

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 21st, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Before we begin, I have to show off a new mask courtesy of a friend of ours, Pete Stilianessis of the State Police. I want to give Pete and the folks who helped put that together, a couple of things, off topic. Good afternoon, everyone. Before we jump in, other than mask updates, I want to wish one of my predecessors, a guy who's been a mentor to me for going on 20 years, happy 85th birthday to Governor Tom Kean a guy who not only distinguished himself as a leader of the state, as a Member of the Legislature, Educational Opportunity Fund, by the way, born thanks to him 51 years ago. But obviously an extraordinary Governor and I think quite relevantly, in this time of crisis, someone who the nation looked to, to find the answers of what happened, and what can we do differently as it relates to the aftermath of 9/11 and the Commission that he chaired, along with Vice Chair Lee Hamilton. And he would want me to say that, that he treated Lee as a partner every step of the way. So God bless you, Governor Kean, and happy birthday. In fact, we were supposed to do something together at NJ PAC, and I would just say, I hope someday the dust settles and we're able to do that together.

Pat, do you mind? It looks like it's already past here, but any 30-second update on what folks should know about weather?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Just real quick about a thunderstorm watch that's in effect for most counties. It's a west to east storm. There was some hail just a few minutes ago out there. Winds could get up to 50 or 60, and it's going to get pretty cold tonight. So just, you know, possible local power outages. As the Gov always says, and Joe Fiordaliso, if there's a downed power line, just don't touch it. Report it. We have our BPU folks up at The ROIC standing by to assist with all the power outages. Thanks, Gov.



Governor Phil Murphy: Amen, and if you do have your power -- not only don't go near a downed line, but if your power goes out, don't assume your neighbor called it in. Please call it in yourself. The more density of those calls, the faster you'll get your provider to come out and help.

One other off topic but incredibly important not. I want to acknowledge that today is Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Today we remember the 6 million Jews and millions of others senselessly murdered by a hateful regime whose legacy is of their ignorance of, and disregard for, our common humanity. Never again.

I'm honored to be joined today by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, another person who needs no introduction, the State Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan, thank you folks, for being here. And the guy to my left who needs no introduction, State Police Superintendent Colonel Patrick Callahan, the Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples is with us. I don't see apparently Parimal. There you go, Parimal Garg, Deputy Counsel is with us, as well as some other teammates.

Again, apologies for being later today. We had previewed this that we're getting started much later than usual. By the way, we will as well, tomorrow, I believe, again, we're going to be at 3:00 p.m. tomorrow here, for similar reasons I'll get to in a moment. The reason today is earlier, Judy and Pat and I, and many others, did a tour of our third field medical station. There are some pictures, which has been set up with 258 beds in the Atlantic City Convention Center. We're bringing the station up just as we are beginning to see more hospitalizations migrate in the state toward the Central and Southern regions. Judy will get into that a little bit more in her remarks. We had predicted that the spread of the virus would move from North to Central to South and had prepared and built out capacity to, God willing, stay one step ahead of that.

We were joined by many and we kept our distance, but I want to give a particular shout out to Major General Jeff Milhorn and Lieutenant Colonel David Park of the US Army Corps of Engineers. They have been extraordinary, US Army Major General John F. King, Adjutant General Brigadier General in our National Guard Jamal Beale, Mayor Marty Small, Casino Reinvestment Development Authority Executive Director Matt Doherty. As Judy has noted, we migrated very early on, under her leadership, to a regional strategy. So importantly, we were joined both by Kevin O'Dowd who is the CEO of Cooper University Health Care who is the Southern Region Coordinator and is doing an extraordinary job, as well as by Laurie Herndon, who is the CEO of Atlantic Care, among others.

It is really amazing to see a space like the Atlantic City Convention Center turned into a field medical station, and I thank the hard work of the women and men of the Army Corps, in partnership with our team, the troopers, Department of Health, and many others, our federal partners, our brothers and sisters in labor, for making all of this possible. As with each of our field medical stations, these are much-needed spaces to ensure that we have the capacity that we need not just for today or tomorrow, but also from when we begin to reopen our state, at which time we must be prepared for new cases. It is simply just prudent planning.

Tomorrow, I will be and I suspect I'll have company from my colleagues here, will be with Commanding General Todd Semonite of the US Army Corps of Engineers, he's the top guy, to tour the new bed spaces being constructed at East Orange General Hospital and at New Bridge Medical Center in Paramus, and the Army Corps is providing tremendous assistance at both. General Semonite is the guy you see frequently at the White House briefings and on television. He's an extraordinary leader. I know him by reputation, I've never met him, but I know him by reputation because the Defense Attaché when I served as US Ambassador in Germany was a mentee of General Semonite and so I'm very excited to be with him tomorrow. And again, I want to thank the Army Corps for all their help.

Let's get to today's numbers. We are announcing today 3,643 new positive test results, pushing our total to 92,387. And as you could see, we are announcing with the heaviest of hearts 379 new deaths. This is the highest single day number that we have hit, and these are not numbers, these are human beings, bringing our total cumulatively to 4,753 lost precious lives.

Separately and as a subset of this, I want to note that we have tested, I'm happy to say, every veteran at the Paramus Veterans Memorial Home and we will be doing the same for those living at Menlo Park and Vineland. Our veterans deserve nothing less. I'll come back to why I was in Wildwood this morning, but part of that was I went over to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which I always do when I'm in Wildwood with Joe Griffey, who is my dear friend and a great veteran leader, and said a prayer for all of our veterans, but especially those who have been impacted in our veterans homes by this awful virus. As I said, we reported another 379 precious lives lost and the total now is 4,753.

We continue to see a trend emerging, and I say emerging, in the leveling of the rate of new cases. You can see that in the chart in front of you. We have a significant, there's no question about it, flattening of the curve. But that is not enough, and I wish it were, to go back to business as usual, not by a longshot. We need to begin to see this curve finally to start its decline and so we must keep our strong social distancing and policies in place for at least the next several weeks.

I've returned to this map, courtesy of the New York Times every day, and it bears out the lines from the graph. It shows that the rate of the spread, in this case measured by how many days it takes the caseload to double, has also significantly slowed. We must keep this map in its lightest possible shade if we're able to begin to reopen our state. And even yesterday, one day to the next, I recall yesterday saying that Bergen County had 20 days to doubling; now that's happily up to 21 days. Let's keep those numbers going up and not down.

In the nightly reporting from our hospitals there are 7,594 residents currently hospitalized with COVID-19, of whom 1,930 are either requiring critical or intensive care. There are 1,501 ventilators currently in use, and our field medical stations are treating 72 patients. I might add, Judy and Pat, I heard from Kevin O'Dowd that they may actually be taking patients in Atlantic City as early as later today or tomorrow. So Atlantic City is not just, looks good in its structure – and by the way it does – but it's ready to go.

For the 24 hours preceding 10:00 p.m. last night, our hospitals reported 630 discharges. Putting these raw numbers into focus, we can see on this chart, that the number of patients in either critical or intensive care has been relatively stable over the past week, as has the number of ventilators in use. Certainly we want these numbers to decrease before we can move to our next phase, but not seeing any significant increases is a good starting point. Daily new hospitalizations continue to fluctuate, but hold below their recent high, and you can see that. This is an incredibly important metric for Judy and her team and for all of us, and it ties almost directly with the rate of spread that we show on that map every day. The fewer people who test positive, the fewer who need to go to the hospital, the fewer who are in intensive care, the fewer who need ventilators, please God, the fewer who we lose. It's just really mathematical and cause and effect. While this is never abstract, these are human beings. These are precious lives. The fact of the matter is, the math is almost explicit when you look at the amount of infections.

Finally, we see the number of discharges versus the number of new admittances, and we need to get that reversed again. I think in fairness, Judy, you'll get into this, I think at least one hospital had reported from the day before, so this is a little bit – for four days, 400 cases. We are relying on the data as there they are submitted to the Hospital Association, so this is a little bit skewed, but nonetheless important and valuable. As I noted, these are real numbers, and they are valuable metrics. We know we need to significantly increase our testing capacity. I said this, I think yesterday, by at least roughly double, if not more, to know we have what we will need to trap and contain future outbreaks.

And every other state, by the way, without exception is facing the same limitations we are in this fight. But the numbers that we are getting from our hospitals is real, on-the-ground data. They are not estimates. They are definitive measures of our progress and the challenges which remain. They're among the most invaluable data as we prepare our plans for ultimately reopening our state.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, we have the sad and heavy duty to relay the news that another 379 of our residents have passed. As we do every day, we would like to honor a few of those lives. Darlene May Andes was a health educator and risk communicator responsible for planning, organizing and conducting various emergency management operations right here for the Mercer County Division of Public Health. Before that, she had worked for the Hunterdon County team. In fact, she helped craft the health education materials and tools that Mercer County is using as we speak in its current COVID-19 emergency response. Well known, well respected and loved by her colleagues and peers, Darlene is remembered for her patience and kindness, for in her innovative thinking, and for her love of family and her faith. And she was only 54 years old. I spoke yesterday with her sister Barbara, who lives in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. And as you can imagine, like all these conversations, it was emotional and God bless and Godspeed, the precious life of her sister Darlene.

Darrell Johnson. There's Darrell, both on the left and the right. By the way, someone told me just as I was coming over here, that Darrell at one point worked as a bouncer. That he never had to break up a fight, but he worked as a bouncer and I'm not surprised. Darrell Johnson worked in the guidance office at Morristown High School and also worked part time at Morristown Medical Center. Born and raised in Morristown, he remained committed to his hometown for his entire life. He was only 43 years old when we lost him. He leaves behind his ex-wife and best friend Melissa, with whom I spoke yesterday, and four children, Caitlin, who I also spoke with, who's 22 and a senior at Montclair State University, AJ, Emma and I reminded her that we have an Emma, and Macy, and they span in age from 22 years in Caitlin's case, to just four years old, in blessed Macy's case. As well as, by the way, Darrell's mother, he leaves behind, Isla, his brother Wayne, his sister-in-law Kate. His loss isn't just being felt by the members of his family and friends, but by so many across Morristown. We keep all of them in our thoughts and prayers. God bless you, Darrell.

Here is Carol Wolf, surrounded by her kids, of Newark, New Jersey. She's surrounded by, by the way, left to right, Scott, Chris, Stephen, with whom I spoke yesterday, Mom, God bless Carol, who we lost, her daughter Dawn and her son Mark. Now imagine this. All four of her sons are Newark firefighters and Dawn is a nurse at Overlook Hospital. Think about that for a second. Unbelievable. Born in Newark, Carol attended Our Lady of Good Counsel and earned a secretarial job at Prudential following graduation. She and her then young family would relocate to Phoenix, Arizona, but eventually come back, as we all do, to Newark, where she became a nurse's aide at Hospitality House. In addition to her children, Carol also leaves behind 13 grandchildren, five siblings, and a large and special extended family. Carol, bless her heart, was 73 years old. Don't forget I mentioned her son Stephen who's in the white shirt in the middle. More on him in a couple of minutes.

Remembering these lives is not easy for us to do. We wish nothing less than for these faces to still be counted among our New Jersey family. But these are the faces we must remember every day and remind ourselves why we are fighting COVID-19. We can't afford to lose any more Darlenes or Darrells or Carols. And the only way we do that is by maintaining our aggressive positions on social distancing, until we know for sure that we have broken this pandemic. So that means for now we have to take steps like keeping our parks closed. I know lots of folks don't want to see that or hear that, but we have to. We have to keep requiring face coverings while you're out shopping. We cannot rush to reopen anything and risk undoing all the extraordinary work that you have done so far.

That's why our schools are still closed and will be, until we are certain that we can keep everyone as safe as possible. We are not going to open our schools back up until we are convinced by the science and medical professionals that doing so would be safe for students, for staff, and by the way, for their families. And even when we get to the point that we believe a reopening is safe and prudent – and we will get there, by the way – we will not hesitate to require additional protection. Things like requiring face coverings, or certain configurations of classrooms, if we believe that by doing so, we will make our schools even safer.

I understand the concern being felt by so many parents about what their kids are missing by having schools closed. Believe me, we're living it as well, especially the parents of older students who were looking forward to sports seasons, or proms, or graduations. We get it, but we cannot rush this. We just cannot do that. My number one job is the health and safety of our state, every single one of us. And as I said yesterday, public health leads everything. Public Health creates economic health. Public health creates educational health. On those principles, I cannot and will not equivocate.

One of my childhood idols was President John F. Kennedy. In just three short years as President, he inspired a nation to look within and to channel our strength for the common good. I was struck recently reading in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, he addressed the nation with the following words, and I quote the President: "Many months of sacrifice and self-discipline lie ahead; months in which our patience and our will, will be tested. But the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing." Now we are now nearly one full month into our strongest social distancing measures. There are still at least weeks to go and even when we begin to reopen, it's not going to be all at once and things are not going to just pop back to as they were.

We all must be prepared for continued sacrifice and self-discipline, because going back to the way things were and doing nothing would be our greatest danger. We will get there folks. The new normal may not look, at least at first, like the old normal, but we will get through this together as one New Jersey family, stronger than ever before. Sadly, as we've already seen, not without casualty; too many lives have been lost. Sadly, we expect more will be lost. But our job collectively is to keep doing what we're doing to limit the number of infections, the number of hospitalizations, the number of intensive care unit beds, the number of ventilators, and please God, the number of fatalities. Keep at it, folks. It is working. You're doing an extraordinary job. We will get there together.

If I may, on some other topics. I had a very good call this morning with the Colombian Ambassador, Ambassador Calderón. He is a great friend of our countries and of New Jersey. New Jersey has one of, if not the largest Colombian communities of any American state and he wanted me to know that he and the entire country were with us in our hour and time of need, and we promised we would get together with the community in New Jersey when the dust had cleared, by the way at a safe distance, and celebrate together.

I mentioned I was in Wildwood. I went down to be with Mayor Pete Byron, Senator Michael Testa, Members of the Wildwood Council, Representatives from Cape May County to look at the damage that was wrought on the boardwalk on April 13, eight days ago. Indeed, it's quite striking. It's a very compact area, but boy, when Mother Nature moves furiously, as she did today and may still, the damage is jaw-dropping. I wanted to see it with my own eyes, in addition to going over and saying a prayer with Joe Griffey, I wanted to see with my own eyes. I said, I've got no magic wands, but we've got to work together and try to figure out how we make that whole again. Wildwood, I said as I stared out, I said, it is I think the best beach in, forget New Jersey and the Jersey Shore, in the United States of America. It's an extraordinary, jaw-dropping natural gem and we want to do everything we can to work with our friends, both in Wildwood and in Cape May County. And again, I want to give Mayor Byron and Senator Testa in particular a shout out.

I mentioned this yesterday, just to say that among the conversations we've been having, I've spoken with some of, if not the owners of the big sports teams in New Jersey, Josh Harris is one of the owners of both the Devils and the Sixers, and as you know, the Devils play in Newark and the Sixers practice and have their headquarters in Camden. John Mellow of the New York Giants and Chris Johnson and his team for the New York Jets, just to make sure we hit our lines, as we always do, when those teams open. I've got no conclusion as to where things are headed as it relates to large sporting events, but we each, on each side of those conversations, wanted to make sure that we were open and comparing notes as events unfold.

I'm pleased to announce today that many New Jersey residents who are facing hardships in paying their private student loans and were not eligible for relief under the federal CARES Act can now qualify for much needed assistance. Under this initiative, eligible students who hold federal Family Education Program loans, or privately held student loans may receive a minimum 90 days forbearance relief for borrowers waiving late fees, protections against negative credit reporting, a cease in debt collection actions and the ability to enroll in other applicable assistance programs. This is an initiative that servicers have opted into, and we should note that borrowers should contact their servicers to utilize the relief options. Just as we mentioned when we got the mortgage bank relief, go to your mortgage lender directly, as opposed to through some middle course. We expect additional servicers to sign on to this initiative and I want to thank those who have already done so.

I'm extremely grateful to Commissioner of Banking and Insurance, Marlene Caride for working with lenders to get this relief program in place. I also want to thank the Head of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, David Socolow, for his work to provide this relief to borrowers under HESAA. We announced the HESAA efforts and March, and it bears reminding residents that this relief is also available. To get more information, please visit the Department of Banking and Insurance at dobi.nj.gov. This information will also be added to our online information hub, as you can see, at covid19.nj.gov.

By the way, while you're on that site, also visit covid19.nj.gov/testing to find the location of the 27 public and community-based testing sites available across the state. There are many more sites which your primary care practitioner could direct you to, if you meet the requirements for testing. All told, there are currently 73 testing facilities in New Jersey.

As I have mentioned, a solid testing regime will be critical in our reopening strategy. A key piece of any serious reopening strategy must include the ability to test, trace and isolate. Good news and bad news. We're punching way above our weight and working with all of our partners. We have the fourth-most tested amount of folks in New Jersey of any American state, with the 11th largest population, and we're working with every partner that makes sense, including our state's flagship university, Rutgers. But the federal government must step up in a big way here. That means not only on the kits and the PPE, which we do need help with, but also on the resources to do this work, potentially for an extended period of time. In the absence of either yet – and I hope it's yet, and someday soon we'll get them, proven therapeutics or ultimately, a vaccine.

Also, on a separate note, if you have dependent children and are not required to file a federal tax return, whether it is due to your income limitations, or if you receive Social Security, survivor or disability payments, or railroad retirement benefits, you have until noon tomorrow to register with the IRS to qualify to receive your \$500 per child stimulus payment. Please visit irs.gov and use their new non-filer online tool.

Finally, before I hand things over to Judy, I want to give a few thank yous and shout outs. First, I want to thank both United Airlines and Delta Airlines who are providing no cost, round-trip flights for out-of-state healthcare workers who are coming to New Jersey in our hour of need to help us on the frontlines. This is a great example of our corporate partners stepping up to help out. And in fact today, I think, Judy, you previewed this last week, a flight from United is bringing in 34 caregivers from Centura Health in Colorado, our friend, Peter Banko, who will be deploying across hospitals that are a part of the Catholic Healthcare Partnership of New Jersey. To Centura Health, in addition to United Airlines and Delta, we also thank you.

Next up, this is a picture of Jill Terrick from Jamesburg. Jill owns and operates Furry Paws Apparel. But now, Jill is turning her sewing machine from making bandanas for our four-legged friends to making face coverings for our two-legged heroes, and she's already donated hundreds to healthcare workers across Central Jersey, including at St. Peter's and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospitals in New Brunswick. Thank you, Jill, and I know you are just one of many people out there who are finding tremendous new ways to use your skills to help us out.

I'll finish where I alluded to earlier. Remember I mentioned Newark firefighters Stephen Wolf? Stephen again, is one of four brothers who are firefighters and his sister's a nurse. That's Stephen on the right. After losing his mother Carol, and we praised her and God rest her soul earlier, Stephen needed an outlet, and he turned to a skill that he enjoys: cooking. He took over the kitchen at Firehouse No. 7 and started preparing meals that have been delivered to local seniors who are staying at home, and also to the healthcare workers at University Hospital, Judy's old stomping grounds, and Newark Beth Israel and St. Michael's Medical Centers. He also enlisted his fellow firefighters to help on the prep line and in deliveries. You can see one of his colleagues there. So to you Stephen, especially at this time for you and your family, and to every hero out there working hard to keep our state running, New Jersey thank you. We know that across our state, there are emerging many more happy stories than sad, and I ask you to continue spreading messages of hope and optimism by sharing them with every New Jerseyan through the social media hashtag #NJThanksYou.

Finally, I encourage everyone, remind them, to tune in at 7:00 p.m. tomorrow night for the Jersey for Jersey fundraiser for the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund. Again, 7:00 p.m. tomorrow night, April 22. Jersey for Jersey will feature some of our state's, I would argue our nation's, and I would argue the world's biggest stars: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Bon Jovi, Jon Stewart, Whoopi Goldberg, Charlie Puth, SZA, Danny DeVito, Halsey, Chris Rock, Kelly Ripa, Chelsea Handler and Saquon Barkley, among others. It will all be broadcast live on your local television stations. I believe every major network is carrying it, and it will be streamed online, and 100% of the proceeds will go to help those impacted by COVID-19.

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

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As the Governor mentioned, today we traveled down to the field medical station in Atlantic City. I want to add my thanks to the Army Corps of Engineers for their commitment to working with the Department of Health to bring this site online. As the Governor mentioned, I reported last week about Peter Banko, a New Jersey native sending nurses from Colorado. Well today, I met Dr. Rick Scott, another New Jersey native, who responded to the call for help and traveled from his home in North Carolina to give back to his home state. He will be the Chief Medical Officer of the field station in Atlantic City. The station expects to bring in patients as early as today.

Our alternate care sites are increasing bed capacity, and allowing our acute care hospitals to focus solely on those individuals, those patients in need of the most critical care. These sites are important in easing the burden on our hospitals. In addition to the three medical stations, the department is also working closely with the Army Corps to reopen closed hospitals. As you know, we're using a hotel to offer healthcare workers a place to crash or quarantine, and also a place for those individuals who cannot go home to quarantine, a place for them to stay, a safe place. Nonprofits, counties or local responders also have the ability to set up similar hotel rooms and should work with FEMA for congregate sheltering authorization. If they are interested in setting up this housing for their workforce, they should contact their local or county Office of Emergency Management.

Now for today's report. As the hospital's reported last night, 7,594 hospitalizations, 400 of them should have been reported the day before. We really have seen a flattening out of the hospitalizations. This is basically flat, and it has been for the last three days. There are 1,930 individuals in critical care and 1,501 of those individuals are on ventilators. That's 78%, or as I reminded you yesterday, we've been as high as 97% just a week ago. This is the lowest percentage of patients on ventilators that we have had for quite some time.

Last night there were nine hospitals on what we call divert. Most of them on critical care divert; five of those hospitals on divert were from the Central region. That's the first time we have had Central region hospitals more on divert than the Northern region. And as we have shared, we are seeing the increase in COVID-19 individuals and persons under investigation, we've seen that increase come from the North, and it is now hitting Central. And most of the critical care beds in the central region right now are full.

There are 432 long-term care facilities in the state reporting COVID-19 cases. That's either long-term care facilities or assisted living facilities. They report a total of 11,527 cases; 2,048 deaths have occurred in these facilities related to COVID-19. As you know, yesterday we posted an online listing of COVID positive cases at long-term care facilities and assisted living and developmentally disabled congregate homes. This data is self-reported by the facilities, and some facilities today informed us that the data needs to be reconciled with their current information, that they have seen some gaps. So we're working with them and will provide updates on a regular basis. However, the basic direction of COVID positive patients or residents, and COVID positive deaths, are the same. There's just too many of them.

Additionally, as reported over the weekend, 21 facilities were reviewed by our survey staff for staffing adequacy, the availability of PPE, and their infection control procedures. According to data reported this morning, of the labs that are reporting to us on their positive COVID-19 results, 167,233 tests have been performed on individuals, with 74,884 returning positive, for a positivity rate of 44.75%. That has stayed stable at 44% for quite some time.

This completes my daily report, but I want to share some national data on increasing calls to poison control centers. The hotlines are reporting that there's been a 20% increase in calls related to exposures from household cleaning products and disinfectants. We know we have been encouraging everyone to clean frequently touched surfaces, but it's important to do so safely. CDC's COVID-19 website, [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov) has information on how to clean your home safely. For example, you should wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect. Use EPA-registered household disinfectants, and ensure proper ventilation when cleaning. Follow the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of these products to protect your health.

As always, I thank you for staying home and maintaining social distancing, Stand in social solidarity with all of us. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, stay doing what you are doing, to do your part to save lives in New Jersey. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. May I give you a couple of follow ups, if that's okay? First of all counties which I've read just in terms of positive cases it's the same six which dominate, but let's remind everybody. There are many cases in every county and there are fatalities in every county. But the top six in terms of positives continue to be Bergen followed by now Hudson, Essex, Union, Passaic and Middlesex.

You mentioned the Central hospitals on divert and I want folks to know that we were not on a random walk in terms of where we work with the Army Corps in terms of opening these field medical stations. I want to give Judy and her team, and Pat and his and our federal colleagues a big shout out. We expected this and therefore the sequencing of Secaucus to Edison to Atlantic City is something that was not by accident, shall we put it that way.

There are always bad apples. I'm not sure I know how many of them there are. We're going to know at the end of the day. But with all due respect to Judy and I, we're in violent agreement on this, as we discussed this earlier, with all due respect to the long-term care operators who are disputing the data, with all due respect, the data is largely, as Judy said, I want to reiterate this, whether we're off here or there by a number or two, and let's never let this become abstract. These are humans. The overwhelming, overwhelming reality is there are far too many people who are dying in these facilities, period. The standards and the protocols, the unevenness is incredibly disappointing. I know for Judy, it is for me and for the rest of us.

You didn't mention the racial -- the underlying conditions look like they've stayed about the same. Would you mind hitting, because that's also been about the same, but it's worth repeating, if you don't mind.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Certainly. On the 3,564 deaths that we have complete information on, 49.9% are White, 22.2% Black, 16.6% Hispanic, 5.5% Asian non-Hispanic, and 5.8% other non-Hispanic. I also have the breakdown of 29,739 individuals who have been tested and have returned as a positive test. 35% are White, 21.1% are Black, 28.6% Hispanic, 5.1% Asian and 10.2% other.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. You took the words out of my mouth. We have been saying, I think consistently for now a couple of weeks, the African American representation among fatalities is about 50% higher than the representation in the state's population, but the Hispanic representation among fatalities has been slightly lower, just a point or two lower, than the overall representation. But you took the words out of my mouth. The African American testing number, positive testing these are, is about consistent with fatalities, but the Hispanic number is meaningfully higher as it relates to positive results. That's

something that I know you and the team are going to stay on. That is the first data point that we've had that is somewhat consistent with some of the reality that our brothers and sisters are dealing with in New York City. Judy, anything on Veterans homes, do you want to hit that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I do. Let me find it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Just because I mentioned that we've tested everyone in Paramus. I want to again thank the VA who are surging in this week in both Menlo Park and Paramus, and ultimately they're there if we need them at Vineland. Thank God we haven't, and I hope it stays that way in Vineland.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Menlo Park Veteran's Home, with an overall census of 226, reports total residents confirmed positive 60, pending 5, total hospitalized 26, total resident COVID-19 deaths, 29. They also report staff have tested positive, 36 staff members out of 445. In Paramus, 239 is today's census and confirmed positive COVID residents are 119. They report 46 resident deaths associated with COVID-19 and 51 staff of 394 tested positive. Vineland remains a census of 282, they have one positive COVID-19 patient and no deaths.

Governor Phil Murphy: God bless them and let's hope Vineland stays as it is and God bless our veterans who we've lost. It's also, they've got some staff positives, but thank God no fatalities among staff in any of the three homes. Thank you, Judy. Thank you for everything, and your team as well. Pat, anything on compliance, PPE, infrastructure? As you wish.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Yes, sir. Thanks, Governor. With regards to overnight, Newark Police issued 18 EO violations and closed one business. In Monmouth Township Gloucester County, a trooper made a motor vehicle stop for a motorist driving erratically. The subject was found to have several active warrants, resisted arrest, ultimately spit in the troopers face upon being placed under arrest and was charged with aggravated assault, resisting and obstruction. At Edna Mohan Correctional Facility up in Hunterdon County, an inmate was intentionally and forcefully coughing and trying to spit on corrections officers. She was charged with terroristic threats, aggravated assault, endangering another and throwing bodily fluid. Patterson, across three different events, 10 people were cited for the EO violations. In Passaic, three subjects were cited for being out for no reason, driving in an unsafe manner in Paterson. In Dover, a barber shop owner was cited for having his business open. In Lakewood, police responded to eight kids that were playing in the gym and cited the owner for a violation. Also in Lakewood, at the Monmouth Medical Center, an irate patient pulled the fire alarm and proceeded to cause over \$2,000 worth of damage and was charged with causing false public alarm and causing damage to property.

Just on the heels of the visit to Atlantic City's medical station today, I think one entity that we've not maybe appropriately recognized has been the members of the Department of Corrections under Commissioner Hicks. They have been phenomenal every step of the way on our incident management team. Secaucus, Edison, now Atlantic City, Lieutenant Clay McClain, who I've known for several years, is just a phenomenal partner with us and I wanted to make sure that we gave them the proper thanks and gratitude for their assistance in supporting our efforts.

Lastly, just because I know, as the Governor said, we're a month in and the mental health aspects of this are a daily grind for many, I just wanted to remind people of the number that Department of Human Services set up under the NJ Mental Health Care's hotline, which is 866-202-HELP, which is 866-202-4357. They have trained specialists on call on those phones from 8 to 8 p.m. and I would certainly recommend that if anybody is struggling with the depression or anxiety because of this virus, that you take the time to call those specialists to walk you through any of the issues you might be having. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Colonel, thank you. It's a good reminder. We're going to start over here, Brendon. It's a good reminder that while the phenomenon continues to be overwhelmingly true, that while we're all isolating, we are in an almost spiritual way, coming together. People overwhelmingly get this is war and we have to do unusual things, including this bonding that's taking place even though we're all staying away from each other.

But to Pat's point, that doesn't apply to everybody. Folks with mental health challenges, with addictions, folks who may be in an unsafe domestic environment, there are folks that we cannot leave behind. And so Pat, would you mind just one more time, that phone number for everybody?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Sure. It's 866-202-HELP, which translates to 866-202-4357. They're open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. to assist anybody in need.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. That's a great reminder. We're going to go right to left. We would love you to limit yourself to three or four. I'll get you, don't worry. John, you're up to bat. Please, again, if you can limit these a little bit because we've got a big crowd.

Q&A Session

John McAlpin, Bergen Record: Can you speak broadly to what you're doing to get things up and to begin to plan? And specifically on testing, what's the rollout on testing of vulnerable populations, what that looks like? And your partnership with Abbott and Rutgers, what will that be? Will the state be doing the testing? Will they be providing access points? Have the 90 VA nurses arrived in Paramus and Menlo Park?

Governor finally on the day you issued the EO order for considering the release of some state inmates, since then about 15 inmates have died and we don't believe any have been released. Can you explain the delay? Is there a process behind this and any reaction to that?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, John, Judy, and Pat, I'll say a few words and then can you come in as you wish? Listen, we've cobbled, you know, you talk about cobbling it together. We've gone from zero to 73 sites and I think Ed Lifshitz said the other day, bordering now and I suspect it's closer to 9,000 than 7,000 every day. I'm incredibly proud of that progress. And again, we're the fourth-highest tested state in America, but it's not remotely where we all think it needs to be for folks to feel comfortable and confident to get back to some semblance of normalcy. All I could say is right now it's singles and doubles, bunts, moving the runner over, to use baseball analogies, but we need the feds in a big way. Not just in New Jersey, my entire focus is New Jersey, but based on comparing notes with our regional partners and looking around the country, we need that as a national matter, and that's at all ends. As I mentioned, it's not just the PPE, but it's the front end as well as the back end.

I'll let Judy address the vulnerable patients. I mentioned Paramus, all folks have been tested there, but she can walk through other steps that we have taken and will continue to take. I think it's a little bit too early to give you a full answer on what the Rutgers and/or Abbott partnerships will ultimately look like. It feels, one observer, tell me if you all disagree, that Rutgers has more scale potential, more scale potential, and that is going to be very important. Turnaround time is incredibly important. So it won't just be enough, even if I'm right that it's close to 9,000 a day that are being tested, it's still many days until you hear back. That can't be.

If we're going to really begin to reopen, we've got to be able to very quickly through testing, again contact tracing, isolation steps, we've got to be very nimble and that's not where we are yet. We're better than we were, but we're not we need to be.

The VA nurses, I believe are there, but I'll defer to Pat and/or Judy on that. And there is a process. So if I wasn't clear on that, Parimal can back me up. There is a process as it relates to corrections. That is underway, and our hope is that it's going to be in batches. So it's the most acute, exposed communities in some order. Parimal can remind you. I believe it's age first and then it's conditions and then it's whether or not you're within X days of your max. Fourthly, I believe whether or not you were, I believe, considered and denied parole within a period of time. It is being done in batches. There's a multi-headed participation because we have to get this right.

Pat mentioned Carol Johnson and Human Services. Human Services is very much a part of this, because we can't just throw somebody out on the street. Parimal, is that approximately correct in the process?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: Yes, under the timeline laid out in the Executive Order, there are lists of eligible inmates that are then transmitted to the Emergency Review Committee. The Emergency Review Committee has seven days to act on those lists, and they're in the process of reviewing the first two lists.

Governor Phil Murphy: They're in the process of that as we speak. When we have more on that, we will let you know when we've gone through Process A, these are the results. We will let you know what those are. Judy, anything on testing generally, vulnerable, our partnerships, the VA nurses, and/or Pat or folks inside the correction system?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Okay, I'll start with the VA nurses. They were to be on site yesterday and a Corps is coming in tomorrow. They'll be primarily at Paramus. On vulnerable populations and testing, the Governor has repeatedly shared that a testing strategy includes not only testing but contact tracing, and then the follow up, which primarily would be isolation, and then it's retesting. It's not just one test, and you know that the one test, the PCR test, is a point in time. It identifies at that point in time whether you're positive or negative. The other tests, the serology test, is the antibody test, which may point in the direction that you have been infected and you have antibodies, but I don't think anyone knows how long the antibodies – this is everything that Dr. Tan teaches me by the way, so I look at her. I don't know how long the antibodies last.

However, while we're developing the testing strategy with Dr. Tan and the epidemiologists, we are looking at vulnerable populations of which long term care is specifically targeted, primarily in the South. We know that there's widespread infections in the North. We also know in the South that we can prevent that, because there are a number of long-term care facilities that do not have significant spread. We do have a plan to target the 16 or 20 long-term care facilities in the south, with the help of Cooper University, to test those individuals, cohort appropriately, and actually prevent further spread in the south of the state.

We also have a plan with Rutgers to test their saliva test in our developmentally disabled homes. And that, I think is going to start this week. Then we're looking at corrections and healthcare workers, helping them to return to work. We have vulnerable populations, or what I call special populations because of their need, congregate living, high risk, and then also trying to get people back to work. And then we have a full testing strategy for the larger group, which could be 20,000 or 30,000 tests a day to help open up the state. More to come on that. Tina, did you have anything to add?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: The only thing to add, the Commissioner is absolutely correct. It's the issue of, the testing strategy also involves the need to then take the next step. Once you get the results, you have to be able to act upon those results. Because otherwise, what's the point of doing the testing, right? If you're not going to be able to take the next steps to isolate, to be able to do contact tracing, to be able to, for example, in the long-term care facilities, to appropriately cohort and to do all the appropriate infection control measures that needs to happen.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat just reminds me that the CDC is also, I think, mentioned on the video call that we have with the White House yesterday, sending a team, I think to each state, and we're trying to get as early in that queue as possible. We'll go back to Nikita, but as we do, John, the one thing I want to say on the corrections question is two things. One is we need to bring everybody along. We've said that many times. It isn't enough to crack the back of this, putting aside humanity, putting aside doing the right thing, if we don't bring everybody along, we're not going to be able to crack the back of this.

And I don't want folks to think that a process is a bureaucratic reality in the face of loss of life. We've got to make sure if we're releasing folks, we've got to make sure that we're doing it right. And every loss of life, regardless of where they are, is a tragedy but we've got to make sure we do something like that properly. Please, Nikita.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. Most of my questions are going to be off the Monmouth University poll that was released this morning. That poll found both that you had a pretty good approval rating and then also that the residents of New Jersey agree with most of the measures that you've imposed on COVID overwhelmingly.

The first question is, do you think that you drove New Jerseyans to those views? Or do you think that they were already there before you imposed these policies? And then since 70% of New Jerseyans agree with your decision to close state and county parks, do you think Jack Ciattarelli and others who attacked you over that measure were in the wrong? Are you surprised that you have a 71% approval rating? Is there any concern that there's nowhere but down to go from here? I hope that you can do a yes or no on this one. But if President Trump flies here in October, will you give him a hug?

Governor Phil Murphy: Listen, you're probably going to be disappointed by my answers. I haven't read the poll. One of my colleagues gave me some of the highlights. I've said this before, good, bad or otherwise, we don't run things based on polls. It just isn't what we do. We're spending every second of our lives trying to try to save lives and keep people healthy. It's gratifying. I think that folks, it looks like, again, I've only seen a couple of highlights, that they agree generally with what we're doing to save lives. Because that allows us to have the moral suasion that we need to continue, to please God, people stay at home. That maybe there's enough trust that's been built up and they believe that, and they need to and they should.

I have no insight on whether or not we drove people to that or not. But I do think people believe, when you make decisions based on science, fact, data, those are always going to be better decisions. That doesn't mean you always get it right and I'm not suggesting, by any means, we always get it right. But I hope more often than not, we do. That's what we're going to continue to do.

I'm not giving anybody a hug right now for the foreseeable future. But if the President were to come to New Jersey, clearly he is the President of the United States and I would do right by that. Thank you. Very quickly.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Just to be clear, the question was about October, so no hugs in October still?

Governor Phil Murphy: My answer stands. We'll come down to Elise. Thank you.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. Fitch today downgraded the state's credit one step and shifted the outlook to negative from stable. Are you anticipating more downgrades from the other credit rating companies? How does the downgrade affect any borrowing plans?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? Elise, my Lord. If I were hugging someone, I'd come out and hug you right now just for the – note to file, Dave, as you get ready for your question. Listen, you never want to see a downgrade. Fitch was a half-step higher in its rating than both Moody's and Standard and Poor's. So particularly in this environment, I'm not shocked, so they're now aligned with Moody's and Standard and Poor's in terms of their ratings. I'm not going to get political. This is no time for politics. But boy, we entered office two-plus years ago, we've entered this crisis with a fiscal peashooter, given the decades – and by the way, both sides of the aisle – decades of fiscal mismanagement of this state in one form or another. I would love to have a stronger arsenal financially going into not just our administration, but more importantly into this crisis. It is what it is. I'm not shocked by it, by any means.

It doesn't impact, I assume you mean the discussions that we've had in terms of the potential to take advantage of the Federal Reserve. It does not impact us there. I'm not sure, we don't have any color yet in terms of rate, so it will probably cost us a modest amount more, which I bemoan but it is what it is, and we'll continue to make the best of it.

I particularly bemoan the fact that we had spent two years doggedly increasing surpluses, rainy day funds, you know, doing the stuff that folks around the state do with their own lives, and they expected the State of New Jersey to be better and be a stronger fiscal steward. We had made an enormous amount of progress. But needless to say, we're blowing through a lot of that for the time being. Thank you for asking. Please.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. On medical marijuana access during COVID-19, there's been a lot of concern that dispensaries are running out of supplies. I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that? Also, are you planning to speak with President Trump tomorrow?

Governor Phil Murphy: What is tomorrow?

Reporter: No, just saying if you have plans to speak with President Trump tomorrow or in the near future, later this week?

Governor Phil Murphy: On the latter, I don't have any specific plans but I have to say, again, I've never made a call that was not answered or returned, I should say. But at the moment, to be determined. We speak pretty regularly, as you can imagine.

I don't have any unique insight on the medical marijuana reality other than many organizations like that are running low on supplies. That's probably not surprising. I'm not saying that's a good thing. We can come back. Mahen, help me out if there's a specific, we'll come back to you if we've got a specific insight. I don't have one in particular on this one, but it doesn't surprise

me that there's supply shortages, because we're seeing that across the whole spectrum of entities of the state right now. Thank you. Paul.

Paul Mulshine, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. On a TV talk show you were quoted as saying the Bill of Rights is above your pay grade. Attorney General Barr recently said that certain governors have been infringing on constitutional rights. He didn't name names, but your administration brought charges against a woman for peacefully protesting at the Statehouse. Where specifically in the State Constitution do you find the Governor has the power to suspend the Bill of Rights and specifically the rights to travel, free speech, peaceful protest and assembly?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm only surprised it took you this long to ask me. I was wondering every day I walked in here, I was wondering, where's Mulshine? When I said above my pay grade, I didn't mean that we were above the Bill of Rights. What I meant was, we've got to do what we have to do to save lives here and we'll continue to do that. Obviously, we respect the US Constitution, as well as our own. We respect the Bill of Rights. I have no insight on the charges that were brought against that woman. Literally, I've read about them, I've got no insights and I probably, even if I did have insights, one of the lawyers here would advise me not to share them with you. But I literally have no insights on that.

And as I said, I don't begrudge folks protesting. I would prefer strongly that they do that in a virtual way, at home and social distance as we are asking folks to do in their lives, as a general matter. I don't begrudge folks having a different opinion. I don't agree with them but I don't begrudge that. I have no more specific insights as to where I can lead you. But I promise you that Parimal or our team will come back to you. But I'm not suggesting for one second we're above the law, or above the Constitution, or above the Bill of Rights. I just meant that was literally above my pay grade. My job right now is to keep people alive and I'm doing everything I can to do that. Thank you.

Do you have a question, sir, or are you good? No? You're good? Dave, we're coming down to you. And please keep Elise in mind as you ask.

Dave Schatz, New Brunswick Today: Yes, I shall try. Thank you. You report today that Central Jersey hospitals are getting crowded. Is there a worry they could be overwhelmed? Is there a plan to share staff and ventilators if necessary? Any information about when the peak could come in Central Jersey and how long it could last?

Governor, many public sector workers are hearing rumors about layoffs, furloughs, demotions, salary cuts. Have you made any decisions about cutting the workforce or freezing hiring? Will we need to cut the size of state government along with different programs? What do you think of Sweeney's plan to furlough many workers and let them collect unemployment?

Finally, this whole business about the 15,000 to 20,000 tests that would be quick tests, what is the magic number with 15,000 to 20,000? I understand it's double of where we are now, but it would seem to the average person who does not have the insight that Dr. Tan or Commissioner Persichilli might have, that you'd need many more tests to have a sense about what's going on in our state. 15,000 to 20,000 is just a drop in the bucket, it would seem.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yep, obviously there are experts here who are more qualified to answer that but I'll give you at least a quick perspective. I've got nothing to report or update, Dave, on any -- I think we are in a freeze, aren't we, Parimal? We are in a freeze right now. Yeah, so that is actually in place. We have about, just under a billion dollars of expenditures that are frozen in addition to hiring. What I painted the other day, and I would repeat today, is we have two levers we can pull right now and we likely need to be able to pull both.

One is we need federal cash on the barrel, direct state assistance, and I would lead everyone to look at Senator Menendez's leadership along with Senator Cassidy. That's exactly the sort of bill, that's exactly the sort of support that we need. It takes into account the size of states, how crushed you are or not by this awful epidemic, etc. One lever is, we need not only liberal interpretation of the CARES Act, which we still await, but we need a lot more to the tune of many billions of dollars. That's one, federal cash assistance.

The other lever, to Elise's question is, these are not either/or, we need to be able to take advantage of the Federal Reserve's facility to buy municipal bonds. We've got a leadership meeting, actually, just after this. We have had good conversations on that. Too early to tell what that looks like, but those two levers are really important to us. And they're not either/or they're and/both because if this is the first lever, you pull, and you get this, you're able to use those proceeds to pay this down. And/or you can augment over here with something over here.

But in the absence of those, we have no choice. We've got no choice. We've got to reassess the scale of our government, which would be devastating, both at the state level and at the local level. Something that would bring us not only no joy, but it would run directly into a vast array of services and programs that we have before folks across the entire spectrum of our society. So please God, we don't get there.

Two other quick comments. Just to repeat what I said earlier, it wasn't by accident that we sort of have sequenced the field medical stations. Judy and her team, Pat and team, everyone who looked at this knew this was coming in terms of migration of the reality. God willing, because this hit us like a ton of bricks, that we've learned lessons in the northern counties that we are applying and being as proactive as possible as it migrates.

And again, I'll have Christina answer this because she's the epidemiologist, as if you hadn't noticed I'm not, but I only say 15,000 or 20,000 or more, I said double or more, because you hear that is potentially a significant amount of a sampling. Daily, by the way, these are daily. So if it's 20,000 that's 140,000 tests a week that you're getting back, again scaled and rapid return.

Druthers, with a strong federal partnership, I'd like to test everybody on a regular basis in the entire state. I'm only highlighting where as a non-medical professional, where I think the experts believe is a minimal, minimal standard to be able to give folks the confidence. Forget about what we think at one level. What's it going to take you to go to a restaurant or go to a movie theater, or go to a park once we've reopened? And you've got to have confidence that we've got a system in place that is both scaled enough statistically significant. We've got contact tracing that can be nimble, and that we've got a plan to isolate folks. With all of that, I will now turn it over to the experts.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Just on the Central part of the state, as the Governor said, we regionalized on purpose, so that we did have the ability to move, primarily equipment at this point, throughout a region to send it to where it's needed the most. The intensive care units are tight in the Central part of the state. We still have capacity. I really think we have flattened that curve. Peaks are lower and capacity is available. But we're prepared, if we have to, to move patients down into the southern part of the region if we have to. But at this point, I don't believe we do. We expect this heavy hospitalization to go through mid-May, by the way. Flattened and spread out.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Judy, just to add to that. It's not like there are no cases. Middlesex, depending on how you define Central Jersey, so that's for another conversation, right? Middlesex has almost got 9,000 cases; Monmouth, where I am, almost 5,000 cases. Right here in Mercer you've got 2,753 cases, so even though it's not -- Bergen has got 13,356. It's not at that level, but these are many multiples, double digits, thousands in Central Jersey. Christina, in terms of testing protocols?

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: Well, you know, first of all I think it's kind of hard to say that there's a magic number for the number of tests. We have to look at testing also in the context of what tests are available. What are the diagnostic tests in terms of the turnaround time? Because that helps also give a context of what makes sense as far as what the testing strategy might be. It's more difficult, for example, if you have turnaround time of results that's much longer versus say a point of care test where you get a result within 15 minutes in terms of your ability to quickly act on it. Because again, we have to remember, we have to tie the test results ultimately to something that's actionable. This answer on testing strategy really depends on the whole context of what we have, what's available, the characteristics of the test themselves, what people can ultimately do with the tests, how good the results of the tests are. This is continuously a work in progress that we're still examining and discussing on the health department end.

Governor Phil Murphy: As we go, we're going to go back up. Do you have a question, sir? Before we get to you, though, just to underscore what Christina just said, it's a number of different factors here, including how quickly do you hear? Judy has said, as have I, it's gotten better. But you're still five to seven days, in many cases. That's not enough. That's not fast enough. And then Christina's making the point, okay, hopefully you get the test result back quickly. Then what do you do? You've got to have the second step and the third step. You've got to be able to isolate the person. You've got to be able to trace who they've been in contact with.

Again, we're pounding away on all of that, but that sort of gives you a sense of the architecture that we're going to need so that not only we feel confident, you all feel confident, you know what? It's okay to go back out again. Please.

Reporter: Thank you, Governor. Apologies in advance, I was handed a few. First is, would you consider using an Executive Order to extend the deadline for property taxes from May 1 to June 1, considering the stay-at-home order extends past the current deadline? Or excuse me, grace period?

Second one is, do you have any updates specifically on the Andover nursing home? And are you investigating other nursing homes that share the same owner?

Third, what are your comments on the wedding venue in Lakewood that's going to be allowed to host weddings? And then Mahen handed me one from ABC 6, which is, do you intend on keeping the Atlantic City facility open and running longer than the others, to potentially allow for the summer season to begin with some sense of normalcy? A surge facility would give local officials some degree of confidence that they could handle a potential uptick in hospitalizations.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I jump in, then you all can come in? Nothing new on property taxes. Andover, I think Judy addressed it, and other nursing homes. We will give a short repeat but I think you've already addressed this, but we can come back on that.

The wedding venue, listen, I want to gather as much as the next guy, but we can't allow that to happen. I'm not sure if Pat's got any more insights, but we cannot allow folks to congregate. That's got to continue to be the case.

In the Atlantic City facility, we've already said that, thanks to my colleagues, they had sort of mapped out how these facilities, and frankly, it's more than facilities. It's equipment, as Judy said, as a general matter, its manpower, our heroic healthcare workers. I think we also said this the other day and previewed this notion. We have to be prepared for this thing to come back and rear its head again. I know no one wants to hear that. And God willing, we could have the sort of stuff that Dave asked about in place. We could have therapeutics that may be developed over the next X number of months and ultimately a vaccine, so that you can mitigate what it looks like when it comes back. But we know from the H1N1 experience, this sort of virus does come back, even if we bat 1,000 in terms of all the steps we take.

So having these facilities available, not specific to Atlantic City, for instance, but having these facilities available and again seeking federal funding to allow us to continue to keep them ready to go is a priority. As it relates to the shore and the season, I was asked in Wildwood this morning, I would love nothing more to be able to cut the ribbon on a great Jersey shore. We just can't. It's April 21. We can't say that yet. Whether Atlantic City is open or not relative to whether the shore is wide open, partially open, etc., I don't think there's a whole lot of correlation with that but we're going to make all these decisions based on the facts and the science. Thank you for that. Anything on Andover? I think we've largely hit it.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, pretty much. The Attorney General's looking into it, as you know. And as the surveyors go to the long-term care facilities, if they see something that has to be reported, we have a direct line to the Attorney General and we would report it. At this point, I don't believe there are any, but it's an open line.

Governor Phil Murphy: You said, Judy, since Friday, you had 30, your team surveyed 30?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Twenty-one plus 11, so 32.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, since the end of last week.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Brent, you get to wind us down here.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: H are you defining Central Jersey then? That's not like a jokey question. Is it Union to Burlington County? How confident -- I think you've addressed this a little bit, but we have a specific colleague asked this. How confident is the state that you are getting accurate info from nursing homes? When will you post reports about the 21 nursing home inspections that were done last week? What have you decided on testing in nursing homes? There are only 5 to 10 tests available per day there. Is that correct? How many people were assigned to the division that inspects nursing homes? Have more been assigned since the pandemic?

With testing sites in Paramus and Holmdel sometimes not hitting daily capacity, are you being too strict with just testing symptomatic people? Is this a sign you can start testing asymptomatic people? Last question, are you still working on reopening hospitals in Woodbury and Plainfield?

Governor Phil Murphy: Sorry, reopening?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Hospitals in Woodbury and Plainfield.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay. It doesn't matter how I define Central Jersey, it matters how Judy defines Central Jersey. I think a lot of these, Judy, are over to you. I would just say the only one I wanted to comment on, and Pat as well, Bergen Community College and Holmdel. I think as you've heard by our answers over the past number of days, we are reassessing the entirety of the testing regime right now. Again, not just to lower infections, to help folks like Christina understand this in as granular detail as possible, but also begin to figure out the pieces of that architecture that we need in place to reopen and certainly in that regard, you're going to have to test not just symptomatic people, you're going to have to have some statistically significant broader testing of the population. But Judy, how do you define Central Jersey for your purposes?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I'm not going to do it off the top of my head. I'm going to bring you a map tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, we'll follow up with you. There is an explicit--

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Union down to --

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you. Accurate info on nursing homes. You're asking, is it accurate?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Is it accurate? We had a report today that three nursing homes said there's gaps in the system, so.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, the information is self-reported. It goes through our communicable disease system and that's what was posted. Some of the nursing homes are saying, well, it's not exactly accurate. So we're giving them the opportunity to clean up the data. I can tell you it's directionally correct.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm sorry, you asked about the 21?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: When will you post reports about the 21 nursing home inspections that were done last week?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: The nursing home, Andover that was reviewed with the feds, with CMS, they'll post that. I don't know what their timeframe is. I know that the survey team is working on the reports, and they'll post when the reports are completed. Again, I can't give you a timeframe. There's a limited group of men and women that are going out to survey. They're the ones that were appropriate for PPE in fit testing, because they go in with full PPE, and some of the fit testing, some individuals could not wear an N-95. They were too large, we had to get smaller ones in and it took us a little while to get the appropriate protective gear. We'd rather them out in the field than at home writing reports, but they have to do both.

Governor Phil Murphy: And how about reopening Woodbury?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have Woodbury on reserve. It's ready to go at a moment's notice, and that's exactly how we wanted it to stand up. I want to thank Inspira, they've emptied it out. It's in very good shape. We have beds in reserve, if we have to bring them up then we will. We also are bringing up Salem. The Army Corps and I believe the National Guard are at Salem today. Salem will bring up a number of beds that we will be using for higher acuity med surg patients.

Governor Phil Murphy: With that, this will be a little harder to do. Thank you all. Just to repeat a couple of things. Tomorrow we're going to be at East Orange, Mahen, at 10:45, again with General Semonite, who is the senior officer of the Army Corps and an extraordinary leader. We will then be at New Bridge at noon. Is that correct? And then we will be back here at three o'clock tomorrow. We don't have visibility yet into Thursday, just because Thursday is sort of a potential, usual White House VTC. We'll come back and let you all know the minute we know.

And again to everybody, first of all, I want to thank our Commissioner Judy Persichilli. I want to thank Dr. Christina Tan, Colonel Pat Callahan, Jared, Parimal, the whole team. Again, folks, keep doing what you're doing. Stay at home, staying away from each other, wearing masks whenever you're going out or near anybody. Be careful with some bad weather which may still be passing through today. Never forget on this Holocaust Remembrance Day. Happy birthday, Governor Kean.

And again, folks, what we're doing is working. This is not going to have to go on forever, but it is working. As we continue over the next days and few weeks here, we will be working aggressively to develop the sort of infrastructure, healthcare infrastructure, that we're talking about. Testing that's rapid and scaled, contact tracing that's nimble. Isolation so that we have the confidence we can look you in the eye and say, you know what? We think it's safe to take the following steps.

And far more importantly, you hear that from us, you see the facts, and you agree with us. That's sort of what has to happen. Let's keep cracking the back of this virus. Let's not just get to the top of the curve. Let's start going down the back end of that curve as aggressively as possible and better days are ahead. God bless you all and thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy

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