

Governor Phil Murphy

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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. To all of our friends and neighbors in our Muslim community – and we have one of the very largest in the entire United States – Ramadan Mubarak. With me as usual, the woman to my right who needs no introduction. The Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Great to have you both. To my left, a guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have the director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, Chief Counsel, Parimal Garg, and a cast of thousands.

Over the past several days, we reached another couple of critical milestones in our vaccination program as both our five millionth dose was administered, and we surpassed two million fully vaccinated individuals. To all working across the state to administer shots in arms regardless of where you are, whether you're at a megasite, a local health clinic, a community-based vaccination center, one of our federal pharmacy program partners, or any of the hundreds of other sites across the state, from the bottom of our hearts, we say thank you for your incredible and hard work. To every single one of you who has raised your sleeve to be vaccinated, thank you as well, not only for showing your faith in our vaccine efforts but for being role models for those around you.

I'll give you a couple of rankings. We're not patting ourselves on the back, and this is a journey that is not yet complete, particularly as it relates to equity and getting to folks who are hard to reach, but we do – it is a fact – continue to have one of the nation's best performing vaccinations programs. We now rank fifth nationwide in the percentage of our allocation being administered. That bounces around anywhere from three to seven. Either way, it's high, and it's a good ranking. We're seventh in the number of shots administered daily. More than 105,000, by the way, as of last count. 41.5% population has received at least a first dose, and that's good for sixth in the country, and with 28.5% of all New Jerseyans now fully vaccinated, that ranks as ninth. It is important to note if you look at these top ten rankings – again, I'm not trying to pat ourselves on the back Judy, but look at the other states. There are states on there that don't have as many people as Bergen County or Essex County. We are, by any measure, a big state.

Also, among older residents – and I want to clarify the data here – contrary – explicitly contrary to some reporting that came in electronically overnight and then I read in hard copy this morning – according to the latest statistics from the Department of Health, 75.4% of all individuals aged 65 and up have received at least their first dose, and that includes 74.8% of those over the age of 75. For us up here, the continued supply/demand imbalance has been our single greatest challenge over the past several months, and it continues to be, but we have also approached it with the recognition that given the number of doses we've been allocated, it is much better for us to know that there are still many more millions of New Jerseyans eager to get vaccinated. I would much rather be where we are with doses getting into arms nearly as fast as they are arriving than to have millions of doses sitting unused in a freezer.

On Friday, Tammy and I received our first doses. Judy was there right beside me giving me – encouraging me at the Atlantic City megasite, and I know that we're both looking forward to returning in a few weeks to get our second. The entire team at the Atlantic City Convention Center was top notch, and we were extremely grateful for everyone's efforts. By the way, as we sit here, as I speak, the Atlantic City megasite has appointments available, so let me just say this. You can barely feel anything. I know millions who've had this have already said that. You can barely feel the thing. Little bit of soreness in my arm, but that was it. Went for a run on Saturday. The process was just extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary.

If that weren't enough, on the next day, Saturday, I had an opportunity to visit alongside – and I want to take a minute and give a shoutout to some of the folks in front of you there – alongside Mayor Gabe Rodriguez, the vaccination clinic set up in West New York in Hudson County, which is helping meet our goals in that part of the state. This is an important one because West New York is an overwhelmingly Latino community and community of color. That's Gabe on my left. That's Mike Maron, the CEO of Holy Name Medical Center, who Judy knows well, down from Bergen County to set this shop up. Boy, did they do a great job. That's to Gabe's left his commissioners in West New York, and then to Mike's right are his – combination of his team and a couple of elected – really important elected officials. Angelica Jimenez is there in the blue coat, and she's a great assemblywoman, and all the way to the left is Weehawken's mayor Rich Turner and Albio Sires his chief of staff. That was a really good second vaccine visit.

With this morning's numbers, our chart on our vaccination page at covid19.nj.gov/vaccine is tallying at nearly 2.2 million fully vaccinated individuals. This means that we're roughly 47% of the way to our initial goal of 4.7 million vaccinated individuals who live, work, and study in New Jersey by the end of June. As a reminder, one week from today, we will remove the final barrier for vaccine eligibility, and all New Jerseyans aged 16 and over will be able to begin making their appointments. From there, it'll be 72 days until June 30th, and I think I can speak on behalf of Judy, Tina, Pat and myself. We are all confident that we will meet our target.

Moving on to some other of the key numbers. We are reporting an additional 2,079 positive PCR, 552 presumed positive antigen test results. That's combined for 2,631 positives. Positivity rate for the 45,456 tests recorded last Thursday, 8.39%. The statewide rate of transmission today is .94, and it's important to note – Judy and Tina will have forgotten more about this than I know – but it's really important that we're back under one. Also, remember that the rate of transmission is calculated using a seven-day rolling average of positive test reports, so this number tells us that we're currently seeing a gradual decrease in the rate of spread. Dan Bryant, we should at some point maybe Wednesday go back to show some of these charts all the way back into March because this graph doesn't tell you a whole lot. We've been at either just above or just below one. That begins on September 1st, but if you were going back to March 1st, I believe that the RT got as high as 5.31. Remember those days. Please God, we never see them again.

In our hospitals, we see relatively stable – and that's the word Judy used earlier on a call – stable numbers over the past several days as well. The number of individuals hospitalized statewide as of 10 p.m. last night, you can see it 2,261, 2,150 of them already have their test results confirming they're positive. 448 of them are in intensive care, 241 on ventilators. Throughout the day on Sunday, 233 live patients were discharged from hospitals across the state while 255 new COVID positive patients were admitted. Again, these are not confirmed, but 29 deaths were reported by our hospitals over that 24-hour period. This is confirmed. Today we also must report with the heaviest of hearts, 27 newly confirmed deaths linked to COVID-related complications. The total number of New Jerseyans we have now lost over the past 13 months is 22,323 confirmed with another 2,573 deaths remaining listed as probable. As we do at this point in our proceedings every day, let's take a minute to honor the lives of three more of those we've recently lost.

Let's begin today by remembering Fairfield's George Volpe, Sr. George was 82 years old and a long-time Essex County resident after having first moved to Lyndhurst with his wife after their marriage more than 58 years ago. With an educational background in chemistry and service as a military medic and through his own strong will, some might call it stubbornness, he started his own fragrance and flavor company Penta International back in 1976. Penta continues to this day as a New Jersey company, and that is because of George's singular efforts and commitment. As successful as Penta is, however, George would say his greatest legacy was his family that he and his wife Grace – right there with him at his side – raised in the Garden State, and which now survives him, which besides Grace includes his two sons, George, Jr., and Mark, and their wives Evelyn and Sandy, respectfully, and his daughter Christine and her husband Joseph, and his beloved granddaughter Nicole. He is now united with his grandson Joey who passed away three years ago, bless his heart, at the age of 20.

I spoke with wife Grace and daughter Christine on Wednesday, and you can't make this up. God bless them, they had just buried George, and they took the call from the mausoleum at the cemetery and insisted on staying on the line, so bless them and bless him. We are honored that George made his success in New Jersey and contributed to our strong reputation as the best state to live, work, and raise a family. We thank him for his service to our country. May God bless you, George, and watch over you and your incredible family.

Next up, we honor Dr. Uma Chaudhuri from Ridgewood. Born and educated as a doctor in her native India, she came to the United States in 1980 to further her career in psychiatry through residencies at several hospitals in New York. From the start and through the caring way in which she approached everyone with equal respect, she became a trusted provider to countless individuals over her career. The attributes which served her well as a medical professional also did so away from work as she put aside her practice to raise family and make her home a safe place for people to gather and stay awhile. Dr. Chaudhuri was 76 years old.

She leaves behind her husband, Dr. Biman Roy – Dr. Biman Roy, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday, and their daughter Sumona. She also leaves behind her siblings and numerous nieces and nephews and countless friends, not only here in New Jersey but across the country, back in India, and in the United Kingdom. As we have said many times, everyone who comes to this country brings their own definition of their American dream from beginning – or becoming, rather, a successful doctor, a loving parent and aunt, and a respected long-time member of the Ridgewood community, we hope Dr. Chaudhuri would say she found hers in New Jersey, and may God bless her memory.

Finally, this Monday we remember Dr. Julia Miller known to many if not most as Judy. She was a pioneering educator and a giant in Montclair and the surrounding communities. We lost her at the age of 92. Born in New York, her early experiences foretold a life of service. Get this one, Judy. Whether it was being offered a ride home – literally, a ride home from the settlement house where she was volunteering by none other than Eleanor Roosevelt or being mentored as an underclassman at Brooklyn College by an older student who would make her own mark in history – Shirley Chisholm. Following the Newark Uprising of 1967, Dr. Miller was appointed by Governor Richard Hughes to his Select Commission on Civil Disorders that studied the underlying issues that led to those events. With those experiences she would help found the Black Studies Department at Seton Hall University where she also taught as a professor for 20 years.

Near the end of her teaching career, she received a Fulbright Grant to teach students in the People's Republic of China about the civil rights movement. This, as it would turn out, would correspond literally while she was there with the Tiananmen Square Uprising, and her students implored her also to teach them the movement's anthem "We Shall Overcome." How's that? Upon her return to New Jersey, she would serve at the New Jersey State Director of Communities and Schools and sit on numerous community and statewide nonprofit and philanthropic boards including the Turrell fund, which is committed to lifting up children from underserved communities. She was also a founding member of the New Jersey Amistad Commission and the NJ Association of Black Educators. Judy's now reunited with her beloved late husband Donald, whom she had lost in 1993 after more than 40 years of marriage.

She is survived by her sons Eric and Craig, and I had the great honor to speak with both of them at the same time on Wednesday, and their spouses Lynn and Shawn, as well as by her three grandchildren, Abayo, Marley, and Trent, step-granddaughters, Nicole and Erica, and great-granddaughters Kay and Sophie. She also leaves her sisters Olga and Martha and numerous nephews and nieces including a dear friend State Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, and I have Mila as well as a dear friend in the Democratic Party Levon [Biebler] Johnson in Burlington County to thank for bringing Judy's life and passing to our attention. May God bless Judy, and we thank her for a lifetime of service to our state and to our civic life and ongoing dialogue. She will not be forgotten. Nor will we ever forget any of those we have lost to this virus. We continue our fight to end this pandemic in their memories and in solidarity with those they have left behind.

Moving on. A couple other quickies here. Today, the largest public school district in the state, the Brick City, Newark, switched from being an all-remote schedule to a hybrid schedule. This means that for the first time in more than a year, Newark schoolchildren and educators are getting together in their classrooms. I again applaud Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, Newark Superintendent of Schools, Roger Leon, and Newark Teacher's Union President, John Abeigon for their efforts to get New Jersey students and educators safely and responsibly back to school. This transition is also being seen in other districts statewide, so here's the rundown. Today there's 165 districts are back for all in-person instruction. That covers, by the way, 144,500 students. That is an increase of roughly nine schools or districts and 21,000 kids from last week.

Another – I want to make sure I've got my math right – roughly 810,000 students across 496 districts are open for hybrid instruction, and that includes now Newark. This is an increase of about 64,000 over last Monday. A lot of that's coming from Newark. We know there were districts across the state which purposely reopened coming out of spring break last week in either a hybrid or all-remote stance out of precaution and who are now moving forward or moving up to the next level today. We are living that in our household as we speak. This leaves roughly 323,000 students and 118 schools or districts still on an all-remote schedule, and many of these are actively working toward

bringing its students back into their buildings on at least a hybrid schedule. That's unchanged since the last time in terms of districts, but it is down – the total remote is down about 40,000 from last Monday. Again, a big chunk of that's coming out of Newark.

Finally, about 76,000 students across 32 districts or schools are in a mix of one form or another. That's a drop of 10 schools or districts and 45,000 students, but all totaled, there is now unmistakable movement back into our classrooms, and I know that for students and educators and for moms and dads and countless families, this is a tremendous positive sign and a great relief. I applaud everybody associated with this beginning with the continuing efforts of Acting Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan and her team in working with our education communities.

Now finally for today for me, and as we usually do, I'd like to note another of the communities which has partnered with the Department of Community Affairs headed by the one and only Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver through its Neighborhood Preservation COVID-19 Relief Grant Program, and this time we're in Keyport in my home county, Monmouth County. Keyport was a recipient of a 423,000-dollar grant that it has put toward downtown-wide improvement projects and direct grants to 48 small businesses, which have helped these owners stay current on their rents or mortgages, to pay for their utilities or you name it.

Nearly half of Keyport's downtown businesses qualified for one of these grants, and one of them was a famous one, Gerber Salon, which is co-owned by that woman on the left, Lorraine DeVizia, and Robert Gerber. They opened their doors in historic sea captain's house back in 1987. Next year they'll be celebrating the 35th anniversary of being in business. Through their leadership and business acumen, Gerber Salon has become a nationally renowned salon, and Lorraine and her team continuing education classes for stylists who gather in Keyport from around the world. Thanks to the support of the DCA and the borough's grant, Gerber Salon has been able to reopen to its clients and keep its reputation of excellence alive and well. I had the opportunity last Wednesday to check in with Lorraine and to thank her for her longstanding commitment not just to her clients and team but to the success of Keyport, and you can visit Lorraine and everyone at Gerber Salon either online at the incredibly creative website address of gerbersalon.com or go see them in person, 100 West Front Street in Keyport. I also want to thank the borough of Keyport for working alongside the Lieutenant Governor and her team at the DCA for the betterment of its downtown. This is truly a win-win relationship.

This DCA grant program – we've talked about a number of different communities – is a very cool model. Communities apply for it. They get a big lump sum, and they basically split the amount between community-wide improvements to their downtown districts and then grants to particular, specific small businesses that compete for those grants, and that combination is really good because it's an environmental – what's the downtown area look and feel like, but it's also money directly into the small businesses. I think it's pretty cool. 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. As the Governor shared, we're making great progress in getting New Jerseyans vaccinated. Unfortunately, we will see a slightly lower allocation of vaccine doses from the federal government, particularly with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Last week we received a total of 550,000 of J&J, Moderna, and Pfizer doses. This week we expect about 466,000. It's about 272,000 of Pfizer and 178,000 of Moderna. We received a large infusion of J&J at the end of March, but the sense we have from the federal government is that for the short term, our allocation of J&J will be severely restricted for the next several weeks. J&J drops from 131,000 doses last week to 15,600 doses this week, and the week after that, as far as we know, it may go down to 5,200 doses. Since J&J is going to be scarce, and we want as many people as possible to be vaccinated, please take whatever vaccination is available to you. All three of these vaccines have been found to be safe and effective. They've been proven to reduce severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Please take the first opportunity you have to be vaccinated.

As a reminder, the COVID-19 vaccine is available to all regardless of insurance status and should not require any out-of-pocket expense. As the governor outlined, we've been targeting those 65 and over as this population experience the most severe illness and death. As you know, we prioritized long-term care residents for the vaccines also due to the risks that they experienced living in congregate settings. A recent study of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes found it is highly successful in preventing infections. This research found that the vaccine had an estimated effectiveness of 63% against infection among facility residents after the first dose. This study conducted by the Yale School of Public Health and the Connecticut Department of Health and CDC demonstrates that this vaccine helps protect this most highly vulnerable population.

Increasing vaccination in our state is particularly important given the spread of variants that we are experiencing. As I've reported previously, we are seeing what they call CDC variants of concern in our state, especially the UK variant. A variant of concern is a variant for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease, and increased hospitalizations or deaths. The strain most common in the US and in New Jersey right now is the UK variant B117. This variant is associated with a 50% increased transmission and likely increased severity based on hospitalizations and case fatality rates. The South African variant has about a 50% increase transmission, and the California variants we are seeing about a 20% increased transmission.

Right now, there's a total of 958 reports of CDC variants of concern in New Jersey. 936 of these reports are the UK variant, which has been found in every county in the state at this time. Additionally, we have nine reports of the Brazilian variant P1, two reports of the South African variant B1.351 and eleven reports of the California variant – of the 1.427 and the remainder of the B1.429. Only five of these variant cases have a known travel history. Given the effects of the variants and the effects they are having on the spread of illness in our state and country, it is vital that we continue to mask up, physically distance, wash your hands frequently, avoid large gatherings and get tested if you've been exposed to the virus or if you don't feel well.

Moving on to my daily report, you will see that 2,261 individuals are in the hospitals, and it looks like the hospitalization numbers have stabilized a bit. However, patients on ventilators and deaths have actually increased. Interestingly, 11% of the new hospitalizations over the weekend were between the ages of 30 and 39. 10% were between 40 to 49, and 21% of the new hospitalizations are between the ages of 50 and 59. Overall, 48% of the new hospitalizations were under the age of 60. This is a shift from our prior experience. Fortunately, there's no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. We have 114 cumulative cases in the state. Two of the children are currently hospitalized.

At the state veteran's homes, there are no new cases among our residents, and I'll remind you that the state veteran's homes have vaccinated over 90% of their residents and almost 70% of their employees. At the state psychiatric hospitals, there's no new cases among the patients. The daily percent positivity as of April 8th in New Jersey is 8.39%, the northern part of the state 8.51, the central part of the 7.99, and the southern part of the state 8.80. That concludes my report. Please stay safe. Continue to mask up. Maintain social distance. Stay home when you're sick. Get tested, but most of all, get vaccinated for yourself, for your loved ones, and for your community. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, two quick – first of all, thank you, but two quick underscores on vaccines. Number one, you said it. Let's just say it again. All three of these vaccines are good, so don't get choosy, folks. Just get whatever you can get. They all work. Secondly, J&J was explicit over the weekend that they would still be able to achieve their 100 million dose production by the end of June but clearly it's going to be back-ended within that period of time. That allows us to have the confidence that we have while the next few weeks feel like they're going to be lighter than we would like, for sure. As we look at our objective of by the end of June getting 4.7 million vaccinated, adults, we feel confident and comfortable to continue to say that. For all of the above, thank you.

Pat, what do you got? It feels – first of all, you got to work on the weather. We got to warm this place up here a little bit, which would certainly help us at many levels. You and I were having this discussion earlier. Compliance – and it's not like we've stopped enforcing. Compliance has generally been very good of late, and any color you've got on that? You look at some of the tragedies around the country, it probably only increases your passion to have – to be able to put on the field not just the best but the most diverse group of troopers coming up through the ranks as possible. Would love to give you another shot to promote shamelessly signing up to be a New Jersey State Trooper. For all of the above, good to have you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thanks, Governor To your point about compliance, it has overall been very well. We have calls throughout the week with our law enforcement leaders throughout the state. The Attorney General and I will be hosting one that we call State Stat in a few weeks. That's with major cities as well as some smaller towns to get the full scope of eyes and ears on the ground. Compliance has been overwhelmingly phenomenal and to your point about this online process that's open for us, as of this morning, we had just over 1800 qualified applicants, which is historically low. I think I've mentioned it before. In years past, that would be 15 to 20,000 people and although the demographics are doing well with 55% of those candidates minorities and 45% white, it's not enough. We need to make sure that we have qualified and diverse candidates. Even in the last week, from you, Governor, on down, the Attorney General and I briefed the Legislative Black Caucus last week. The Cabinet's assisting, our interfaith community leaders, so we have 11 days left in this online application process, njtrooper.com. All the information is there. It's a relatively simple process, so it is a call to action that we've talked about before. I think the young men and women, when they look around the country and they see things that are going on and question it, I think it's time for those to step up and be a part of igniting change to make sure that those relationships – the police are the public and the public are the police and that's certainly – that certainly holds true in 2021. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Pat. I wonder – Judy, I actually don't know the answer to this question Perhaps you do and if not, maybe Dan can help me figure out – help Judy and me figure it out. I wonder what applications to nursing schools look like right now.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I think they're up.

Governor Phil Murphy: They're up?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, they're definitely up.

Governor Phil Murphy: Interesting. Thank God, by the way, right? You just – a year like – we can't underestimate the impact that the past 13 months is going to have on the generations to come for decades, right? Whether it pulls people toward or away for particular careers, how it's going to impact their own physical, mental health going forward, it's going to be fascinating for sure, right? Pat, thank you. Njtrooper.com, singular?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Yes, sir.

Governor Phil Murphy: Njtrooper, I always get that mixed up, njtrooper.com. Sergeant Mario would be mad at me if I didn't say that. So I think we'll be on our regular rhythm this week, so we'll be on the road tomorrow. I don't think we've got a COVID. As far as I can recall, we're not on the road doing COVID. I think we're on the road doing a bill signing trying to put some more money into the state. Then Wednesday we'll be back at our usual time, 1 o'clock, and then we'll see how the rest of the week goes. That make sense?

Q&A Section

Matt, we'll start with you because you were kind enough to come out twice today, not just once.

Matt Arco, NJ.com: Good afternoon. Commissioner, on the variants, how much testing is now being done on each new positive case? Is it still that 2 to 5% of each positive case as we've discussed in the past? Or has it increased, excuse me? Are there projections on just how prevalent these variants are in the state based off the limited testing? Commissioner, I was also wondering if you would – latest age breakdown of new cases. Are you seeing any trends? Is it maybe younger folks or is it different?

Governor, do schools for graduations have to abide by the 200-person outdoor limit, or can they use the 30% limit for outdoor stadiums? Should schools be scrapping any hope of having proms either indoors or outdoors, or do you plan to update any guidance before time runs out on the school year? Finally from Brian Thompson, given counties are using virtually all their vaccines as they get them, why is it that both Morris and Bergen Counties have more than 36% of the adult population vaccinated while Hudson County just has 22%? Brian asked that the percentage gap is smaller for elderly vaccinated population according to CDC numbers published yesterday. Why did Hudson get so few doses?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I'll have a couple thoughts and then throw it open to you if it's okay. We're assuming – I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I think you've said this, that the variants, in one form or another, are the prevalent form of the virus right now. You'll have some update on the testing. I think the answer's unequivocally – Judy I think said this on hospitalizations and I assume it has to be on test results that this is going to a younger demographic, right? Judy can weigh in on that as well.

We definitely will be updating guidance on graduations and proms. I'll be very surprised if our numbers don't go up. The 30% works as long as the venue has how many seats, 2500?

Parimal Garg, Chief Counsel: Twenty-five hundred or more.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, so the 30% is operative assuming it's a 2500 and up outdoor arena. It's 20% if it's an indoor 25 up indoor arena. I'll be very surprised – I think you'd join me on this – that we're not going to be updating this guidance and I hope expanding but not yet. Listen, I think we've been – Senator Menendez said it and we said he was right; we agree with him. Part of the reason I was in west New York on Saturday, Hudson County has been – this is the densest county in America and it's got a lot of really hard-to-reach communities and people. We're working intensely with them. I think if you look at one week to County X versus County Y or even over a couple of weeks, you might get a distorted sense of that. I think if you look at the equity program that Judy and team are working on, the mobile vans, the faith institutions, the going into hard-to-reach folks, homebound, other individuals, Hudson County is a disproportionate winner in that over the next number of weeks. I'll be surprised if you don't see that – those numbers come into a meaningfully better place.

Judy, any more on variants, the amount of testing we're doing, which forms are prevalent? I assume you agree that the virus generally has gone to a younger demographic.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Definitely our testing shows that the younger demographic account for most of the highest percentage of the test. I'm going to let Dr. Tan talk about the variants and what they're finding.

Governor Phil Murphy: Tina, we could not bring you here and not give you your money's worth. Shame on me for not pulling you out of the bullpen earlier.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: No problem. Just specifically right now, we're seeing about 30%, for example, of our cases in the 30 to 49 age range just to give you a sense of what the Commissioner was saying, that we're shifting toward a younger demographic. That's the majority of the cases that we're seeing right now in those working age category. As far as the variants are concerned, our laboratory, our public health laboratory in conjunction with commercial labs across the state as well as the country and in conjunction with CDC's national

strain surveillance program, we're testing hundreds of specimens every single week because the intent is that we want to be able to detect the emergence of these new variants as best as possible. This gives us a good sense of what proportionately we're seeing not only here in New Jersey but nationwide.

We would encourage you also to take a look at some of the data on a national level. We're one of several states where B117 is more of a predominant variant. Nationally over a quarter of the variant cases are the B117 variant. Here in New Jersey, the majority of our variant cases are B117 so there's a little bit of variation depending on what data set you're looking at.

Governor Phil Murphy: I had two comments, Matt. Again, correct me if you all see this differently. I guess one really – one overarching comment, there's no data that suggests the basic stuff we've been doing and now the vaccines against the variants are not effective. Knowledge is incredibly important and obviously knowing as much as we can, particularly in the epidemiological world that Tina oversees is incredibly important, but the data so far is keep doing this. Keep being away from each other. Keep complying if you're in an establishment. Get your shot. If you don't feel well, take yourself off the field and at the right point, get tested. There is a lot of comfort notwithstanding these variants that the overwhelming evidence to date says that basic stuff is still what the doctor ordered, worth repeating that. Thank you.

Dustin, how are you?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. You just touched on this with the Johnson & Johnson, but I just want to follow up. How much of a setback is that dwindling supply for the state's vaccination efforts, and why do you feel assured that you'll be able to meet the goal of 4.7 million fully vaccinated people by June, by the end of June? Do you have any assurances on the numbers of doses the state will receive to make up for the decrease the next couple weeks to reach that goal? Since the three waves of vaccinations at nursing care facilities by CVS and Walgreens, how will newer residents at these facilities get vaccinated? We have reports where some newer residents who've been there for over a month are not getting vaccinated, and the facilities were told that pharmacies would not come in until at least ten new residents or staff need vaccinations. Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Dustin. On the first one, I rolled this number out at the end of the week. You and I had a meeting with some legislators in the Senate. If our objective is to – first of all, J&J has said – so one thing we're relying on is J&J, and the White House I think has supported their statement that they will still be able to achieve 100 million doses of production by the end of June. We have to – at this point, we have to take that on its face. Secondly, if 4.7 million people are needed to get to our objective by the end of June – I asked Judy the other day what she thought of – how do you feel about a million J&J doses between today – this was as of Friday or Thursday, April 8th at that point, and June 30th. Is that a reasonable number and recognizing – I think you and I calculated it. We're already up over 200,000 cumulative J&J that's already been administered. I think you thought – I don't want to put words in your mouth – that that still was a reasonable objective. If you back that 1 million out and everyone else is on a two-shot regime, if you bear with me on the math, you have to get to 8.4 million shots. We just feel as we sit here today very comfortable between expected J&J and the continued production out of Pfizer and Moderna, that that total of 8.4 million, a million J&J and 7.4 million Pfizer and Moderna, are well within our reach. Frankly, I hope we do better than that but that's where we are on that.

Judy, the second question is a good one because we just had this conversation when the federal partnership program ends between CVS and Walgreens, the arrangements that they're going to make for those long-term care facilities for new residents and new staff.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, the federal government has contracted with the GPOs, the group purchasing organizations that supply pharmaceuticals to the long-term care industry. There's two main ones, MHA and I'm going to say Innovatrix. I think that's how they pronounce it. They then will be contracting with the independent pharmacies that already serve long-term care. All of the long-term care facilities will be covered on an ongoing basis. Hopefully more employees will want to get vaccinated and the local – their independent pharmacies will take care of that, and also new admissions or readmissions that've not been vaccinated yet or those that are in active outbreaks and have not been vaccinated and need follow-up vaccination.

Governor Phil Murphy: Just to repeat something that we've been saying, you've been saying for a couple weeks, if you were to look right now at holes in our plans, I personally am not of the opinion that the anti-vax block is going to be significant enough to come close to prevent us from getting a 70%. There's going to be some folks, clearly, but that's not going to be as big a number as we feared. I think the biggest hole – you and I talked about this earlier – continues to be long-term care staff, right? That's still the biggest hole, and to the credit of the veterans' homes, not in the vets' homes. Their number are much stronger, and that's something we just got to continue. I know Judy and team are pounding away on that, but that's something that's got to change. Thank you, Dustin.

Do you have anything, sir?

Reporter: Thank you. For the Colonel, how many state troopers have been fully vaccinated so far? Do you have the power to order your troopers to be vaccinated and if so, will you? Lastly, have you heard any reports of vaccine hesitancy among law enforcement across the state? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well, I know there's some vaccine hesitancy probably in every community in the state. There just isn't the level that we were fearing, and I just know anecdotally that that's the case in law enforcement as well. That's the case we have heard in long-term care. We've got to break through that. Pat, any color on that or do you want to get back on the number?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: We did ask every trooper and civilian member that's been vaccinated, we asked them to let our medical services bureau know so I could follow up with you. I don't have the number off the top of my head. I do not have the ability to unilaterally mandate that troopers get vaccinated, although it's my hope that they do given their role in protecting the public. I'll follow up with you on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. David, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, Governor. First a non-COVID question if I may. New York congestion pricing, what is your opinion of it? Opponents including some of our Congress representatives say it's extremely unfair to New Jersey residents and it could wind up costing commuters thousands of dollars a year. Have you talked to Governor Cuomo about this? If not, will you? Is this something that can be stopped?

I believe you're probably aware there's a report of a man who got the J&J vaccine five weeks ago, then wound up getting COVID. Now he's in the ICU. Obviously we don't know the specifics here, his medical history and so forth, but are you concerned that this could cause panic or hesitancy in some people to wonder about getting vaccinated?

Finally, do we have any idea why compliance has been so good lately? It has been suggested that it's perhaps because Governor and Colonel, your good looks and charming personalities. Would you think that that's the case? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Without question. A couple things: congesting pricing, any scheme that discriminates against New Jersey commuters will not be supported by me or by our Administration. God willing, that's something we can work out peacefully and I'm very optimistic we can. There were a couple elements of the plan originally – and by the way, bless our Congressmen for standing up and being so forceful; I applaud them. One was a loophole that covered the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels but didn't cover the George Washington Bridge, which makes no sense. Secondly, frankly, the proceeds from this pricing scheme – if New Jersey's folks are paying into this a lot of money, we deserve to get a fair amount out. We've spoken to the Cuomo Administration at length over the past. Since I've come into office, I've not spoken to him personally about it of late, but that's something we're going to be

vigilant on. Listen, God willing we get to a peaceful resolution because in many respects, as one side of the Hudson goes, the other side goes. New York City's dear to us and I think we are to them. God willing we get to a peaceful resolution. If we can't, which I hope we will be able to, we have means by which we will exercise our power and we will do so.

I'm not aware of this J&J person. Perhaps Judy and Tina are, but I'm not. Assuming it's true for a moment and again, not knowing the details, there are so few cases in Jersey, in the country, in the world where someone's been infected after a vaccine. I just would not want anyone out there to assume that that's the norm because it isn't. There's no data at all that suggests that, but I'll come back to Judy and Tina in a second.

I think on compliance, it's a combination of both sides, Pat. It's proprietors who overwhelmingly from day one were and continue to do the right thing I also think it is customers who overwhelmingly know a good situation, a safe public health situation when they see one versus one that isn't. I think people really get it. People are smart. They understand that this thing is easily transmissible. If you're about to walk into a place that's got tables on top of each other and you look around and not a lot of mask-wearing, you vote with your feet. I think there's a combination of both sides of that.

Let me go to Judy on the J&J vaccinated person who's in the ICU and then Pat, any color you got on compliance.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I mean, we're aware of the case. I have nothing more to add to it. It will happen. The efficacy could be close to 100% but there's also a percentage of cases that are either contracted COVID-19 before they got vaccinated or were exposed afterwards and will fall ill. That's about all that I have on it.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a vast minority, is it not?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Oh, yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is not happening.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Very few people are having significant side effects.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, any comment on –

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: I would just add it happened yesterday morning. My wife and I were at a supermarket, and it was torrential down-pouring I watched a woman run all the way across the parking lot without a mask, got into the store, and caught herself, and she didn't want to run back to her car. The woman from the supermarket said, "I got a box of surgical masks right here," so I think it's that self-policing, and I also think that our proprietors have supplies ready to help in order to make sure that compliance continues to happen.

Governor Phil Murphy: Having said that, we enforce aggressively and we will continue to do so. Thank you. Nikita, good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. I have to warn you, I have questions from myself and then two other reports, so this might take a little while.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll see about that.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Senate President Steve Sweeney 15 months ago said that he wanted to reform financial disclosures filed by legislators. There's been no real movement in that time, and I'm wondering whether or not you think it's about time that these reforms start moving and whether or not you still want legislators to use the State Ethics Commission Disclosures used by members of your administration. Separately, your campaign said that petitions filed by Lisa McCormick were fraudulent, and I'm wondering whether or not you will rethink an executive order that allowed electronic petition signatures and whether or not you're certain that electronic petition signatures will still remain allowed for independent candidates filing for the general election.

Then from Brenda Flanagan over at I guess it's NJPBS now, what do you think of Jersey City reopening with its municipal workers back at their assigned desks as early as May? Are you considering reopening offices for state workers? If so, when? Then from Colleen O'Dea over at NJ Spotlight, any comment on the resignation or coming resignation of Correction Ombudsman Dan DiBenedetti. Do you believe his office has been fulfilling its mission over the last year or more? On a similar note, any new insight on whether Corrections Commissioner Marcus Hicks should retain his job given his comments and answers during last week's hearing?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: As promised, that took a while. Nothing new from my perspective on the financial disclosures other than I think more transparency is better than less transparency as a general matter. I don't have a comment specifically on that. I'm on the side the more folks know the better we all are off.

I have no comment on the specifics of the Lisa McCormick petitions, but I continue to think the ability to have electronic petitions filed, at least in this moment in time, continues to be smart. I assume folks overwhelmingly take that responsibility seriously and lawfully. Whether or not it will still be in place for the general, I've got no news on that, but as long as we're in a pandemic and we can do this, I think we should continue to do it.

No comments from Brenda other than we miss her in this August Hall in Jersey City. Steve Phillip's done a great, incredible job during this pandemic. I've been on a lot with him, so I've got no insight in the timing of Jersey City, but it feels like it's going to be getting to a point where we're all going to be revisiting that. That leads me to state workers; I don't have any news on that. My guess is it's only a matter of time here.

Now, will we go back completely to what we looked like before? No, I hope among other things, Judy gets to take a Saturday or Sunday off, God forbid. I mean, some of us have been going in every day, but a lot of folks, rightfully, have been able to do this from home. My gut tells me not just in state workers or Jersey City but talking to businesses as we do all the time, I think the new normal's going to be a hybrid. It's going to be some amount of going to headquarters some amount of days a week, some amount of working from home, and maybe a middle plug-and-play pod. I'm not sure the state government will have that, but I bet a lot of private sector players will have that.

The role – if your question is does the role of ombudsman matter, the answer is yes, it matters. I've got no comment on the personnel matter on the individual leaving or any new news on Commissioner Hicks. That's a position that we take seriously, and I would suspect – we had a conversation this morning that the folks who are responsible for filling that position will be doing so expeditiously. That's clearly an important role but beyond that, no comment on any individual personnel matters.

I think that's it. Again, Judy, Tina, thank you. As always, Pat, Jared, Parimal, Dan. Again, have I spoken correctly? We'll be on the road tomorrow but not COVID, and we'll be back here at 1 o'clock on Wednesday. I would just say keep doing the right thing. I mean, it's proprietors, individuals getting their shots, doing the smart public health stuff. It feels like we are – Judy, I'm going to use the word stable, which I think is the word you used, as opposed to turning a corner but it feels like it's within us to turn a corner on this plateau that we've been living with for the past four to six weeks. We only get to do that if everybody gets there together. To each and every one of you, many thanks and God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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