

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: March 18th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

03/18/2020

Governor Murphy Holds Coronavirus Briefing



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everyone. We have a fair amount of stuff to get you up to speed on, and obviously we'll go through this as fast as we can and we'll take questions afterward. I think tomorrow we're at a different time. Alex, what time tomorrow? Can you come back to me? Ask Mahen.

We've got a call with the White House tomorrow which conflicts with our normal time, so we're going to be a little bit earlier. I think we're going at noon, 12:00 tomorrow. So, it'll be right here. And the only issue with that might be, and I'll speak for Judy – you may not have all your data as buttoned down as you would like by noon. It takes Judy and her team a good amount of the morning, in fact all of the morning to get to where she wants so we can be as accurate as possible

And again, I'm honored to be joined by my partner in government as always Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver. Sheila, as always, great to be with you. Commissioner of the Department of Human Services Carole Johnson, we're going to hear from her. To her left, at least answering questions if not jumping in on any number of topics, Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan. To my right, as I said she no longer needs any introduction, the Commissioner of Health Judy Perischilli. To her right, a new face at least as it relates to these conferences that have involved me, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, Medical Director Communicable Disease Services inside the Department of Health. Dr. Lifshitz, it's great to have you here. And Assistant Commissioner, another guy we're familiar with, Chris Neuwirth. The Director of the Department of Homeland Security was here, Jared Maples, and our Head of Emergency Services in our offices Dan Kelly among others are with us today.



We received 162 new positive test results. Two cases, if I get this wrong Judy will correct me – two cases that were reported yesterday and which were under further investigation turned out both to be out of state residents. So, they are now being removed from our count and our statewide total is now 427. So, this is increasing with a pretty steep curve as we had expected. And again, you've got a combination of a couple of things that we have already previewed. Number one, you've got some amount of community interaction and spread as part of this; and importantly, a lot more people are getting tested. And I'm happy to say that as of this Friday there will be another big opportunity for folks to get tested, and Judy will get into the details of that.

Sadly, we have learned overnight of two additional deaths related to cases of COVID-19. That brings the total fatalities of the 427 positive cases, that includes five fatalities. Again, Judy will get into the details at least as a top line. We're not going to get into a whole lot of detail, but she'll get into the detail of all of the positive tests including by county.

I want to reinforce the announcement made earlier today that our statewide 211 call system is now up and running as an additional resource for residents. Residents can also text NJCOVID to 898211 to receive text information and stay informed. Or if they need live assistance, they can text their zip code to 898211. And we thank the United Way of New Jersey for partnering with us on this. As Judy invariably or I have said at these gatherings, as a general matter of you've got questions about this it's 1-800-222-1222 and the website is www.nj.gov/health (<http://www.nj.gov/health>).

Also a number of things – in direct response to the letter that I sent President Trump yesterday... In fact, we got an initial email reply, Dan Kelly got last night at I think around 11:00. I had a conversation this morning with the US Army Corps of Engineer in the person of Major General Jeff Milhorn and his team. General Milhorn will be coming here to Trenton tomorrow for a meeting with me and my team to see how the Corps can help us build out plans for expanding New Jersey's hospital capacity. Judy can give you a little bit of a sense of what that looks like. Pat Callahan and Dan Kelly have each been up to their eyeballs in that. Again, I thank the Trump Administration for their swift response to our request.

It has been and will continue to be a busy day. In addition to speaking with the Army Corps we had a very constructive call with our Congressional Delegation from both sides of the aisle. We went through what the reality of the coronavirus was in New Jersey which obviously they know, but we went into detail, steps we've taken; help that we still need from the federal government, in particular in terms of equipment and things like the Army Corps, FEMA which has been very involved with us this week; and also the likely financial impact. I don't have a number for you but you can't do what we've done and not have a dramatic – and I would use the word 'dramatic' – impact on not just people's lives. We're seeing that for sure but also on the health of the state's budget and on the state's revenues.

So, we talked with the Congressional Delegation about things like getting flexible block grants as fast and as soon as possible. That is the singular fastest and best way for us to sure up our finances - grants and forgivable loans which are modeled after the Sandy Essential Services grants and/or Community Disaster loans, again which Dan Kelly ran; CDBG or other programs to fund loans and grants in addition to the proposed SBA program; operating subsidy funds for bus and rail transit. You can imagine the impact that this is having on NJ Transit as it is on the MTA in New York, etc.

And then lastly, but just as importantly, real relief at the individual level, particularly for those who are struggling and need help the most – things like lowering eligibility thresholds for SNAP or food stamps and free and reduced-price lunch student benefits to ensure that more people can access the programs; as well as more flexibility to when the benefits are received to reduce pressure to go to grocery stores; and reimbursement for emergency childcare grants. I could go on, but the block grants are A-1 in terms of what we need to sure up our finances.

Again, an excellent call. The Delegation has been extraordinary on both sides of the aisle. One example, earlier today Congressman Donald Payne and I spoke. He serves on the Homeland Security and Preparedness Committee in the House. He Chairs the subcommittee which oversees FEMA activities. FEMA Region 2 has been working hand-in-glove with Col. Callahan and his people to set up some testing sites among other things. The Congressman and the Colonel had a great conversation which will bear fruit.

Judy and I and others will also be on a call later today, a combination of CEOs of big healthcare systems on the one hand and union representatives of our healthcare workers on the other hand, to try to iron out some of the challenges inevitably that we're going to be facing with something on this scale. Getting more consistency across the healthcare systems, making sure there's consistency in things like training, obviously personal protective equipment, daycare. How can we redeploy folks from other walks of life in to help, etc.?

And I am additionally having a call with representatives of the educator community just to walk through the reality of the coronavirus situation in the state, how we got to the decision we got to in terms of closing schools and where we see the road headed. So, lots going on.

I want to reiterate, and you all know this but I want to repeat it, that all events of 50 or more persons are cancelled as a matter of protecting public health. I've ordered this not just for some but for all events, and that includes a concern I have, and I can speak on behalf of Pat and law enforcement up and down the state. We don't want events to go underground, into people's homes. If people are gathering in large numbers, we don't care where they're gathering. It's a public health concern and we will enforce this aggressively over the coming days and weeks if need be.

We need everyone to take personal responsibility, to do their part to flatten the curve. Again, a lot of what you're going to continue to hear about: over here, aggressive, proactive, tough measures to flatten that curve – you could see by today's positive tests we're not there yet by a long shot – which will over here lessen the burden on the healthcare system and hopefully save lives and keep more people healthy. But you're also going to see us over here, we can't rely on this for sure – we can't rely on exactly when that curve flattens. So, over here you're going to see us, Judy, Pat and others, going out aggressively, trying to build out our capacity to care for people.

Simply put, this is not a time for anyone to be bringing people together, whether it be for a wedding, a funeral per John's question yesterday, a religious rite of passage, a large birthday, an anniversary or other party. My team got on me kind of hard yesterday after I said I wouldn't break up funerals. I still don't know that we'd break up a funeral but the fact of the matter is, we mean it when we say 50 people. You're going to have to, and I feel awful about this – you're going to have to figure that out. We mean it. It's a real public health reality.

Anywhere a group gathers is a place coronavirus easily spreads. Even if you're showing no signs of the illness, this is, again, a particular shoutout to our youth. You can still carry and spread coronavirus. We cannot run the risk, especially where there may be multiple generations of people gathering or even interactions with older generations. I take personal responsibility for the public health and safety of our state, and if you or your great aunt are unhappy about this, I am sorry, I feel badly. But for your safety and hers it is my highest priority.

And we know this can be a delicate and hard decision for families. We appreciate that. As I've said all along, there's anxiety and we understand it. We respect it. Our job is to be straight with you, to do everything we can to get out ahead of this – and by doing so, even though there's short-term pain, to lessen the anxiety and not to increase it. But these are extraordinary circumstances and we cannot continue either with the concept of business as usual or equally out of sight, out of mind.

As I've said all along, this is no time to panic but it's just as much no time for business as usual. So, we urge you in the strongest possible terms, make the right call if not for you then for your families and friends; and help prevent the spread of coronavirus and help flatten the curve.

I want to spend a good part of my remarks on the human and social services responses we are engaged in, and I'm going to ask Commissioner Johnson to speak to this in greater detail in a minute. There are many communities across our state who rely upon the Department of Human Services and their direct care provider partners for daily life. Many of these residents are considered especially vulnerable to coronavirus. It is imperative that we do not disconnect them from their lifelines during this emergency.

To be clear, we consider home health aides and other direct support professionals to be an essential part of our emergency response team. They are first responders within our healthcare system for many in these communities and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts. We need these folks working and caring for high-risk seniors who live alone or helping individuals with developmental disabilities, many of whom may face other very real health and safety issues.

When I say we're going to get through this as one family I mean it – we are going to get through this. I say that unequivocally. But we cannot leave anyone alone at this time of heightened anxiety. Carole and the Department are doing all they can to ensure that the families of those working at our frontlines – our nurses and hospital personnel, lab technicians and other frontline public health workers, our law enforcement and fire professionals and EMTs, our corrections officers, the women and men working in our supermarkets among so many others – that all of them are able to continue to access the critical childcare services they need.

Let me say it this way: we need everyone who is part of our frontline army to be able to get to work so we can beat back the threat of coronavirus together. And in this, childcare professionals are themselves essential players. As Carole will lay out in greater detail, we're taking extraordinary steps to support those who need these services and these critical service providers – whether that be extending emergency financial support for families in our subsidy program who are relying on childcare during this emergency, ensuring providers in our childcare subsidy program are paid if they close, or providing greater access to cleaning and sanitizing supplies. We must ensure a continuity of childcare for our frontline public health and response workers.

Now, the Department doesn't do all of this on its own. We know another critical social service support network exists within our many varied communities of faith. We have been communicating daily with our faith communities to help us get our message out. Additionally, the Interfaith Advisory Council, which is convened and chaired by Homeland Security Director Jared Maples has kept open the lines of communication within our communities of faith. In fact, you have a call on for tomorrow morning at what time? 11:00 AM, and there are I might add, in the Interfaith Advisory Council over 3500 members. And my guess is you'll get good attendance, given what we're dealing with right now.

First, I want to thank our faith community for embracing fully the need for social distancing. And I appreciate that social distancing is in fact the opposite of what many of our faiths teach. Our faith leaders recognize that their paramount role is to protect their communities. They live that reality every day, pandemic or not. We know that cancelling a service or closing a sanctuary entirely is not an easy call, but in these times it is the right call.

And may I say this as clearly as possible. Several dear friends among the faith leadership community have come to me over the past 24 hours. We need all walks of our life, and in this case especially our faith leaders, to adhere to the 50-person maximum requirement in terms of gathering. We must get 100% compliance in our faith communities and around the state. And because of these actions, we know that many of our houses of worship at the same time are facing very real challenges, and we pledge to work with them to seek out creative ways to mitigate their pain and ensure their long-term health.

But more than ever, we need them to keep spreading the faith. We need them to stay active in our communities and help us disseminate vital information, and we need them to rally our communities to send up their prayers, to lift up our state's spirits. Sheila's heard me say this before – I'm in way over my paygrade here, but I know they've certainly lifted my spirits and I live every day with my favorite scripture in my heart. 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

And as I close my comments today, I ask every New Jerseyan of every faith, or those of no faith, to embrace these words. This is an anxious time. We have said that. We understand the anxiety. We respect it. Who could blame you? Our job is to be straight with you, to do everything we can to proactively get in front of this; to beat down this curve over here and over here, to expand our capacity to deal with this crisis.

For the most part, with our healthcare workers, bless them, our heroes, we'll take the lead over here. We need the 9 million New Jerseyans to take the lead over here. We need you to live this, everything from washing your hands with soap and water, to social distancing, to sneezing and coughing into your arm, from not touching your face. If you don't feel well stay home. No gatherings over 50 and don't go underground. Moms and dads, I'm asking you explicitly to make sure your kids are not having big house parties. And I promise you we're going to be policing that. When we say stay off the roads between 8:00 PM and 5:00 AM we mean it, just for essential folks to be out there.

So, for all of the above, the 9 million of us will flatten the curve over here. Our extraordinary leadership in partnership with our federal partners and our extraordinary healthcare workers will do everything we can over here.

I'll conclude by reminding folks what I've said the past couple of days. The overwhelming amount of folks in this state get it. They've got their anxieties but they understand what's before us and what they have to do. We don't have many left but there's still folks who are nonbelievers. Believe it. Trust us. And again, if we get this wrong it's on yours truly, and we won't in the sense that this is real.

And then lastly, particularly, I can't say this enough to our young folks. You may feel like you're above it all. You may feel and you are the picture of health. But if you gather, you run the risk that you spread it from one to the other – and by the way, you could get sick. And more importantly, when you sit with Grandma or Grandpa or an older relative, Mom, Dad, teacher, coach, you could be unwittingly spreading the virus.

So, to those who have anxiety, our job is to lower it. To those who don't yet believe, and I don't think there are many yet, believe, trust us. And to those who have not heretofore cared, care. Please, for your own sake and for the sake of the rest of us.

God bless you all. With that, it is my honor to introduce to say a few words, my partner in government, the Lieutenant Governor of the great State of New Jersey, Sheila Oliver.

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver: Thank you, Governor Murphy. I was so pleased that the Governor is working with the Congressional Delegation to seek block grants. Block grants allow us the opportunity to invest resources where they're needed without regulatory restraint.

One of the things that many of the administrators in our departments are talking about, many of us are currently the recipients of federal assistance to do a variety of things. And I think no one more than Commissioner Carole Johnson can attest to that. We have existing funding from the federal government but we are hampered and handtied by regulation. So, we are going to begin to outreach to the regional administrators of the various federal departments to see if we can work towards waivers to give us flexibility to use those funds other than a very specific, defined population. One of the things that people always lament about, "Well yes, there's government help but I'm never eligible for it." We want to broaden the universe of New Jerseyans who are eligible for those things. So, Governor, I am so pleased that you're having that conversations with the Delegation.

I also just want to touch on Jared and the faith leaders, and one of the things I am hearing from faith leaders is that because they're not having mass, because they're not having services, of course their revenue is declining as well. So, in the next several weeks I think we'll be working internally in the administration. New Jerseyans are the most charitable people to be found, and I hope that we can set up some methods in which we can call upon the citizens and the residents of our state to provide support to those faith institutions.

And then I'll conclude by saying that I'm going to give you a website, a correct website. I would like you to encourage your readers and your viewers to go online to www.nj.gov/dca/dcaid (<http://www.nj.gov/dca/dcaid>). Right on that website you can apply for the full menu of services that you could potentially be eligible for. It'll take you three minutes on the website and we can make a determination. I want you to know that it is anonymous and it is confidential. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Sheila, for not only those words but for your extraordinary leadership, both as Lieutenant Governor and head of the Department of Community Affairs, which is one of the biggest parts of our government.

So, I'd love to ask Commissioner Persichilli to comment as she does every day, and I cannot say enough about the extraordinary work that she is doing. And I hear from all over the state, as well as your extraordinary team, comment on what we've seen overnight. As you can see, folks, the numbers are, as we predicted, going up. She'll give you more color on that; also on how the healthcare system is holding up, Judy, and anything particular that you've got on testing. Welcome, Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Good afternoon. Yesterday, we received about 670 calls on our hotline. That's a total of over 8600 calls. So, as the Governor said, we're concerned that your calls are answered in a timely fashion; that you're not held waiting. So, to ensure that you get the information that you need, we've expanded the call center to include the New Jersey Call Center 211.

As cases continue to increase in the state our concern about the healthcare system's capacity also grows. We talked a little bit about that yesterday. As the Governor and I mentioned, we're looking to ensure that hospitals have the manpower, the supplies and the space to care for residents. There are predictions that many parts of the United States will have far too few hospital beds if the new coronavirus continues to spread. That's why we're looking with our hospitals to develop surge and capacity planning.

Right now, we have identified additional capacity that can be rapidly brought online. 260 additional beds can be brought online and will be prepared today. 199 are in the north, 11 are in the central region, and 50 are in the south. Additionally, we expect 227 more beds to come online within the next three to four weeks.

We recently, yesterday, completed a walkthrough at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey. We are working with the board and administration at Inspira Health, and I want to thank them for this, and we expect that that hospital can reopen and accommodate an additional 300 beds. This facility would be a general acute care hospital to absorb the surge we're all expecting. As you know, all hospitals in New Jersey are able to and are expected to care for COVID-19 patients.

To meet the need for additional healthcare personnel in the state, we are working with the New Jersey State Nurses Association. Judy Schmidt, the CEO, has put out an alert to all nurses that hold an active or inactive license in the state for a call to action. I will be connecting with her on Friday at the end of the week for the responses and the follow-up.

Additionally, I signed an executive directive yesterday that would authorize hospitals to use New Jersey-certified mobile intensive care paramedics in their hospital settings to perform function and duties within their scope of practice to enhance and supplement the existing medical and nursing staff.

We're also working to protect residents in healthcare facilities in our state. As you know, last Friday we sent guidance to all long-term care facilities to restrict visitors in order to protect this vulnerable population. The only exception is for end-of-life situations. This includes nursing homes, assisted living, pediatric long-term care facilities, and dementia care facilities. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to protect these vulnerable individuals. They are most at risk as we have learned from the outbreak in Washington State.

At the department, we are monitoring all outbreaks of respiratory illnesses, and that's defined as two or more individuals in a facility with symptoms no matter the cause. We are looking at them in all of our long-term care facilities to be alert for any problems. We also restricted visitors to Department of Health licensed substance use disorder and mental health programs.

As we mentioned previously, we are working to expand testing in our state. The Bergen testing site will be up and running on Friday. Initially it will collect specimens for symptomatic individuals. We will be prioritizing our symptomatic and healthcare workers first and our first responders. This site will have the capacity to collect 2500 specimens a week.

As you can imagine, as we find more positive cases, the work for our local health departments greatly increases. Every day, they work tirelessly, boots on the ground to investigate cases, identify contacts and take the appropriate public health actions. To support their important efforts, the Department has been working with Perry Halkitis, the Dean of the Rutgers School of Public Health to connect his students with local health departments. I'm pleased to say that those individuals will be redeployed next week and they will provide the extra resources to carry out this vital work to protect public health.

As I mentioned previously, New Jersey has been expecting the return of nine asymptomatic New Jersey residents from the Grand Princess cruise ship. These individuals are being held under CDC quarantine at the Dobbins Reserve Airbase in Marietta, Georgia. We expect six of these individuals who are identified as low-risk to return home today and to self-quarantine for the remainder of their stay, about four or five days.

Now, I will provide you with an overview of new positive cases. We are sad to report today two additional fatalities of individuals who had tested positive for COVID-19. As we have seen across the nation and in New Jersey, both of these individuals were high-risk, over 60 years of age with comorbid conditions. Of course, our thoughts and prayers are with their families.

Today, we're announcing 162 new cases for a total of 427 cases. To center our thinking around this, our first case in New Jersey was March 4th. On the 16th, we reported 80 new cases. On the 17th, yesterday, we reported 89. Today, we're reporting 162.

Here is the breakdown by county for the cases for the counties we have information on. And these numbers are not complete. Atlantic 3, Bergen 27, Burlington 5, Camden 5, Essex 12, Hudson 9, Hunterdon 2, Mercer 6, Middlesex 17, Monmouth 8, Morris 9, Ocean 4, Passaic 8, Somerset 8, Union 12. And we have 27 that still need a county assigned. We're still gathering those details. The age range for the total positive cases is 5 years to 95 years of age.

I know this is a difficult time for all of New Jersey. As the Governor has said repeatedly, we will get through this together. All of you can do your part to lessen the spread. Follow the Governor's social distancing measures, please stay at home when you're sick and practice respiratory etiquette. Wash your hands frequently during the day for 20 seconds with soap and water and practice general, good health hygiene overall. Take care of yourselves and your loved ones. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy, again for extraordinary leadership. I think if you do the math in this, and there is a chunk of unknowns to be determined. But if you've been listening the past couple of days and you do the math, 18 of the 21 counties now have a positive – at least 18 counties I should say because there's about 30 unknowns at the moment – the exceptions right now being Cape May, Salem and Sussex. And so, as Judy predicted when it was only a handful of counties, this is a statewide reality – clearly much more intense in certain counties like Bergen than in others.

So, as we've said many times, thank you, Judy. Thank you to your team. As we've said many times in government, it takes a village – both folks within government, across the range of government agencies and departments. And again, we started studying and trying to figure out how to react to the coronavirus in January. We established our whole of government Taskforce on February 2nd or 3rd. Here we are on March 18th, at every step of the way trying to stay out ahead of this thing. And obviously, it is a beast no matter how you slice it.

One of the most important departments alongside Health is the Department of Human Services, and with that I'd love to ask Commissioner Carole Johnson to say a few words about what her Department is up to, to help us fight this battle. Thank you, Carole.

Department of Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson: Thank you. Thank you, Governor Murphy, Lieutenant Governor Oliver, Commissioner Perischilli, Col. Callahan for your leadership during this difficult time.

In Human Services, we're actively working with the frontline health and social services workforce to support their response. Our priorities are the health and safety of the individuals we serve, the health and safety of our workforce, and the health and safety of the workforce of our critical partners in communities across the state.

First, through Medicaid's Long-Term Care Program and our Division on Aging, we help to support seniors across our state who are homebound or those who are now homebound because their congregate site is now closed and have limited natural community supports. That means the home health aides, private duty nurses and our county-led Aging Network are a critical workforce that is caring for our older, vulnerable residents in addition to in nursing homes, but as importantly in their homes, across the state.

We're working to support older residents and their care providers in maintaining these services, and working with our community partners including by mobilizing the nurse care managers of our Medicaid health plans to do proactive outreach to all of our higher-risk seniors and identify critical needs like medication, medical supplies and food. We're working with our county Offices on Aging to help them maintain food for their Meals on Wheels programs and other senior feeding programs. We're also working with them on outreach to seniors who are known to be socially isolated.

We are also in close touch with the home health aide and personal care provider community to identify issues and we had a large call with them yesterday morning, and we're continuing to move as quickly as possible to address issues they raise. We're very focused on rides to critical medical appointments that are provided by

our Medicaid transportation provider or by programs through our county Offices on Aging. We're working hard to continue to secure rides to necessary medical appointments and very focused on what we consider life-sustaining services, like dialysis, chemotherapy and methadone treatment.

We're not alone in this work. We're closely coordinating through the Emergency Operations Center the Governor stood up, and working closely with Col. Callahan and General Beale and others to make sure local emergency management is tracking these critical needs for our community-based, high-risk older residents.

Second, as the governor mentioned, we're doing our part to support the critical childcare needs of those who need to work in this difficult time, and who are served or could be served through our state's childcare subsidy program. We're taking action to help families in need of childcare and those centers that are able to remain open, by one, waiving copays in our state childcare subsidy program if parents are unable to pay because of COVID-19.

We're providing enhanced payments to providers who are able to remain open at this time and serve our childcare subsidy children. We are providing an enhanced payment of \$100 per child in subsidy per month to help support those childcare providers. We are going to pay in our subsidy program base don enrollment, not attendance, so that those providers get the money that they need, even if a child who normally would show up is not there.

We're continuing to pay subsidies to those centers that are forced to close, so that at sometime we can hopefully bring them back online; and that they don't lose their business in the short term because our subsidy isn't available.

We're creating flexibility in our subsidy program rules so that it's easier for eligible parents and parents who might newly become eligible because of changes in their job circumstance to enroll their children in our childcare services.

Childcare providers who are able to serve critical needs at this challenging time are doing very important work. We're grateful to them every day for the work that they do but never more than in this challenging time.

Third, there are the vital services that we provide to adults with developmental disabilities who live in the community, with support from direct support professionals; and those with developmental disabilities who live at home with support from their family or other professional. We're grateful to direct support professionals who are working both in the community and in our developmental center facilities who support this critical population.

We've taken several steps here, including temporarily suspending congregate day programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We're providing flexibility for families who are able to employ workers directly through our programs, to allow them to hire additional workers quickly to support their loved ones as needed. We're also working through our care manager partners to check in with and identify needs for those with physical disabilities who participate in our Personal Care Assistance Program and in other programs across the department.

Fourth on our list, we're laser focused on the needs of individuals with mental health and substance use disorders and the network of residential and community-based providers who serve them. We issued guidance yesterday to our methadone clinics which provide both methadone and Buprenorphine to individuals with opioid use disorders.

Methadone has very specific federal rules that govern how it's prescribed. We've worked with our federal partners to create some flexibility here for our clinics so that individuals might be able to take more medication home where clinically appropriate, so that we can reduce the volume in these facilities and the amount of travel that individuals have to do to get methadone treatment.

Buprenorphine does not have these same restrictions and we are working closely with our Medicaid Centers of Excellence on Opioid Treatment to make sure we're doing everything we can to sustain individuals who are in treatment throughout this emergency. And make no mistake, this is a challenging time for all but it's very challenging in particular for those we serve with mental health and substance use disorders, and we're working very closely with our community provider network to hotspot issues and support their needs so that these critical services can continue.

Fifth, I want to talk briefly about the individuals and families in our state who are lower-income and depend on our programs for support, and those who are at risk for or are homeless. We are in close contact with our partners throughout the state who are the lifeline of supports for this vital network. We hosted 100-person calls with both the pantry and food network community, and we had a call with more than 100 providers this morning who provide homeless shelter services and other vital providers across the state.

We are continuing to support them in a variety of ways. We've changed many of our rules to make it easier for people to get and keep public benefits. We've extended benefits in Work First New Jersey, our cash assistance program, for 60 days for anyone whose case was coming up for renewal in March or April so that they don't have to take action to renew our case. We're extending all of our emergency assistance cases through at least April 30th. We're viewing this emergency as a good cause exemption to the work requirements in the Work First New Jersey Program and SNAP, our food assistance program; and we're suspending all adverse actions for anyone for noncompliance including suspending sanctions.

We're continuing to work with the homeless shelter community and are working on the needs that they may have for cleaning supplies, and we're talking with them about how they can implement guidance that has come from both the CDC and HUD with respect to continuing to deliver their services.

We in the Department of Human Services will continue to take all available actions that we can with the authority that we have and the waiver of that authority under the Governor's executive order. We also are expecting additional authority under the legislation that's pending in Congress that will give us access to additional federal waivers to help expand some of our services. And we're working on that now to be prepared as soon as that legislation were to pass.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts to the providers in the community, to the community organizations in the community, to the volunteer organizations in the faith community that are standing up during this critical time to continue to serve the vulnerable populations that have critical needs and are going to continue to have critical needs in the days ahead. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Carole. I cannot thank you enough for your leadership on this and across the board. A couple of very quick items. I'm looking at Nikita – we're going to have something to say on elections tomorrow, so I can maybe save you or David's question on that front. I meant to say that upfront.

Secondly, we don't have any announcements today in terms of further social distancing steps such as we did yesterday with indoor malls, but just know that we're continuing to look at and monitor what we've got in front of us. For instance, Pat and a lot of his colleagues were out last night trying to sort of spot check the state, and we still feel there are a couple of holes in the system. So, we're looking at that.

And thirdly, while there's no particular action associated with this as I sit here, we are in intense discussions not just with the federal government, with the White House – I had a good conversation with the Vice President yesterday afternoon. I mentioned we sent a letter in late yesterday afternoon regarding the Army Corps and Dan got a response last night and we were on the phone this morning. So, that's a good thing.

Other areas, I have no news to report on PPE, personal protective equipment but that's something which is still a significant ask that we have. But in addition to our relationship with the federal government and the Congressional Delegation, I cannot say enough good things about them on both sides of the aisle – just their passion, intensity, "What do you need for us to do?" Some of the best fighters in the country in Congress happen to represent New Jersey. That's a good thing at a time like this.

But also to say that we are in constant discussion with a group of other states as well, and I'd say high in that list are New York, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. And they're not the only ones but we are constantly thinking through where our commonalities are, and there are many. And if we can combine forces and ask for X or Y we will be stronger on that ask if we can do it together.

I don't want to cut anyone off, but before we take questions, Pat, Ed, Chris, anything any of you want to add? Okay, please feel free to jump in on any of the questions as before. You good, Judy? Okay, let's take a few questions, please Brent.

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Q&A Session:

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Real quick, a quick three things. One, hotels – are they still okay to operate as they are? Two, what area of the state, what county has the most need for hospital beds? And three, the second testing site in Holmdel, do we know when that will be online?

Governor Phil Murphy: First, hotels are still open for business, Pat, to the best of my knowledge. Although Pat's an important guy, because based on the executive order that Sheila and I put forward, it gives Pat complete latitude to add or delete entities from that list. So, as we're walking down here, hotels are still okay. I'll let Judy answer both the second and third question but I would just say Holmdel we hope a matter of days, with Bergen opening on Friday. Judy?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: They're most needed in the northeast. It's just going to follow the spread of the disease. But we do anticipate that it's going to be a statewide issue before long.

Governor Phil Murphy: And would you agree, Pat and/or Judy, that Holmdel is within a matter of days after Bergen opens? Chris?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: We're working on having the Monmouth County site up and running by next week.

Governor Phil Murphy: We're all looking at each other to make sure we agree with our answer. May I just say, I don't know if Judy said total cases. You said how many over night, but total cases to date by county top four, Bergen 113 – this is, the denominator is 427. Secondly is Essex at 45. I know for instance, Essex Congressman Payne, the County Executive – they would like to try to figure a way to work with Pat and FEMA and the Department of Health to get a drive-through. That's going to be a little bit more off. Middlesex has 40 cases and my home county of Monmouth have 32. Those are the top four.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: This is a question for Commissioner Judy on testing. So, how many different kinds of COVID-19 tests are being used? Do we know? It seems like different medical groups and organizations are adding them almost every day now. You've got FEMA coming in with their tests; you've got another drive-through test in Secaucus – somebody else is opening one. Is anybody keeping track of this? Do they have to get FDA approval? Do we know, are there problems in terms of reliability for these tests, false negatives or positives? Could this skew our overall picture of what's going on here? And are there any suggestions for people in terms of where they should or should not get tested?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let's let Judy answer and/or Chris. Chris, do you want to jump in?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: Thank you for those questions. I think a point of clarification is that these sites are specimen collection sites. These are locations where individuals who are symptomatic can present, go through the process, have a nasal swab specimen collected; and then those specimens, at the end of that operation are brought to one of the commercial laboratories for processing. So, the process for specimen collection is basically standardized throughout the state, and then, depending on where the clinic is operating they'll send their specimens to a particular lab like Qwest, LabCorp, Bio Reference.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: So, what about the tests themselves?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: Same tests.

Governor Phil Murphy: That's what he's referring to. It's collection on the frontend of which there are a number of different places you can go. The most robust as of Friday will be the one I think in Bergen County College. But the backend, there's a limited number of folks who actually perform the test. There's the Department of Health, there are a couple of hospital systems and there are I think three private sector tests – high-scale by the way, which is important, high-volume testing companies. Is that fair?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Dr. Lifshitz would be able to...

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Services, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: And just quickly, so the testing that's being done on all these is using the same general procedure. They're all using what's known as a PCR test that looks for the virus itself. These tests all need to be approved through the FDA before. You can't just

go out there and say, "Hey, I want to run this test." So, that's what's happening on the other side.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Like last week, Hackensack Meridian announced some breakthrough where they had a test that could get results in hours and not days. Now we haven't heard about that. Is that being used? Are other companies doing this? Is it reliable?

Governor Phil Murphy: It's absolutely being used, right?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: It's absolutely being used. And you have to recall that you know, Hackensack in particular and others, those are not the high-throughput clinical diagnostic laboratories that LabCorp and Qwest are.

Governor Phil Murphy: This is an important point. Chris, what's their capacity daily would you say?

Assistant Commissioner of Health Chris Neuwirth: Theirs is more or less equivalent to what the state lab can do, between 40 and 60 or so; whereas the high-throughput clinical diagnostic laboratories can be in the thousands.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: So, the same test just quicker.

Governor Phil Murphy: Essentially. Let's keep moving. John?

John Mooney, NJ Spotlight: On the numbers, can you tell us how many people who are positively or presumptive positive and infected have been hospitalized and are currently hospitalized? And can you talk about the number of hospital beds that are currently being occupied? In other words, you talk about the possibility of shortages down the road. What's the percentage right now of people in hospital beds and on the numbers, how many people have been hospitalized because of this? And have any of those hospitalizations or positive cases come from nursing facilities or long-term care?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: All good questions that I don't have answers for. We do not have the diagnosis in every hospital of a COVID-19 individual. We do know generally about 55% of all of our positive cases end up in the hospital. That's a general number. That will fluctuate depending on the number of cases that we have. We do not have specific hospital-based diagnosis. We are tracking the number of individuals that are admitted from nursing homes. I don't have that number today but I will have it for you. You can ask Alex and we can get it for you later. We track that very diligently because of the high-risk nature of those individuals.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, has the 55% about held in terms of 55% of positives either are or have been in a hospital?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I would think so, and Dr. Lifshitz, he's closer to these numbers than anyone.

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Services, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: And the short answer is yes. However, we expect as time goes on, as more and more people get tested who have milder symptoms and milder illness in the first place, that those numbers will drop. You have to remember that early on we've been testing mostly people who have been the sickest to begin with, so that doesn't mean that 55% of everybody who gets sick with this will end up in a hospital.

Governor Phil Murphy: If that number holds true, John, it looks like about 230 out of 427 assuming that that number has held. Let's also remind everybody, and again, if I get this wrong the health experts will correct me, that we have a lot less visibility into the high-speed, high-scale commercial testing companies – Bio Reference, Qwest, LabCorp. The good news is they can do it a lot faster on a lot bigger scale and we need that. The challenging news is we don't have at least at this point the same insights as we would have in particular into the Department of Health.

And I also want to underscore something that Ed just said. You know, when the first tests were available, particularly obviously at the Department of Health, you were by definition testing people who were – I'm going to use a term of ours here – quite sick. We're not going to be yet to the worried well. You're still going to need a reason, a permission slip essentially to pull up to Bergen County College on Friday. You're going to

have to have a healthcare counterpart that's going to deem that you're worthy of that test, but by definition, the pool is going to be more healthy and less acute than the original pool that we started with. Is that a fair assessment?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, on Friday we are hoping to test symptomatic individuals who have a primary care physician. However, if they do not have a primary care physician and they are symptomatic, there'll be a screening. If they are symptomatic we will develop a feedback loop to make sure that every single person that gets tested knows the result within a certain period of time. I can't tell you specifically what that period of time will be; we're obviously working on that. But I want to make sure that individuals understand that they will not be turned away if they do not have a primary care physician.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, I assume tomorrow that we'll have some of the protocols for Bergen County ready to go live with you all so you can hear it, and we'll disseminate that all throughout our social media and other channels.

Reporter: A question about the economic impact that this is going to have. We've spoken with a number of small business owners who say that this will cost them a lot of their workforce or put them under altogether. Will there be any state aide available for small businesses or has the SBA given any indication if they might declare a disaster for SBA loans?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, several things. Dan Kelly can correct me if I'm wrong on the SBA front. We put our request in. We're waiting to hear back, and any more color you'd care to add to that? Yeah, we're checking that real time. So listen, the impact on small businesses is unmistakable. Yeah, when you shut restaurants and bars in a state our size and you go take-out only... I'll give you an anecdote, last night my family and I – we're living the same, we're living through this like everybody else. The first two restaurants we called up to order in from were closed. So, this is real.

I mentioned this at the outset. This is going to have an enormous impact on the finances of our state. We're not immune; we're not alone in that respect. We are one of 50. The impact is going to be significant on individuals and workers, and all the things that Carole for instance enumerated for so many of the folks that her agency deals with; but also unemployment insurance, their working lives, period. The Secretary of the Treasury for the federal government said last night that he could see the unemployment rate approaching 20%. That's double what it was in the great recession.

Small businesses you referred to; large businesses certainly aren't immune and our state finances. So, as I said, at the end of our call with the Congressional Delegation I said the two words we all need you to remember more than any other right now are block grants – the extent to which... And Sheila was extremely good on this. The extent to which we can get block grants we can continue reaching deep into our communities and helping the folks who need it the most. Thank you for that. Charlie?

Charlie Stile, The Record: Do you at this stage consider the President to be a partner with the state right now? I mean, there's been a lot reported about his sort of early mismanagement of the crisis, his dismissive tone and some even inaccurate claims about testing and the like. I was just wondering, do you think he gets it now?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, I'll leave history to the historians and I have less interaction with the President than I do with the Vice President and their teams. The President and we were on a call on Monday. His rhetoric appears to be, at least in the past 24 to 48 hours, consistent with the challenge that we have before us. But it is the Vice President that we spend, the Secretary of Health and Human Services and their teams respectively.

And I would just repeat, and it's worth repeating, the asks that we've had – we're persistent. And we'll continue to be forward-leaning on those asks. The most acute challenge we have is with personal protective equipment. I know Chris Neuwirth has ordered 1 million N95s. The problem is, and he's doing extraordinary work – that could be five or six weeks away. So, we got a fraction of our ask. We need more from the Strategic Stockpile. We've asked for boots on the ground. FEMA Region 2 has been very, very good this week. Since Monday they've been at it. I can't say enough good things about how quickly the Army Corps turned around.

By the way, that was out of a letter that I wrote the President, in fairness. So, in that case I give him credit. And it's too early to determine but we've spent a lot of time speaking with the administration as well as our Delegation on the financial. The question was asked a minute ago – we're going to need an enormous amount of federal help. I'm speaking as much as a former banker, not specific to New Jersey's needs but the national, I think the national appropriate level of stimulus is something, believe it or not, in the \$3 trillion to \$4 trillion range for national stimulus. And New Jersey will quite happily take our fair share.

Charlie Stile, The Record: This is separate but coronavirus-related. Do you think it's appropriate for the Highway Authority to be even considering a toll hike amid this period, especially when the community and the journalistic focus on this is severely constrained right now?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know if I've got a strongly-held opinion. I believe that there are a couple of public hearings today. I mentioned this I think yesterday, so I don't have a whole lot of visibility into it. But I did ask that two things be considered and I know I spoke to one of them which is that they be livestreamed, and please God they will be; and secondly, which I may or may not have mentioned yesterday, I strongly urged that the comment period be extended given what we're going through. And I believe, Mahen, that has happened, is that correct? In both fronts?

Communications Director Mahen Gunaratna: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Alright, thank you. Who else has not asked? Nikita?

Nikita Biryukov, NJ Globe: I have two things for you. So, are you prepared to say at this point that candidates, staff and volunteers on political campaigns from both parties should stop all in-person voter contact? And then, are you involved still with the DGA while this crisis is going on in any way?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I'm not sure that I'm prepared to say to any campaign no human-to-human interaction. There's not a lot of it going on. So, we've already limited interactions to 50 people of any kind and then within that, there's got to be social distancing. I can't recall the last time I saw an actual political event happening. You may know better than I. It's been weeks I think.

Nikita Biryukov, NJ Globe: There's not a lot.

Governor Phil Murphy: There's not a lot going on. So, I'm not sure. I'm prepared to say what we've said as a general matter – no more than 50, keep your social distancing, mind your Ps and Qs and it ought to be essential, whatever it is. I saw Vice President Biden last night for instance speaking on a livestream I think from his house, is that right? Yeah, in Wilmington. And secondly, on the DGA very much involved but all of it by telephone and much more sort of technical matters of late. This is consuming more than 24 hours of my day right now. Thank you, Elise?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Thank you, two questions. The first: has the number of unemployment benefit applications exceeded what was filed on Monday?

Governor Phil Murphy: I do not have an answer on that. Alex, assuming we have it we'll get that back to you. I don't know the answer. On Monday, yeah. No, Monday was 15,000. You're asking it is has exceeded that since then?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know. Yeah, we can get that for you.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Okay, and for the Colonel, I'm familiar with two weddings in Lakewood that were shut down by local officials because the attendance was so great. Are you familiar with any other incidents around the state in which law enforcement told people that they had to clear out?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I am not, Elise, and I wasn't even familiar with the ones in Lakewood honestly. But we actually have our Regional Operations Intelligence Center trying to monitor all of that. I'm on the phone every day with Chief Chris Leusner who's the President of the State Association of Chiefs of Police. So, we're trying to just see what is... From what we're gathering, the last few days people have been complying. But to the Governor's point, if they start not or we find otherwise we will take action.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you.

Reporter: Hi. Can you give a status report on schools? I assume they're now all closed. Any particular challenges that have emerged in these first days?

Governor Phil Murphy: I asked this. Dr. Repollet, you won't be surprised, has been manning his post over the past couple of days to make sure that things were going well. We had a sidebar again an hour or two ago with Sheila and Pat and myself. I think we think things are good but I do think there's at least one story we heard that troubled all of us, which is the meals. Again, the concerns we had were food access for kids who don't get a good, reliable hot meal anywhere else other than school; remote learning; and daycare. And I think food every time out was number one on my list. And we heard a disturbing story that the food was prepared and very few of the lunches or meals were picked up, and I think it's fair to say Sheila was quite concerned about that; I was as well. I think, Pat, we're trying to get to the bottom of that, is that right?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I did follow up with Commissioner Repollet on that, and that's – not that we're not looking into it further – but he said that that's normal a lot of times, that the food is prepared and that it doesn't get out. So, we're looking into whether it's other distribution points, whether it is the privacy concerns. If we have the ability to deliver meals and are we able to give out addresses of students? So, it's almost an hourly conversation to make sure that we don't fail in that regard.

Reporter: And was that in multiple districts or was that an isolated here or there issue?

State Police Superintendent Pat Callahan: That was in one district that we heard this morning.

Governor Phil Murphy: It was one district but it was a big number and it concerned Sheila and me. I know it concerned Pat and the rest of us as well. If we're going to go to the trouble of making the meals and we know for sure that there are literally tens of thousands, in fact I think it's a couple of hundred thousand in total kids in this state where the only place they're going to get that reliable meal is in a school, we better darn well be able to deliver the bacon – no pun intended.

Reporter: And just one more. At least one state and a couple others are considering closing schools for the rest of the school year. Is that even on the table at this point? Do you want to speak to that?

Governor Phil Murphy: I can say unequivocally, and I literally mean this, everything's on the table but no decisions have been made.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: We've talked a lot about testing and positive cases and how this is expanding and so forth. Has there been any discussion about trying to quantify recovery? Exactly what does it mean if we say a certain percentage of people are recovered? At what point, how long does that take? Once they recover are they completely recovered? You know, there were some stories from China where they had celebrations and then, two days later the guy tested positive again. Do we have enough information about this virus to be able to say when it's considered "safe" to be considered recovered and when somebody could go and, for instance, check on an elderly relative?

Governor Phil Murphy: Ed, do you want to get that?

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Services, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: The answer is not really. I mean, we're learning more about this virus every day. The CDC in particular is doing those sorts of studies, both on the earlier people who came into the United States and so forth. There are people who are being swabbed regularly every single day. So, we're learning more about it all the time. We have some good general ideas, but if you ask me those sorts of specifics my answer is no, we can't tell you yet.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: The general?

DOH Medical Director, Communicable Disease Services, Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Well, the general is, like many other viruses in this family or other things, you know, we know about what the incubation period is; we know about when you begin becoming infectious. We know that there is the ability for this virus to spread before you become sick but we still think that when you're sick is when you're spreading it the most because it's when you're sickest. We know that after you recover and you feel well you may still continue to test positive for this virus. It's less clear exactly what that means if you test positive for this virus going forward as to whether that's if someone has a viable virus, meaning whether it actually can infect other people or not. And

certainly, we think that you're less infectious. But if you ask me for a hard cutoff where I can say absolutely, for sure when anybody can stop being infectious, or when they can be sure that they would not again become ill, the answer is no, I can't tell you that.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you.

Reporter: Yesterday's action with the executive order, telling locals and counties to comply generally with the state order, are you going back at the executive order in Bergen? And any thoughts on Hoboken Mayor's order to shelter in place for that city?

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, so I'll leave the specifics aside but we're looking at each one of these. Sheila and I take each one of these steps seriously. Again, I'll repeat what I said yesterday. I haven't found one person whose heart's not in the right place but at the end of the day, the buck stops with us and we reserve the right to overrule, reverse, whatever it takes.

I would only say this. We spoke to Mayor Bhalla and his team last night. That is a recommendation from him in Hoboken so that's not a hard and fast executive order and it's hard to argue with someone making a recommendation. We believe we are seeing the whole waterfront of the state – no pun intended – and that we are not patting ourselves on the back, and we're not saying we're the smartest folks in the room. But we think we have the most amount of information with which to make decisions like that. But a recommendation, it's hard to argue with unless we have a violent disagreement with it.

And as it relates to other local or county executive orders, we'll take them as they come. But at the end of the day, again, I want to be unequivocal. The buck stops with us. We reserve the right to either confirm or deny any orders that are out there. Nikita, and then we'll go back to you, Brent. Alex, thank you again for your help.

Nikita Biryukov, NJ Globe: So, this kind of got brought up earlier but I was wondering, do you agree with the bailouts proposed at the federal level and do you agree with the limits that Senator Warren wants on those bailouts? And then, are there any state-level bailouts planned, like cutting gate fees for airlines at Newark?

Governor Phil Murphy: So, I don't really have a comment per se about bailouts. I actually don't even know that Senator Warren's plan or proposal is. But I will say this – I don't know what form it takes other than it better take, block grants had better be one of the forms. But the amount of stimulus that we are going to need as a country and as a state is a big number. And so, my only advice is history will not be unkind to our country if we overshoot. History will be very unkind to our country and to our state if we undershoot. So, whatever is at our disposal, and there's no amount of money in any state – New Jersey, New York, California, you name it. There's no amount of money that can deal with the challenges, the economic challenges that will come from this; the federal government, Congress, the Administration.

And again, there's good news here. There's a lot of feeling, to me, like there's a lot of bipartisan coming together. But the numbers are going to need to be very substantial. Brent?

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Unless I missed it, do we have a county-by-county breakdown of how many cases there are total now?

Governor Phil Murphy: We do. Can we get that? Can Alex get that to you afterwards, is that alright?

Brent Johnson, Star Ledger: Sure, that's fine. I just wanted to make sure.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, I just wanted to reiterate. I did say earlier the top four are Bergen – again, if you disagree, Judy, tell me. Bergen 113, Essex 45, Middlesex 40, Monmouth 32 are the top four. Oh sorry, I skipped Hudson. Hudson 34, Monmouth 32. Those are the top five and we'll get the rest of the list to you. Please.

Reporter: Any further progress, and I think you mentioned yesterday about converting dormitory beds or using them for isolation?

Governor Phil Murphy: No. But in the interest of time – if they disagree, jump in – but that's one of the things we're talking... Not only are these folks, Judy and Pat, looking at that, but that's on the list of projects that we want to talk to the Army Corps about as well. Elise? Is that fair, folks?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: For the Commissioner, the recent beds that you have identified, were they in wings of hospitals or where did they come from?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: They're primarily in hospitals that have wings that have been closed because utilization has gone down. So, they have medical gasses; they're appropriate to open up. And we're pleased that we have that capacity.

Governor Phil Murphy: May I say this? And Judy, if I get this wrong please correct me. We've looked at a lot of things. I was asked about dormitories. I also think about popup potential that I know that we've utilized in the past via the State Police OEM. It's worth noting and if I get this wrong, again, I'll be corrected, that some of this also is displacing current patients who are under healthcare supervision for a reason other than COVID-19. Is that fair to say?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: To handle the surge, the surge is going to come in two directions. One is going to be the COVID-19 patients, and then the other patients that come into the hospital through the emergency room that are appropriate for an acute care stay and perhaps a bed is not available. And that's where opening up a closed hospital, using an empty nursing home that has the facilities that we need to adequately take care of that level of patient is going to become really important.

Governor Phil Murphy: I think in fairness, a dorm is more likely to be in a quarantining capacity for someone who's got either low-level symptomatic or asymptomatic who we want to isolate. Fair to say? Please, and then we'll come back to you, Charlie.

Reporter: Question along a similar topic. Are there any other specific sites that you are considering for surge capacity other than Underwood? And I know I've asked this before, but just to get an updated number, what's the current number of beds in New Jersey that are available?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, my answer for you is I don't have those statistics with me today. I answered it yesterday for the absolute number of beds.

Governor Phil Murphy: Alex could get you that because we have gone on record with those. Is that alright, Judy, afterwards?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah, and it has stuck with me that we have almost 2000 critical care beds. From what I know, from what's going on in hospitals, it's those critical care beds that are so important. And I know we have just about 2000 of them. And total number of beds in... Somebody's handing me statistics. Ah, we have 16,433 med/surg beds and 1983 critical care.

Governor Phil Murphy: You were off only by 17. Other hospitals that you're looking at other than Underwood, or facilities, yeah.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, we actually looked at every closed hospital in the last ten years, and most of them were not able to be brought online. Underwood, being the most recent was able to be brought online. We're also looking at empty nursing homes. We're looking at spaces that are under construction that can be outfitted with medical gasses and the appropriate ward type of a facility. So, we're just about looking, like the Governor says – everything's on the table.

Governor Phil Murphy: Charlie, you had something?

Charlie Stile, The Record: A real quick question about the two fatalities. Can you give some more information about them, where they were from and whether they had exposure to others that you were able to identify?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I don't have the answer to the second question. I can tell you one was from Essex and one was from Hudson County.

Charlie Stile, The Record: Ages?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Both females, Essex and Hudson, both over 60 years of age; both having underlying medical comorbidities but I don't have a list of what they are. This is the general information that I was just given before we came in here.

Charlie Stile, The Record: Do you have the town names or anything?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, just the counties – Essex and Hudson.

Governor Phil Murphy: Anybody else?

So, before I thank my colleagues, a couple of things. We promised I think at least two things for tomorrow. First of all, to remind everybody I think we're at noon tomorrow unless you hear otherwise. Alex and Mahen is still here, you're saying noon right here?

Again, on behalf of Judy and her colleagues, forgive us that by doing it at noon cuts into the time that they need to have the full soup to nuts. We're doing it because the Vice President has convened, I'm not sure the President will be on it or not, but I'll probably know when I see you tomorrow, a VTC that at least a portion of us will need to be on.

We promised two things for tomorrow. One is the details regarding the Bergen County drive-through testing which will open on Friday, God willing, and will give folks explicit guidance as to what you need to do to qualify to go to that testing site. I say 'testing' – we're using that word – that reception site where you're going to give your swab. And then it will be tested on the backend.

And then, secondly, we will have our guidance as it relates at least in part – I'm not sure in full but at least in part – on elections. And we'll obviously have, as best we can at that point, the overnight realities of what we're dealing with.

Again, I wrote down a line which I think is the order before us. There is no greater call than to do something bigger than oneself. And that's what we're talking about right now. I can't emphasize that enough. This is the job over here of flattening the curve, getting out ahead of this thing, breaking the back of this is the job of all 9 million of us. We'll do our part, we need everyone to do their part.

The healthcare system is going to be in the hands of the professionals, the extraordinary heroes among our healthcare workers and folks like the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Guard, the State Police and others in the sense of we're going to flatten the curve over here but we're not going to take any chances over here and make sure that we've got the equipment and the capacity that we need. And we're going to get through this together.

Unequivocally, assuming we all do our part, there is no question we will get through this together. We'll be stronger than ever before, not without mistake, not without being scathed but we will get through this. On behalf of the Lieutenant Governor, Commissioner Johnson, Col. Callahan and Judy and Ed and Chris and their extraordinary team at the Department of Health, God bless you all. We'll see you tomorrow.

Governor Phil Murphy

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