



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Monday, June 1, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Good to see you. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining us this afternoon. Hope everyone had a decent weekend. I think, as a lot of folks can understand and appreciate, the last few days, not just here in New Hampshire, but especially around the country we've seen, have been pretty tough in a lot of different aspects. So we have seen a lot of the peaceful protests happen across the United States, including here in New Hampshire. But we've definitely also seen a lot of violence that has fallen usually on the backend of some of those events.

On Saturday, there was a very peaceful march here in Manchester. And I did call the organizers of that March ahead of time to lend the State's support to their efforts, to their messaging, which I think we can all agree is the right message.

I know Chief Capano of the Manchester Police Department, also hats off to him and his entire team. The men and women of Manchester Police Department did just a phenomenal job, again, engaging in a very proactive and positive way prior to the event, and even leading the escort of the march in Manchester. So, hats off to them, I think for really driving the right tone in ensuring that it was a peaceful demonstration with the right message and a message that doesn't just carry the day on Saturday, but a message that I think we can all agree has to continue in a conversation, as we move down the road with real action items.

Making sure that we're staying on top of the issues, not just around the tragedy of what happened out in Minneapolis, but making sure that we're learning from that and seeing what else we can do, pushing the envelope here to make sure that we're on top of these issues.

So, we do know what has happened here in New Hampshire. And I believe there's actually a protest going on now over in Hampton, as well. There have been a couple over the weekend. And we will be monitoring those and working with those organizations, again, in a very positive manner. And it has been very peaceful today.

But we know that, at any moment, there's no State. There's no community that could potentially be immune from the potential of the violence and the rioting that we have seen unfortunately play out in other parts of the country.

Last night, I was on a call with many other Governors across the country, many of which have States with cities that are experiencing a lot of the heavier-hit areas, in terms of the violence; talking to them about everything from messaging to preparedness, what they're seeing out there, again, just to make sure that we are prepared and, regardless of what we think may be coming, our job is to really prepare for the spectrum of different opportunities and incidences that could happen, if things were to take a violent turn.

For the most part, I can tell you, in talking to those Governors in those States, again, there's a lot of people protesting, done by residents of those communities. And when things do take an unfortunate turn and can turn violent, it's very often, as being reported by those other Governors and some of the Mayors

we've talked to, it's very often from folks that aren't even from those communities and aren't even from those States. It's folks that are from outside areas.

And unfortunately, I think we can all agree that that violence in those riots really do overshadow the importance of the protest message of social injustice. And we don't want that very important message to be overshadowed that way. And so, our job, as a team here in New Hampshire, and as Governor, is to make sure that we are prepared for any protest scenario that may come.

So we have been in regular contact with State Police here, local law enforcement across the State, the men and women of the National Guard, General Mikolaities, all aspects of the community that can and probably do need to be on the frontlines in terms of just being aware of the situation, communicating with the organizers here within the State, but also being prepared for what potentially could come.

We all know that racism has no home here, will not be tolerated anywhere in New Hampshire, and neither does violence and looting, or rioting, by any stretch of the imagination. So, the important conversation we just want to make sure does continue. It's a constructive one. It's one of positivity. The message does have to be heard.

But we're not going to condone or accept violence by any individuals against any small business, anyone's property, any community, will not be condoned and tolerated in any way. And I'm here to assure the people in New Hampshire that we're putting every effort to make sure that we are prepared for whatever those scenarios may come. We're going to hope for the best and unfortunately, in these very uncertain times, times full of a lot of anxiety, our job is to prepare for the worst, unfortunately. But we will be prepared. And we will be in the communities working, again, in a very proactive manner with a lot of these organizations.

With that, I'm going to turn over to the folks at Public Health for a quick update on the COVID epidemic. It is still very much here. It's still going to be with us for quite some time. It's still on the forefront of our priority list, of course. And then, we can come back for questions. Dr. Chan?

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. And thank you, Governor. And these are certainly trying times. And the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a challenge, as we see what transpires around the world, within the United States -- excuse me -- as well as in New Hampshire.

There's now more than 6.2 million cases of COVID-19 globally, including approximately 1.8 million cases within the United States. Today, in New Hampshire, we will be announcing an additional 39 individuals confirmed with COVID-19, bringing our total to 4,685 people diagnosed with COVID-19 over the last few months, since we identified and reported out our first case back at the beginning of March.

There are five additional people who have required hospitalization for COVID-19, bringing the total cumulative hospitalization number to 456 people. And thankfully, zero new deaths to report out today; however we still have a total of 245 people who have died from COVID-19. And there are additional individuals under investigation for possibly passing away from COVID-19. And so, our thoughts and sympathies are with the families that have been directly impacted by a family member or friend who has passed away from COVID-19, one of the unfortunate complications of this pandemic.

We have to-date tested more than 74,000 people for active COVID-19 infection with our PCR-based tests. And currently, in the last week, we're averaging about 1800 tests per day. There are an additional more-than-2100 people currently undergoing testing within our Public Health Laboratory.

And so, we have certainly been successful at a State level to ramp up testing. We've brought in the additional supplies that we have needed for COVID-19 testing, and are actually working with our communities and our healthcare partners to promote and increase testing.

About 4% to 5% of these PCR-based tests every day continue to be positive. On top of that, with the antibody-based tests, again about 4% to 5% of the antibody-based tests continue to be positive. I do want to stress that testing is only one tool that we have to try and control the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individual social distancing precautions and guidance still needs to be followed, still should be continued. This is an important tool that we have to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within our communities. And so, we continue to recommend that people, when they're out and about, continue to practice social distancing, maintaining a safe distance of at least 6 feet from other people at all times. And when people are in positions or situations where social distancing may not be always possible, please wear a cloth face covering. There's a lot of information out there about how people can make their own cloth face coverings.

We are at-risk, certainly, for seeing increasing numbers of COVID-19, increasing community transmission. And I think that the testing numbers point to this. Again, 4% to 5% of the antibody-based tests that we have been conducting in the State have shown people with prior infection. That leaves a high percentage of people who remain susceptible to infection, because of a lack of past exposure or infections.

We will continue, certainly, to follow these numbers very closely. We have, as the Commissioner, I think, announced on Friday a new data dashboard that is now available on our website. These numbers will be updated on a daily basis in real-time. And currently, a lot of the data on there is data that has been posted in our weekly Epi Summary or Epidemiologic Summary.

We will continue to work to expand the data dashboard over the coming weeks, hopefully bring in more detailed testing data, bringing in more detailed hospitalization data. These numbers and this data continue to be important for tracking the progress of the outbreak in New Hampshire. And it's going to take continued effort on all of our part to bring this outbreak under control. We will continue to follow the numbers very closely. And we will continue to report out pertinent information, as it becomes available.

With that, let me turn things over to Commissioner Shihinette. Thank you.

Commissioner Shihinette:

Thank you. I'm just going to do an outbreak update. I have no new outbreaks to report today, which is great news. But we did update our long-term care comparison to the other New England States just as a data point.

So, in the past week, we've compared New Hampshire to other New England States, both by the percentage of long-term care deaths, or the percentage of residents lost to long-term care, in long-term care beds. So, currently, New Hampshire is at 1.5% of our long-term care residents lost to COVID-19. Comparatively, Maine is still at 0.4%. Rhode Island is at 8.2%; New York at 3.5%; Massachusetts, 6.9%; and Connecticut, 6.4%.

The other data we look at is the percentage of our long-term care facilities that have even one case of COVID-19. In New Hampshire, that is 29% of our facilities have at least one case of COVID-19. As a comparison, Rhode Island has 36%. New York has 38%. And Massachusetts has 51%. So New Hampshire, again, is 29%.

As I said previously, whether we are the best or the worst, every death or negative outcome to COVID-19 in our long-term care population is devastating for both the residents that live there, their families, and the staff that care for those residents. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, thank you, Commissioner. Just finally, later this week, we hope to make some additional announcements, when we talk about flexing the economy over. But, we have nothing to announce on that level today. And hopefully, we will keep working with Public Health to try to get some announcements later on in the week. With that, we can just open it right up for questions for folks. Yes, sir.

Q&A Session

Governor, you were on a call today with the President. It's been widely reported that he used some very strong language in how he'd like to see protests handled. He said, "They're going to run over you and you're going to look like a bunch of jerks. You have to dominate." What's your reaction to that statement?

Governor Sununu:

We don't take, whether it's the rhetoric that is used out of Washington, we always look for guidance, if it's from the CDC, or guidance from anything that comes out of them. But, at the end of the day, here, in New Hampshire, we have to work within our communities, with our rhetoric. Yeah, I try to stay very positive, frankly, when we talk about these things.

I don't want to get into the President's statement other than to say, at a national perspective, you have some cities going under some pretty tough situations. And I work with those Mayors and I work with those Governors to find out what's happening on the ground level. What's working? What isn't working, what the messaging there is? So, we're talking mostly to the individuals that are experiencing some of these things firsthand and on the frontlines. And the President's rhetoric is the President's rhetoric.

But, specifically, is that appropriate, though, for a President of the United States in America to say you have to dominate people you disagree with?

Governor Sununu:

No, I would say, speaking for myself, no. I don't think that anyone needs to be dominated. If anything, here, in New Hampshire, I think we've shown working together in a very constructive and peaceful way is clearly a pathway to success, to be sure.

Now, when the violence that you've seen in other parts of the country break out, I can tell you we are going to deal with it, absolutely. We have folk that are going to be on the frontlines working very seamlessly with local law enforcement, State Police, National Guard, whatever it takes. We're going to protect our communities, make no mistake about it. We're just being very clear in that message.

And on that same front, the National Guard is obviously geared right now to a COVID-19 response. If you did need to call out the National Guard, are the resources there? Or would you be having to take from the COVID-19 response in order to respond to any potential...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I mean, the good news is the men and women of the National Guard are incredibly flexible. And the fact that they can transition from whether it's working at the food bank, or working in a testing center, or kind of mobilizing themselves on the frontline of a riot, or anything of that nature, they can do it. And they can do it very quickly.

So, I've been speaking directly with General Mikolaities all throughout the weekend and today. And we will have some of them will be prepared. The National Guard will be ready to go, if called upon, if those situations were to arise.

Governor, you made reference to it earlier today about people outside the community. And I know you know they've been in contact with you. Both the Mayor of Manchester and law enforcement in Manchester has been picking up traffic comments about encouraging looting in Manchester tomorrow. Could you talk a little bit about conversations you might have had in preparing for any response, and do you take it seriously?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, we take everything seriously. So, if you look at the conversations that have happened specifically on social media, there's some conversations happening what some people refer to as the Dark Web and things of that nature. We watch all of that.

I can tell you that one thing we are really honed in on here in New Hampshire is whether it is working with State Police, local law enforcement, the National Guard, we're not just focusing on Manchester or just Nashua. Obviously, those are two very potential hotspot areas, to be sure, because they're just densely populated areas. Every community, 220 cities and towns in the State, we're making sure that we're going to be prepared wherever something might break out.

One thing we have seen, in talking to other Governors across the country, is that, in some of the more suburban areas, they are getting hit, as well, with some of these riots and this violence. There seems to be an idea in some of these areas that, as the larger cities are reinforcing with personnel and frontline personnel to deal with the riots, that some of these individuals are making a calling to go into smaller areas, areas where the Police or aspects of public safety can be overrun a little easier.

And so, from learning from those unfortunate instances across the country, we're trying to make sure that we are prepared in every city and town, whatever it might be. And so, we're a smaller State that can really mobilize at a very grassroots level. And that's a very important tool for us.

Some of the larger States and larger cities have a harder time with that. But I think, because we already work very seamlessly with one another on aspects of law enforcement and public safety, we can have a statewide preparedness.

Obviously, I think more direct to your question, there have been some more overt calls to take violent action in Manchester and Nashua. And of course, we're going to keep a lot of our efforts there. We know that some of the protests happening in Hampton today; I believe there's a candlelight vigil in Dover tonight. I think there may be a candlelight vigil in Manchester happening later in the week. And

there'll be other events. And those are very, I think, important events. Those are very positive events. Those are events that carry a very important message for all of us, frankly.

But what you don't want is, sometimes when those events have taken place -- similar events have taken place in the evening in other parts of the country, you have this other element that comes in on the other side of it that overshadows the positivity of that event. Often it's with a whole different group of individuals. Often it is from folk from out-of-state.

And again, we're just trying to learn from that and prepare from that, and prepare ourselves for those potential contingencies, whether it's in Hampton, or Dover, or Manchester, or New Boston. I don't know. It could be anywhere. We don't have any threats on New Boston. But the whole point is it really could happen anywhere. And our job is to be prepared for that entire spectrum of possibilities.

Can you just talk about how it's been so far with the businesses opening across the State, how that's gone so far?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, in terms of flexing businesses open, so far the feedback has been very positive. We understand that the guidance we put out to allow businesses to flex open are not going to work for every business. We know that, for example, early on, a lot of the salon owners, it just didn't work for them. And we understand that.

We're always willing to look at possibility of changes and making some adjustments. Again, no one's every really done this before. So, given that we really are creating something from scratch, and I think it's gone very, very well.

And what we try to look at, also, given our ability to use our contact tracing and all the individuals that are doing that, we can look at the data that is coming out of, for example, opening restaurants with outdoor seating. Okay. Are there incidences where we're seeing massive outbreaks with outdoor seating in restaurants, or something of that nature? Or are there incidents of outbreaks that are being driven off of retail, or some of the other areas that we've opened.

One area that I think we're all being very cautious of is the opening of houses of worship, because it's really one of the first areas we're opening that is allowing larger gatherings to happen. We're allowing up to 40% capacity, which should still allow for that physical distancing. And there's some other guidance that is being put in there to limit a lot of the physical contact that can often lead to the transpiring of the virus.

So, we're still trying to put a lot of good guidance in place. But we will be keeping an eye on those numbers. Again, the fact that the folk at Public Health, I think, have done a great job keeping the contact tracing not just available, but actually increasing our ability to do it, will just allow us to be a little more proactive on the data, as we get it, so that we can make adjustments if we need to at a very micro level, as opposed to just saying, well, we're seeing an outbreak somewhere. We're going to shut it all down. No, that's not going to be a good pathway for anyone. The best way to mitigate that is with data. And I always say data trumps models. And that's one of our biggest assets we have now.

Can we hear from Dr. Chan, actually, on Stay-at-Home 2.0 and sort of watching the numbers? Have you seen any appreciable change? Or has there been any kind of notable uptick, or any kind of thing you can say coming out of hairdressers or any area of reopening?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, it's a great question. The question, just to repeat it, was have we seen anything in the data, because the Governor's absolutely right that we are watching the data very closely. And a lot of the decisions going forward are going to be driven by New Hampshire-specific data, not necessarily modeling, which sort of looks at theoretical possibilities, many of which are not usually accurate. We will follow the data very closely.

A lot of the re-openings that have happened have been within the last couple of weeks. And sometimes it can take two to three weeks to really see a change in the data and a change in the numbers. We're going to be watching that very closely going forward over the next two or three weeks.

We haven't seen yet any substantial increases in the numbers, or changes in the percent of tests that are positive. We're still about 4% to 5% of the PCR-based tests that remain positive. That's obviously down from 10% to 12%, where we were four to six weeks ago.

Overall, over the last several weeks, the number of hospitalizations, when you look at graphs of people that have been hospitalized by date of admission, date of hospitalization, has shown a slow trend. That's some of the data we're looking at getting up onto the data dashboard that I mentioned, in the coming weeks, so that this kind of data could be more readily available to the public.

That's the type of data we're following, and overall has shown an improvement, but haven't seen any substantial upticks or increases yet in the numbers. That obviously reins a concern and a real possibility, especially as some businesses reopen and the weather is nicer, and people are out there and interacting.

We want to make sure that people continue to do so safely and take advantage of those opportunities safely, that the businesses are implementing the guidance that's out there, and that the individuals on the individual level are taking their own part of practicing social distancing and wearing cloth face coverings when in situations where that may be difficult to do. So we haven't seen any trends in increasing transmission yet. Again, but that's something we follow over the course of two, three weeks. But we will be watching that very closely. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Could we take a few questions on the phone?

Holly Ramer with Associated Press:

Hi, thank you. I have a question about the antibody testing. Do you have a sense of how many of those who are testing positive for antibodies are people who maybe felt sick a couple of months ago, but couldn't get tested early on, versus people who never had symptoms?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, that's a great question. The question is about antibody tests, and do we know specific situations for how many of these people that are getting tested might have been symptomatic in the past, versus not having any symptoms? And unfortunately, we don't have detail down to that level.

We are, on average, doing about 300 antibody tests per day in the State. And I just want to also take this opportunity to clarify again that antibody tests are intended to predict -- or not to predict, but to show potential past infection with the Novel Coronavirus causing COVID-19. An antibody test is not intended to diagnose or to tell somebody if they're actively infected. It can take upwards of a couple of weeks for someone's body to produce these antibodies after they're infected. And so, the real role of these antibody tests is to inform Public Health about past infection.

We don't have data regarding these approximately 300 people per day, on average, that are being tested. We don't have data whether these are individuals that were symptomatic in the past, versus asymptomatic, not having symptoms, but just want to know whether they are infected or not.

I do want to stress that an antibody test, again, is intended to help us understand population levels of past infection. We don't know enough about these tests yet for them to be ruled out for informing clinical use, individual decisions about protection.

So, if somebody is positive, we don't know how that positive test translates to whether they're protected or not, or how long someone is protected for. There are ongoing studies being conducted, I know, in other States and by the CDC, at a national level, to look at these antibody-based tests and how we can use them to predict someone's immunity and someone's protection to the virus. But, unfortunately, we just don't have enough information yet at this point to be able to use those antibody-based tests to help inform whether someone is protected, if they're positive, by these tests. Thanks.

Paul Hayes with The Caledonian-Record:

Hi. Yeah, just with many communities choosing to not open their pools this summer, I wondered if there was concern about people swimming in unsupervised areas, and if additional efforts are going to be taken to sort of ensure some safety in ponds, rivers, lakes, that sort of thing.

Governor Sununu:

It's a very good question. I think, as a lot of folks know, we had two very unfortunate fatalities this week of individuals swimming in what have been traditionally some troubling waters. And we have had other incidences in those waters in the past.

Every year, in New Hampshire, we try to put out a very strong message. And this year will be no different, in terms of the warnings that we try to instill upon folks, not just in the seacoast communities. As a lot of folks know, in Hampton Beach, there can be a very strong undertow and current. And a lot of us who grew up here understand that and appreciate it. But there's always a message we want to put out.

But especially a bit in our lakes but also in our rivers, especially we have a lot of folk that might go tubing or swimming in rivers. There could be undertows. There could be currents. Those could be very dangerous waters, as well. There can be a lot of rocks and things like that underneath that have caused serious injuries and unfortunately fatalities in the past. So we will make sure that that message continues to be a heightened one. Those warnings continue to go out.

I don't know how much of a direct relation there is between the closing of the pools and people swimming in rivers. Obviously, we just know that it's always an issue here in New Hampshire. And there always has to be an elevated message. And we're going to continue to do so this summer, as well.

Paula Tracy with InDepth:

Yes, good afternoon, Governor. I have a question. I think it's probably for Shibinette on the status of the nursing home results. I know last week she had said that about 95% of the baseline tests for all residents would be back. And I'd still like to get a clearer picture of that baseline information. I also noted in the dashboard that, as of the 30th, that 202 of our 245 deaths were in cluster outbreaks at long-term. Is that correct? Or is it just care? And I'm just wondering why are we facing such high percentages, compared to even other States in our nursing home deaths? And I also had a question about contract tracing. Are we up-to-snuff with that? How many folks do we have doing that? Are they behind or keeping up with demand?

Commissioner Shibinette:

All right, let me see if I can address most of those questions. Baseline testing for nursing homes, all the specimens have been collected and are at Public Health Lab. We received the last of them over Friday/Saturday. So if they're not all reported out by today, it should be tomorrow.

So we begin our sentinel surveillance testing today, because all the baseline is done. We're right in kind of that transition week between the State doing it and having other partners doing it. So, for this week, we're going to kind of step in with a secondary program to get that surveillance testing started. So what that is, is 10% of residents in nursing homes and all staff tested between seven and 12 days, with the hope of the average being 10.

The death number, the 202 in clusters, clusters are not just long-term care. They can be anything from hospital clusters to residential programs that have clusters. But the majority of are long-term care. You mentioned, why is our death rate so high?

So, I just read off our numbers as compared to other States. I had said that the numbers that we track is the percentage of long-term care residents lost to death, as compared to our overall bed size. So, New Hampshire has 1.5% of our residents in long-term care that have been lost to COVID-19 deaths. Comparing that to other States, Rhode Island is at 8.2%; New York, 3.5%; Massachusetts, 6.9%; and Connecticut, 6.4%.

So, we are not worse than other States. It really depends on the data points that you pick to compare. When you compare long-term care deaths as a percentage of our overall deaths, we are high, because we've had very low deaths in our community transmissions.

Contact tracing, we have between 100 and 130 people doing contact tracing. We have been supplemented by many of our healthcare partners, our National Guard staff. We are not behind. We are definitely on-time.

There have been times, and I saw this on social media over the weekend, where someone said on one of our posts, it's been two days and I haven't been contacted. But, I was tested in another State. And sometimes when you're tested in another State, let's say Massachusetts, it could take longer for one of those Public Health Labs to contact New Hampshire.

So, my messaging to any citizens out there that have received a positive test result from any lab at all, if you have not been contacted by Public Health, then there's probably a problem. Either we did not get that test result, or there's been a delay coming from the lab. So you should reach out to Public Health,

yourself, and contact. We have had very, very few people that that's ever happened to. But if you're one of those people, you should absolutely reach out.

Michael Graham with New Hampshire Journal:

Yes, Governor, you've spoken very passionately about racial justice and it's raised a couple of questions. One is people are asking why you would be calling a group and commemorating them, or approving of their gathering of 1,000 people, in violation of the ongoing Stay-at-Home Order, even for a great cause. And it makes people ask what the priority is here in the middle of the pandemic. And would you encourage other groups who have other good causes to gather 1,000 at a time in the middle of Manchester in non-socially distancing ways? And the second question is do you have any concerns about the data that shows that the Stay-at-Home shutdown on businesses is wildly disproportionately affecting black and Hispanic business owners? The Washington Post reports that 40% of working black business owners are out of business under the lockdown nationwide. We don't have data for New Hampshire. Does that concern you? And what would you say to people who say they'd like to hear more about opportunities to get back to work for black and brown people in New Hampshire, rather than incidents around the country?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so let me answer the second part of that question first about the disproportionate number of apparently businesses, it sounds like, that are owned and run by minority being disproportionately negatively affected by Stay-at-Home Orders nationally. I have to be honest. I have not seen that data. That's a national piece of data, it sounds like.

I don't know if we have the data for New Hampshire. And I don't know what is the proportionately affected businesses, due to the Stay-at-Home Order, and the shutdown of businesses here -- or the temporary shutdown is on that same on that same path of disproportionality. I haven't seen that, to be honest.

So, I just want to answer the question and say, I haven't seen the data. It's something that we can definitely look into. We have set up a Task Force to look at the disparity of COVID-19 within minority communities to see, because we do believe that right now the data does show here in New Hampshire, and nationally, that it does have a disproportionate negative health effect. And what are the drivers behind that? What can we do about it? What are the suggestions within certain communities around New Hampshire and the steps that we can take as a State to make sure that that disproportionality doesn't exist from a healthcare standpoint, I think, is a very important discussion to have.

I haven't heard of the data on the businesses, to be honest. So I hesitate answering that. And I haven't seen that in New Hampshire. It may exist. But I haven't seen it. But it's something we can look into.

To the first part of your question, those that want to compare social injustices, the issues surrounding the murder of George Floyd, to the effectiveness of a Stay-at-Home Order and social gatherings are completely missing the point. They are two completely separate issues. And those that try to combine those two issues, whether it's a large gathering of individuals who, frankly, I think, did a terrific job wearing masks, appreciating the importance of the moment, but not forgetting about the fact that we are in a pandemic. I think they did a very good job here in New Hampshire. You saw a lot of folks wearing masks for that.

And individuals trying to conflate that with the Stay-at-Home Order and our restrictions on social distancing, they're doing an absolute disservice to the importance of the message around those protests, the importance of the message around the injustices. Yes, that was a single event in those communities. There may be more down the road, to be sure. But that was a single event in those communities that was, frankly, going to happen whether we approved of it or said, sorry, you can't do it, because, sorry, you're in a group of larger than 10.

That event was going to happen. And frankly, it should have happened. And it should happen in a positive and constructive way. And that's exactly, I think, what both the folks in Manchester, the Manchester Police Department, Chief Capano, myself reaching out to them proactively, making sure that they understood that we were supportive of it. Those steps were taken to ensure that it went off peacefully and constructively, and it wasn't just a one-day event, but really the beginning of an ongoing discussion that we have to continually have in our communities with law enforcement, really at a grassroots level at a one-on-one level. Trying to conflate those two issues, you're missing the point. You really are.

Tony Schinella with the Patch:

Oh, sure, quick statement and then a question; first off, the data dashboard is great, to Dr. Chan and Commissioner Shibinette. Thank you so much for getting that up-and-running. Secondly, Governor, you know New Hampshire is a stand your ground, open carry, non-permitted concealed carry State, whereas many of the communities around the country that are literally exploding with the looting violence and shop owners being assaulted and even killed trying to protect their property and businesses are places with strict Gun Control Laws. When you're on the call, like you said, I was on the call with, I think you said, other Governors Sunday night, have Second Amendment personal protection rights been discussed in any way? And are you and/or any State Officials concerned with the potential faceoffs between future rioting incidences -- we hope it doesn't come here -- and the business owners who might be protecting themselves and their property here in New Hampshire? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Well, thank you. So, I can tell you, in all the conversations we've had nationally with Mayors and Governors, and the Administration, the issue of Second Amendment rights and Gun Owners' Rights has not come up in any way, frankly. We talk more about the value of the messaging, the constructive ways of dealing with the issues.

When we talk about the violence and rioting, some of the strategies that have been implemented, both successfully and unsuccessfully in various parts of the country, and we just try to learn from them. No, there hasn't been any real discussion around Second Amendment rights, per se.

Does it concern us that individuals may try to protect their businesses with a firearm and all of that? Look, God forbid that we should be in a situation of rioting and violence, my job is to make sure that law enforcement is there working seamlessly from the State level, local level, National Guard, whatever it takes, so that we are on the frontlines protecting those individuals and those businesses, that property, and it doesn't come to a situation where individuals are put in a situation where they have to defend themselves with their firearms.

So, obviously, any time you're in a situation where a citizen may have to use a firearm to protect themselves, that's a bad situation, right? That's a troubling situation for a variety of reasons. And so,

we're looking at all aspects of it, to be sure, and engaging with all aspects of not just law enforcement but members of the community to help make sure that we mitigate that situation, before it even starts.

Rick Jurgens with the Valley News:

Yes, thanks. Regarding the nursing home and long-term care settings, I wanted to just ask you to step back a little bit and give us some overview. Most of the deaths in the State have occurred in long-term care settings, most of those in nursing homes. And have you been able to, through the baseline testing that you've done, or other information you have, kind of trace out the course of the epidemic in that setting? And do you feel that you have a strategy that could somehow break that chain and zero out the spread within the nursing homes, both among staff and among residents? That's my question. Thanks.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you. Our strategy has changed through the months, as it should, as we've learned more about the virus. Our baseline testing has revealed some asymptomatic positive, both in staff and in residents.

As we look at it -- and I've talked to a lot of Administrators of a lot of facilities about this. And a couple of them are really surprised, because they were getting their baseline testing done, or they had one person with very mild symptoms. And we would come in and test. And they would have 20 positives, and even amongst residents that never became symptomatic. I mean, some obviously did become symptomatic and got very ill. But a good amount of the residents didn't become ill at all. And that was the same with the staff. So if there is one trend that we are definitely seeing is the amount of asymptomatic positive testing cases that we are finding, both amongst long-term care and staff.

One of the strategies that we've changed initially, when we first started doing long-term care testing, we were testing symptomatic people. And then, we moved to, as soon as you get a positive test, testing all the residents, and then all the staff.

Now, we are at a point where, when you have a positive case, we are testing all residents and staff either on the unit, if it's contained, or building-wide. And then, we're going back about every five to seven days and we're testing everybody again that tested negative. And we continue to do that every five to seven days, because what we've found, in some of our bigger outbreaks, that we were going to their building twice a week anyways for symptomatic testing with our CSC teams with the rapid test.

So now, we're just putting it on a schedule to go out every five to seven days to test anybody that had not tested positive within that group. That's our strategy right now for trying to limit the spread and reduce the amount of negative outcomes.

But we're still fighting the invisible enemy. We don't see it. So it's really, really tough. Because the residents are not going out of the building, because they're not getting visitors, the two ways that we have found that it has come in the building, either by a new admission from a hospital that tested negative at the hospital, and then five to seven days after getting to the nursing home became symptomatic and tested positive; or through asymptomatic staff transmission to the residents. Those are the two main ways that we're seeing it getting into the facilities.

Governor Sununu:

We're good? Great, well, thank you guys very much. Any further questions here within the room?

Yes, Governor, I mean, for two months the mantra was why shouldn't everybody who wants a test get a test? Well, now, everybody can. I mean, what's kind of the expectation that's going to happen now? Is it that there's going to be a lot of people who weren't able to get a test are going to flood the system? Or have most of the people, because of risk and household, and all the other variables you had to this point, most of the people who thought they needed a test have already gotten one?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, well, I can tell you. I'm actually surprised in that we've really opened up the ability to test. And not as many people are stepping forward that want a test. So, we're really encouraging people to step forward and be tested, to be sure.

We want to make sure that people understand that, while the vast majority of obviously the fatalities are within long-term care facilities, and I want to say about 35%, 40% of the positive cases I think right now are coming out of long-term care -- is that about right? 40%, maybe a little higher now, 40% or more, that's obviously a hotspot.

But there is also a lot of community-based transmission, as well. It is out there. We want people to be tested. Even if you do qualify under those scenarios and you're asymptomatic, you can be tested. And we just want folks to really take advantage of that. So, if you want a test, go get a test, really.

Just one final one for Dr. Chan, if you can; talking with other Epidemiologists around the country and perhaps the world, now that we've been in this for a few months, is there anything more? Is this Coronavirus behaving like any other Coronavirus? Is there a corollary? Is this lining up in any kind of way, where you can see? You just know a little bit more about it, I guess.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so, I mean, we definitely know a lot more about this virus than we did even a few months ago. And part of what we've realized is how much more easily this virus spreads than some of the other emergency Coronaviruses we've seen in the past, like the SARS virus back in 2002/2003, and the MERS virus back in 2012/2013, right?

So, I mean, each virus, each infectious disease threat that we encounter is unique. And it has its own unique challenges. And this Novel Coronavirus is no different. And so, I think early on what you saw and what people in public may have heard is us looking at past viruses to inform how this virus might behave.

And over the last few months, we've learned that there are certainly some substantial differences, which have made it difficult to control spread of this virus, right? We know that this virus spreads very easily, person-to-person, unlike some of the other past Coronaviruses that I just mentioned.

We know that there's potentially a substantial portion of people that can have this virus and be transmitting it, before they even show symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated that upwards of a third of people may be asymptomatic. And that's obviously an estimate. We don't know what the true number is. But that has great implications for our ability to control this virus.

And as we've learned more about this, we've tried to adapt our strategies, which you heard Commissioner Shibinette just talking about. The testing recommendations have, in fact, changed, as we've learned more about this virus and how it can be spread easily, before someone shows symptoms.

And potentially, people could be shedding this virus in high amounts before they even have symptoms. And so, that has informed our testing strategies, to be certain.

But there still is no vaccine, right? We're hopeful, but a vaccine is likely months away. There is still no medication that people can take to prevent infection, like there are some with some other viruses. And so, a lot of our strategies, as we've learned more about this virus over the last few months, have focused on testing as one component.

But there's still a great need for people to continue with the social distancing, wearing cloth face coverings when they're in public settings where social distancing may be difficult. These are part of the key strategies for controlling this virus, given what we've found out and understood about the virus over the last few months. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Great, oh, we have one more? Sure.

Harrison Thorp with The Rochester Voice:

Oh, thank you. Can you hear me okay?

Governor Sununu:

We can, Harrison.

Harrison Thorp with The Rochester Voice:

All right. I have one for Commissioner Shibiinette, one for you, Governor. Commissioner Shibiinette, can you tell us what the average percentage of folks testing positive these days for the regular daily testing? I thought you said I don't know how many thousand. What percentage of them are asymptomatic? And for the Governor, Governor, if you'll allow 40% capacity in New Hampshire churches, I'm wondering why not 40% inside restaurants, where they come in, they wear a mask? When they go to the bathroom, they wear a mask. Other than that, they get served their food just like they do outside right now.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so, if I may, I'm going to answer for the Commissioner, if you will. I don't believe we have the data on the exact percentage of individuals that are asymptomatic versus symptomatic in our positive population, unfortunately. It's one of those things. It's a bit gray. If someone sneezed, is that a true symptom or not? It's a bit of a gray area. So that data's actually very hard to come by, both locally and nationally, frankly.

In terms of the percent capacity in the church situation versus other scenarios, we are allowing churches and places of worship to proceed with their services, up to 40%. The question is why can't we allow that in restaurants? And hopefully, we will be able to take that step.

We've taken a first step with restaurants with outdoor seating. We, hopefully, will be able to announce and take another step potentially looking at indoor seating with potentially some restrictions around it in the near future. Yes, we are looking to take similar steps. But they are two very different things, as well. So, you got to be careful not to assume one directly pertains to the other.

Can I speak one more to Dr. Chan?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Doctor, if you had a patient who came to you and said, Dr. Chan, I would really like to attend one of these protests, but I'm worried about my health, what would you advise that patient?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so the question is about someone being out in public settings, I think, not necessarily just if they're going to be attending a protest. Really I think that question pertains to going out to a restaurant, going out to a barber shop.

There are certain individuals who are at higher risk for severe illness, if they become infected with COVID-19, right? And this is where it's important for individuals to be talking with their Healthcare Providers about what their risks are, based on their own individual health conditions.

We still recommend that people who are at higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19 stay at home as much as possible and only go out for the essentials. Who's at higher risk, right? So, older adults, people if people are older than 60 years of age; people with multiple medical problems. And again, the more health problems that someone has, the more susceptible we believe probably they are to complications from COVID-19.

Certainly, if someone's immune system doesn't work correctly, they're at increased risk of not only COVID-19 but any number of different infections. And those individuals, regardless of what they may be considering going out for, are at increased risk if they get COVID-19. And so, the recommendation is still for those individuals to stay at home as much as possible.

I think it's also important to highlight, though, that anybody can become infected with this. And then, they can go onto transmit it to someone else. So, for example, kids, younger adults, people that may not have chronic medical conditions, they are certainly at lower risk for severe complications. But, risks still remain for themselves for their own personal health. But they also can potentially serve as a route of transmitting it to someone else, an elderly parent, an elderly grandparent, a elderly neighbor, maybe a neighbor who has a health condition that you're not aware of who might be at increased risk. And so, for that reason, it's important for everybody to really continue with the social distancing recommendations. Thanks.

Main Street Relief Grants announcement later this week?

Governor Sununu:

Yes, for the Main Street Relief Fund, we've received -- the rough number is just over 13,000 Applications, I think, through the end of Friday, which was the last day of the two-week period for the Pre-Grant Applications. And we're kind of assessing.

One of the things we're looking at now is sometimes people might have submitted two Applications. So we have to kind of dedupe the list and things of that nature. And then, we hope to

release the final Grant Application back to those individuals who meet the qualifications hopefully sometime later this week. Yeah, I think we're on a very good path there.

Okay. All right. Well, thank you for joining us. Again, we just want everyone to be safe. We always end this with talking about be safe, when you're out in the public. We always want to encourage people to wear their masks and whatnot.

But there's a different, I think, message around safety this weekend, as well. We have to be very cognizant in what's happening nationally. We have to be cognizant of our communities. I think, as we've said many times this afternoon, that the message that is surrounding these protests is a positive one. Unfortunately, that could be overshadowed with violence.

And if folks are out there and they see something, there's still a see something, say something aspect to our communities. It's been a very powerful message in a variety of different situations. And the situations that we're experiencing that the country saw this past weekend, and that we know we could potentially face really still do apply.

So, whether it's something on social media, whether you see folks trying to incite something that really shouldn't be there that could lead to something violent, you shouldn't have any hesitation picking up the phone and letting local law enforcement know that there's something out there, so that we can follow up on it.

We have a whole team here. We're following up, staying right on top of these issues, so that, again, we're, again -- unfortunately, our job is to plan for the worst in the spectrum of incidences that could happen surrounding these protests. And it's often in the aftermath of these protests we need to be prepared for.

We're going to be prepared. We're going to be ready to make sure that we're protecting our communities, our homes, our businesses, individuals, and make sure that, regardless of where it is, whether it's Manchester, Nashua, or any city or town across the State, local law enforcement, State Police, National Guard are all prepared to step up and provide that safety and security.

So, we want everyone to be safe. Understand these are trying times, a lot of anxiety for a lot of folks for a variety of different reasons. But, again, when we stay together, we stay strong. And it helps everyone get through it. Thank you guys very much.