



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Wednesday, May 20, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon. Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. A couple quick items, and then I want to ask the Commissioner to come up and just give our public health update. But earlier today, the Executive Council did vote to approve the State's June Warrant, which I think was a relief to a lot of folks. It allows the State Treasury to expend necessary funds for State Government functions to proceed as planned for June. And I'd like to thank, obviously, the Executive Council for unanimously moving this forward.

Earlier this week, I also announced additional areas that our economy would be able to reopen with new guidance, things like paintball and mini golf, and some of these outdoor guided services for hiking, things that don't quite always fall on the forefront of folks' radar but are important businesses, especially given the dynamics of our great State.

On Friday, we hope to announce additional areas that we can reopen in the coming weeks. And as we continue to reopen, we always talk a lot about testing, the need for testing, having adequate amount of data that really helps inform our decision-making. We don't really look at models as much as we look at data, trends, and where we are. And it helps really make informed decisions on all the different steps that we have to take.

So, as we continue to take these steps in trying to expand testing, we're announcing two new fixed locations, fixed testing sites in Londonderry and Keene, to ensure more regional access to testing. These two new testing sites will bring our total of our fixed sites to nine. And those two new sites will go live as of Sunday, I believe.

Another area that we're expanding testing surrounds the requirements to receive a test. So we always want to keep pushing ourselves to allow more and more individuals, even though they might have very minor symptoms, or whatever it might be, we really want to open it up as much as possible to allow folks to get that test and give them the piece of mind of whether they are working with COVID or not.

So we have anyone over the age of 60, something that we have previously announced; any healthcare worker; anyone with an underlying health condition; and anyone with even just a single symptom of COVID can just go onto the website, self-attest to any of those stipulations at [nh.gov\COVID](https://nh.gov/COVID). That's [nh.gov\COVID](https://nh.gov/COVID). Go on, self-attest to any of those stipulations. And you'll get a reservation to get a test done. And again, whether it's through our mobile facilities, our fixed testing sites, all the different partners that have really branched out across the State, we can't thank them enough. It's providing a lot of testing opportunity in New Hampshire. Again, just they keep knocking it out of the park which is, I think, great for all of us.

I'll now turn it over to Commissioner Shibinette, and maybe she can give a public health update.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you, Governor. Today we are announcing 149 new cases of COVID-19 in New Hampshire, bringing our total to 3,868. Of those 149, 51 of those cases were at a single long-term care facility. That came from a testing event that we did at that facility.

We are still at 5%. So we have, sorry, eight new deaths to report today, six of those at long-term care facilities, which brings our total to 190, or 5%. We are still holding steady at 10% for hospitalizations, with a total of 385.

Total, we are over 56,000 tests conducted in the State of New Hampshire so far, which is great news. Our testing is really making a huge difference. We're averaging over 2,000 tests a day for the PCR tests, and over 680 tests per day of the antibody tests.

As the Governor said, we will be opening two new fixed sites on Sunday -- one in Londonderry and one in Keene -- and expanding our testing criteria to include household members of people in the high-risk categories, so the categories that the Governor mentioned: people with underlying health conditions, or older adults. So if you're a household member of those categories, you now will have a place to check. That's starting next week. We're ramping up right now to handle that increased volume.

Additionally, starting next week, we will be adding a column for staff of childcare centers, as we announced earlier this week, that will be reopening some of those programs. So, being able to test the team members before some of those reopen, and for those that really stepped up to the plate and stayed open through this crisis, if you still need to be tested and you haven't been tested yet, being able to go to a test site to get tested is really important. So, starting next week, which would be Tuesday, we will be offering those two categories when you sign up to do testing.

Additionally, for long-term care, I'm announcing two outbreaks today: one at Community Bridges in Belmont. This is a facility for people with disabilities. They have two resident cases and four staff cases. And then, Greenbriar in Nashua, which is a long-term care facility, they have 10 resident cases and no staff cases as of today.

Additionally, I just wanted to update some of the data that I shared a couple weeks ago. We had talked about the percentage of long-term care residents lost to death, as compared to our total licensed population.

So, last week, when we talked, I had announced that New Hampshire had 0.7% of our long-term care population lost to death due to COVID-19, and compared to other States. So I just want to update those numbers.

Right now, we're at 1% of our long-term care population lost to COVID death. As compared to our other States around the northeast, Rhode Island is at 5.7%. New York is at 3.2%; Maine, 0.4%; Massachusetts, 5.6%; and Connecticut, 4%.

Additionally, a couple weeks ago, I shared the percentage of our long-term care facilities, or our nursing homes, that have had COVID-positive cases, and looked at how we compare to other States. Today, New Hampshire, about 28% of our nursing homes have at least one COVID-positive case. Rhode Island's at 34%; New York at 32%; and Massachusetts is at 50%.

As I said a couple weeks ago, we share these numbers because we always look at what other States are doing, how we can do it better. Whether we are the best or the worst, every death is a tragedy. Every long-term care facility that gets affected is a tragedy, not just for the residents but the families and the staff that take care of those residents. So we will continue to employ programs that work and continue to

pivot every time we need to, to make sure that we're providing the best care as timely as we can. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Well, thank you, Commissioner. And before we get to some of the questions, just want to also talk a little bit about as more of a reminder than anything that, on Friday, we did announce the formation of the Main Street Small Business Relief Fund. And we are currently in the middle of our two-week Pre-Grant Application process. It's a requirement for anyone who would like to receive small business relief out of the \$400 million fund that we announced last week.

The period that the Applications have to be submitted by ends on May 29th. So you still have maybe nine, 10 days to get it in. So there's plenty of time. But we really want to emphasize to folks that anyone who has an interest in that fund, the application process is very, very simple. It really just looks at your revenue and potential losses, and other federal monies that may have come in, or may be coming in. And we've really tried to streamline it.

To-date, we've had over 5,000 small businesses apply already. And part of that Pre-Grant Application process really will allow us to have the -- it also kind of dual-serves as an information-gathering period so we understand what the real impact of this COVID epidemic is on our small businesses and that, therefore, we can create an agnostic, fair formula that really allows everyone to partake in something at a level where they can really make sure that they are paying those most-needed bills, whether it's property tax bills, or a mortgage, or rent, or just keeping the lights on, whatever it might be.

This fund is not designed to make businesses whole. We know there's going to be a lot of economic loss. But we really do believe that there's a possibility to, in a very fair and balanced way -- not first come, first serve, not big businesses. It's really for small businesses on a fair level to participate and have some economic relief from the State. And hopefully working side-by-side with the Federal Government, as well, that has also provided quite a bit of business relief.

So, again, folks can go to the website, the revenue.nh.gov, R-E-V-E-N-U-E.nh.gov, or they can go to the GOFERR site, as well, which is the G-O-F-E-R-R.nh.gov, G-O-F-E-R-R. Either way, we try to make as many pathways available to folks. And we will keep promoting this program. We want to make sure that everyone can qualify, has an opportunity to partake in it, which is why we've kept the application period open for another 10 days.

So, I guess that's it. It is Emergency Medical Services Week here in New Hampshire, EMS week, which is great. I mean, what better time to really say thank you to all those folks on the frontlines than our Emergency Medical Services and their Technicians in all the different aspects of the State. They are 24-hour, on-call, rush into a situation on a moment's notice, and really provide a lot of amazing life-saving opportunities for our citizens.

And so, again, as part of EMS Week, we just want to say thank you to all those folks that are out there, that are on the frontlines. We've never needed them more. We really haven't. Whether it's over the past few years, what we've seen with the opioid epidemic that has hit this State, other emergency services that are needed, now we're in the troughs of the COVID pandemic. They're always there for us. And we just can't thank them enough, frankly.

With that, we can open up for questions, if anyone has any questions.

Q&A Session

Governor, Memorial Day weekend coming up, I know State beaches on the seacoast are closed. What about Weirs Beach, lake kind of beaches? What is that going to look like?

Governor Sununu:

So the only beaches that the State has mandated to remain closed through Memorial Day weekend are the seacoast beaches, the State beaches on the seacoast. We are working with towns that have like the Seabrook Beach, for example, within the town. Again, we want to provide some consistency there.

Other small beaches within the parks, because our park system is open, so if we looked at small beaches within the park system, they are open but not for congregating, just for transient travel, walking, things of that nature. But we're asking people not to sit on a blanket and relax on the beach, so to say. If you want to dip your toe in the water, that's fine. But, we haven't closed those down.

And then, there's other beaches, like you talk about Weirs Beach and other beaches around the State that, again, we're allowing to remain open. Most of those beaches are town beaches. And a lot of those folks are making their own decisions at the town level for our lakes and ponds, things of that nature.

And what will maybe enforce -- I don't know if enforcement is the right word there. What will that kind of look like for First Responders kind of keeping an...

Governor Sununu:

You mean over the weekend to make sure no one puts a toe in the sand on Hampton Beach? Well, look, we don't want to get in a position of hard enforcement. I think all the folks up and down the seacoast deserve a lot of credit for, I think, having the right tone, when working with individuals. I don't think anyone really wants to go out and kind of ruin it. A few bad apples can ruin the whole bunch. We've heard that term before. And I don't think anyone wants to be in that position.

So, we will try to manage those crowds as best we can. We know the Massachusetts beaches will be open on Monday. And I think there's probably a lot to learn there, frankly, whether you're looking at traffic patterns, how they park. Who's going to the beach? Are they congregating? What kind of activities are being done? What's the business looking like?

So, we actually have an opportunity to learn a little bit in terms of what happens in Maine and our partners in New Hampshire to make sure whatever guidance we put forth in the long-term, we get right. But in terms of enforcement, we don't want to come down with a heavy hammer.

But we do really encourage people to have the discipline. If we can just give us a little more time, we hope to make an announcement. There's no promises we're going to open on any particular date. We were asked to shoot for June 1st and we're going to try to meet that, to be sure. We still have some issues to work out with the seacoast, whether it's traffic and parking, and some other aspects of businesses and restaurants.

So we're working very diligently on that. But we do ask the citizens of New Hampshire to be patient. We know it's going to be warm. I mean, we heard 85°, maybe even 90° on Friday. I get it. Someone who lives over on the seacoast, I would love to be over at the beach.

But we're asking folk to have the discipline to not jump in the water just yet. Don't put the toes in the water just yet. If we can wait a little longer and get it right, it allows us to get it right, if you understand what I'm saying, for the long-term. And that's really what my job is. Don't just cave to the pressure of just opening something, because if you do that in a rash way without really understanding the data and the details of what could happen, you could set yourself back. Nobody wants that.

So, we're really asking folks to have that discipline. Enjoy some time with your families and our Home Hike Challenge, or whatever it might be. Might get a little warm, but relief will be here soon. It is only May. That's the good news. It is only May. We want to make sure we get it right for June, July, and August.

Governor, with regard to the childcare support that you announced last week, the rule is that, say, no more than 10 children can be in any one facility at any one time. I think most operators with childcare centers would say, I can't make a profit, or I can't even break even with only 10 kids. And I assume that \$25 million is aimed at standing them up so that they can open. Could you talk a little bit about your timeframe for when you want to start that application process?

Governor Sununu:

So, we put forth the \$25 million fund for childcare last week. It's a great fund. It allows to provide economic support for the employees and the centers, themselves, all the different aspects that will be required as part of the guidance.

I absolutely acknowledge, going back and looking, there are parts of the guidance that may be problematic. And so, my promise to a lot of folks over the past 24 and 48 hours has been we're going to take another look.

I think most of it is pretty good. But whether you look at class size, whether you look at the processes that are being required, in terms of how to manage the kids outside versus inside, the sanitary procedures, most of those are pretty good. But there are a few stipulations that sound good on paper, can provide a lot of good public-health benefits, but can just be impractical. And we don't want to become so impractical that these facilities aren't opening their doors.

So, the overall assessment there is we're talking to the team today. We're going to be taking a look at it. And if we have to make revisions, we're willing to do that. And we're not making any promises on any individual stipulation.

But, we have been open with our childcare centers to-date. And with the new guidance that came out, it's a good document. But there are certain pieces of it that, I think, are creating some inconsistencies. And we recognize that. So we're more than happy to go back and take a second look.

Just to follow up on that, what are some of the pieces that you think may be adjusted? We've had some viewers reach out to us concerned about staff wearing masks and kids not being able to see their Teachers communicate to them, talk, some other concerns about the social-distancing requirements and...

Governor Sununu:

No, that's exactly it. So some of the areas, we've heard those very same concerns over class size, whether they have to be 10-or-less. And there seems to be a little confusion on where the class size is mandated and where it is not.

The stipulations for being outside, do Teachers have to wear a mask outside or don't they? And just some of the provisions around the mask wearing and what flexibility there may be there, because obviously, when you're dealing with especially very little kids, there may be times when a child might not understand a Teacher unless they have the mask down. Is that allowed?

And we don't want to put anybody's health at-risk or anything. But we also have to be practical, I think, and understand that you have children, at a very young age, that are trying to work one-on-one. And we're trying to provide childcare in a safe and a secure, and a happy manner. You want kids to enjoy the process there and make sure that it's nothing that is so different that it becomes out of the norm for them. I mean, that's just a practical reality.

So, none of this is the norm for any of us. And as adults, I think we always say that kids are incredibly resilient, which they are. I'm always shocked at how resilient kids can be. But when you're talking about a pandemic like this that is such an unknown, it can be very, very scary for children. And we just want to make sure we get it as right as we possibly can, of course.

There's not going to be a perfect answer. Unfortunately, the guidance document isn't going to work 100% for every person, every family, and every organization. But we're really trying to take a lot of that input.

I just popped on randomly on a Facebook Live conversation. I never know how that's going to go when I do that. And there were some great questions. A lot of these issues of childcare were actually brought up, and we answered a lot of them. And we took some of the feedback. And I think it's all great feedback to, again, not be some sort of Concord bubble, where we pass out guidance and then we just kind of sit back and let it all bear out.

This is a State where you can really, from the top level-on-down have great connection, interaction with all the stakeholders: with businesses; with childcare; with schools, whatever might be. And this is an area where I think the State can shine and actually have an open ear to what's happening out there. And if we have to make adjustments, we're more than willing to do that.

I mean, it has to be all done within the realm of public health, of course. We're not going to throw everything out the window. But, if there are small stipulations, like the mask wearing, the size of the classrooms, and specifically some of the regulations even being outdoors, we're always happy to listen.

When might those new adjustments come out?

Governor Sununu:

I don't know. We're talking to the team today. So we will try to get them out soon. If there's anything that's conflicting or confusing, it doesn't behoove anybody to drag it out. So we're happy to reassess.

Getting back to numbers, I think you mentioned 190 new positives?

Governor Sununu:

There's 190 fatalities to-date, I believe.

Okay. What was the new positives?

Governor Sununu:

149.

And 50 was in one residential home?

Governor Sununu:

51 were in part of one residential facility. Yes.

Where was that? What facility?

Governor Sununu:

It was Hillcrest, correct? Oh, Villa Crest in what town? Sorry, in Manchester, Villa Crest in Manchester. We had gone in and assessed a lot of their staffing. And 51 of those staff did come up positive. A lot of them were asymptomatic. But in a healthcare facility, in a long-term care facility like that, just one can create a problem.

So what's the protocol? What happens when you have that many positives in one facility to protect other people and residents?

Commissioner Shabinette:

So I don't have the exact breakdown of how many of those were staff and how many were residents, because we have gone in, in the last week, and we've tested all the residents and all of the staff. And I actually talked to the Administrator there last week. And she was doing a great job with cohorting. And cohorting is our way to work through a contagious illness like COVID-19.

So, when it comes to residents, you cohort residents in a separate area of the building. So you may have a wing or a cluster of rooms, separated out to, say, any COVID-positive people, or people suspected of COVID that are waiting for the test, and they're very symptomatic, may go in one part of the building. And then, any staff that are obviously symptomatic with COVID are not going to be at work at all.

But, with a number like 51, if they're staff, or if they're a lot of staff, you can't just close down the building. So there are essential workers' guidelines for maybe COVID-positive staff that are asymptomatic and didn't know they had the illness to be in PPE and taking care of COVID-positive patients. So we've done that in a couple of different residential facilities, where a good amount of both resident and staff were affected with COVID.

This facility, has it been tested before? It seems like a lot.

Commissioner Shibinette:

So, what you'll see is big numbers that come up immediately now. Initially, when you would have a resident or a staff that was COVID-positive, we would go to test a wing, or test a group of residents that resided in the same area. Or we would test all the residents, but not necessarily all the staff.

Now, we are going in, and we're testing both. So, if there is a lot of COVID in the building -- and like the Governor had said, we're seeing more and more asymptomatic COVID. When I talked to the Administrator last week, I think she said she had two residents that had very mild symptoms of something. And to see 51 people come back positive, it's unimaginable to have that much positivity in your building and not have any symptoms at all. And it really is a testament to how difficult COVID is to fight, because you have so much asymptomatic-positive.

So, is that number big? Yes. I think we will see more big numbers like that, as we go in, and potentially test hundreds of residents and staff on the same day.

On the long-term care, I think you had said 1% of all long-term care residents. Is that accurate, 1% of all long-term care residents have died?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yes, by licensed beds. So 1% of our licensed bed capacity we've lost to COVID death.

How has it been procuring the N95s? I know we're getting a lot of the gowns and the surgical masks. Are those N95s still really difficult to get? Or where are we at with...

Commissioner Shibinette:

Today, they are difficult. It seems to be that, through this crisis, the limiting factor for PPE has kind of rotated between surgical masks right up front, right? And then, we worked really hard and got 10 million of them, and that was great. We stocked our warehouse and could give everybody some.

And then, we rotated into gowns, and it became a real big issue. And now, we're at N95s. And it's definitely our limiting factor right now, N95s. We do have some KN95s, which is a different version of the N95s. Most people, especially healthcare professionals, do not think it meets the standards. But it's better than a surgical mask.

We do have several orders in for N95s. It's just a matter of when they're coming in. We had two orders last week that canceled. And that's one of the reasons why you make multiple orders. Oftentimes, if you put four orders in, two will get either backordered or canceled, and two will come in. So that's kind of the position we're in right now is where we have multiple orders out and we're just waiting to see which ones are coming in.

Governor, I know you've had Senator Bob Giuda kind of tasked in working with religious groups. I think he was working on a draft he was hoping to bring to the Reopening Task Force. Bishop Libasci announced

today that they were going to distribute Holy Communion to parishes for distribution as a temporary situation, until masses can return. What can you tell us in terms of the prospects of...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so in terms of getting folks back to houses of worship, we're continually working on it. I think Senator Giuda's done a great job. The Task Force has taken it forward. We don't have anything in terms of guidance just yet. But I think that's because they're trying to make sure they get it as right as they can.

One thing I was looking at today, because, when you look at houses of worship, funerals or weddings would also probably come under very similar categories, right? We're talking about those types of religious services, in one form or another.

I was looking at all the different States around us. And it's amazing. We all try to stay relatively on the same page in terms of where we're going with some of this. But this is one area where everyone's a little different.

Massachusetts, even though they have the biggest and toughest epidemic, really, in New England, has already opened their houses of worship to, I believe, 40%. Some are opening in a week. Some are in two weeks. Some are in a month. Some are in three weeks. So, the States are really all over the place a little bit.

So, I think that has led us to the conclusion that we just have to talk to our folks here and work with our public health here. Look at our data here and make the right decision for New Hampshire. And hopefully it'll be sooner than later. But, we can't make any promises.

Unfortunately, as I've said many times on this very stage, some of the super cluster events that we talk about, the events where one individual can infect hundreds in a matter of an hour, do happen in places of worship. So it makes it a real concern for us. We don't want to be in that situation, or just ignorantly move forward and hope for the best.

You're talking about lives, and this is a very severe epidemic. It can have devastating effects on individuals and families. And so, we just need to make sure we get it as right as we possibly can, and there's a couple different ways to do it.

But it's interesting to see this is one of those areas, everyone's doing it a little bit differently, at a different time. And we will look at those models, if there's something to be gained out of them. But, I think, again, hopefully we will get some guidance that we can at least start talking about and working with public health to see if there's a path forward sometime soon. And that'll help folks.

The weddings is a big one. I know I have a lot of folks that have contacted me. Their daughter's getting married. Their son is getting married. They're getting married. And there's contracts out there. There's money.

The wedding ceremony, itself, is a little different than the reception, right? So we're looking at, how do break those two apart and make sure that we're handling the issue. I'm less concerned about the wedding ceremony, because you can have physical distancing. Those tend to be smaller gatherings, and it's easy to make those smaller gatherings.

A reception's a whole different story. I don't know about your wedding reception, but mine got pretty fun. We don't want to start encouraging hundreds of people gathering for a party and all that kind of stuff, when it's just unfortunately not the right time and, again, could create a real cluster event. We've seen that play out around the country in a negative way, as well.

So, we are really trying. We appreciate everyone's patience. It's nothing that we're not paying attention to. It's just a real difficult decision right now. And as we get the guidance, we will start working on it as soon as we can get something before us.

I don't know if this is a question for the Commissioner or the Governor, but where are we at with contact tracing, and just sort of the process of that, especially with outdoor seating at restaurants reopening? Does that pose a challenge, if someone goes to a restaurant? Or how do you sort of reach out to all the people and...

Governor Sununu:

Well, if you don't mind, I'll take that one, unless the Commissioner wants to. She'll correct me in a minute, if I get something wrong. So, again, we have a very robust contact tracing program here, hundreds of individuals that are set up in their own location now. We have offices and just people working around the clock on it.

It doesn't change too much in terms of our ability to go out, if someone does have COVID, if they were at a restaurant. We will take that into consider -- the group will take that into consideration. Luckily, we've set our guidance up to ensure a certain amount of physical distancing between individuals in some of those new locations, whether it's a retail store we might have opened up, or a restaurant they might have attended.

It does take a lot of manpower, a lot of phone calls, a lot of work, a lot of tracing. But it's all doable. And it has been a very valuable tool. And I think it's one of kind of the more hidden but very important tools that we've had, in terms of maintaining our numbers versus our friends to the south in Massachusetts.

Like, why are the numbers so different just right over the border? Well, there's certain aspects of our program that we didn't give up on. We stayed right on top of. Contact tracing is one of them. It allowed us to really segregate individuals in those communities that might have presented as positive sooner.

So, we're not giving up on it. We're going to keep it for as long as we need to keep it to make sure that we're segregating folks out. And it is a very tough endeavor, to be sure. But, it's definitely worthwhile and it has, I think, led to some very positive results in the State. Anything you wanted to add there? Okay, great.

So if someone said I was at X restaurant, do you, then, have to reach out to everybody that ate there, and things like that? And what does that process sort of look like?

Commissioner Shibiante:

So, really, what you're looking at is a close sustained contact, right? If I was in a restaurant and I was on the other side of the seating area, and we didn't put you in the restroom facilities at the same time, or something like that, then you're not going to reach out to every person.

But, the standard has always been is closed sustained contact. I mean, if you look around even this room, right, we all maintain social distancing. While we're in the same room, we're not having sustained close contact. And that's important.

So, in the contact investigation, that's what you get to. So what we end up doing, if you were at an outdoor seating, we may contact the restaurant and say, who was the party sitting right next to them? And if we can't figure it out, what we will do -- and you've probably seen us do this early-on -- is we will put out a public notification and say, there was a positive COVID case at this restaurant at this time. Anybody that has symptoms that was at that restaurant, please contact us. So, if there's a reason to do a public notification, we will do it, if we can't trace down the people the people that had close contact.

Governor Sununu:

Which is why opening the beaches creates a challenge, I mean, for obvious reasons, right, because that's just an example. Or if you were hiking, something like that, there's just only so much you're going to practically be able to do, if you're surrounding yourself with a lot of strangers.

But by limiting the number of individuals in any certain area, allowing for that natural physical distancing without people feeling like they're forced or almost on top of one another, or within 6 to 10 feet, give them the ability to have space and people will utilize it. I think people take that very responsibly and hopefully that will help, again, keep these cluster-type events down, with our great teams over there.

And the folk that are over there, we have folks from all over the State, in terms of different Departments. Men and women from our National Guard, everyone's been trained up and not many people go to school for contact tracing, right? But a lot of people are doing a really good job here in the State. They've really taken it on themselves to be retrained, jumped right into it. And it's been a great tool. Do we have some folks on the phone?

Holly with Associated Press:

Hi, this is a question for Commissioner Shibinette. I think you've mentioned this before, but I just wanted to clarify. If someone lives in New Hampshire, but they test positive or they die in Massachusetts, or another State, is it correct that they're counted in New Hampshire because they live here? And conversely, if someone from Massachusetts or Vermont, or Maine tested positive in New Hampshire, or died in New Hampshire, do you not include them in the numbers that you're reporting?

Commissioner Shibinette:

So, all New Hampshire residents, regardless of where they contacted COVID-19, are counted in the New Hampshire numbers. So, the best example of that are people that live in New Hampshire and work specifically in healthcare in Massachusetts. And we've seen that happen a lot where they may have come in contact with COVID in their workplace but they live in New Hampshire. They may get tested in Massachusetts. And then, the Massachusetts Public Health Department will report those numbers back to us.

Conversely, you will often see our numbers change by a couple every day. It may not totally add up. Maybe they're two or three, off. And the reason for that is that, in the course of our contact investigation, we find out that, although someone works in New Hampshire and was tested in New Hampshire, they actually just live over the border in Massachusetts, Maine, or Vermont. And so, we take them out of our count and their home State puts them in their count.

Donna with the Colebrook Chronicle:

Hi, there. I have a bit of a long-winded question, so bear with me. I'm wondering. It's an ever-evolving moment in time for all of us right now. I'm wondering what recourse you have for those who refuse to follow DHHS guidance and orders, or the State of Emergency orders. For example, if somebody tests positive at their healthcare facility, they're told to isolate for 14 days. They might refuse to do so. They might continue circulating in public without masks. Is it a recommendation or a mandatory that they isolate? The next part is for Firefighters, for example we have many volunteer Fire Departments. Well, pretty obvious, they cannot put on a mask as they're heading out to a fire. They have enough equipment to wear. What is the expectation for them, or for EMTs, or First Responders? What about in their personal lives? Maybe they're not wearing masks in public, but they certainly need to be careful when they respond to an emergency call? The next one is businesses, they might have signage in place. We have a lot of that up here in Colebrook. Businesses have signage asking customers please wear a mask. No shoes, no shirt, no mask, no service. Yet, there are customers who go into a store without their mask, and the business does not refuse service. Is it recommendation and not mandatory for retailers to make this request? And then, you have a lot of smaller outdoor venues with events and activities up this way, the racetrack in Groveton, for example. They have large outdoor space. Maybe they can only fit 100 people at their venue. Maybe they can social distance. They're continuing to plan their racing activities, even into this weekend. Can you really regulate something like that? Is it a ban on groups of over 10? Or is that a recommendation? Is it mandatory? You're talking about beaches. Town beaches, for example, are under the authority of Town Officials and not under the State. Is it mandatory for them to close down? The bottom-line question is, what recourse do you have, under your Emergency Order, or any Health Department orders to correct or stop any of these activities from taking place, or can you? What would be a violation of your Emergency Order? And that's it. Thank you. It's a lot.

Governor Sununu:

So, I'm going to answer a few pieces. And then, I'll ask the Commissioner to come up and talk a little bit about how Department of Health and Human Services responds. We have guidance for all of these things, and we're creating guidance for all of these things. Where a mask is mandatory or where something is mandatory, it's in the guidance. Where it's recommended, it's in the guidance.

So, for example, the retail stores you discussed, the State does not require customers. It is not a mandatory. Recommendation, but not mandatory, and we do make that very clear that they wear a mask. And if a business wants to have people wear a mask, that can be a requirement of that business. And they have the right to refuse that service, if they so choose. But the State hasn't required it.

Same with towns, if towns want to go more restrictive on some of our requirements, whether it's in their public areas or their parks, that is their right to do so. And we try to provide as much as data and guidance as we can.

But what the State mandates and does not mandate, we try to make sure we make eminently clear in the guidance. It's the difference between shall or should, or recommended or mandated. Those are some of the keywords that we try to use.

When you talk about First Responders, such as Firefighters or EMS, again, they're wearing a lot of protective equipment already. But, we don't have mandates that they put on a surgical mask every time they walk in. Obviously, it is in their interest to do so. And I think a lot of them do-do that, as much as they possibly can.

They've always been on the frontlines of our priority list, in terms of getting PPE. And we still have a few N95s. But when we really had N95s to hand out, or gowns, or gloves, or masks, I mean, we were always very willing to provide that resource to them.

And obviously those folks are really rushing in. And that's why we also understand that it isn't also always possible to put on that PPE, which is why we did the First Responder stipend, paying them a little extra, incentivizing them to be on the frontlines, when they absolutely couldn't, and really thanking them more than anything for the risks that they're taking for themselves and unfortunately for their families, as well.

The outdoor events, again, we will have guidance on outdoor events. The 10-person stipulation in the State, as part of the Stay-at-Home Order, is a mandate. That is a rule. It is absolutely a rule. And overall, there's a bit of a self-enforcement, if you will. I think people really do stick to it. And we've had a lot of positive results.

I've always said that, with all these guidance and these requirements that we are putting on folks, it's challenging. It's difficult. But most importantly, there is a self-incentive to follow those rules, so that we can have the flexibility to make additional steps forward, as we start to flex more businesses open, or more flexibility with our communities, whatever it might be.

So, if there are specific instances, there is an enforcement aspect that we can go to. We've been fortunate that that's an extremely, extremely rare circumstance here in New Hampshire. So, I don't know, Commissioner, did you want to add anything else, in terms of the isolation orders? Yeah.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah, I get this question a lot about how to enforce a directive from Public Health Department on isolation or quarantine. So just to make the designation, an isolation order is when someone is symptomatic or has tested positive for COVID, and we've asked them to isolate in their home, or in somewhere that's safe to isolate. Quarantine order, or directive, is when you are a close contact with someone that's COVID-positive, and you could potentially have COVID, or you need to quarantine to make sure that you don't get COVID.

So, in 99% of the cases, people willingly comply. I mean, it is not that often that you find members of the public that are not willing to comply. But in the event that there is someone that is not willing to comply, and we've assessed that they're putting the community at-risk, the Commissioner can issue either a order of isolation or an order of quarantine. And I've had to do so a handful of times during COVID-19. And that will require them to isolate or quarantine in a safe place.

And that's appealable up to a court level to get in front of a Judge. But, fortunately, we have not needed to go there. Like I said, 99% of people always comply. And the times that I have had to issue an order of isolation or quarantine, we were able to have a conversation with those people. And they complied after.

Paula with InDepth:

Hi, everybody. I have a question about nursing homes today. I'm interested. And I listed to the Governor and Council Meeting. And I think I heard Commissioner Shibinette speak a little bit about some sort of a response crew that could go into nursing homes in the event that there's a mass deduction of staff, or an illness. And then, also, I'd like to get a little bit of an update on the testing at the nursing homes, what your

strategy and goals are. How are we, in terms of getting a number on all of the people who are in these for being tested?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Sure, so, as I've said before, we look to other States and say, what great ideas do they have that we can steal, basically? And we've seen that a couple States have teams of people that their State Government or State Public Health Department has recruited.

And so, we started that process a little over a week ago. We're negotiating with three companies right now to give us a team of people. That's usually eight to 10 people, combination of Nurses and Nursing Assistants. And we're hoping to have that finalized in the next week-or-so, in the event that we have a facility that his short-staffed.

And staffing is always going to struggle in long-term care facilities, and, honestly, in healthcare, for the last couple of years. So we're not talking about just short staffing. We're talking about a facility that has a significant amount of vacancy due to the COVID crisis that we have some ability to help.

Now, all along, we have used our resources to create partnerships, ,maybe not just with the State of New Hampshire but with our partners that were furloughing workers. So we created systems to connect facilities looking for workers with people that were furloughed. We connected our facilities with our Medical Reserve Corps., our volunteer. And we've placed several volunteers into long-term care facilities that were Nurses, or Nurse Practitioners, or LNAs.

So, we've used a variety of tactics. But, like I've said is that we're always looking for the next thing that we can do to help. And that will be one of the things that we put together in the coming weeks. And Paula, I forget the second part of your question. I'm sorry. Could you repeat it?

Paula with InDepth:

Yes, I was asking about if you can give us an update. I guess we were testing all the nursing homes in the most affected counties. And the hope was that you were going to get everybody tested in the next couple of weeks. I just wondered if you could give us an update.

Commissioner Shibinette:

So we are right in the middle of that right now. Last week, we were at 40%. And we have scheduled completion, if not the end of this week, early next week. So I would say we're probably closer to 60% today.

I know that thousands of test swabs and test kits went out to the nursing homes. And we're staggering the dates that they're doing the specimen collection and having our courier pick them up. So that is still scheduled to be done, like I said, if not the end of this week then early next week. That's baseline for all residents.

So, then, the next part of that testing strategy is testing staff. And we've already tested thousands and thousands, and thousands, just by the strategy of testing the entire building when there's one positive person. We've tested thousands of staff.

So, we will have something concrete. We are testing staff now. But I'm going to formalize a plan, because it's going to be a combination. We're probably not going to send a mobile team out to all

70 nursing homes every 10 days. What makes more sense, as we stand up these fixed sites, is assigning facilities to a fixed site and say, every seven to 10 days, your employees can go to this fixed site and get tested.

And so, that's going to work for part of the State. There may be still part in the North Country that we send a mobile team up there to test facilities. So, we're really not trying to do a one size fits all. We're trying to look at every region individually and see what works best for them.

Michael with Inside Sources:

Thanks so much. It's interesting. We're almost an hour into this press conference and no one has mentioned yesterday's job numbers, the more than 16% unemployment in New Hampshire due to the lockdown. Governor, can you assure the 100,000-and-some odd workers who've been forced out of their jobs by the lockdown that what they've achieved is a goal that was worth the pain that they've been suffering and continue to suffer, particularly given that, outside of nursing homes, impact of the virus has been so extremely low here in New Hampshire?

Governor Sununu:

Okay. I apologize. Can I assure people that are on unemployment, what? I don't know the question.

Michael with Inside Sources:

Can you assure the people who've lost their jobs, who are suffering without jobs right now, that this sacrifice that they've been forced to make by your lockdown is going to be worth the outcome, particularly given that the impact of the Coronavirus outside of nursing homes is so extremely low in New Hampshire?

Governor Sununu:

Well, sure. I mean, well, if the argument is we shouldn't have locked anything down, we shouldn't have taken any of the precautionary measures that we did, then I'd tell you to go look at New York. Go look at places that didn't lock down as fast as we did, that didn't take the precautions that we did. Look at what happened to their hospitals, to the incredibly high incidents, not just of COVID but of fatalities, as well.

Of course, it made huge differences. And of course, I stand by the very difficult decisions of asking businesses to shut down. I think we've created as much flexibility in that process as we could. I always challenge anyone that says that we've shut down the entire economy.

16% unemployment is a staggering number. Maybe we haven't talked about it, because it's still not shocking in that we knew it was there. It's something we've been talking about for a while. We watch those unemployment numbers on a day-by-day basis.

I remind folk that, as Governor, I was very proud to lead one of the strongest economies in the country. And the two strongest months this State has ever had with employment, I should say, was January and February of this year, right before COVID hit us. We were flying. We really were. Our economy was strong. And I believe, with a strong economy creates opportunities for families, for Government, for all these. Everything really clicks when the economy's flying.

So, the decisions that we had to make were decisions that we had to make. And they were very tough decisions. But they were the right ones. And I made them. And I stand by them. And again, there's a reason why we're in such a positive position right now. It's because we made those decisions. It isn't a coincidence. It is a direct relation in terms of the health of this State to the decisions that we made. That is unquestionable to be sure.

We hope that we can start flexing things open. We hope we can keep taking more positive steps forward and that, over time, we're getting that. And I'd love it if that number we saw yesterday at 16% unemployment were truly a peak. It may be. I don't know. We can't promise that. Are there going to be other surges? Are there going to be other surges in unemployment? Are there going to be other factors that we work through this pandemic over the next few months that drive those numbers higher? It's possible.

But I'd like to think that, as we start flexing more businesses open, as the very opportunistic -- and it's a very good program that allows some of this extra money in unemployment insurance, the \$600 per week creates a lot of opportunity for families. Helps ensure people aren't going bankrupt. It helps ensure individuals aren't being foreclosed on or kicked out of their homes, so they can actually pay their bills and put some food on the table, while they might be out of work.

That program goes through the end of July. And my sense is that, as we hopefully get kids back to school, we see the numbers continue to drop through the summer. My sense is that, come into the fall, the economy's going to be really coming back in a strong way.

Will we be at 2.4% unemployment like we were? No, of course not, and that's unfortunate. But, I don't think anyone has any notions that we can come back that fast. But, we have created certain very tangible structures in our economy and in our Government, and in terms of how we do things, that are going to allow us to be more resilient than most any other part of the country. The fact we don't have income taxes here; the fact that we don't put a lot of burden and regulation on businesses and families, in an undue respect; the fact that we believe in limited and local control, all these are fundamentals that are going to allow businesses to come back stronger here.

I was reading a study recently about, what's going to happen in the cities? Is there going to be a massive deurbanization of businesses and families out of some of the cities that were clearly hit the hardest through this pandemic where people say, you know what? I can live and work in Southern New Hampshire just as easy I could in Downtown Boston. And I could do it a lot cheaper with a lot better quality of life.

I absolutely think that that's going to be a very positive aspect of what we can see here in New Hampshire, because we have those fundamentals and we're not making long-term fundamental decisions based on the crisis. We have to make some very drastic decisions for the short-term. But they are temporary. They are part of the Executive Order and the Emergency Order.

And when we come through the emergency, we have a system here that really does work for businesses and individuals. And I really believe it will allow us to come back as strong, or if not stronger, than you saw in 2017 or 2018, when we really created this very vibrant economy of ours.

Sorry for the long answer, but it's a very important question, very important for folk to really understand that we are poised for success here. It may take some time to get there, and we have to be disciplined about it. And our expectations have to be real. We have to set the expectations where they should be.

I'm not going to tell you the economy's going to be right back to normal come October. That's not practical. It's not realistic. And it sets a false expectations for decisions of our State. And so, we have to, I

think, just use good judgment, look at the data, and, again, hold true to what has kept our economy strong in the past. And it'll lead us down a very positive path in the future. We're going to get through this and we're going to bring it back.

Rick with the Laconia Daily Sun:

NBC reported today you were a guest at some of the elaborate Madison dinners Secretary of State Mike Pompeo staged in Washington. How many did you attend? Did you travel at taxpayer expense? What did you get out of these events?

Governor Sununu:

Can I say, who's asking the question? I missed the name. Oh, Rick, I've never attended a dinner with Secretary Pompeo. I don't know what you're talking about. So, I think there were no taxpayer dollars for a trip that never happened. And I've never had dinner with him. I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know a better way to answer that one.

Tony with the Patch:

Thank you so much. Governor, have you looked at the closure of the Child and Family Development Center at the New Hampshire Technical Institute? It's a lab school for Early Childhood Educators. Many of the parents who send their children to the program have requested that it's kept open and that some of the CARES Act funds, either for community colleges or the DHHS, DOE, early childhood education program, which I guess is about \$280,000, be used to reopen the Center for at least a year. Similar to the nursing staffing issues that we have in the State before COVID, we have childcare issues here, and educator issues, as well. Shouldn't a Center like that be kept open? And if not, why? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Yes, absolutely, so the Early Childhood Center at NHTI, it's a lab school for early childhood education and development. I think it's a great program. Unfortunately, as we entered the COVID pandemic, there were a lot of folks that were pulling their kids out. And it just didn't become economically viable as, unfortunately, a lot of childcare centers did not become economically viable while we went through this crisis.

And obviously, we would love to get them back. I've personally spoken to folks within the community college system. We've talked about how to get it back up and running, whether it's about bringing another outside provider, if we have to make changes to the model, whatever it might be. But the core model of having it as a learning center, I think, is very important, not just for that institution but all across the State.

It's an indirect issue, but it is related in that we fought very hard to get funding into the education lab school over at UNH as part of the last budget. The folks on the other side of the aisle took that money out. It was very disappointing. I really was hopeful that that money could go in. Luckily, we got the Early Childhood Development Grant out of Washington that'll help support a lot of those lab school programs at UNH and across the State.

But this is a very important Center. I've spoken to people about it very directly. I think there is a decent plan in place to get it up and running. It might look at a little different. But those core tenets of

having it as a laboratory school, as a place that parents can come to rely on, with not just adequate education but frankly a place where people can test the limits, can really look at opportunities to make sure our early childhood education and development programs are up to 21st century standards. I think it's an awesome opportunity. And I look forward to actually getting it back up and running.

Rick with Valley News:

Yes, this is for Governor Sununu. Last summer, the State was debating the possible enhancement, or what turned out to be the enhancement of Medicaid reimbursement rates. I wanted to ask you, after the toll that the COVID has taken on the State's nursing homes and the measures that you've undertaken to boost staffing in the nursing homes, the \$300 a week stipends, etc., would you view that debate, or future debates about Medicaid? How would the current experience with the deaths in nursing homes affect your view of Medicaid? And then, part 2 is, would you consider extending the \$300 a week stipends beyond the currently planned expiration date of June 30th?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so we did, as part of the budget process, an expanded Medicaid rate reimbursement was negotiated as part of that process. And that was a very good step, a very needed step to make sure that our rates in a lot of the different areas across our State that simply were not on par with our peers in surrounding States in the New England region, we tried to get a lot of those rates back on par.

And you'll always have to keep an eye on that. You have to make sure that you're keeping your rates in par with your peers, or you risk losing workforce. If you don't have workforce, you're not providing a service. And some of those services are incredibly important, whether you're talking about long-term care facilities or other healthcare services across the State.

You have to really make sure you're on top of it, working with the individuals that are providing that. And that's one reason, because those rates tend to be low, to your point, that's why we put in the \$300 per week stipend. We couldn't do it for everyone. The private sector simply, on average, gets paid significantly a lot more than folks that are working in the Medicaid sector. And we've tried to create some parity there, at least on a short-term basis.

I don't think that it's practical to think that we can keep that going for the long-term. This is through the COVID crisis. This is something where we want to recognize those that are on the frontlines, recognize the risk that they're taking, the low amount of pay, frankly, that they were getting, even with the increase in Medicaid rates. They just weren't getting enough to ensure that that staff could be there. So we wanted to incentivize that staff to keep coming in and being part of what we see is a solution, not just for the short-term, but likely for the long-term, long-term being not just a couple weeks but months or even beyond, down the road.

Okay. That's all, great. Anything else from here?

Could I ask one demographic question for the Commissioner? You're giving more and more information with the weekly summary reports. We really appreciate that. And I just noticed the gender gap in here. Maybe it's always been there. I've just never seen it, which is males have 45% of positive cases. But they have 60% of hospitalization and 55% of deaths. Is that what all States are seeing with COVID that it's more fatal for males than females?

Commissioner Shibinette:

I don't know that we've actually pulled down the data from the other States. But it would be a great question to look at how our demographic data, as it relates to gender, compares to other States. And it's definitely something that I'll dive into a little bit over the next week and let you know.

Governor Sununu:

All set? Great. Well, thank you, guys, very much again. We will have some more announcements on Friday. It's going to be a warm beautiful weekend. We know that. I think at this time on Friday, it'll be about 85° out there. So, we will have some more announcements. We thank everyone again. A reminder that it is EMS Appreciation Week for all those folks that are on the frontlines. We cannot thank them enough.

And thank you, guys, for really sticking it out. We know we're asking a lot of individuals for sacrifices in their businesses and their community, and their families. And if we can have that discipline in the short-term, it does set us up for the long-term in all the different aspects of what we do. So, we appreciate everyone in New Hampshire really being part of that very successful model for our entire State. Thank you, guys.