

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: March 31st, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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## Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. With me is the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, COVID-19 Medical Response Advisor and former State Epidemiologist, Dr. Eddy Bresnitz. Great to have you both. Eddy, welcome back. To my left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Chief Counsel Parimal Garg. We will have a APB out for Jared Maples and a cast of thousands here.

As we foreshadowed on Monday, I want to spend a couple of minutes up front – and Judy may want to add, or Eddy – some color to this in their remarks – discussing the latest modeling from the Department of Health that is helping to guide our decision-making processes. The caveat, which we've given before, is that – I must give is that while these models are based on a years' worth of data, they do change I think, Judy, day to day as new data better informs our path forward. Additionally, remember, these are projections, and they are not certainties, and through our behavior, and we saw this in the spring last year, we can change the trajectory of the models. The more vaccinations we administer, the better we can make the model, and the more we continue to wear our masks and keep social distances even after we've been vaccinated, we can further push these projected numbers lower. Of course, while the numbers of projected new cases can and should give us all pause, it is the numbers in our hospitals which are of the greatest concern when it comes to determining the steps we need to take as a state. The metrics in our hospitals and their ability to ensure full and equitable treatment for those who need it are the greatest indicators of our on-the-ground realities. If you look around the world right now, there are some places which are facing those awful decisions of equity, Paris, among other places. Now with those guideposts covered, lets take a look at the models.

First up, we're going to call this one our moderate case scenario. This model assumes that the number of new hospitalizations follows the rates that we have seen after past religious holidays and expansion of indoor activities, including indoor dining. This model also assumes some impacts from this week's spring break where our students are home. This model takes into account the expected increases in vaccinations statewide and also assumes that the vaccines in our arsenal will average 95% in their efficacy against all variants of the virus. I will help you out with the numbers because it's not necessarily the most readable chart I accept. Under this moderate scenario, we would reach a daily high of new cases on April 18th with 5,445 new positive tests but hover within the 5,000-plus range for most of April. We would also hit our high total hospitalizations on that same day, April 18th, at 2,669. That is some 300 more than we are seeing currently.

Likewise, we would also see our highs of ICU patients at 574 and ventilator use at 319 on that same day, April 18th. Both of these would be significant increases from today. However, even under this scenario, we would not expect to see new cases drop below 3,000 until the middle of June at the earliest, and the number of hospitalizations would not approach 1,000 until August. For a lot of reasons, I think, Judy, I'll vote on my side here, this feels to me the closest to the reality that we're going to be dealing with. As I said, this is our moderate case scenario. Let's now take a look at a high case. We do not have a low case with us today. I think if there's a demand for that, we should come back and show you that.

This is the high case scenario. This is important because it's got some assumptions which I think are pretty conservative, but we need to test our limits here. To create this model, we still assume that our vaccination program continues at its current pace, but – and this is a big but – that the vaccines only ultimately prove 65% effective against all variants, not 90 something percent, but 65%. I don't want to overstep my bounds to Judy and Eddy. I don't think there's any evidence that supports 65%, but we're being careful with this scenario. Secondly, for this model we also assume that more people will lower their guard with the warmer weather, and they won't be adhering to the necessary precautions for protecting themselves at gatherings through the spring and into Memorial Day. Thirdly, we also assume a rate of hospitalizations from the holidays and reopenings that are above what we have seen in the past. With all that being said, under this scenario, we're in for a long, hot summer, so please, God, this is not what we have to live through. We would hit a new high in new cases, more than 8,000 daily, in mid-May and again in mid-June. You can see in the middle bracketing the words "high scenario" where those peaks occur. Likewise, hospitalizations would continue to increase through April before holding into an unsettling range of 3500 from mid-May all the way into mid-June.

Certainly, this is not a break point number for our healthcare system, thank, God. However, so we measure that capacity usually in beds and PPE, but let's remember there are human beings working in these hospitals treating these patients, doctors, nurses, and support staff that have been at this for well over a year, and their stress and exhaustion cannot be overlooked or overstated. Additionally, ICU counts wouldn't drop below 600 until late July, and ventilator use would not approach 300 until early August. We would basically plus or minus, be back to where we were in December and January when the second wave was crashing on us.

Judy and Eddy, in your remarks, please feel free to address this point. I'm less worried or horrified by the numbers than I am about the length of the calendar. In other words, the numbers don't come close to our physical capacities, although I'll repeat what I said about doctors, nurses, and support staff. Their capacity, their mental health, their physical health is also a huge factor here. I'm more concerned by how elongated this becomes if it's this scenario that we have to live through, and please, God, we don't. As I said, these are models. They're not certainties. We can change them through our behavior. The fewer new cases, the fewer new hospitalizations, and the fewer new hospitalizations, the fewer patients in ICU on vents and the fewer deaths.

It really is that simple. It is a matter of cause and effect. I recall a conversation I had early on. You all may remember this because we talked about it privately and publicly with Ron Klain, who was at the point not White House Chief of Staff as he is today, but I was calling Ron who's been a friend for a couple of decades in his former capacity as the Ebola czar, and I went through our modeling, and, Judy, I remember you and I talked about this, and he said, "Remember. Don't forget one thing here. Human behavior can bend these curves." Guess what? He was right, and you all by the millions bent those curves. I don't want to preempt Pat's report, but the compliance violations are not that significant, so most proprietors by the tens of thousands are doing the right thing. We have it within us. We've done it once. We can do this again, folks. If the past – that's not just a challenge because if the past has shown us anything, it is that you all by the millions are up to that task.

Again, whatever we're showing in these models, whether it was last spring or over the winter, you have responded, folks, by doubling down on what has been needed to do to slow the spread, and in both instances, whether it was in the spring of last year or the winter of this year, our actual numbers did not meet the projections, and they did not meet them meaningfully. Remember, we were worried that our hospital systems were going to be overwhelmed in April and May last year. Our numbers of beds – I'll never forget it – peaked at 8,270. That got us at the edge, but because of what you did, I think we had worst case scenarios 12 to 15,000 at one point bed use. Folks, you're the reason why we did not see those awful moments. We have crushed the curves twice. Let's do it a third time and, hopefully, for a final time. I know that we can do this. We have to push through fatigue and refocus, get vaccinated as soon as you can when you become eligible. Keep wearing your face coverings and social distancing. Let's get this done. Let's make this pandemic history.

Now, if we can, let's turn our attention to today's numbers. Looking first at our vaccine dashboard, we are reporting a total of 4,225,964 doses into folks' arms. That's as of 9 a.m. this morning, and there are one million – Judy, I'm showing 1,570,907 individuals who live, work, or study in New Jersey who have now been fully vaccinated. Nationally – I'm going to put these rankings up, but I'm also going to give you a footnote and make sure that I underscore this. We're now third among all US states in terms of the percentage of our vaccine supply that we're getting into the arms of New Jerseyans. That's more than 88%. Two states ahead of us, Minnesota, 5.6 million people. A great state, we've got 9 million, and North Dakota, 750,000, another great American state but a population less than either of Bergen County or Essex County. At nearly 94,000 doses administered daily, we only trail seven states. We're also eighth in the percentage of our population having received at least one dose, and we're the state with the largest population of any of the states in the top ten, so we continue to make unmistakable progress, and these numbers bear that out, but here's the footnote.

If you're out there watching right now, and you're eligible, and you still can't get your appointment, we have nothing but complete support, empathy, and sympathy for you. We know that we are still a supply/demand imbalance as a country and in the state of New Jersey, and so while we're really proud and Judy and her team deserve the overwhelming amount of credit – Pat, you and your team, we were with – I'll get to that in a minute – some of your colleagues this morning, National Guard, FEMA, healthcare players, volunteers, there's a lot of folks who deserve credit for those – the current reality, but that does not mean that everybody is in the place they want to be. You have two types of people right now, largely, if you're eligible. One is, there's still a group, as I said, who're frustrated they can't get that appointment, and we don't blame you for your anxiety. Then there's a much bigger group, I'm happy to say, who have gone through the process, and they say almost to a person, it's the singular most impressive healthcare experience of their life. We want everybody to be in that category. Let there be no doubt about it.

Today, some more news. We are proud to unveil a new tool on our COVID-19 information hub to help you more easily find an available COVID-19 vaccination appointment to that point. Our new appointment finder can be found in its beta version at that website, [covid19.nj.gov/finder](https://covid19.nj.gov/finder). This new tool aggregates information across multiple scheduling platforms, multiple times an hour letting you know where appointments are open and directing you on how you can make one for yourself. We hope this new tool will take some of the stress that I mentioned a minute ago out of your search. Now, to be sure, as I said a minute ago, appointments are still limited and are especially so mid- to late-week, so the finder at this moment will reflect this reality. As our vaccine supply increases over the next few weeks, you will see many more available appointments show up on this website.

With today's launch of the finder's beta version, we will continue to test and make improvements to the appointment finder, and we will welcome your input in this ongoing effort. The creation of the appointment finder has been a collaboration among the Office of Innovation under the great leadership of Beth Noveck, the Office of Information Technology, again, under the great leadership of Chris Rein, and the Department of Health under the leadership of the woman to my right who needs no introduction and her team, and I thank everyone for their great work. I always want to thank some outside partners in this including CVS, Epic, Zocdoc in the private sector as well as some volunteer groups including @NJ\_vaccine on Twitter, [vaccinatenj.com](https://vaccinatenj.com), and the US Digital Response. Again, the appointment finder is at that website, [covid19.nj.gov/finder](https://covid19.nj.gov/finder).

I mentioned this a second ago. Our vaccination program received another boost, no pun intended, early this morning with the formal launch of the new federally run community vaccination center at NJIT in Newark. Judy, Pat, and I were honored to be there with Mayor Ras Baraka, Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill, NJIT President Joel Bloom, as well as a cavalcade of important folks, and importantly, probably most importantly, with some of the first Newarkers who went in to receive their vaccinations. I want to just make a couple of points here. On the left, that woman is in the United States Air Force, based in Texas, but grew up in Millville, New Jersey. The woman on the right is a Newarker to the best of my knowledge who was just vaccinated. That gentleman on the right works in the DPW and was known to Mayor Ras Baraka, and I don't know about you two, but that place is a machine. They are going to put 6200 doses into arms today. Their daily objective is 6,000. They're going to exceed that today, and it was an all hands on deck. Pat, you know the FEMA region two folks very well through all the storms and pandemics that we've been through, but their folks have been outstanding. They were there today. Armed forces were there. State police were there. HHS under Xavier Becerra, the federal Secretary of Health and Human Services, had his regional representative there. It was a really impressive visit, and it's a game changer for the state and specifically for Newark.

However, despite all that good news we're getting for the vaccination front, we're also being shocked back into the reality that this pandemic is, as I mentioned, far from over. By the additional – if you add up all the PCR positives and presumed positive antigens, it's a total of 5,902, and you're right if you're doing the math at home. That already exceeds the peak that we're expecting in a few weeks. The positivity rate, and again, this is from a weekend, is 14.26%, but we've been saying weekdays 45 to 55,000 tests a weekday. This is based on, guess what, half of that, 26,215, so as much as we're not happy with that number, we're also not surprised by it.

Statewide rate of transmission is currently at 1.09. It has been at 1.09 for the past couple of days, and it was at 1.10 for five days. I think, Judy and Eddy, the reason why people ask us all the time positivity rate goes up and down, the RT doesn't have that same level of volatility, and the answer is simple. Positivity rate is from that particular date of tests. The rate of transmission is on a rolling seven-day basis, and therefore, it is somewhat smoothed out. Our hospitals last night as of 10 p.m., 2,363 patients, 2,221 of whom have been confirmed COVID positive. Just one comment not only specific to today. You've seen over the past month a dramatic shit in the numbers where we know that somebody's COVID positive versus presumed awaiting their test. Guess what? That's because the antigen testing and then the back-up PCR testing capacities in our hospitals are dramatically better than they were not that

and that's why that gap of now four 150ish, 140ish of the total, 458 were being treated in intensive care, 236 ventilators in use. 298 live patients left our hospitals yesterday. That's good, but another 344 confirmed COVID positives went in, and our hospitals reported not yet confirmed 25 in-hospital deaths yesterday.

There's no other way to put it. The virus continues to spread, and this pandemic is not over. We have more contagious variants to contend with. We have the on again, off again weather we have to contend with. Please, God, Pat, bring us some warmer weather sooner rather than later. That's preventing us from moving more of our activities outside, and we know when you're outside this virus is a lot less lethal, and we have pandemic fatigue, to some extent misinformation and denial to contend with as well. This is why we have to continue the basics: wearing facemasks, keeping social distances. It's why we ask you to use your commonsense. It's why we need to take this thing seriously. I know we all want to get back to things the way they were. Believe me, we all do. We all do up here, but yet we cannot yet do that. We have to keep pushing, folks, for a little while longer.

We are also with the heaviest of hearts reporting another 44 confirmed losses of life for a total now of 21,993 confirmed deaths, and the number of probable deaths, as we do most Wednesdays, has been revised to 2,568. I think it's fair to say, Judy and Eddy, the overwhelming amount of those probable deaths are from early on I would think. When you add those two numbers, we now have the sobering reality of having lost 24,561 members of our New Jersey family. It's hard to believe. Let us honor. Let's take a couple of minutes and honor three of those lives.

We begin today by honoring this woman, June Boyne. June was 87 years old and a long-time resident of Haddon Heights in Camden County where she raised her six kids. Her home was a warm and inviting place, and June had a reputation for never turning anyone away especially if she should provide them with a home-cooked meal, and she was well renowned for her chocolate chip cake and her chocolate pudding pie. In her professional life, June was a property manager at the Lakeside Apartments in nearby Woodbury, and her daughters told me everybody there loved her, but once she retired, her entire focus went onto the things that really mattered to her, in no particular order: bowling, her regular pinochle games with her friends, spending time with her sisters, Billie, who survives her, and the late Eileen, and doting on her grandchildren and great-granddaughter.

June's family and friends will always remember her good nature – she never complained at any circumstance – her eternal optimism and her infectious laughter. She leaves behind five of her six children: Edward, Holly, Albert and Frank, who are twins by the way, and Audra, and their spouses. Another son, Michael, sadly, predeceased her about a year ago not from COVID. She's also survived by her eight grandchildren, Edward Jr., Stephen, Garrett, Jacob, Allison, Lauren, Ava, and Christopher and her great granddaughter, Ellie. Her first great-grandson is expected in May. I had the honor of speaking with her two daughters Holly and Audra on Monday, and she gave me – they gave me, rather, quite a picture of this remarkable woman. June's love of family and life reflected the very best values of our New Jersey family. May God bless and watch over her and may her family carry on her extraordinary legacy.

Next up we honor the life of West New York's Hector Mendoza, Sr. He was born on a small town in the hills of El Salvador and came to New Jersey a half century ago in search of his American dream. He arrived with very little to his name but held a drive to be successful and to be accepted in this new country. He began his journey in the embroidery factories of Union City, but when an opportunity to drive a truck at the Port of Elizabeth opened, he took a leap of faith and focused on learning English so he could earn his CDL license. He succeeded at both and was a driver for Marine Container for nearly 20 years. Hector was proud of what he accomplished given where he'd come from, but he would say his greatest accomplishments were as a devoted husband and father, and his greatest joy was seeing his twin children Hector, Jr., with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and Jennifer graduate together from Rutgers University. He is survived by that woman on the left, his wife of 45 years, Maria, and by his children Hector, Jr., and Jennifer. He was only 68 years old. Everyone who comes to our state and our nation has a different American dream. We are so proud that Hector found his in New Jersey, and may God bless and watch over him and his family.

Finally, today we remember this guy, Robert Brennan, Jr. of Hamilton, right here in Mercer County. Bob was 64 years old. Born and raised on the other side of the Delaware River in the Philadelphia Suburbs, Bob came to New Jersey following his graduation from the University of Pennsylvania, bringing with him a love of math and a degree in engineering to take a job with Johnson & Johnson, and he worked with J&J for a total of 30 years and still found time along the way to earn an MBA from Rider University. Bob's family and friends always noted that his analytical mind made him a ringer for any trivia game anyone dared to challenge him to. More than anything, he focused on his family and friends, and he always considered those who had joined him for life's journey as a part of his family, whether they be neighbors, former classmates, or work colleagues. He was also devoted to his Catholic faith and was a member of the Knights of Columbus because he knew he had an even larger family to do good things for.

Bob leaves behind his wife Lauren, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, after 42 years of marriage, along with his daughter Cassie. Cassie lives in Columbus, Ohio with her husband Nicholas. He's also survived by his sisters Kathy and Aileen. We trust that Bob is receiving his eternal reward for a life well lived and lived in accordance with his faith. We are honored that he chose to make New Jersey his home, and may God bless and watch over him and his family.

Switching gears if I may, this week our Jewish community is celebrating Passover. Our Indian-American community – and we have one of the largest both Jewish and Indian-American communities of any state in America – celebrated Holi. On Sunday, our Christian communities will be celebrating Easter. Each holiday is a celebration of renewal and rebirth and the promise of a better day. Let's all do our part to keep to the spirit of these holidays and to maintain our commitment to our fellow New Jerseyans to work together to end this pandemic. Let's remember that one way we can show this commitment is by helping our small businesses across the state not just survive but thrive so our communities can remain strong.

To that end, tomorrow, I'm going to be incredibly honored to be in Burlington County to sign into law a bill that will commit another \$25 million in grants for small businesses with five or fewer employees who have been among the hardest hit. This bill will further the tremendous work of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, which has already committed hundreds of millions of dollars in federal coronavirus relief funds to our small businesses. The EDA has worked hard across the board to build partnerships not just with local business owners but also with countless community organizations. One of those partnerships is with the New Jersey Farmers Cooperative under the leadership of that woman, director Barbara Wilde. From their home base in North Cape May, the New Jersey Farmers Cooperative helps put educational programs and cooperative marketing opportunities to work so farmers, artists, and artisans can all succeed together. The farmer's cooperative recently received a grant through the EDA's new Sustain and Serve New Jersey program that will allow us to purchase 150,000 meals from local restaurants across South Jersey to feed families who need a helping hand.

More broadly, though, the Cooperative is ready to help us prepare for a stronger future by working to lower the bar for entry into farming and small business ownership, especially for people of color, for women, youth, veterans. They're doing this through their work to establish a business incubator at LeGates Farm in Cape May in collaboration with the SCORE, uppercase, business membership program at Stockton University. Other projects in the works include a teaching garden, a community garden allotment program, and an apprenticeship program for farming and historic restoration. There's a lot happening needless to say. To Barbara, who I had the great honor of speaking with on Monday, and her team and everyone working with the New Jersey Farmers Cooperative, I say thank you for your partnership and for all you're doing to keep New Jersey's farming heritage alive and sustainable for the future. Check them out, [njfarmerscoop.com](http://njfarmerscoop.com), not org, com. [njfarmerscoop.com](http://njfarmerscoop.com), C-O-O-P.com.

With that, I'll prepare to hand things over to Judy for more detail on the modeling and today's number, but before I do, let's flash this one up, Pat, on your behalf, for the state troopers out there everywhere. First of all, we had an extraordinary ceremony on Monday after our press conference to celebrate the 100th birthday of the New Jersey State Troopers, the premiere state law enforcement organization in America. I just want to remind everybody as I'm

sure Pat will remind us. To folks out there who want to become a part of that tradition, to be a part of the next hundred years, sign up. Applications are open from March 28th, which I think was Sunday, all the way to April 23rd. you can see the website right there, njtrooper.com. Sign up. It's an extraordinary career. I've had the honor now of being at several graduations, and it's emotional. The quality of the women and men is as high as it gets. It's a great career, and you're helping us. By the way, folks, if that weren't enough, you're helping us keep New Jersey safe and secure, whether we're in a pandemic or whether in the daily day in and day out reality of living in this great state.

Lastly, as we turn things over, especially as we enter the Easter weekend, take your precautions, everybody, seriously. It is expected to be a little chillier than we'd like and potentially at least for part of it, a little bit of rain over the next couple of days. Folks are going to want to get back inside. We understand, but we have to be careful and vigilant. We only want chocolate bunnies, jellybeans, and Peeps to be doing what anyone takes home from their Easter egg hunt, no taking home COVID-19.

With that, please help me welcome a woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor. As the Governor shared, hospitalizations have increased again in our state, and this trend is definitely concerning. Over the past two weeks, new hospitalizations are up 28%, patients in hospitals are up 21%, and patients in ICU are up 16%. However, ventilator use is actually down 4%. In terms of hospitalizations, we are seeing changes in those most affected. When we compare hospitalizations in the first and last weeks of March by age group, we're seeing the percentage of younger individuals being hospitalized. We have seen a 31% increase among hospitalizations in individuals between the ages of 20 and 29. That's a 31% increase; 9% increase in the age group of 30 to 39; a 48% increase among individuals 40 to 49; 29% in the age group of 50 to 59; 27%, 60 to 69; and interestingly, 7% those 70 to 79 years of age; and only 1% increase for those over 80.

The largest increase is among the ages of 40 and 49. This could explain why ventilator use is declining, minus 4% over the past two weeks, because seeing younger individuals in the hospital who may not need ventilator assist. Rising case counts are driving an increase in our overall COVID-19 report, our CALI reports. If you go on our website, you will see that the state in February, half of the counties were in yellow. All of our counties are now back in orange or high-risk activity. Based on this report, we're expected continued increases in hospitalizations and unfortunately deaths as we follow this rise.

These sustained increases of hospitalizations and COVID activity demonstrate that we are definitely in another wave of this virus. In the predictive modeling that the Governor reviewed, our assumptions – and they are assumptions – show increasing hospitalizations April through May with a very slow recovery over the summer. It is important to note that models change daily and if you change even one factor in the modeling, the scenarios can vary, and they are very helpful for planning purposes. As the Governor stated, we use certain assumptions to develop these models, but it is our behaviors that can impact the trajectory that we are on.

I have shared this predictive modeling with the hospital CEOs across the state because I want them to be ready for the possibility of perhaps a long and difficult spring and summer. We cannot forget the dark days of April last year where we saw a peak of 8,270 individuals in the hospital. We had shortages of PPE and ventilators. We had to bring up field medical stations. Tents were set up in hospital parking lots. Unused wings and cafeterias were converted all to make bed space for critical COVID patients. Well, now we have adequate PPE. We have operational stockpiles and we have strategic stockpile at the state level. We have ventilators, and we have supplies, and we don't expect hospitalizations to rise to these levels, but we must work together and be vigilant so we ensure that we don't slip backwards.

We all worked so hard last year to flatten the curve. We have to redouble our efforts. There are still an uncertainty ahead with this relentless virus that continues to change. All of the country's in a race to vaccinate as variants are contributing to the surges. New Jersey is making great progress in vaccinations, and we're confident that if the supply continues to increase, we can continue the rapid pace of administering doses in the arms of New Jerseyans. We just returned from the FEMA Community Vaccination Center in Newark which has the capacity to vaccinate 6,000 or more individuals per day seven days a week. This site will help us continue our efforts to ensure vaccine equity by reaching communities who've been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The center is an addition to 12 vaccination sites that we have up and active across the city, receiving part of the state's supply of vaccine. Additionally there are six pharmacies in the city that are part of the federal retail pharmacy partnership receiving additional doses of vaccine from the feds.

To date, nearly 40,000 Newark residents have received at least one dose of vaccine, and 19,075 individuals have completed their vaccine journey. This week, New Jersey's allocation of doses of vaccine totaled 494,430. We received 174,800 Moderna vaccines, 87,400 first doses, and 87,500 second doses. Our Moderna allocation has actually been flat for over a month. This week, we received 267,930 Pfizer doses, 148,590 first doses and 119,340 second doses. Surprisingly, we received 51,700 J&J Janssen vaccine. Next week, we will get another boost. We are expecting 551,320 vaccines; a little bit higher, Moderna, about 3,900 Moderna additionally. That is a total of 178,700 Moderna; and 241,000 – 20,000 Pfizer, a little bit lower. However, we are expecting 131,600 J&J doses next week, so we're excited about the increase in the one-shot J&J dose.

Moving onto my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals have reported 2,363 hospitalizations with 458 individuals in intensive care. It is believed that the uptick in cases is due primarily to more contagious variants; for example, B117, the UK variant coupled with less cautious behaviors. However, we are still better than where we were in January. In mid-January, we had 3,547 patients in our hospitals and 635 patients in ICU.

There are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. The positivity in the state, on March 27<sup>th</sup>, was 14.26%. The northern part of the state reported 15%; central part of the state, 14.38%; and the southern part of the state 11.7%. We have no new cases in our veterans' hospitals. We have one new positive case among patients in our psych hospitals.

That concludes my daily report. Please remember to celebrate your holiday safely. Continue to mask up, socially distance, wash your hands frequently, stay home if you're sick, and get tested. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, many thanks for all of the above, and I suspect that we all have the same reaction. That setup in Newark is a machine. That thing had – I forget how many stations they said they had, but they had –

**Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli:** A lot.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** – dozens of stations, and you see something like that and you really can see it. By the way, disproportionate amount of representation of folks getting vaccinated of color, which is exactly what the doctor ordered, and that's why it's where it is. Pat, again, it was a real treat. Thank you, Judy. It was a real treat to be with you Monday afternoon, including with your wife, Linda, and your mom and dad. Your dad's a retired trooper, so that made it even more special. I did notice that you're mounted colleagues had a little bit of a challenge when the two helicopters flew overhead. Again, congratulations, happy 100th anniversary. Here's to a second great century. I know you don't have much on it, but any color on compliance, weather, any other matters.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Thank you, Governor, good afternoon, and thank you from all the women and men in the state police for Monday. I, too, was glad to be sitting next to you and not on the top of the horse when those choppers went over, but she held on. With regard to compliance, as the Governor indicated, there was no reported EO violations to the rock since we last met.



questions of equity, so this is something you get asked a lot on voting rights. What's wrong with IDs? Well, you have historically and I think in the here and now, an under-representation of valid government IDs in under-served communities, particularly communities of color. It is something I would say I remain open-minded to.

In the best case scenario, I think if you could hold off on that, unless you've got your fingertips, we can show that on Monday. Would you be okay with that, Mahen? Judy, is that okay with you? We could show it on Monday? My gut tells me we're in the moderate reality. There's a very good – I think you agree with me. There's a really good piece in the *New York Times* digital portal today by David Leonhardt, sort of a best of – or *Tale of Two Cities*, rather. Near term, the next four to six weeks, we're in this variant versus vaccine reality, but there's a very good cause to be optimistic in the medium term, and the medium terms is, say, June. We could show the best case scenario on Monday if you're okay with that. Nice to meet you.

Sir, do you have any? Please.

**Reporter:** I have two. First for the Health Commissioner, apparently 1,895 PCR cases were removed from the total from yesterday. That's a huge number. Why did this happen? Also for the Governor, the DEP is preparing land use regulatory changes including flood zones. The NJBIA says the DEP is relying on a records report from a 2019 that estimates five feet of sea level rise by the year 2100 and would put half the state in a flood zone. Are you aware of this and do you support this move by the DEP? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. I don't have any comment in particular about the DEP question other than I'm very much aware of the report. We made a big deal about it when it came out from Rutgers, that is, but I've got no color on the DEP piece. Mahan, can you follow up on that one for me? Thank you for that. Judy, any color on the – you said 1,839 PCR tests were removed yesterday. Is that correct? PCR results? Okay. Can we come back to you on that? No color. I know there was some inference – I'm not suggesting it was Alex. There was some inference based on his question the other day that for some reason, we are making this look worse than it is. This just in: that's the lat thing that we have any interest in doing. If you all think it's a burden, you should be – you should assume you've got a lot of sympathy up here in a sense. The last thing we want to do is mislead people. That's just not going to happen. That's not to say that there may be some reason why you got a handful of tests that are getting caught up on or to your question, getting removed. We'll come back to you with color. The last thing we're going to do is make this seem worse than it is. We are trying to call balls – or better than it is, by the way. We're not going to do that, either. We want to call balls and strikes and call it as we see it.

Dave, with that – sir, Kenny – I apologize, I didn't –

**Kenneth Burn, WHY:** No worries.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Skipped you. Dave, I apologize and get back to you. How are you, sir?

**Kenneth Burns, WHY:** I'm well. Saw you on television this morning.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Oh, you did? Yeah, I was on Fox 29, right?

**Kenneth Burns, WHY:** Yes, and to that end, you say you –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** With Alex and Mike.

**Kenneth Burns, WHY:** With Alex and Mike. You said that you wouldn't qualify for a vaccine appointment until Monday, and you just announced a new component to the web portal all being in beta mode. In advance of that, is it ready to handle the high amount of traffic even though New Vaccine Finder or the regular COVID-19 appointment website isn't ready for the traffic, because you're talking about a large window of people. Then my last question, Congressman Gottheimer and Pascrell said that unless President Biden takes the deduction cap on salt – take it off the table, they are not entertaining any type of corporate tax or any tax code changes even though President Biden wants to have – trying to find a way to pay \$2 trillion for this infrastructure plan. You're vocal about the deduction cap. Are you aligning yourself with the Congressman as far as getting rid of it before we start talking about raising corporate taxes? Do you feel conflicted about that? I'm sure New Jersey has a number of infrastructure projects that need money to pay for it but at the same time, you have two congressmen that say we're not going to talk about it until we get rid of this deduction cap.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I want to make sure I understood. Dante, stay close, and I love your mask, by the way, as I've said before. If folks can't see it, it's the flag of this great state of New Jersey. First, as I said this morning, I'm eligible as is my wife beginning on Monday, so we're in the 55 and up category. We'll go online just like everyone else is doing and we'll try to get our appointment. I think your question was is the appointment finder going to be up for the fact that you've got a lot more volume coming on as of Monday? Yeah, so far, we have been able to do that, and we wouldn't be taking this step if we didn't think it could. Again, remember, this is in the context, without question, of an ongoing supply/demand imbalance. I'm very confident in our technology team, Judy's team and their inputs, but again when you add a new group of people, you add, at least temporarily, to the supply/demand imbalance. I'm confident that the system will hold up well. We had real vendor issues early on as we've spoken to many times. We had teething pains with the call center. We're largely through that on both fronts, right? It wasn't a straight line, but we're in a place that we feel good about.

I spoke to Congressman Pascrell yesterday. He and I were at a Cover All Kids event, which was a home run in Passaic, city of Passaic, and he mentioned he was going to take that position. I don't have any conflict about it. I don't blame him for taking it. We were crushed by the salt cap. I think it was completely political by the last federal administration I'm very happy that Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen, has expressed broad sympathy and support for addressing that. We'll see whether or not it ends up being a part of this infrastructure plan. I can't predict, but I sure as heck don't blame Congressman Pascrell or Congressman Gottheimer for having that opinion.

May I say, because you asked about it, this infrastructure plan, which I think the President is unveiling this afternoon, is a huge game-changer for us. I mentioned this this morning in Newark. If you are investing heavily in things like infrastructure, climate, roads, bridges, rails, tunnels, because of our density, because of our location, because of our legacy assets, we are a disproportionate winner. We're going to win relative, much more significantly relative to an average American state. I will say with some amount of pride we're doing a lot of the stuff that's embedded in that \$3 trillion plan. That access to community college, access to pre-K, climate initiatives all-time high investment in infrastructure, so for a lot of reasons, we like what the President is doing. Thank you for that.

Dave, I misspoke a minute ago, but here we are.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** I'll let you off the hook this time, thank you. Commissioner and Dr. Eddy, could you guys explain please why you think more young people are getting hospitalized? Is this just the result of the UK variant being a little more severe in terms of the illness that it's causing, or is there something else going on here? Are you concerned that people, Governor, may be fed up and tired of dealing with the pandemic and they just won't behave appropriately? In your comments about the modeling, it sounded like you're trying to let people know that this could really be a problem and this thing could drag on terribly into the summer if people are not behaving properly. Commissioner, the Pfizer vaccine is reportedly very effective for kids ages 12 to 15, and they say if they get approval they're anticipating having enough supplies to let our children get vaccinated before the start of school in September. What's your reaction to this? Many vaccines are mandatory for children to attend preschool and school in New Jersey. Do you guys think that the COVID vaccine could or might be added to this list? Finally, the – as you were talking about, Commissioner, the vaccine delivery is increasing for the coming week. If this pattern continues and we do hit herd immunity or as Dr. Eddy says, community coverage protection by Memorial Day, Governor, what

do you think the reality will be in our state at the end of May? Will we be masking and social distancing still? Do you think that there'll be parades, dancing in the streets? Will you declare a state holiday with free beer for everybody over 21?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Exactly.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Will changes continue to be made incrementally, though, based on hospitalizations, the RT, and other metrics? Obviously you can't predict where we're going to be at the end of May, but can you give us a sense, what's our new reality going to look like this summer if things go according to plan?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I will let – we got to give Eddy his money's worth, so I got to let Eddy comment in a second on the question as to why younger people are getting it. Are we concerned that people are fed up? I have to say this – fed up or don't behave. I think fatigue is something that I would prefer to say because a lot of really good-natured people are sick and tired of this. By the way, we are – we'd be among them, and I don't think it's because they're being jerks. You listen to Pat's compliance reports. Does this mean they're not missing bad behavior by establishments? I'm sure there are. When places like the ABC go out, they do a couple of counties a night, they're out in a big way in those counties. I think folks are generally doing the right thing, but people have – I do think they're showing rightful fatigue, and we're just saying listen, these models, these are the choices before and no amount of public policy that we proffer is going to move the needle from one of those models to another. It's going to be the millions of us together.

I'll defer to my colleagues to the right on the Pfizer vax for the kids. Your question is could you see this as a – the second part is could you see vaccines for kids being another factor on school reopenings?

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** And could they be required?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I personally am still of the opinion that I think we should want people to get to this vaccine of their own free will. I really continue to believe that. That's not to say that I think Rutgers is wrong to do what they've done. My personal bias is you get their on your own free will. The most important question you've asked me is what's it look like Memorial Day. I'd say it's really the window Memorial Day to the Fourth of July when we normally open the state up on the shore and our lakes and have that. I think we're in store, I still believe, for a great summer, but – and this is the but – I think particularly when we're indoors, we're going to have to continue to, as my late mother would say – I'm not even sure what this means – mind our Ps and Qs. I just continue to think if you're in close proximity indoors, we're going to still have to be careful. I continue to believe that.

Will we continue to be incremental? Yes, I don't see that we won't be incremental in how we reopen. That doesn't mean, though, that by the time in that Memorial Day to the Fourth of July window that we're not at a much more meaningfully open level. Parimal and I had a conversation earlier. We want to make sure, and we will give sooner than later, guidance on what graduations can look like, which we hope will overwhelmingly occur outdoors and hopefully on time. I think we're in a dramatically different and better place both compared to where we were in January to some extent where we are now but especially compared to last summer.

May I go to Eddy? Any observation really in particular on why younger people – and any reaction to either of you – to Pfizer trialing a COVID vaccine for kids?

**Dr. Eddy Bresnitz:** Well, you're with the increased and successful vaccination of those who are older in 65 and older category. We have I think two-thirds of that population vaccinated already, and we've seen the benefits of that in the long-term care facilities where the incident of disease has really declined I'm going to say almost to zero compared to what we had before. We know that the efficacy of the vaccine in the older population who are eligible from the beginning or pretty close to the beginning has made a difference. The younger population, whether they have underlying diseases or not, have not been in the highest priority area.

Proportions that we're seeing that the Commissioner basically stated is not surprising, that we're seeing more of those individuals forming the bulk of the folks who are being hospitalized. That's not to say that we don't have older people who aren't being hospitalized, too. There are plenty who haven't been vaccinated yet. I will say that I want to remind folks, though, while I have the opportunity, Governor, to say that we do have a therapy, monoclonal antibodies, that can prevent hospitalizations, particularly those who are eligible, if you're 12 and over. If you're in a high-risk setting, it's only for outpatients, and if you have mild or severe disease, we actually have a flier that we're distributing that will remind people if they're positive and they're mildly ill to contact their healthcare facility to see whether they're eligible for the vaccine – sorry, for the monoclonal therapy.

As far as the Pfizer – it's a great announcement that we heard today. Just a reminder for those who didn't see that, it's for the 12 and 15 population. The topline data that they reported in their press release is very encouraging for this population.

As I've said, and the Commissioner's heard me say this many times, we really shouldn't make policy on a press release from a manufacturer. That's not a good approach. We saw, recently, with the AstraZeneca vaccine that the data changed over a few days. We really do need to see the data. That being said, Pfizer's indicated that they're likely to file a supplemental application to extend their emergency use authorization that they currently have for the vaccine.

Let's say they file for that in the next three or four weeks, which is what they implied. It will take the FDA three or four weeks to basically review it with input from their advisory committee. They'll issue the EOA. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for the CDC will review it. Eventually, there will be a recommendation. It could very well be by June that we'll actually have guidance from the CDC and probably support from the President to basically move forward. That's the point where you basically make policy.

In the meantime, I think we'll be preparing for the possibility that we'll be vaccinating those adolescents. Of course, Pfizer has said they are extending their trials down to younger ages as well in a sequential approach. We're looking forward to that data as well.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Eddie, thank you. This is not to say transmission is in the same category as fatalities. Thank God to remind us all as of this moment of the 20-odd thousand fatality, 7 persons have been under the age of 18. Again, that's not to say that kids – we've talked about this ad nauseum, not of late, that that's not to say they can't transmit the virus. Judy, it won't surprise you that Pat Callahan has bailed me out on mind your Ps and Qs. He reminds me also that he's premature on this because Lent is not over until Sunday.

English pubs and taverns of the 17th Century, bartenders would keep a watch on the alcohol consumption of the patrons, keeping an eye on the pints and quarts that were consumed. As a reminder, to the patrons, the bartender would recommend that they mind their Ps and Qs. Pat, thank you for that, something I did not know. Nikita closes out today. I've gotten into a right, left habit here. I should mix this up, shouldn't I? I apologize. It will allow you guys to leave early if you wanted to. I'll focus on that going forward, Nikita.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** All right, so Governor most of my questions today are about the American Dream Mall, which yesterday was reported is going to lose a lot of equity in a – or the developer that funded or built the mall is going to lose equity in a couple of other malls because it's defaulting on the loan payments. I'm wondering if American Dream has asked the state for help with this. I'm wondering if the state intends to offer help. I'm wondering, given the general downward trajectory of malls as a concept, what you think the long-term prognosis is for American Dream.

Separately, a Stockton poll released earlier today put your approval rating at 58% to 36%. Do you think that's an accurate reflection of where you are? Lastly, I have a question from David Wildstein who asks if you have any comment on allegations that Tom Moran put his hands on Hudson County prosecutor Esther Suarez.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, well, those are certainly all over the place and certainly off topic, that's for sure. On the American Dream Mall, yeah, I've read the same stories you have. As I understand it from the press, their lenders are going to get an equity stake in their non-New Jersey assets, Minnesota, and their location in Canada. That's my understanding of it. Secondly, we talk to these folks and work with them all the time. I'm not aware of any state – further state – I should say further because the state, as you know, at the beginning of this loan before I got here was very involved. I'm not aware of any other financial discussions as it relates to us.

Having said that, I still am a believer in this thing. I'm not sure if I had a blank sheet of paper however many years ago, 15 years ago, that either it would have been this exact concept, or that it would have taken so long and had all the challenges. It's an extraordinary concept that I think in a normal time is still a winner. It's just I haven't been in it for over a year, but I was in it the day that they kicked off their amusement part of it. You've been in it. It's an extraordinary concept notwithstanding the fact that ecommerce, which already had a lot of momentum before the pandemic, has picked up even further. I still think there's a place for something that is as experiential as this thing is to go to. They still believe that it is a big tourist attraction. My guess is that in a normal time, they're probably right. I really could see somebody going there as a destination. I'm not running it, but I still believe in it.

No reaction to the polling numbers. I hope they included my family, which may explain them. The numbers we're focused on are the ones we're talking about here, but I appreciate. There's a time for politics, and there's a time for not, and obviously nice to hear the number but not spending any time thinking about it. Listen, I haven't seen this whole thing as it relates to Tom. I know what it is generally. A couple of general reactions I'd have, I would say putting your hands on anyone in that manner based on how it was described to me is never okay. I can't believe I've got to say that, but I think that's true.

I think, secondly, as we have said many times in other situations, we always have to start in the place of believing the women who come forward. That, I think, holds here as well. I always have said in other situations, in a situation like this if there's an accusation there should be an independent investigation. I don't see why it would be any different on this one. If the organization itself knew about this and did nothing to look into it, I think they have to answer for that as well. Those are generic points, but they feel to me like they're consistent with a situation like this.

Again, we are going to be virtual tomorrow. I will be signing a bill in Burlington County, which is a game changer for micro businesses. I mentioned this earlier. This is basically in the five and fewer category, which had been particularly crushed. I'm not sure, given the timing, if I'll have COVID numbers, but I'll try to have them at that point. I'll mask up and say this as I do that. Judy, always an honor, Eddie, great to have you. I know you're going to miss a few weeks. Are we going to have you next week or no?

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** Next two weeks.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Next two weeks, we'll miss you.

**DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** No, I'll be here.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You'll be here the next two weeks, and then we'll miss you. We'll try to keep the home fires burning while you're gone. Pat, as always, thank you, Parimal, Mahen, cast of thousands. Again, folks stay at it. We get that moderate case versus the high case. I think we can, together, achieve the moderate if not better case. We'll promise to show the best case on Sunday, maybe show them the data. The curves are less important to me, 00:53:32, than just showing cases, hospitalizations, ICU, ventilators, and peak just side by side by side, best, medium, worst.

It's up to us, folks. We've done it before now twice. We could do it a third time. Thanks to the vaccinations, God will the third time is a charm. It's the last time. If you're celebrating Passover, bless you. Do it responsibly. Holi is behind us. Easter is upon us, Ramadan in a few weeks. Please, we have – you have our blessings to each and every one of you, but please celebrate responsibly. Take care, folks, God bless.

## Governor Phil Murphy

## Statewide

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