

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: January 15th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Wearing my State Police mask that you gave me the other day, thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz. To my left, the guy who needs no introduction, State Police Superintendent Colonel Patrick Callahan. We have Jared Maples, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, we may be calling on you, Jared; Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel.

I meant to say this on Wednesday, I'm mad at myself. It's not every day that a Member of the Legislature gives birth and Britnee Timberlake did this week to young Damascus. I am told mom and son are doing great. She sent me a couple of pictures and I stupidly didn't keep them, but he's a really handsome and healthy looking lad. We give Brittany and her family and especially young Damascus a big shout out.

Earlier this morning, Judy and I joined a cast of thousands, importantly, Congressman Frank Pallone, Speaker of the General Assembly Craig Coughlin and others to tour the vaccination mega site opening at the New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center in Edison in Middlesex County. There you get some pictures from this morning. And by the way, Judy and Pat will remind me that Mark Pellegrino give us a tour of that exact same site in the spring, in our darkest days, when it was a field medical station, and they've repurposed it and it's a really impressive operation.

I have to say it also included, Judy was just saying this to me privately, it includes the command center, which is basically the intel chip inside for all six of our mega sites is at the Edison facility. While we were there, and you can see some of that right there, we had the opportunity to watch along as several seniors were receiving their vaccinations. I want to thank all of the state, county, local health and other officials for everything they did to get this open and who joined us, notably Senator Sam Thompson was there, Assemblyman Rob Karabinchak, Assemblyman Select Sterley Stanley was with us, County Commissioner director Ron Rios, County Commissioner Shanti Narra was there, Barry Ostrowsky, it takes a village. So you had RWJ Barnabas was in the house, members of the State Police, Pat, your colleagues were hugely instrumental, members of the National Guard, obviously the health team at the state, county and local levels, volunteers; really, really impressive.

So as with each of the other sites, and there's a total of six we've visited now, Morris, Gloucester and Middlesex and the county facilities that we've seen at Essex and Bergen, what is clear is that we are ready to move forward with an aggressive expansion of our vaccination efforts. That's the good news. We have the distribution capacity, as we have seen through the mega sites and the hundreds of other vaccination sites which are either already online or preparing to go online. Judy, I'm still showing your plan is for 259, at least for the time being, distribution sites. We've got about 160-something of those already up and running. We have residents ready to roll up their sleeves to get vaccinated as the 1.5 million now pre-registrations tell us, through the [covid19.nj.gov](https://covid19.nj.gov) portal.

However, we just need the supply from the feds to meet that demand, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that we are ready but they are not. And we saw some stories, Judy, you and I were talking about this, that there was a little bit of a I don't know what you'd call it, hide the pea, we were all going left and it turns out we should have been going right, but it looks like the feds have already blown through the vaunted Strategic Reserve. So, we're ready to go. We just cannot be caught flat-footed when we do get the supplies out of the feds and we will not be and we are ready to rock, but we need, we need a complete transformation here in the number of doses that get manufactured and distributed. We will work intensely with the incoming administration to do everything we can to influence that as best we can.

While I'm on the topic of vaccinations, I have to push back on a false narrative that is out there in some circles that we are vaccinating smokers while we're not vaccinating another group, whether it be our blessing heroic educators or other incredibly important and heroic essential workers. This is mixing up apples and oranges for the sake of a quick headline, frankly, or taking a cheap shot. First of all, we've got to remember that at the current time we have a limited supply, as I mentioned a minute ago, of vaccines from the federal government, roughly 100,000 additional doses coming in per week. So our first priority must be to vaccinate those at higher risk due to age or other health factors that put them in a greater vulnerability for severe COVID. We cannot lose sight of a critical medical fact that this is a respiratory virus. Our goal from day one has been to fight to save every life possible and make our decisions based on the facts, on the science, on the medicine. It is a simple fact, whether we like it or not, that smoking like other chronic and medical conditions puts someone at a higher risk of a more severe case of COVID.

In this, we are in agreement with the CDC guidance. Let's be clear. In our new eligibility, we are vaccinating educators, transit workers, grocery store workers, and many other frontline workers, whether it is because they're also perhaps a volunteer firefighter, or that they have a high risk medical condition that qualifies them for immediate vaccination, and that includes smoking. I get it, I understand the optics here and that attacking folks who took up the habit of smoking and who are now addicted may be politically expedient but at this time, we are stuck in a position

where they have to prioritize a limited federal produced – or at least distributed – vaccine doses based on medical fact, and not on political want. We need to save lives and we need to protect our hospitals, by the way, from a patient surge.

We've said this many times. The one thing that cannot happen is to have our hospital beds, or especially our intensive care beds, get over run. And again, we're following the CDC guidance which is backed up by numerous medical experts. Let's not fall down this rabbit hole of breaking people down into categories of job A versus job B and who is more politically favorable to vaccinate. The correct comparison is, are you more vulnerable to a severe case of this virus and/or hospitalization or are you not more vulnerable? Our job is to focus on vaccinating vulnerable residents first. That includes our seniors, our frontline healthcare workers, and first responders. And yes, that does include our blessed educators, essential workers and many other New Jerseyans who are at a higher risk because of their medical conditions.

What we need to end this divisive and unproductive debate, and this will solve all of the above, is we need a bigger supply of vaccines out of the feds, period. We get that supply, this debate goes away immediately. And for that, we need a federal administration that will unleash the process to meet demand. Given the broad pandemic relief measures outlined last night by President-Elect Joe Biden, I have confidence that that increase will soon be coming. And as I said, we're ready. We should not hold back. We should be throwing everything we have at ending this pandemic, and vaccines are just the latest and perhaps greatest tool at our disposal.

The President-Elect put forward other areas where the federal government can step up and it's a long list but I'll give you a few that struck me: One, providing an additional \$1,400 in direct relief to millions of American families, more childcare assistance, food supports, more federal emergency unemployment assistance, all of those are critically needed. Directing much-needed aid to states and localities to do things like open up our schools and to ease the burden that the pandemic has put on an already taut budget lines. Think about the need right now to continue to deliver the critical services that our residents need, which means we need to keep our frontline workers, police, fire, educators, healthcare workers, EMS, you name it, in their jobs employed, delivering these services, and stepping up to support the small businesses that we'll be relying on for our economic future, among so many other elements of the program.

That direct relief to families living under the pressure of unemployment is of particular importance. As the Department of Labor noted yesterday, 21,833 New Jerseyans filed for an initial claim for unemployment last week. That is an increase of 847 individuals over the prior week. The department continues to push forward. We were asked about this on Wednesday, push forward to implement the \$300 additional weekly benefit that was authorized by Congress, which supplements regular unemployment benefits for anyone currently receiving them, and will come as a welcome financial boost. The department is on schedule to process payments for the first two weeks of eligibility this weekend. If all goes as planned, eligible claimants will see funds in their direct deposit accounts or on their debit cards beginning this coming Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, depending somewhat on their bank.

Meanwhile, more than half-a-million New Jerseyans who are currently collecting benefits are eligible for the 11-week extension enacted as part of the expanded CARES Act with no interruption in their benefits. These programs expire on March 13<sup>th</sup>, however, so this assistance is temporary. But we are hopeful as long as our workforce continues to struggle through this pandemic, that there will be adequate support for them.

I've said it many times before, this is a moment that requires big thinking and bold action. History will be kind to us if we meet this moment; history will judge us harshly if we do not. If you combine the \$908 billion program with the \$1.9 billion announced last night, you're starting to get – and by the way with the promise of a recovery package some number of weeks from now – you're getting into that \$3 trillion to \$4 trillion range that I've been speaking about for now months. We need every penny of that as a country.

And as I said last night, getting our nation in front of this pandemic and staying there cannot be done piecemeal, and it cannot be done through austerity. We will assist in whatever way we can to see the President-Elect's plan passed and signed. New Jersey, as we all know, was one of the first states to be battered by COVID and I commit that we're going to be at the head of the pack in defeating this virus and picking our nation backup.

And to that end, let's get to the latest numbers to track our progress as a state. Our dashboard is showing a total of 310,595 vaccinations statewide as of this morning. Judy, if my math is right, that's an increase of just under 23,000 since yesterday. The number of cases, unfortunately, also continues to increase; 5,490 new positive PCR tests, 1,042 new presumed positive antigen rapid tests being reported. Between PCR tests, if you add the 555,299 and the 60,787, 616,086 cumulative positive tests.

The positivity rate for tests taken this past Monday was 9.63%. And if you're wondering whether or not we have the testing capacity, on Monday 70,055 tests were taken. That is a capacity almost unlike, per capita, any other state in America.

The statewide rate of transmission as we had predicted, Judy, you and Ed and colleagues have predicted is up and it's staying up in that range 1.11. In our hospitals, as of last night's reports, we had 3,543 in total of whom 3,313 were known COVID positive, 230 persons under investigation. That's down for the second day in a row and boy, that's a number we'd love to see keep going down. And of that number, 626 were in intensive care. That number is also down three days in a row. Not hugely, but down and 438 of them were requiring the assistance of a ventilator.

Throughout the day yesterday, and we can't understate that when you have those numbers up there, that's both the combination of good news and really bad news. So 452 live patients left hospitals yesterday. Unfortunately, 427 were admitted, and these are not yet confirmed, 59 folks sadly died in our hospitals.

Today we are reporting another 67 confirmed deaths and we report that with a heavy heart, giving us a total now of 18,229 confirmed COVID fatalities and another 2,091 of probable. Let's take a couple of minutes and remember three more of the lives that we've lost. And like every day, three extraordinary lives lived and lives lost.

Let's start with this guy. We begin by honoring Kenneth Warner. Talk about a first responder, Pat, right? Born in Atlantic City 53 years ago, Ken would call Hamilton Township right down the road here in Mercer County, home for the majority of his life. He committed himself to his New Jersey family, spending the past 22 years in the employment of the New Jersey Department of Transportation, most recently as a senior communications operator, and I want to give our colleague Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti a shout out for bringing Ken's extraordinary life and his tragic passing to our attention.

In his community, as you can see, Ken served with the DeCou Fire Company for 32 years, rising in the ranks from volunteer firefighter to fire police captain, and serving as a Fire Commissioner. When he wasn't at work or at the firehouse, Ken could often be found riding around Hamilton on his Harley Davidson and volunteering his time tending to the dogs at Pawsabilities PA Animal Rescue, or playing Santa, only when Santa himself could not make it at Pawsabilities adoption events. Ken leaves behind his sister Marianne with whom I spoke on Wednesday and his nephew Antonio, to whom he passed along a love of motorcycles. He's also survived by several cousins, along with numerous friends and colleagues from the firehouse and at the DOT. Services for Ken were literally yesterday and the day before. We thank Ken for his years of dedication to our state and his community. We hope he's found a place with an open road for a Harley and a dog that needs a friend in heaven. May God bless and watch over him.

Next up, we remember Tammy Medzadourian. She spent pretty much her entire life in Bergen County, although born in the city of Passaic, she called Paramus, Fairlawn and Washington Township home for 47 of her 54 years. Tammy too served her community as a longtime and dedicated member of the Paramus Ambulance Corps. If Tammy wasn't at home or on an ambulance call, she was probably at either a Billy Joel or a Bruce Springsteen concert with her family, or sitting alongside watching them and rooting for the New York Football Giants, the New York Yankees, or

the New York Rangers, and she would have been happy last night with the Rangers. You would find her at one of her daughter's dance events. She was a noted dance mom. Or in a quiet moment, she might be at home relaxing with her beloved dog Lacey at her side.

Tammy is survived by her husband of 27 years of marriage, Deke, and by their four children Deke Jr, who's 25, Kaylee who's 23, Riley who's 20 and Joanie who's 19. I spoke with all five of them at length on Wednesday, and you can only imagine how they're doing. She also leaves her siblings Colleen and Thomas and her nephew Travis and many friends. Deke's cousin is Father Carl Lindblad of the New York City Archdiocese. He is the one who gave us a heads up and Deke reminded me that Father Lindblad actually married Deke and Tammy. I will just say selfishly, the world needs more Tammy's and not fewer. God bless her, God watch over her memory and her family and her blessed kids as they grow up and grow old.

And finally today, let's celebrate the life of Dr. Doris Carpenter, a Pennsauken resident for the past 30 years and a career educator and faith leader. Doris was just 66 years old. She was a music teacher, an assistant principal, a supervisor of arts and world languages curriculum and a principal. She was the founder of Lion of Judah Restoration Ministries and the power behind the formation of the Risa Praise Ensemble Gospel Singers. She was a proud member of Camden County's NAACP branch 2080 and a member at large of the NAACP New Jersey State Conference Executive Committee.

While she retired in 2014, Dr. Carpenter continued to support our education and faith communities in the struggles for social justice in any way she could. She leaves behind her husband William, her three children, and this one cuts close to home, one of whom is Olivia Glen, who's a colleague of ours serving as the Deputy Commissioner for Environmental Justice and Equity at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. I spoke with Olivia on Wednesday. I had actually read Doris' biography before realizing it was Olivia I was going to be calling, and it was Olivia's mom. She also leaves behind her other two children, Lawrence and Alexandra, and her seven grandchildren, her mother Arberta, please keep her in your prayers, and stepfather Barry and her siblings, William, Myrtus and Arberta. And by the way, this virus is so lethal not only did mom pass, but Olivia told me that she herself, her husband and two of the three kids all have had COVID. Doris also leaves numerous godchildren and special adopted children and grandchildren, people she welcomed to her family as if they were her own, and she leaves many friends and grateful neighbors. We honor Doris for her lifetime of commitment to others. May she rest in peace, and may God bless her and her family.

So three more members of our New Jersey family and take note, each of them was still relatively young, and were robbed of many years that they should have been able to enjoy with their families. Please don't fall into the trap that COVID is something that we can take only to the very old or the very infirmed. Those are the people we have to protect first and foremost but this thing is lethal in so many ways.

Next up, I want to turn our attention to the Brick City, the City of Newark, which is home to Newark Arts, one of the state's premier urban centers for arts education and artistic supports under the leadership of that guy, Executive Director Jeremy Johnson. Newark arts has fought hard through the pandemic to maintain its 40-year mission to support the city's diverse cultural scene, and the more than 1,400 artists and creative entrepreneurs behind it.

Because of the arts importance to Newark's economic future, Jeremy and Newark Arts worked with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to receive the grant funding necessary to keep vital staffers employed and to continue many signature programs. Newark Arts was able to maintain its Art Start mini-grant program to support more than a dozen community-based arts groups. It was able to hold a virtual Newark Arts Festival that attracted more than 300,000 impressions from around the world. It helped the city establish a new Creative Catalyst Fund to support black and brown artists who had been impacted by COVID, and the support helped maintain their strong arts education programs for Newark's youth.

I was honored on Wednesday to be able to connect with not only Jeremy, but he happened to be with several of his board members, to learn all the ways Newark Arts is working to keep Newark's cultural scene strong and thriving across our entire state. We need the arts more than ever before. We need to harness our creativity and our passion to get to tomorrow. Check them out, check Jeremy out, check Newark Arts out. Its website is simple, NewarkArts.org. And to Newark Arts and everyone in our arts community, we thank you.

Before I go, a couple of other quick items. On a lighter note, I must acknowledge that today, Pat, is National Bagel Day. In that light, we might as well just go ahead and declare this to be a second national New Jersey day, since we know that we live in the bagel capital of the United States, and even perhaps the world. Today, it doesn't matter if you ask for pork roll or Taylor ham on your egg and cheese. If you prefer the simplicity of plain or the glory of everything, whether you prefer a butter or a cream cheese schmear, or even if you want lox or white fish, those arguments are all for another day. Today, we salute all the bagel shops up and down our state who have boiled and baked New Jersey's reputation as the undisputed home of bagel greatness, one paper bag at a time.

Finally now, let's get serious for a minute here. On a serious note, a reminder that we will not be with you on Monday as it is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. God bless him. Let's all remember the words of Dr. King, and I quote him, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?" That says it all. Tammy and I, in a very small way, will be taking part in our National Day of Service by assisting in a food pantry in Paterson, and I hope you also will consider donating some of your time and efforts to a worthy cause in your community. Throughout the pandemic, we have all certainly seen our share of selfish behavior but overall, we've seen far more selfless behavior across our state, everyday folks doing extraordinary things for their communities and for all of us. Let's celebrate this spirit, especially on Monday.

And we'll be back here not on Monday. We'll be back with you, unless you hear otherwise, Tuesday at one o'clock. I'm going to leave it to Pat to go through some of the security deliberations and discussions we've been having, but there have been many, as you can imagine. 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 and good afternoon. This morning the Governor and I joined Middlesex County officials at the opening of a new mega site at the New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center in Edison. This site, which is in partnership with Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health, started vaccinating residents this morning. Also opening today is the Burlington County mega site in the Morristown mall, which is in collaboration with Virtua Health. Four of the six state-supported mega sites are now open, and we expect the Atlantic and Bergen County sites to open next week. When more vaccine becomes available in the coming weeks and months, the state's mega sites will serve as vaccination hubs as we continue to expand capacity.

As the Governor shared, more than 310,000 vaccine doses have been administered in the state. Of that, 60% of all of the claimed first doses have been administered, and 50% of all the claimed second doses have been administered to the general public. With the expansion of eligibility into more categories, there are now many more people who can get vaccinated, but the vaccine supply is still extremely limited, and will be for some time. There will be more vaccine with each coming week. We urge everyone to be patient. Understanding everyone's desire to get vaccinated as soon as possible, we understand that people are anxious. Currently we have been receiving a little over 100,000 doses a week, so only 100,000 individuals can be vaccinated each week, while there are over 4 million New Jerseyans who are now eligible.

While people are encouraged to pre-register, there are currently many more people seeking vaccination than there are appointments available across the state. In collaboration with the CDC and our Professional Advisory Committee, we continue to review the conditions that put individuals at increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness. We are reviewing the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommendations and given the dynamic nature of this, we may change groupings as we go forward and prepare hopefully for more vaccines.

We are continuing to expand our network of dispensing sites, including the six mega sites in every region, to accommodate large numbers of people at one site. As vaccine supply increases, additional slots will become available for people to make appointments. The New Jersey vaccine scheduling system will notify those who have pre-registered in batches so that they can now schedule their appointments.

More than 1.5 million individuals have pre-registered in the New Jersey vaccine scheduling system and more than 66,000 emails have gone out, letting individuals know they can schedule an appointment; 10,371 have scheduled their appointments. Residents can visit [covid19.nj.gov/vaccine](https://covid19.nj.gov/vaccine) to pre-register with NJ VSS. There are also some points of dispensing not participating in the state's scheduling system. On that same page, that's [covid19.nj.gov/vaccine](https://covid19.nj.gov/vaccine), you can find a list of locations with their contact information. Again, at this time demand is much greater than supply so please, we ask the public to be patient. The state is working hard to vaccinate as many eligible people as possible with the available doses that we have.

Moving on to my daily report, our hospitals reported 3,543 hospitalizations of COVID-19 individuals and those that are persons under investigation, with 626 individuals in critical care and 70% of them in critical care are on ventilators. Hospitalizations continue to remain stable, between 3,500 and 3,700 and that's in two weeks post-holiday, which is a really good sign. We're hoping it continues.

There are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are a total of 75 cases in our state.

At the state veteran homes, the numbers remain the same as they do with the psychiatric hospitals.

As of January 11th in New Jersey, the positivity rate for the state was 9.63%, the Northern part of the state reports 9.28, Central 9.85, and the Southern part of the state 10.13. That concludes my daily reports. Stay safe, continue to mask up, social distance, stay home when you're sick, get tested and remember, for each other and for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ App. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you for that and for everything. We talked about this a little bit earlier. Any sense, and Ed may have an opinion on this. We hit this on Wednesday as well, whether or not taking the monoclonal antibody – again, this is important, two things that are important here. If you test positive, you need to take that pretty quickly. And secondly, if you're either asymptomatic or light symptoms. Any sense as to whether or not they may that may be positively impacting the hospital numbers?

**DOH Communicable Disease Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz:** I don't think we know 100% for sure, but I do not think that we've been giving enough of it in the state to make that much of a difference. We've only been giving out roughly 100 doses or so a day. So while every little bit helps, I don't think that's playing the big role, no.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** This is something we talked about on Wednesday, Eddy Bresnitz was with us. The more we can see that therapeutic being used, the more likely that we've got a healthier reaction to this, right? And I think you said Wednesday, Judy, to Ed's point, we're seeing reasonably good take up in the big hospitals, less so in the smaller ones.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I'm going to try to get some statistics on this because the larger hospitals are anecdotally telling me it is making a difference.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That's good, huge. Thank you for everything. So Pat, I know you've got at least one compliance readout. As a security matter, and I think Jared would agree with this, we continue to be on high alert, communicating aggressively with stakeholders, and I know you're going to go through that. But as we sit here today, the threat, whether it's for Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup> or Wednesday the 20<sup>th</sup> continues to be a general threat, not a specific threat. I think that's a fair way to characterize it. But again, we're in the category of we'll hope for the best, but we're going to prepare for the worst. And with that, great to have you. Take it away.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Since we last met, to the Governor's point, one EO compliance issue reported to us by Paterson Police Department of the Belie Cafe not complying with the EO.

And to your point, Governor, with regard to what I would refer to as significant streams of communication with federal, state and local partners just in the last day or so Director Maples, the Attorney General, myself, a lot of briefings and phone calls to include one this morning with law enforcement from around the entire state. That included myself, the AG, Director Maples as well as the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI George Crouch. Yesterday, Jared and I briefed the League of Municipalities. We had hundreds of mayors on that call. Yesterday, Governor, as you know because you were there, we briefed Jersey's Legislature, the leadership, Senate President and Speaker, among others. Today, this afternoon, we are briefing our congressional delegation. I can't really recall a time when the communication and the exchange of information has been so robust. It has been clearly constant and to your point, at this time, no specific or credible threat, but we are postured and prepared to respond with all of those partners, should that need arise.

I'll close with, Governor, as you also know that we also responded to Washington's EMAC request and we will have 53 troopers departing Monday morning to head down there to support the security efforts for the inauguration on Wednesday. Those troopers, if that mission is not extended, we expect those troopers to come back by Thursday afternoon.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** That would be Thursday, the 21<sup>st</sup>, the day after the inauguration. They will join, at last count, 571 members of our National Guardsmen and women who continue to serve down there. They're there and they're likely to last, I think longer, probably my guess right now is it would be to the end of the month. And folks have asked us, are they armed? Are they not armed? It actually literally depends on the mission that they're being assigned to on the given day that you ask that question. So without getting into details, some days they're going to be armed and others they won't be, and that will depend on the role that they're playing in the overall mission. Thank you for that. We'll continue to be preparing. We've got I know at least one more call tomorrow morning on the books to go over the game plan. I think we're inclined not to get into a whole lot of detail. You'll forgive us for that and I hope you understand. But again, taking this very, very seriously, hoping for the best but preparing for the worst.

I'd asked everybody, this is probably, I mentioned this the other day, I think this weekend, Sunday in particular is a good day to curl up on the couch, throw on two NFL playoff games and enjoy that from the comfort of your home. I would probably give you similar advice for next Wednesday as well. Thank you, Pat, for everything.

We will, as I mentioned already, so we're going to be virtual not just tomorrow and Sunday, but we will be as well on Martin Luther King Day on Monday and we'll be back together Tuesday at 1:00. I'm not 100% sure, as we sit here, how the rest of the week will play out but just assume, unless you hear otherwise, we'll be back here Tuesday at 1:00. We'll do the normal COVID readouts and get the information to you each day. As a security matter, obviously, if we think there's something that needs to be communicated we will do so at the time and in the manner that we think makes the most sense.

With that, let's start over here. Matt, Councilman, how are early days in public service? Good?

Q&A Session

**Matt Stanisci, Aide to the Governor:** They are good, thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Excellent, excellent. Give our friends in Green Brook our best. Matt, good afternoon.

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Commissioner, is the state system actually going to start to schedule people as in give them a time and a place to get vaccinated once their time has come? And if yes, when will that start happening?

Governor, you've said everyone who lives works or studies in New Jersey can get vaccinated. Are you aware if New York and Pennsylvania have the same rules, as many of our residents also work in those states and maybe they could get a vaccine there quicker?

A couple from Karen Yi. Why hasn't the state rolled out a central phone number for older residents or for those without internet access to make vaccination appointments and register? And what is the state doing to address racial disparities in the number of vaccines administered? Karen pointed out that Latinos account for only 5% of vaccines administered and black people only 4%.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, I'll take a couple of shots and then turn it to you for correcting the record or more detail. It is an appointment-based system and it must remain that way. We can't be overrun, particularly given the enormity of the supply-demand imbalance, thanks to the feds. We've taken the decision, and you tell me if you disagree with this, Judy, that once your number is up, if you're at the Baskin & Robbins shop, it's up to you where to go in and figure out what's the most convenient to you, whether it's where you live, work, or study. But I'll let Judy come in.

There's no evidence that anywhere else is easier to get a vaccine than New Jersey right now, and so can you technically? I assume that Pennsylvania and New York have the same regime that we do, if you live there, obviously, but if you work or study there you're able to get it. I just don't know there's any evidence that it is any easier there than here to get a vaccine.

Central phone number, Mahen, is not a not a bad idea to start putting that up. Why don't we commit to ourselves to put something up on Tuesday when we're back together? And if you've got one you can send it to me right now while Judy's answering and I'll bark it out.

Judy, I know you've been focused intently on the racial inequities and we'd love you to weigh in. Any thoughts on central scheduling versus what's convenient for you? The phone number we'll come back to you on, anything about our neighbors and then especially racial disparities?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Okay, first I want to explain the scheduling system. People can go on and NJ VSS and for those sites that have interfaced with NJ VSS, there's a link for them to schedule. There are a number of sites that are not linked. There's a reason for that. Many of our sites are hospital based and the hospitals are using their own registration system that they use for their patients every day. When you go on NJ VSS, you pre-register, you look for the area, the county where you want to be, where you want to have an appointment. If there is not an interfaced site, you will be directed to a link or information on the site closest to you, and you can call or register through the link to those that are not interfaced. So, a little clunkier than we would like, but the reason being that registration systems that particularly the hospitals are familiar with are up and running, and running well.

The call center, if it's not up this week, it'll be up next week. There's people in training. In fact, there's probably a robo call already up and running. I don't have the number but that's been under development.

The racial inequities are a big issue. We have a team just working on what we call specific and vulnerable populations. That is a pretty in-depth plan. That includes mobile vans going into underserved communities, not only with COVID-19 information, vaccine education, but also vaccinations. So that plan will be rolled out as soon as we have enough vaccines to move into broader dissemination.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** There's no evidence that our neighbors are anywhere ahead or in a different place than we are. The one piece, with science, data, facts, we're obsessed with that but the one piece, Judy, that came out of the CDC, and for the most part we're taking the advice, and you, you're independent. To this last question, Matt, to us it was quite striking that the CDC did not give any guidance, at least initially, on racial disparities or inequities. That's something, the program you're describing is something that you have taken and your advisors have taken upon yourselves to sort of push back against that.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Yeah, our Professional Advisory Committee uses the Social Vulnerability Index of the CDC for prioritization purposes.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that. Let's go to Mike and then we'll come back to Ashley, is that you? Nice to see you. Mike, we'll hit you and then we'll come back to Ashley.

**Mike Catalini, Associated Press:** Good afternoon, thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And by the way, it's nice to see you as well.

**Mike Catalini, Associated Press:** Likewise, thank you. For the Commissioner, I'm sorry, what is NJ VSS? Can you just say what that is? And I'm curious, do you need to pre-register or if you're one of these millions of people who are in these categories now that are approved for a vaccine, can you just start calling around to try to get an appointment for your vaccine, or do you need to be in the pre-registration system? And if you do, why do you need to be in the pre-registration system?

You mentioned that the supply is about 100,000 vaccines coming in a week. Have you figured out what the figure would be to meet the demand? How many would you need to get in a week to get everybody who wants and needs a vaccine vaccinated?

You might you might have addressed this, I think but I just wanted to ask. What determines whether someone goes to a mega site? I mean, is that up to them, or are there certain factors that sort of funnels someone into a mega site?

Finally, Governor, I don't know if you will be able to talk about it but I understand there was a call and I think you alluded to this, between the National Guard and Governors this morning about the situation in Washington and the possibility for something to happen there at the inauguration. Can you talk about what the concerns are or what specifically is concerning? Why do you need so many troops in Washington? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You betcha. I'll hit a couple of these, Judy, and then throw them over to you. The supply-demand question is an interesting one, because we can fill – the demand lever is completely, we can just open that thing up if we get the supply. So literally, you know, there would be distribution logistics. You'd want to make sure that you had the capability to deliver these doses while they're still alive and effective, into people's arms. But you can do the math, Mike, in one respect. We want to get 4.7 million adults vaccinated within six months. Basically, you look at that number and I'm going to say, Judy, that realistically we could right now probably take double what we've got, at least. You'd say four times?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** We could use 470,000 doses a week.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah, and that would get us well within the timeframe that we want to get to, so we're not close to it. We're going to get there based on the intense discussions we had with the incoming Biden team and the outgoing Trump team, but it is not going to be this week to next week, it's going to be something that scales up.

Mike, I'll give you my answer. You don't have to pre-register but it takes a burden off of you for knowing when your number is up. Otherwise, you don't need to do it. And whether or not you go to a mega site, that's an option that you've got where you can assume it's probably – I can't say this today but over time, it's going to be open for more

hours; chances are it's going to have some scale of doses over time. It's an option for you. It's not a requirement. Obviously, this is all separate and apart from the CVS and Walgreens federal program directed at long-term care.

I won't get into any details on the security front, but I think it's nothing more, Mike, than a continuation of the concern that we had with the Capitol nine days ago. That cannot -- it should not have happened and it must never happen again, and it certainly can't happen, especially can't happen, in and around the peaceful transfer of power. I think Washington, gentlemen, I think Washington is probably in the same mindset that we are. They are going to over-prepare and hope that the threat under-delivers. I promise you, that's where we are and I believe that that is where they are.

Anything else you want to add, Judy?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I do want to make a distinction between the mega sites and the county sites. There are a number of counties that have put up their own sites. And very appropriately, they will give priority to the county residents first. I want to make that clear, go to a mega site, with the state-supported site anyone can go there, but the counties will give priority to their county residents first. And if others show up, they'll do the callback system to make sure that at the end of the day, all doses are used.

Mike Catalini, Associated Press: NJ VSS. What is that? I'm sorry, you mentioned that and I didn't know what that was.

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** The county sites, some are connected, some aren't. It is the New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System.

**Mike Catalini, Associated Press:** That's a website, or?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** Go to [covid19.nj.gov/vaccine](https://covid19.nj.gov/vaccine) and it'll bring you to it.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you, Mike. Ashley, Good afternoon.

**Ashley Balcerzak, The Record:** Good afternoon. You mentioned reports that say it seems like the Federal Reserve has been dwindling and that we are receiving roughly 100,000 doses a week. Can you tell us how many doses we expect to receive next week and if there will be an increase in shipments? What's the impact on our shipments with the news of this dwindling reserve?

What's to stop anyone from saying that they are a smoker to cut the line and get a shot? NBC reported New Jersey is activating around 100 National Guard members to provide security around the State Capitol. Can you confirm that, and is there anything else you can tell us about preparations for possible weekend protests?

Will the state make it mandatory for employees at the veteran homes, psych hospitals, developmental centers and correctional facilities to get vaccinated? What percentage of eligible hospital workers and long-term care employees have accepted the vaccine so far? Thank you very much.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I think the supply we've addressed, Ashley, but it's meaningful. This is a meaningful, if it's true that they've already blown through the strategic reserve, that's a pile of doses that all of us, all states, including ours, were counting on to have a ramp up into a different place sooner than later. It feels like if we understand the news that's come out this morning, that that's not true so it's going to take longer. Do you have next week's allocation, Judy?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I don't have the exact numbers. It comes in today. But we expect about 53,000 Pfizer and 53,000 Moderna, that's what it's been running since the beginning of January.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And that needs to be, as you heard a couple of minutes ago, that needs to be a multiple of what it is. What's to say someone could -- people can lie? Unfortunately, they can. We cannot be overly bureaucratic here. We want to get as many shots into people's arms as humanly possible, as fast as possible. I would just hope that folks would do the right thing.

I don't think we're going to comment on the specifics, other than the National Guard is obviously an element of the response that these folks have put together and I think we'll leave it at that.

Judy, for you, if you could. Where are you on forcing folks at whether veterans -- I assume you mean staff as opposed to residents -- staff at veteran homes, psychiatric hospitals, etc.? And do you have the percentages? I do not have the percentage, we can get back to you, what percent of, I think you're asking healthcare workers, and what percent of long-term care residents and staff have taken up vaccines, please?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I don't have the percentages, but we can get them for you. We're not making it mandatory at this point in time. I've had that question from a lot of employers, whether a private employer decides to do that is a different matter. But right now, we're not.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Again, we hope folks come to this of their own free will. Judy continues to test, I mentioned 70,000 tests. Some of those are tests that folks are getting conducted at the door, I think is the phrase you've used, at long-term care facilities. This continues to be a reality. This crushed us in the spring and it continues to be a reality today. There are a lot of folks who have this who are asymptomatic and are unwittingly carrying it into the midst of folks who are more vulnerable.

Mahen, can you help us follow up with Ashley in terms of specifics on the percentages? Sir, do you have something? You good? Please, hold on one sec.

**Reporter:** Thank you, Governor. Is there a risk that the doses needed, second doses for those who already received the first shot will not be available? And if so, what are the implications of that? Does it pose a health risk to those people or potentially serve to lessen the effectiveness of the vaccine overall?

And another question from Michael Hill. What are your thoughts on the Motor Vehicle Commission approving driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants starting May 1<sup>st</sup>?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I can't say that it is. I believe I can say this with 100% certainty, I'll say it in the positive, Judy and Ed, the system has got to work for both doses. That's what we're committed to. It has to, and as Judy and team allocate dosages as they come in. And again, there's an enormous supply-demand imbalance here, thanks to the feds, that is obviously paramount in your distribution. No two ways about it.

I'm not shocked by the date. I joined the folks who are outside pleading with us for this to become a reality. It's the right thing to do for the folks who right now don't have access to the ability to get a license. But this is a point we've made a lot over the past, at this point, years. It's also smart for the rest of us. Every state that's done this has safer roads. So I, with a heavy heart, wish it were sooner but again, Motor Vehicles has been clobbered. And, again, with a heavy heart I understand why it had to slip a little bit. I don't want it to slip any more than it has to because it's the right thing for all of us. Thank you for that. Please. Is that Brian?

**Brian Bossard, Channel 6:** Yes, Brian Bossard from Channel 6, how are you?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** How are you, Brian?

**Brian Bossard, Channel 6:** Good.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Give your colleagues at Channel 6 my best.

**Brian Bossard, Channel 6:** We were presented information from Salem County, and it is saying that they've only received 100 doses which they've administered and they've been trying to get additional supply. Obviously, you've talked at length that the supply issue problems, but they haven't been able to get any more. Just seeing if that is accurate? And then how much this imbalance is setting back your plans.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I know John Burzichelli, to his credit, reached out to me over the weekend and Salem County and our team got on it. I don't have any specifics, Brian beyond that, but I know we were focused on it. Judy, anything you've got? Can we get back to you on that? It's a concern that we know exists and it was raised with us and we put our folks on it, and we'll come back to you if we could.

Sue Fulton has just weighed in. She approved the regulations today for licensing without regard to immigration status. Again, it will be implemented on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Part of the challenge is they have to pull people offline to get trained to do this, which is part of the reason for the delay.

I believe I'm about to make news here so Mahen, or Parimal, is this already out there? Next Wednesday. So it may not be news. We're going to go, state offices are going to be remote/virtual next Wednesday, the 20<sup>th</sup> on Inauguration Day. Pat, Jared, you may want to weigh in here. The rest of us looked at this and felt that was the right thing to do, given the level of tension right now in the country. The silver lining of this big protest call on Sunday is that it's a Sunday. That's, frankly, a good thing. But with all the other tension in the country right now, we've made the call that I think working from home in state offices is the right call.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, I would just add that we use that term out of an abundance of caution. That's what that recommendation and the Governor's approval to work remotely. We all know that we are very comfortable working remotely, given what we've been through for the last year. We just thought to help us facilitate any security or response measures, the fewer folks in and around Trenton, the better. Thank you, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, do you have news there or not?

**Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli:** I have a little information on Salem. To date, they have vaccinated 1,428 individuals. I think they have either two or three vaccination sites. I'll be able to tell you, I can get back to you on how many doses they will be getting on a weekly basis or have gotten.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that. I guess we just heard of another silver lining of this awful pandemic, and that is that we can work remotely and from home like the back of our hand at this point, because by the millions we have in this state.

With that I'm going to mask up. Pat, these are your new fancy, really good by the way, State Police masks. So a couple of things. First of all, I want to thank Judy and Ed, as always. Pat, thank you. Jared Parimal, Matt, Mahen, the whole team here. We've got a couple of follow up items. I know we've got one item for you, Ashley, and we've got one for you, Brian, on Salem, and you'll help me with that.

Again, remote tomorrow, Sunday, Monday. We'll be back here Tuesday at one o'clock. Again, I repeat on the security side, no specific threat. If that changes and we feel comfortable, we will not only take action, but communicate that, assuming that does not compromise our ability to deal with that threat. But otherwise, I would just say folks, the next number of days, probably good advice to lay low. When you're lying low, remember, we have a maximum of a 10-person gathering inside. Or go outside, sit by a fire pit or some other place but please take it easy. And again, a lower posture is better than a higher one right now.

We're going to continue to be in the supply-demand imbalance as it relates to vaccinations. We will fight through it as best we can. Again, we are going after the folks right now who the science, the data, the facts overwhelmingly suggest are the most vulnerable to this virus, especially our seniors, and especially folks that have chronic health realities. We will continue on that path. We will open, I promise you, we get more supply, I'll pick our blessed heroic educators as an example. They're on deck. We can't wait to get to the broader population. In the meantime, if you are an educator, an essential worker, and you're either 65 and up or you've got some sort of a chronic condition, please get vaccinated. Get in there. The faster we can deliver those shots into the arms, the better we will be.

I believe strongly based on all the evidence that we have from the incoming team that this supply-demand at the federal level will be corrected. I have no doubt about that. We're also not giving ourselves any credit, quote-unquote, in our forecast for other vaccinations that may well get the emergency use approval or authority. We know there are at least two or three out there that are in trial right now. The problem I think we have to all accept, and this is why I use the word patience, Judy, that's not going to be next week. I still am comfortable with the timeframe we put out there, but I think it's going to be more middle to backload than we want, that we feel comfortable with, that we had expected. But I think within the timeframe that Judy now for many months has been saying within six months getting 4.7 million adults vaccinated, I'm not off of that yet, but I'm certainly not happily, and I know you're not based on what we're hearing out of the feds, that's going to be probably within that same window, but pushed back. It's going to ramp up steeper and we're going to need that, and it won't be next week.

Folks, you've been extraordinary. Please keep up the great work. Enjoy some football inside this weekend and stay safe. God bless you all.

## Governor Phil Murphy

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