

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 5th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I am joined, as usual, by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, another guy you know well, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Thank you both for being here; to the far left, again someone who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Patrick Callahan. And today, we have the great honor of being joined to my immediate left by the Attorney General of the Great State of New Jersey, the one and only Gurbir Grewal.

The Attorney General is with us because we want to give you more depth to our efforts in our long-term care facilities, which have been especially hard hit by COVID-19. In the wake, in specific of the tragedy at the Andover Subacute and Rehabilitation Center One and Two, I asked the Attorney General to look into the matter and to review all long-term care facilities that have experienced a disproportionate number of deaths. I've asked him to join us today to speak to the task force that he has assembled to lead this charge, as well as to the new online hub through which residents and employees, and the families of those working and living in long-term care facilities can submit complaints for further review. Additionally, I've asked Commissioner Persichilli to also speak to her team's ongoing review of our long-term care facilities and to the steps the department has taken to enforce critical safety measures and protocols to protect residents and staff.

We know the long-term care issue has been among our biggest challenges, if not the biggest. The data spells out why we need to undertake these efforts. The number of long-term care facilities reporting cases of COVID-19 continues to increase, as you can see, and the number of cases continues to increase along with it. And with great sadness, we've lost too many lives of long-term care facility residents to COVID-19. Roughly about half of all of our COVID-19 deaths statewide have been of individuals who had been within the long-term care system.

And just as tragically, we have seen some of the industry be slow to respond and adapt to the emergent threat of COVID-19. We intend to hold folks accountable, as we should, and as you would want us to. As I've said before, we know this is an issue not unique to New Jersey. It is truly a national issue. And while we know there are many good actors who will do all they can to protect their residents and staff, unfortunately, we also know that there are bad actors in this industry. We hope the solutions we find here in New Jersey can be a national model for mitigation, protection, and resiliency, whether it be for COVID-19 or a future pandemic.

Before I get to today's numbers, I also want to briefly address the new guidance we received yesterday from Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and his team regarding how we can use the \$2.4 billion in CARES Act funding that New Jersey has received. As you may recall, it's a total of \$3.4 billion, but there's up to \$2.4 billion that could go directly to the state; the balance goes to the counties. I've had multiple direct and frank conversations on this with, from President Trump to Secretary Mnuchin and others in the administration, along with in Congress, Leader Chuck Schumer and Speaker Nancy Pelosi, on the need for us to have greater flexibility in the use of these funds to meet our emergent needs.

I am pleased to announce that we have received greater flexibility in how we can use this money, which means that more of it will stay here in New Jersey to backstop our efforts against COVID-19. I am grateful for the spirit of cooperation with which the administration and specifically Secretary Mnuchin and his team has taken these discussions and for their willingness to listen to our concerns. While this new guidance doesn't get us all the way to where we want, or frankly need, to be, I'm grateful that we now have greater room to meet some of our immediate needs. We will put this money to good use for our first responders and our small businesses.

And because of this guidance, we'll be able to fill an immediate need to provide the funding we had budgeted for our schools and educators. I can say today with confidence that because of the new federal flexibility, we will be able to make the next school aid payment of \$467 million, which will go out on Friday. This is a well-deserved recognition that education and educators are a critical part of our COVID-19 response. This guidance is a win for them, a win for the 1.4 million students and their families, and a win for our property taxpayers.

But to be clear, we are not out of the woods yet. This funding was already accounted for in our cash flow planning, we just didn't know if Congress would let us use it. We still have a long way to go, and some of the previously announced restrictions on our ability to maximize this funding remain. We not only need full flexibility to use our CARES Act funding to cover the escalating cost of the war – and it is a war – but also billions in direct federal cash assistance to stave off the economic and financial catastrophe that is threatening not just New Jersey, but every American state.

We need Congress to step up in a big way to provide direct relief to the states to help cover the immense revenue shortfalls that are a result of our having to close our economies, a step, by the way, that none of us wanted to do, but that we had to do to save American lives. It doesn't matter, frankly, if your state is large or small, urban or rural, led by a Democrat or Republican, this need is universal. And again, I call on Congress to pass a package of direct state relief so we can ensure that once we restart our economy and are on the road to recovery, we could stay on that road.

But obviously, to get on that road, we need the data to know that we're in a position to be there. So with that said, let's review the overnight numbers. Today we're announcing an additional 2,494 positive test results for a statewide total of 130,593. However, as Judy and Ed would want me to say, we still have some, as we've said before, some lagging results from the past several days. I think, I believe without putting words in either of your mouths, we probably need to smooth over Sunday, Monday, Tuesday at least.

As we look to the trend of new cases, we are hopeful that once all are accounted we'll see the trend lines moving downward. However, the map which we show often of New Jersey continues to show slowing rates of doubling of new cases, and this is a good thing. Stay with this if you could. For those of you watching at home, I'm not sure you can see this, but there are now a majority of counties where the virus is taking at least 30 days to double. That's a big deal. The only counties that are still in the darker orange are in the South with smaller number of cases where the virus is newer, so the steepness of that curve, while we want to see it flatten obviously, is not surprising. This map is going in the right direction, please God it continues to.

As of 10:00 p.m. last evening, 5,328 patients with COVID-19 were being treated in our hospitals. This is a very small increase from Sunday, but still represents a decrease of nearly 3,000 over the past three weeks. And remember there was at one point in our very worst case scenario, Judy, it wasn't that long ago that we were fearing 36,000 potential hospitalizations. We have avoided the worst of it by a lot, and that's thanks to everybody out there. Let's keep at it, because our vigilance is working. It's paying off and it needs to continue to pay off.

As we see the number of hospitalizations across our health systems regionally continues to trend in the right direction. And again, North, Central, South, the South had seen over the past, I guess about now 7 to 10 days ago, that upswing which we were expecting, we expected the virus to migrate North, Central to South. We saw that, thank God the numbers have remained low. And furthermore, there's a flattening, there's not only a decrease in the Northern and Central curves, there's a meaningful flattening in the South curve.

Our field medical stations reported 35 patients last night with a total of 400 having been treated. So while hospitalizations had a small increase, the number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care dropped and Judy's been reminding us, this is a big one for us to look at, to 1,534. We have now had one full week of declining numbers. Ventilator use currently stands at 1,169, and this number too continues to decline.

There were 385 new hospitalizations yesterday. I'll come back to that. And on discharges, 232 live patients were released from our hospitals yesterday. Let's stay with this for a second. I know there's a lot of folks out there who think that this is some recipe out of a cookbook, that there's some magic wand, that there's some magic date, that this is somehow a two-dimensional reality we're dealing with. It is at least three-dimensional, folks. There's no magic wand. There's no recipe, other than we know social distancing is the most important thing we could do. And just remember, if you're one of the folks out there as I am, by the way, itching to get things back open again, 385 people entered the hospital yesterday in New Jersey with COVID-19. 385 people entered the hospital in the past 24 hours with COVID-19. Please God, most of them, I hope all of them, get out of there. But sadly, the data tells us they will not in their entirety.

So with all due respect on Memorial Day weekend, I'm sorry about schools being remote for the rest of the year, particularly the high school seniors and their parents, I'm sorry we can't give you more definitive guidance yet on things that we're working on. By the way, non-essential retail, I hear morning, noon and night. I appreciate all that, I appreciate all the inputs and the wisdom on beaches. We still have people getting sick, going to the hospital and sadly, over 300 today, we're reporting in a minute, have died. So with all due respect, this is the fight of our lives. It's not two-dimensional, it's at least three-dimensional. We are considering data. We're considering perspectives. We're trying to learn from other places in the country, in the world. We're taking the best advice we can from medical experts. We're trying to make every decision based on the data, the science and the facts. Nobody is itching more to get this state back up and running than yours truly and the team up here. But we've got to do it right. We've got to do it responsibly. We've got to do it safely and we are committed to that whether folks, frankly, whether you like that or not.

Okay, our hospitals are continuing to show positive trends and as I've said several times already, just to repeat the point, data determines dates. These are the numbers that will tell us when we are in position to get on the road back and toward the responsible restart of our economy. So let's keep focused on the task ahead, pushing these numbers down further. That means keeping up, folks, with the great work you've done on social distancing, wearing a face covering when in public. We think increasingly, these things, or the kerchiefs, or the handkerchiefs, they really actually make a difference. And doing all the other seemingly little things like washing hands regularly with soap and water that can make, even though they're little steps, they can make a huge difference.

Remember, public health creates economic health and data determines dates. No state has flattened the curve as mightily as New Jersey. Hats off to each and every single one of you. Keep it up. This is in your hands, our hands to keep doing that, and the extent to which we can do that, that gives us the public health that we need, the metrics that we're looking for. That gives us the data that we need to then say, you know what? We can responsibly not just open up state and county parks and have golf again in New Jersey as we did responsibly last weekend, let's keep that up. But we could take other steps. But we'll do that together based on the science, based on the facts.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned a minute ago and with great sadness, we continue losing members of our New Jersey family and today we report that we've lost 334 more blessed souls. And again, Judy and Ed would want me to say that this did not all happen since being together yesterday at this time. This is cumulative over the past number of days, but they are lost souls, let there be no doubt about that and God bless each and every one of them. Our statewide total is now 8,244, which is almost unfathomable. It is unfathomable. I'd like to honor a few of these great folks, if I could.

First up, we remember a giant, literally, Dr. Gerald Glisson, Principal of Patterson's Eastside High School for the past three years. Look at that guy, man. He began his career in education as a special education teacher and moved on to serve in other roles, including as the Patterson's Athletic Director and the Principal at Great Falls Academy and as a coach. But to many students and countless others across Patterson, he was a beloved, respected presence, not to mention a role model. Dr. Glisson leaves his wife Michelle, with whom I had the honor of speaking last night. They were together for 24 years, married for the last 21. In addition to Michelle, who is a giant in her own right, he leaves his daughter Sydney who's 17 and Skylar who's 12. His parents and countless other family and friends, including our dear friend and his dear and close friend, Assemblyman Coach Benji Wimberly and his beloved brothers of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity. Michelle said he should be remembered as, and I quote her, "An amazing husband, father, son, brother and friend." who cherished family and friendships. Others called him, and I heard this from many, a gentle giant. He was only 46 years old. Our thoughts and deepest prayers are with Michelle and his daughters, his family, his community, and with every life he touched in his short time on this earth. May God bless him and watch over him.

Next up, somebody I have had the honor of meeting, Corliss Henry, a legend of Plainfield, New Jersey. She was 95 years old when COVID-19 took her from us, but what a life she lived. A graduate of Hunter College High School in New York City, at the brink of World War II, she took a job at a factory to support the war effort and was trained as a metal solder, but she found her calling in nursing and after a move to Plainfield in 1957, already a legend, by the way, that's the year I was born. When you think about an incredible life she had, she was hired at Muhlenberg Hospital, becoming the first African American nurse on their staff. She stayed at Muhlenberg until 1968, leaving to become a nursing instructor at Middlesex County College. And even while teaching full time there, she found the time to earn her master's degree in education at New York University.

In February of 2018, during Black History Month, I was honored at Drumthwacket to recognize her tremendous life of service with a proclamation I handed to her at a ceremony that evening, alongside my wife, alongside the rocking Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver. Corliss is now reunited with her late husband Preston, and leaves her sons Stephen, with whom I had the honor of speaking yesterday, and Bruce, her granddaughters and numerous nieces and nephews. You talk about a life well lived. Thank you for all you gave, Corliss. Thank you to all you meant to so many. We will miss you. Bless you.

Finally today, we remember Reverend Gregg Alan Mast. While he lived in New York and he won't be counted among the New Jerseyans we have lost, he was part of our family. Born in Michigan, he came to New Jersey to study for his master of divinity degree at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, which he received in 1976. He then joined the pastoral staff at Newark's North Reformed Church before becoming the pastor at Irvington's Second Reformed Church. It was during this time that he earned his master of philosophy and then his PhD at Drew University in Madison. In 2006, Reverend Dr. Mast was installed as the 14th President of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and his tenure saw the institution returned to financial stability and its programs expanded to better serve the needs of its students and community.

Throughout his life, He held a deep commitment to racial and social justice and his work to dismantle institutional racism at the seminary stands as a lasting and laudable legacy. He leaves behind his wife, Vicki, with whom I had the honor of speaking yesterday and who by the way herself is a PhD, and their three

children, Andrew, Katherine and David, and their spouses and four grandchildren. He also leaves many, many thankful parishioners. May God bless him and may God bless them all.

I don't have a picture for you, but I had a moving conversation this morning with Joanne Povia, who works as the Chief of Staff to Treasurer Liz Muoio and has been in government and has been a star for a long time. She lost her mother last night, Philomena, who was 94 years old, and I'm not disclosing anything. I hope that is not violating privacy's Philomena was also stricken with COVID-19 but I can't say here for sure whether or not that was the cause of death.

But she was an incredible woman in her own right. She was working in polling places into her 90s. And the most striking part of the conversation with Joanne, who's a fantastic colleague, was the fact that she grew up with stories from her grandmother, so her mother's mother, about the, guess what? The Spanish Flu. The fact that her grandmother, who was a seamstress, made a wedding dress for her best friend, but her best friend, got the flu, perished, and she was instead buried in a shroud that was made of her wedding dress. Think about that for a second. Grew up on the tales of her grandmother of the Spanish Flu in 1918 and then COVID-19 struck her mother and her mother passed last evening. It's extraordinary.

These names and the faces we showed are the reality of COVID-19. They are the reason why we continue to fight this virus and they are the reason why we will continue to do everything in our power to defeat it. Doing so takes a veritable army. With the Attorney General by my side today, we are announcing that this army will grow. Today the Division of Consumer Affairs will begin standing up a program to grant temporary emergency licenses to recent graduates of nursing, physician assistant, pharmacy and respiratory care therapy programs who have not yet been able to take and pass their licensing exams. This means that thousands of recent graduates could quickly join the teams of healthcare professionals currently fighting COVID-19. I'm sure the Attorney General will be able to speak more to this effort and I thank him for this and so many other arenas in which he is leading right now.

There are countless other residents who have rolled up their sleeves as well and as we do every day, let's salute a couple of them before I turn things over. Actually, I'm going to turn it to Gurbir and then to you, if you'll forgive me. We'll start in Hackensack There's Kelly Carroll, a culinary arts educator at Hackensack High School. After school closed, he kept in touch with his students and learned that some of these families were having difficulties in putting food on their tables. So Kelly started reaching out for food donations to help, which quickly and steadily came in from all over. He now has 225 bins in his front yard and spilling over into his neighbor's. The bins are refilled with fresh foods every Monday when delivery drivers come and pick them up to get the food to the families who need it most. So to you, Kelly Carroll, I thank you for keeping your students and all in need close to your heart and New Jersey thanks you.

Second, let's meet Jane Berlant. Jane's behind the mask there on the left, of Springfield in Union County. When she was seven years old, she was gifted a sewing machine by her dad. Today, that sewing machine has helped Jane churn out more than 400 face coverings which she is donating across the community. Jane's friend, Lauren Platman, didn't think this amazing work should go unnoticed so she tweeted at us using the hashtag #NJThanksYou and so to you, Lauren, thank you for recognizing Jane's tremendous contributions. To you Jane, New Jersey thanks you for all you are doing to help us get through this.

And finally, in a point of personal privilege, I want to give a personal shout out to this guy. Former Senator Bill Bradley, a giant literally and figuratively, a guy who has never forgotten this state and his stood tall. I will tell you, it's almost been like pulling teeth to allow me, from him, to allow me to speak about what he has done. He has personally mediated the delivery of 750,000 masks to the State of New Jersey, and he is still at it. He is still at it, trying to help us track down more masks and as we've discussed, the new ventilators or the gowns, and he is helping us track down gowns mightily. The two biggest sources for his help and coordination, and I want to give them a shout out again, we've recognized them before, but I did not recognize them associated with Senator Bradley is UNIQLO and the Joseph and Clara Tsai Foundation. I want to thank each of those organizations.

I want to give a particular shout out to Tadashi Yanai, who is the founder and CEO of UNIQLO who is a global humanitarian. I want to thank him, especially, because I've not referenced his name in the past. So to Tadashi Yanai, to Joe and Clara Tsai, we thank you and most importantly, to Dollar Bill, Senator Bill Bradley, I can't

thank you enough. In our hour of need, you have stood tall as ever. Senator, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

With that, please help me welcome the gentleman to my left, the great Attorney General of the Great State of New Jersey, Gurbir Grewal.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: Thanks, Gov and good afternoon, everyone. On April 16, I announced that my office had opened an investigation of New Jersey's long-term care facilities. Our investigation was prompted by both the high number of deaths that we were seeing at these facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and by the disturbing reports that we were receiving. Reports of bodies piled up in makeshift morgues, of nurses and staff without adequate PPE. And of family members left in the dark, unable to contact their loved ones and in some cases, receiving little or no information from the facilities. And in others, inadequate information.

To be clear, at this particular time, we're not alleging any misconduct by any particular facility or any entity or any individual. We'll simply follow the facts and the law wherever they lead us. And I certainly understand that for many of these facilities, this was the equivalent of a 500-year flood. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't examine how folks responded when those floodwaters started rise. And it also doesn't mean that we shouldn't examine how they operated before that flood. If they cut corners, if they, or anyone, for that matter, ignored red flags or warnings, if they lied to regulators or others, if they put profits over patients.

We want to be as thorough as possible in this endeavor and for us to do our job well, we need the public's help. So if you have firsthand knowledge of illegal activity or other misconduct at a long-term care facility or in this industry during the pandemic or before, please let us know. We've created a reporting portal at covid19.nj.gov/LTC. There you can share with us any evidence of misconduct that you might have. You can also upload documents, photographs or other materials directly using that portal. And importantly here, you can remain anonymous.

But we ask that everyone keep this in mind, that this particular portal is designed solely to further our ongoing investigation, and not to answer specific questions about a nursing home, or about the condition or status of someone living at a nursing home. If you're seeking that information, we urge you to contact the nursing home or the facility directly. And this also bears repeating right now. If you're reporting an emergency or any other imminent danger or threat, call 911 directly.

But here's the other thing, is that I've mentioned we're not waiting on the conclusion of our investigation to help residents at these facilities, especially those that are in nursing homes. As the Governor announced today, our Division of Consumer Affairs has been working overtime to ensure that we have the healthcare staffing that we need in this state to meet all of the challenges that we're seeing across the state. And to that end, we will soon begin granting temporary emergency licenses to recent graduates of certain healthcare, education and training programs before they've completed all the testing required for licensure. We're taking this step because we know that there are many out there, many future healthcare workers, who stand ready and willing to help us but they can't, simply because the centers where they would take the required tests are closed during the pandemic. Our new program temporarily removes these roadblocks and will allow thousands of nurses, pharmacists, physician assistants and respiratory care to enter practice more quickly, at a time when our healthcare system needs their help the most.

This particular program complements what we've already done to bring reinforcements to New Jersey's healthcare workforce. So far, we've issued about 18,000 licenses to out-of-state healthcare workers, over 600 licenses to recently retired doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. And just in the last few days, we've started issuing licenses to foreign-licensed physicians. All of these measures have been made possible through the emergency programs authorized by Governor Murphy, and established by our Division of Consumer Affairs, in consultation with Commissioner Persichilli and her team at Health.

As we mark Nurses Week, a week that gives us another opportunity to thank our nursing professionals for their incredible sacrifice at this difficult time, I can think of no better way to thank them by telling them that not only are we working overtime to make sure that they have all the tools and resources to do their job safely and effectively, but that we're also doing all we can to ensure that more help is on the way. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Gurbir, for both. Dan, can you put the slide back up again? The one we just had? Again, everybody, if you've got something to report, this is where you want to go. And you made a very fair point. If it's an emergency, you should be not going to a website, you've got to call 911.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: 911, and for status, contact the facility. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you so much for both of those initiatives and for everything you're doing. Allow me, please, to introduce the woman on my right 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 noted, in New Jersey and across the nation, COVID-19 has devastated our long-term care facilities. I want to share some of what we're doing to address these issues. As you know, since the beginning of March, the department has issued 18 orders and guidance to facilities which included:

- Curtailing visitation on March 14, and requiring screens of all individuals who entered the facilities; screens for symptoms and temperature checks.
- Allowing facilities to hire out-of-state, certified nurse aides to support the staffing vacancies.
- Enforcing mandatory notification of residents, families and staff of an outbreak in their facilities, and requiring universal masking.
- Additionally, prohibiting admissions to facilities that could not cohort patients and staff.
- We've also shared a list of over 150 certified nurse aides and 90 RNs and LPNs as possible staffing support.
- We are currently working with National Guard to bring in some efforts to additional long-term care facilities in the state. And the VA, as you know, is in our veterans homes.

Throughout April, the state surveyors inspected 60 facilities. The survey teams are looking at infection control, staffing levels, availability of PPE, and implementation of outbreak response plans, which includes family notification. As a result, four surveys resulted in the issuance of directed plans of correction. Several facilities are directed to bring on consultants in nursing and infection control.

We recognized that increased testing in these facilities, especially those that have yet to experience large outbreaks, is critical to stopping the spread. We developed an expanded universal testing strategy for vulnerable and priority populations, that includes long-term care, and a pilot program in partnership with Cooper University Hospital. Nearly 4,000 residents and staff were tested at 16 South Jersey long-term care facilities. Of the facilities tested, 9.75% of staff tested positive and 24.4% of residents tested positive. Most of these individuals were asymptomatic.

I want you to reflect on that. As we promote social distancing, wearing face coverings, we do so for a reason. Asymptomatic positive individuals are amongst us. We provided guidance to the facilities that they should plan in advance to take quick action to prevent the further spread within their facilities, and to adopt a strategy to retest patients and residents and staff who are currently found to be negative to assure that they are negative. So for all of the individuals in the 16 facilities who tested negative, they are being retested.

The Cooper pilot was the first phase of a long-term care testing pilot. It will continue in phases. The next testing phase will begin in facilities that have fewer than five cases. In Phase 3, testing facilities will include facilities that have between 6 and 25 cases. And in Phase 4, all other facilities will be tested. We're prioritizing facilities with fewer cases so immediate action can be taken to increase infection control protocols to further prevent spread and ultimately save lives.

In addition to the state effort, in the next two weeks with several partners, we will be conducting testing at 74 long-term care facilities, over 10,000 residents and 20,000 staff. Our partners are Alaris, CareOne, University Hospital in Newark, Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas, Atlantic Health, St. Joseph's in Patterson, Inspira Health System, St. Claire's and Sinclair's Health System. We have also been working to increase personal protective equipment available to these facilities. The state has shipped 10.7 million pieces of PPE to long-term care facilities. These included 235,398 face shields, 4.3 million gloves, 28,468 gowns, 965,420 N-95s, and 5.2 million surgical masks.

In April, the Department of Health contracted with the Alaris Group and CareOne and St. Joseph's Health to allocate beds for patients being discharged from hospitals who are awaiting nursing home placement for long-term care or skilled nursing. We have contracted with CareOne for 319 beds and 260 beds with Alaris. These beds are for COVID positive patients being discharged from hospitals needing nursing home placement upon discharge. Additionally, we will open 250 beds at East Orange for skilled nursing level patients.

Now for my daily report. As the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 5,328 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients, of which 1,534 are in critical care, and 76% of patients are on ventilators. Although hospitals have been declining in the North Central region, they are now declining in the South slightly, but the ICU patients on ventilators are still remaining between 70% and 75%.

Today we are reporting 2,494 new cases, for a total of 130,593 cases in the state, and 334 additional deaths. The breakdown of deaths by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 52.6%, Black 19.3%, Hispanic 17.4%, Asian 5.3%, and other 5.5%. There are now 509 long-term care facilities or assisted living facilities in the state with COVID-19 cases.

At the state veterans homes among a census of 677 residents, there have been 360 residents testing positive and a total of 125 deaths. At our state psychiatric hospitals with a census of 1,250, 167 patients have tested positive and today we are reporting 10 deaths. That's one additional death over the past week.

According to lab data from this morning of the labs sending us COVID-19 results, 257,587 tests have been performed, 105,557 testing positive for a positivity rate of 39.05%. That concludes my daily report. As always, stay connected, stay safe and stay healthy. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. We made a conscious decision to focus a little bit more heavily as you heard today, both with Gurbir here and Judy's remarks on long-term care, because you all have been quite rightfully asking a whole lot of questions over the past month or so. And as opposed to just dealing with it episodically we felt like it made sense to sort of lean more heavily today.

A couple of things. The counties positive cases, the same six, so it's Bergen, Hudson, Essex, Union, Passaic, Middlesex, the most by a meaningful amount. Positivity, that's the first time we've been under 40 in a while Judy, right? And Ed, you'd remind us that that's a cumulative number so the spot numbers, presumably, are lower and again, were still overwhelmingly symptomatic folks, not entirely, but overwhelmingly symptomatic folks who are in the universe there.

And again, we remind you that the total number of positive tests, we know one thing that, that's not the denominator. We don't know, I don't think anyone knows anywhere in the world right now, what the entire universe is. There's theories abounding from every which way, but we know that it's a universe that's larger than that.

I think some time, and I'm not going to marry ourselves but just to preempt maybe some questions you've got, we're going to be coming to you in the next number of days on both a specific sense of the way forward on testing and more color on contact tracing, I think probably in that order. Thank you, Judy, for that. And again, thank you for the deep color on the long-term care front. Gurbir, thank you for your leadership on that as well. Pat, good to have you, as always. Anything on compliance, PPE, infrastructure or other matters? Thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Compliance continues to be exceptional, I think is the word that I would use. Overnight, Patterson responded to an abandoned building where four subjects were in front of it trespassing. Those four subjects were cited with the EO violation. Newark Police Department issued 36 EO violations and closed five businesses. And then Hamilton Mercer County, the owner of a nail salon was cited for the second time for having a non-essential business open.

And just on a separate but I think, important note, our trooper that was shot last weekend expects to be discharged and he appreciates, and so do all of us, your support and outpouring of prayers for him and his family. That's all I have, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, that is great news. Please give him, his mom and his girlfriend, I don't want to jump the gun, our best. We're going to start over here. I've lost Dan. Dan is tomorrow one o'clock? You could check that while we're starting here. If you all, there is a big crowd here today for those of you watching at home, you may not be able to tell that, and we appreciate and are honored by our riches, but please, keep your questions to a couple today. We are one o'clock tomorrow unless you hear otherwise. Thank you so much. Sir, Brendan's got the microphone.

Q&A Session

Reporter: Thank you, Governor. We've been talking to small business owners who have social distancing plans in place. When can businesses that implement those guidelines begin to open? And Governor, talk about the decision to lift restrictions on golf courses, but not allowing small businesses to reopen?

Governor Phil Murphy: Two very good questions and answers I think are fairly straightforward. Non-essential, small businesses that are currently not able to open is on our list that we're looking at very carefully and I've gotten some very, I would say highly responsible inputs, including a really compelling case from a Mayor this morning that Matt and I were discussing earlier. I can't give you a date but that's something clearly we're looking at and doing that right, including the consideration of curbside pickup is something that we're looking at.

And the golf question, it's not because I'm a golfer, because I'm not. The answer is quite straightforward. Things that are out of doors where we can impose and then enforce, mostly self-enforcement, self-imposing social distancing are far more logical steps for us to take. Judy and Ed, I think, would support that. Indoor activity is more complicated. Now indoor activity with proper social distancing is something that we hope we can get to sooner than later. I can't marry myself to when. But outdoor activity is more manageable. It's more logical as a healthcare matter for us to get to first.

There's also the mental health issues that we've raised, not necessarily specific to golf, but golf and state and county parks as well. Thank you. We'll go back and then Elise, we'll come back to you. Thank you, Ma'am.

Reporter: Thank you, Governor. More than 22,000 people in long-term care facilities have tested positive. You are and will be doing testing, as the Commissioner mentioned today, of more facilities. Do have a number overall for how many people in long-term care facilities have actually been tested and what the positivity rate has been? And do the facilities all have the testing kits they need?

And then second, the Attorney General –

Governor Phil Murphy: Second? This is like the fifth. Sorry, last one, please.

Reporter: I'm sorry, this is my last one. The Attorney General's work, looking into facilities raises the question of long-term repercussions for the eldercare industry.

Governor Phil Murphy: For the what?

Reporter: For the eldercare industry, for the long-term care industry. Issues like staff-to-patient ratios, staff pay, these have been issues before the pandemic. Is it possible you'll be looking into regulating the industry in these areas in some way, depending on the findings of the Attorney General's Office?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I don't know that I – do we have a positivity rate for the tests that have been done in long term care?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, we don't because it's the same issue with the numerator and the denominator, because we have been testing symptomatic people all along, we don't have a positivity rate. But the test that we did in South Jersey, which is really an important test because it was asymptomatic individuals, and over 16%, were testing positive is a significant number.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would also add, I think you've heard this from us already, but you should assume in that testing protocol that we're going to come to you in the next number of days, and Judy has alluded to this as have I, that vulnerable communities will be high priorities on that list, and that will include clearly long-term care.

Before the Attorney General comes in on your second question, there's no question there's long-term repercussions for this industry, period. I'm constantly thinking through, other experts, by the way, everybody has had this challenge. So it's not like, in some of these cases, you can rip a page out of somebody's playbook that's done it really well and steal the good idea. We haven't found that. Other than the basic blocking and tackling, cohorting, Judy's been talking about testing, restricting visitations, testing asymptomatic employees that we thought early on were coming in unwittingly. Again, I don't want to speak for the guy to my left and I know he'll answer this, but on behalf of Judy, him, myself, the rest of us, there's no question there's long-term repercussions. There's no question we'll go out and we'll try to find as much expertise to help us with that, to make sure that we're prepared, that we're not just in the here and now dealing with this and saving as many lives as we can, but learning our lessons that have been pretty tough lessons for all of us across the country but certainly here in New Jersey, and getting much more right the next time. Gurbir.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: Thanks, Gov. The goal of our investigations is to look backward and to determine what went wrong and if anyone did anything wrong or illegal. And if they did, we'll hold them accountable. But at the same time, if we identify issues and gaps and things and areas for improvement, it's my hope that in addition to the accountability, we'll also share what we find so we can inform better policy moving forward.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think that's really well put. So it's not just what happened, but what gaps have we found? I mean, Judy and I spend most of our time on this topic, I think it's fair to say, and your team, and we're going to take any good ideas we can get from anyone, and certainly none more so than the guy to my left. Thank you for that career, Gurbir. Sir.

Reporter: Yes, thank you. Both for the Commissioner. A little less than a year ago, Commissioner Elnahal issued a report on Wanaque that identified several gaps in long-term care facilities, infection control, etc. How quickly were those recommendations adopted? Have they been adopted? And post Wanaque, did DOH have the resources it needed to properly regulate the industry moving forward?

And then second question is, you've described several actions in the department, that the department has taken to address the long-term care crisis but it doesn't appear that DOH is taking any kind of affirmative steps there. Do you have the confidence that the industry can work within its current regulatory structure to fix itself? And if not, do you think that there are specific -- what specific steps do you think need to be taken so that LTCs aren't seeing these outcomes moving forward?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start Judy, and go to you. I'll speak for myself as a non-medical expert. The industry does not have it within themselves to make the changes they need. If they had, they would have done it already. I want to be definitive and unambiguous on that, and change will be coming.

Secondly, I don't have a particular answer on Wanaque, you mean Wanaque the facility or the report that Sharif put out based on what happened at Wanaque?

Reporter: The report itself.

Governor Phil Murphy: That I think is probably more, Judy is far more qualified to address that. But I think we've said this, that happened in October of 2018 and we had asked for emergency action plans, Judy, to be in by February of 2020, I believe, right? And by the way, none existed in the state before then. I want to remind folks of that. Judy, do you want to jump in on that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. Actually, early on, when we started realizing there were significant issues in long-term care, I did get a copy of the Wanaque report to make sure that we did follow up. One of the follow ups was that at the end of every day, the Commissioner would get a report on every outbreak that occurs in all of New Jersey, and I do get that. So you see not only for long-term care, but throughout all of New Jersey, the Communicable Disease Service sends me a form that identifies every outbreak and that was one of the recommendations.

The other recommendation was outbreak plans for every long-term care facility. We do know that they exist. They were to be filed, and they were. The second thing was for every facility to have, as I recall, consulting infection preventionists. I believe it may have also been physician infection control practitioners, but I'm

stretching back on my memory a bit from when I read it. All of that occurred. I have to say that the follow up based on Wanaque was in place.

I don't think anyone prepared us for the transmissibility of COVID-19 and I think early on in this outbreak, when we realized that a whole family was stricken from a family gathering of 25, we realized we were dealing with something a lot more prevalent and virulent than we had expected. But at that point, it was already in our facilities.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, on that point, it feels like years ago, the Fusco family of Freehold, the extraordinary reality of the connection with patient one, I guess, I'm not sure what the medical term was.

Two other quick points and then we'll move down to Elise. Number one, and I think we've said this consistently, it was execution on the plans as opposed to whether or not the plans were submitted and approved and blessed by DOH. It's an uneven execution. And secondly, or finally, I remember very clearly standing in front of Wanaque and speaking not just in a press conference, but to parents and loved ones of folks inside who could not get information. I think if you've heard, one of the biggest frustrations from Judy and me, every step of the way in terms of the uneven execution has been communication. You know, to loved ones, to staff members, to other patients in the these facilities. So thank you for that. Thanks, Judy. Elise, how are you? Good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: I'm well, thank you. Good afternoon. On the CARES Act guidance, did the administration turn down any of your asks? My second question for the Attorney General, have you been giving any attention to the Paramus Veterans Home in your investigation? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll let Matt Platkin, who's here with us, address that in terms of the specifics inside of the CARES Act. I'll let Matt address that in terms of guidance. The broader ask right now for us is overwhelmingly the next round of direct cash assistance coming out of Congress and hopefully signed by the President. That's the big ask that is still outstanding that we're spending a lot of our days. When we're not working on long-term care, we're going around trying to figure out how we can get federal money. But within the CARES Act, Matt, do you want to comment about the guidance?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: I think broadly speaking, they accepted most of our requests. I mean, obviously, in any ongoing conversation like this, you won't get everything you asked for. The state has two problems, Elise. We have a budget problem in terms of what's going to happen to it over the course of the next 14,15 months and our revenues falling off, and then we have a short-term cash flow problem, due both to the revenue cliff but also because of the moving of the tax deadline from April to July. So the big ask we had before then was to give us more flexibility about what we can use immediately before we're into the next budget cycle, when there will be additional flexibility, and they were helpful in granting us that flexibility.

Governor Phil Murphy: I want to reiterate my thanks for that, because we were pounding away on that on our visit to Washington last week, on the phones. In particular, I want to thank Secretary Mnuchin. Gurbir, I would just broaden Elise's question to not just Paramus but also to Menlo Park and God willing, it exists in Vineland but at a much lower scale. Any comments you've got there?

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: So with any investigation of this size, in particular with so many facilities and the resources that we have, we've assembled an incredible team from across our Department of Law and Public Safety. But with any investigation of this size, we have to be driven by data and numbers. We're being, to borrow a term, surgical in our approach and focusing where we think our focus is deserved. And I'm not going to talk about specific facilities that we'll be looking at or where we're going, in what order, but we have a very comprehensive investigative plan and we're following it. And in the last three weeks, we've taken a number of investigative steps and we'll continue to do that until our investigation is complete.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Thank you, sir. Sir, do you have any? You good? Sir, do you? Okay, hold on one sec. We're coming at you.

Reporter: Governor, two for the Commissioner. As far as long-term care, what is the timeline on all four phases of the testing plan for long-term care facilities? When can family members who test negative visit loved ones at those facilities?

A separate topic, 15 children in New York City have been hospitalized with symptoms compatible with a multi-system inflammatory syndrome possibly linked to coronavirus, according to a health alert by the City Health Department on Monday. The patients, ages 2 to 15, were hospitalized from April 17 to May 1 and several tested positive for COVID-19 or had positive antibody tests. Have you seen any cases like this in New Jersey?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think I just want to make one general comment on testing, Judy, and turn it to you. Again, we're going to come back to you within, I hope, a matter of days with a broader protocol on what's testing look like going forward. Dan can look this up while I'm speaking. We've gone from zero to 100 and something testing sites. We are among the highest tested states in the nation but we're not where we want to be or need to be. We now have the supplies to allow us that latitude. Jared Maples is here with the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, thank you for your help in that regard as well.

But as a general matter, we want to come back to you. We've done a little bit today with long-term care. Come to you with a little bit of a one-day deep emphasis on testing protocols. Judy, with that.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Sure. First of all, the Phase 2 long-term care program is kicking off this week. That's with the facilities that have lower positive cases. On the pediatric cases, as you know, the age range of COVID-positive patients in New Jersey is less than one year up to 108 years of age, so we have had pediatric cases. We have not, I have not gotten any reports of the multi-symptom inflammatory Kawasaki disease that's affecting individuals throughout the United States. But I have not gotten notification of any of those cases to date.

Governor Phil Murphy: And please God it stays that way.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: We have 122 testing sites. Thank you, Dan, for that. Thank you, sir. Brent, we'll go to you, if that's okay.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Will the state have the Casino Control Board make sure Atlantic City casinos follows stringent health procedures when they reopen, whenever that is? And will the state work with unions on it? Has there been any decision made on July 7 Primary being in person yet? When can we expect that? Is the state prepared for a surge of mail-in ballots? State Senate President Steve Sweeney wants to furlough 100,000 state workers. Do you support that idea? And what did you make of Chris Christie's comments about maybe we have to thread the needle when it comes to reopening?

Governor Phil Murphy: How many more questions you're going to jam in there?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: 17.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, you're quite good at this. I want to say that you're an Olympic gold medalist at this. There's no news on most of this, but no news on casinos, but obviously the governing bodies and the representatives of the workers will very much be a part of any decisions that get made. Again, as I mentioned to the earlier question about golf, it isn't golf versus non-essential retail. It's outdoors/indoors, and casinos are quite decidedly indoors. Now I had said at the very first press conference that I participated in on Friday, March 13, that they have big scale, which helps. But there's no decisions there. No decisions on the July 7th Primary, but those are probably going to come sooner than later, I would guess so bear with us on that.

We've said to the Senate President, that as a conceptual matter on furloughs, we're open-minded to that and I don't have any more comments specifically as it relates to that. I think we've got to be very careful, and we've said this to him and he knows this, and I think we all understand this point. We need government, in many cases, more than we've ever needed it before. We need, I don't know many of us, Judy you tell me, Gurbir, tell me, you've got a lot of people sitting back with their feet up right now? Pat? People are working to the bone. I don't know where a lot of that opportunity is, but if there is an opportunity we're open-minded to it. I only saw a couple of headlines on Governor Christie, as I said earlier. Count me in as the guy who wants, more than anybody else, to see us safely and responsibly get the place up and running again, particularly staring down the barrel of the shore season. No one wants that to happen more than I do but we've got to do it right.

And as I said, we're not just reporting over 300 fatalities sadly, today, we're reporting over close to 400 people who walked into a hospital in the past 24 hours, or between 10:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. Those are new folks in the system. You read the White House guidance that we're going to have, you know, now it looks like a lot closer to 100,000 fatalities, 3,000 a day by June 1. We are not out of the woods here. I think we have flattened the curve. Bless you all. We've done it better than any state in America, but we're still not in the end zone. So again, I don't have any specific comment other than what I said earlier. I want it more than anybody. I wish there was a magic wand. We're going to try to take the steps responsibly in some logical order, outside/inside, social distancing, ability to do that. Those will be key elements to this and we'll keep everybody posted. Let's come down to Dave if we could. Dave, hello.

Dave Schatz, New Brunswick Today: Hi, Governor, how are you doing? Most of this is going to go for the Commissioner who needs no introduction, but maybe you want to weigh in as well. When we say we talk every day about coronavirus deaths, how are these deaths counted? Are they all lab confirmed or do they include probable cases? And if so, determined by whom? If a patient has an underlying condition, is it always counted as a coronavirus-related death?

And as you're aware, obviously, we've seen some case numbers revised significantly, most recently in Camden County, they had several dozen earlier deaths that have now been added in an update. What is the cause of that? Is it just a lag in reporting or do the tests come back later, and so forth?

And then for the AG, any idea how long the investigation that you're participating in will take? Can you just give us an idea about how many investigators are working on this? I guess importantly, what kind of charges potentially could some of these people face, these bad actors, if they are found to be negligent? Is it just fines or could it be beyond that?

Governor Phil Murphy: You're giving Brent a run for the money. I just want to make sure that, he would want me to say that, right? Judy and Ed, do you want to talk about, Ed, we'll go over to you in terms of how the fatalities are counted and any revisions that we've had.

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Deaths are one of those things that seems like it'd be very easy to go ahead and count. Basically, you'd say, okay, I know somebody got sick, I know they died, I count them. They're not going to get better. They're going to stay dead. And that's just going to be a number and that's it. The reality is somewhat more complicated than that.

What happens is this, typically. We know that somebody gets a lab result back, so we know that there's a positive result for somebody. However, we may not know that they die for a while, for a number of different reasons. In order for us to know that somebody died, that has to get entered into the system somehow. That can either happen in the hospital if the person died in the hospital, a local health department on investigation. We have an outbreak investigation team at the Department of Health that follows up on people to see what their outcome was, and if they had passed away or not. Or we may get that information from a death certificate. All of those different sources take a different period of time, so they can take a while until they come back.

We may not know, in fact we do not know when that person died, in most cases. I can tell you, for example, that while we report out these numbers of deaths every day, and we always make a point of saying that they don't occur within the last 24 hours, and they certainly do not. Those numbers coming back will include deaths as far back as about a month. Most of them are grouped within the week or so before that, so mostly close to when we're reporting it. But some of that stuff comes back a whole lot later.

As to what we count in those deaths, for the most part what we report out are what we call confirmed deaths. In order to be a confirmed death, two things have to happen. We have to have known that you were positive on the lab test, and we have to have known that you died. That's what we reported out today, for example, when we said there were 8,244 deaths, those are all confirmed. Those numbers will go up, unfortunately, but very rarely down. They may go down a little bit, because sometimes on further investigation, something is discovered, like maybe they weren't a New Jersey resident, they might have lived somewhere else instead so they don't get counted in our numbers or they might have been a duplicate case. So it'll get moved around a little bit, but not much downward.

Sometimes they might jump up because if we get a lot of those reports coming at once, if our investigations people do a lot of work or manage to actually sit down in front of a computer and enter in that information all at once, you might see that jump going up. To some extent, the numbers that are coming from the nursing homes are the little bit different part of it, because everything else that we've been talking about, those are only the confirmed deaths, not probable. And again, so long as we know that you had the positive test and you died, you're a confirmed case as far as that goes.

In the long-term care facilities, because of the concern, because of the interest, and because of our wanting to be transparent and getting as much information out as we possibly can, those deaths are a little bit different. Those deaths are what are reported to us by the long-term care facilities. They're a mix of what we have confirmed, because some of those people we know have had positive lab tests and we know that they have died. Some of them are not in that group. Those numbers tend to be more subject to revision as investigation happens and we find out whether they are in fact confirmed deaths or not. And that's basically it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Ed. Anything you want to add, Judy, or you're good? Gurbir, on the questions that Dave asked about the investigation.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: On the first question on the size of the team, what I can tell you is that we'll put as many people on the team as necessary, but we've drawn from our Division of Consumer Affairs, we've drawn from our Division of Law, we've drawn from our Office of Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, we'll draw from our Division of Criminal Justice. We'll bring whatever resources we need to take this investigation wherever it goes. As far as charges, we're in the first phase. We've developed our investigative plan, we have our team together, and we're gathering the facts. And those facts, if they justify criminal charges, we'll bring criminal charges. If those facts justify civil charges or would invoke civil liability, then that's the route we'll go, but we're very early on in our investigation. And if it's neither of those, and if we're at a place where we're going to then just issue a report with best practices and recommendations to address gaps, as the Governor mentioned, then that's where we'll go. But we're willing to go wherever the facts take us. We're willing devote whatever resources are necessary at this point to figure out what went wrong and if anyone did something wrong, to hold them accountable.

Governor Phil Murphy: I want to repeat something that Gurbir said earlier, that there is, in some cases, I suspect you'll find there's a 500-year flood reality that you might have done everything we had hoped of you, based on the plan that you submitted and our expectations, but it overwhelmed you. That is also an aspect I'm sure that you'll uncover. Thank you. Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. Quick follow up off of one of Brian's questions. You said that you only saw the highlights of Governor Christie's op-ed. Is there any reason that you didn't read that in its entirety, given, you know, I would guess, not being a Governor, that there might be some insight that could be gleaned from that?

Then I also want to ask the Attorney General whether or not you have any reaction to Trenton Councilman Robin Vaughn's comments on a call on Saturday. And then, Governor, I have one more for you but it has slipped my mind, unfortunately. Oh, right. I asked you this a few weeks ago, but have you spoken with Vice President Biden regarding the crisis, clearly.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, on Vice President Biden, we were intended to have gotten together on a call, I think last Friday, or a week ago Friday. No, last Friday, and that's trying to be rescheduled as we speak. So not yet, but we are in the process on that. It's nothing specific to the Governor, I can't read remotely everything that either you all write or that is spoken, and we do our best. I was just literally reading about Kawasaki as you were answering the question from you, sir. You know, I try to read as much as I can, but I don't read everything.

Gurbir is welcome to answer the question about Trenton's City Councilwoman, but it's completely unacceptable, reprehensible. There's no choice as to what you should do in my opinion, but I'll let the Attorney General.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: I'd echo the Governor's comments. I think I've made pretty plain over the last number of years my position on this type of conduct. Thanks to the Governor's help, we've rebuilt our Division on Civil Rights into a very proactive organization that's issued guidance on issues related to discrimination in housing and other areas of public accommodation based on whether it's homophobic comments or any other type of comments that could have a discriminatory impact. I'm being a little bit measured because I also oversee two agencies that investigate this type of conduct but I have zero tolerance for it. If there's something for us to look at and something's referred to us, I need to be a little bit measured and not go into any more detail than that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that and thank you for your leadership on this whole range of stuff, but completely unacceptable from my standpoint. Thank you. John, you'll bat clean up here. Good afternoon.

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: Thanks. I have two questions first Daniel Munoz NJBIZ. Governor, you mentioned that this Economic Advisory Commission to have groups, "much closer to the ground." What did you mean by that? Will there be more Chambers of Commerce and Local Business Association involvement?

Governor Phil Murphy: The answer is quick on that is yes. That's exactly what we were talking about.

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: And the State Chambers, Business Associations and Trade Groups sent you a letter this week on ideas for reopening the economy. Anything in those recommendations that stick out to you? Anything you're in favor of or rejecting outright?

Governor Phil Murphy: I haven't seen it. I will absolutely take that. We've got a good relationship with those organizations and we'll take their input very seriously as we had intended, even in the absence of a letter.

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: On deaths, is the state tracking deaths at home? And are you seeing an uptick in deaths at home generally? In other words, are you seeing people who are dying that might have sought treatment elsewhere?

What are you looking at in terms of lifting the barrier toward elective surgeries? What has to happen or how close are you to doing that?

And Governor, you telegraphed that you'll be talking tomorrow about testing and contact tracing. What will you be doing in terms of announcing plans for isolating people, the third part of that component towards reopening?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll defer on deaths at home? I think we've answered both of Daniel's questions. On elective surgeries, Judy, I'll just say this, that that's something that is, I'd say on the sequencing, that's probably on the more sooner than later side, but we're still not quite there yet, but I think you'd probably agree with that. Testing and contact tracing, please don't hold me to that. I didn't say tomorrow, I said in the next number of days. Isolation would probably either be in one of those discussions or its own discussion shortly thereafter. That's sort of, if you look at the six-part road to recovery, slam the curves down, ramp up rapid return testing, contact tracing, a combination of boots on the ground, Judy, and technology, isolation/quarantining and then economic recovery and resiliency. That'll come either as part of those conversations or on its own. Any comment either on that, Judy, and/or Ed, or specifically on how we're counting deaths at home? You said you thought that the numbers of deaths at home was going up? Okay.

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: It comes back to how we find out about things. Deaths at home are something that come in slower as far as that happens. For the most part, the way that we find out if somebody died at home was through a death certificate, which usually, which should tell you where that person died, as well as other things, including about whether the cause of death was related to COVID or something else. That's one of our slowest sources of information, meaning that's something that we don't get very rapid information from. I don't have the exact breakdown as far as whether more people are dying at home from COVID or other related things. Certainly we know as the Commissioner and others have mentioned that the number of people going to emergency departments for other reasons besides for COVID have dropped dramatically, about half the normal levels or so. That is something that we're keeping an eye on.

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you want to add anything to that or?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No.

Governor Phil Murphy: We're good. Thank you. I'm going to start to remask here. Thank you, everybody, again, for your patience and for your good questions. We need very much in a time of crisis, we kid a lot back and forth in some cases, but we need a strong press right now, more than ever before. So thank you for everything you're doing, including these are not fun times in the Fourth Estate either, so hang in there, everybody. I want to thank, as always, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli for her extraordinary leadership. Dr. Ed Lifshitz, right at her side. Thank you both. Extraordinary, I think best in the nation, Attorney General Gurbir Grewal to my left. Colonel Pat Callahan, as always, thank you. Jared Maples, Matt Platkin and the whole team, we'll be back here at one o'clock tomorrow, unless you hear otherwise.

Keep at it, folks. Keep at it. I mean, we have done extraordinary things in this state to get us to where we are today. We need to continue to do that. Again, we're coming out of a really good weekend in terms of compliance, not just good weather. Pat mentioned earlier, the compliance overnight continues to be really strong. That's a huge tribute to everybody out there in this state. You're doing an extraordinary job and by doing that, you're allowing the map to turn better, the hospitalizations to go down, etc., etc. And please God, sooner than later, the fatalities to go down dramatically. But we're not there yet and that's why we've got to continue to keep asking you stay at it, stay strong.

I promise you, we're going to take every single responsible step that we can collectively take together to begin to get back on that road to recovery. The fact that you're staying at it and being so good, and so vigilant, and keeping up social distancing and wearing things like this, that's allowing us to take these steps. So it's in your hands, and you've been extraordinary. Keep it up, folks. God bless you all. We'll see you tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy

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Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
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