

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: September 30th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. Before we get started, I need to send a huge congratulations to this group of young men from Brick Township who are the 2020 New Jersey Little League State Champions. Mayor John Ducey sent me this photograph yesterday. In any other year, they would be preparing for regional play and a chance to head to Williamsport, Pennsylvania but with the cancellation of this year's Little League World Series, this win marks the end of their season. Regardless, we congratulate each and every one of them on winning Brick's first state title in exactly 30 years. Congratulations to them, the coaches and every team who took the field this summer.

I am joined as usual by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. I apologize to him but we have relegated the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz to the front row seat, great to be with you, Ed. To my far left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We are also joined and honored to have him back, the guy to my left, the Interim Commissioner of Department of Education, Kevin Deemer. Kevin, great to have you, as well as two to my right, another familiar face, our Chief Policy Advisor, Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis. We have Jared Maples, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, in the cast of a few here with us today.

The Department of Health, and Judy will talk about this, is today unveiling a new dashboard to report instances of in-school transmission in each county and the numbers of coronavirus cases identified with these instances. This dashboard is going live on our information hub at covid19.nj.gov. Again, that's the

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master account at covid19.nj.gov. In creating this, we have balanced transparency and public information with protecting the privacy of those in our school communities.

We knew, as we've been saying going in, that there would be positive cases in our schools and our overarching aim remains ensuring that our schools do not themselves become the epicenters of new outbreaks. We have in place the protocols and guidance to ensure that when identified, a case is removed as quickly and carefully as possible from the building environment. Again, Judy will give much greater detail into the dashboard in a few moments, and Kevin and Zakiya will speak to the overall progress of the new school year in all of its various forms across the state. Kevin will give some prepared remarks, and Zakiya is here to answer any questions.

So far, the reopening of our schools has progressed smoothly and in accordance with the plans the districts submitted to the Department of Education and Kevin, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it's about what we expected. Over the past three weeks, we have had minimal disruptions reported and as I alluded to moments ago, any identified cases of coronavirus have been quickly dealt with to minimize the potential for in-school spread.

Across the state, as you can see, of the 802 completed reopening plans, 403 of our regular school districts, charter schools, or special services district schools are open for hybrid education. 278 are currently -- and I say currently -- all remote; 81 are open for all in-person instruction, and 40 are using some combination of all of the above across different buildings. Nine districts are still finalizing their written plans, but given where their plans were in the process, all of these schools are open either in person, hybrid or remotely, and are currently serving their students and communities. And in the coming weeks, we know that some of the all-remote schools will be switching to either a hybrid or in-person model as laid out in their reopening plans. In every case, we will continue to work closely with our districts and communities to ensure a safe process. But the dashboard is an important new reporting tool and I thank everybody for their work to bring it together.

Two quick comments before we switch off of this. Remember Kevin, the remote districts had to give you a plan that you were satisfied with, both in terms of what they were remediating and a reasonable date by which they would be back at least to a hybrid format. And so that number should, assuming that other health realities stay constant, that number should go down over time, particularly as a lot of them I know are in or around the end of the first term marking period.

Secondly, Judy, to the White House news we talked about on Monday, having that ability for the school nurse to give that test and get the answer in 15 minutes with 98-plus percent accuracy will be a huge weapon to deploy with our schools. We don't have that yet, that supply of tests is coming. The Binax supplies are coming in the next 10 days to two weeks, but that'll be a game changer.

Okay, switching gears, as it was reported yesterday, the list of states from which travelers to New Jersey are being advised to observe a 14-day self-quarantine period has been updated. Anyone traveling or returning to New Jersey from Arizona and Virginia no longer have to self-quarantine, while we are asking now asking those entering New Jersey from Colorado to do so. The 34 states and territories in red on this map have, over a seven-day -- let's remind you how you get on this list -- over a seven-day rolling average either more than 10 new cases of coronavirus per 100,000 residents or a daily positivity greater than 10%, either/or, again over a seven-day rolling average. Anyone entering New Jersey from one of these states or reentering in the case of our traveling residents, is advised to observe a two-week self-quarantine period and go out and get a coronavirus test. If you've got any questions, visit the website at the bottom, covid19.nj.gov/travel to learn whether you should be self-quarantining and to fill out the Department of Health travel survey.

And finally, before we get to the overnight numbers, I am signing legislation today permanently dedicating each September as Sickle Cell Awareness Month in our state. Sickle Cell is an inherited condition that affects thousands of residents in our state, mostly those in our African American community. Those with sickle cell are also particularly vulnerable, as Judy has discussed and Ed and Tina over the past many months, especially vulnerable to COVID-19. To the individuals and families impacted by sickle cell, especially those who have been also impacted by this pandemic, we are with you.

With that, let's look at the overnight numbers. We are reporting an additional 722 positive test results bringing the statewide cumulative total since March 4th to 205,275. Judy, you'd want me to say, and I know you're going to have a lot more color on this in a minute, the top three counties, Ocean continues to lead with 188 of

those cases. My county, Monmouth 75, Middlesex next, 67. And Judy, looking at the list, it's a pretty sizable drop off to the counties that are below that; Bergen and Hudson each have 45. But for the most part, you've got a lot of teens, including a bunch of single digits. But those are the counties right now, especially Ocean, we'll have more on that later. That's what we're watching very carefully.

Of all the tests recorded on Saturday, September 26th, the positivity rate was 3%. That's the first time we've had a positivity rate back to 3%, according to my records at least, Judy and Ed, since July 17th so just over two months, and Judy will have more color on that and specifically where the numbers are coming from that are driving that. Statewide rate of transmission is 1.15. That's up a hair from the past couple of days.

In our hospitals as of last night, there were 271 COVID positive patients, as well as 208 persons under investigation. That's a total of 479. Of these, 108 were in intensive care, 39 were on a ventilator. We are also reporting, with a heavy heart, nine additional deaths, eight from September 25th to September 28th, and one from way back in mid-April, bringing the total number of our confirmed deaths to 14,335. The number of probable deaths has been adjusted somewhat to 1,787.

There were again, at the risk of comparing apples to oranges, just to give you a spot sense of this, there were eight deaths reported in our hospitals yesterday. And again, those are not included in the numbers you see on the screen.

As we do every day, let's take a few minutes to remember a few of the residents, cherished members of our New Jersey family who have left us because of complications of COVID-19. We begin by remembering Albert Selinka Jr., a resident of Ridgewood in Bergen County for more than a half-century. He had just turned 92 when he passed. Al was born in Eastern Pennsylvania, served in the United States Army in the Pacific Theater in World War II, and came home to attend Penn State on the GI Bill, earning a degree in electrical engineering. Alan and his wife Teresa moved to Ridgewood in the 1950s so he could pursue a job at IBM; a job he held all the way until his retirement in 1989.

Al didn't let retirement slow him down and he dedicated himself to community service. He became a regular volunteer at both Eva's Kitchen in Paterson and the New Jersey Botanical Garden at Skylands in Ringwood, where both he and Teresa are honored with a bench to mark their more than 20 years of service.

When he was at home, Al enjoyed crossword puzzles and fishing. Around town, he easily stood out from the crowd with his bow ties. Al leaves behind Teresa after nearly 65 years of marriage. He's also survived by their five children, Tom, Patti, Jim, Kathy and Susan. Four of them are in New Jersey, one of them in New Hampshire, along with 10 grandchildren and one great grandson. He also leaves his brother Jerry and his daughter Patti, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday. I might add Patti and her family lives in Oakland, and she is married to a gentleman by the name of Phil Murphy. She wanted me to note that Al was always a recognizable face at his grandchildren's events. Al, we thank you for your service to our nation and for adopting New Jersey as your home. May God bless and watch over you and all your family.

Next we stay in Bergen County to recall the Reverend Gladys D. Brinson of Hackensack, Interim Pastor at St. Cyprian's Church there. Gladys fought a tenacious six-week battle with COVID-19. She was 77 years old. She lived a life of faith and was always eager to share her faith, never failing to take a call from a family member, friend or stranger who looked to her for uplifting and inspirational words, day or night, in good times or bad.

Away from the pulpit, Gladys had a 45-year career as an instrument technician at Englewood Hospital, Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck, and at Hackensack University Medical Center. Even after her retirement from Hackensack in 2001, Gladys would often return to provide support and comfort to patients through prayer. She is survived by her husband of over 50 years, Atticus, please keep him in your prayers. He was also COVID positive, and their four children, Atticus, Vanessa with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, Arlena and Monica, and their spouses. She also leaves behind six grandchildren who were her pride and joy. And this one is tough. She is also survived by her mother, Lucille, who is aged 100. Can you imagine that? As well as her brothers and countless other family and friends. We know she has been blessed and is now looking down upon us. We thank her for a lifetime spent in service to her faith and our people. May God bless and watch over her, her husband, her kids, and especially her mom.

And finally for today, we remember Dr. Michael Giuliano of Nutley. Look at that smile. Born and raised in neighboring Bellville, he did his undergraduate studies just down the road at Seton Hall University before earning his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine Degree from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. From there, he launched a successful four-decade practice in Nutley, long enough to serve multiple generations of the same families. He kept practicing his profession right up until he contracted COVID-19.

He will be long remembered by his patients for the compassion that he showed them and for his commitment to their health, and for the extensive collection of Peanuts cartoons that adorned his office walls. He'll be remembered by all who knew him for his kindness, his passion for medicine, and his singular sense of humor. Dr. Giuliano is survived by his wife Mary Lou and their five children: Mary Jane, Sally Anne, Danielle, Michael and Olivia, and their families, including his beloved grandchildren Thomas, Olivia, Derek and Christian. He also leaves behind his brothers Dominic and Kenneth, along with many cousins, friends, and even more numerous and deeply thankful patients.

In his honor, his family established the Dr. Michael G. Giuliano Memorial Fund to support the delivery of vital healthcare services to underserved communities nationwide. How cool is that, Judy? There can be perhaps no better or more fitting tribute. So we thank you, Dr. Giuliano, for your commitment to our state and to the families to whom you dedicated your life, his own and those for whom he cared, may God bless and watch over him and his family.

Three more remarkable lives lived in the name of service, each of them. There are no doubt many more among the nearly 16,000 total lives lost to this pandemic, and through the stories of those like Al Selinka, Reverend Brinson and Dr. Giuliano, we remember and honor each and every one of them.

Next, I want to return, switching gears, to Hackensack to give a much-deserved shout out to the husband and wife team of Yusuf and Tugce Ural, the owners of El Turco Grill Restaurant. Both Yusuf and Tugce were born and raised in Turkey, but met while they were working together in a New York City restaurant. Yusuf has a degree in physical education and Tugce has one in corporate communications, and they combine their skills in creating El Turco Grill. Yusuf bringing a focus on a healthy menu, and Tugce getting the word out to the community. El Turco grill opened its doors -- talk about timing -- December 2019, just a couple of months before the pandemic forced them to close to indoor dining.

To keep their dream alive. They found a partner in the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, which came through with both small business grant funding and an emergency assistance loan. I had the opportunity to check in with Tugce on Monday. I wanted to speak to Yusuf, but where was Yusuf, he couldn't speak to me? He was in the kitchen, as he should be. I thank them for bringing their dream of life to life here in New Jersey. I look forward, I told them living in Germany, where Germany's got probably 3 million or 4 million Turkish-German citizens, it's got an extraordinary Turkish culture, including cuisine, and I fell in love with it living in Germany, I told them I look forward to stopping by the next time I'm up in Hackensack. And by the way, if you're in the neighborhood, it's 270 Main Street.

Finally, a quick reminder that there is still time to respond to the 2020 census, as the counting is not over yet. Take a moment to head the 2020census.gov to be counted or work with the community census taker who knocks on your door and to help us start the next decade off strong. Now, one comment on this. Let's assume that this ends at midnight tonight. So go to 2020census.gov, and it takes 5 to 10 minutes. It's safe, it's quick, it's reliable, it's important.

There's some noise out there, a judge has opined that the President or the Trump administration couldn't cut this short by a month, that we have potentially until October 31st. The Secretary of Commerce yesterday I believe said that he'd give folks until this Monday March 5th. I hope the judge is right. Second place, I hope maybe the Secretary is right. But my view is this: let's hope for the best, prepare for the worst. Get it in today. Today is September 30th. Let's assume it ends today. Please, please, please sign up, 2020census.gov. It's a matter of billions of dollars of federal aid that will go somewhere. Let's make sure it comes here. And we've seen during this pandemic, that aid can be correlated literally with life and death in our state.

That's all for now. Everyone, please continue the work you've been doing to slow the spread of the virus and to keep our communities safe. Now it is my pleasure to hand things over to the guy to my left, the interim Commissioner of the Department of Education, please help me welcome Kevin Deemer.

Interim Education Commissioner Kevin Deemer: Thank you, Governor, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today. As most schools begin the fourth week of instruction, we're getting a clear picture of our progress. Governor, I saw your Facebook conversation with Dr. Fauci last week, and I was pleased to hear the positive remarks about New Jersey schools. A few times Dr. Fauci used the same two words to describe our approach to reopening schools. He said we're doing it prudently and carefully. He added that if we continue with our plan, and if infection levels are kept under control, he said, I quote, "I think you're going to be in good shape."

Governor, I also think your comments to Dr. Fauci were also on the mark, when you made the point that it is not a normal school year. There are going to be cases and our core principles must continue to be safety, high quality education and equity. When the school year began, we all saw images from schools in other states, where students returned to crowded hallways, or they congregated without masks. Here in New Jersey, staff and students are following social distancing rules, they're wearing masks, they're working closely with their local health officials, and they're making safety the number one priority.

Local schools have been taking a careful and prudent approach to reopening as well. Out of the 802 completed school reopening plans, half are hybrid in which students do some remote learning and some classroom instruction; 10% of school districts haven't returned to full-time in-person instruction, and a little over one-third of districts took advantage of the flexibility we offered to start the school year with all-remote instruction. Those all-remote schools are making plans for a return to in-person instruction in some capacity, and some are looking to return to classroom instruction earlier than planned.

Schools have spent the last few months working hard to close the digital divide between those students who have devices to connect with their teachers and those who don't. We put \$54 million towards closing the gap with the digital divide grants. Last week, we announced grant allocations totaling \$100 million to every school district and charter school from the Coronavirus Relief Fund, which will be used to help schools with their reopening plans and for technology.

In addition, schools in New Jersey had \$279 million in CARES Act funding available to spend on COVID-related issues, and we found they're using about one-fourth of the funding for technology.

We understand that some schools have been facing supply chain issues in acquiring devices. Still, we plan to closely monitor the situation until we are assured that all students have access to the technology they need to connect with their classroom.

In the area of student preparation, last week we made the Start Strong Snapshot Assessment available to schools. These assessments, which are free and entirely optional to schools, are another tool designed to give teachers an early indication of the level of support that students may need for the school year.

And finally, we're looking to distribute 2.4 million masks for students throughout the state, courtesy of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Half are adult sized, which generally corresponds with grade six and above, and the other half are for children and adolescents.

As we settle into this school year, we have to keep in mind that we're recreating an entire delivery system of public education. This new system of education needs to be flexible enough to provide in-person and online instruction. There have been obstacles and we'll continue to make adjustments. We still have much work ahead, yet we're light years ahead where we finished last school year. I commend the practitioners who worked in the schools, from teachers and school administrators to support staff such as food service employees, custodians, bus drivers and nurses. I think everyone agrees this isn't easy but day by day, we're getting better and we're providing the education our children deserve. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Kevin, thank you for your leadership. Again, talk about baptism by fire over the past number of months. I was, by the way, very happy to be in Carteret yesterday doing a groundbreaking on a new junior high there and your predecessor, Dr. Repollet was with us, a guy who knows Carteret well. You said something I wanted to say upfront that we've said a lot but I want to reiterate.

Number one, this is not going to be a normal school year. So if you're expecting normalcy, you're going to be disappointed. Having said that, we're sticking to our principles of safety, high quality education, equity, with a big dose of flexibility wrapped around it. And I'd say, so far so good. And that's not to say we're batting 1000.

There are cases, we expected that. The reactions by the districts, the principals, the superintendents have been outstanding. Again, I want to thank our educators, our parents, our kids, staff and administrators who are doing an extraordinary job under very, very unusual circumstances. So thank you again, Kevin, and thanks for being here. Please help me welcome to give some more color on some of the stuff I hit, as well as some other thoughts, 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 I mentioned last week, the local health departments are conducting investigations of cases connected to schools to determine if they are related to in-school transmission. Local health departments are able to determine if a case is associated with in-school transmission by interviewing the individuals who tested positive about where they've been and who they have been in close contact with, and to identify a connection between cases. Today we are updating our dashboard with statistics on confirmed outbreaks associated with in-school transmission, those that are reported to the department. An outbreak is considered two or more laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases among students or staff with onsets within a 14-day period which are epidemiologically linked within the school setting, do not share a household, and were not identified as close contacts of each other in another setting during case investigation or contact tracing.

In-school transmission is considered the transmission of the virus between students and/or school staff that occurs on school property in the context of academic activities. Currently, we are posting that there are 11 confirmed outbreaks linked to in-school transmission that have been verified by the local health departments. The outbreaks are in 11 different schools. There are 43 cases linked to these 11 outbreaks and although we track cases within each outbreak, the outbreaks are actually what drive public health actions, not necessarily the number of cases associated with the outbreak.

As we have covered in the past, the department has issued COVID-19 recommendations for schools that cover steps to take to respond to cases and outbreaks in schools. Much of these decisions are based on what the local public health investigation finds, but we have developed a short matrix, which I have shared with you in the past, to help guide the decision making. If there is one confirmed case in a school, the school can remain open. Any students or staff in close contact with that one case are excluded from school for a period of 14 days. If there are two or more cases in the same classroom, the school can remain open. Any close contacts of the case are excluded from the school for 14 days. Local health officials would make recommendations on whether the entire classroom should be considered exposed.

If there are two or more cases within 14 days linked to an exposure outside of the school setting, the school can remain open. Any close contacts of the case are excluded from the school for 14 days. If there are two or more cases within a two-week period linked together by a school activity, local health officials would make recommendations on whether to close the school based on their investigation.

If a significant community outbreak is impacting multiple staff, students and families served by the school, closure of the school for 14 days should be considered. If there are two or more cases within a two week period that occur across multiple classrooms, and a clear connection between the cases cannot be easily identified, it's recommended that the school be closed for 14 days. And if the school falls in a region with a very high risk on our dashboard, it would be red, a very high risk area according to the department's activity level report, the school should be closed until transmission has decreased.

We have divided the state into regions, as you know, for the tracking of school outbreaks because local health departments have the data and knowledge about the impact of COVID-19 in their communities. That's important because it can inform local planning and response actions. School closure is a local decision that should be made by school administrators in consultation with the local public health officials.

As you know, the department also tracks outbreaks in long-term care facilities in our state. We are still and we remain very concerned about the number of active outbreaks reported in long-term care facilities. Right now it stands at currently 160 of our total of over 600 long-term care facilities, assisted-living facilities and dementia homes. We are tracking the situation in long-term care very closely and being as vigilant as possible. We are currently revising our long-term care directive. Our revised testing guidance will follow the federal guidance and will speak to the use of antigen testing and stepped up visitation.

We know that the long-term care industry is anxious to start using antigen testing. Last week we conducted a webinar for the industry on how to use antigen testing, with over 400 industry leaders. Antigen testing will be used for visitors and staff alike at these facilities. We can expect that directive to be published and posted at the end of this week.

Moving on to my daily report as the Governor shared, our hospitals are reporting 479 hospitalizations of COVID-19, with 108 individuals in critical care; 36% of those individuals are on ventilators. That is a slight uptick over the past 14 days. There are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children.

At the state's veterans homes, the numbers remain the same, as do those at the state psychiatric hospitals.

The daily percent positivity as reported in New Jersey is 3%. That's the highest we have seen since mid-July. The Northern part of the state is reporting 2.73%; the Central part of the state 3.79%; and the Southern part of the state 2.4%. As noted, the positivity rate in Central New Jersey is reported as 3.79. That includes Ocean and Monmouth Counties. Ocean County reported 188 new cases today. 134 of those cases are in Lakewood. As of the 26th, Ocean County reported a positivity rate of 5.44%. As I stated, most of their new cases are concentrated in Lakewood.

Lakewood, as of the 26th, is reporting a positivity rate of 27%. We are working closely with the Lakewood community and religious leaders to increase our testing at the federally qualified health centers in the region and to promote safeguarding initiatives throughout the town. We will be visiting Lakewood this week to meet with religious and community leaders. We will be visiting Ocean County, I should say, and to assess the situation further. That concludes my daily update. Stay safe, and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. A couple, if I can add a little bit more on this. Ocean County is our main focus right now; it's not our only focus, but it's our main focus. I myself was back and forth with a range of elected officials, the Mayor of Lakewood, Ocean County Sheriff, a lot of the faith leaders. Everybody is trying to do the right thing and they've been great partners, but just trying to get our arms around this. I know Pat was on with the Ocean County Prosecutor as well as the Chief in Lakewood and again, we're all in there. Active engagement includes, as Judy said, plussing up of contact tracers and tests.

I'll break news, we're going to be in Ocean County on Friday, instead of here, for our Friday event. We'll be doing it a little bit differently, it's probably going to be more in the vein of a roundtable. We won't have all the fancy trappings with us. Stay tuned in terms of, I think it'll be at one o'clock, Dan, but the details as to where, stay tuned. This is something we're taking very, very seriously. A lot of active engagement and active considerations around the table. So Judy, thank you for that and for all. Zakiya, unless you've got any specific on either Judy or Kevin, I'm going to go to Pat, is that all right with you? Pat, good to have you. Compliance and other matters, and thank you as always for your leadership.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor, good afternoon. No Executive Order compliance issues were reported to the ROIC overnight. And to your point, Governor, I did reach out to Prosecutor Billheimer of Ocean County, as well as Chief Greg Meyer. Because we're seeing, if we're not having compliance issues, and then looking at the positivity rate, and I think the greatest thing that I took away from the Chief was just really remind folks that with regard to worship services, that that's the lesser of 25% capacity or 150 people. And as well, indoor worship, everybody should be wearing a facial covering or a mask. I think what I got from Chief Meyer was that some of the photographs that they had seen at the police department was with regards to the wearing of a mask indoors. I just offer that up as a reminder to all communities throughout the entire state with regard to lesser of 25% or 150 people indoors to worship, and when you are, just be vigilant about wearing masks. Thanks, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, I have to reiterate what I said a minute ago, the cooperation from leadership, both elected as well as faith leaders, as well as the school community has been outstanding. But you know, the transmission sometimes, we've seen this in other communities and other realities, we've seen it with universities. Everybody gets it, but you still have transmission issues where in the trenches, in the quote-unquote man on the street level, you have a reality that that doesn't reflect the level of intensity and cooperation and outstanding leadership. We'll stay at it. As I say, we'll give you the details. If I had to predict

we'll be in Bayville at the OEM center, Pat, at one o'clock on Friday, but we'll come back to you with the details. Tomorrow we will be virtual unless you hear otherwise. And with that, I think we'll start over here. I'm not sure where Ashwin went. Ashwin, how are you? We'll start with you, Dustin. Good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. Could you clarify, is the antigen testing at nursing homes the same as the Binax testing, or is it a similar principle?

On the SDA, the State Commission of Investigation said in a report this morning that your office was in regular communication with Lizette Delgado Polanco. She had tacit approval from your office of her activities and your office, quote, "knew everything that was going on; everything, every hire, every move." What's your response to that? And don't these revelations lay blame for that scandal at your feet, contrary to what attorneys you hired, said, which was that Delgado Polanco must shoulder the majority of the blame for what ultimately occurred?

Why did your office claim executive privilege when the Commission tried finding out the process by which you selected Delgado Polanco? Can you explain now how and why you chose her, and do you regret that decision?

Two from NJ Spotlight. With some of the recent COVID spikes, you've talked about connections to house parties, religious services and sports-related celebrations. Other than the numbers directly connected to certain parties, does the state have contact-tracing data or other evidence of an actual link to specific events, or is this more anecdotal?

For the Health Commissioner, you've talked in the past about adding location data to the state's collection and public reporting process, as a few other states have done. Is that a goal? What's the timeline for making some of these findings available? Thanks,

Governor Phil Murphy: Location data is the last question?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, Judy, you could address if you'd like antigen and the testing you're talking about versus the Binax, which is a different, yet another iteration. Location data, I think we've already addressed many times, but you're welcome to address it again. I've got no comment on the SDA report. I haven't read it. One of my colleagues just raised it as a headline. I will say this, Manny de Silva is running the SDA and he's doing an outstanding job doing exactly what we need there and I'm proud to call him a teammate.

I think we've been pretty explicit, we have been pretty clear about this house party or that house party. About six or eight weeks ago, I remember Judy, there were a bunch in Middletown, we had some off-campus at Rowan, we had some athletic-related at Rutgers. We know, you've gone through in prior sessions, we think adjacent activities to sporting events as opposed to the actual sporting engagement itself. And then we clearly have the geographic specificity that we're talking about today and we have for the past week or 10 days of Ocean County and communities there.

And then, Judy, anything else you want to add on the antigen test or on the location data?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: It's not the Binax, we don't have them yet but it's the antigen tests that were deployed to the long-term care facilities over the last number of months.

Governor Phil Murphy: And location data, data, nothing new to add?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Location as to?

Governor Phil Murphy: Do you mean drilling down to zip codes?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: This was a question from Spotlight, so I'm not sure about –

Governor Phil Murphy: No problem, we'll get Dan to follow up with whoever asked it, if that's okay. Thank you. Let's go back, ma'am, how are you?

Reporter: Hi, all my questions have to do with schools. Are school districts required to report cases and/or outbreaks to their families in their school community?

Governor, you mentioned that these rapid tests that New Jersey's receiving will help a great deal with schools. Will all school districts receive a portion of these rapid tests, or will they be reserved for districts that are having outbreaks?

And 11 outbreaks in about a month statewide, is that expected? Is that higher? What do you think about that number?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for those. The answer is on the first one, Kevin, unless you tell me otherwise, absolutely. In fact, I was going to say this earlier, we listed the 11 outbreaks. That may be news to a lot of people. It's not news to the educators, families, kids, administrators involved in those districts. Is that fair to say? So the answer is they are required.

Secondly, I think it's too early to tell on the rapid tests distribution. I think we had talked the other day, Judy, about holding back and then deploying into areas where we felt were hotspots and were needed. Is that fair?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, but we do think that the school nurses, we have to get them approved to do this, but I think the school nurses should have a stockpile for a child. It's most effective for symptomatic and for a child that may get sick at school, so that's on the list.

Governor Phil Murphy: So not 100% certainty yet and again, we're going to get these in phases, weekly chunks over a 12-week period. And again, I think the great, Judy or Ed, tell me if you disagree, the great use of this is a kid is symptomatic, goes to the school nurse, assuming we get the approval for the nurse to administer the test. The student sits in a room by himself or herself and in 15 minutes, as someone said the other day, you know that either the child is going home or they're getting a Kleenex. It breaks literally, you know, right then.

I'll speak for myself. Kevin and Judy should weigh in, or Zakiya with theirs, 11 outbreaks with a total of 43 cases three weeks in, probably as good as I would have hoped. I don't know how you all feel.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Kevin and I were discussing this and he's better at the numbers of schools that we have, so he might want to share.

Interim Education Commissioner Kevin Deemer: We were kind of discussing, and we were talking about roughly 3,000 schools. So out of those 3,000 schools, 11 cases. I think the data actually goes more than a month.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, it goes into the last week of August, actually, in some cases.

Interim Education Commissioner Kevin Deemer: So we're looking at roughly two months' worth of complete data and across over 3,000 schools roughly, 11 outbreaks, which is two or more cases is pretty good numbers.

Governor Phil Murphy: I just add to that, I think you probably sense this for the six-plus months we've been doing this, the last thing we want to do is pat ourselves on the back and wake up the next day and find that number went up by multiples. But I will say as objectively as I can, relative to what I would have predicted a month ago, I don't want to put words in Judy's and Kevin's mouth, that's a pretty darn good result. And by the way, for me at least, it allows us the confidence to continue to get those remote districts, as Kevin has said many times, and have a reasonable date by which they want to be back in business, it gives us further confidence that that's going to be a reality. Zakiya.

Chief Policy Advisor Zakiya Smith Ellis: Yeah, I would just add, correct me if I'm wrong, it's students and staff, those 43 cases, so we're not just talking about students and all the students. And some schools were open in terms of staff before September for planning purposes and things. This is going all the way back. So again, not patting ourselves on the back but we knew there would be cases.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's a good point. You've got some schools that are in session the week before Labor Day, but you had educators and staff in there without question before Labor Day. Thank you for that. Sir, do you have anything? Sorry, I forgot Dave. How could I do that? What am I here?

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: What's going on here?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, what's going on here? Sorry about that.

David Mattau, NJ 101.5: That's all right. Good afternoon. The 11 outbreaks, can you clarify, is this a combination of students to students, students to staff? Does it differ in the different outbreaks? Do we have a breakdown on that? Why was it decided that it would be left up to local officials as to whether or not they would close?

Governor Phil Murphy: Whether or not they could close?

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Close, yeah, or should close? And I think you had indicated that everybody in the affected areas was told about, you know, we have this positive situation. Has it been announced in terms of something up on the website? Does the entire community know about this or not?

And then with regard to the Ocean County spike, can we talk about what is really causing this? I know, Governor, you just said that everybody's cooperating, leadership and faith. But I mean, we just went through the holidays in Lakewood and if the faith community leadership is cooperating, then why is this outbreak happening the way it's happening?

I know the Ocean County Health Coordinator said this is in part because it was batch testing. What does that mean, batch testing? I don't know what that means and maybe Judy, if you could explain. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Dave. Let me hit a couple here. I think for privacy sake, we're not going to get into too much detail but I think it's a combination of students and staff, Judy, right, on the 11 outbreaks. We'll leave it there.

Local officials, I mean, Judy, you tell me but they're close, they're on the ground. It's their backyard. They are closer to the point of attack than we are.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, all of this goes to the local health departments, and the local health departments, in collaboration with the school, based on the matrix that our Communicable Disease Service put together, make the determination. Remember that the case investigation, the contact tracing, when you know the who, what, where, when, and how, all takes place at the local health department level.

Governor Phil Murphy: Is everyone told who should be told, I think is the question? I don't know about the community, Kevin, the community I think goes a little bit further than I would go.

Interim Education Commissioner Kevin Deemer: I'm looking too at Commissioner Persichilli. There's a joint aspect here and there's significant guidance has been provided by the Department of Health on how to notify and when to notify, including form letters and things like that, that go to parents through the school community, and who should be notified and when. There's comprehensive guidance on that through the Department of Health that works from the local health department in coordination with the local school, so there's a joint effort in that. There's different circumstances on who should be notified and it's fact specific.

Governor Phil Murphy: We've also broken the state down by regions, and the regions also dictate whether you're yellow, green, red, etc. We're all trying to together figure out the Ocean County spike, and that's part of the reason why we're going to be there on Friday, and part of the reason I've been burning up the texting and phones, as has Judy and Pat and the rest of us, Zakiya and Kevin. Kevin has got a call, I think, with the superintendent right after this call.

I think folks know this, but it's just worth noting for one second. This is the fastest-growing community of any size in our state, and one of the fastest-growing communities in the country, of any size. This is a dense, fast growing community. Clearly we've come through a period of religious holidays so that's certainly something that is on the list of consideration. It is a school district that is fully back in, so they're on the list of the 80-ish that are back in, so that's something we're clearly looking at. We're turning over every stone and we'll continue to do that. There's a lot of active investigation going on and a lot of active consideration going on. Judy, any comment on batch testing? That's was not on my list of potential factors.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I don't know what exactly you mean by batched.

Governor Phil Murphy: We may want to get back to you and figure out exactly what they meant by that. Thank you. You're good. Alex, is that you? Okay.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Thank you. Good afternoon, Governor. First for the Health Commissioner, you talked about these 11 in-school transmissions. Can you identify the schools? Will you be identifying the schools? Can you at least tell us which counties these might be in? For Interim Commissioner Deemer, I'd like to ask you if there's been any consideration given to making Lakewood schools go to either partial remote learning or full-time remote learning?

And for the governor, I know you said you haven't read the report from the State Commission of Investigation but a couple of yes or no questions. Do you intend to read the report on the SDA, yes or no? Are you satisfied with the way that your administration, specifically your management team, has been operating since then, yes or no? Did you personally sign off on Lizette Delgado Polanco's hiring, yes or no?

Governor Phil Murphy: The counties of the 11 outbreaks were on the slide. I know it was hard to see, it was an eye chart, the counties yes, but the schools specific we're not going to post. The dashboard is online, covid19.nj.gov but it'll be by county, not by school. But if you're in the school, believe me, you know and it's not news to you.

Kevin, I'll answer this for you but obviously if you see it differently, all considerations are on the table as it relates to Lakewood, Ocean County, as you would want. I mean, I don't say that ominously. That's what folks would want us to say, want us to do and that's in fact the case.

I have nothing else to add, yes/no/maybe or otherwise on SDA other than Manny de Silva is doing a fantastic job and I'm really satisfied with him and his team. Thank you. Sir, how are you?

Charles Dean, NBC: Governor, thank you. Charles Dean from NBC.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hi Charlie. I have a son named Charlie, so you're automatically in good grace here.

Charles Dean, NBC: I wanted to follow up on a Politico New Jersey report this week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Hey, Daniel, do you mind dropping your right arm just for a sec? Thank you.

Charles Dean, NBC: If we could get your reaction that Senator Sacco from North Bergen is apparently trying to eliminate mandatory minimums for public corruption-related offenses, the impact this effort will have on the overall sentencing reform bill, and given numerous past reports about questions of possible corruption and abuse of power in North Bergen, do you have any concerns about Mr. Sacco's leadership, despite his past political backing of you?

And then on a separate topic, President Trump last night suggested numerous Democratic Governors say he has done a great job when it comes to dealing with the COVID crisis. What is your reaction to the debate overall? Do you think you are one of the Democratic Governors he was talking about?

Governor Phil Murphy: I can tell you I didn't think he did a good job at the debate, I can say that definitively. We can hit that separately. So on the first one, without getting into personalities or names, I want to reiterate something I think I've said before, but if I haven't, I want to make sure I say it here. Within a matter of literally days of our coming into office, there was a Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission that had laid dormant for the entire eight years of the prior administration. So we populated that commission, co-chaired by former Chief Justice, Deborah Poritz, and the head of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement, Jiles Ship, with another cavalcade of other really impressive people on it.

That commission did an extraordinary job. They came up with a whole series of recommendations. We stood with the leadership of the Commission, the Senate President, the Speaker, myself, the Lieutenant Governor, the Attorney General, and it won broad support. It was really impressive by the breadth of the support, when you're talking about eliminating things like minimum mandatory sentences, which is not necessarily always going to be a popular notion depending on what perspective you're looking at, but they did a really good job

of finding common ground, they came up with a list of recommendations. Some of those recommendations were achievable through Executive Order and we have long ago taken those steps. But many of them, I'd say most number one, and number two, the ones that really make the biggest difference were subject to statute.

And again, this is eliminating minimum mandatory sentences on non-violent crimes, right? So this is largely, but not only, drug offenses, property offenses, some implications as well for the juvenile justice reform as well. Official misconduct was not on the list of either what the Commission proposed or was not on the list of any of the Executive Orders that we signed or any of the bills as they were originally proposed.

I want to reiterate what I've said at least once before, I am opposed to any bill that includes eliminating minimum mandatory sentences for official misconduct. It was not part of this entire Commission's remit and it should not be a part of any bill. The fact that this bill is not moving means it is running headlong into the very reason the Commission was populated and these bills were originally drawn up. And that is thousands, literally thousands of folks, overwhelmingly persons of color in our criminal justice system that are being kept there because this bill is not moving. Thank you.

Oh, sorry, on President Trump, I apologize. Listen, I think I've been clear on this. I'll say three things, one of which I haven't said before, but two things I have. Number one, when our fat was in the fire, whether it was testing, bed capacity, PPE, ventilators, including earlier this week when we were one of the states, one of the very few non-hotspot states to get the allocation of the Binax testing over the next 12 weeks, we have found common ground successfully with the Trump administration. We were and we remain grateful for that period, no footnotes.

Secondly, as I've separately said, we as a nation have suffered and continue to suffer from lack of national policies, lack of national guidance that would apply to all states, so you wouldn't have to worry about somebody who was in a hotspot state returning to New Jersey because you would have had a national policy, especially on face coverings and face masks. We continue, and it's not too late, but we continue to pay a price for that.

And thirdly, you didn't ask but I thought that the debate last night and the demeanor was embarrassing to the Office of President of the United States of America. Daniel.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hi, Governor. Some questions on budget and then on Lakewood. What kinds of tough decisions do you expect you'll have to make in FY22? What are you going to do then after the window closes for the Federal Reserve Program and you can't borrow under that if there is a revenue shortfall, be it a second wave or sluggish growth or the CARES Act money doesn't come through? Do you expect you'll have to gut services in order to pay for pensions and debt service, or are you going to have to borrow more through the public market?

With regard to Lakewood, it looks like the outbreaks of the Jewish majority communities in Lakewood and Rockland County, New York proceeded the wave in New York and New Jersey back in March and April. Do you think this is something of a canary in the coal mine? What's causing the outbreaks in Middlesex and Monmouth County? I don't know if you've gone over that.

And also, how delayed is the data on new cases, RT and positivity? Is this data from a week old? I know there used to be delays on testing results.

What are these academic engagements and active considerations that you've said you're considering for Lakewood?

Governor Phil Murphy: I missed the rate of transmission question, sorry.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: How delayed are the numbers on tests and daily cases and RT?

Governor Phil Murphy: On that one, we're pretty clear every day, I think, what day they're from. So today's testing data is from September 26th, so it's four days, and RT is from two days ago. That's what it normally is. That's what it is.

On the budget, I appreciate you're talking about fiscal 2022, because I just signed fiscal 2021 yesterday and I'm glad I signed it. We're off, tomorrow's a new first day of the new fiscal year, an unusual year. It's far too early to tell. It's just far too early to tell.

I'm proud, given the extraordinarily challenging circumstances that we have that we got the budget done that we got done. I thank the legislative leadership and we're still in tough times, so it's too early to tell and we still need federal cash. And boy, would I be the happiest guy in the state if our economic recovery exceeds our reasonable projections over the next nine months. Either or both of those things would be big game changers. The federal piece is just really frustrating because it's so obvious. It's not just New Jersey, it's every American state needs it.

Listen, we're taking the Lakewood stuff and the Ocean County stuff very seriously. So is it a canary in the coal mine? I don't know. But I will tell you we are taking it very seriously and we're on the phones. We're back and forth with leadership. We're going down there ourselves. I hope it isn't. The answer is I hope it is not. There's some amount of sense, maybe it was some travel within the religious community between New York City and Lakewood, I don't know. I don't know that we have facts around that. But we look at it and we're looking at everything. Considerations are everything, you would guess, all the things that you would expect us to be doing, including more testing, more contact tracing as an offensive matter, but also considering anything we have to do defensively.

Judy, on the Middlesex and Monmouth cases, those in baseball terms, they felt like me to be singles and doubles, a little bit here, a little bit there; sports teams, house parties. Is there any theme?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Some gatherings of the younger individuals, the 19 to 24. So we're looking at the schools, the universities, working with them to see if there's anything that we should be concerned about. And you know, on Lakewood we sent down 20 contact tracers this week. Part of that investigation will help us focus in on what may be the issues.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. Hey, Matt.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Is there a benchmark of a positivity rate or rate of transmission health officials would need to shut down schools like people are doing in New York, setting that benchmark?

Clarification on the 11 outbreaks, are those 11 schools or 11 districts?

If the positivity rate is 27% in Lakewood and on average about 150 people are testing positive, that means only about 500 people a day are getting tested. Is that the extent of the daily testing that's done there?

And are you concerned about under counting cases in Lakewood and Ocean County, considering the number of visitors that tend to come in every weekend? And then correct me if I'm wrong, those out-of-state residents would not be reflected in the case count.

And lastly, you kind of just touched on this, but has there been any information from contact tracers about whether or not outbreaks in say Brooklyn and other places could be tied to Lakewood?

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I'll jump in, please come in behind me and clean up my efforts here. There isn't a benchmark positivity rate. But I would say for guidance a sustained rate of 10% or more is the qualification that we ask folks to quarantine from coming from another state. I'm not going to necessarily hang my hat on that but that would be statewide, certainly, a big benchmark. But again, we're taking what we've got, whether it's in Ocean or elsewhere very seriously at the sub-state level.

It is 11 schools, not districts, 11 schools out of how many schools? We have over 3,000.

I don't have the numbers on daily testing in Lakewood, Judy, but I think that math is about right. Do you have actual Lakewood?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I do. I'm looking at in the last week, because we stepped up testing this week we did 1,000 yesterday. Last Friday we stepped up testing and we did over 1,000 is my understanding. Otherwise historically we've been doing between 400 and 500 tests a day. We need to step that up which is what we're doing.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's why we're sending the resources there. I think if I understood this, is there potential undercounting because of travel in the tristate area, basically, not coming in from Florida but going across the Hudson, potentially? You'd have to say potentially. I think your last one was related to that on Brooklyn, I just wrote the word Brooklyn down.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: You kind of touched on this, that there potentially could be some cases in Brooklyn that are coming to Lakewood. I mean, but we have we found that from contact tracers. Can you dive into that a little bit more, about whether or not what's going on in Lakewood could be spreading outside of the state?

Governor Phil Murphy: I think we think that's anecdotal. Do you have any?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, I don't have anything specific. I don't know if Ed, he's –

DOH Health Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Kind of.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, for the insult that we threw off the dais, the least we could do is to get you to come in here and answer a question.

DOH Health Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Thank you, and I won't say anything about the singles and doubles, referring to the Red Sox who aren't in the playoffs, unlike the Yankees, who of course are.

Governor Phil Murphy: Totally uncalled for.

DOH Communicable Disease Service Medical Director Dr. Ed Lifshitz: To answer the question, we have been in contact with both New York City and New York state health departments to talk about this because we do know that there is an issue with communities moving back and forth between Brooklyn, Rockland County and parts of New Jersey and particularly in Lakewood. So we can say that we, again, hear anecdotal information that suggests that some of this is happening but I don't have any hard number that can put an exact number on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: But it's certainly on our list of what we're looking at, I promise you.

Chief Policy Advisor Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis: Just I would say, in addition to the very comprehensive school closure or school exclusion criteria that the Commissioner laid out earlier, there is the regional risk matrix which we've outlined previously which has areas of risk across the state. And if it does get to a certain point, the recommendation is that schools in those areas close. I just wanted to point that out as well.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Ed, thank you. Zakiya, thank you. Judy, as always. Kevin, thank you for your leadership and being here. Pat, likewise. Jared, Dan, Matt, the whole team. So again, as a logistical matter, we'll be with you virtually tomorrow and we'll be in Ocean County on Friday at one o'clock. We're not waiting until Friday at one o'clock. We've been on this and we'll stay on it and turn over every stone we can.

Again, we just ask everybody to keep doing the right thing. It's actually, when you come down to it, some things in life are really complicated. This is incredibly hard on all of us, but not complicated. In the absence of a vaccine, in the absence of a therapeutic, it's face coverings, social distancing, washing hands with soap and water. If you don't feel well, stay away and when in doubt, get tested. It's that simple. We've just got to all row that boat together.

We're all in this together. We are one family. So whether it's Community A or Community B, we need to all root for each other, that we get through this together. That's what we're seeing in Ocean County, a little bit in Monmouth and Middlesex. Clearly, those counties want to get it right and I salute their leadership, but the other 18 counties ought to be and are rooting that we achieve success there as well. That's the way it should be, just as we root for every American state to get behind them, whether we agree with their policies or not, lives are at stake.

I spoke to two people yesterday about a funeral for a 46-year-old dad who died in Lakewood. This is a guy who left behind kids. I heard that from the sheriff. I heard it from a faith leader. That's what this is about. This is about saving lives and we're all in that endeavor together. God bless you all. Thank you.

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