

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: September 8th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** I've said this before, but I think today for sure it holds. We have a lot of ground to cover. Good afternoon. With me is 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. Great to have you both. Guy to my left who needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, Chief Counsel Parimal Garg, and a cast of thousands.

I want to begin today by thanking President Biden for coming to visit New Jersey yesterday to see firsthand the destruction left in the wake of Tropical Storm Ida. I also thank the residents of Manville in particular for welcoming us into their community at such a tough time. I'm also grateful to the county commissioners, mayors, local officials, and volunteers who have welcomed me and the first lady, Pat, many of us on our team into the many other communities we've toured over the past week. At each location, we've profoundly felt two things: first, the overwhelming sense of loss, but second the determination to come back stronger and more determined than ever before. As I told the President prior to our tour, our New Jersey values shine brightest when our days are darkest. That's true in so many communities where neighbors and complete strangers are coming together to help each other pick up.

I cannot say enough, Pat, about the state troopers, members of local law enforcement, firefighters, EMS teams, everyone in the first responder community who went out in the height of this storm in the flood waters to save lives and property. You are all true heroes, and by the way, we have had a significant loss of life, significant damage to homes, but I'm not exaggerating this when I say thousands upon thousands of people's lives were saved from the roof of their car, the roof of their house, out a window of their house, just extraordinary heroism. To all the first responders – we've got one of them with me today, so Pat, I say this to you representing the entire first responder community in this state, hats off to you. That is, by the way, a house in Lambertville. Those are the owners, those two folks. That house was moved 30 feet off its foundation to where it is resting there. 30 feet off its foundation. I also want to thank our federal delegation,

Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker, and each one, both sides of the aisle of our house members, and state legislators, again on both sides of the aisle. I thank all for their partnership in advocating for the needs of our residents and our communities.

As it relates to getting what New Jersey deserves and what we need, I think we're off to a good start with a long way to go. We have major disaster declarations declared in Bergen, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Passaic, and Somerset counties. That's a big deal. We got an emergency declaration – disaster declaration almost immediately after a phone call with the President, but the major disaster declaration is a bigger deal because it allows individual homeowners to access federal assistance to being rebuilding, and let me just say this if you're not in those six counties, we are not done. Our work is not done. We're continuing to work with FEMA and county leaders across the state to expedite damage assessments and have those counties added to the major disaster declaration. Pat, I think you're going to go through a little bit more color what's happening outside of those six counties in your remarks. This was truly a statewide event. It demands a statewide response. We made this case directly to the President as well as the FEMA administrator, Deanne Criswell, who's another outstanding leader and has been there for us.

We're not entirely out of the woods. I can't even believe that we're talking about this, but here goes. We are at risk for some severe storms this evening, which could bring wind gusts and downpours into areas that need neither. Please take it safe as these storms progress. If your phone goes off with a flash flood or tornado warning, please take it seriously. Do not try to go out in any storm. We had too many people in particular – bless their souls, and I say this in nothing but complete sympathy because you can all see any of us having tried to do this who felt like they could be better than the water. Nobody passed from the tornadoes that touched down in the south. I think there's a lightbulb that goes off when it goes from tornado watch to warning. Everybody went into their basements, and even houses that were completely clobbered and lost and flattened, everybody lived with very few if any injuries.

I know I have this – I can see myself in this situation. My late father-in-law almost lost his life a few years ago due to this. You have a different – human nature has a different reaction to water than they do to say a tornado, and I just have to beg all of us, all of us to take all of this as seriously as we can. We don't want to cry wolf, right, so we don't want to now make every one of these warnings a high C, but we need to be factual. We need to be fact based, and when the warnings go off, they're real. I think the biggest thing – takeaway that I have – Pat, this does not encompass all of the losses of life, but most of them. It is particularly to stay off the roads, particularly in roads where you may think you know that road but it is prone to flooding, and too many people were lost that way. God bless each and every one of them.

Back to looking back and how we get – again, this weather warning, Pat, we'll get into as it relates to what we think the dimensions of this are today. I'm going to say this, and please, God, we don't find out it's otherwise. It's not at the level that we were sitting here a week ago literally exactly talking about what was going to happen last Wednesday night, but it is nonetheless, something that is potentially serious, and it is largely because we have very saturated grounds in the state right now, so vegetation, trees, foundations, everything is more likely to be easily moved. Let's go back to the – what we do to get back on our feet on that long road to recovery from Ida. For those who are living in the six counties that are included in that major disaster declaration – again, Bergen, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Passaic, and Somerset – go to [disasterassistance.gov](https://disasterassistance.gov) to start your claim for direct help from FEMA. [Disasterassistance.gov](https://disasterassistance.gov). There are some phone numbers up there. My advice is first go to the website.

For those of you who are in counties who have not yet been included in the FEMA declaration – and please, God, you will be sooner rather than later – go to – you have to go to a different website, [nj.gov/ida](https://nj.gov/ida). There you should log your damages. That will help us, by the way, make the case for your inclusion for whatever county you're in. When that happens, when you are included, your information will transfer from that website over to the federal database to help expedite your claim. By the way, that same website, [nj.gov/ida](https://nj.gov/ida), we're also cataloging available resources, so you should also go there whatever your need is to find the answers.

Not to inundate you with websites, but there's one other one I would recommend you go to, and I think everybody probably should visit this one. It's [floodsmart.gov](https://floodsmart.gov), the website of the National Flood Insurance Program. Across the state I heard from homeowners who did not carry a flood insurance policy for any number of reasons. Their location hadn't been flooded before – and I heard a lot of that – or they were told that even though they lived in close proximity to water, their property wasn't “technically in the flood zone”. Others didn't realize that their homeowner's policy doesn't cover flooding events. For these families, the FEMA assistance is nothing short of a lifeline, but at a certain point, it's limited and will not make you whole. FEMA assistance is there to help you meet your basic needs and begin to rebuild. Flood insurance is there to bring you back to where you were pre-flood.

This is an important point. You do not need to live in a flood zone to purchase a flood insurance policy. Ida proved that devastating floods can happen anywhere and at any time. Where it rains, it can flood. Again, this is a really important website, so [floodsmart.gov](https://floodsmart.gov). From there you can learn more about flood insurance and find a list of companies across the state offering NFIP approved flood insurance plans. Federally backed flood insurance through the National Flood

Insurance Program or through the private marketplace is security in times like these. I can give you a real live example of a friend of a friend who lives, again, in Lambertville. Her house is outside of the flood map. Her neighbor is inside the flood map, and they both flooded. There's no reason why their flood insurance profile should look any different from either her or to her neighbor.

Finally, again with an incredibly heavy heart, as of this morning, we know that 27 New Jerseyans have lost their lives in Ida. Some were swept up in flood waters that rushed into homes, some if not many, in fact, in cars that were swept off the roads and into roaring waters. At this moment, four more are still missing. It was a horrific, unfathomable loss of life. I've directed our flags to fly at half staff through dusk on Friday in memory of them all, and I think right now it would be proper for us to take a moment of silence to honor all who we have lost. Thank you. God bless each and every one of them.

Changing gears, Ida interrupted the start of our school year. Some districts are now opening their doors or for those who had their first day one week ago, reopening them. We remain committed to a safe start to the school year. As a reminder, all students, school personnel, and visitors are to wear a face mask when in a school building, but masking is just part of a whole package or layered approach to safety that we're engaged in to protect our educational communities. As I've noted before, masking is not a forever thing, but it's what we need to do to rely upon now as the Delta variant continues to impact communities, and many of our students, as you know, are still too young to be vaccinated. As we have previously mentioned vaccinations for all staff and eligible students, regular screening testing, physical distancing and handwashing and staying home when sick among other protocols are all important layers for protection in our school communities. The more we all take – the more we all follow these guidelines, hopefully the sooner we'll be able to lift the masking requirement, but at this time it is what we need, and especially for families impacted by Ida, a return to school for their children may be an important return to normalcy.

Our kids are especially resilient, but the power of being back in their classrooms with peers and educators can be part of their own process of healing from the stress of the past week, and that stress is real. The President and I were in a home with a young couple that had a couple of kids, and their family was rescued in the middle of the night. One of the families, Pat, we were with yesterday in Manville, high waters, dark, rescue boat, and the mom said listen, I need to know where to go to – for some mental health advice for my kids, and God willing, as we get back to school and we do it safely, and you're with, again, peers and educators and you've got structure in your life, that can be part of the solution. Let's face it, virtual learning cannot work if you don't have a safe and comfortable place to live to do it, and sadly, we have too many homes right now in our state in that situation, and too many students right now and their families are displaced or living in homes that are still being cleaned where the power isn't restored or the cable is still out. Remote learning just isn't really – isn't an option. We need this return to in-person education. Through both the Department of Health under Judy's leadership and the Department of Education, we are ready to assist schools and districts in any way we can, and we want everyone to start the year safely, both in terms of protection from the coronavirus and having a safe place amidst a sea of storm destruction. Again, we wish everyone a good start to the school year.

Now let's turn our attention to today's numbers. First up, and we'll run through these fairly quickly. This is our latest vaccination figures as of this morning. Again, good progress, but the day in, day out numbers have gone back down again. Judy, I'm counting – averaging 8 or 9,000 first shots a day, and we've got to be better than that as a state, so folks, if you've not yet vaccinated, get out there and get your first shot and then follow it up with your second. Here is updated information on breakthrough cases. First, we'll look at the overall effectiveness of the vaccines among the more than 5.2 million individuals who achieved their level of full vaccination by August 23rd. That's the last date in this particular analysis, and then here are the data points specific for the week August 16 through the 22nd. Once again, the preliminary data overwhelmingly and conclusively makes the case to get vaccinated if you've not yet done so.

Now let's get to today's newly released numbers. Here are the latest case totals as of this morning, and it must be noted that today's numbers of test positives includes a backlog of reports from yesterday due to a lab reporting issue from then, so if you average yesterday and today out, Judy, you get to about 2,000 cases a day over the past couple of days, which is about on trend. Here is the look at the impact on our hospital systems, and as you can see, these numbers are up. There's no other way to put it. In fact, overnight, the hospitalization numbers are up, I think, 94 from yesterday. Here with the heaviest of hearts are the newly confirmed deaths We're confirming 31 new deaths today, and you can see the total's unfathomable. The bulk of those – I know, Judy, you laid out earlier, the bulk of those are from August, a handful from September, and a couple from May as I recall.

As we do every day, let's take a minute to honor the lives of some of those members of our extraordinary New Jersey family who we have lost to COVID-19. I want to start today by remembering this guy, Carlos Garcia. He lived in Paterson. COVID claimed him on January 25th at the young age of 64. Carlos was born in El Salvador and came to the United States 47 years ago settling in Paterson. For 22 years, he worked at the Lubrizol Corporation in nearby Clifton where he was the maintenance manager. Away from the factory, he loved the outdoors from fishing and hunting to tending to his garden to hosting a cookout for family and friends, which was his favorite activity, and he was a soccer fanatic,

especially for his long-time team Real Madrid. Carlos leaves behind his three daughters, Karla, Veronica, and Angelica – and I had the great honor of speaking with Angelica last week – along with his son-in-law Veronica’s husband Luis, along with their mother Rosa, and his significant other Jessica. He also leaves behind his brother and sister Juan and Ana and his nieces and nephews. Carlos was a devoted catholic and a parishioner of Clifton’s St. Brendan and St. George Roman Catholic Church. We pray that God has welcomed him, and we thank Carlos for choosing to be a part of our New Jersey family.

Next, we’re going to head to the shore to recall the life of this woman on the right, Bayville resident Donna Toner. Donna was 70 years old, and we lost her on February 26th. Donna was born in Red Bank, and she was a graduate of my hometown – one of my hometown high schools, Middletown High School North and moved up the shore to Keansburg before moving to the Lanoka Harbor section of Lacey Township and ultimately to Toms River. Many clients in the beauty salon at The Pines of Whiting Senior Community would likely remember Donna as the manager of that establishment where she spent a total of 25 years. A parishioner of St. Barnabas Roman Catholic Church in Bayville, Donna was a woman of abiding love of her faith and her family with whom she loved spending time, especially with those two guys, grandsons Daniel and Michael.

Donna is survived by her husband Glenn, with whom she enjoyed 48 years of marriage. She left her daughters Tara and Denise, and I had the great honor of speaking with Denise last week, those two grandsons – bless them both – Daniel and Michael, who were her world, and she’s now reunited with her son Glenn who previously passed away. She also left her sister Karen, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, her brother Jackie, and sister-in-law Patti, along with countless other family members and dear friends. May God bless Donna and watch over her memory and her family, and we thank her for a lifetime spent as a proud New Jerseyan, and may she always be remembered.

Finally for today, remember this guy, another proud member of our immigrant family, Jesus Pita. He lived in Clifton by way of his native Puebla, Mexico. He passed on March 14th and was 69 years old. Jesus came to the United States more than 40 years ago, first living in the Bronx and then in Passaic before settling in Clifton in 2001. He was the proud owner of Las Maravillas De Tociingo Mexican Restaurant which he grew into a successful business with loyal patrons at its two locations in Passaic and Englewood. He was also a man of great faith. He was a parishioner of Our Lady of Fatima Roman Catholic Church in Passaic. He leaves behind his wife Lucina, three beloved children, his daughter Jenny and her husband Jhovanni, Jesus, jr., with whom I had the great honor of speaking last week, and his wife Wendy, and his daughter Daisy along with her fiancé Jose. I know he would’ve loved nothing more than to have walked her down the aisle. He also left his five grandchildren Marcus, Jesus, III, Jacob, Layla, and Camila along with five siblings back in his native Mexico. May God bless Jesus and his memory, and may his legacy live on through his family and through the taste of Mexico he brought to our communities. Our state’s family is proud and diverse, and we remember each and every one we have lost.

Now moving on, I want to recognize another of the small businesses who in partnership with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority continue to make a difference in their community. Today we’re giving a well-deserved shoutout to this guy, Amazing Athlete in Hamilton Township right here in Mercer County, and its founder, the guy on the right, Shawn Kenny. Prior to the pandemic, Shawn and his team were bringing their unique physical fitness programs to 2,000 children ages two to six in more than 150 preschools and daycare centers across central Jersey. COVID required Shawn and his team to try to adapt to a virtual model, and thanks to an emergency grant he received from the EDA, not only was he able to provide virtual instruction during the school day, but when the clock struck 3 p.m., he was able to turn his virtual learning center into an in-person after school operation. I had the opportunity recently, last week in fact, to speak with Shawn. He and Amazing Athletes are still on the comeback, but we are committed to helping them stay on the path. Check them out, [amazingathletes.com](http://amazingathletes.com), [amazingathletes.com](http://amazingathletes.com). Keep at it, Shawn. You’re doing a great job.

Before I turn things over to Judy, I want to once again note that we are expecting storms to head across our state later today. Please take every precaution given that the ground as I mentioned earlier in many places remains saturated despite the sunny weather of the past several days. The potential for flash flooding always exists with a quick moving thunderstorm. Please stay safe. Do not attempt as I mentioned earlier to drive into standing water. In fact, if you see a storm approaching, just don’t go out, period. Stay in and stay safe. I will again put on screen as you can see here the information for those of you in the counties designated a FEMA for federal emergency disaster relief to begin the process of filing such relief so you can restore your homes and businesses. Again, the easiest way is to go to that website, [disasterassistance.gov](http://disasterassistance.gov). Again, for those of you in other counties, we need you to log on to that website, [nj.gov/ida](http://nj.gov/ida) and catalog your damages. This is the information we need to get more individual homeowners and more counties included for FEMA assistance.

From our side here, we will continue to work with President Biden and FEMA and its great administrator Deanna Criswell to ensure that folks get help as quickly as possible and to advocate as strongly as we can for every impacted county to be covered by this major disaster declaration, but also remember that FEMA relief is no replacement for flood insurance. Your homeowner’s policy is not going to protect you against a flood. Only flood insurance policy will ensure that you can

get back to where you and your home and property were before a flood event. You do not need to live in a flood zone to purchase flood insurance. And so many families learned last week, places that have not known to flood can and will. Don't wait for the next flood. Prepare now. Here again is that last website we want to show you for the National Flood Insurance Program, [floodsmart.gov](https://www.floodsmart.gov).

Again, be safe this afternoon and into the evening, but just as vitally, pay attention to weather alerts. Do not head out if there's a danger of flooding in your area, and keep helping each other out. You've been extraordinary, unbelievable. By the thousands upon thousands, folks have come out whether they be first responders, neighbors, you name it. People paid, people unpaid coming out and just doing the right thing by the tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands. Only in New Jersey. Keep that up folks. We are going to get through this together, and we're going to rebuild together. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. As cleanup and recovery efforts continue in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Ida, the Department has been sharing resources about how homeowners, business owners, community volunteers, and contractors should protect themselves against environmental hazards that may be present and unseen in storm damaged home and buildings. When doing cleanup work, protect your health by wearing gloves, masks, boots, protective eyewear, and respirators. Only specially trained and licensed contractors should remove asbestos containing materials. Serious injuries can also occur from post-storm tree hazards. Leave that work to the professionals. Individuals can search for a licensed professional at [njtreeexperts.org](https://njtreeexperts.org). Do not apply chemicals to remove mold and bacteria without wearing protective equipment because many times these products contain chemicals that can cause reactions if they come in contact with your skin or if they are inhaled.

After a storm or flood, any area damaged by water could be subjected to mold. When mold spores drop on places where there is excessive moisture such as there has been flooding, they will grow. To determine if mold spores are present, examine your walls and ceilings and floors for signs of water damage. Mold can also be recognized by a musty, earthy smell or a bad odor. Exposure to mold spores can be dangerous. It can also cause nasal and throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or in some cases skin irritation. People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. A fact sheet and a link to a department mold brochure can be found on the Department's storm recovery resource page, which can be accessed from the Department of Health's homepage. Those involved in cleanup activities should check with their healthcare providers to determine if they need booster shots or tetanus vaccination.

Following Superstorm Sandy, we saw the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning from using generators inside homes and garages. In the two weeks following Sandy, nearly 400 patients were treated in New Jersey emergency rooms, and five individuals died from carbon monoxide poisoning, so only use generators outside more than 20 feet away from your home, your doors, open doors and windows. Food safety is also an important issue. Throw out perishable food in your refrigerator, meat, fish, cut fruits and vegetables, eggs, milk, and leftovers after four hours without power or a cold source like dry ice. Do not eat any food that may have come in contact with flood water. Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container. Also, throw out cardboard juice, milk, or baby formula boxes. I encourage you to visit [nj.gov/health](https://nj.gov/health) for more information on how to protect your health during this time, not only your physical health but your emotional and mental health as well.

This week marks the return of many children and adolescents to classrooms, and we want that return to be as safe as possible. A vital way to protect the health of children in school is to get them vaccinated if they are eligible. The percentage of New Jersey children between the ages of 12 and 17 who have received at least one dose of vaccine has risen to 57%. 66% of 16- and 17-year-olds have received at least one dose of vaccine. As we emphasized last week, a layered, preventive approach, which includes masking, frequent handwashing, physical distancing, and staying home when you're sick is being implemented to protect the health of students and staff alike. Additionally, all K-12 schools are strongly encouraged to develop a screening testing program that will provide screening testing for staff and students. Districts have until September 13 to opt in and participate in the Department's screening testing program. That will provide screening testing for staff and students at no cost to the districts.

The reports from the *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly*, otherwise known as *MMWR*, released last week illustrates the impact of COVID-19 on emergency room visits and hospitalizations among youth. The CDC found that from late June to mid-August, hospitalization rates in the United States for children and teenagers increased nearly five-fold. The reports also highlighted how well vaccination works to protect against severe illness. Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 years, hospitalization rates were approximately ten times higher in the unvaccinated group compared to the fully vaccinated adolescents. This data demonstrates that vaccines were highly effective at preventing serious COVID-19 illness in this age group during a period when the Delta variant was the dominant strain.

While it is unclear at this time if Delta causes more severe illness in children, we know generally children and adolescents can experience severe COVID-19. All individuals who are eligible should receive COVID-19 vaccines to reduce the risk of severe disease for themselves and others with whom they may come in contact, including children who are currently too young to be vaccinated. Visit [covid19.nj.gov/finder](https://covid19.nj.gov/finder) or call 855-568-0545 to schedule an appointment. Strong vaccination rates are critical to fighting this pandemic.

The Delta variant continues to be the dominant variant in our state representing over 98% of variants sequenced in the last four weeks. The Mu variant accounts for a very, very small proportion of variant cases in New Jersey and the US, but we continue to monitor it. In the past four weeks, New Jersey had 16 reports of the Mu variant. The CDC has not yet classified Mu as either a variant of concern or interest as there still needs to be an evaluation of this variant as the data are somewhat limited at this time. As with all variants, we are closely monitoring all genetic sequencers to identify variants that are increasing in proportion or that are causing unusual patterns in terms of disease transmission or severity. The public health recommendations otherwise do not change. Get vaccinated, mask up, and practice physical distancing.

On to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 1,186 hospitalizations of COVID-positive patients or persons under investigation. Since our last briefing, we have had two new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. There are now 132 cumulative cases in our state. One of these children remains hospitalized. At the state veterans' homes, there are no new cases among residents at the homes, and at the state psychiatric hospitals, no new cases among patients.

As of September 4<sup>th</sup>, the positivity in New Jersey was 7.93%; the northern part of the state reports 6.39%; the central part of the state, 9.52%; and the southern part of the state, 9.595. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, our friends, and our children. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you. A lot of good advice as it relates to public health in the aftermath of a storm. The communities – I've now been to a bunch of communities. I'll just pick one, New Brunswick, where I was on Saturday. Very brackish water coming out of the river, lots of stuff in it. Just can't take a chance, right? You cannot take a chance. As sad as that is and as tragic as that is – because that means you end up throwing a lot of prized possessions and things out, so thank you for everything.

Pat, several things occur to me but tell me what you've got. Number one, maybe go through a little bit of the FEMA process and what counties have been assessing beyond the original six that they put over the goal line. Secondly, any more word on what we might expect later today or tonight as it relates to rain and/or other activity? Thirdly, in the category of there's a special place in hell for people who take advantage of moments like this, but you can't make this up. There are bad apples out there, everything from looting out of people's homes to – although thank God that's not widespread, but it's happening – all the way to a much more pervasive hey, here's my card. I can get all this organized for you. I'll deal with FEMA, stuff that we saw after Sandy, just awful people taking advantage of folks who are on their knees. That's on my list but anything else you've got, fire away. Thank you for your great leadership these past days.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Starting with that joint preliminary damage assessment in addition to those six, yesterday our OEM team, along with FEMA, were out in Hudson, Essex, Mercer, and Union. Today, those assessments are being done in Burlington, Monmouth, and Morris. I think this afternoon, Warren county has a preliminary joint assessment meeting, which means they'll be underway shortly there. I was on the phone with the Region II administrator this morning, and that process is ongoing. We're confident, although it's never a guarantee, we're confident given the amount of damage that we're seeing there that in short order, we'll be submitting those. Although those threshold amounts are a good indicator, until it's approved by FEMA, we just want to make sure that we're – want to manage people's expectations, but we do expect that to go in favor of New Jersey.

With regard to the weather, yes, this afternoon, I think our highest risk of flash flooding and thunderstorms is north of but including Mercer and Middlesex Counties, especially west of I-95. Flash flooding expected this afternoon into the pre-dawn hours of tomorrow morning, and again, even with tornado warnings expected. I know we sat here a week ago today talking about that, to your point, Governor. I think the alerts are key. There wasn't a person that we talked to down in that stretch of Mullica Hill up to Winona that didn't go to their basement when that happened. Hardly any injuries, if any, but because of those alerts – and we do that. That's that new iPause alert system, which certainly saved lives in that case. Regardless of what it is, whether it's tornado, flooding, we just ask folks to certainly pay heed to that to stay safe and to not have to be rescued.

I will highlight the phenomenal efforts of our first responders, our county OEM coordinators. More than 4,000 rescues across the state in that short time, first responders leaving their families and their own homes in order to go out and save others. That's a staggering number while getting a staggering amount of rain in short order. My personal and professional gratitude certainly to all of them. To your point with regards to those that seem to take advantage of those

during catastrophes like this, I know the attorney general would want me to say it, that we're watching. New Jersey Consumer Affairs is where anyone should go. I talked to the mayor of Winona last week when I was there, and there were already exorbitant prices to have – \$37,000 to have the trees removed from your front yard is unacceptable. It's njconsumeraffairs.gov to report price gouging or consumer fraud. The attorney general and the director of Consumer Affairs has committed to prosecuting those bad actors to the fullest extent of the law.

I'll close on a somber note. We have a contingency of troopers up in Connecticut today for the line of duty death of Sergeant Ryan Mohl who was swept away while on duty last week up on Woodbury. I have talked to Colonel Mellekas of the Connecticut State Police who was a close friend to offer our condolences to his family, a 26-year veteran out there in the midst of the height of this storm and unfortunately, he gave his last full measure of devotion – of devotion and our thoughts and prayers certainly go with the Connecticut State Police family and the Mohl family. Thank you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** God bless them. We came close. There's some famous stories. I think in Hopewell Township right here in Mercer County, several law enforcement officers holding on for – onto trees and people just laid themselves out in a way, police, fire, EMS, neighbors, elected officials. It was just extraordinary the outpouring.

Pat, the case is so compelling for those counties to get added. I'll just give you two examples with my own eyes where I've visited. Again, I've visited a bunch. Millburn in Essex County – if County Executive Joe DiVincenzo were here, he'd remind us that every community in Essex County – I think there are 22 of them – was impacted meaningfully. Irvington was – Tony Voss, they had a fatality. Millburn, there was literally a river going down the middle of town. It's a quite famous video. I visited there and then Elizabeth in Union County, just to pick two communities, devastation. Four tragic losses of life in the same apartment, significant flood damage, beyond that, just that one area. These are worthy.

Again, FEMA's been great and they're doing it quickly and professionally. Please, God, these other counties get added sooner than later. Thank you for your leadership and than you for all.

I think we'll start over here. Dustin will kick us off; Ruth's got the microphone. I think we should probably make a little bit of news here, Mahen, if it's okay with you. Due to back to school, due to the fact that the variant is, unfortunately, still with us, due to now we've got post-storm activities, I think we're going to go back, at least for the next couple of weeks, to two a week. We're going to go Monday at 1 o'clock will be our next gathering unless you hear otherwise. We'll be Monday at 1 and Wednesday at 1, and we think that is the right cadence, at least for these few weeks as we get back on our feet and as we get back to school and please, God as we get our arms around this virus.

### Q&A Session

Dustin, good afternoon. Good to see you.

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** You, too. Good afternoon. My colleagues found in an investigation that Rutgers University has been leading money to its athletics division to cover annual operating expenses for years despite having a policy that said internal loans from its university bank should only go to capital projects. President Holloway said this is unsustainable. Do you agree? Should the university stop loaning money to cover annual operating costs? Do you support forgiving the loans as the university is considering?

On the booster shots, since there is some disagreement in the Biden Administration that may mean scaling back those plans, is New Jersey still going onward as planned with offering boosters later this month? Is the plan still to offer it to people after about eight months? Last, I want to see if you have any reaction to several chore area schools that are lifting their mask mandates this week because of the heat. Connected to that, has the Administration defined what constitutes excessive heat? Some districts are going with a temperature of 75 degrees to remove masks. I'm just not clear on if there's a hard number that schools should follow. Thanks.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thanks, Dustin. I'll start and Judy, maybe you could come in. On Rutgers, I've got no insight beyond what I read, quite concerning. I'll defer a more formal reaction because I still need to understand the facts. Just having read what I read, it takes your breath away. There's a high bar for transparency and doing things the right way, and I think if you're asking me how I reacted to President Holloway's – I think he said it's not sustainable. I would certainly agree with that based on what I know, but I'm going to hold off on giving you a fuller response to that but quite concerning based on what I read.

Boosters and schools lifting the mask mandate because of heat – and we've been very clear that that is a safe harbor. That does qualify. If there is excessive heat, folks have the right to do that. I'll leave it to Judy or Ed to put more definition on that. Frankly on boosters, Judy, unless you see this differently or have got more updated information than I have, it's still TBD whether it's after six months versus eight months. I think there's a debate or I think a healthy discussion between the Administration and the CDC and other bodies as to when to hit the go button. I think I can speak on behalf of all of us. The week of September 20<sup>th</sup> was where we were led to believe this was going to begin and we want to make sure that we're ready. As I think we discussed this last week, the range of the amount of people who would be eligible

during that week is very significant, measured in the millions. It's hard to compare completely for that. That's a long way of saying from my perspective – and I'm not talking about the immunocompromised folks of whom – they've been able to get it since I think August 14<sup>th</sup>. Long-winded way of saying whenever it is that get – that starts, my suspicion is that we'll have a supply/demand challenge that we'll work through hopefully in short order. Judy, any color, or Ed, on boosters and how folks should define what excessive heat is in schools?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** I'll talk first about boosters. We'll wait for the ACEP and FDA recommendations. We're planning for six months; we're planning for eight months; we're planning for Pfizer. We know Moderna won't come out first; there'll probably be a lag between Pfizer and Moderna. We are planning for almost any scenario, so we will be ready. People will get their boosters as soon as we get the recommendations and know when to start.

As far as masks are concerned, I think it's really hard to put a specific number on what the temperature has to be. We do know that kids become very uncomfortable, as we all do, with masks on when it's really hot and humid. We're just going to have to trust that the teachers make the right decision for their students and keep kids physically distanced from one another, becomes more important, or other layered techniques; wash their hands frequently, physically distance, definitely stay home if you're sick, open the windows, keep ventilation up in the classroom. Move classrooms outside; do whatever you can to keep the kids safe if they're going to take off their masks. Ed, did you have any?

**Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** No, I think you covered it excellently. Obviously, 75 and humid is different than 75 in the shade on a nice, cool day. Yes, we do rely on them to know what's happening with their students and to take the measures that the Commissioner said to try to keep people as safe as they possibly can.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Ed, I'm glad we got your money's worth out of coming here. I apologize. I didn't want to leave you hanging out there in the bullpen. Judy and Ed both make a very fair point. If it's at that threshold where you feel like you have to take masks off, I would say two things. Please don't play games with us. Don't use that as the excuse because you don't want – you got people who don't want us to be wearing masks. That is not part of the program here. These masks are mandated.

Secondly, on a lighter note, as it were, if it's, by definition, warm enough to take the mask off, it's warm enough to be outside, and to have the windows opened, and to have really good ventilation and social distancing, which is all the more important for obvious reasons. If you're not wearing these, that social distancing matters even more. Thank you, Dustin.

Mike, how are you?

**Mike Catalini, Associated Press:** Good. Good afternoon, Governor, thank you. People in Manville yesterday were saying that they don't have their gas, so that means no cooking, no hot water. How many people in the state still don't have gas, and when will it be back? A woman yesterday was telling me that she, in a previous storm, had \$10,000 worth of damage but only got \$1700 from FEMA. What is your administration doing or will you do to help people who've lost everything and are facing these steep costs and sometimes inadequate-sounding help from the federal government? What is the state doing right now to help with people in the devastated areas across New Jersey who are facing the potential for more flash flooding? You talked about staying off the roads, but if you're living in Manville or other parts that were devastated, what is your Administration doing to help those people? Can you just talk a little bit more about why you're not ordering road closures or why you're not ordering people to stay off roads given the forecast for tonight? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Couple of things: I don't have a number, unless you do, Pat, on how many without gas. I know power is down to 600; that's power. I don't have a gas number but can we – Mahen, can you help me follow up on that? You probably saw, Mike, yesterday one of the homes that the President and I visited. Pat was with me – is a home that blew up, literally, because of a gas line. We're doing everything we can and Pat, you may want to weigh in here on this question of I had \$10,000 worth of damage and I only got \$1700. We are – these websites that we're having folks go to, be as thorough and complete and broad in the definition of your loss as possible, obviously accurate. You can't overstate it, but state it accurately. It does get back to my point. Again, this doesn't do you any good if you didn't have flood insurance. It's another reason for – it's a healthy reminder for everybody to get health insurance.

I would just say, and Pat, you should come in here. You try to call the balls and strikes on mother nature as best you can. It's like a pandemic. You're doing everything you can to get it as right as possible, but you're dealing with something which is by nature unpredictable. I've said this many times. Every time we think we have the pandemic figured out, it takes a turn. It's very humbling. Mother nature is a similar reality. If we think road closing, particularly in a particular area, are warranted and we know for sure that's the case, clearly, but as a general matter, if you see standing water in a road, don't test it. We had too many people – again, who – I'm – this is human nature. I probably would've been in a similar boat, but don't do that. Pat, any other advice you've got for folks tonight, not just road closures, but you've already been clobbered. Any other advice you got in the near term?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Yeah, I would speak to one and just to echo what we're doing for those residents, we have disaster recovery centers going up. Right now, I think there's only 28 folks in a shelter up in Passiac County. A lot of people found either family or temporary housing. That individual assistance comes with rental assistance. We're right now assessing a transitional assistance sheltering program, a TSA, they call it, transitional sheltering program with FEMA, to make sure that we support everybody as much as we can.

As far as the weather, it's the unpredictability of it and the volatility to it, to the Governor's point. There was way too many people out on the road Thursday morning following that storm, probably historical numbers as far as road closures, interstate, state, local. I think at one point, Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti said 600-plus and if last week didn't teach us a lesson, then shame on all of us. I think if you don't have to be out, don't be out. It could certainly wait. We talk about it even during the winter blizzards and struggle to keep people off the roads, but there's a sense of invincibility that, unfortunately, can be deadly at times.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** We've all lived it; it's nobody's fault. You could see ourselves walking in those shoes. Mike, you didn't ask this but I mentioned this several times this last Wednesday. As a state and as a nation, we need a whole new – we need a bigger boat, as they said in *Jaws*. We need a whole new playbook. We've got to be creative. We've already started that process. Any infrastructure bill out of Congress would be a game-changer for us as we're the most densely populated state in the nation. We've got a location second to none, but we're very exposed as a result of that location. It's got to be creative. It's got to be creatively thinking through flood plains. It can't just be barriers and levees, although that probably needs to be part of it, particularly on the shore. The shore, thank God, was spared on this one. We got to – we had a discussion with mayors and county officials, members of our Congressional delegation. Pat was with me yesterday. We've got to be creative.

It may include buying people out and just acknowledging that this part of a community is going to be – there's no amount of mitigation we can put in place that is going to keep them from the reality of what we're seeing, which is the intensity and the frequency of storms. That's got to be an option on the table that you don't say with any amount of glee because people bought those homes. They raised their families there. They've got memories. I have spoken to a fair number of people including mayors who've said enough is enough. This is not – given the world we're in today, this is not a place that makes sense to have folks with their homes. Everything's got to be on the table. Thank you.

Do you have a question?

**Reporter:** Yes, hi. We're wondering – there's been eight people who perished in the Ida tropical storm who've not been identified yet. Just wondering do you have those names and if – when do you plan to release that information? About the disaster designation, how – could you explain how those first several counties got in early on? Was that the state's recommendation? Was that something that FEMA recognized? Obviously you know a lot of people are questioning why other counties were left out, so if you could shed light on that process. Commissioner was saying about – or maybe it was the Governor, about students needing distance learning, home learning because of the damage by Ida. I'm wondering if you have any idea how many towns, how many students are going to be relying more on home learning as a result of the storm.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Nothing more to add on identifications I think those will come at the local level. The disaster declarations we have nothing to do with other than we work with FEMA when they get into a county, but it's – we are not responsible for the order that they make designations. Distance learning, we can come back to you in terms of how many districts and schools are covered by that. Do you have anything to add on FEMA, Pat?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** I would just add on those first six, from what we were hearing from that process of communication with municipalities and counties that we do what are called windshield assessments and aerial assessments. Those are done with our aviation unit as well as joint FEMA folks, OEM folks going out and assessing that. What that does, that immediate major disaster declaration then opens the door. The other ones are the four that I mentioned today. We also, for the first time ever, opened up that damage assessment portal, which allows us as a state to assess and prioritize which counties we're going to next. Although I know the frustrations of counties that are not included, I can assure all of them that that process is happening around the clock. If they meet those threshold, it is certainly our hope that they be included in the major disaster declaration. Thank you, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Another part of my answer, long memory. Please.

**Reporter, NJ Spotlight:** Hi, question from David Cruz. Have you prioritized resiliency projects that you hope to proceed with once you get federal aid from this infrastructure bill? Can you name a couple that are at or near the top of this list? Question from Colleen O'Dea, can you provide more details on those who died in this storm, for instance, how many died in homes versus cars or walking? Was most of the flooding in the usual places or were there other locations that have never flooded before? Will the state and towns be getting any federal assistance to help with road and other infrastructure repairs? Question from the newsroom –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Please talk faster.

**Reporter, NJ Spotlight:** Police and firefighter unions in Newark are protesting today against Mayor Baraka's mandate that all public workers get vaccinated or face termination. Do you support that mandate, which is stricter than the one at the state level? Do you think the union has a case here against the mandate? Question from Tim Nostron, you just reported that there have been 80 deaths among vaccinated people, up 12 from your last report, but only 2 of them died last week. When did the other ten die? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, I wrote as fast as I could. Listen, the good news is we haven't been waiting for this storm to make ourselves more resilient. In some remarks I gave in the aftermath of this storm, I talked about the several billions of dollars that were put into resiliency projects. One of them – and Joe Fiordaliso would want me to say this, team. Protecting substations, an enormous amount of efforts, and energy, and dollars went into protecting substations. I forget which hurricane he mentioned this morning to us.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Irene.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Was it Irene? Irene had 2 million outages, as I recall. We had 92,000, so for all the damage, and all the loss, and all the tragedy, that is – again, I'm not – if you're one of the 92,000, you're not happy. I don't mean to imply that, but we have – that's a lot of investment that we've put in already. It's early stage. David, by the way, I saw in Lambertville, so please tell him I noticed that he came out and was with us there and saw the destruction in that extraordinary community. It's early, but Sean LaTourette at the DEP, Diane Scaccetti at DOT, Pat in his OEM function, we've got a pretty good sense of where we want to go with this. It's a mix of big of small; it's a mix of tangible hard asset versus codes we may want to put in place versus very good piece today. I think it's the Netherlands and the *New York Times* just having natural – maybe taking – I mentioned a minute ago to Mike's question, maybe taking an area where it doesn't make sense to have people living and just turn that into a natural runoff area for waters as they rise. It's going to be a combination of a lot of those things.

On how folks perished, I think I'd like to come back to you on that. There was – no one perished from the tornado either directly or indirectly. It was, therefore, all related in or around the flooding realities. Tell Colleen we'll come back to her on that.

It is both – and this is the sobering part of this. It is both – I met them myself. This is – “Governor, this is the fourth time this has happened to me.” “Mr. President, this is the fourth time this has happened to me.” Just as many if not more, “This has never flooded before.” Back to my riff on flood insurance, you heard a lot of folks who said you know what? I asked the same question when I moved in. They said it had never flooded before. That's why I say with the increasing intensity and frequency of these storms, it's inevitable that this is going to get worse before it gets better. We have to get the playbook not just up to where we are in 2021. We got to anticipate what this is going to look like over the next number of decades.

I've got no comment on the first responders in Newark, God bless them all and God bless Mayor Baraka. I missed your last – just – I was – I promise you, I was going as fast as I could.

**Reporter:** Totally understandable. Question, you just reported that there have been 80 deaths of vaccinated people, up 12 from your last report, but only 2 of them died last week. When did the other ten die?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think we have to come back to you on that. Judy, is that fair to say? Do you want to look while – while Dave is asking his questions and if we can't, we'll come back to you through Mahen.

Dave, welcome back.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Thank you very much, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I was worried about you. Dustin wrapped you up. He did a very good impression.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Yes, I heard about this. I was on a beach, but I appreciate your concern. Thank you. Governor, you had just talked a little bit about don't play games with the business with taking the kids' masks off at school. Can you please spell out what you mean by this? I think I know what you mean, but could you please spell it out? What do you say to parents who may be concerned if the kids' masks are going to come off with the Delta variant threat and so forth? They may not want their children's masks to come off.

In Manville, some residents are asking for the National Guard to be sent in because of looting concerns. This is what my newsroom is telling me. Are there any plans to send in the National Guard possibly in Manville and maybe other areas? Question from Mike Simons. As of Monday, the state must pay interest to the feds on the federal loan that it has to pay

the UI benefits, which was 193 million in the latest update. New Jersey, he says, is one of ten states with a balance due. Why not use the state's new debt avoidance fund or federal stimulus dollars to avoid owing interest on that debt, which is what the states of Ohio and Nevada just did?

Hospitalizations are slowly rising again after leveling off for a while. The RT continues to slowly drop and we have on average – I think, Governor, you mentioned a couple of thousand new positive cases every day. Do we have any idea what's going on with this pattern? On the one hand, it's concerning, but on the other hand it's not. Finally, the state of emergency that you declared, Governor, was after the one that was declared in Pennsylvania. Could you give us an idea? What is the way that you guys – and I think Colonel, you're probably in on this as much as the Governor. How do you figure out when a state of emergency is going to be declared? Is there a specific pattern? Do you wait to hear back from the different counties? I would not think that, Governor, you're sitting at home watching the Weather Channel and having a tall, cool one and then just deciding at the spur of the moment to declare an emergency. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. I wish. Playing games, I mean, I think it's fairly straightforward. There've been certain communities – by the way, not many to the credit of many. Parimal should correct the record on this, but certain communities were reasonably if not quite vocal about the masking. The good news is, to your point about parents who are supportive of masking, I think it's something like 69/23 in a poll that came out a week or two ago in favor of it. By the way, I think none of us with any amount of joy but we just know that this is – given where we are, that's what's required.

I just want to make sure, folks, this excessive heat carve-out is real. Judy and Ed, it's real. It's there for a reason. We don't want to put anyone's health at risk. Make sure you're doing it for the right reasons, and I'll just leave it at that. Your point's a good one. There are folks on both sides of this, including the vast majority, who accept that this is the right thing to do to protect their kids.

I had mentioned looting myself. I had not mentioned it specific to Manville. Pat, that's something I – bear with us. I think we'll follow up on that. Lisa Howe has been very much by our side at every step of the way. The Guard's doing an extraordinary job backing and filling a lot of what Pat and other first responders are. We haven't talked about it today, but we've got a significant refugee population that's growing at the joint base. Lisa and Brigadier General Cockley is her point person, doing a great job. Pat, you may want to come back on that.

We'll come back to you on the UI question. I think the one thing we want to do is make sure we've got the highest rate of return on whatever wherever we deploy our money. My guess is that we're looking at the interest versus the return we can get on deploying that money elsewhere. Mahen, if there's more on that, we'll come back.

Judy, I'd love you to comment. I'll just make a comment on state of emergency and then ask Judy to talk about hey, what's going on here. As I mentioned earlier, every time you think you got this thing figured out, it takes a turn. I'm on record as saying eight out of ten of those turns were negative. Two of them, on average, are positive. Would love your thoughts on that. A lot goes into the state of emergency. When I had said our neighborhood, by the way, I was really thinking about New York City and New York state, but the storm was coming. Pennsylvania got it before we did, so that's my bad.

There was a National Weather Service all hands call at 10 a.m. on that Wednesday. You activated the OEM functions at both the state and county levels at noon that day. We were here at 1. You're building towards something like that, but I'll let Pat get into the details on that.

Judy, very interesting question here. You've got the RT stuck just above 1. You've got positivities that's spiking. You've got a mismatch in the hospitalizations versus ICU and ventilators. Any wisdom on any of that?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Let's start with the RT. The RT is 1.04 today. We've seen it around that for quite some time. It's based on the cases, and if the cases stay steady, the RT will stay steady. We want it to be under one. Anything over one means there is still transmission, but it's lower than it has been, so the cases are steady. We are seeing hospitalizations creep up. We're about 50% lower than where we were in April. Remember, we had a surge April 2020; we'll never forget that time. Then we had a surge again in December/January. We had a surge in April. We are now 50% less than the surge in April, but that's what we're looking at. I expect hospitalizations to go up. Three-quarters or more of the hospitalized individuals are unvaccinated, so although we have high vaccination rates, we do expect unvaccinated individuals to contract COVID-19, particularly the Delta variant.

We look pretty critically at ICU and vents because we've said overall, high vaccination rates should protect people from severe hospitalization and death. Severe hospitalization is intensive care, and if you're put on a ventilator, it means that you are really perhaps in very difficult condition. Ventilator use has been at 50% or lower. Now at our surges last April, went as high as 97%, and that was April 2020. April 2021, it was between 55 and 65%. A couple weeks ago, it was a little bit higher than 50%. Today it's under 50%.

It looks like for vaccinated individuals, severe hospitalization is stabilized It's for unvaccinated individuals where it's really hitting them pretty hard. Ed, did you have anything you wanted to add?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Ed?

**Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** No. Well, again, I think that was an excellent review. I think it's a combination. I think a small part is being plagued by the fact that there are somewhat better therapeutics to keep people out of the hospital, but I think the much bigger part is what the Commissioner is alluding to. First off, if you have been vaccinated and you do happen to have a breakthrough case, you're less likely to be hospitalized than if not. A large percent of the population has been hospitalized – I'm sorry, has been vaccinated, so even if they become cases, they aren't vaccinated – they aren't hospitalized, sorry. While our numbers are creeping up, these other things are certainly working in our favor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Get vaccinated. When the boosters are available for you, get the booster and we'll give you the information we get as soon as we get it. Pat, any other color? I know you'll follow up on Manville specifically and any other color on emergencies.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Just real quick, when we know a storm is – thank you, Governor – severe enough or imminent, what that does, it then allows us to deploy aid to counties and municipalities. We call them emergency protective measures. At the same time, when we're asking FEMA at first for emergency declaration, we have one in place here. That then, in turn, with this storm allowed FEMA to deploy resources to us in the form of high water vehicles that we asked for, in the form of an internet management team – we call them an IMAT team – in the form of teams to come do those damage assessments, so it's a tiered effect. A town can declare one, a county, certainly a statewide event, the state, and then it opens the door and that domino effect up to the federal level, which then allows us to draw down upon those resources.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you. Ultimately it's a team decision and it's approved by me, personally. It works the way a lot of other things work. Judy and Ed, thank you, as always; Pat, likewise, Parimal, Mahen, Ruth. To everybody out there, again, we're pounding away on the storm. On Ida front, we're pounding away to get more counties included by the feds. I promise you we will not relent on that front. If you've been impacted, God bless you. We're going to stay with you. It's not going to be overnight, sadly. We're not going to be – you can't flip a light switch here. It's going to be a journey, but we will stay with you. I'm confident the feds will stay with us as well.

As it relates to weather today and tonight, please be careful and take these warnings seriously and do what you overwhelmingly have done and stay safe. As it relates to COVID, continue to do the right thing. The most important thing you could do if you're not vaccinated is get vaccinated. We're down now to about 8 or 9,000 first shots a day. We'd love to see that double that and just for folks to do that. That's the best way to stay healthy, stay out of the hospital, and stay alive. God bless y'all.

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