

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: June 2nd, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I'm honored to be joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz, honored to have you both here. To my far left, another name who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan, and I have a particular honor today to be joined by the guy to my left, who has been with us many times before, the great Attorney General of the Great State of New Jersey, Gurbir Grewal. Great to have you, Gurbir. Also, we're here with Jared Maples, the Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Matt Platkin, Chief Counsel will be with us later, and we have the other high honor of having First Lady Tammy Murphy in the house with us.

As I noted yesterday, the pain and fatigue felt by many in our Black and Brown communities is real and it is palpable. It is an experience that many, most people, myself included by the way, will never know firsthand. It is the pain and fatigue of decades, generations, at this point centuries of inequality and systemic racism. It is pain that has eroded the ties that bind some of our communities and the men and women whose sworn duty it is to protect them. While the heart of the issue is certainly not limited to problems in policing, I've asked the Attorney General to join us today to outline the expanded efforts he and his colleagues across the state are taking to build upon their existing work to promote trust and strengthen the bonds between law enforcement on the one hand, and the communities in which they serve on the other.

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The Attorney General and Superintendent Pat Callahan, to their enormous and tremendous credit, have undertaken initiatives to heal these breaches of trust in our communities. They've traveled across our state, building partnerships with faith and community leaders, residents and stakeholders so that our transformations to policing and police culture are achieved through collaboration with our diverse communities. What we have seen across our state these past few days was the natural outgrowth of these efforts, law enforcement marching side by side with their communities, some members taking a knee, joining their communities and committing to the simple natural law that Black lives matter.

Under the Attorney General, New Jersey has emerged as a national leader in true community policing. These haven't been words, but actions that have brought about a sea change in law enforcement, increased accountability, transparency, and professionalism which bring us closer to a reimagined police culture. And now, New Jersey will take further steps to deepen the well of trust in our communities, including the first update of our use of force policies in two decades. So to you, Gurbir, I thank you. We all thank you for your commitment. To all the community members and stakeholders who have come to this work in faith and trust, I say thank you. And I thank all the members of New Jersey law enforcement for proving that when we work together as one New Jersey family, there's no telling what we can do, and we can do so much more. I mentioned yesterday words matter, but actions matter even more, and we're not letting any grass grow on this front.

I want to switch gears, switch gears in a big way and turn to a piece of data that we have not discussed here with you all, but which is one of the valuable points we have looked to as we have set our expectations for our restart and reopening, and especially as we set our target for entering stage two on June 15. And I may ask Ed to come in here and play a cameo role, if he doesn't mind. Let's look at this chart if we can, Dan.

This is a chart of the rate by which the coronavirus spreads across New Jersey through each infected person. The scientists call it RT, the rate of reproduction. It's a gauge of how fast contagions spread, and with a virus like COVID-19, knowing that RT is vital. Flattening this curve has been just as important as flattening the curve of the overall numbers of new cases, which we've shown you for now many weeks. But from a data perspective, this curve has been perhaps even more valuable, and perhaps more than any other measure, it shows the importance and the impact of social distancing.

When I issued my stay at home order on March 21, COVID-19 was at a nearly unstoppable pace of spread. Each infected person, whether they were symptomatic or asymptomatic, by the way, was spreading COVID-19 to an average of more than five other New Jerseyans. That's right, more than five new cases for each infected individual within three weeks of our stay at home order being put in place. And by the time when our hospitals were at their peak stress, we had cut the rate of spread to roughly one to one. And today, thank God, that rate of spread is less than one to one, and we need to keep it that way.

In other words, since March 21 when the stay at home order was announced, and when we put in place our strongest measures for social distancing, we have cut the rate of spread by about six times. Without these measures in place, it is certain that our healthcare system would have been overwhelmed. A five times reproduction rate would be simply unsustainable for public health. Even as this chart shows, cutting that rate to three would still mean COVID-19 running rampant. But guess what? Social distancing works, wearing a face covering works, and even as we undertake a greater economic restart on June 15th, we will need to keep up with both of these practices.

COVID-19 is among us and there is no cure and no proven treatment. Right now social distancing and face coverings are the only cure and treatment. Again, look at how far we have pushed down this curve in 10 weeks. An RT rate below one means we have a declining rate of spread, we have saved, undoubtedly you and we have saved undoubtedly hundreds of thousands of our fellow New Jerseyans from contracting COVID-19, and we have undoubtedly saved tens of thousands of lives. So let's keep it up, folks, even as we enter stage two, and then we begin the work toward stage three. Our economic restart cannot come with a restart of COVID-19. Keep your social distances. Wash your hands with soap and water. Wear a face covering when you're out. It has worked and it will keep working.

Ed, may I call a quick audible? anything you want to add on RT?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you, Governor. As usual, very nicely done. Yes, as the numbers suggest, this is telling you the number of people that you would expect to get infected from one infected person. And very clearly as the number goes above one, this number will go exponentially large in a very quick period of time, which helps explain why the cases exploded throughout New York, New Jersey and through much of the country, so many people are becoming infected from one person, and they infected someone, so on and so on and so on. As this number goes lower, as it goes below one, as the Governor was saying, once we go below one, the virus is no longer increasing. It's basically, if it infects one other person, you're staying the same. If you're infecting less than one person, you're getting better and better as far as the outbreak goes. And that's what's happening here, and that's what's been happening for a while. And as the Governor said, from your hard work and sacrifices made this happen.

There were different ways to, you know, the exact number doesn't matter, it's clearly less than one and it's doing well, and I would go a little bit further even than the Governor said, that when I've compared this to how other states are doing, New Jersey is one of the best states as far as lowering this number down. So we've gotten this number lower than all but a few states out there, by most calculations.

So yes, I do think that this is great hard work that the people of New Jersey have been doing, and I do think that's made a huge difference in this outbreak.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, Ed, I think that last point is a pat on the back to everybody that is richly deserved. We have flattened the curves that we have both been looking at, and this curve that you all have been monitoring privately, unlike any other state that I'm aware of. And we were in the thick of this, let there be no doubt about it. Ground zero for this virus was the metro New York area, particularly in our case, the six big community counties. But let's remember, every county has got cases, every county has got fatalities, and you all out there have been extraordinary, so hats off to you. Thank you, Ed, for that color.

With that, let's turn to the overnight numbers if we can. Yesterday we received an additional 708 positive test results, the statewide total cumulative 161,545. Here's the trend line of new cases. And as you can see with the slides we also just saw, you can see the impact of that decreasing rate of spread and the overall bend of the curve. The spot positivity is now 3.6%. These are from samples taken on May 29. And by the way, there were 29,000 recorded samples on May 29th.

Looking to our long-term care facilities, we are far from done fighting this, 33,318 positive cases, and the numbers of lab-confirmed fatalities associated with long-term care remain far below what we saw at the peak, but it is still 5,158 blessed lives lost. Our hospitals reported 2,372 patients being treated for COVID-19, field medical station, 21 patients. I think Judy and I think there's a little bit of an anomaly because a couple of the hospitals didn't come in with a Sunday report. So we're not, again, one day to the next, we're not obsessed one way, good news or bad news. This is a breakdown of hospitalizations across region. The number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care was 639, number of ventilators 459, that's the fourth consecutive day under 500. 151 new hospitalizations, 102 live discharges.

Here are yesterday's, those numbers by region. As I've said many times before, we know some of these numbers can bounce around from day to day, so we cannot get lost in the noise of one day's report but rather, we need to look at things over time to find trends. And we see from our hospital data, we continue to trend overwhelmingly in the right direction on all of the vital indicators. Looking at just the past couple of weeks, we see many more green balls than red ones, and it's the green ones that have told us that we're ready for stage two of our trip on the road back.

Moreover, these green lights are now outnumbering the red ones in every region of our state, North, Central and South, and that's why we feel confident we can enter stage two together. However, we cannot also lose sight of what's important and that means remaining vigilant and keeping up with social distancing, face coverings, etc. We're still at or near the top of the list in terms of patients in our hospitals and the number of residents we are losing to this virus. Yes, we have made and continue to make tremendous progress, but we can't let our guard down. You can see we're 15th in the nation among US states and new cases per day. That's been dropping like a rock and let's hope it continues to be, but we're still number one patients in the hospital, and number two in America in fatalities per day.

Let's keep all of this in mind and with the heaviest of hearts, we are announcing that 51 of our fellow New Jerseyans have been lost to COVID-19 related complications. The total number now stands at 11,770 precious lives lost. Let's talk about a few of these unbelievable human beings.

Let's start right here with Flora Guerin. Look at that smile, bless her. Flora was 91 years old. She lived in Brick after spending most of her life in Morris County. She was raised by a single mother and Flora helped bring some extra money into the household by playing the piano as a young teen. At the one-room Mount Freedom schoolhouse, she met another boy named Lou Guerin, and they were married in October of 1947. Flora ran the household and kept their growing family tight and in line.

When Lou set out to start his own trucking business, Flora stepped in to help out there as well. Flora would go on to also work for the Randolph Township Schools, for M&M Mars and at National Religious Broadcasters in Morristown. Faith was a constant in Flora's life, and she was a member of Dover's Trinity Lutheran Church, Redeemer Lutheran Church in Succasunna, and Blairstown's Evangelical Free Church. Her spirit of community was strong, and Flora was one of the highest volume blood donors at Morristown Medical Center.

She leaves behind her husband of 72 years, Lou, who by the way, has also tested positive for COVID-19 a couple of times and is in the fight of his life. Please keep him in your prayers as well. And she also leaves behind their children Kathleen, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday and her brothers, Kathleen's brothers that is, Glen Scott and Lewis III, and their families which gave her 12 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. May God bless her soul and may God bless each and every one of her family.

Next up is Mildred Goleman from Highlands, right by me in Monmouth County. Born and raised in Newark, Millie was a talented artist and gifted athlete, especially in basketball and baseball. In 1948, Millie married Walton Goleman, and soon they would move to Highlands to raise their family and Millie never left, spending the rest of her life along the Jersey Shore she came to love as a child. Once her children were older, Millie worked at EAI in Eatontown, running the publication's control desk until her retirement, but she wouldn't let retirement slow her down, and she continued working in the publishing industry at Amend Publishing. Millie's artistic talents never left her and her family recalls the tremendous creativity she would put into telling stories or inventing games for her children, her grandchildren, and her great grandchildren. Millie was also never one to forget someone in need and took time to care for others in her life, including her many four-legged friends.

She leaves behind her daughters Linda, and I had the great honor to speak to Linda, and also heard about Millie's and Linda's personal struggles with Superstorm Sandy, and Millie fell a couple years ago, and she lived with Linda for a period of time. So Linda, her daughter Mary, who lives in Germany and in Hamburg, by the way, a town we know well, and her son John, their spouses, eight grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren, along with nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. Millie is now backed by the side of her Walton and another daughter Diane, who was Linda's twin and for whom Millie cared, among other family. She was 94 years old, and may her memory bring peace to all who knew and loved her.

And finally today we remember a special guy, Louis C. Schmidt. Louis passed away at Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck at the age of 74. He was a resident of Brightside Manor in Teaneck and this is what, among other things, makes Louis so special. He leaves behind no surviving family, but he will always be a cherished member of our New Jersey family. And especially to the doctors and nurses at Holy Name, who made sure that Louis was treated with respect and dignity and was never alone as he fought this virus and to his caregivers at Brightside, you were his family too. They'll remember his gentle nature and playfulness, and his preference for ginger ale over water. I spoke with Mike Marin, the CEO of Holy Name yesterday, and it was a pretty moving conversation about the final days of this great guy's life. Let's all keep Louis in our thoughts and prayers today, especially when you look out and see our flags at half-staff, remember him. And for you, Louis, go Giants.

This is why we remember these individuals every day, because COVID-19, because of it, many families cannot get together to grieve as our traditions tell us that we should. And because of COVID-19, some of our family have passed away without anyone by their side, so it's up to us to be there for them. It's up to us to ensure that no one is just remembered as one of a big number, but that they are remembered for the lives they lived. Each deserves that basic dignity.

And so before I close, I also want to give a shout out to some more folks across our state who continue to do their parts to help our communities remain strong. And as in so many cases today, we also put a spotlight on our state's tremendous diversity, which we wear as a badge of honor. Today, I want to recognize Burlington County Turkish Community, who have stepped up with donations of hundreds of masks for responders and essential workers in both Willingboro and Edgewater Park. And more, by the way, is on the way. And soon, BCTC, as they're known, will be opening its own building in Willingboro with plans to have a pantry as well for residents who need help putting healthy food on their family's table. So, to Burlington County Turkish Community Treasurer, [Fatig Koratos] and Vice President Yakup Koksaldi, here on either side, by the way, of Willingboro Township Manager Dr. Sharon Rogers, and everybody at BCTC I say thank you. And I also have to give a special shout out to my dear friend Levon [Deblour] Johnson for sending us the information in that photo.

That's everything for today, but before I close and hand things over to the Attorney General, let's keep in mind again how far we've come in 10 weeks, and where we would be if we had done nothing to stop the spread of COVID-19. Again, back then, one infected person was infecting more than five others, and today it's less than a one-to-one ratio. We, you, have slowed this virus significantly. Social distancing, turns out, it works. Covering your mouth and nose with face coverings works, so keep it up and we'll get through stage two of our restart and recovery and get on as quickly as we can to stage three. And with that, please help me welcome an extraordinary leader in our state who sets the bar nationally, our extraordinary Attorney General Gurbir Grewal.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: Thank you, Governor, for your steady leadership during this difficult moment and good afternoon, everyone. Like so many Americans at this difficult time, I'm still reeling from the footage of George Floyd's murder. Like so many Americans, I too am angry. And like so many Americans, I'm angry that a White officer suffocated a Black resident in broad daylight. I'm angry that at least three officers watched and did nothing. I'm angry that these officers disgraced their entire profession, and undermined the good work that so many others perform on a daily basis.

Mr. Floyd's death reminds us that our country has a long way to go, not only in healing our nation's racial divides, but also in addressing the systemic and implicit biases that affect all Americans. And so, to the thousands of New Jerseyans who assembled peacefully this week, let me be clear: we hear you. We see you. We respect you. We share your anger and we share your commitment to change. And at the Attorney General's office, we've been hard at work to make that change a reality.

This past December, for example, we launched a groundbreaking project known as the Excellence in Policing initiative. It's a sweeping set of policing reforms designed to promote the culture of professionalism, accountability, and transparency that are the hallmarks of New Jersey's best police departments. Today, I'd like to provide some updates on the Excellence in Policing initiative, and share some additional steps we're taking to ensure that New Jersey remains a national leader on policing issues.

First, we're launching a pilot program to expand Crisis Intervention Team, or CIT, training across New Jersey. CIT is an intensive and collaborative training that brings together law enforcement officers, mental health professionals and other stakeholders, and it gives them the knowledge and the skills they need to respond to an individual and psychiatric crisis in a way that minimizes the potential for injury. Experts agree that this best-in-class training is one of the most effective ways to reduce use of force incidents. As part of this effort, we're launching a pilot program involving police departments in Paterson, Trenton, Atlantic City and Millville, as well as the State Troopers assigned to the Statehouse Complex Security Unit. We're going to use this pilot to study the feasibility of creating a statewide CIT training program.

Second, we plan to develop a statewide licensing program for police officers. As some of you know, when we launched Excellence in Policing in December, I asked the Police Training Commission to study whether their licensing program made sense for New Jersey, and I asked them to give me their response by June. They've now looked into this issue, and will hold a meeting later this month to recommend that we license police officers statewide. As chair of the PTC, I will vote in favor of this recommendation. Because just as we licensed doctors, nurses, lawyers, hundreds of other professions, we must ensure that all officers meet a baseline level of professionalism, and we must ensure that those who cannot meet this standard can't work in New Jersey. In the months ahead, we'll be working out the details of the program and will prepare a plan for its implementation.

Third, we're expanding our statewide use of force database. In December we also announced that we were going to pilot this database in six towns. Since we started this pilot, we've worked out a number of technical and policy issues and by July 1st, we will begin opening up the database to police departments across the state, so they can report and we can more effectively track the use of force by officers across New Jersey.

Fourth, we're updating the statewide policy on use of force by law enforcement. We last updated this policy in 2000, and a lot has changed in policing over the last 20 years. We'll be consulting with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil rights leaders, police unions, religious leaders, victims, advocates, and community members to ensure that our policy reflects the values of New Jersey today. We'll be drawing on data collected through our new use of force database, and we plan to issue this new policy no later than the end of this year.

And finally, we intend to build an incident response team in our Division on Civil Rights. We will have a team of community relations specialists, similar to the one that existed in the Justice Department under the Obama administration, who can deploy to local jurisdictions following a major civil rights incident. They serve a vital role in defusing tension and healing a community after a moment of collective trauma. To be clear, we began planning all of these programs long before this week's protests, and will continue them long after the protests end. We're in this for the long haul, not because it's popular, not because it's easy, but because it is the right thing to do. There is only one way to build trust between law enforcement and the community. That's by working at it day after day, year after year, in church basements and school gymnasiums, during good times and bad. It's that ongoing, persistent effort by people like Chief Wysocki in Camden, Director Ambrose and Chief Henry in Newark, Colonel Callahan at the State Police, and our 21 County Prosecutors that keeps New Jersey safe during our most perilous moments, and it helps us avoid the worst of what we've seen in other states.

I'd like to thank everyone in New Jersey law enforcement for their restraint and resiliency over the past few days, and I look forward to announcing additional progress in the days and months to come. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: General, thank you for your leadership. And one important point I want to underscore, we didn't just wake up, the Attorney General didn't wake up yesterday and decide to put these programs in place. These have been building for a long time, and the timing clearly is ripe, and I take my hat off to you and members of law enforcement and your whole team and the stakeholders, community leaders, faith leaders, who you have worked so collaboratively with and will continue to do so. Thank you. With that, may I turn to the woman to my right who needs no introduction, for her daily update, please help me welcome the extraordinary Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon. Today we are reporting an additional case of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, for a total of 32 cases in New Jersey. The children affected have either tested positive for active COVID-19 infection, or had antibody tests that were positive, indicating exposure to the virus. Although there are still unknowns about this illness, it is believed to an abnormal, aggressive immune response to the virus. The syndrome was initially compared with Kawasaki disease because it displays similar symptoms and causes a similar inflammatory response in the body, but most of these cases have occurred in older children and adolescents who were previously healthy. By contrast, classic Kawasaki disease typically affects infants and very young children. With the data currently available, it is unclear if the risk of developing this new syndrome varies by race, although according to research, Black children account for a disproportionately high number. It has also been compared to toxic shock syndrome, which is a rare complication of a bacterial infection.

However, it is believed that what we are seeing is a new illness, not Kawasaki disease and not toxic shock syndrome. The underlying risk factor identified among children is active COVID-19 infection or exposure to the virus, or living in areas where there is a large amount of cases. So parents, you should be especially aware of your children if they have a fever, if they have fever for several days, as well as severe abdominal pain, as these are symptoms most commonly seen in these cases. In New Jersey, thankfully there are no deaths reported at this time. The ages of the children affected are as young as 1 to 18 years of age. Seven of these kids are still hospitalized. The breakdown by race and ethnicity is White, 26%, Black 26%, Hispanic 37%, Asian 7%, and other 4%.

As the Governor shared, 2,372 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive individuals or persons under investigation are in our hospitals, with 639 of these individuals in critical care. 72% of the critical care patients are on ventilators. The breakdown of race and ethnicity for the deaths that were reported today are White 53.3%, Black 18.5%, Hispanic 19.5%, Asian 5.5%, other 3.3%. The veterans homes numbers remain the same as yesterday, as do the numbers at our state psychiatric hospitals.

Overall the daily positivity rate in New Jersey is 3.62%, in the North of 2.86%, Central 3.45%, and South 5.77%. So that concludes my daily statistical reporting. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy. I don't have my race, ethnicity and demographics. Under the age of 18, are we still at one loss of life overall?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I think so. Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: So please, God, we keep it that way and we mourn that loss of life, but please God, we keep it that way. Before we take questions, Pat, I would love you to weigh in. We had a whole series of protests yesterday with really only one exception, which was in Asbury Park. It was a peaceful day. I think you told me we've got 21 more scheduled across the state today. Any color on that? Any color on, unrelated to peaceful protest, COVID-19 compliance and anything else you've got?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon, everybody. With regard to the overnight on the Executive Order compliance, there were zero incidents reported to the ROIC on the overnight. As the Governor stated today, there are 21 scheduled events throughout the state, and we monitor them all with our local county and state partners. We do have troopers throughout the state staged and ready to assist if need be.

With regard to the overnight, last night there were four major gatherings Newark, Trenton, Asbury Park and Atlantic City, and Asbury Park was the ones where we had a little bit less than peaceful incidents. We had a total of 12 people arrested last night. Charges ranged from third degree aggravated assault on a police officer, resisting arrest, obstructing and some disorderly persons offenses. Two of those were juveniles. With regards to injuries, amongst the three law enforcement officers, one was struck in the head with a rock and had a depressed fracture of the skull. One officer was bit in the leg, and one officer needed stitches on his chin as a result of those encounters. That's all I have, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, we got a lot of feedback yesterday and I just want to repeat this. We respect completely the folks who want to protest peacefully and New Jersey has been, let's keep it that way, folks, overwhelmingly peaceful protestations. I know Ras Baraka who has done an extraordinary job in Newark, put out a statement that he thinks everybody who was together in that close proximity on Saturday may want to get tested.

I also just would add to that if you are out there, please wear a mask, wear something over your face and try to keep social distancing as best you can. And again, given the gravity of what we're dealing with, we don't begrudge folks wanting to stand up. In fact, to the contrary, and protest peacefully, who could blame you? But please do it responsibly, including with your own health and the health of others.

We're going to be over here, Dante. I want to say two things. Number one, Brent, I'm looking at you because you're going to lead us off. Don't give me a laundry list. We've got a lot of you here today and we've got an enormous amount of balls in the air, so please help me out, everybody. So two, three at most.

Secondly, we just found out there's a White House video conference tomorrow, so we're moving tomorrow – do you know when yet Dan? Okay, we'll get it to you. But it will not be at one o'clock. I think it's going to be earlier, and that was just hot off the press. And if that changes in any way, we'll come back to you. And again, I appreciate everybody being here. We have a big crowd today, so let's get through it. Brent, over to you.

Q&A Session

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Sure. When will unemployment offices be reopened, so people who are still waiting for benefits can get help, now that we see the DMV might be part of stage two? And when are you going to allow short-term rentals to reopen across the state? Some people, even in places away from the

Shore, I think in Hunterdon County, are complaining that some municipalities are using them arbitrarily to keep them closed.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Brent, for setting the example. I don't have any news on the unemployment offices. We promised you news. I don't have it yet on the motor vehicles commission, but we will come back to that shortly. I believe, Matt, short-term rentals is a local decision, is that not correct?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: It's currently a local decision under a prior order, but it's on the list of things that are under consideration.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, so we'll come back to you on that. Thank you for that. Dave. Let's do you down front real quick. Over here, if you can. Dante, you didn't wait for the barbershops to reopen. I see that you got your haircut.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Wow, it's a good look for you. Governor, from the newsroom, Senator Pennacchio has announced that he's asking the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to take control of the state's long-term nursing care facilities, in light of the discussion about that issue. What is your reaction to that?

Today there's been a lot of talk about remaining vigilant as we go from stage one to stage two, with many more reopenings and there's a lot of moving parts. Are you concerned about this in terms of, are you afraid that if you stop talking about it, that people will get sloppy and stupid and the dreaded knucklehead effect will come into play?

And finally, Commissioner, with regard to the discussion about the kids and the syndrome that we're seeing, you said this is a new illness, perhaps. Could you shed a little more light? Explain what you mean? What are we talking about here? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: So the Senator had a birthday recently, I sent him a note and I said, we agree on three things. We love our country, we love our state, and we want you to have a great birthday. Beyond that, there's not much other common ground, and that will include whatever you just referred to.

I do worry about people getting sloppy. I mean, that is a big concern and it's not just a New Jersey concern. And frankly, in this case, it goes well beyond the so-called knuckleheads. This is, you know, you've got human nature at play here, going on three months of staying at home, staying away, vigilance on washing hands with soap and water. You just worry that folks will, just with the clock going as long as it's gone, that they'll let their guard down, and we can't.

And again, we've made enormous progress. We just don't want to blow it. Now Governor Cuomo said this, I think yesterday, we don't want to steal defeat from the jaws of victory. We've come so far together, we've just got to make sure we do it right, we stay vigilant, including, as I said, I think it's the very basic stuff. This is not, you know, we're not going to try to get high minded with people here. This is literally covering your face properly. It's staying away from each other, six feet minimum. And it's being vigilant about, you know, washing your hands with soap and water, cleaning surfaces, etc. I think if we do that, and we stay on that, we're going to be in good shape, particularly with the testing capabilities we have that we've spoken about, and the contact tracing team and the community team that Judy and others are working on, which we're going to give you more color on, I would hope, within the next week. Judy, the last question was on the child virus.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: At this point, all signs are pointing to an aggressive inflammatory immune response to the COVID-19 virus. I don't know, Ed, if you've read anything more illuminating than that? I have not.

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: No, as the Commissioner has said, we're still certainly very early in understanding this new syndrome. We are working with other states and the CDC to learn more about it. Similar to Kawasaki disease, which it has looked like in the past, and toxic shock which has also been mentioned, sometimes what happens is it's not just the infection that causes the problem. It's the body's response to the infection. And as the Commissioner was saying, it appears that in this syndrome, the body is being overly aggressive in responding to the infection and that's causing its own issues.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: But is it a disease or a syndrome?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: To some extent, that may be a distinction without a difference, meaning a syndrome is a constellation of things that kind of make up an illness. At this point, I would call it a syndrome as opposed to a disease. But literally, if you asked me next week, it might be a different answer.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Please, right behind you there.

Reporter: Good afternoon. Governor, what is one thing right now where you find unity, or where do you think there can be unity amongst everything that's kind of going on?

General, could you please clarify when the preliminary investigation and final investigation details are released for OAG investigations into officer-involved shootings? Is there a hard deadline or a loose deadline? And is there anything else you can say yet about the Bass River investigation from May 23?

And the last one yesterday, Governor, you seemed to okay peaceful protests, but yet small business still cannot open. We've heard from many of our readers about this issue. Could you please expand on how risks are greater for a restaurant or a small business such as a boutique when they open their doors?

Governor Phil Murphy: Your first question on unity, do you mean with the aftermath of George Floyd's killing?

Reporter: Correct, yes, please.

Governor Phil Murphy: Where do we find unity? I think in New Jersey right now, with a few exceptions, and believe me, there have been a few exceptions. I don't want to make light of that. You know, you hear about three police officers get nicked up, including a severe concussion in Asbury Park as an example. But the unity has been in peaceful protests, for my taste, and we've seen a lot of it. It's an overwhelming sense right now. But with 21 protests today, as Pat reminds me and Gurbir reminds me, we got to make sure, we have to continue to bat 1,000 or as close to it, but it's an exceptional human behavior both at the individual level, as well as at the community level.

We've put a timeframe out for small businesses and we think it's a responsible one. We've put a timeframe out for outdoor dining, for salons and barbershops. We will be doing more with gyms and health clubs. We're trying to keep people alive and as I said on protests, given the gravity of the killing and the stain of racism in this country, we have to acknowledge that there is a desire and there is a right to peacefully protest. I would ask you, please to wear masks and keep social distancing. This is about a loss of life. And it's about now, the beginning of the fifth century since slavery came to America and the hole that we continue to dig out from under. Thank you.

With the second question, Gurbir, on officer-involved shootings.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: Sure. Officer-involved shooting investigations, whether they're fatal officer involved shootings or non-fatal or death in custody investigations, I consider among the most serious investigations that we conduct as law enforcement officers in this state. And those are investigations, like every other investigation, that we have to get right. And getting those investigations right means maintaining the integrity of those investigations. And maintaining the integrity of those investigations means that we have to be able to interview witnesses, review footage, chase down leads, collect evidence, re-interview witnesses, without any outside interference.

And so I know there's a pressure to release videos, or things of that nature, or give more information. But I need to be able to interview witnesses based on what they saw, not what they saw in a video and then are repeating in a witness interview. That means maintaining the integrity of investigation. I need to be able to talk to other witnesses based on what they saw, not what they saw on a website or on a news release, based on information we may have put out.

So we are in that phase of the investigation where we need to be quiet. We need to do our jobs, do the interviews we need to do and the follow up we need to do. But I understand that there's a need for information, because the lack of information sometimes breeds mistrust, that there's something that we may have to hide, for example. These are natural tendencies. Because of that, shortly after investigation, we

announced that we're investigating the matter. And then the next day we announced who the individuals involved were, the name of the decedent in the Bass River case. And in 2018, when I became Attorney General, we changed the policies that applied to the release of videotapes and body-worn camera tape, and MVR tapes. In a prior time, we used to hide behind laws and other excuses to not release them. And sitting on that video, I thought, created more mistrust.

And so in our policies, which we revised, we said we will release those videos once an investigation is substantially complete, which is typically after 20 days. Sometimes we might need more time to do those interviews, so we might push it out. But that's the marker and we tend to abide by that in this particular case. But everyone needs to understand, we need to do our job and we need to do it well, because these cases are that important to us, and the integrity of those investigations are that important.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Gurbir, well said. Dan Bryan tells me we're together tomorrow at noon, so 12 o'clock. Thank you all. Nikita.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. So it's been five days now since Chris Neuwirth was fired from his post as Assistant –

Governor Phil Murphy: Since what, sorry?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Since Chris Neuwirth was fired from his post as Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Health. Now this is an official that was important enough to have joined you at several briefings and who you entrusted to answer questions on your behalf and on behalf of your administration. Now, over the last five days, you've more than once declined to comment or answer questions about why Mr. Neuwirth was fired, citing a policy to not discuss personnel issues.

I'm wondering if this was 2017 and we were in the midst of a pandemic and Governor Christie declined to comment on a high-ranking official in a department that was responsible for dealing with the crisis, would you be satisfied?

And I also want to ask, if you won't say exactly why Mr. Neuwirth was fired, can you at least say that he was not fired for endangering New Jerseyans lives?

Governor Phil Murphy: I hate to disappoint you. We don't comment on personnel matters, and you'll have to ask Governor Christie. Thank you. Please.

Reporter: Governor, what's your response to the anonymous letter written by DOH employees who allege that your administration's response to COVID-19 was a quote, "unmitigated failure" that led to, quote, "preventable deaths", and also called for the resignation of Commissioner Persichilli. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean, we don't spend any time in replying to anonymous anything's, so I'm not going to deign that letter with any comment, period, full stop. We spend all of us, every single minute of every day trying to save as many lives as we can. We've gone, as an example, from nothing on testing, literally nothing to number one in the nation. We've gone from nothing in PPE, personal protective equipment, to having put out per capita as much as any other American state. I've said it publicly to her, with her rather, and I've said it privately with her. Judy is not going anywhere and she's as good as it gets anywhere in the United States. Thank you, Paul, Good afternoon.

Paul Mulshine, Star-Ledger: Oh, hi. On March 27, the MMWR put out a study showing the threat of spread in nursing homes is extremely rapid. Yet on March 31, Your Health Department issued an order that nursing homes must accept COVID-19 patients. Other states, such as Florida, followed the CDC advice and had much lower death rates. Why did your administration ignore the data and science on that issue that caused so many lives?

And those three employees also said your data cannot be trusted. Why should we trust that any other decisions are based on solid data? Do you really have data that shows shopping in big box stores is less risky than shopping in small stores? If not, why are the small stores shut?

Governor Phil Murphy: Paul, as I said, I'll repeat what I said a minute ago, we're not going to respond to a letter from three anonymous people. It's just not going to happen.

Reporter: [Interjection off-mic]

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I heard your question. I heard your question. That's just inaccurate. It's completely inaccurate. And we've addressed this before already.

Reporter: I read the study. Anybody could read it.

Governor Phil Murphy: The actions that were taken and the steps that were taken by the Health Commissioner was not to put COVID-positive residents back into a general population. There were very strict guidelines as to how folks should be reintegrated, including I used the word cohort, and that means separation, in some cases by floor, by building, by wing. It had very strict requests in terms of PPE. This is from Judy and her team, it had very strict parameters about staff. In other words, it's not just residents, you couldn't cross-fertilize a staff member from one wing to another. It was very, very clear.

If people violated that at the operator level, then they need to be held accountable. Do you want to add anything to that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The CDC guidance, by the way, mirrored what we put out. In fact, the chart that CDC put out sharing with the LTCs, with long-term care facilities, how they should cohort staff and the use of PPE, was exactly the same as what we put out. So I just want to clear that up. I also, secondly, -- I'm sorry, go ahead. You're the Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: No, no, no. Go ahead. Judy, let there no doubt, you're the boss here.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: March 31, we put that out. We also told the long-term care facilities if you cannot do that, you cannot admit, let us know. April 1, 99 long-term care facilities told us they could not admit, so we immediately started looking for available beds, for hospitals to be able to admit their patients. And we located 707. So there were beds for the hospitals. Within a week, over 200 long-term care facilities told us they could not admit. They didn't have the staffing. They didn't have appropriate PPE. They couldn't cohort, their physical plant capacity did not allow them to cohort. Over 200. And we said thank you, we will locate beds for our patients.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I say one thing? I think it's tomorrow, Judy. I think the firm that you hired has got their report and I think we're going to talk to that tomorrow. So tomorrow will be a big long-term care day. I believe it'll be tomorrow, either tomorrow or on Thursday. Have I got that right? Thank you. Do you have something, please?

Reporter: Governor, under what circumstances would you decide to deploy the National Guard to quell civil disturbance in New Jersey? And also, if a person missed their assigned time to register for unemployment, what do they have to do to get into the system? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I come back to you on the second question? Because I don't have a particular answer. And by the way, if you've got an individual, it would even be better for us because we'll get someone to follow up. As I've mentioned many times here, these tend to be very specific to the individuals, but we'll come back. Dan, will you follow up with this in terms of the general answer?

I think the circumstances on the National Guard, and Gurbir and Pat should weigh in here, would be that if we were, for whatever reason, unable to deal properly with law enforcement with the current assets that we have deployed in either communities, counties, State Police especially. And I'm knocking on wood because I hope it stays that way, whether it's through mutual aid arrangements between counties or municipalities, whether it's certainly through the State Police. Pat had 25 colleagues, I believe, Gurbir or Pat, in Asbury Park last night. So the circumstances would be that for whatever reason, you're beyond your capacity, beyond your ability to deal with it based on the current squads and teams that you've got on the field. Anything you all want to add to that? You good? Okay. Thank you for that. We'll come to Elise right in front of you there.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. Regarding police licensing, how would it work? For instance, would officers be subject to examinations and periodic renewals? Are police unions part of this effort and if so, are they in support? Are you following the example of any other US jurisdictions? Would licensing apply to municipal and State Police? Finally, how soon would licensing happen, say within a year or five years? How much more needs to be sorted out?

Governor Phil Murphy: For obvious reasons. I'm going to turn to the guy to my left answer these. Thank you.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: So as a first step, the proposal will be before the Police Training Commission in mid-June at their meeting. It will be voted on. I'm hopeful, as the chair, I'm voting for it and like-minded Commissioners will vote in favor of it. And then the next process would be the implementation of it. It would apply to all law enforcement in this state.

As far as looking at other models, while I'm proud of how we are at the forefront of so many different policing reforms and efforts, this is one where we lag behind. I think there are something like 43 states that have some type of licensing or certification program, and so this is one we will be building from the ground up through our Police Training Commission. As far as what it looks like, annual training or annual renewal rather, what that process would look like, that would be one that we would work with the unions on. We would work with other law enforcement leaders on, and that is where the details will be worked out in the coming months. So I couldn't give you a timeframe, but it is something that we are fast moving towards.

Governor Phil Murphy: And I'm not sure, you may have addressed this, because I had to make a quick note of something. This would be police of all, municipal, county, state, everything, right?

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal: All 30-plus thousand, 36,000 plus law enforcement officers in the state would be professionally licensed under this program.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Thank you, Elise. Mike, is that you? We'll go to the back and we'll come down through here. Mike.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: Hi, Governor. Thanks. I want to ask about the National Guard deployment to Washington yesterday. I want to know when that request from the White House or from whomever came in and what you did about it personally. How many New Jersey National Guard members are in Washington, DC and for how long? And do you know whether any of them were involved in the clearing of Lafayette Park outside the White House yesterday, before the President walked over to St. John's Church? What was your reaction to that? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: On the former, I can say with almost certainty that they were not involved. They're not going down there for police action. This was a request that was made, I think, to all 50 Guard Generals, but in particular, I know it was made to the ones in proximity in the region. It is explicitly to guard federal, protect federal buildings and monuments. So I can say with certainty that they were not part of that yesterday. And again, this is also, but when you're guarding federal buildings, you're also protecting workers going in and out of those buildings.

Listen, I have said two things consistently about the Trump administration and I will stick with them. We have found a lot of common ground, particularly on ventilators, bed capacity, testing, etc. We're grateful for that. We continue to find common ground, and we will need to do that.

I've also said secondly, I don't think the President pulls his punches, and I can guarantee I don't pull my punches. So in specific answer to your question, the notion of using tear gas or smoke devices or rubber bullets on peaceful protesters in exchange for a photo op is disgraceful. Thank you. Dustin.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Thanks. Have you decided whether to sign or veto the Senate President's Public Worker Furlough Bill, especially since your Treasury Department's in budget discussions with the Legislature?

Have all the long-term care facilities completed their testing as they were supposed to by now? And that letter that you don't want to comment on was written anonymously because the officials fear losing their jobs, and they believe Chris Neuwirth's firing bolsters that fear. So just as a matter of fairness, does the Commissioner or the Colonel want to address any of the claims against them?

Governor Phil Murphy: We've said, I can speak on behalf of all of us with complete conviction. We've said all we're going to say about that letter. Plenty of people come in and tee off on me either on emails, texts, phone calls in my office all the time, and they've all still got their jobs.

On furlough bill, nothing, no development on that. We're working closely with the Legislature. I was very happy to see in the Assembly yesterday, the Committee voted out the bonding bill, which is a big step which we need. And I hope not just the full General Assembly, but the Senate will follow suit soon. Judy, you updated us on long-term care testing the other day. Do you have any update on that? And again, we're gonna have a big, I think tomorrow will be the day we have a big discussion on long-term care.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: At this point, let me see total residents in May that were tested were 54,000, and we have 11% positivity rate. Of the staff, 65,000 tested with a 4% positivity rate. The testing goes on, many of the organizations are now into retesting. All but 2% have reported, so pretty high compliance. For those that have not reported, we're on the phone with them.

Governor Phil Murphy: And, Judy, it shouldn't surprise anybody, again, I'm going to practice without a license here so forgive me. Given the intensity with which this is spread and in closed communities, long-term care facilities, not just in our state but in America, that the existence of comorbidities which would be disproportionate among, by definition, among a community of older folks, they're going to have clocked up more things over the years than younger folks. The higher positivity rate, I assume, does not surprise you?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No.

Governor Phil Murphy: No. Thank you. And again, more on long-term care as a general matter tomorrow. Daniel, you get to take us out today.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hi, Governor. Regarding the restaurants on phase two, a lot of restaurants might not be in a position to offer outdoor dining, just because they lack outdoor space or because they're in a city. Would they be at a disadvantage for restaurants that can't offer that kind of outdoor dining? What would you say to those owners? Is the state going to ask municipalities to help out? Like closing parking lots or downtown to the cars so that they can accommodate outdoor dining, or loosening parking restrictions so cars can park elsewhere?

Is there a certain threshold for what's being considered outdoors? Like if a restaurant could slide back, say outdoor facing walls, would that be outdoors? Or a parking lot closed down to street, car traffic?

Governor Phil Murphy: I would just say as a general matter, I think I've said this here, but I know I've said it with the team. I'm not sure what authority we have, and it has to be done safely and responsibly. But we like the idea of again, safely, responsibly, and not every situation is going to allow for this. We like the idea of being creative on outdoor space. Whether that's a parking lot, whether it's a piece of a wider sidewalk, a space between buildings perhaps, that may not otherwise have been. I think, Judy and Ed would want me to remind you that again, outdoors, this virus has a lot less veracity and teeth than it does indoors. And so the answer, broadly speaking to the above is, yeah, we like that idea. But I think it's going to really be up to, that's got to be executed locally. I don't think there's a top down reality for us on that.

Secondly, and maybe more importantly, I hope we're in indoor dining sooner than later. And, again, that's more complicated. Indoors, lacking ventilation, sedentary, close proximity is harder. And we have to accept that. You know, we want to get our casinos back on their feet. They have the advantage of having a big footprint of space, but I hope that we could be creative in both outdoor dining that we have and that we can get to indoor dining as soon as possible.

With that, I'm going to mask up and say, we probably get to indoor dining sooner than not, assuming that RT curve we showed earlier, the positivity curves that we show always, the new hospitalizations, you know, that we keep them driving in the right direction. And folks, you have done that. We haven't done it, you have done it, and it's because you've taken to heart the basics. You've stayed away from each other, you've stayed home. You've worn a face covering, you've washed your hands with soap and water, you've been responsible.

And again, we talked and you all gave me some grief for this. I think it was rightful, because I didn't explain it properly at first. We've all been in our bubbles, and now as we open up, we're going to start to crosshatch those bubbles. So it isn't just in the restaurant/. Judy and I were having this conversation. It isn't just that the tables are six feet apart, and that everything else is in order, but who are you having dinner with? You know, is this a new, are you reintegrating with someone you haven't been around and they've been in their own bubble

and you've been in your own bubble, and so that's got to be done responsibly. I don't think there's any real guidance we can give you on that, other than the basic stuff of be responsible. You know, common sense for the common good, as we said yesterday, and do it right.

Tammy and I, with our kids, we're having these conversations literally, you know, what does that look like? And it won't be easy for any of us. In a strange sort of way, when you shut the place down, it's a black and white, we're shut. When you open it up, you're in a reality which is much more difficult to either execute or to describe in black-and-white terms. With that, I want to thank Judy and Ed, as I do every day, for your leadership, not just today, but every day. General, God bless you, great to have you here and your leadership. Pat, likewise to you, Jared, Matt, Dan, and of course the First Lady. We'll be back here again tomorrow a little bit different, unless you hear otherwise, we'll see at noon. God bless you all.

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