

NEW JERSEY COVID-19 UPDATE

Governor Murphy's COVID-19 Mitigation Press Conference, November 18th, 2020

Governor Phil Murphy

College and Universities

- Along with Governors Cuomo, Wolf, Carney, Lamont, Raimondo and Baker, I am urging all colleges and universities to make covid-19 testing available to all residential students before they leave for Thanksgiving break.
- All students who test positive should be encouraged to isolate on campus or, if they are to go home, make arrangements for their safe travel in coordination with local health officials.

Schools

- We are reporting five new in-school outbreaks confirmed over the past week, leading to 47 new cases of coronavirus infection.
 - In total, we have had 239 cases of in-school transmission from 56 confirmed outbreak instances.
- Current school status:
 - 99 in-person
 - 529 hybrid
 - 145 remote
 - 38 combination
- Digital Divide Update:
 - 70.3% of districts report no current device or connectivity needs
 - Approximately 35,000 students currently lack a device or adequate connectivity, down 12% from last week and down from 231,000 over the summer.
 - Find more information at nj.gov/education.

The Numbers

New cases today: 4,063

New statewide total: 289,562

Rate of transmission 11/16: 1.42

NJ spot positivity rate 11/14: 10.88%

Hospitalized: 2,446

New yesterday: 340

Requiring intensive care: 461

Require ventilators: 223

New deaths: 27

New statewide total deaths: 14,843

Total additional probable deaths: 1,812

Some individuals lost to COVID-19 honored today

- We remember Sister Ellen Margaret Staiger. A Jersey girl, Sister Ellen Margaret was a licensed practical nurse and helped others throughout a noted career in health care. She was kind, compassionate, and lived a life dedicated to the betterment of others.
- We remember Anna Cariello. Anna spent a career in public service, serving as an emergency dispatcher with the Newark Police before moving to the Auto Squad Division. We thank Anna for her years of service.
- We remember Theodore Nixon. After serving in the U.S. Navy for seven years, Theodore worked as a mechanic with SEPTA for 32 years. He loved to read and collect comic books, and was a Trekkie. He lived a rich and colorful life

Department of Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli

College Students

- Students hopefully should be quarantining for 14 days before going home.
- If they haven't completed the 14-day quarantine, they can continue it from home but they must remain separate from their family members and wear a mask.
 - They should use a separate bathroom, utensils and other household items, and if that is not possible they should disinfect them after each use.
- Students who have a family member that are in a high-risk category should quarantine perhaps away from that home.
- Even if a returning student tests negative, they should plan to quarantine for a 14-day period as symptoms can occur any time during that 14-day period.
 - Anyone who tests positive should avoid travel if possible.
- These steps will keep your family safe.

Multi-System Inflammatory Syndrome in Children

- We now have 61 cases. No new reports.
 - The ages are between 1 – 18.
 - One is currently hospitalized.
 - All have either tested positive for covid19 or had positive antibody tests.
 - There have been no deaths.
- Breakdown of race and ethnicity:
 - White 20%
 - Black 33%
 - Hispanic 36%
 - Asian 6%
 - Other 6%

Testing and Hospital Data

- 42% of those in the hospital in critical care are on ventilators.
 - The highest percent we've had on ventilators for quite a long period of time.
- Our spot positivity rate in testing for November 14th is 10.88%. North was 11.13%, Central was 10% and the South 12.16%.

Superintendent Pat Callahan

EO Compliance

- Multiple violations of exceeding indoor capacities and no mask wearing in Atlantic City.

FEMA

- Will be speaking with FEMA to discuss vaccines and regional coordination.

Questions from the media

Would you allow municipalities or counties to do a 24-hour or 3-day lockdown? If so, why?

Murphy: The executive orders that are issued at the state level are the executive orders period. There are exceptions that we shared earlier this week. We continue to work with communities.

How significant do you think the issue of people not cooperating with contact tracers is?

Murphy: I think the significance is very clear. We think we should be trying to understand where this is coming from as much as possible.

Dr. Tan: As we hit widespread activity with covid, we do recognize the importance of containment measures such as contact tracing, but we have to shift the focus to community mitigation. That is encompassed by the restrictions that are being re-introduced right now as well as wearing a mask and social distancing.

What kind of numbers are we expecting to see as we move through the winter? What do we think the average death total is going to be moving forward?

Murphy: We have numbers that go up to 8,000 cases a day and a lot of people dying in some of the models we're looking at. The models are scary. Human nature can bend the curve. Just because the models say something doesn't mean we can't push back against it.

Can you comment on the tax and fee structure on the cannabis industry that's being reported?

Murphy: We've made a lot of progress and I am optimistic but nothing new to report.

NJ Spotlight has been told that Virtua is asking nurses who have tested positive for covid-19 to come into work if they don't have a fever or other symptoms, are you aware of this policy and what is your reaction?

Murphy: I have not heard about this.

Persichilli: We were notified yesterday of that complaint and it is under investigation.

Why are casinos in Atlantic City still open when they have been closed in Philadelphia?

Murphy: The casinos have had to comply with the closing of restaurants and bars by 10pm, and we believe that, based on the evidence we have, that they have been able to responsibly manage their casino floors.

Did you or any other Governor's on the call with the White House make the case that the Trump Administration blocking out Joe Biden is putting lives at risk?

Murphy: This did not come up on the call on Monday but we are making that case in other avenues regularly.

What benefit does the public get in that number that we see every day for positive cases if it includes possibly cases from weeks ago?

Dr. Tan: There is definitely a lot of value of monitoring these cases over time. The benefit of knowing the cases is trying to stem and contain disease transmission, but in light of the fact that we are focusing more on community mitigation, there is still value in putting out the message that people need to be serious and not let down their guard.

What is the current situation in hospitals?

Persichilli: Every day we look at hospital capacity. Those 2,400 admissions are spread across 71 acute care hospitals. We have started comparing covid-positive cases in the hospital compared to where every hospital was at their peak. There is still significant capacity in our hospitals. We are on calls with the CEOs every week and we go over statistics. On staffing, that may be our biggest issue and PTSD is real and our healthcare staff is going through it. Many of our organizations and universities have set up counseling centers and outreach services to employees appropriately so.

What will be the guidance to local law enforcement for Thanksgiving?

Callahan: Our law enforcement execs are regularly updated. I would say that residences offer different challenges than public establishments, and we are relying on individuals to take on personal responsibility. Guidance comes from the Attorney General's office.

Do you remain confident that the recent restrictions you put in place will be enough to curb the spread of the virus?

Murphy: I am confident that they will have an impact. Restricting indoor capacity was a big one, by example. Can we say for sure? We can't. But if folks do what they need to do along with the real threat of compliance, it is a real step in the right direction. There are no more steps that we are planning to announce today or tomorrow, but they're all on the table.

We're getting reports of people waiting for days for an appointment to get a test, and people waiting in lines outside for hours for walk-in testing, are you concerned that there is stress on the testing system?

Murphy: It's not just New Jersey, this happened when the flare ups began in other states as well. Testing resources and the supply lines and supply chains are tight. When you see the folks on line waiting to get a test we need to fix that. We are doing everything we can to address that. We had a call on CUE health tests yesterday. This has a high degree of reliability and the data goes right into our system. We need more capacity as a state and as a country. Some days we are testing up to 75,000 people, but we understand its not acceptable. We don't blame people being upset for being out on line for hours.

What is going on with the complaints from people about their workplace violating covid-19 guidance?

Murphy: I have no color on this but we will follow up with you.

Do you have an estimated cost of vaccinations to New Jersey? What's the plan to pay if the federal government does not come through?

Persichilli: We're doing that modeling now. What we've identified what it will cost to set up a vaccination sites and what the reimbursement level is. We know there is a delta between what we need to vaccinate 70% of the population in a 6-month period and what we expect to get in reimbursement. We will probably go deeper into this at a future press conference, I don't want to misrepresent the number but the delta is in the millions.

Murphy: There is no plan B to the federal government not being there to support us. I'm completely confident that the Biden administration when they get there will step up and take on that responsibility.

NYC's MTA is warning of 40% subway service cuts and layoffs of about 9,300 employees. How much of an impact would be felt on New Jersey?

Murphy: I don't have color on this but I'm not shocked. This is not surprising. The MTA, probably more so than NJ Transit, on the theory that the work from home phenomenon and the outward flight of people has led to a drop in ridership. For somebody who commutes from NJ into NYC, my guess is that this will have an impact. It's no surprise that transit systems across the country are up against it. I hope one day we will be able to emerge from this and use our time wisely.

Antonia Spano

Director of Legislative Affairs

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