

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: November 23rd, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for your patience. I'm honored to be joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, another familiar face, Dr. Ed Lifshitz; Ed, great to have you. To my left, the guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. We've got Chief Counsel Parimal Garg with us, and we better put an APB out for Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

This has nothing to do with anything we're going to talk about today, but I just reviewed the national security appointments that President-Elect Biden has made and there are a bunch of folks, in many cases, who I have had personal and professional relationships with for a long time. I want to give a particular shout out to my old boss, John Kerry, who is going to be the first person ever to be a Special Presidential Envoy for Climate on the National Security Council. Hats off to Secretary Kerry and to the rest of the team.

Today, unless you hear otherwise, is the only day that we're planning to be with you live before Thanksgiving. We hope that you and your loved ones have made plans to remain safe this Thanksgiving so we can look forward to bigger celebrations next year. But Thanksgiving is also the starting point for the entire holiday season and we recognize that with everything that we have already endured, plus the fact that our holidays have to look differently this year to protect ourselves, our families and our communities, the stress may become too much for some to bear. Please know that help is available for any New Jerseyan feeling the strong emotional and mental toll of COVID-19 and all that it has done to our routines and traditions. Any New

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Jersey resident can call, and please make note of this, 1-866-202-HELP or text NJ Hope to 51684 for free, confidential support from NJ Mental Healthcare. It is a partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Mental Health Association in New Jersey. This toll-free line is open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. every single day and is staffed by live, trained specialists.

For the deaf and hard of hearing, help is also available through a partnership with Access at St. Joseph's Health in Paterson. I was on with Kevin Slavin, in fact, this morning, Judy, checking in with him, which is offering assistance in American Sign Language to people dealing with anxiety and worry. You can reach them via video phone at 973-870-0677, that's that number in the middle of the screen from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Again, support is free, confidential and provided by live, trained specialists.

We know that the holidays in a normal year can be stressful, but this year even more so as so many of you are making arrangements that don't include family and friends who you yearn to see. If you need a break and you need somebody to talk to, reach out and make the call. The Department of Human Services has done its work to provide you a safe space to talk about your worries and your anxieties and I extend specifically my thanks to Commissioner Carol Johnson and her team and their partners for all that they're doing. Remember folks, help is there.

Moving on if I could, we have a lot of ground to cover. Yesterday I signed an Executive Order extending the public health emergency in our state for an additional 30 days. As we have noted before, these declarations unless they're extended actually expire after 30 days. And as we have also mentioned before, this action means that we continue to be vigilant and prepared and ready to act. It also continues the authority of the Department of Health under Judy's leadership to coordinate our health system's response to this emergency.

We are now in the midst of the second wave and we don't know how long this new wave of cases will hang in. Because of this, we can't let our guard down. Whether that means asking you to continue to use your common sense and living up to your responsibilities for keeping your family and community safe, or keeping those of us up here in a position to act in a statewide manner. The numbers show why we all need to remain on a heightened state of alert.

Today we're reporting an additional 3,592 positive cases, bringing the statewide total to 309,588. The positivity for all PCR tests recorded on Thursday, November 19th was 8.65%. The statewide rate of transmission is currently at 1.32.

Across our hospitals yesterday, a total of 2,693 patients were being treated, while 247 patients were discharged yesterday, and that's a good thing, another 333 COVID positive patients were admitted. And again, at the risk of apples to oranges, these are not yet confirmed, 21 patients died in our hospitals yesterday. There were 537 patients in critical care and 240 ventilators were in use.

Today, we're also reporting an additional 11 confirmed COVID-19 related deaths, and that brings our total for the pandemic to a staggering 14,960 with another 1,812 probable deaths. Right now our focus is to deploy the resources we need to the places that need it most in an effort to bring these numbers down, and to prepare to execute our vaccine distribution plan. We're now back at a place we haven't seen in many months and unlike some across the country who seem content to just let the virus have its way, that's not what we are about in New Jersey.

We also know that responding to the crisis is not for us to do alone. We need the federal government to be right there alongside us as we fight COVID's resurgence. To help ensure that partnership remains strong, Commissioner Judy Persichilli and I sent a letter to Emily Murphy, no relation by the way, in case you're wondering, Administrator of the General Services Administration in Washington, imploring her to immediately sign the paperwork necessary for President-Elect Biden and his team to begin in earnest the transition process, which right now also includes sharing public health information vital to our national response. The time for politics has passed. The time for coming together to save lives is now.

There is perhaps no more important area where the transition must get going than where a vaccine is concerned. On Friday, I'm sure you saw Pfizer applied to the Food and Drug Administration for an emergency use authorization for its vaccine. We anticipate that Moderna will soon follow suit. AstraZeneca came out with some positive news today. But maintaining a supply chain that requires careful cold storage and mobilizing resources for distribution, including potentially our National Guard, is not something we can leave

to chance or which can wait until January 20th. This will be an enormous logistical undertaking and any break or disruption in the supply chain will be paid for in lives, make no mistake. Unless the transition is allowed to get going immediately, those breaks and disruptions and lost lives will be unforced errors by the current administration, and let there also been no mistake of that.

We have been preparing for the eventuality of a vaccine here in New Jersey since, I think, March Judy, am I right? Last spring at least. As we noted a few weeks ago, our comprehensive vaccine plan has already been filed with the federal government and we continue to review it and are prepared to make whatever changes need to be made to make sure our in-state distribution goes as planned. Every day that the transition is held back puts our ability to be ready at risk.

Judy noted on Friday that should Pfizer receive their emergency use authorization in a timely manner, we would then expect to receive our first 130,000 doses of its vaccine by as early as the third week in December, with another 130,000 doses following closely behind the next week.

Additionally, should Moderna receive an authorization for their vaccine, we could see 100,000 doses in state by the end of 2020. We are ready to move forward the moment these vaccines get to us, with healthcare workers being at the front of the line to receive a vaccination and Judy is already working with our hospital leaders to prepare for this. The healthcare experts we have convened as part of our vaccine task force stand ready to ensure the safety of a vaccine for New Jersey. From the get-go, we have worked to ensure a data-driven process that puts politics to the side to save lives. We are asking nothing less of Washington and of the General Services Administration.

As I said, we're not going to be improvising on this and we cannot have the incoming Biden administration hamstrung because of politics. We need this entire process to be methodical and deliberate. That's how we're planning here in New Jersey, and we need to see the same seriousness and focus in Washington. The election is over. Record numbers of people are contracting COVID and thousands dying every single day across our country. We have to stop playing politics with their lives.

So while we fight on this front, we are also continuing to ensure the testing program we need to map out the battle lines here in New Jersey. There are more than 400 testing sites available across our state, and you can find one by going to that website, covid19.nj.gov/testing. There are several additional pop-up sites where you can go as well. First up for the residents of Union County, which has been among our hardest-hit counties, there are two new sites available to you tomorrow. You can either go to the Jefferson School at 155 Hilton Avenue in Union from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., or to the Seventh and Eighth Grade Academy at 1139 Kline Avenue in Rahway between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.

There are also new sites available, as we promised at the end of the week, for those across South Jersey. In Atlantic City, tests will be available tomorrow at the Stockton University Residential Complex at 3701 boardwalk from noon until 7:00 p.m. Testing will also be available at St. Michael's Church on North Mississippi Avenue from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. this upcoming Friday, November 27th, as well as on Saturday, November 28th. Testing will also be conducted at the Atlantic City Convention Center, both Friday and Saturday of this week from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. as well as Monday through Saturday of next week, that's November 30th through December 5th and the following week as well, December 7th through December 12th. Again, all of this is in the website.

In Galloway Township, testing will be available on the campus of Stockton University at the Townsend Residential Life Center on December 5th and 6th from noon until 7:00 and at the Lakeside Town Hall on December 7th and 9th from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. And in the great City of Camden, tests will be available at the Mastery Charter Schools McGraw Hill Elementary at 3051 Fremont Avenue starting next Monday, a week from today, November 30th, and every Monday through December 21st. More information on that site is forthcoming and will be available soon at covid19.nj.gov/testing.

Next up, I want to lift up that the New Jersey Economic Development Authority has now exceeded 30,000 businesses which it has been able to assist through its suite of COVID relief programs, whether it be direct grants, low-interest loans, support for private sector lenders, and community development financial institutions or capital guarantees for entrepreneurs. Particularly the Small Business Emergency Assistance Grant Program has to date provided more than \$120 million to more than 27,000 businesses and nonprofit organizations, and another 22,000 are in line to receive funding in phase three of the EDA's grants program.

One of the EDA's beneficiaries is Trenton-based Camp Fire NJ, a nonprofit organization within the Camp Fire national organization, which provides social emotional and overall mental health wellbeing programs for youth, especially through educational programs that help kids gain the knowledge and skills necessary to interact with others and the tools needed to manage their behavior and emotions, as well as family supports. Camp Fire NJ's executive director right there, Jessica Nidhi, who I had the great honor of speaking with on Friday, worked with the EDA to secure a grant that has allowed them to cover expenses and continue serving their kids. We know that with the family and community stresses stemming from this pandemic as we started off with today, we need organizations like Camp Fire NJ more than ever.

Check them out on Facebook, Camp Fire NJ. Their website, shockingly, campfirenj.com. It's also time for their annual appeal and I know Jessica would want me to say that. Folks, this is a great organization, they need your help. Please step up. Again, campfirenj.com. Camp Fire NJ represents those who the EDA has targeted with its resources. Businesses and communities that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, including minority and women-owned and operated businesses, as well as those in census tracts eligible to be designated as opportunity zones. The EDA continues to explore new ways to address the challenges being posed by the pandemic and looks to announce additional programs and funding opportunities as they become available. For more information about the NJ EDA's COVID-19 response, go check them out at covid19.business.nj.gov.

The EDA is also maintaining its NJ Small and Micro Business PPE Access Program, which provides businesses with discounts on the purchase of PPE from designated vendors including Office Depot, Boxed and Staples. Right now all New Jersey-based businesses, regardless of size, can receive a 10% discount on their PPE purchases through these vendors. But Pat, get a hold of this one. Starting tomorrow, Businesses with 100 or fewer employees will be eligible for a total discount of nearly 70%. All small businesses previously approved for 25% discounts will automatically have their accounts updated to the 65% discount level for all future purchases. The deadline to register your business for this discount has been extended from November 30th to December 10th. For more information, I encourage you to visit that website, covid19.nj.gov/PPEAccess. I thank especially Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan and the entire team at the EDA for all –

[Break in audio stream]

when the de facto lady of the house for her four siblings while her father worked, and then if that weren't enough, losing her first husband in an accident in 1941 not long into their marriage. During World War II, Julie worked in New Brunswick at Johnson & Johnson and later would work for many years at Phelps Dodge Manufacturing in Marlboro. She remarried in 1945, and she and her husband John would remain together for 55 years until his passing. He, by the way, was a skilled woodworker and the two of them could often be found together in the workshop, crafting furniture that they would then give to family and friends. Julie loved to garden and just as equally loved to can the literal fruits of her labors, earning quite a reputation for the numerous quarts of pickles, jams and preserves she put up every year.

Julie leaves behind her children Geraldine, John with whom I had the great honor of speaking, Thomas, Patricia and Joan and their families who blessed her with 21 grandchildren, 38 great-grandchildren, and seven great-great-grandchildren. By the way, bless her heart. Julie was just buried on Friday. I spoke to John just after the funeral and burial. She was buried at St. Ann's Cemetery in Wall Township. An extraordinary life worthy of remembrance. May God bless and watch over Julie and her family.

Next, here is Maplewood's James Curley, I believe Irish. He grew up in New York City and earned an engineering degree at the University of Alabama before joining our New Jersey family as a student at Rutgers Law School. He was an expert in patent antitrust law, writing and lecturing on the subjects outside the courtrooms, where he also argued complex cases of international trade. He practiced law for a total of 42 years, 30 of which were spent in federal service with the United States Department of Justice in the Civil Division. He was, in many respects, a renaissance man. He loved reading classical literature and took an interest in a wide variety of subjects. He remained true to his Roman Catholic faith, and he was also a baseball fan, coaching for several years in the Maplewood Recreation League.

James lost his wife Patricia in 1995 after 30 years of marriage. Patricia worked at New Jersey's Department of Labor. Together they had two sons, Peter, also to this day works with the Department of Labor, and Russell who works in the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office. I had the great honor of speaking with Russell on Friday. James now leaves them along with their families, including his grandchildren, Finnegan and Declan. He's also survived by his sister Marianne and his cousin Seamus of Kiltormer County Galway in Ireland.

Russell told me a great story. He was giving – Russell himself obviously a lawyer – giving a lecture to a group I believe of up-and-coming aspiring law students and talked about the time when a lawyer received, from the other side, not the brief that they had intended to send but some very confidential information that would incriminate and undermine their case. The lawyer did the right thing, the minute he read the first sentence, sent it back to the other side without reading it. That lawyer was his dad, that guy right there. James was 84 years old, may God bless and watch over you, my friend.

Finally today we remember Ronald Frech of Villas Lower Township in Cape May County. Now he was North Jersey born and bred, a native of East Paterson, but he found his way to Cape May nearly 40 years ago, becoming the custodian at Middle Township School No. 2 and Cape May Courthouse and Stone Harbor Elementary School. He also drove a trolley for Cape May Mac for 15 years, helping countless residents and visitors alike explore Cape May's rich arts and cultural heritage. Ronald and his late wife Estelle, and I believe she passed in 1994, had five children and you can see the family there. Ron Jr., with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Friday, Joe, Robert, Lori, and Lynn, and he now leaves them alone with his 11 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. Ronald was 83 years old. May God bless you, Ron, and watch over you and your family.

It is even more important that we highlight those we have lost today as we prepare for Thanksgiving. These are three of the now more than 16,500 families who have empty spaces at their tables this year because of the virus. Think about that for a second, folks. Over 16,500 individuals who were alive last Thanksgiving are no longer with us. That's more than 16,500 families who will have that empty chair. Some families, like the Fuscus, remember them early on? They're going to have multiple empty chairs at multiple tables. The last thing we want is for anyone's Thanksgiving to lead to empty spots in their homes for the celebrations yet to come. We urge you, if you haven't done so already to plan for only a small immediate family gathering on Thursday. Again, only with those in your bubble, in your immediate household. If you're going to get together with a bigger group, and I beg you not to do that, please do it only outside where social distancing can be better ensured, so you can better protect your loved ones from this deadly virus.

We know this is not what we're used to nor what any of us want to do. And we know that there are those who are so yearning for normalcy that they're willing to risk their family's health for a big Thanksgiving with generations crowded around the table. Please, we urge you one last time, to think beyond this holiday and past yourself to the days yet to come, and to doing all you can to make sure that everyone you love will be able to see those celebrations.

Let's be safe, let's be smart. It's been a long nine months, to be sure, but we have to hold strong for just a few more. Better days are coming, let there be no doubt about that. Let's make it there together with our entire New Jersey family. Again, I wish you and yours, each and every one of you, a blessed, safe and happy Thanksgiving. By the way, the quintessential American holiday. But please, just celebrate it with your immediate family.

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. Well, the promise of a vaccine in the near term is certainly an exciting development. The preliminary data from Pfizer and Moderna released shows that these vaccines are 95% effective. That is an incredible scientific breakthrough. AstraZeneca also recently announced that they expect to request an EUA, an emergency use authorization, for their vaccine shortly. Vaccination is an important step in helping to prevent this illness and it's potentially devastating consequences. The early news of the effectiveness of these vaccines means that there may be light at the end of the tunnel.

But at the same time, we can't give up. We must adhere to the proven public health practices to slow the spread of this virus. We need residents to be vigilant with the alarming surge in the cases that we are experiencing. We need you to be vigilant during this upcoming holiday. We cannot let our guard down. We must adhere to those public health measures. They're the only tools we have in our toolkit: masking, social distancing, testing. Once a vaccination is approved, there is still much work to be done. A recent Gallup poll found that 58% of Americans said they would most likely get vaccinated if there was an FDA-approved vaccine. That's up from 50% in September. A Rutgers Eagleton poll found that four and 10 residents are somewhat reluctant to get vaccinated. Building public confidence in a safe and effective vaccine is essential to reaching our goal of vaccinating 70% of the adult population in New Jersey, in a six-month timeframe. That's about 4.7 million individuals.

The department is focused on building the public confidence in the vaccination, so more individuals will go out to get vaccinated. We are in the process of developing a public awareness campaign to educate residents about the scientific process of developing a vaccine to get people more comfortable in receiving it. Hopefully, as the public learns more about the preliminary data from the Pfizer and Moderna and other clinical trials, and as results from independent clinical trial monitoring boards comes in, public confidence will increase further.

The vaccine manufacturers all signed a letter to assure the public that they would not allow the political process to interfere with the approval process of the vaccine. As you know, the first shipment of vaccine will be reserved for paid and unpaid persons serving in healthcare settings, who have the potential for direct and indirect exposure to patients or infected materials. It is vital that our healthcare personnel get vaccinated not only for their own protection, but also to set an example for the rest of us. Eventually, once the general public is vaccinated, we will be able to build immunity to COVID-19 in our communities. That is our hope.

In the meantime, we have to take this pandemic seriously. COVID-19 can be a minor illness in some, or lead to severe disease or even death in previously healthy individuals. Many treatments and medications are being studied but as you know, there is no specific cure. Prevention is the key. Please wear a mask when around individuals outside of your immediate household. The CDC recently studied counties in Kansas that had a mask mandate, compared to counties without one. Those with a mask mandate saw a 6% decrease in new cases; counties without a mask mandate experienced 100% increase in new cases. This study demonstrates how effective masks can be in reducing the spread of the virus. And remember, wearing a mask right now can also prevent the spread of the flu.

So for the Thanksgiving holiday, everyone should celebrate only with members of your immediate household. If you gather with others, please limit the number of attendees to allow people from different households to remain at least six feet apart. The best option is to host outdoors rather than indoors as much as possible. Even outdoors, require guests to wear masks when not eating or drinking. And if you do host indoors, increase the ventilation by opening the windows and the doors, or by placing central air and heating on continuous circulation.

If you are hosting, provide attendees with supplies to help everyone to stay healthy and safe. These include extra masks, hand sanitizers, tissues, stock bathrooms with enough hand soap and single-use towels. Remind attendees to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

As cases increased in the state, the majority of our state is now in a high COVID-19 activity, according to the department's COVID-19 activity level report. Currently only the southeast region, which includes Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties, are in a moderate level. Long-term care facilities in regions that are in high activity are required by CMS to prohibit indoor visitation with limited exceptions. Exceptions include compassionate care, end of life situations and essential caregiving visits.

Facilities with available FDA approved or authorized point-of-care tests in what they call a clinical laboratory improvement amendment, a CLIA amendment, in high activity regions are strongly encouraged to test all visitors to allow entrance into the facility. Indoor visits can resume at these facilities when the region enters moderate or low activity.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, the hospitals report 2,693 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients and persons under investigation. That is about a 30% increase from a week ago. 45% of patients in critical care are on ventilators. That totals 537 individuals in critical care.

Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. Currently, there are 61 total cases in the state.

At the state's veteran homes, there are cumulatively 403 cases and as I have reported previously, 146 total deaths. And at our state psychiatric hospitals, the numbers remain the same, a total of 259 cases across the four hospitals.

The daily percent positivity as of November 19th in New Jersey is 8.65%. The Northern part of the state is 8.79, the Central part of the state 7.19%, and the Southern part of the state 8.65%.

Lastly, and I want you to listen carefully, 80% of our deaths are in individuals 65 years or older; 47% of the deaths are in individuals over the age of 80, follow by 32% of individuals between the ages of 65 and 79. However, our new cases since October, the highest positivity is in the 19 to 49-year-old age group. It appears that younger individuals are exposing older, more vulnerable loved ones, your grandmother, your grandfather, a vulnerable older neighbor. This has to stop. You need to be more careful. You need to be safe, not only for yourself, but also for your loved ones. Please be careful at Thanksgiving. And remember, for each other, for us all, please take the call. Download the COVID Alert New Jersey app and enjoy a safe and happy Thanksgiving. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for all of that. That last point, though, is the one that I think was the right one to end on. That's exactly what we're worried about right now, which is multigenerational gatherings, especially multi , but not only that, but certainly especially that. And it's the unwitting, perhaps asymptomatic spread from one generation to another. Unfortunately, there's no better time for that to happen than a holiday where you naturally are coming together across generations in a family.

Also, that study in Kansas is fascinating, the impact of wearing face coverings. Thank you for this and thank you for all. Pat, I know pretty busy compliance weekend. Good to have you. Thank you for everything. Over to you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Good afternoon, Governor and good afternoon, everyone. With regards to compliance over the weekend, in Bellville the Police Department was processing an individual under arrest. He subsequently spit on one of the officers claiming to have COVID. Newark Police responded to a house party where there was more than 100 people in a relatively small house. That homeowner was cited. Also over the weekend, ABC investigators conducted compliance operations. One establishment in Vineland was cited. They also visited 76 licensed establishments in Middlesex County; 10 were found to be in violation of the Executive Order. On Saturday, an establishment in Manahawkin and Ocean also found to be in violation.

Lastly, Governor, the City of Elizabeth has its own local task force with health officials, fire prevention officials as well as licensing inspectors. They went out on compliance checks and issued multiple summonses to various locations. Some were local code violations, others related to compliance, social distancing, employees not wearing facial coverings. I would refer anybody with specifics in the City of Elizabeth to contact Elizabeth for those details as far as those establishments. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, thank you. I'd actually heard that independently from the mayor, Chris Bollwage, which is a terrific mayor. The weather is a little choppy, unfortunately, as the week goes on. I think we get some rain on Thursday, which is a little bit of a bummer given that's the holiday we're all focused on right now. But hopefully, we get enough, we've got better today. Whatever you can do to be outside, please do it. That is another watchword, I think, from all of us. So thank you for that.

I think we'll start over here. So as I mentioned, we're going to be with you virtually for the balance of this week including, Dan, I assume on Thanksgiving itself, we will also give you at least a quick sense of the data on Thursday. We reserve the right, based on circumstances, to get back together in person if we don't, expect that we'll be back on the Monday, Wednesday, Friday routine schedule next week. So with that, Dante, thank you. Dustin, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. If the state is getting enough vaccines for 130,000 people at first, and we have 600,000 healthcare workers, how are you going to decide which hospitals and other facilities are going to get their employees protected first? How will this be distributed in a way that avoids political influence, or at least the appearance of it? What about the people on the dais getting vaccinated? You all seem like essential workers. Wouldn't that set a good example of your confidence in the safety?

Can you talk any more about the security of distribution and how the National Guard or law enforcement could be involved in that?

Governor, can you give us any details on the date and location of that dinner where the woman accosted you and your family? Can you tell us what happened before and after that 36-second video clip that's been circulating? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'm going to address a couple of these and then turn it over to you, Judy. We've got another vaccine call, I believe, this afternoon, you and I do so I know we'll be picking up more information. I'll answer two of these. Number one, absolutely. I don't want to prevent even one single healthcare worker from getting her or his vaccine but if we believe that it would add to the ultimate take up, getting as close to Judy's 70% objective, I would be more than happy to be first in line. But again, I want to balance that. I want to be a good role model. We're not going to put this on the street unless we believe it's safe. So balancing being a good role model with also not taking one vaccine away from a nurse such as Judy or other healthcare workers.

The situation with my family and me was Saturday night in Red Bank. Really nothing at all happened beforehand and there were two women, they had a third friend who sort of pushed them away and that was the last we heard of them. I would just say a couple of things. Number one, you know, I'm a big boy, thick skin. That doesn't impact me at all and I think I could say the same thing for my wife. I would say this though. Our kids are not part of that, and so that's one observation.

The second one is this, though, and I don't even know who these people were, by the way. I've literally no idea who they were. I started out with stress at the upfront end of my remarks. There's more stress in our state, in our country, than I think any of us have ever seen. I mean, it's possible with the outbreak of you know, Pearl Harbor getting attacked in that period, but the stress levels are overwhelming and they're not unfounded. I mean, there are too many people out of work, too many businesses no matter all the good work that our Economic Development Authority does, too much economic hardship. I mentioned 16,500 families will have Thanksgiving – it'll be more than that by the time we get to Thursday, sadly, will have Thanksgiving with a family without a family member that was with them last year.

I don't condone out-of-bounds behavior, but I'm a big boy and I think I speak for my wife. But let's leave my family out of this, number one.

But number two, let's all keep each other in our prayers right now, because this is an extraordinarily stressful period that we're in. Please God, like we always have as a country and as a state, there's no more quintessential American state than New Jersey that we all come together, find common ground and get to a better place sooner than later.

Judy, with that on other vaccines, other than the question about – I don't want to speak for you all, but we're going to be good role models. How do you square the fact that the first set of doses won't be enough to cover the entirety of the healthcare community? How do we keep political influence out of this? And security of distribution as well, please?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: First, let's start with the doses. You're absolutely right 130,000 we expect to get by the third week in December, followed perhaps two weeks later by another 130,000. That number may change. We're hoping it will go up. Shortly after that when Moderna gets released, we'll get 100,000 doses of Moderna, in the same type of cadence, another 100,000 probably two weeks later. We are expecting about 460,000 doses.

If we look at all the paid and unpaid healthcare workers, not only within a hospital but in our communities, really it is about 650,000 individuals. We have a professional advisory and health equity committee that has met twice a week, mostly twice a week, since March. One of their tasks was to put together a prioritization framework that can be followed by all of the vaccine sites. The initial sites will be our hospitals, as I've shared. That prioritization framework is right now at the Governor's Office for review and will be released before we get the first doses.

It's based on equity. It's based on transparency, justice, you know, ethical principles that take into consideration the social vulnerability index of individuals, where they live, access to nutrition, it's the John Hopkins framework, a whole host of social vulnerability issues. They've done a great job. They have been three hours a week, every week, since March, looking at this, so that will come out soon. Hopefully, followed by Moderna, there will be more but we have heard that by the end of January, we should get on a rolling schedule 1.1 million doses a month. Very shortly, we'll be able to vaccinate not only all the healthcare workers, internally to hospitals and facilities, but also those that are working in our communities, essential workers, first responders, etc.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, we should remind everybody and I know Dustin you know this because we've talked about it with you. These are two-jab vaccines, both Moderna and Pfizer. One of them is a 21, Pfizer is 21, Moderna is 28. Anything you want to add, Ed, to that? Okay, thank you. Brent, thank you.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. When you say we'll get 130,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, does that mean it will go to 130,000 people or 75,000 because it involves two doses?

Two, will the State Education Department approved school district plans for a switch to remote learning purely on the basis of community spread as the required reason?

One in seven restaurants had violations in the recent sweep. What would you say to people pushing for indoor dining to reopen when you have problems like that?

What did you make of the hecklers harassing you at dinner the other night? Was that at Char in Red Bank, and was your security detail with you and did they intervene?

From a reader, do you also think it's wrong for Black Lives Matter protesters and even some elected Democrats to call on people to harass Republicans at dinner elsewhere when something like this happens?

Governor Phil Murphy: Say that last one again, sorry.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Do you also think it's wrong that some Black Lives Matter protesters and even some elected Democrats have called on others to press against Republican politicians while out at dinner to shower resistance?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, I hadn't seen that. I think I've got these but stay close, Dante, because I'm not sure I got – so the 130,000, the first question is, is that 65,000 people or 130,000 people who will then get another one? 130,000 people.

Your question on whether or not it goes remote as the potential singular reason could be the status of the area in which the school – yeah, I mean, I think we've tried to balance from the get-go what it looks like inside the school building with what is going on in the community. I think that'll continue to be the case. It got to the point, as you know, in March where we were reviewing, as we did on reopening, we were reviewing every plan as they closed, but it got to the point in March where the levels were unsustainable around the state.

Your question on restaurants, based on the report that the Colonel gave, does this show us some sense of what the future may look like for indoor dining?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Sure, and what do you say to people who are saying, we have to have more capacity for indoor dining? Does this show that might not be possible?

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, it will be possible but I don't see it in the foreseeable future. It's just hard to see it. And again, if there is outbreak, you know, X cases at restaurant X, that's a very specific reality. We haven't had a whole lot of those. But as Judy and Ed and I and Pat have said, when you open up indoor activities you take on, you assume a certain amount of risk, as we've said this before. If you line up all of your habits with

mine, and I've got more indoor habits than you do, the chances are higher that I'm going to be exposed and/or infected. But I don't see our changing posture on indoor dining on the increase side. I also sure as heck hope that we don't have to bring it down. I don't anticipate that, so I hope it stays that way.

I think I've answered the question on the unfortunate dining experience, other than one thing I meant to say. We were dining outdoors. I was eating my food, which is why I didn't have my mask on, Judy, you should know that. And by the way, they were yelling at me and I remembered you banned yelling and singing, so I immediately put my mask on, so that they weren't coming down on me.

Listen, I don't have any background on the last question but this is not the time. This echoes a little bit of what I said to Dustin. This is exactly not the time to be going after each other. Let's just all try to – the stress levels are overwhelming, I get it. We all live it ourselves. You're out of a job, you're out of work, your business is bust, you've lost somebody? Who the heck could blame you for being stressed? But let's not allow that to turn into dividing us even further. Let's try to find common ground.

I've been incredibly rewarded and humbled by the amount of Republicans who have reached out to me since last night and I have spoken to some. I spoke to John Bramnick live, I got a lot of texts and go get them and exchanges and that's Jersey on our best days. We certainly are not always going to agree on policy but when we're up against it, we come together unlike any other American state. I think we wear that all as a badge of honor. Sir.

Reporter: COVID cases are rising fast at long-term care facilities. More than 2,600 residents and 2,600 staffers are currently positive. In 13 counties, more staff than residents are infected. Is the state going to implement additional restrictions? If so –

Governor Phil Murphy: Which county?

Reporter: 13 counties.

Governor Phil Murphy: 13 counties. Sorry, okay.

Reporter: How will this affect visits from family members and is this causing staff shortages?

Can you update us on what's happening at veterans homes? The DMAVA website lists resident status but nothing about current positives among staff.

You have said repeatedly that no FDA-approved vaccine will be released in New Jersey before there's a state level review with the commissioner quote, "kicking the tires." What exactly does this mean? Will the state hold trials of its own, or is this just a data review and who will be involved?

Lastly, what red flags would cause you to hold up distribution?

Governor Phil Murphy: What red flags could?

Reporter: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: okay. Judy, I think these are largely going to be in your neck of the woods, long-term care. You said in 13 counties the cases are up in long-term care homes?

Reporter: 13, more staff than residents infected.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, and any impact on visits, any updates on Veterans homes. Every single day I write down the loss of lives, which has remained at 62 in Menlo confirmed, 62 Menlo Park, 81 in Paramus, and three in Vineland. God bless each and every one of those veterans. There's no solace to a loss of life, believe me, but those numbers have not changed since June 10th. But in terms of cases, I know there's some staff challenges that you had. And then any other comments on state level, I think you've already addressed this, but any other comments on state level processes and procedures in reviewing vaccines.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Let's start with long-term care. Right now in the state, 285 of our facilities are reporting outbreaks, an outbreak being two or more cases in a confined area. We're concerned. We're on the phone with them every week. There will be a call tomorrow and we will be talking about some measures that we're recommending for all long-term care for a period of time to study how this

virus is getting into those congregate living spaces, so more to come on that. The call, I believe it's tomorrow, and we're being extremely vigilant. Some people would say we're being too conservative and that's probably true, and we will be.

As far as a state level review, the professional advisory committee will review all of the information from the advisory groups that are providing their input to the FDA, ISIP being one, the other one another vaccine advisory group. It is not what I would call an independent review. It's looking at two very scientifically based organizations of high reputation and looking at their review and advising the Governor to go forward.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, any specific color on veterans?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have some outbreaks right now. I don't have the numbers in front of me, in our Menlo Park and Paramus homes. We have stepped up the testing, in fact today. Binax will be delivered to both the Menlo Park and Paramus homes. Additionally, the new molecular point of care test Cue will be going out this week, as soon as we get our shipment.

Governor Phil Murphy: Great. We'll update you, Dan, if we've got anything in terms of cases, we'll come back to you. Thank you. Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: The Daily News reported that a report is imminent from Governor Cuomo regarding the Gateway tunnel. The conclusions, if followed, effectively would kill a second tunnel. Your reaction to that?

The second question is, testing in recent days has been very tight with some places experiencing long lines and rapid tests have been in short supply. Do you believe that the testing situation will ease or get only more stressed with the December holidays approaching? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll do the second first. Judy, I think it could potentially get worse. I mean, you saw today that I went through some of the temporary pop-ups, and we had done that on Friday, we'll probably continue to do that. But we believe this entire virus story gets worse before it gets better. And when it gets better, it gets a lot better. We're talking about a vaccine that, you know, when you put AstraZeneca now up, they believe they will be at 90% effectiveness. You put that alongside Pfizer and Moderna, you've now got three independent companies that are all batting at a very high batting average. But I think it gets tougher before it gets better.

The Cue Health rapid turnarounds are going to help. As you mentioned, those are starting to come in within the week. As I said, we're going to continue to make a habit where we can to shine a light on pop-up testing. But I think it potentially could get worse. Because again, we've said this before but it bears repeating. As it relates to both healthcare workers, which is I know the area that Judy is most concerned about in terms of capacities, and testing, the spring was an aberration because no one saw this coming. We were all clobbered. But once we got our capacities together, the turnaround time shrank dramatically until the rest of the country started to go on fire. And then you have got, you know, you've got supply chain issues that are real. I suspect, given how much on fire the rest of the country is, that may well still be the case.

Listen, I put a statement out about this. Any amount of -- I just look at that potential. This is from the so-called London Bridge Associates, I believe, is the name of the company that did it. To me, it looks like alchemy. I mean, with all due respect, we need four tunnels under the Hudson and we need to do it in a way that does not disadvantage and further impact the lives and the experience of the commuters from New Jersey under the Hudson to New York. It is crystal clear what we need. We need four tunnels. By the way, the two tunnels we have, built 1910, Pat, that was a year or two before you joined the State Police. Let's build two new ones, as the plan has always been, and then rehab the two old ones so at the end of the day, we have four tunnels and we do it in a way where we're not making our commuters any more miserable than the commute to New York City has been. We're still digging out of the fact that ARC got canceled a decade on and we are paying an enormous price for that. Thank you for those. Alex, we'll go to you and then we'll come on down to Dave.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Thank you, good afternoon. For Commissioner Persichilli, how closely will you be watching the five to seven days after Thanksgiving when any sort of virus spread at Thanksgiving could be incubating? What will be the indicators, the red flags that you're looking for during that period?

For the Governor, to follow up on a question asked by the other New Jersey Network last week, what level of reopening are we at? Are we at level two? Are we back at level one? Or have we jumped the level system altogether?

For Colonel Callahan, it was asked before but I just would like an answer from you. Where was the Governor's security detail during that confrontation at the restaurant? I know it was very quick but were they there? Did they step in?

And for you, Governor, lastly on this, you know, we're all glad that you're taking this in stride, you say you're a big boy with a thick skin. But your message of simply saying that we shouldn't aggravate each other. There are a lot of people out there who might want to hear something stronger from you, especially in regards to what happened in Pittsburgh and DC over the summer where diners were being harassed by activists. And specifically, there are progressive supporters of yours watching right now who might be tempted to treat a Stephen Miller or a Steve Bannon or a Jared Kushner, Jersey resident, the same if they're out dining and they run into them, with or without their family. What is your message to progressives? Is your message simply don't do that? Is there a stronger message you have?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, post-Thanksgiving. Judy and Ed, we've got to get Ed out of the bullpen here, Ed. This is two days in a row you've been here. We've got to get you some reps. All kidding aside, this is a big weekend coming up. What period are you looking at and what are you looking for within that period?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: The incubation period, as we know, can be up to 14 days. So yes, five to seven days after would be when we would begin to expect to see an increase of cases if we could, if we do see them, and the following week after that as well. And basically what we're going to be looking for is just that, a bump up overall in cases. Unlike in schools, or gyms or restaurants, we're not going to likely get that. These are much more likely going to be happening in people's homes where it's not going to be as easily seen that that there was a specific outbreak associated with a particular place. We're going to be looking for that general increase in numbers over that time period.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think you used the word level, Alex, I think it's phase, we've used the word phase. I think we're somewhere sort of in the late two to early three and we're stuck there for the time being. I don't anticipate any meaningful amount of opening or loosening of our parameters anytime soon. It doesn't bring me any joy to say that but we're in the thick of it right now. And I'm also hoping likewise, to Ed's point, you've got a lot of private setting transmission. If somebody wants to take it out on gyms by closing gyms when we don't really have the data to support that, that's not something we're going to do either, please God.

Pat and I both agree and this is a new -- we're not going to comment on security other than to say, I'm incredibly humbled and honored to be spending every day of my life with the extraordinary representatives of the New Jersey State Police. They're as good as they can be.

I'm going to stay with where I am, Alex. I don't think this is the time we should be teeing off on people, and that goes for both sides. You can imagine what I think of at least a couple of those folks that you mentioned. That cannot be what we're about right now. I understand the frustration, both from my beliefs and folks who are on my side of the aisle and I see it on the other side, even though I don't agree with a lot of the policy pieces. This is not the time to be taking it out on each other. Again, I'm a big guy. I'm not worried about me, and I think I could speak for my wife. But the collective reality right now, this is a nation that's been ravaged, torn in two. We're going through a once-in-a-century pandemic, economic hardship unlike anything we've faced -- again, 1930s, 1860s. Those are the two comparisons. Those are not good periods to be comparing yourself to.

And on top of that, we haven't talked as much about this lately, the national moment of reckoning, coming face to face with the stain of racism. There's a lot of moving parts right now and I think we should err on the side of giving each other the benefit of the doubt. Thank you. Dave, you're going to close us out.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Thanks, Governor. On the significant rise of COVID cases we've seen in the previous several weeks, we do have Thanksgiving coming up. Commissioner, you touched on this idea of the importance of, I think you'd said wearing a mask but specifically you mentioned opening windows to have ventilation. Could you and perhaps Dr. Ed, and you Governor as well comment on how significant can this really be? If people -- even if they have a couple of people, including a kid coming home from college, maybe

there's a neighbor that they are with all the time and they talk to them, they're going to have them over because otherwise they're going to be alone? That's the reality. We don't want people to gather, as you're saying, but how significant can these steps, social distance, masking, and specifically the ventilation system in your home by just opening a window, how significant can that be?

Governor, you encouraged people to reach out for mental health counseling if they feel stressed or freaked out. If they feel funny, embarrassed or ashamed to do that, what would be your advice to them? What's your message? Do you have to give your name and address? Are you going to be identified if you call for mental health counseling or can you do this anonymously?

Final question, the vaccine schedule that you've laid out, how significant, the fact that we think we're going to be getting a fairly significant amount of vaccine pretty quickly, how significant will this be in terms of a timetable to start turning this whole thing around? You've previously said in the April timeframe we could have a much better result than we're seeing now. Could this be bumped up or back, I guess to February, if the vaccines are as effective as we think they are going to be and people start to take them, could we start to see a real turnaround quicker if in fact, this takes place? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dave. Listen, I've said this before, when we're indoors, we don't sit at the same table as our kids. I know that sounds kind of crazy. We do more outdoors but if you go back to this infamous incident, you'll see I was sitting in the end beside my wife, even then.

Ventilation matters, right? We have our windows open. It's a little chilly, I have to admit, but it matters. Right, Ed?

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Well, not a perfect analogy. Imagine you're in a room with a smoker. What can help get rid of that smell so you don't smell it so much? Well, you can be further apart from them. That's obviously a very good thing. You can open the window, the more air that's flowing, the more it's blowing that smoke out, the better that's going to be. You can have that fan on, that can help also just dissipate that smoke throughout the house. All those things will help. None of those things are perfect. The most perfect thing is not to be in the room with a smoker or in the analogy, the person with COVID in the first place.

Governor Phil Murphy: I would stress absolutely the ability to be anonymous as it relates to those numbers I put up there. It's a great question because it allows me to say, don't not pick up the phone because you're worried you're going to be ratted out or someone's going to know who you are. That won't happen. And again, they're professionals in their lives. This is not press one if you want X or press two if you want Y.

I personally, Judy, tell me how you feel about this. I'm personally not of the opinion that we move that timeframe up just because this is enormously complex and for everybody to get two – I'm where I am for two reasons. Complex and two jabs on the one hand. And secondly, on the other hand, weather. I'm now a big believer that the longer we're indoors, the tougher this is. When you do the math of how many you think you're going to be getting a month, you look at 70%, you then look at when it might get a little bit warmer to be able to be outside again, I'm still April/May. But Judy, weigh in.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: In order to vaccinate 70% of the adult population in New Jersey, which is about 4.8 million individuals, we have to have vaccination sites open six days a week and do about 67,000 vaccinations a day to complete that 70% in a six-month period. Now put that together with, you get your first vaccination shot, it takes you a couple of weeks to build up an immune response, then you're ready for your second shot, and to get your maximum immune response, another couple of weeks. Then, at the end of the day, if we can only get vaccination sites up five days a week, we have to vaccinate 87,000 people a day in New Jersey, or about 3,200 to 3,500 people a day in every county.

It's a big undertaking. You need to register, you need to make sure people get the right education about the vaccine, you need to actually put the shot in the arm, you need to have 15 minutes of observation afterwards, then you need to get a card and make sure you call everyone back for the second dose. So logistically, six months is probably a pretty aggressive timetable.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. Thank you, Ed. Thank you both for everything. Pat, likewise. Parimal. We never found Jared, that concerns me. Dan, thank you. I want to give my sister Jan a Happy 70th Birthday if she's watching, a retired Balsa City school teacher.

Listen, I don't want to beat the drum here more than it needs to be beat. This is a big week, folks. This is a really, really big week. It's almost an inflection point. I think it's the front end of the holiday season that'll last basically five, six weeks. It's the quintessential American holiday, which means nobody does it like we do it. No one does it, period. When I was in Berlin, the biggest holiday for the Germans to understand and come around our table for was Thanksgiving, because no other country in the world has a holiday like this one. We've just got to find a way, folks, to both respect that extraordinary American holiday but do it responsibly. Particularly the number of people together and avoiding multigenerational gatherings on the inside, at least, are the two specific pieces of advice. Keep it in single digits and keep this as far from multigenerational gathering as possible.

And again, this is not forever. We're going to get through this. This is a matter of months now, not years. And next Thanksgiving, I believe, looks a heck of a lot different than this Thanksgiving. So Judy, Ed, Pat, Parimal, Dan, everyone else. God bless you all, Happy Thanksgiving. Be safe.

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