



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Tuesday, July 28, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon, everybody. Just want to thank a moment, obviously thank everybody for joining us. We hope everyone had a good weekend. It was a hot one. So we hope everyone stayed cool and stayed safe.

We appreciate everyone tuning in a little bit of a different time today. It's 2:00 p.m., not our typical 3:00 p.m. I'll be joining a lot of other Governors on a call with the White House and the Vice President at 3:00. So we wanted to make sure we -- we had some good stuff to announce today. And so, we wanted to make sure we were able to present, give people a little bit of an update following the weekend.

Before we start, I want to take a moment and talk about something that kind of caught my attention, as I was leaving the State House to come over to do the press conference. There were two newspapers sitting on the floor as I was leaving the State House. State House is kind of quiet lately. So sometimes they drop the newspapers by the press room. There's no one really there.

But anyways, I was taking a look at the headlines. And the headlines talked about a variety of things. One was the ability for us to use reusable bags in our grocery stores that we announced. There was a great story about wedding businesses doing pretty well in this State. We know all the businesses are suffering a little bit. But actually that part of the business is coming back a little bit.

There was a great story in, I think it was maybe, the *Concord Monitor* that did a little bit of a story on Bob Bahre. Very timely, unfortunately, Mr. Bahre passed away this past week. He was an incredible individual. He's responsible for bringing NASCAR and really building up what we have with our NASCAR race in Loudon, and just an amazing individual on a variety of levels, and obviously our hearts and prayers go out to the Bahre family.

But it got me thinking. Those are our headlines today. And when you contrast that with what we're seeing nationally across the rest of the country, when you see the riots, when you see the skyrocketing COVID numbers, when you see the stories of overrun hospitals that are having trouble managing the number of COVID patients coming in, the escalating violence we see in some of our major cities across the country, it brings a little pause, I think, to all of us.

It's a good time to be in New Hampshire, to be sure. We have issues. We have a COVID pandemic. We have a lot of issues we're dealing with at the State level. We don't want to minimize any of that. But let's remember what's happening in the rest of the country. And I think it got me thinking, as I was coming over here, that that is where our thoughts and our prayers really need to be. And whether you're in Portland, Oregon, or Manchester, New Hampshire, we're all American. And we all want the best for our country. And we just really hope that everybody across the country is -- they're facing some very, very tough challenges in other parts of the country.

We know our numbers could spike here. We're not immune to anything, really. I think we have a great team. We can manage what comes at us. We've shown our ability to do that, our resilience, if you will, and our ability.

We know that COVID numbers are going to increase here, to be sure. But we're prepared. We have capacity. We have one of the best healthcare systems in the world. And we know that, as those numbers increase, we can definitely manage. But just that contrast a little bit of what's happening here in New Hampshire versus the rest of the country, it's pretty stark. It's pretty stark.

And on that point, I do want to also mention we're going to have a Public Health update in a moment with some of the latest numbers. Over the past week, as we look at the numbers coming in, and we're doing kind of a deep dive on their numbers, last week we had a day where we had 59 COVID cases. And then, yesterday we had seven. And today, we're back up in the 50s, approximately. I think Commissioner Shibinette will give an update on that.

So the numbers are kind of going up-and-down and up-and-down. And we're looking at exactly why that is. We're still fairly consistent with around average of about 30 cases a day. Our percent positive is remaining fairly steady, of course.

But I just want to remind folks not to get too excited about low numbers and too dire about high numbers. With the overwhelming increase of testing capacity and demand in this country, we're getting a lot of these numbers coming in, in batch forms. And there's some other reasons, too, that I think we're looking into. We're doing a lot more sentinel testing in our long-term care facilities. I think we're identifying more asymptomatic individuals, because we have such easy access to testing now.

So, I think over time we will see whether these troughs and peaks of data keep coming in. And I know Dr. Chan and the entire Team at Health and Human Services will continue to look at that. But, as I said, we have always known our numbers may continue to rise in the future. We expect that. We're prepared for that.

But I saw some news articles out there about low numbers and high numbers, and low numbers and high numbers. It's one of the reasons why we do average things out, why we look at that percent positive, and why we do look at things from a statewide perspective.

On that note, I would just add one thing we noticed with the current COVID cases. We have approximately 600 individuals, maybe 600 or 650 individuals-or-so that currently have COVID that we've identified through contact tracing in New Hampshire. I think there's only about 17 or 18 towns in the entire State of over 200 cities and towns. Only 17 or 18 have more than five cases currently. So it's very regionalized which means, again, we're going to try to take a regionalized, localized approach to a lot of what we do.

But there's some good news out there, to be sure. But, again, we just want to make sure that people don't get, again, too excited about the low numbers, too dire about the high numbers. Like we've got a great team that continues to look at the data. I guess, with that, it's probably a good lead-in to Dr. Chan and his Public Health update. Thanks.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. So there are now more than 16.5 million people with COVID-19 globally. And that includes more than 4.3 million people within the United States, which includes more than 148,000 people that have died from COVID-19 in the United States.

The U.S. is experiencing approximately 1 million new infections every couple of weeks. That's sort of the most current national numbers. And so, we are seeing a majority of other States around the country seeing increases of COVID-19, which we're obviously watching very carefully.

For New Hampshire, we will report today an additional 59 new people with COVID-19. That brings the total to 6,500 total people confirmed with COVID-19 in New Hampshire since the beginning of this outbreak in our State.

There is one new hospitalization to report, for a total of 690 people that have required hospitalization with COVID-19. And thankfully, zero new deaths to report today; however we're still at 409 people that have died from COVID-19, the majority of these being in our long-term care facilities who we continue to work very closely with to try and bring outbreaks under control, and to prevent transmission in some of these congregate living settings.

Of these 59 new infections, the majority are in the southern part of the State. More than 80% of the new individuals infected with COVID-19 that we're announcing today are from Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties. That has been the case over the course of this outbreak and continues to be the case, continues to be the situation, where we're seeing the majority of infections within these counties.

As mentioned, in the last week, I think our numbers have increased a small amount. And we're obviously watching this very closely. But it is important to note that the percentage of all PCR-based tests that are positive still remains stably low in New Hampshire at around 1%. 1.5% of all PCR-based tests are positive for COVID-19.

Hospitalizations remain stable and low throughout our State. Our hospitals are not nearing surge capacity. However, obviously, given what's happening around the country with the majority of other States around the country seeing increases in COVID-19, we are watching and investigating any increase in the number of infections identified in New Hampshire very closely. And we will continue to do so.

Again, Public Health investigations, Public Health contact tracing is one of the tools that we have to identify infections and try and interrupt chains of transmission, and prevent spread within our communities. But we continue to need everybody to do their part to protect themselves and their families, but also to protect their communities and prevent spread of COVID-19 within their communities.

And so, it remains very important for everybody to stay a safe distance of at least 6 feet from other people when in public places. It still remains important for people to wear cloth face coverings, when out in public places, whether indoors or outdoors, where social distancing may not be able to be maintained.

Hand hygiene is critically important to prevent spread of COVID-19 from surfaces to people. And we need people to stay at home, if they are sick or experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, and to go get tested. Testing remains widely available throughout the State. Testing and Public Health investigations are one of the tools that we have. But we need people to continue to hear and abide by these Public Health recommendations, as well, as a primary way to control transmission and prevent spread of COVID-19 within our communities. Now, I'm going to hand things over to Commissioner Shibiante. Thanks.

Commissioner Shibiante:

Good afternoon. Just two quick updates on long-term care facility outbreaks, today we are closing Hillsborough County Nursing Home's outbreak which was a significant outbreak that's been active for quite a while. So we're very happy to be closing that outbreak today. We are also announcing a new

outbreak at Ridgewood Genesis in Bedford. They currently have two residents that are COVID-positive, and seven Staff Member, for a total of nine people. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Thank you, Commissioner. So, a couple different announcements, I think a few very important announcements and important opportunities that we're talking about today. As the Commissioner was just discussing, as well as Dr. Chan, we know that long-term care facilities really do face a lot of the brunt of the COVID-19 crisis, specifically here in New Hampshire. And a lot of the facilities that have had outbreaks, I think, at one time, we peaked at just over 20 different facilities with outbreaks. And now we're in the four or five range, in terms of the number of facilities. So, the frontline staff and a lot of folks have worked very, very hard to make sure we get that under control and that it's managed.

And today we're announcing that the State is now undergoing a two-week review of all long-term care facilities that have had an outbreak of COVID-19. And the purpose of the review is to analyze the ventilation systems, in particular, in these facilities and collect the data to find patterns between the facilities.

This comprehensive review that is being taken by the Department of Health and Human Services and the State Fire Marshal's Office will analyze things like the current system within each facility, what type of air filtration might exist, how the air flows through the facility, where the facility might have sustained an outbreak, whether it's on one floor or another.

And again, we know that there is emerging signs to suggest that COVID-19 could be airborne. That's not confirmed. That's not verified by any means. But, again, we're trying to stay ahead of these types of issues. And this review we see as a good tool to help determine how we can mitigate those potential risks going forward.

The goal is to establish potential links that can be identified in the way that the ventilation system and air flows through the building, so that we can be data-driven in truly everything that we do. So, just a very good opportunity, just another example of us trying to stay ahead. And we appreciate the support of these facilities that have helped us, while we go in and do these underlying investigations. Again, just all means to stay ahead of the game a little bit.

Another area that we're making an announcement today surrounds education and financial support for students who have financial barriers to receiving education. Today, I'm signing an Emergency Order that will free up additional funding for our Unique Annual Allocation Scholarship Program. The Unique Scholarship Program has existed in the State for quite some time. And we're going to temporarily expand those opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This change will increase funding for direct scholarships by up to \$8 million, allowing for an additional 3,000 students to receive support with an additional 25% increase for all Unique Scholarship recipients. So millions of new dollars going in to help thousands of students, again just creating a little more opportunity for them, knowing some of the financial hardships that many of these students and institutions are facing.

We know that COVID-19 has truly impacted and caused financial hardships for so many families in New Hampshire. And those families right now are trying to make those decisions in terms of what their next steps in their child's education will be. And we just want to make sure the State is doing everything that we can do to stand up and provide support and help for them.

Similarly, a few weeks ago, our office received a letter from minority business owners across the State. And it was a great letter. It had ideas and potential recommended action items in our fight against COVID-19. And acknowledging that minorities and people of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, we've worked to take some additional actions.

An idea that was requested in that letter included \$1 million to funding for black, brown, and new immigrant student scholarships for schools. And while we currently already allocated millions through the USNH system and the Community College system, for both financial support and tuition assistance, and then you combine what we're doing today with the Unique Scholarship Program, an additional up to \$8 million for scholarships for individuals, we realized there's probably one more area we could also improve in. And that's scholarships to families in elementary, middle, and high school.

Similarly, the Equity Report that was also released last week -- separate from the letter, there was an Equity Report that the State put out this last week -- also highlighted education, since education we know is one key factor in the social determinants of health, specifically for minority families. So merely addressing the healthcare system in isolation is not sufficient in decreasing and eliminating racial health disparities.

So, currently New Hampshire Scholarship Organizations, they already provide families with education options to meet the unique needs of their kids in K-12 schools. We already have a great system set up for those scholarships for elementary, middle, and high school students. But the need for flexibility has obviously been very highlighted, due to COVID-19 pandemic.

As such, I'm putting forward \$1.5 million of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund towards scholarships for students and their families. These funds will provide up to 800 new scholarships for our kids all across the State.

Importantly, of those that currently receive support from New Hampshire's Scholarship Organization -- so the way that it is currently allocated, 22% are of racial and ethnic minority populations, which is more than double our statewide demographics. So we know that the dollars are going to help remedy this disparity.

These hardworking families deserve our help so that their children can remain on a positive educational trajectory. And I think we can all agree this is a key step in ensuring the best health and education opportunities for all the people of New Hampshire.

In that same letter I received, there was a couple recommendations in it, a few. And it also had a call for funding to local organizations that support black, brown, and new immigrant communities. And while we have many organizations across the State that continue to do tremendous work in this area, helping those communities, we will be committing new additional funds from the CARES Act to various organizations to help communicate and facilitate COVID-related opportunities to all of our citizens and businesses.

And some examples of the work that these organizations currently perform are things like refugee resettlement programs, English as a Second Language services, inner city business coalitions, and community-based COVID-19 testing services. So all important aspects of what's going on surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, and, again, just a couple examples of this letter that I think a lot of folks had received a copy of that had come in. And we wanted to move on it as quick as we could.

So, again, we just want to thank them. And we will continue to work to see not just what other suggestions within that letter, but what other suggestions and ideas could possibly come from that community where the CARES Act, under the guidelines and limitations of how those funds can be spent, might be possible in the future.

Finally, one more really important thing that we want to announce, a little bit of a second and follow-up to an announcement we made a couple weeks ago surrounding our Veterans. A recent study released by the Bob Woodruff Foundation raised concerns about the impact this pandemic is having on Veterans, including what they called -- it was a very interesting article -- what they called the perfect storm of trauma: the impact of social isolation, unplanned job losses, which threatens the mental health of many of our Veterans and particularly those with preexisting mental-health conditions.

Last month, we did make an announcement here for approximately \$7 million for Veterans' services throughout New Hampshire, Veteran's COVID-19 Relief and Support Fund. The Fund is intended to improve outcomes for our Veterans by assisting homeless Veterans finding housing; helping Veterans' service programs to provide direct services, like financial assistance or mental-health supports; as well as support local Veteran organizations, like the American Legion, or the VFW, the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars Chapters.

Today, we are opening the application process. So that's what we're really announcing for a variety of these organizations. The application will allow \$3 million of the \$7 million to be come available, again for organizations like the VFW or the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans Chapters. There's a variety of them that can apply. Also for organizations that provide transportation or employment support, recreation and wellness services, all for our Veterans; these are the types of organizations that can also apply into this fund.

The application will run until Monday, August 10th. And applications on how to apply can be found at GOFERR, goferr.nh.gov, that's goferr.nh.gov. That's where we try to keep a link to almost all of our applications throughout the State.

So, again, we're just announcing that that first \$3 million is available. So if you're a Veteran's service organization, please go online and see if you qualify, your services currently qualify. That application process will be open for another two weeks. And then, we will get the funds out as soon as we possibly can. So, with that, we're going to open it up for a variety of questions. Hi, Paula. How are you? Good to see you again.

Q&A Session

Yes, what's left in the kitty for the CARES Act? And do you think there will be reapplications of the funds that you have, or new ones, with money that's still left?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so there is approximately -- I'm doing this off the top of my head. I'd say approximately \$200 to \$250 million available in unallocated CARES Act funding, the flexible \$1.25 billion that we originally received. Now, we know that a second surge is probably coming. We know there's going to be additional costs, whether it's around testing or PPE, or whatever it might be this fall. And we want to be able to make sure we can provide for that.

Also, too, keep in mind a lot of the funds that we allocate, we were never quite sure how many people might apply into a fund, whether it's a healthcare fund for hospitals, or for Dentists, or for business relief, or for whatever it might be. We have quite a list of funds that we've created and opportunities that we've created. If, for some reason, all those dollars in a specific fund don't get pulled down, they can lapse back and then we can still reuse them, potentially.

I think we will have a better assessment of that as we go through the fall in terms of exactly how much of each of these funds were drawn down. We're going to make an announcement on the Broadband Fund, whether this week or early next week. And I can tell you. I don't believe all \$50 million -- I mean, we put \$50 million out there because no one really had any idea how much the applications might come in. And they came in a little bit short of that. So there's an example of some of the funds that might lapse back in. So, we create the opportunities, but we're not going to waste the money, if it doesn't go allocated.

Also, depending on what comes out of Washington is very important. The rumor is -- and it's strictly rumor that we've heard from a variety of sources -- they are looking at potentially allowing States more flexibility to use their CARES Act funds, which could be both a blessing -- I mean, flexibility's always a good thing, to be sure. It would have been great if they gave us all the flexibility we asked for originally. It's nice to set the rules of the game, if you will, in the very, very beginning.

But even at the end, we will take whatever flexibility they can provide. Hopefully, it comes with additional support and funding for schools, and things like that, that I think has been talked about at the nationalized level. So, there will be definitely some additional funding available to cover our additional costs. And did I get the second part of our question?

Well, we've been hearing from people that for some reason did not get Main Street Funds.

Governor Sununu:

Oh, sure, yeah.

And I don't know whether that would go to the GAP Fund, or whether there would be a reissuance of that.

Governor Sununu:

So we're one of the only States in the country that is actually providing CARES Act relief for businesses and nonprofits. We've done two business relief funds already. The Main Street Relief Fund, about \$330 million, \$340 million was sent out. Another \$25 million or \$30 million just was sent out in the first round of our Self-Employment Fund. There'll be some more dollars that are sent out this week and next week, as they go through some of the details of that.

Then, the third piece is the GAP Fund, which are businesses or organizations that just kind of fell through the cracks, didn't meet the qualifications for certain reasons. Again, the Main Street Relief Fund was designed around more smaller businesses. Self-employment, it's obvious is for the self-employed. There are folks that may not qualify for one reason. The GAP Fund, \$30 million sitting at the BFA to use a little more discretion.

Will we have more business funds down the road? I hope so, because I think, to your point, there are still businesses that maybe still don't qualify or, for some reason, don't get relief through the GAP Fund. We want to provide them.

I also think that, as we go through the fall, as the dust settles a little bit, economically, maybe certain businesses that thought they were going to be fine are in a tougher situation than they thought. We really didn't open up to franchises the first time. And there were a lot of very small, I guess I'd call them, micro franchises in this State. I'm shocked with how little help they're getting from their parent companies. I got to tell you. The stories I've heard from the hotel industry, in particular, these parent

companies that have billions of dollars in lines of credit and they're not sending it down to their franchisees. I feel terrible for some of the hotel owners and restaurant chains.

I was talking to a guy that ran the Sunglasses Hut at the mall. It's small, but it's a piece of the brand. I think these larger parent organizations that literally have billions of dollars of cash at their disposal should be investing in their franchisees that support their brand and do all their frontline work. But be that as it may, it's not happening at the rate that we would like. So maybe there's an opportunity down the road to do that. It's not a guarantee.

I think to the heart of your original question, we will really have to see how big the surge comes, what dollars have to be spent on healthcare and most critical aspects. You have to prioritize in this pandemic. And if there's an opportunity later this fall to open up another business relief fund, we'd love to do it.

Governor, I know it's a little early here. But has contact tracing revealed anything about what might be responsible for this slight uptick in numbers?

Governor Sununu:

I'd turn to Dr. Chan on that one a little bit.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so contact tracing is an ongoing process. So, for example, out of the 59 new people with COVID-19 that we announced today, we're still conducting the investigations. I don't have exact numbers parsing apart risk factors.

But the majority of people that we're identifying with COVID-19 continue to have some identified risk factor, whether that's direct contact or close contact with another person confirmed with COVID-19, travel. Travel remains a risk factor. And then, outbreak-associated; so looking at the new numbers for today, we're still investigating a good proportion of those.

But of the people with identified risk factors, probably about maybe a third are identified close contacts with someone else with COVID-19. Another third are related with travel. Another third are outbreak-associated.

So, still the majority we're able to identify some risk factors for. But there are other individuals that we believe have picked it up somewhere in the community that we're not able to clearly identify. We believe COVID-19 continues to be present. The risk continues to be present in most communities throughout the State. And so, it remains important for people to continue to follow the Public Health recommendations around physical distancing and cloth facemask use, because just simply going out in public places, especially if you're getting together with groups of people, the risk is there. And so, we need to people to continue to stay -- excuse me -- continue to take the recommendations seriously.

Is there a point at which if there are cases going up, or some other metric, where you would start to look at closing down businesses again?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. No, there's not a fixed data point.

What metrics would you be looking at?

Governor Sununu:

So metrics in terms of restricting and closing down businesses? I think to Dr. Chan's point, if there's direct contact tracing that says this type of business, this type of activity, whether it's a business or an institution, facility, whatever it might be, is a key and direct cause to a lot of our increasing cases.

So, I think because we're so data-driven and because we can process that data fairly quickly for a small State, it allows us a lot of flexibility to be very myopic about how we go about making those types of decisions. I don't think anyone wants to close businesses down. But if there's a clear pattern there, then, of course, we're going to address it.

We still have a few other cards to play, so to say. And again, right now we're in a good spot. We know the numbers could increase. There's still other things we can do. And we will take whatever steps are necessary to keep people safe, to be sure.

But we've seem to found this right balance. People are definitely wearing masks a lot more often. They're managing their social distancing. The fact that we saw our surge and it's come down, and we've been able to manage it fairly well for four-plus months, almost five months now, gives I think all of us I think a lot of understanding that this can be managed, right?

When you take that personal responsibility on yourself and you wear those masks, and you maintain distancing, if we keep doing the things we've been doing, we can be very successful in the future. But if other more drastic measures have to be taken, if we have to make pullbacks, we will. But we obviously hope we don't get to that situation. Hi.

Governor, hi. This might be a question maybe for the Commissioner. But when did that review of the long-term care facilities begin? And what are the data points that allow you guys to close an outbreak at a facility? Does that mean they're completely clear of COVID?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Commissioner Shibiante:

Thanks. So, typically we look for about 14 days from your last time of onset of case, or positive case. So we look at the data. And we look for 14 days of basically having no onset of illness to close an outbreak. And so, that takes a while.

Sometimes we see it. We will do testing. We will have a cluster of illness present. We will have no new symptoms, no new illness for several days. And then, all of a sudden, we will have one more pop up, right? So sometimes it tends to drag an outbreak on for several weeks to sometimes a couple of months in some of the cases of some of our long-term care facilities.

The review of the long-term care facility ventilation systems started today -- sorry, yesterday. So we have both the Fire Marshal and the Licensing and Certification person going out. And we're really looking at the ventilation system.

First, we're starting with the facilities that had outbreaks. And is there any pattern associated with the ventilation system, air exchange, things like that, in the way the outbreak moved through the building? And then, we're going to take what we learned from that evaluation and apply it to other facilities that have not had outbreaks. So we're really trying to figure out, is there anything that relates? We don't know. But this is a great starting place for us.

Commissioner, quick follow-up there.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Sure.

Why now? Why not a couple of months ago? What was the limiting factor in not being able to do an investigation like this sooner?

Commissioner Shibinette:

So, I think that our knowledge about the virus has just evolved, really. If you remember back in March, everything we initially messaged was people had to be ill to transmit the virus. I remember saying that back in March. And then, very quickly, April/May, we started looking at asymptomatic transmission.

Even in our testing protocols, we were initially, due to some testing-supply issues, but just what we knew about the virus, we said only people that were symptomatic would get tested. Only people that were symptomatic and had underlying conditions. And we evolved that thinking and we evolved over time. And we've said this before is that, as more information comes out, we need to be able to pivot.

So, in the last couple of weeks, I would say there was probably more discussion around how long droplets suspend in the air with COVID, right? So I'm sure you've seen lots of Reports being written on it. Is it as simple as a droplet precaution where typically you'd see the droplets drop to the floor? Does it suspend for any length of time? We know that initially we talked about surface-to-surface transmission. We're seeing that that's not as big of an issue now.

So when we really look at how COVID is transmitted and the attack rates that we're seeing in the facilities -- so the attack rates is the degree in which the residents get infected, right -- in some of the facilities, especially early on, we saw some pretty high attack rates. So, we don't know what is contributing to the spread of COVID within the facilities.

So we're really just looking at anything that we can look at to say, is there a way that we can enhance this ventilation system to decrease transmission? We don't know that we're going to find

anything. But, we're leaving no stone unturned. And where we're at right now with the knowledge that we've gained over the last several months, I think it's the right time to do it.

In the 20s, you said that was the amount of facilities that have seen outbreaks?

Commissioner Shibinette:

We've had 28 facilities that have closed. And we have four that are currently open.

Thanks.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah.

And funding for it, is that funding that's coming from the CARES Act or State for the testing of the ventilation?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Oh, yes. So any recommendations that we make for improving, maybe changing out filters, changing something in the system will come out of CARES Act funding. Yeah.

Governor Sununu:

Hi.

Hi. Now that absentee ballots are available, a lot of voters who plan to use them probably are doing it for the first time. Are there any initiatives going on to make sure that voters feel prepared and confident in voting absentee? And outside of legislation, what is the State doing to prevent some of the hiccups that we see in other States? And what have we learned from those hiccups in other States?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so anyone who is -- the absentee ballots are available. They're very easy to get through your town. All of the towns work with the Secretary of State and the Attorney General's Office to be educated, themselves, in terms of what the ballots provide, how to do it, how to fill it out.

Because we handle everything at a very localized level here in the State, there's a great one-on-one contact there so people can get the help they need. It isn't like we're going to have 10,000 people calling into a centralized service up in Concord with backlogs of people. You can go right down to your Town Hall, or pick up the phone and give them a call, and ask them questions. It's a very simple process to get an absentee, very simple process to fill it out. A lot of them may be new, to be sure.

In terms of what other States are doing, I don't want to go into too much of that only because I don't completely understand how other States do their absentee process. I'll tell you in here, in New

Hampshire, we do it really well. We do it really, really well. We have a great not just tradition, but a very reliable system, a system with a lot of integrity. And it has worked tried and true, year after year, after year. As I used to say and brag about, we've gotten our elections right 100% of the time for 100 years. And we take that very, very seriously.

And so, I think because the Attorney General's Office works so closely with the Secretary of State and they have such great connection with what's happening at a localized level, it's a pretty seamless system. But if people have questions, they should feel free to pick up their phone to their town. They can put them in touch with their Moderator, or whoever might be -- usually there's an Election Official in the town that kind of heads up all of those processes. If they have any questions, then they should feel free to do so. But the opportunity is available now and will continue to be available almost up to the election. Yeah, one more and then we will take some on the phone.

I don't want to mess up Thursday too much, but we do have a NASCAR race coming up this weekend. And people are probably going to talk about that into this week. But, can you just give us a sense of what, if any, message will be delivered to people who are there, who are coming in? Obviously, a lot of people are coming to vacation in New Hampshire, because this is a concentrated crowd in a concentrated area. So, is there going to be any kind of messaging put out to those visitors? Or what kind of activity will DHHS be...

Governor Sununu:

So we have a lot of statewide messaging, as we have just a lot of people coming into the State, and vast majority from New England, for travel and tourism. I think the guidance -- I'll take a step back and remind folks -- the guidance documents that we put out were very specific, whether you're a retail facility, whether you're a travel-and-tourism destination, whether you're a hotel and lodging, restaurant, whatever it might be.

So, the number 1 message that we have, when you come into the State, you'll see it on all of our electric boards on the sign is, first, wear a mask. Maintain social distancing. It really can save lives. And we've put a lot of money behind that messaging and we're going to continue to do so.

If you're in a restaurant or a place of business, know the rules and maintain the rules, right? We have everything very public. Those businesses, for the most part, I think, all understand their guidance documents and how they should be implemented.

Even when you're outside, if you can maintain social distancing, please do so. Just because you're outside in the fresh air, we know that that fresh air can obviously help decrease the chance of transmission. But there have been cases where people are transmitting the virus in outdoor settings, on beautiful breezy days, if the crowds get too big. So when you can maintain that social distancing, please do so. And if you can't, be sure you're wearing a mask.

And so, that goes for the NASCAR race. It goes for Bike Week. It goes for anyone coming up on a typical weekend. That messaging really stays universal. And we will keep pushing it out, as strong as we can. We have a lot of money behind those efforts in terms of promoting those messaging, whether it's through digital media, or signs on the highway, and a variety of things in between.

So, common sense matters. Just because our numbers are low today, we've worked hard to get the numbers low. In a way, we've earned it. And so, we have to keep earning it. But that comes with each of us understanding what's in those guidance documents and living and abiding by all those things that Dr. Chan goes over every week ad nauseum.

I mean, just time and again, please wash your hands, something as simple. I notice I don't think people are washing their hands as much anymore. I don't. I think we kind of were strong with it in the spring. But I feel like everyone's so focused on masks. Wash your hands a couple times a day, 20 seconds under hot water.

I know it sounds silly. The Governor's out there making sure people wash their hands. But, please, it could be one of the most important tools you have in terms of transmitting the virus to you or loved ones in a close situation in your home. Wear your masks, social distancing; the three most important tools. If you do that, it's all very manageable.

And quickly on a follow-up, I know a lot of our visitors for tourism tend to be regional. NASCAR can sometimes bring a crowd. I'm not sure if the Canadian folks are coming down this time around. But it's from all over the country. So, if they are coming in from outside of New England, what, exactly, again do they have to do to self-attest?

Governor Sununu:

So, we don't think there's a lot of folks coming from outside New England, because there's so few tickets available, right? There's only about 18,000 tickets available. Usually there's up in the 50,000 and 60,000.

So if you're coming from New England and you're coming from the race, and you go back, I mean, you can do that. That's fine. If you are going to be here, you need to attest that you have quarantined. And you can quarantine back at home. But we've made that message loud and clear all across the country to anyone that's coming in. You need to quarantine for 14 days before coming.

And Governor, just one more clarification on the scholarships, is that for college students or is that any age?

Governor Sununu:

So we talked about two scholarships today. The Unique Program is specifically for college students. And the K-12 program, the \$1.5 million that I'm putting out of my education dollars is for K-12 scholarships.

Okay, thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Okay?

So is that scholarship to private schools?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

And then that Governor's Education Fund, is that CARES Act money, or is it...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so there was about \$8.8 million or \$8.9 million in discretionary dollars given to the Governor, myself. I don't know what it was in other States. It might have been different. I'm not sure how the formula was.

But in New Hampshire, about almost \$9 million; we've used some of that money for this new statewide system that really links what happens with our University and Community College system to all the other schools, so that better communication tools -- everything from lesson plans, finding out what's due -- it's a broadening of both remote learning and the hybrid models that we think may come this fall.

We want to make sure everyone is on kind of a standardized tried-and-true system that's just ease of use, so you can talk to your Teachers. You can find out what your assignments are. You can communicate very easily. A lot of School Districts have that already. Some don't. And so, we've allocated a few million dollars to that statewide system, as well.

And I still have some in reserve. And I'll likely keep in reserve specifically for, I'll call it, the students that may be falling through the cracks, especially around special education, if more services, direct services, prevention services need to be put there, or whatever else might be needed this coming fall. We're kind of trying to play it safe and appreciate that we don't know everything that might be coming. And we're going to have some resources available for that. Okay. If we could, we will grab -- oh, sorry.

And just to clarify, was that from Federal dollars? Was that CARES Act money?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, I'm sorry. Those are all CARES Act dollars. So that's not out of the \$1.25 billion but out of the third CARES Act package that was passed. The State received -- I'm going to ballpark this -- about \$80 million into education -- about \$40 million-or-so for K-12; another \$40 million or \$50 million for the higher education, being the university system and whatnot; and then another about \$9 million into this discretionary fund that we have. Great.

Holly Ramer with the Associated Press:

Hi, I have one quick question about the scholarship and then another one about contact tracing. The one about the scholarship, the scholarships for K-12, am I correct that that's not specifically for minority students, but it's a program in which a significant number of participants are minorities?

Governor Sununu:

That's right. It's not specifically for minorities. But those programs typically, like I said, I think the data showed about 22% of the recipients were minorities and people of color last year. And so, obviously they kind of are already tapped into helping bridge that disparity within the system. So it was obviously a good process to, again, address some of the concerns of those individuals that provided us some information, and made sure it's available for all students across the State.

Holly Ramer with the Associated Press:

Thank you. And to follow up on Adam's question about contact tracing, aside from the outbreaks at long-term care facilities, are you seeing instances where you can say this batch of positive cases stemmed from a restaurant, or a particular business, or a party? In other words, here's an example where a large number of people weren't following the social distancing guidelines.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I'll ask Dr. Chan to answer that, if that's okay.

Dr. Chan:

Great, thanks for that question about contact tracing. And I think it's important to remember that there's two purposes of contact tracing. One is to try and get at the question that you asked about, where did the person who was diagnosed with COVID-19 acquire it from? That's oftentimes very difficult to determine, because we're asking people to think back two, three weeks for potential exposures.

The other purpose of contact tracing, remember, is to identify people that that person diagnosed with COVID-19, who they may have come into close contact with, so that those close contacts can put under a quarantined [sic]. We're now recommending close contacts be tested for COVID-19, as a way to prevent forward transmission, once we've identified someone with COVID-19.

I am not aware of any, other than the occasional facility outbreak, like long-term care facility outbreaks. I'm not aware of any other large groups, or large gatherings, that have led to outbreaks. As I mentioned before, some of the investigations that we do identify whether someone might be a close contact of another person with COVID-19, right, because we are now recommending testing for people exposed, we're going to be identifying more people who might have had close contact with somebody else and hopefully picking up asymptomatic transmission. That's the purpose of recommending testing for people that might have been exposed but are asymptomatic.

We continue to identify people who are part of outbreaks, many of those long-term care facility outbreak facilities. And then travel remains the other large category. So people that might have traveled out-of-state acquired COVID-19 from outside of New Hampshire then brought it back to New Hampshire.

Those are sort of the three categories where we're identifying potential risk. But we have not identified other large-group gatherings that I'm aware of that have contributed to large outbreaks like we've heard from some other States. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Thank you.

Rick Green with The Laconia Daily Sun:

Hi, two questions. When a Coronas virus -- excuse me -- when a Coronavirus vaccine is developed, would you require school children to be vaccinated? And the second question is, all the States in the northeast and most States in the country have mandatory mask requirements. As major events like Bike Week and NASCAR approach, as the schoolyear approaches, as people return to work, would you consider a mandatory mask requirement?

Governor Sununu:

So the first question revolves around the potential vaccine down the road. And obviously we all hope that we see one sometime in the near future. It is not anticipated that there would be any mandatory vaccine in the State. I think a lot of folks will step up and choose to take the vaccine. But a mandatory vaccine is not anticipated at this time by any means.

The second has to do with the mandatory mask order. And again, we could still go down that road if we wanted to. Again, the number of people that have begun and really you see out there wearing masks over the past two weeks has skyrocketed in New Hampshire. And that's a very, I think, positive sign. I think a lot of national businesses and stores here in New Hampshire are taking that.

So there's very, very few people that are out there without a mask at least on-hand. It's really up to those individuals to wear it in those situations where they can't socially distance or where it may already be required.

I look at States that have required mask orders: California or Oregon, or Washington. We could keep going down the list, where the numbers continue to skyrocket. Masks help. They can save lives. I firmly believe that. But a mandatory mask order isn't some end all, be all that just keeps everyone blanketly safe. There's very little way to enforce such an order.

So, at the end of the day, it's still up to each of us to take that personal responsibility seriously and wear it as often as we can, as much as we can. We know people aren't going to be 100% about it. We know that there could be situations where you leave your house and you might not have your mask, and all that.

But, I think by kind of keeping the message elevated and making sure it's truly instilled in something in our everyday culture, and it's hard to go out now and not see a vast number of people wearing masks. I think we've really been very successful in that with our messaging. And it's been a team effort. It isn't just the Governor. It's a team effort across the State and in our communities, in our neighborhoods.

I feel like every time I put my mask on, we're sending a message to everybody that it's important. And remember, when you wear a mask, it's not to protect you as much as it is to protect everybody around you, right? It's a sign that you're doing something for everybody else. And it has real positive effective in terms of mitigating that viral spread.

So we're not at a point where I think we need to go a mandatory mask order. I think people are realizing the importance of it. It's not an end all, be all. And we just want to keep encouraging individuals to take that responsibility very seriously.

Annie with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Hi, thanks for taking my question. Can you hear me okay?

Governor Sununu:

Yes, go ahead.

Annie with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Okay, great. So, just first of all any sense of what you're talking to the White House about after this; and then secondly a follow-up for Commissioner Shibiinette on the long-term care study. Are there any plans to expand that to sort of staffing constraints, infection and control procedures, or any other aspects of how the virus may be spreading in those facilities?

Governor Sununu:

Great, I'll just answer the first one real quickly. There's a call this afternoon. I have a weekly call, at least one if not more, with the vast majority of the other Governors and the White House, usually Dr. Birx and Dr. Fauci, and a variety of other folks. Secretary Azar is very often on those calls.

And we always get an update in terms of PPE coming into the State, what they're seeing at a nationalized level, in terms of data coming out of the CDC, a variety of different things. So, we always have at least one, if not more. And that's just when they scheduled today's call. I'll turn it over to Commissioner for the second half.

Commissioner Shibiinette:

Thanks. So the ventilation review that we're talking about is really not a compliance review. It's really an investigatory process. We don't know and we don't expect that any of the ventilation systems in any of the facilities are in any way noncompliant with what the standards are for long-term care. We really just want to go in and investigate to see if we can identify a pattern, or if we can help.

When it comes to things like infection control and staffing, a lot of that falls under compliance. And every single nursing home in the State has been surveyed by Licensing and Certification at least once. Several of them have been surveyed more than once.

In addition to those formal processes, we have a variety of work groups that go on through the Healthcare Association, through some informal groups that communicate with the Department, either on a call or by email, and ask for help around staffing, if they lose staffing and they need help with staffing, or if they have questions around infection control.

So I think we've established the formal processes to make sure compliance is happening. I don't see that being an issue statewide. The informal processes have been up-and-running since the beginning of COVID.

And just to follow up on that, when you say that nursing homes that have been surveyed for compliance, are you talking about like the CMS reviews?

Commissioner Shibiinette:

Yeah.

Okay. And so, we've seen some of the outbreaks that are of facilities that are not reviewed by CMS, not at (inaudible) facilities, but at other retirement committees. Is there any plan...

Commissioner Shibinette:

Assisted living?

Assisted living, thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Sure.

Is there any plan to review staffing in those facilities that are not reviewed by CMS?

Commissioner Shibinette:

So, assisted living facilities fall under licensing, not certification, typically, by the State. If we get complaints of any kind, any word that there's a staffing issue, we can certainly send a team in there. And we have sent teams in to review any type of complaint or evidence of noncompliance with the standards.

Most of our communication that we received are really around long-term care facilities, not as much assisted living. It's a lower level of care. Typically residents are more independent in their care as compared to a nursing home, where they're requiring more one-on-one care with caregivers.

Harrison Thorp with The Rochester Voice:

Yes. Hello. Thank you for taking my question. Governor, I know you wanted to be at the groundbreaking at Lydall last Friday. But I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about how important it is that they are breaking ground on this large facility, two more lines of filtration system for masks. And I wondered if you could just talk a little bit about that. I know you wanted to be there.

Governor Sununu:

Sure. Yeah. No, a great thing happened last week. They broke ground at Lydall over in Rochester for an expansion of their facility where they make the filters in a lot of the N95 masks. And it's just awesome to be part of it. We have so many manufacturers in the State that have stepped up to be part of not just a localized, but a nationalized solution for PPE and testing materials.

And Lydall is really second-to-none. They've done an amazing job. They continue to do so. They'll be expanding their operations. We were hoping to be at the groundbreaking. Unfortunately given, I mean, the COVID pandemic, my schedule's a little bit all over the place lately. So I couldn't be there.

But it's a great organization. They keep doing great stuff. And there's going to be a need for these materials to finalize the construction of each of these N95 masks across the country for quite some time, without a doubt. So we just want to thank them for stepping up and making the investment. Great.

Just a quick follow-up, Governor, on the immunization question, so you're saying a nonmandatory for COVID-19 for schools. They do require, I think, about five different groups of vaccines before kids can go to school. And that's legislative. That's the law. If it's added to the law, you would oppose or what's the...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. No. So that's a very, very good distinction. There are a lot of immunizations that are already required to go into school. If they were to add that as part of it, yes, of course. But, we're not going to -- it was never the intention of the Governor's Office to say this is mandatory for blanket everyone across the State. But, of course, for schools, if the Legislature were to add that through the process, then, of course, we'd abide by it.

Back to the conversation about contact tracing, as test result delays continue, how useful is a test result eight, nine days after the test has been taken? And is it compromising the efficacy of contact tracing as a containment tool to have these continued delays?

Governor Sununu:

I'm going to let Dr. Chan. Good question.

Dr. Chan:

Thanks for that question. That's an excellent question that we continue to struggle with, right? The question is about turnaround time for testing. And let me first reiterate I think what was mentioned last week which is that the turnaround test time varies based on where somebody gets the test.

So if someone's test is sent to a national laboratory, many of the national laboratories have turnaround times of more than seven days, 7 to 10 days. That obviously impacts the usefulness of that test for immediate action.

The turnaround time for testing within the State, if it's sent to our Public Health Lab, it's probably on the order of one to two, to three days. We're also working with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center who's conducting overflow testing for our Public Health Laboratories and for other facilities. Their turnaround time is on the order of a day-or-so.

So for people that are tested instate, the turnaround time is much quicker than for specimens that are sent out-of-state. And that's one of the reasons why we're looking at how to increase the testing capacity within State, because the quicker that we can get test results, the more actionable that becomes.

It is important to note, though, that, when somebody gets tested, the recommendation is that those people that are tested should remain home and isolated, right? If they're getting tested for a reason, if they are symptomatic, if they're concerned that they have an infection, they should be staying at home pending the results of that test.

When someone is identified as positive, we do our contact investigations. We identify close contacts. We, then, recommend that those close contacts also get tested. Sometimes the turnaround time for those test results can also be lengthy.

But people that are close contacts still need to quarantine for 14 days, so it doesn't get that person -- testing doesn't get that person who's exposed out of the need to quarantine. Testing is a way to

identify early transmission or early infection, so that we can try and trace down and stop chains of transmission.

So, delayed test results certainly is and will continue to likely be a challenge across the country. But remember that people that are being tested, whether because they're symptomatic, or because they were exposed, still need to be staying at home for the specified duration of time, or whether they're under isolation or quarantine. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Okay. Anything else? I think we're going to wrap it up. Well, great. Well, thanks. Oh, sorry.

One more about the scholarships for private K-12 schools, why was that a idea chosen out of all the possible ways to fund education? Why that?

Governor Sununu:

Well, I think we already have an -- so the question revolves around the K-12 scholarship opportunities that are being created. We already have a great infrastructure here in the State. I think there's one or two organizations that are doing it. They're facilitating it. They're in those communities that were identified in that request in the letter.

So, again, it's nothing that we have to invent and hope for the best. They're already doing it and they do a great job with it. So that's just an obvious path and something we can just keep moving forward with, and keep providing them opportunity to get more of those opportunities out to the individuals in communities they're already working with.

And that letter that you spoke about, where did that come from?

Governor Sununu:

So that letter, boy, I think Dale officially signed the letter. And there were a variety of different businesses that he wrote it on behalf of. We can get you a copy, if need be. Was it made public? I'm not sure. We will make sure the press receives a copy of it. It's just a really good letter just talking about a lot of the disparities, not just health disparities, but in the communities.

One of the issues that came up was, as we're creating these business opportunities, if English is a barrier, if language is a barrier, did those businesses know of the opportunities like everyone else did? We try to keep all of our business funds and grant opportunities very agnostic, very equitable across the mainstream.

But let's recognize there could be other barriers like people didn't communicate, or didn't know about it. And there are good organizations in these communities that already facilitate some of that. So, again, providing some opportunity for them to keep that communication up and facilitate those opportunities to their communities is going to be very, very important.

They looked at contact -- or not contact, I'm sorry, COVID testing within those communities, making sure that we're addressing those groups, so there's not a disparity there, as part of the health

disparity aspect. Just a lot of different things that I think we can tackle, but we will get you a copy of the letter. It was a great letter.

Okay. Well, thank you, everybody. We want everyone to be safe, stay cool. We're still in the middle of summer. It's warm. And as Dr. Chan said, wash your hands. Wear your masks. Keep social distancing.

I mean, here's a challenge for you. How about everybody that's watching commits to washing their hands four times before they go to bed? I really mean it, right? Let's just make that commitment. We were great about it early on. I think if we just keep up with it and keep that mindset where it needs to be, I think even though we may see increases in numbers down the road, it's all very manageable. And we all have to take that responsibility upon ourselves. Wear your masks. Stay safe. We will be back on Thursday. Thank you.