



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Tuesday, July 14, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon. Thanks, everyone, for joining us. Our first press conference for the week, let's start with a public health update from Dr. Chan.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for all being here. So, I have a number of updates to provide today before we, I think, jump into the meat of the press conference here. Globally, there's now more than 13.1 million cases of COVID-19, which includes almost 3.4 million cases within the United States.

The last several days, within the United States, the country, as a whole, has averaged more than 60,000 new infections per day. And most States outside of New England are now seeing increasing, or worsening, outbreaks of COVID-19.

New Hampshire and New England, as a whole, continued to do very well, in terms of having brought our outbreaks under control. And we are obviously watching the numbers and the data very closely. And I want to update you on some of those New Hampshire-specific numbers this afternoon.

We will be announcing later today an additional 23 new people with confirmed COVID-19 infection. That brings the total to 6,091 people, in New Hampshire, New Hampshire residents who have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

We also have been reporting out on a daily basis the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19. And we are going to be updating and correcting some of the numbers that we normally release today and will be reporting an additional 76 individuals that have been hospitalized with confirmed COVID-19. Now, these numbers include two new people with hospitalizations and then 74 old hospitalizations that occurred primarily back in April and May, during the peak of our outbreak here in New Hampshire.

So, as I'm sure you're all aware, we're continually looking at how we can improve the reporting and the updating of our New Hampshire-based data on a daily basis. And so, we recently went back and performed an assessment on the quality and the completeness of some of our hospitalization data. And these 74 additional hospitalizations that we're reporting today, in addition to the two new hospitalizations, were picked up primarily because, in the data-reporting process, individuals who may have been hospitalized after they were initially reported to us were not always captured in some of the daily report outs we have given, right?

So, if someone was diagnosed with COVID-19, we reported their infection out in our daily updates. But if they were, then, later hospitalized, days, week or two down the road, they were not always captured in the daily hospitalization report out.

And so, the numbers that we're updating today for a total of 665 total people with confirmed COVID-19 who have been hospitalized at some point in the course of their illness is simply updating some of the numbers and doing some data cleaning, and updating the quality of our data. And we are obviously going to be reporting hopefully more reliably and accurately on the hospitalizations going forward.

And so, even though we're reporting an increase in the number of total hospitalizations, we have a graph here that we have shown before that graphs the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 by the date of their hospital admission. And you can see that, since the end of April/beginning of May, we have had a slow, gradual, progressive decline in the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19. And so, this trend continues. We continue to see low and declining numbers of hospitalizations, which we believe represents ongoing low or decreasing transmission within our community.

So, again, we are reporting an additional 76 new people hospitalized with COVID-19 for a total of 665 total people with confirmed COVID-19 who have been hospitalized. Only two of these are new, or recent, hospitalizations. 74 represent old hospitalizations that occurred back in April and May. And if you look at the graph again, the overall trend is a good trend of decreasing hospitalizations. We will obviously work to continue to improve our data reporting completeness and accuracy in the future.

We also report on a daily basis the number of people who have died from COVID-19. And sadly I have to report one additional person who has died from COVID-19, who has had confirmed COVID-19. This is a resident of a long-term care facility. A total of 390 people so far in New Hampshire have died, as a result of COVID-19, or related to complications from COVID-19. And again, this highlights what we are trying to avoid, the impact that COVID-19 can have on our communities and our family and friends, and why it's important to try and prevent spread of COVID-19 within our communities.

Now, the Commissioner of DHHS is not here today. So I'm going to provide some updates that she oftentimes provides, in terms of updating our testing data and updating outbreak data. Over the last week, we have performed, on average, more than 2,600 PCR-based tests per day.

Now, this is also an increase from what we have previously reported. And so, as part of our ongoing commitment to providing accurate and timely, and updated data, we also went back and did some data cleaning and QA on some of our test data.

If you remember a few weeks ago, we made a transition to report not on the number of people who were tested, but on the total number of tests performed, taking into account that some people may test negative and subsequently decide to get tested again, and potentially again. And some people routinely have been getting tested, checking for COVID-19 infection.

And so, in order to provide more accurate data for the total number of tests that are being performed on a daily and weekly basis, we have been reporting the number of the total number of PCR-based tests. And we are updating those numbers today to reflect that, in the past week, we have been testing on average about 2,600 people per day.

This is a substantial increase from what we have been reporting previously. So this is good news. This is a good update to our numbers. And again, we will continue to provide accurate and updated information. But the testing data continues to show a very low percentage of positivity for our PCR-based tests, which, again, is good news.

And then, finally, we, on a weekly basis, have been issuing a list of current and closed outbreaks. We will issue an update again online in today's update. I am pleased to announce that we have one new outbreak that has been closed since our last press conference. This is an outbreak in the Salemhaven long-term care facility, where there were a total of 61 infections in residents and staff, including

11 deaths. This outbreak, thankfully, is closed. There are currently five ongoing institutional outbreaks and no new long-term care facility outbreaks to report today.

So those are the New Hampshire numbers. They continue to show a good trend, as do the numbers in the surrounding New England States. But we do watch with concern with what has taken place in the rest of the country, as I know many of you do.

I want to continue to stress the importance of the public health precautions and recommendations that we continue to recommend. We continue to recommend that people avoid large gatherings of people. We continue to recommend that, when people are out in public settings, that they take steps to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet between other people.

Please wear cloth face coverings. The new evidence is emerging for the efficacy of cloth facemask use for preventing transmission of COVID-19. And please continue to frequently clean and sanitize your hands.

As always, if anybody's having any symptoms of COVID-19, even mild symptoms, we encourage them to go get testing. And testing remains available for anybody, even people who are potentially asymptomatic, that is without symptoms. With that, thank you and I'll hand this back over to the Governor.

Governor Sununu:

Great. Great. Well, thank you, Dr. Chan. So we have a lot to cover today. It's all good stuff. I think a lot of folks are tuning. We're going to talk about the education guidance that we are releasing today. It's a great document, very stakeholder-driven, very practical document. We're also going to look at just some general data.

So, the first slide we want to show is the unemployment data. These slides that we want to go over are really indicative of where our economy is. Is it coming back? What kind of job opportunities might be available.

So, what we have here are all the States in the country. And we have New Hampshire right about here in the middle. And this is very simple. This is looking at the workforce of each State and the percent of unemployment off of those workforce numbers that we currently have. So, right now, New Hampshire's right about the middle at 9.5%. So in other words, our week-over-week numbers are at about 73,000. Last week 73,000 people in New Hampshire filed for unemployment claims, versus the approximately 780,000 people that were as part of our labor force just prior to COVID. That's how we get to the 9.5%. And we're really right in the middle, in terms of national data.

You can see in white -- it's a little hard to see there, I know, on television. But in white, those are the surrounding States from Maine, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Mass., all of our New England counterparts. And we're right there in the middle along with Maine.

The next slide here is pretty interesting. This is really where our unemployment numbers have gone, relative to the rest of the country, since the pandemic started. So, if you owe, you have a blue line here that shows the United States, and the yellow represents New Hampshire.

Where we started back on May 2nd, you can see that New Hampshire was pegged at what we call an index of 100, meaning that we had, per capita, to our size and to our population, we had more people filing for unemployment relative to the rest of the country. As the rest of the country's unemployment numbers have gone down, people are going back to work. Things are flexing open. That's all very positive. You can see New Hampshire has been very rapid, in terms of our ability to get people back to

work, flex our economy open, still maintain public safety, our very good COVID numbers to-date. Still have a lot of work to do, of course.

But I think this is really a testament to the folks not just working with Employment Security, their job at the Department of Employment Security helps people get back to work. They help maintain our unemployment numbers. The Department of Labor, everyone really coming together. The guidance documents, also, just hats off to Dr. Chan and his team at the Department of Public Health, they worked. They worked really, really well. And a lot of businesses embraced those documents, using them as a guideline, allowing them to open safely. It's really working. It is. We got a long way to go.

Here, you'll see the number, 65. Really what this means with our numbers down here, that is we are at about 65% of the unemployment numbers as we originally had back in May, so, in other words, approximately 35% reduction. We peaked out at about 116,000 people on unemployment back around May 2nd. We're down to about 73,000. And that number continues to drop at about four to five times the national rate. So that's great news.

We'd love for all the United States to be on this path. We know that they're having some difficulty with their COVID numbers in other parts of the country. But we're doing well here. We're definitely on the right track in terms of getting people back to work and getting the economy moving again.

Some folks were asking specifically which industries were affected the most during the shutdown, the Stay-At-Home Order, and which industries are coming back, and at what rate. So we picked a few here just for folks to look at.

The first one you'll see at the top is hospitals. And what you'll see in the blue where it says 80.6%, so that means about 80% of the employment base of hospitals was still working during the Stay-At-Home Order, which means that about 20% were either furloughed, or laid off, had gone on the unemployment rolls, whatever it might be.

The 12.2% you see on the righthand side there in yellow, that's what's come back during what we will call the Safer-At-Home period, as we start flexing open the economy. So right now the hospitals have about almost 93% of their employment that they had prior to the COVID epidemic. So they still have a ways to go, of course. But that's a very good indicator that our healthcare system is coming back.

Hospitals live on very thin margins, of course. And a lot of our smaller Healthcare Providers live on those thin margins. And we want to get them back at 100% or even over 100% of where they were before. But they are coming back and so that's a good sign.

Grocery stores, as you can see, they didn't take nearly as much of a hit. They were deemed essential for obvious reasons. Most of them did stay open. During the Stay-At-Home Order, about 85% of the people that were employed at grocery stores remained employed during the Stay-At-Home Order, and they've come back at another 6.5 points on top of that.

Clothing stores and if you look all the way down, I mean, these ones here, clothing stores, retailers, restaurants, lodging, they were all around the 45% to 55% range. So in other words, about half of the employment base of those industries was lost during the Stay-At-Home Order. But what you see in yellow is what has now come back. So, over 36% of the clothing stores' employment base is now back on top of where it had been; 28% for the other retailers; about 27% just in the past month on the restaurants; and about 22% in lodging.

Those are all clearly good, positive trends. We want to stay on those positive trends. And that's why those guidance documents are so important. Some of the capacity restrictions that we still have in place are so important. Social distancing and masking, all of this stuff works. It really, really does. It's allowed us to maintain low numbers and have our economy come back.

So, we're definitely on a good trend. But, again, we wanted to show this just so folks could get a little bit of a better understanding of which industries were hit the hardest, which industries are coming back the fastest.

Oh, so we have one more really great opportunity today. We have a new portal. If you remember, we started I want to say just with our Long-Term Care Providers. The Department of Employment Security set up a portal where, if you were unemployed and were looking for a job or needed a job, and you are a Healthcare Provider, a Nurse, whatever it might be, someone in long-term care services, you could go to the recruitment portal and find a job that might be in the area. And this allowed us to really move the healthcare workforce to exactly where the need needed to be, as we went through the toughest times of the COVID epidemic.

Well, today, we're really opening it up. So, you can see the link there, unemploymentbenefits.nh.gov. This is a new streamlined approach. And we're going to connect, again, the job seekers with the employers. There's already 1,000 open positions available on there right now for nearly 200 employers across the State. There are companies really looking to expand and grow.

Vapotherm, I was talking to our friends at Vapotherm, a company over in Exeter. They make a lot of different types of supplies, medical-type supplies. And they're booming. I mean, they're expanding very aggressively.

So there are really good signs, not just that our economy's coming back, but there's real opportunity that wasn't even there six months ago. So, by creating this portal, we're allowing all the industries to participate. They can put their jobs online. It's really a centralized database specifically for New Hampshire-based employers to allow people to come back, as we slowly recover and manage through the pandemic.

Before we go onto some of the other data, just want to take a quick pause because we're talking about Unemployment Security a lot. A big thank you, today is one of the last days -- today and tomorrow are the last days that our National Guard -- the men and women of the New Hampshire National Guard have worked in our Unemployment Insurance hotline day-in and day-out.

And you can see from that slide, over 540,000 calls. That is how many phone calls they have personally taken, one-on-one, from individuals all across the State, helping them manage those unemployment benefit process, a process that, for a lot of folks, was new. The first time a lot of folks had to apply for unemployment benefits, what that opportunity was, what the process was, how to maintain those benefits. And the men and women of our New Hampshire National Guard, just cannot thank them enough, day-in and day-out and countless hours. They just did a phenomenal job.

The hotline is still very much open, very much active. We're transitioning to a private contractor to help us manage those calls and that process. And we're in that transition process now. But we just want to put out a big thank you to all the men and women that day-in and day-out have been there for the citizens of our State. And they did a great job.

So, let's take a little bit of step back to talk about straight COVID numbers. This is a graph you have all seen before. The number in blue, you see the number of tests on the bar graph that we typically do on any given day. The tiny little bit of orange, really hard to see there, just the very tips of the orange, those are the positive numbers we have. And then, the really important line is this yellow line. And that's our percent positive, the percent positive cases per day, the three-day rolling average per day, based on the number of tests we have.

Now, as was alluded by Dr. Chan, for a while, for really up until now, we typically only have talked about the number of unique individuals, first-time people coming in for their first-time test. That's what we would look at when we looked at the percent positive.

What we realized is that now we're really focusing a lot of our testing on long-term care facilities, or folks that are right on the frontlines. They're getting tested two and three, and sometimes four times. They're all included in the mix, as well.

So, to get a little more accurate representation in terms of a true percent, number of positive cases versus the total cases for that day, whether a person has been tested once, or they're coming back for their fifth test, it's still an accurate representation of what our percent positive is for that day. And so, again, we average well-over 2,000 tests at this point.

Maybe about half, or 60%, are actually unique individuals. But a large portion are folks that are just on the frontlines. They've had their maybe weekly or biweekly test in their facility. We're coming back to some of the same facilities, making sure that we're managing those outbreaks in long-term care facilities.

And so, again, as Dr. Chan alluded to, that yellow line, we continue on a very positive path. Our percent positives are well-below 5%, consistently. So that's a good sign. And obviously we want to keep it that way. And I think, by having the testing protocols, the PPE, all these tools that we keep using to manage our process, we don't want to see these numbers again, to be sure. We don't want to see that surge.

We know it could come. A second surge could come. But as much as we can do to stay on the frontlines where the issue really is, I think that'll help give folks a lot of confidence that we can manage the public health and safety and slowly open our economy to get back to normal.

Speaking of long-term care facilities, individuals are also asking us about, well, how many outbreaks are there in your long-term care facilities? Commissioner Shibinette does a great job every week identifying the number of facilities that might come on or off the rolls, in terms of what is classified as an outbreak.

And you can see by this chart here, at one point -- this is the average weekly number of facilities that had -- a long-term care, or institutional facilities that had an outbreak. And as you can see, when we're around mid- to late-May, we were average approximately 20 facilities in outbreak mode. We have over 200 facilities here in New Hampshire, but that was close to or around 10% of our facilities could have been deemed as having an outbreak.

As of today, we're down to five. And that's really, really good news. Those facilities, we're still managing. We're still testing. We're still trying to isolate individuals as fast as possible. But this is where we see a lot of the issues when it comes to fatality, when it comes to just the high rates of spreading of COVID.

And we're going to keep our resources right where it needs to be, on these facilities, on these frontline workers. We can't thank them enough for everything that they've been doing, taking care of our loved ones through some very difficult times. But we've really made a lot of progress here to have about five facilities currently with an outbreak out of well-over 200.

We don't want to declare victory. That is the last thing we're doing right now. We still have a long way to go. But we've really identified that issue and we want to stay right on top of it, and make sure we're there, and hopefully get that number down to zero.

Let me do this. Let's talk about PPE. Before we do that, I want to go back to a point I just made. What we're really doing, right, when you look at our low level of COVID in New Hampshire, relative to the rest of the country, some would say it's some of the lowest you're going to find in the country.

When you look at the strength of our economy coming back, what we don't want is for people to think that we're at some sort of endgame here. We really are not. This is not a mission-accomplished moment, not by any means. We are right in the middle of a very long marathon. We're doing well as a State. And the citizens of the State deserve all the credit.

The success that we have will not be dictated by the Governor, or even by Public Health. It'll be really dictated by the individuals in this State that are taking that responsibility of wearing masks, maintaining social distancing; understanding that while our numbers are good, we saw what happened in other States.

And I mean, God bless the individuals down in Florida, or Texas, or Arizona, or California, or Washington, or Utah, or Idaho. We could go on all day with the list. Pretty much every State outside of New England is seeing these massive surges. There's a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear. There's a lot of outbreaks in their long-term care facilities.

We're not at that position. But if we are not vigilant and diligent, if I may, with our personal responsibility of maintaining social distancing and managing this crisis for our families and our workforce, we very well could be there, just like any of those other States.

And so, we really want to keep impressing upon folks that, while our numbers are good, we have a long, long way to go before we get through this pandemic. We could see a second surge, a third surge, a fourth surge. We don't know what things are going to look like in September and October, November.

But, again, we want to make sure those tools and resources are available. We've put our guidance documents that's allowed us to flex the economy open in a safe and productive way. We've really increased our testing capability well over 2,000, 2500 tests per day. That's great. We're going to talk a little bit about PPE.

Hospital capacity, we talk a lot about hospital capacity. So in other words, at what point would the number of COVID cases in New Hampshire be at such a level that our hospitals would start really feeling the pressure, as you see happening in other parts of the country? You see hospitals in certain parts of Texas, Atlanta, Miami-Dade County down in Florida. Those hospitals are really bursting at the seams trying to care for the individuals walking through their doors.

Knowing that the hospitalization rate might be about 10%, and knowing, just to use a round number, we have a 1,000, maybe 1500 or 2,000 beds available within our hospital system, that would indicate that we could go to 10,000 or even 12,000-or-more cases before we really start bursting at the seams. Now, we don't want that, right, at any given point. I mean, those are really, really high numbers.

But the reason I'm giving them is I want folks to understand we do have capacity. We've found a way to manage. Our hospitals have done a great job managing not just the COVID patients they have, but finding a way to balance, doing other surgeries and procedures, while making sure there aren't outbreaks within their facilities.

And then, obviously, our PPE, PPE's such an important part of this. And what I'm going to show now is a series of slides on where we are with our stockpiles. If we were to hit another second or third surge, will we have enough PPE to manage?

What we've done at the State level is deemed that we want about two months' stockpile of PPE on-hand at any given time. If we can get beyond that, that would be great. But we've really set our goals for our two-month stockpile.

We know what our burn rate is. For example, this slide looks at facemasks. It's one of the most common pieces of PPE out there. The State has given away 10 million to 15 million facemasks to private business, to hospitals, to long-term care facilities. We're constantly bringing it in.

What we really want in the yellow there is 4 million. We want about 4 million on-hand. We have a burn rate per month of about 2 million to 2.3 million masks per month. We currently have about 6.5 million on-hand. So we have a robust stockpile, to be sure. We've more than met our kind of two-month minimum that we would like to see over time.

Another aspect of PPE is isolation gowns. This is a really interesting one. If I had showed you this graph about a month ago, it would have been right down here. We had almost none, almost no gowns. You couldn't find them anywhere in the country. Our team did a phenomenal job focusing on where that need was, talking to the hospitals and the long-term care facilities.

We would like to have 1.5 million on-hand. Currently, we have about 3.5 million on-hand. But again, we use close to 1 million a month. So, again, what we're looking at is what that burn rate is, constantly have our orders in. Hopefully, we can maintain at least 1.5 million on-hand so that if a crisis really were to hit, if, for some reason, we couldn't get any more PPE, we would have at least a couple months' storage on-hand.

These are just some other ones that folks have asked about: goggles. We have about 35,000 on-hand. We'd like to have about 70,000 on-hand. So we need to increase that one. Gloves: that's our big need. About a month ago, gloves was not a severe need for us. Some of the orders that we have put in just did not come through. It happens. We always try to hedge our bets with a lot of different orders.

We would like to have about a half a million gloves on-hand in our own, personal, New Hampshire-based PPE stockpile, so we're not just relying on the Federal Government to come in and help us every time. We want to be very self-sufficient. So gloves is an area where we're really focusing. We have orders out all over this country and even overseas. And again, we feel very confident that we can definitely get to the point to meet our stored quantity. We were able to do it with gowns. We were able to do it with facemasks. And now, the focus is on gloves.

Face shields is another one. Face shields are very, very useful, especially in the long-term care facilities and the hospitals. And again, right now, we'd like to have a quarter million on-hand. We have well-over a half a million. So we're doing good. We're pretty good there. Is there anymore here? Oh, so we will go ahead.

So, again, we're just trying to give folks a sense of it's all about preparing for the future. We're focusing on our stockpiles. We're focusing on our testing capacity because we know that a surge very well may come. We have great numbers today and that's something that everyone should be proud of.

But we really do have a long way to go. We're right in the middle of the marathon, and I'm thinking of, like, when I ran Boston Marathon, right? You get to about -- I don't know where it was -- maybe mile 17, and all of a sudden you get to the part where you think you're doing well. And then, you get to heartbreak hill. And you realize the hardest part is still ahead of you.

That's really where we are. I really believe some of our biggest challenges are still ahead of us. But we are prepared. We have funds. We're stockpiling. And we're going to be able to maintain, I think, a management capacity for whatever the challenge that may come.

So, school guidance, everyone wants to know where we are with school guidance. So, this afternoon we are releasing the school guidance documents for opening schools up across our State. And we know a lot of folks -- parents, Teachers -- are pretty keen on where we're going with some of this.

So, some of the things that I do want to highlight before we get into it too much, first a big thank you to the Department of Education. Commissioner Edelblut did a fantastic job in working with the School Transitioning -- I got to get the name right. It's called STRRT. I always call it STRRT. School Transitioning, Reopen, and Redesign Taskforce, STRRT.

This was the group we put together, about 30-or-so stakeholders, from all different walks of life with connection to the school community: parents, Teachers, Administrators, input from students. This is the group that's put out the tens of thousands of surveys across the State so we could get the feedback from all the different communities so we knew we weren't going to be making decisions just within a bubble. We weren't going to be just doing anything behind closed doors, making sure everything we did was transparent; having some public meetings about what was important, what should be included, not just in the guidance document but where we really need to go as a State. And I just can't thank all of them. They did a phenomenal, phenomenal job. And all the guidance that we've put out today comes from the recommendation of that STRRT Taskforce. And again, they did a great job.

The one thing that really underlies all of this guidance document is flexibility. That's what the STRRT Team heard across the board. I think that's what everyone understood was needed in a State like New Hampshire: local flexibility with comprehensive public safety guidelines.

So in other words, we just want to make sure that we have the ability to understand that what happens -- the example I like to use is a little elementary school over in Croydon, they have about 30-or-so students, very different than Manchester Center High School with 1500 students, right? Different dynamics, different management capabilities, different resources that might be at-hand for the town and for the school.

And so, by providing the guidelines but allowing the Teachers and Administrators to manage, what we've really tried to do is make sure we didn't create something so rigid it was doomed to fail, so rigid it would be brittle. If you create mandates that are so tough to meet, ultimately I do believe, and I think the folks on the Taskforce heard it loud and clear and agreed, that you're really setting yourselves up for failure.

We have to provide some flexibility. We have to provide a listening moment, if you will, from the Administrators and most importantly the Teachers and the parents about what will work and not work in the classroom. Let Teachers do what they do best. That's manage the classroom, provide a great education, work with their students, all with working within these guidelines and giving them the flexibility to keep kids safe and provide that education within our school system.

Big piece of this communication, right? There's a reason I come out and do my -- or at least a couple times a week, we do these press conferences, because communication is so important. Transparency is so important in times of crisis, in times of anxiety. We want to make sure everyone is onboard with what's happening.

So one of the key aspects of these plans is making sure there is a Lead Communication Team within each District. Each District is communicating to the Teachers and the parents what things will look like, what the opportunities are, where some of the pitfalls are, what's happening and what isn't, not just at the beginning of the schoolyear but all the way through.

So we want to do with this -- the first and foremost I think this guidance document just creates a shell and an outline for Districts to build that Communications Team. And when you have that transparency and you have that back-and-forth communications between parents, Teachers, and students, and folks that are managing those facilities, again I really do believe it's a pillar of success not just for getting kids back in September, but maintaining school operations for the long-term.

So, let's just hit some of those key highlights. Professional development: so first and foremost, Teachers and Administrators need to understand what this new norm in our schools is going to look like. So, a couple things, we really tried to highlight the opportunities for professional development, staffing preparation. What will schools do if a couple Teachers out with COVID, potentially, or have to be quarantined? Do they have enough staff to provide the backup?

We will talk about hybrid models a little bit in a minute and where classrooms and schools can go. But making sure that Teachers have the time to prepare what their classrooms might look like, making sure they have extra development days on the frontend. And the Department of Education, they've asked for three more professional development days on the frontend of the schoolyear. We're absolutely going to provide that flexibility so they can, again, work with their Administrations, figure out what their classrooms might look like, and make sure that, again, they're providing the opportunities for these kids.

We have a lot of classroom guidance in terms of what actually happens in the classroom: how to space out the desks; how to ensure that you're maintaining as much social distancing as possible. We'd like to see at least 3 to 6 feet between the desks, if we can. We understand that that will be very workable and very easy in some classrooms, and a little more of a challenge in others. Doesn't mean we're going to shut down those classrooms. But we're going to allow the Teachers to provide some flexibility and find the best path for their students.

Masks: masks are not going to be mandated in every aspect of the school. But knowing that to manage that, to enforce that, if you will, could, again, create that rigidity that could cause the system to fail. So we're going to make sure we're encouraging it. We're pushing folks to wear masks at all times, if they can. But also understand that, especially in the elementary school grades or during certain activities in certain times of the day, people may have to take their mask off, again, hopefully when they can maintain more social distancing.

But we looked at areas of congregation. How do you manage students that might congregate at the lockers, or in the hallways, or things of that nature? And we always want to encourage those students to have a mask, to wear a mask in those settings, to really have the Teachers engage with the Administrators and the students, in a way changing the culture of the school around this COVID epidemic. And hopefully it's a temporary change, of course. We hope we're not dealing with COVID next year.

But there is a bit of a cultural change that has to happen around public health and safety, specifically with COVID. And I think Department of Public Health did a great job providing some of the guidance to give some options for Teachers and parents, and students to really find that new medium. And then, some of the basic things we talk about all the time: hand hygiene, to make sure you're washing your hands; again, make sure you're having the practical social distancing.

The word I keep going back to and I think it's really important, is practical. This entire document has to be practical. It has to be manageable for the individuals that are going to be on the frontlines having to perform it.

Transportation is a big issue. So we have up here our transportation protocols. So I'm going to give a couple quick examples. Bussing, obviously, is a big issue. There have been some guidance documents. And the STRRT Taskforce looked at guidance documents from all over the country.

The one thing I will also add in as a -- excuse the tangent -- the document that we're putting out, which is available to the public, is very much a dynamic document. It has so many links in there to pieces of information or other guidance, what other States are doing, other ideas that might be possible. It really was created really, really well to provide as much information as possible.

But I got to tell you. I've seen other documents around the country that say, well, every kid that is on a school bus, you can only fill every other seat. And every kid absolutely must be masked, no exceptions.

What I think the Taskforce realized was that might not be very practical. Is the Bus Driver going to have to stop every 100 yards to make sure every kid is putting their mask on and not playing with it? If you create a system where only one child is in every other seat, you're going to need three or four times the number of buses and bus stops, right?

So, things of that nature are good ideas from a public health standpoint, to be sure. But we wanted to make sure that we didn't create a system that just couldn't be achieved. And so, allowing a little bit of flexibility there, encouraging the masking and the social distancing, maybe encouraging assigned seating, things like that, that's a much more manageable process. There's other tools and ideas in this document that those Districts can implement to allow that distancing, to allow the public health and safety aspects to come to the forefront with transportation, but still be manageable for the Bus Drivers and get the kids to school in a practical timeframe.

Student/Teacher wellness: big issue, aside from just the ABCs and 123s, the reading, writing, and arithmetic, just the general student wellness; let's appreciate that so many of these kids haven't been back in a school in five or six months. In some situations, no one else has really put eyes on these children in a long, long time.

We've invested a lot in our summer programs and our summer camps, and tried to make them very robust in this State to allow kids to have that opportunity in the summer for more social aspects. But for a lot of kids, this is going to be their first time back in a real social setting.

There's an aspect of student wellness, Teacher wellness. So we've really provided a lot of funding for outreach programs, so we can more proactively reach out to the kids that might need a little extra help. The special needs programs, or kids that are on IEP, frankly one of the areas I think that was frustrating for us in the remote learning process, as we finished out last year, was special education and the IEPs.

We want to make sure the funding is there. It absolutely is. The opportunities are there. Now, we just need to meet the needs of those students in making sure that we have ideas and protocols in place to achieve those goals for those kids.

Socioemotional learning: a big program we've been pushing here in the State for the last two and a half, three years. Frankly, we lead the country in it when it comes to this process. We have over 400 schools that have some type of socioemotional learning programs available.

We want to make sure those are robust, that we're talking to those kids, that we're, again, making sure that their general wellness -- and not just the students, the Teachers, as well. This is a new dynamic for a lot of Teachers. There'll be a lot of anxiety for a lot of Teachers, in terms of, as they come back into school, are they putting themselves at-risk? Or what are those risks? What might they be? But, again, making sure that those programs are available in a variety of different ways for students and Teachers is going to be very important to the long-term success of the ability for the schools to not just open but to remain open.

Hybrid learning models: you'll see at the bottom of this slide, what we're really allowing -- again, with this document, the public health aspects of where we are today and where we will be in September of what the guidance we've put together, we feel very confident all students can come back into the classroom in a safe, healthy, and productive manner, in a practical way, allowing the Districts the flexibility they need.

But we also want to appreciate that, in some Districts, for various reasons -- it could be because of staffing. It could be because of public health anxiety. Maybe their rate of COVID starts to really skyrocket in one time versus another -- we want them to have that flexibility. So what this document has done is built in what we call hybrid learning protocols. So you can have protocols for traditional in-classroom instruction, protocols around health and safety, protocols for turning to a completely remote learning environment, if that's what your school were to choose to do, or protocols for having what we're now calling a hybrid learning environment, where maybe part of the students are in class. Maybe some of them are out of class; how Teachers could manage it; additional staffing needs that might be needed to manage a more hybrid model, knowing that maybe a certain segment of class, or maybe a class or two, maybe they get quarantined or they're out.

We just don't know what this is going to look like. But we wanted to create a system that allowed that flexibility. I know we're using that word a lot, but it's so important. Allow that flexibility so the Districts and the Principals, and the Teachers could design the model that would work best for their students.

I guess I'll close up. Is that all? Yeah, I'll close up just by saying it's very dynamic. They've done a great job. The STRRT Taskforce did a great job creating a document that isn't just rigid for trying to make one size fits all, but a document that is flexible so they can open today and remain dynamic as they go through the fall semester, so that things can change, in terms of whether it's transportation, what's happening in a classroom, food services, emotional wellbeing, mental-health services. All of these things have been considered and included in the document.

Again, it's all about success. We just want to set ourselves up with the highest rate of success that we can. It's not about institutions. It's just about these kids. It's just about getting them back into a good productive learning environment. We have some of the best schools in the country. We're constantly ranked as some of the best-quality education in the country.

And we did a great job through remote learning and I have no doubts and full confidence that the Administrations, the Teachers, the parents, everyone can come together with this kind of new normal of what schools might look like, but really make sure that it is a success for these kids. Okay.

That was a lot. I know. I appreciate everyone's time with all that. A lot to digest, but we can open up for any questions. Yes, sir?

Q&A Session

Governor, I note that we're in a pandemic and everyone's safety is at-risk essentially. But what guarantee or sort of provision can you tell parents and students, and Teachers, your confidence in the degree of safety they'll have in schools when everyone goes back?

Governor Sununu:

Schools are going to be safe. They really are. All these protocols and guidance were designed with one thing in mind: safety for those kids. And that's what gives us a lot of confidence that it will be successful. It's practical. It's flexible.

And again, it's also designed for feedback. So if parents have a concern, if they're seeing something in the classroom, or a Principal or Teacher's seeing something that, gee, we didn't really think this was going to happen, they can be flexible and adjust, whether it's with social distancing, with mask wearing. If

a school said, look, we really need to mandate masks for all students at all times, they have the ability to do that, absolutely, if they think that that's the best choice for them, if they find a way that they can practically manage it in the classroom.

What we just didn't want to do at the State level is say you must here, and have those certain circumstances where it just wasn't possible, and then those Districts come back and say, I guess we have to close. There's no way to manage what you've mandated. That's that rigidity that we tried to remove from the system.

So I think that the flexibility gives us a lot of assurance that it can be done right and kids can be safe. And I mean, not to keep blowing smoke, but I got to tell you, Dr. Chan and his Team are incredible. They're some of the best in the country. We have the right people that have worked on this, that have designed these plans with stakeholder input, as well. I just think they did a fantastic job with it.

How many Substitute Teachers do you think the State is going to need, because it seems like you're going to need an army to go above and beyond, because even, I mean, there are going to be Teachers on a regular schoolyear who will plow through that fever, plow through the mild symptoms perhaps of illness, that they can't do that this time?

Governor Sununu:

A lot, yeah.

So where are you going to get those numbers?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I imagine that there will be a higher need of Substitute Teachers this year than we have, or Substitute Bus Drivers, or Administrators, whatever it might be. I think you bring up a very good point. Sometimes you'll have a Teacher just, oh, I'm not feeling great but I'm going to be in that classroom. I'm going to be there for the kids.

Well, I think now everyone's saying, I got to be very responsible and get the test. And while we're awaiting test results a lot of Teachers could be out potentially. So, that's one thing that we're asking folks to do is to reach out to the community, find folks that want to be part of that substitute teaching protocol. Get your name on the list.

Or if individuals are interested in participating in that, call your District and put your name on the list to be a Substitute Teacher. That can help them through the remote learning process, the hybrid models, whatever it might be. There could be a variety of reasons, even if the Teacher's in the classroom. Schools might determine we're going to have extra staff on-hand to manage these new dynamics. So even if a Teacher isn't out, there still could be a higher need for those Substitute Teachers. There's a lot of funding available, both through the Federal Government and the State, that we've provided that can pay for those types of things. But, yeah, there'll be definitely a higher staffing need.

What number of people are we talking about? How many children and Teachers? Could you give me a ballpark on the number of people that are involved with this? Then, the other question I have is, this is guidance. It's not necessarily required. What prevents the Croydon School Board from deciding they don't want anything to do with this document? They're going to do their own thing.

Governor Sununu:

So, I mean, there's a few mandates in there. For example, let me give a quick example. We are asking anyone who's visiting a school from the outside -- a parent dropping a student off that's going to come into the school, or an adult that's visiting the school -- there's a mask mandate there. So there are some. That's just one quick example. There are some mandates in there that are required for folks to have. But, again, those are very easy and manageable.

But, again, there is a lot of flexibility. If smaller Districts think, look, these are nice recommendations, appreciate it, but we're going to go in this direction, for the most part that's okay, too, as long as it's allowed within the guidance document.

In terms of the numbers, it's everybody. It's all public schools. I mean, this guidance document was created for all public schools. I know a lot of private schools will probably look at some of the ideas that we have. But a lot of those Districts and private school organizations might have their own guidance document. That's fine. But I think what we've put forth here is robust and something that everybody can use. I mean, and you're talking about over 100,000 students across the State.

K-12?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, K-12 and tens of thousands of Teachers.

Are there difference between the little ones and the high schoolers?

Governor Sununu:

No, we don't discern. So, that's a really good question. This document doesn't say, high schools must do this. Middle schools must do this. And elementary schools must do this. Again, it's just about providing that flexibility.

What you say must happen for a 5th grader in a elementary school, is that truly that different than what must happen for a 6th grader in a middle school? I don't think it's for the Governor or even Dr. Chan to say that from 5th to 6th grade there's this fundamental bar that is completely different. That's why you provide the flexibility. What do those classrooms actually look like? What are they dynamics?

One thing we looked at is the physical size of classrooms. I mean, there's some Districts that their classrooms are just smaller, where getting to a full 6 feet of spacing between desks just wasn't completely achievable. Maybe it's 4.5 feet or 5 feet. And of course I think Teachers will really push the boundaries and try to provide that physical distancing as best they can. In some Districts, it was very easy to do,

some of the newer schools, especially. You could keep desks 6 feet apart, no problem. And I assume Teachers will choose to do that. Why not, right?

So, again, we didn't want to be shutting down this elementary school but allow that middle school to open because of a half a foot, or a foot here-or-there. We looked at the distancing, also. I mean, they got into a lot of detail. The distancing that a Teacher might have standing at the blackboard to their first student in the front of the classroom, right, what was that average distance? And what could be practically managed there?

And so, most cases it works just fine to have good social distancing. In a few examples, it was a little tougher. And again, we didn't want to say no to those folks based on grade, or based on just the physical barriers you might have within the room.

A lot of our educational institutions, they're older. I put forth all that money, for example. I'm going back a little bit. The Safe School Infrastructure Fund, right, when we were first focusing on making schools safe, \$30 million, and we were finding that some of the door systems or the windows wouldn't close all the way. They were just older. And that's exactly where that money went to upgrade. But that was an initial exercise for me, at least, to really appreciate that Districts are so different in their ability of managing the physical structures.

Just to follow up on Paula's question, looking at visitors entering schools, you said that that's a statewide mandate. I'm looking at page 12 of the guidance. It says visitors should be required to wear cloth face coverings upon entry of educational facility grounds. That's a should, not a shall.

Governor Sununu:

That's a good point. It should be a mandate. I mean, I'll go back and take a look at the document. But, Doctor, do you know if we changed that for some reason?

Dr. Chan:

Can't remember; I mean, it should be required, leaving it up to the School Districts to...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, yeah.

Elsewhere on that same page, it says all adults dropping students off shall wear cloth face covering.

Governor Sununu:

There you go. There's the shall.

So that's adults dropping kids off. But much of this document seems to be operating on should. And then, there's a few shalls thrown in there. What is the enforcement, if there is a shall versus a should? And what does that look like?

Governor Sununu:

What does the enforcement look like?

From the perspective of the State.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so that's a good question. The question is difference between shall and should, or recommended. That's kind of a should is kind of like a recommended, versus the firm you shall and you must.

So, in the areas where we do have those you shall and you must, if there are cases where for some reason a school or a Districts is repeatedly violating something, then obviously we will work with those Districts to find out why is it happening. What isn't working at your level? We're not just going to go in and say, well, you have to shut down. This is all about flexibility.

But to start things off, we definitely want to start with things that are manageable. And asking individuals that might be visiting a school from the outside, saying you must wear a face covering, we think that's definitely the right thing to do. That's very manageable. There's no management barrier, if you will, to asking individuals to do that.

But, again, if there's any school that does something that's deemed to be unsafe, given the flexibility you talked about before -- and this is obviously an area that is untested largely in terms of what is the model that works best for schools? What practices might be unsafe? Is there any...

Governor Sununu:

The Department of Education would deal with those instances just as if there was some other unsafe -- let's take COVID out of the mix, right? If we found that a school was doing something consistently unsafe -- unsafe food preparation, not following OSHA guidance or something like that, unsafe classrooms or anything like that -- the Department of Education has the ability to take action with those schools. And you have the exact same protocol within the COVID guidance document, as well. We always have protocols to manage safe aspects of schools, pre-, during, and post-COVID.

Do you think all School Districts should allow any Teacher who doesn't feel comfortable not to return to school?

Governor Sununu:

Should allow the Teacher not to return? So I guess I would ask the question. In other words, keep paying that Teacher, but not have them?

Right, have them teach remotely, for example, rather than in the classroom?

Governor Sununu:

A Teacher could teach remotely in some of these models. We've had some folks as if a Teacher were remote but the students were in class with, let's say, some other Professionals, or Substitutes, or whatever it is, but the Teacher providing that remote learning opportunity. It'd be an interesting dynamic. But we've had a couple people ask if that's possible. And I think it would definitely be possible.

And there are plenty of Teachers that are over 60 and that kind of meet the risk guidelines. So what is the State's advice to those Teachers? Should they come into school? And if they can't come to school, should Districts accommodate them?

Governor Sununu:

So, the question really is about for the older Teachers, let's say you're older 60. We've always encouraged folks that are older 60 with the Stay-At-Home, now, I guess, Safer-At-Home Advisory, but still maintaining that elevated level for folks that are older to come into a congregate setting like a school.

We believe the guidance document that we've put together allows for the social distancing, the mask wearing. And it can allow the schools for the flexibility to meet the needs of those individuals. Of course if the school can't, for some reason, if the physical confines of the school don't allow it, or the job responsibilities of that Teacher don't allow it, then the schools would have to make other accommodations.

Could that accommodation mean that Teacher loses his or her job?

Governor Sununu:

I mean, I got to be careful. That will be a District decision, of course.

But that is one of the options available to Districts, if they don't feel they can accommodate someone who is at-risk of COVID?

Governor Sununu:

I got to be honest. If that's allowed within the Districts, almost all Districts have union contracts that they have to adhere to. So I don't want to comment on that too much. If it were built into the union contract, yeah, they could.

We know a lot of Teachers already have to buy supplies for their classroom and things like that. Most of them will probably agree that it's not fair that they would have to buy their own PPE. If a Teacher feels like they don't have enough, or they need more, what level of access can they get to the State to that stockpile to try to get more PPE for their classroom, if they feel they need more?

Governor Sununu:

So we told the schools we're happy to facilitate those purchases. We've provided COVID funding, so they can make those purchases. And they don't have to go just for PPE. That funding can be used for a variety of COVID-related costs.

And then, if they're having trouble actually finding something like masks, we can help them do that on the private market. And you can find masks almost anywhere now. But if there were really some sort of barrier there, of course we will provide for it. We're not going to let a school go without.

But the PPE market has really opened up commercially, so aggressively. It's a great opportunity. And looking at the level of PPE required for Teachers and students, we're talking about masks, for the most part. For like the School Nurse and some others, you may have needs for gowns or face shields, or maybe some other levels of PPE, but not to the level of having every student having to wear an N95 mask or anything. That's not the right thing to do. That wouldn't be appropriate. But, again, we're always there to help any District that may have trouble with either finding or facilitating the purchase of PPE.

Can we hear from Dr. Chan real quick on sort of from a medical perspective, Doctor, on how you got to yes with schools that are in closer quarters, because we've had it hammered into us? If you can't maintain social distancing, please mask. But desks are going to be 3 feet apart. And in classrooms, there's no mask mandate if they're in there. So, how did you approach this, from a medical perspective, in saying yes to that?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so you're right. Schools are challenging, right? And just to be clear about the distancing, the guidance document, I think, specifies at least 3 feet of distance, right? There's data out there showing that maintaining 3 feet of physical distance. Ideally, 6 feet, right; so the goal here is for schools to, if they can, try to get to 6 feet of social distancing in the classroom, but needing to maintain at least a 3 feet minimum distance.

And you're right. The messaging out there is that we recommend people out in public places, out in public settings, try and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other people. With schools, the goal here is, too, I think, there's a balance to be struck, right? There's a goal to maximize the benefits of educational learning and minimize the risks of COVID-19 transmission.

And so, when we look at building in protections into the school system, we've taken the same approach with schools that we have to any other business, where we don't rely on any one particular layer, or any one particular intervention. And so, we talk about layers of protection or layers of interventions in the guidance that's put out, either with schools or with any other business.

Social distancing is one layer. Cloth face coverings is another layer. Cohorting or grouping students together is a third layer. Hand hygiene, a fourth layer; looking at different structures and processes, there are additional layers that can be built it.

And so, I tend to think about this as almost a Swiss cheese model, right? Each layer has holes. No layer's going to be 100% effective at preventing transmission. But when you put the layers together, the goal is to minimize the risk to staff, to children, to students in the classroom, while trying to maximize the educational benefit of bringing students back to class.

And so, we've tried to put those layers into the school guidance documents, while maintaining the necessary flexibility. As pointed out, a 1st grade classroom is very different from a 12th grade classroom.

And the types of interventions that are possible in a 1st grade classroom are going to be very different from what 12th graders are able to maintain.

So there needed to be the flexibility. And what we tried to do was set some baseline, or some minimum, that School Districts could, then, work off of. And so, we will continue to work with schools, School Districts, to try and implement protective measures for students and Teachers.

But I think generally we believe that the guidance that is out there is striking the right balance between giving schools the flexibility to bring students back into an educational setting, where there are going to be better educational opportunities, better meeting of the needs of students and families, right, not just education, but allowing parents to work, providing meals for students, some of the social support services that students get through the school system, while also trying to implement public health protections in different layers to try and build in a protection and prevent transmission within schools.

I'll also note that there likely will need to be planning from schools at different levels, not only looking at in-person learning but looking at hybrid models of learning. Hybrid models of learning referring to oftentimes separating groups of children, students, and bringing them through in different cycles, whether it's a daily, bi-daily cycle, weekly cycle to minimize the number of students in class, and even planning for the possibility -- and we hope not to get to this point -- the possibility of needing to go to full remote learning.

Obviously, the situation is very dynamic regarding the pandemic in the country. What things will look like in New Hampshire and in New England come the fall time is up in the air. But schools and School Districts need to be planning for all eventualities and applying the guidance to their specific situations and the specific grades that they're dealing with, the specific student population.

And so, we will continue to work with schools and School Districts to try and implement the layers of protection so that students can come back in the classroom and have the benefits of learning in-person, but also planning for the possibility that there may be a point in the future where students need to move more to a remote learning option.

Could you tell us if your Division will intervene at a certain threshold? Does the District make the call on one case, one student, one Teacher comes down with COVID? Does that trigger a full return to remote learning to that school? Is that on the District level? Or when do you get to intervene and decide medically what's right for that school?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so maybe I'll let the Governor comment on that. From a Public Health perspective, we tend not to take frequently a regulatory approach to how to manage schools. What I can say is that Public Health absolutely will be involved with helping to investigate and manage any student, or staff, in the school who's diagnosed with COVID-19.

And so, we've helped to put recommendations into the guidance with that in mind, right? So, thinking about the possibility: well, what if a student is diagnosed with COVID-19 in the classroom? How would that Public Health investigation be conducted?

We would obviously work with the schools, work with the Teachers to identify students that may have been in close contact. And part of the reason and the purpose for implementing the different layers, including assigned seating, for example, is to try and prevent the need for potentially the entire classroom having to go on quarantine, for example, right?

So if you have assigned seating in a classroom and students are able to maintain some amount of distance and consistency in their seating, we're not looking necessarily at putting the whole classroom on quarantine, if there's one person identified in the class. It may just be the students sitting adjacent to someone diagnosed with COVID-19.

And so, these are the kind of considerations that we bring to the guidance, thinking about how we can maintain operations in a school and in a classroom setting if and when there are introductions of COVID-19 or students or staff identified with COVID-19 in the classroom setting. How do we minimize the potential close contacts? How do we minimize the impact on a classroom or a school to prevent the need for a whole classroom, or even a whole school, going into quarantine, so to speak?

And so, that's partly how we approached this. But we would absolutely be involved with any student, any staff who's in the school or a classroom and is diagnosed with COVID-19. And so, we'd work with the school to do our Public Health investigations, and our typical public health recommendations around isolating people that are symptomatic or infected, quarantining people that are potentially exposed.

I have another question about nursing homes, if I can have you up here?

Dr. Chan:

Sure.

Can you give us a breakdown of nursing homes versus long-term care? There are only 74 nursing homes, not 200. What is the breakdown of other facilities? How many patients in nursing homes in mid-March -- another question -- and can you guarantee the children will be safe if a kid gets sick?

Dr. Chan:

So, several questions there, I think. And Commissioner Shibinette usually speaks to the nursing home numbers. I don't have those numbers as easily accessible in my brain as she does. I believe that the 74 number you threw out applies to specifically the nursing homes, not necessarily assisted living facilities. There's more assisted living facilities. But, we can always get back to you with those exact numbers. I don't know them all.

In terms of the safety of children -- and I assume you're talking about in the classroom. You sort of transitioned there from talking about long-term care facilities to I assume you're talking about students now. I think there are any number of infections that students can bring into the classroom, right? It's not just COVID-19. Obviously COVID-19's what we're talking about. But it's also influenza and other viral infections.

This is where it's important to have the layers of protection so for example parents aren't sending sick kids to school. Even kids with runny noses, mild sore throats, right, no longer acceptable for students, I think, to go to school with even mild symptoms. Those are the students that need to be kept home and tested.

And precautions around social distancing and using facemasks in appropriate settings in school and grouping children together, the goal is to make school as safe as possible for students to go back to

school in the fall, assuming that our numbers stay relatively good, as they are now. And I think we can achieve that. I think we can do that safely.

Now, obviously, things are going to change between now and September. And we are following the numbers very closely in New Hampshire. A lot of the data that was shown here today, we're following the numbers very closely nationally. And as I mentioned, we're very concerned with what's happening nationally. Most of the States outside of the northeast, outside of New England, are seeing increases, sometimes dramatic increases in their outbreaks. And so, there's concern that that could and likely will, at some point, come our way. And so, we will take appropriate action and update guidance and recommendations as we see the evolving nature of this pandemic in the United States.

But, again, I want to stress that it continues to be important, even though our numbers look good in New Hampshire. It continues to be important for individuals, for businesses, for all organizations to take the ongoing and appropriate precautions to try and keep our numbers low, because there's no guarantee in the future. And we could see our numbers go back up. And in the fall, this may be an entirely different conversation. But where we are now, given what we know about COVID-19, the recommendations in the school guidance are intended to build in layers of protections so that kids can safely return to school in the fall.

And perhaps the Governor might be able to answer this. The President of the United States has threatened to defund, or not fund, schools. Was there any pressure from the White House on that?

Governor Sununu:

No, I've had no discussion with the President or the Administration about defunding schools. That's not going to happen. Schools can choose to be in a remote learning environment. They can choose to open. I think we provided a guidance document that allows them to open and do it safely with the safety of kids in mind.

Governor, would you be making the same recommendation if COVID was where it was in early May? Would this be the same plan? I ask that simply, because, as you know, there's a lot of controversy out there. Governor in Florida has already ordered a school reopening plan, despite the outlook in Florida, because they believe the risk to children is not the same as the risk to adults.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so the question is: would we be making the same guidance document, essentially the same recommendations, if we were back in May when our numbers were really spiking? I can't say it would be the exact same guidance document, but it would be really close, because the guidance document, again, is designed on flexibility, right?

Look, are we guaranteeing that there'll be absolutely no COVID at any school? No, of course not. That wouldn't be practical. But we are saying that we have the tools to manage, to quickly identify, to segregate those individuals, quarantine them, make sure that there's hopefully not an outbreak through the rest of the classroom, or the school, or anything of that nature.

So we have all these additional tools at our ready that allows us the flexibility to know that we can manage through this process. Everything from PPE to funding, to all of those things really come into play. I think they give us a lot of the confidence.

I don't know what the guidance document would have looked like back in May. But it probably still would have been very flexible, right? We're a State of local control with our School Districts. And we always want to, I think, adhere to that. And again, the STRRT Taskforce with all the stakeholder input, I think that was the number 1 thing that they were pushing loud and clear. Give us flexibility to do what we do best. And then, I'll take one more, and then we will go to the phones, if that's okay.

Thank you, Governor.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Last week, the World Health Organization acknowledged that COVID-19 can linger in the air. So is there any guidance about air circulation? And given that acknowledgement, how do you justify? How does the State justify the lack of a mask mandate in the classroom?

Governor Sununu:

And maybe this is a little more for Dr. Chan. I'll play epidemiologist until he corrects me. But, I believe that what the World Health Organization and other organizations around the world are looking at is the possibility of is this a potential airborne illness? That would be a gamechanger, if that were proven to be true. I think I'm safe to say we're not quite there as it being proven yet. But that would be a gamechanger, everything in terms of ventilation.

But we've been talking about making sure you have good ventilation systems since the first guidance documents came out, whether it's at a retail store, or a bowling alley, or a school, making sure your filters are being cleaned; making sure you have good, clean, fresh air. We've always know that that's a very important aspect of minimizing the viral spread. Do you know anything?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah.

Governor Sununu:

I'll have Dr. Chan talk a little more about that study.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so I think your question refers to a letter that was sent to the WHO, the World Health Organization, last week, I believe, by a number of Scientists and Public Health Professionals asking the World Health Organization to acknowledge the possibility of airborne transmission. Airborne

transmission meaning that COVID-19 can spread in small respiratory droplets that we call aerosols that can spread in the air further than 6 feet of distance, right? And this is not unlike other infections like tuberculosis or measles, or chicken pox that have what we call airborne transmission, meaning it can spread further distances than just with larger respiratory droplets.

We and the CDC have always acknowledged that that is a possibility in certain circumstances, in certain settings, thinking primarily of healthcare settings, right, where you have aerosol-generating procedures: intubation, breathing tubes being put in, in patients with COVID-19. There are certain procedures, as with any respiratory virus, influenza included, where you can have aerosol generation that could potentially spread further than 6 feet.

That is not how we believe that COVID-19 is predominantly transmitted. And that has been consistent with our messaging all along. And so, if you look in the healthcare setting for Doctors, Healthcare Providers, Nurses, any healthcare staff that are caring for critically ill patients where there may be aerosol-generating procedures, the recommendation is for Personal Protective Equipment that meets that airborne protection standard.

That is not necessary. Those types of precautions are generally not necessary at the local level, businesses, schools, because there is not any new evidence, or consistent evidence, that COVID-19 is spread through airborne routes as a predominant means of transmission.

Now, I will mention that there have been other situations where we have acknowledged the possibility of further spread of COVID-19. Certain actions, for example, singing, right; so this had been discussed several weeks ago where there were publications of people at a choir practice with a high attack rate from COVID-19, people who came down with COVID-19, even though they were more than 6 feet away.

And so, these kind of situations have been built into our guidance documents. So you can go and look at our performing arts guidance, or our arts education guidance, where there are additional recommendations built into the guidance, acknowledging the possibility of further transmission in these specific settings where there is a potential for finer respiratory droplets remaining suspended in the air and traveling distances of further than 6 feet. But again, we're talking about specific situations.

COVID-19, we still believe, is predominantly transmitted through close contact with people through larger droplets. And so, that is the guidance that has largely been constructed to protect the public, to protect people in schools. And that is the guidance that has been effective in controlling COVID-19 transmission to-date in New Hampshire and many other areas around New England and around the country. Good question, thanks.

I have a few questions.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, wait, wait. Hold on. Hold on. Sorry. I'm going to go here then here, then we will take the phones.

Just to bring it back to flexibility, so there are provisions for Teachers who choose to remain home to instruct, or who have to, because maybe they test positive or are waiting for a test result?

Governor Sununu:

Yes.

Are schools required to create that kind of planning for students who maybe either short-term they or a family member tests positive, or long-term aren't able to go to school, because they are immunocompromised? Is that required?

Governor Sununu:

Absolutely. Well, so is it required? The schools are required to provide an education pathway for those individuals who may be immunocompromised and can't come into the classroom, whether it's in a hybrid model, a remote education model, whatever it might be. They'll have flexibility there. But, of course, they have to provide that education.

And that was my question, actually. But just to further it, when you're talking about people who are immunocompromised, does every parent in New Hampshire have a universal statewide right to keep their kid at home for any reason, due to concern over the virus?

Governor Sununu:

Of course.

Or is it based on the District that they live in and the policies that the District..

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so let's touch upon that a little bit. Every parent has the right to take the best path for their child and still have quality education for their child. That could come in a variety of different ways. It could come with a hybrid or direct remote-learning model. That might happen.

I mean, we have a very robust homeschooling model here in New Hampshire, and we have a very easy pathway for folks that might choose that. And maybe it's just for this year or for the beginning of the year, whatever it might be. But there's homeschooling models, as well.

We have a very robust VLACS process. We have a contract now with VLACS that allows the Virtual Learning Academy, which is a great opportunity for families. So it can happen in a variety of different ways, whatever they're more comfortable with.

The remote learning model, as we know, it worked really, really well for a lot of folks and really, really well for the State. Sometimes it can be rigid in terms of the timing of things. So maybe folks want to do a VLACS program or a homeschooling model that gives them a little more flexibility with their day and their schedule, because of how they work, right?

When students are home, the workforce aspect comes into play. Can parents actually still go to work? Well, maybe they can but they got to do the remote learning or the homeschooling at night or something like that.

But, again, I know I'm beating the word "flexibility" into the ground, but it's so key. We want parents to work directly with their schools, with their Teachers, to find that best model for their students. And they all have the right to do that, absolutely.

And Governor, quickly with high school athletics, because we haven't talked about that, it's a huge part of the high school experience.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

And I mean, does it look like that's just going to be a no-go this year?

Governor Sununu:

I wouldn't say that it's a no-go. I mean, each school has to decide whether it's a path for them. We have guidance in place with our youth sports guidance documents that are in place, in terms of how to manage locker rooms or close-contact sports, or whatever it might be. And so, those guidance documents are there.

I'll say this. In terms of extracurricular activities, as well, whether they're sports or something else, virtually everything -- let's say a play, right? You're going to be in the Theatre Drama Club, or whatever it might be. We have guidance documents for doing a theatrical performance, as well. And we would ask the schools for those extracurricular activities to follow those guidance documents.

That was one of the benefits of being so particular about our guidance documents early on is they are now usable and flexible for all the other activities that may transpire at a school, whether they're sports or otherwise. We will do some on the call.

Is there an email? Or where can people read this document? We haven't got that.

Governor Sununu:

Oh, that's a great question. It's nh.gov. Yeah, so nh.gov is where all the guidance documents live. Also, the Department of Education will have the guidance document there. It's pretty much going to be everywhere. I think we will be blasting it on social media.

It's on your site now?

Governor Sununu:

Yes, absolutely.

And it's live?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. And I'm going to double-check. I think it's live now. Yeah, just want to make sure. Yeah, great. We will go to the phones.

Holly Ramer with Associated Press:

Hi, thanks for leaving us in. I have one question about schools and one question about testing. My question about schools is, is there any funding available for the increased expenses that School Districts might face, whether it's upgrading their ventilation systems, or cleaning supplies, or remote-learning technology? And then, my question about testing is I saw that Quest Diagnostics said yesterday that, because of the increase demand, the average turnaround time for nonpriority tests is now seven days-or-more. Do you have a sense of whether they're prioritizing States that are seeing the big increases and therefore New Hampshire might have to wait even longer? And even if that's not the case, how concerned are you about that kind of delay at a time when you've been encouraging everyone to get tested, and colleges and schools will be opening?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so a great question. The first one has to do with the funding for COVID-related costs. So the CARES Act provided tens of millions of dollars to School Districts in this State to allow for a lot of those initial costs and really the reoccurring costs through the schoolyear that might be related to COVID. If there are additional financial needs, we still have CARES Act funds that I have the ability to allocate out very quickly.

But there's a lot of money in the system right now. Actually, there's specific dollars for education, for special education, specific dollars for schools. And I was originally allocated -- the Governor, I should say of every State -- in this State I was allocated \$8.9 million. Part of that initial money is going to go out with a contract for a District and statewide management system to allow parents and Teachers to really have better, more streamlined access to the curriculum in the schools and what's happening in the schools, and just allow the Districts, themselves, to be able to better manage their processes with their parents. So that's a great opportunity that we've already allocated some of those dollars for.

But I have a few million left, as well. And I'm kind of holding onto some of that money to identify where future needs may be. I'm trying to appreciate that we don't have all the answers today. We have a great guidance document. We have great opportunity to open the schools. But, we don't know what things will look like in October or November. And so, we're going to hold back even just a little bit of money for those needs that might spur up. But there's a lot of money available.

In terms of the testing, it's a great question. There is a huge run on testing supplies and the demand for tests across the country right now. Not so much here, I mean we still have a pretty decent turnaround time, anywhere between three and five days here.

I do know Quest did put something out that says you should anticipate up to seven days of turnaround time. We haven't seen that hit our State too directly yet. But I imagine it could come. So it is a concern of ours not so much that New Hampshire will be put to the back of the pack, but that individuals across the country will just have a longer testing turnaround time to get their results back, given the higher demand on the tests, and just higher demands in those labs.

But, again, people can get their tests. That's the most important part. They can get their tests. They can quarantine themselves. It may take a couple extra days to get those results in the long run, but actually making sure we have the access to the tests is the most important piece.

Donald with CNN:

I'm sorry. Hi, there. Governor, have you heard anything from the Trump Administration about planning a return to the State for a rally? And do you think they'll be taking into mind any other COVID recommendations, if so?

Governor Sununu:

I have not heard from the Trump Administration about rescheduling their rally, no. And I think that was the bulk of the question. No.

Patrick Adrian with Eagle Times:

Hi, Governor. My question was, is there going to be a problem for schools that would require students to wear a mask but the parents are unwilling to participate with that? The fact that the State does not have a mask requirement, is the school going to be able to enforce that?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, if the school or District requires masks to be worn in the classroom, or at any time during the day, then those are the mandates within those schools. And the students have to adhere to that. And parents are expected to adhere to that.

Look, just like any other safety rule that happens within the schools, there's a lot of rules in schools last time I checked. And you got to enforce them. I mean, if that's the path that the school deems appropriate and necessary, then we absolutely support that. The guidance document supports that. And so, like all the other rules kids have to follow in school, that would be one, as well.

Rick Green with The Laconia Daily Sun:

Yes, Governor, as you know the federally enhanced unemployment benefits are set to expire at the end of this month. Does that create a concern for you in terms of the economy? And what do you think should be done in terms of employment benefits going forward?

Governor Sununu:

So, I think what the question refers to is the \$600 stipend and the expanded eligibility that the unemployment that the Federal Government is providing for unemployment. That's a \$600-per-week stipend. It is scheduled to retire or, I guess, go away, as of July 31st.

I know the Federal Government is looking at expanding it, or extending it somewhat. I don't know if it'll look exactly -- we've heard different rumors here-and-there. I really don't know what the Federal Government's going to do.

Again, there has been a lot of talk that the \$600 has disincentivized folks from reentering the workforce and we can appreciate that. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money you could have for not

having a job. But it also provided a lot of opportunities for folks to pay their mortgages or their rent. So it really cuts both ways.

My sense -- and this is pure speculation at this point -- is that there'll be some easing of the program. I don't know if they could just cut it off on July 31st. And if that's the case, we go back to the unemployment program as it was prior to COVID. We have a lot of job opportunities out there, a lot of opportunities for folks to get back to work. And I think our economy will continue on a very good path.

If the Federal Government chooses to ease the program out, maybe with a smaller stipend for a less amount of time, something of that nature is what I've heard discussed and I think we've all heard that. I don't know anything more than you do, frankly, other than what I've heard in the media that that's being debated within the Senate and the House and whether that's a practical resolution. My sense is we're going to know pretty soon, because they got to figure it out in the next couple weeks. And so, maybe that's an option, too.

But either way, we will be in good shape, as a State. People are going back to work. Like I said, we've already seen our unemployment numbers decrease 35%. The country's only seen their unemployment numbers decrease about 25%. So we're on a good track. And I think, either way, we will be able to continue that.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

So, Governor, while you've been speaking, the two people who want to take your job -- Executive Councilor Andru Volinsky and State Senator Dan Feltes -- have already said that you're failing the mission by not mandating masks for the schools, and that the State should mandate these rules, as opposed to leaving it to the School Systems. Wondering what you think of that. And secondly, what have the Teachers' Unions told you about this? Have they played a role in designing this? And what happens if, as the AFT and NEAF suggested, that Teachers not return to class unless there's massive spending? The AFT's target for New Hampshire is an additional \$414 million in spending before Teachers return to class.

Governor Sununu:

So, again, the first question's political but I'll take it in that, if folks are out there saying that we're failing schools because we don't mandate masks, I would say that those individuals are failing to listen to the stakeholders: to the parents; to the Teachers; to the Administrators. They were the ones that were all part of the stakeholder process that effectively wrote this document.

We did 50,000 surveys to Teachers and parents across the State and got feedback from all of them. And that's what went into designing this document and making sure that we have flexibility. It is those individuals who wanted the flexibility. It was those individuals who were concerned about having a mandate in class, a Teacher unable to enforce a mandate in class, spending all their time doing that.

Now, in some cases, it might work. And Teachers and Districts can make that choice for themselves. But in some cases, it won't. So the only failure is when Elected Officials choose not to listen to the stakeholders and constituents. We chose to do that and that's why I have a lot of confidence in the document. I guess I'll just leave the answer there.

Sarah Gibson with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Hi, thanks, Governor. I have two questions. The first is State numbers show that the number of infections is growing at a higher percentage among young people, especially those under the age of 10, compared to the rest of the population. So I'm wondering how the State is monitoring that particular age group? And in light of school reopening plans, what insight did they have into the possible causes of the increase? And secondly, I'm wondering if you could explain what the State's plan is for disclosing outbreaks at individual schools, should they happen. Will you be following the same approach you've had with long-term care facilities?

Governor Sununu:

Both very good questions; so the first question has to do with the number of infections specifically for young people, or children. We have seen more kids identified as being positive with COVID over the past few weeks than otherwise.

Let's also first appreciate that our numbers are incredibly low. So it just takes a couple of young people to be identified as positive to make it look like there's a massive spike up. But we're really talking about, at any given point, maybe a couple dozen people on any given day. Each individual accounts for 4% of the population of that day.

So, I'll say this. We're taking a look at these numbers not just about the increase of COVID-positive results for young people, not just in New Hampshire, but nationally. It really is a national thing going on. And not just kids in school, but for the 20- to 30-year-olds, as well; I think both of those populations are very different, in terms of how they contract. And again, I don't want to step on Dr. Chan's shoes. He's a lot smarter than me. But how a 20- or 30-something is likely to contract the virus is probably very different than how a 10- or a 12-year-old may be contracting the virus.

We've seen nightclubs, bars, things of that nature, a lot of late-night activity indoors, poorly ventilated areas without masks. That is ripe for a problem. And that's exactly what you saw in Southern Florida, Texas, Arizona, California. I've talked to many of those Governors. They've all indicated that is one of the commonalities that you saw over there.

Specifically around Memorial Day weekend, if you look at the triggers that might have happened and a lot of the parties or what might have happened over Memorial Day weekend in May, which is why you saw such an upstart in numbers around the first week in June, June 10th, 11th, 12th, in some of those areas where you start seeing these spikes really start to take off, because of the incubation time for the virus. So those are the exact things that we're keeping our eye out for, for that constituency.

For young kids, I'll ask Dr. Chan. I don't know if there's any direct link for the kids under the age of 18.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so I think it's hard to comment specifically without knowing what exactly the numbers or the data are that you're looking at regarding children. So, we publish updated daily numbers on our data dashboard online every day. Those numbers are separated out by age groups, specifically in 10-year age increments. And so, I know that, on that data dashboard right now, there's just over 100 kids under the age of 10 that are listed as having been diagnosed with COVID-19 over the course of the entire outbreak in New Hampshire. That represents about 1.5% of the total number of infections in New Hampshire.

But we haven't released any specific trend data on that dashboard by age group. Now, I will say that we are looking at updating our data dashboard in the next week-or-two. We hope to release more trend data, not only about trends in hospitalizations, as we've shown you here today, or trends in testing data, but looking specifically to look in more detail at the trends by different demographics, like age group.

So I think we're hoping to put out more information in the coming week-or-two specifically around this question about what's happening in different age demographics. But right now, the under-10 age population still represents a relatively low percentage of our overall infection. It's about 1.5%.

But I think it also sort of bears pointing out that we do know that anybody can become infected with COVID-19, including children, adolescents, young adults. And so, everybody needs to continue to take the necessary steps and precautions to try and prevent COVID-19 within our communities, both at an individual level and at an organization or institution level. Thanks.

Harrison Thorp with The Rochester Voice:

Thank you. Good afternoon. I have two quick questions for Dr. Chan and one quick question for the Governor. Dr. Chan, Rochester's Emergency Operations Center Director has told me for the past week we've either had zero cases in Rochester or one case. But yet, the State map has been showing consistently I believe eight. And I was wondering if you could speak to how that continuing difference occurs. And secondly, you talk about these outbreaks. But the people coming in that are being tested, there's nothing to really indicate, from what I hear, that they came down with the COVID that day. They may have had the COVID virus in the system for months and been asymptomatic. So I think to call them an outbreak may not be really getting the exact point forward. But maybe you could speak to that. And Governor, I was just wondering if you'd give us any kind of update on the sense of the number of SELF Applications that you're receiving for the self-employed, and reminding those that are self-employed that I believe that that program sign-up ends on Friday. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

That's right. So I'll just answer the last question first, just to be quick. The Self-Employment Relief Fund, the Applications are available through this Friday. We encourage anyone who is self-employed who may not have been able to participate in the Main Street Relief Fund to go online at nh.gov or the Department of Revenue website, as well, to the SELF program; very simple application process.

Unfortunately, I don't know off the top of my head how many folks in the first 10 days of the application process have applied. So we will try to get that information. We will at least have a better sense of it probably on Thursday, as we reach the final deadline.

Dr. Chan:

So, I think the first question was about the number of people infected with COVID-19 in Rochester. I can't speak in any detail about specific town-level data, but I'm not aware of any data issues or inaccuracies at the town level, specifically, in Rochester.

I will say that we assign people infected with COVID-19 by their town of residence. And with each person identified, we do our Public Health investigation, but we don't always notify Town Officials when

someone is infected with COVID-19 in their town, partly because we have to maintain confidentiality and there's not always action on the part of a town, or a community, or Town Officials.

We do our Public Health investigations. We try and identify close contacts. The person who's infected gets isolated. The people who are close contacts of that person get quarantined. And so, I guess I'm not surprised that there may be a discrepancy between what a Town Official knows about and what is publicly reported at the town level.

The other question was about outbreaks and specifically how we define and identify outbreaks, I think, is sort of the larger question. And any time that someone is identified with COVID-19, we do our Public Health investigation. We ask about close contacts, including close contacts at facilities or businesses.

In the setting of long-term care facilities, we ask about people that may have worked or lived in long-term care facilities, about their close contacts. And we ask about symptoms. And we take that all into consideration and look for transmission at the business or facility level.

So in the case of long-term care facilities, even with a single person infected with COVID-19, we go in and we do widespread testing in the long-term care facility as a way to prevent further transmission in that facility by rapidly identifying and identifying people with COVID-19 before there's potentially symptoms, before there's further transmission.

And we started taking the same approach in households and in other businesses, where we will go and recommend testing for any close contacts of someone with COVID-19. And so, I think what people are going to see are increasing testing to try and rapidly identify any transmission that may be occurring. But we require that identification of transmission between people in order to call something an outbreak. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Great.

Governor, one quick follow-up. Is your threshold for returning to statewide remote learning the same as it was four months ago? Again, if we see that slight increase, are you going to go back?

Governor Sununu:

No, the threshold to returning to statewide remote learning is extremely different now because we have PPE, because we know how the virus moves, because we have more funding available, because we understand the values of social distancing; the availability of masks; and the flexibilities that I think everyone understands. And again, listening to the parents and the Teachers saying, yeah, we can make this work. We want our kids to go back to school. That has been resounding across the State from the parents.

And we just have more tools and resources at our disposal, more testing, right? We can quarantine people faster. We have so many more Contact Tracers that work incredibly quickly. We're ranked as one of, if not the best State in the country when it comes to contact tracing. And that's a huge tool to quickly identify individuals. So, no, we're in a very different position today, and for the better.

And just on colleges and universities, given the spikes that we're seeing in other parts of the country, do you think that schools like Dartmouth and UNH, and PSU, who have a lot of students from out-of-state, should be amending or creating special guidelines for students from outside of New England?

Governor Sununu:

As opposed to inside, like having a different protocol for outside-New Hampshire students or inside-New Hampshire students, or outside-New England?

Well, just should they be reconsidering their protocols for those students?

Governor Sununu:

I think they are. So, I mean, I was on the phone with Jim Dean and Don Burkes [ph] from Plymouth State and Jim Dean from UNH. We've talked to the Council of Colleges who kind of helps manage and coalesce a lot of the private schools. Everyone's creating their own guidance documents. We created a backbone document early on for them to build off of.

They are looking at making sure they have adequate testing capacity, having a sentinel program that will test all of their students on a regular basis, having quarantine facilities for their students, managing dormitory living, managing food services. I got to say it's a very robust document, some of them.

They're all a little bit different, because their campuses are different. Granite State College, great opportunity, Mark over there doesn't have dormitories, right? So, he's not going to have to worry about that aspect of it. They're more of a virtual school right now. But there are other aspects that they'll have to manage with his staff and whatnot.

So they'll all look a little different. Do they need to have different protocols for instate students, in-New England students, and outside-New England students? No, I don't think so, because that would be very naïve to think that we're forever going to be in a position of having a low COVID rate and the folks outside New England are forever going to have a higher rate than we do.

That's the situation today. But it might not be that in the future. So I think you got to treat all the students fairly and make sure your system can be flexible to meet the testing and PPE demands that might come. But so far, I'm very encouraged by what I've seen from their documents.

Governor, change of topic, you mentioned way earlier the State's entering into a contract with a private vendor -- I think you said. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Governor Sununu:

On the VLACS?

No, when it comes to the unemployment system and managing unemployment benefits.

Governor Sununu:

Yes.

There has been, over the last few months, significant concern and frustration from people who are self-employed being able to get their unemployment claims fast enough. And that's been with the addition of the National Guard. Without that addition, I mean, when are we going to know, I guess more about this contractor?

Governor Sununu:

So that contractor's already come into place, the private contractor, and through training and stuff. And now that they're kind of fully trained and we have enough folks from the private contractor, that's why the National Guard is kind of pulling out of that role and moving onto different roles and different missions. So that has already happened and taken place.

In terms of the self-employed directly individually, yeah, it is. I mean, look, I got to be careful. We're one of, if not the top State, in terms of the percent of people that apply for unemployments [ph] that qualify for unemployment insurance and that get unemployment insurance. We don't have a delay.

I've talked at this podium before. There's States that still have over 100,000 people that applied and qualify, and they're getting nothing. So, we have about 5% at any given time. And our numbers are dropping precipitously.

Like I said about 73,000 people came in for unemployment insurance last week. My guess is that number will continue to drop at some rate, probably a pretty fast rate. So it's getting more and more manageable, if you know. More and more individuals, whether you're self-employed or work for a business, are going back to work.

But the claim that people are most often voicing is that it's less about the time, which people have been waiting months. Some people are more about the actual system itself not being able to accommodate them, that they have been told by people on the phone when they call that the system simply isn't set up yet to accommodate self-employed claims. And I'm just wondering. This is, again, a much bigger can of worms. But with moving into a new contractor, is the Department of Employment Security, is it kind of ready to make that transition, given that there are still some kinks that seem to be not yet worked out in the system?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. And just for the general public, traditionally self-employed individuals don't apply for unemployment insurance. So no system in the country was ever designed to handle that. So I think we've been able to manage it fairly well and also ensuring no waste, fraud, and abuse. The fraud is where you've seen a lot of folks in other parts of the country.

The example I always give, unfortunately, the State of Washington, hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money went to Nigeria out of their unemployment system. I mean, a disaster. We're making sure that -- and hopefully knock on wood -- that doesn't happen here. We've been very, very fortunate.

So, we take a little extra time with it. There are some other levels of redundancy we ask to be built into the system while we get the full system up-and-running because folks that are self-employed might not file their taxes the same way as someone that works for an employer. All those things come into play.

So it does take a little more time. We ask for people's patience. But this new contractor has been up and being staffed up and running. And they've been on the job for at least a week-or-so now, or more. Yeah.

We will take maybe one more. Are we all set? We good? All right, look, I know that was a lot. We broke some records, to be sure. We appreciate everyone sitting through. It's a great document, stakeholder-driven, allows schools to open, to be safe, flexibility to the local Districts. We're on a good path.

I'm going to reiterate something you heard from Dr. Chan and myself. Our numbers are really good right now. But we are so far from declaring any sort of mission accomplished, any sort of victory on this. We're in a good place thanks to the people in New Hampshire. But we got a long way to go.

Stay disciplined. Wear your mask. Do what you can to maintain social distancing, all those things. No one's going to be perfect all the time. But I think if we just keep that message elevated, in our schools, in our culture and our communities, we can maintain New Hampshire in a very positive place and allow these opportunities for our kids to move forward with the confidence that they're going to be safe. We're going to provide the opportunities and have the flexibility to get it done for these kids. Thank you, guys, very much. We will see you.