount of time from now, we will give some more guidance as to what it feels like to be outside.

Yeah, the answer is on the beaches, we've left it to the local mayors and counties. We've said capacity matters, social distancing matters, strong preference for face coverings, you all figure out how you accomplish that and how you enforce that. Again, I don't think we've had the weather yet to be able to give us a report card yet. But, you know, when you're on a football field that is only 100 yards long and 50 yards wide, plus the end zones, and you are confined to that space, and we just got to make sure we do it right. I'll be shocked if it's 25 or even close to 25 by July 6. But I think more importantly, repeat the point that we want folks, we want to give them notice, we get that. I'm just not going to do it today, because it's 39 days out and we don't have to, number one. And number two, Judy and Ed and I don't have the information that we'd want to have to be intelligent about that.

The last thing we want to do, and we were having a discussion about this earlier, is give a date and then pull back from that date on something, or give you a number on capacity and then pull back. I know you're frustrated, folks. I don't blame you. But part of the reason is we want to go down this one-way street once, and we want to get it as right as we possibly can. Ed, any disagreement on covering the nose?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: No, obviously the nose has to be covered. You know, we understand that it's uncomfortable. We understand that people have problems with glasses fogging up, understand that it's difficult to see your feet and you have to worry about tripping over things and that sort of issue, and it's not easy. But if you're not covering your nose and you're breathing through your nose, obviously you're expelling particles through your nose. And as the Governor said, that's better than coughing and that sort of stuff, but it's not doing everything that it should be doing.

Governor Phil Murphy: Please, Ian.

Ian Elliott, NJTV News: Governor, Executive Order 124 made more than 1,000 people in New Jersey's prison system eligible for immediate release during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, less than 100 inmates have benefited from this move, and 42 have died. What is your response to today's protests at the Trenton War Memorial claiming your failure to follow through?

Have you mentioned any of these incarcerated individuals who have died from COVID-19 in your daily remembrance? And are you responsible for these people who have died in prison from COVID-19?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know that we've mentioned any in our daily remembrances. I don't recall that I have, but I can come back to you on that. I believe, and Matt will correct me if I'm wrong here, and I would like to explicitly ask him, it allowed for the eligibility of a certain number of people to be released subject to a comprehensive review, including, among other things, where were they going when they got out? Did they have housing and did they have sustenance in their life? We take that very seriously, and want to make sure that it's not just a blunt instrument that we're using, but we're taking this one person at a time, and we've been committed to that from the get-go.

I don't know what the exact numbers are now. Matt, I think has got that, but also any other color in terms of the gap between folks who may have been eligible versus the amount of folks that we felt we could responsibly release.

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: That's correct. The Executive Order laid out a process for four different lists of potentially eligible incarcerated individuals. Just on the number, as of two days ago, the 26th, these are the numbers that were filed with the court. I don't have the most current numbers as of today, but the Department of Corrections can get them to you. 607 inmates had been approved either for home confinement pursuant to the furlough program or for parole. There were 88 people who were eligible under both programs. This is, again, as of two days ago, 337 people had actually been released and the remainder were being processed. I know that they've made progress even over the last couple days, so we can get you that information but it's not less than 100.

Governor Phil Murphy: And my strong wish that no one would have died in either incarceration, in a long-term care facility, in a hospital, in a home, in a home for developmentally disabled, a psychiatric hospital, a veterans hospital. I mourn the loss of every single life in this state, period, full stop. Please, sir, do you have anything?

Reporter: Just let me pull it up here. The face ID doesn't work --

Governor Phil Murphy: I didn't mean to surprise you, sorry.

Reporter: One second.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you want us to come back to you?

Reporter: No, I'm pulling it up right now. I'm sorry about that. This is from Walt Kane at 12 New Jersey. We continue to get many calls about problems receiving unemployment insurance. For example, our viewers Stacy, Mike and Stephanie, among others, say that they have not received their \$600 federal supplemental unemployment checks. Is there a problem with the system that's causing this issue? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? May I say this? The best thing I can do, and let me tell you why I say this, because I've had a lot of people come to me directly. I had someone come on behalf of a company this morning where she had a number of folks who were having some issues. I can't think, and this was not the case maybe two months ago when the first wave hit us and the systems and the staffing, as good as they've been, they were overwhelmed. They were everywhere in America and we were no exception. But literally, I can't remember one case that's been brought my way in the past month that wasn't very particular and specific to the individual. There was something. It was the way they filled out their request, the weekly certification, it was something very specific to them. It was a cross-state issue, so the company this morning has got presence in both New York and New Jersey, and there are some cross-state, waiting on New York data in that case.

My best answer to you is, other than you saw the numbers we're putting out and you saw the amount of claims that have been processed relative to the total, is if you could get us the names of those people to Mahen, and we will literally, and we've done this in every case, not most cases, we will follow up directly and have someone at the Department of Labor work with the individuals. Okay? Thank you. Sir, welcome.

Reporter: Thank you. A couple of questions. One about the testing, can you now get tested without a prescription, without a doctor? Can you just walk up and get tested?

Governor Phil Murphy: The answer is yes. It depends on where you go, but the answer is yes.

Reporter: And the tests are free?

Governor Phil Murphy: Tests are covered by insurance.

Reporter: Okay. And the other question is talking about unemployment. A lot of people are not able to get unemployment, for one reason or another. I mean, they've been working for a long time, there's a shadow economy out there and these people have been supporting their families but now they don't have anything. They can't get unemployment, they can't get anything. How are you dealing with these people?

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, it depends on the individual, right? It's hard to give a blanket answer to that. I met a guy on the boardwalk from Toms River over the weekend, and I immediately got his case to the Commissioner. His team tracked it down and the guy hadn't been working since 2018, so he comes into the category you're talking about. So there's a whole range of programs that we, in many cases that we had existing before we ever heard about COVID-19. The inequities in this state have been yawning for a long time, and so we've been working since day one to try to close those inequities, everybody from the homeless to the working poor, getting as much federal support. You know, pounding away to continue programs like SNAP and other benefits that come into New Jersey, pushing back on a lot of impetus in Washington that was going the other way.

We as a country have an under-developed social net. There's just no two ways about it. While we can take great pride in things like the number one school system in America, which we are and we should take pride and among the wealthiest states in America, when we got into office, we had among the biggest inequities and the widest dispersion of experiences in education and income, in job reality and discrimination and whatnot. Whether it's in the criminal justice system, whether it's in the social welfare reality, whether it's in civil rights and social justice, you know, we've been chipping away at that from day one and we are trying to, as Barack Obama used to say, we're trying to perfect our union each and every day, but let there be no doubt it is not perfect. And we have a long road still to travel as a state and as a nation. Thank you. You get to bring us out, sir. Right behind you here.

Reporter: Oh, hey, snuck up on me there. Good afternoon, everybody. Two quick questions. Governor, just to follow up on the inmate question, Matt said that the numbers he gave out were as of yesterday.

Governor Phil Murphy: Two days ago, I think.

Reporter: Okay, two days ago, recently. Are those, when you started the inmate release situation, was that a one-time thing? Is it an ongoing thing that continues to happen?

And Judy, we heard about the number of inmates, 42, 43 that have lost their lives to COVID. How many corrections officers or staff have lost their lives to the disease/virus?

Governor Phil Murphy: So the program -- is there anything else or are you good? The first question is, this program is an unusual program explicitly because of COVID-19. Now, I guess it's fair to say, Matt, you can correct me if I'm wrong here, is we roll, please God, this is not in our midst forever and always, right? We hope there's an end to this at some point, even if we're changed permanently, which we are in terms of social distancing and handshakes and face coverings, we hope we can get through the war here sooner than later. I assume as long as it is in our midst, this is going to have some sort of a rolling element to it, I would think, and Matt's agreeing with me.

Secondly, Judy, do we have the staff number? I know we have it somewhere, I'm not sure I've got it --

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I don't have it with me today, but I can follow up.

Governor Phil Murphy: There's no question there have been losses of lives, yes, 100%. We can come back to you and let you know, and we mourn those losses as well. And again, you look at the long-term care fatalities, that includes staff. We've got heroic folks who have been going in and out of facilities, regardless of what they are, laying their life on the line, nurses in hospitals, doctors in hospitals, postal workers, amen. Matt, you wanted to add something to that?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Just one clarification, going back to Brent's question earlier about graduations. I think I may have misunderstood you. If you're speaking about districts that had already planned purely drive-in events at the district, at the school, the department's going to work with those districts. This is for non-planned events.

Governor Phil Murphy: Sorry? This is for what, sorry?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: The guidance issued last night is for events that haven't yet been planned.

Governor Phil Murphy: And again, drive-ins and drive-throughs are still allowed, as long as you stay in the car. I'm going to mask up, is that all right? I want to thank Judy and Ed to my right, Pat to my left, Jared to you, Matt, Mahen, the whole team. Again folks, keep doing what you're doing. You've been extraordinary. We're getting through this. We wouldn't be where we are without you.

We will be together tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. unless you hear otherwise. We'll have the Lieutenant Governor with us, and we will begin, I think, with a fair amount of specificity in some cases, and in other cases, directionally, pointing folks as to where we think we can be responsibly headed, particularly over the next two or three weeks. So again, folks, keep up the phenomenal work. God bless you all and thank you.

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