



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Tuesday, August 4, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon. Thanks, everyone, for joining us. A couple things, first, I think, before we begin, let's just do a brief update on Tropical Storm Isaias. We've seen a few changes from yesterday and we're kind of in the middle of it right now, especially if you're out and watching in the western part of the State. And that's primarily where the threat has shifted.

The entire State does remain under a warning through this evening and parts of the State will be under a watch, as well. But, really, this is a fast-moving storm. I think things are going to be changing over not just the next half-hour where the first watch -- I'm sorry, the warning is going until at least 3:45 with a watch again going throughout the rest of the evening. But that warning could continue on deeper into other parts of the State. So please be advised. Keep an eye on it in your area. And we want to thank all folks that are kind of on the frontlines of this tropical storm, which does present a fairly significant threat.

We've been updating all the local Department Emergency Management Coordinators in your towns, in your cities over the past 24 and 48 hours, as we've seen the data change. Right now, again, with our strong wind gusts that could lead to power outages or downed trees, we've also been working with the utility companies over the past 48 hours, making sure that they're staged and prepared for what might come.

It isn't so much the rain, although we will potentially get a few inches of rain, especially in potential microbursts, short storm burst areas across the State. But the winds, I think, are really what are most of concern right now.

A flashflood watch will remain into effect in all of the counties, with the exception of Rockingham as of right now. The hope is that the storm moves quickly and moves out of the State around 10:00 or 11:00 tonight. But between now and then, we will have continual Operation Center Management on the ground, making sure that, whether it's a watch or a warning in your county, as that evolves through the evening, the State will be right there.

If you have any issues, whether it's flooding, power outages, or otherwise, always feel free to call your local Emergency Coordinators and Responders, your Police, your fire. We have a great system here in the State of New Hampshire, in terms of being able to move questions up the chain very quickly and get resources deployed exactly where they need to be.

Another thing I wanted to take a brief moment, before we go into the Public Health update, only because some folks are asking about the NASCAR race this past weekend, that was also a very successful race for a variety of reasons. An exciting race as it was, I was there, myself. But a big thanks to both New Hampshire Motor Speedway, NASCAR, and most importantly the fans that were there.

The guidelines that were put in place with Dr. Chan and his team, and NASCAR, and the Speedway were really adhered to. I think people understood that responsibility, took it very, very seriously. For the vast majority of individuals when they were up, they were wearing their masks. When they're sitting in

their seats, they were socially distanced. It really went off exactly as we had anticipated. And we just want to thank everyone for understanding that that was a very unique event, a unique opportunity, and taking the guidelines very seriously.

It showed us that our very strong elevated message of social distancing and mask wearing, and all those things that we need to be doing to help maintain and mitigate the viral spread is there. It's in effect. And it's working very, very well. With that, I'll turn it over to Dr. Chan for a Public Health update.

Dr. Chan:

Thank you very much and good afternoon. Just a brief update for today, so globally there's now more than 18.3 million people that have been infected with COVID-19 around the globe. There are more than 4.7 million people within the United States who have been infected, including more than 155,000 individuals that have died from COVID-19 in our country.

For New Hampshire, we are reporting an additional 33 new infections today, for a total of 6,693 total people confirmed with COVID-19 in our State. There is one new hospitalization to report today, for a total of 698 people who have required hospitalization with COVID-19, since the start of this pandemic. And unfortunately, one new person who has died related to COVID-19, bringing the total to 418 people that have died in our State from COVID-19. This new individual is an older adult who was not associated with a long-term care facility and I think highlights the fact that we still believe COVID-19 to be circulating, although at lower levels within many of our communities.

I do want to acknowledge that New Hampshire has seen a small increase in the number of infections with COVID-19 over the last one to two weeks. On average, we've reported about 30 new infections per day. If you compare that to the prior few weeks before, so going back three, four, five weeks ago, we were seeing about 20 to 25 new infections per day. And so, certainly the last week-or-two, we've seen a small increase.

We are going to see the numbers continue to fluctuate up-and-down. That's expected. We do not currently believe we're seeing another surge of COVID-19 in our State. If you look at the other numbers, the other metrics, our percent positivity rate of tests, specifically for the PCR-based tests, remains stable and low at 1% to 1.5% of all PCR-based tests that are positive. That's well-below many of the thresholds you hear talked about at a national and a global level.

Our hospitalizations continue to be low, both current hospitalization census and daily new hospitalizations that we report out. And thankfully the number of people dying from COVID-19 has decreased. Although, as you heard, there are still infections and there are still deaths occurring from COVID-19 that we need to be aware of and do our best to try and prevent.

So, again, we believe that lower levels of community transmission continue to occur in many parts of the State. And for that reason, we need everybody to continue to protect themselves and their families, and help to prevent further spread of COVID-19 within the communities, as we look to obviously reopen different segments of society, including schools, as an example. We know that what happens in the community is going to directly impact our ability to reopen.

And so, we continue to recommend that people practice social or physical distancing, when out in public places. We continue to recommend cloth face covering use, when people are in public settings. We continue to recommend frequent hand hygiene, frequent cleaning and sanitization of hands. And certainly if people have symptoms, they should stay home and get tested for COVID-19. And with that, I will hand things over to the Commissioner. Thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon. Just one short update: we don't have anything new to update when it comes to long-term care outbreaks. But due to the high winds that are projected with this storm that we're having, our fixed site testing sites are closed as of noon today and will stay closed through today and tomorrow, and reopen on Thursday.

Anybody that is needing a test in that timeframe, if it's urgent, then you can certainly contact your local Health Department, your Primary Care Physician, visit a local health center. Pretty much all of our health centers and hospital partners have access to testing now. So you can visit any one of those healthcare facilities.

But we expect to reopen Thursday. We've contacted everybody that has had appointments and moved those. If it's nonurgent testing, you can certainly still call, still visit our website, and we can set you up for Thursday or Friday. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Thank you very much, Dr. Chan and Commissioner Shibinette. A couple things to discuss, and then we can open right up for questions, we appreciate we're on a bit of a delayed schedule here. The Small Farmer Grant, we're going to be announcing today. We have a new and expanded funding opportunity for New Hampshire agriculture COVID-19 relief program. So we set up an Ag. program with some initial dollars that we allocated about two months ago.

This part of the program is really designed around specialty crop producers, essentially the small farmers, if you're out there, the micro farmers, sometimes, as they're known. They're intended to support those organizations and those small micro farms that do have COVID-related expenses. It's a great example of big and small COVID-related expenses and impact has really hit everyone.

This new funding of approximately \$1 million will go towards the smaller farms with less than \$50,000 in gross sales. So we've already done a fund for the larger farms. There are about 400 larger farms that do more than \$50,000 in sales.

But we have a lot of micro farmers. Maybe they work specifically out of their homes, or they have small farms, themselves, some of the smaller farmers you might see at farmer's markets, things of that nature. These are folks that still rely a lot on that income. And we want to help get them through these tough times.

The application period will open up, I'm sorry, this coming Thursday. So two days from now will be the application period. And it will stay open until August 31st. And again, this is typically the high time of the season for a lot of these farms. And we imagine that there'll be a lot of COVID-related expenses that have already been realized and may still be realized through August and September. And again, that application process can be found at goferr.nh.gov/apply. All of our funds are actually at goferr.nh.gov/apply.

As a reminder, as well, just because it is the time of year, we're going to stay on a constant reminder around the Community College system of New Hampshire. We have a large amount of money dedicated to scholarship grants. And the tuition assistance funding that I announced last months for students to enroll this fall at one of New Hampshire's Community Colleges is available for those residents. Again, goferr.nh.gov/apply, we try to make a one-stop shop for everyone.

And the reason we're harping on it is that the funding is available to any New Hampshire resident who has been financially impacted by COVID-19, or whose household has, frankly. They can get assistance, paying for course, or a full slate of courses to start a degree program, to get a certificate, any of those opportunities that the Community College system offers here New Hampshire. And they are registering students right up until late-August. So there's plenty of time to explore those courses and programs through late-August and apply for these scholarship funds. And again, goferr.nh.gov/apply.

One last thing before we open it up for questions, we got a Report last week from the New Hampshire Commission on Law Enforcement Accountability, Community and Transparency. This is a Commission I set up in response to some of the requests, and kind of that inflexion point that I think a lot of us recognized to do something a little different, to really challenge ourselves, not that we have a systematic problem with Law Enforcement in this State. We don't.

But we know that, as good as our standards are, we can always do better. We can always challenge ourselves. And I just want to thank first and foremost all the individuals that have and will continue to participate in this group: folks from Law Enforcement, the Attorney General's Office, the County Attorney's Office, a variety of different people really coming together. They had some public hearings and discussion about it. So we can't thank them enough, all really led by our Attorney General, Gordon MacDonald. He did a phenomenal job there.

But our office has taken time to review the initial training recommendations. I think that's where they put a lot of their efforts. How best can we rebuild and reassess what our training protocols are to make sure that our Law Enforcement Officers, the men and women in Law Enforcement, are coming through our programs and entering into the various aspects of Law Enforcement here in New Hampshire on the right track and with the right training, not just looking at what's happening today, but I think having an eye towards the future?

The action items that they presented had consensus amongst all Members of the Commission, from community Activists and our Law Enforcement Representatives. One thing I've always said is we have to move quickly. We didn't want to wait and do a long-term legislative study commission. Those are fine, but they take a long time. And I think everyone appreciates this is an area where we have the opportunity to move quickly and get a lot done in a very positive way.

And so, we agree with all the initial findings of the Report. They asked for 30 more days -- they asked for an extended period of time and I'm granting them another 30 days to look at two additional areas. We don't want to cut ourselves short, but specifically around the reporting and investigations that typically surround any issues of Police misconduct at a local or State level, and, again, how to improve relations between Law Enforcement and the communities that they serve, true community policing. What else should we be doing? How else to engage?

I think we do it fairly well here in New Hampshire. And we should all have a point of pride around that. But we can always challenge ourselves to do better, look at new methods, new opportunities, again, whether it's around the investigations or community policing. And so, again, I'm asking them to come back with kind of a second phase of their Report and recommendations in early-September. With that, we can open it up for questions.

Q&A Session

I have a question about that very subject.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

They are looking at in-service training increasing existing Police Officers from 8 hours to 24 hours in a three-year period. Would that be considered an unfunded mandate? And where would we find the money?

Governor Sununu:

We will fund it. Yeah. No, we will take care of it. Again, the way the funding around Police Standards and Training, it's primarily a General Fund operation. And then, there's some funds that come in at the local level. But whatever the need is around the training, the funding is not going to be the issue. We can promise you that.

Governor, can you just share with us, as schools try to build up PPE reserves for their Teachers here, what is available if a school starts to struggle or is unable to come up with that material on its own, or a District can't do that? What does the State have as a backup to help, if a District or a school is struggling with that, and a Teacher doesn't have what they need to start the year?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so if there are schools that for whatever reason are having trouble obtaining the PPE, maybe their shipments are being delayed or something of that nature, we have a stockpile. That's exactly what the stockpile's meant for. And we've been building on that stockpile. Literally every day we build on it, whether it's gloves or gowns, or facemasks and things of that nature.

We will work with the schools to help define what their need may be. I think there was a expectation that the need for face coverings in some form would be much higher than it is. Most people have their own face coverings. But we will make sure that they have what they need, if there's a delay in them being able to obtain any PPE.

When should they call, I guess, because if...

Governor Sununu:

As soon as they realize there's a need, yeah. No. I mean, we have stockpiles here. And that's exactly why. I mean, it's a lot easier for the State to replenish our stockpiles than to ask a school to wait and hope for the best.

So we have a communication system set up. And if there's a need, again, we will help them define that need. What is the real need? Some schools may say, well, I need 10 masks per student per day. Well, that's not really realistic, because that probably isn't a realistic need of that school. So we will help make

sure that we understand what that is and we can get them going in the early months of September. See if their shipments come in. We will facilitate the process any way we can.

Almost a dozen towns or cities across the State either have a Mask Ordinance in place or have one imminently on the Agenda. For the sake of uniformity and clarity of message, if a significant number of Municipalities adopted such a measure, would that change your calculus on a statewide Ordinance?

Governor Sununu:

So are you saying if 110 towns or cities adopted a mask mandate, would that change my calculus, because that's about more than half?

If the significance of the number was enough that people traveling through the State, residents, would be confused about where and when they're supposed to wear a mask?

Governor Sununu:

No, I mean, I guess my general answer to the mask mandate question is: if Municipalities want to take that step, I think one has done it already, technically, has actually done it. I think only Nashua's done it. Maybe Portsmouth is thinking about it. And maybe a dozen-or-so might be thinking about it, as well. So, if they want to take that step, absolutely. We're very supportive of that.

Again, I can't stress it enough. What's going on in the issues in Littleton and Berlin, and Claremont, and Colebrook are very different than what's happening in Portsmouth and Salem, and Derry, and Manchester, and Salem [sic]. So, if I were to impose a mask mandate, it is for the entire State, all 220 towns, even though 60% of those towns have no COVID at all in them. So that's one of the challenges there.

So we do have a regional issue. Our COVID, as low as it is in the State, is regional. And I'm very supportive. If towns and Municipalities wanted to take those steps, they can absolutely do it. If the vast majority of the State started taking those types of steps, I think we'd probably be well-ahead of it at that time. But we don't have any evidence of that now, and we just want to help support those towns that want to take those measures and those steps.

Can we hear from Commissioner Shibinette on test turnaround times and kind of an update on where that stands very briefly; mosaic of providers and times, but sort of the ballpark now, if somebody's going to go get a test?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Sure. So, for anybody local, so Public Health Lab, Dartmouth Hitchcock, we're looking at one to three days with an average of probably about two days for a turnaround time. LabCorp was right around five or six days.

Quest, which was up around eight to nine days last week, started pool testing on Thursday/Friday. They were supposed to work through their backlog. The numbers that we report are a seven-day average. So their seven-day average moved from, like, eight to nine down to seven yesterday. So I expect

to see that continue to drop. So Quest is probably the longest at this point, which is reporting out at seven days. So if you get tested by one of our fixed sites, they typically go to Quest. So that would be the longest.

The local hospitals that either have testing inhouse, use Broad Institute or LabCorp, they're seeing probably on average three to four days. So it's a good timeframe. That's where we expected. If I were to set kind of the bar at what I would like to see for turnaround times, three days would be the average that I'd like to see.

Will this closure this week because of the tropical storm have any impact on turnaround times, or a backlog in the availability? Are people waiting a long time to get it?

Commissioner Shibinette:

No, people that want a test can get the test the same day at our fixed sites. And at this point, we have several of our hospital partners have stood up their testing sites also. We will be doing announcements on that Thursday. I wanted to have a map available with contact information. So we will do that on Thursday. But, at this point, anybody that wants a test can get this test the same day, pretty much across the State.

Commissioner, with regard to our low positivity rate, is pool testing a viable option for the State Public Health Lab to do broadly?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah, so we're validating it now. There was a lot of conversations. There has been a lot of conversations about pool testing for the last month and the difference between pool testing for surveillance versus pool testing for diagnostic purposes, which means you can tell someone whether you're negative or positive.

We are actively validating pool testing for New Hampshire so that we can jump in, if we need to, especially when we look at some of our surveillance programs right now. We have long-term care nursing homes in surveillance. We have assisted livings in Rockingham and Hillsborough County doing surveillance.

We'd like to start. We have a voluntary program for homeless shelters that would like to have their clients tested in a surveillance program. All of those things, pool testing lends itself very well to surveillance testing, because they're asymptomatic people with a very low positivity rate.

Any news on the ventilation systems? It's another week-or-so before you expect to get results?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah, I don't expect to have them right now. The initial phase is going out and visiting some of the facilities, looking at the airflow within the building, and then actually comparing it to how the virus spreads within those buildings. So we are probably at least a week away from having any type of evaluation on that.

And then, really applying it to say, what can we do to change? Is it more filters? Is it minor changes in the ventilation system? Is there a difference between buildings that were built 60 years ago versus buildings that were built 10 years ago? They're all the questions we're looking. We don't know what we're going to find and we're not anticipating what we're going to find. We're really just asking the question at this point.

Governor Sununu:

We can take some questions on the phone. Thank you, Commissioner.

Kathy McCormack with Associated Press:

Hi, thank you. I have another mask-related question. The State of Maine has put out new guidelines regarding the use of masks at daycare facilities. So masks are now required for children ages 5 and up, and recommended for those ages 2 through 4. Has New Hampshire considered revising its guidance at childcare centers which currently recommends face coverings for staff but not for children?

Governor Sununu:

Just to be clear, we have revised our guidance around childcare centers. We've done it a couple times now, two or three different iterations, really listening to the staff, listening to parents, and trying to make it as usable as possible.

So right now, I don't think we're considering any requests or anything like that to make a further mandate on young children. That becomes a very, very challenging mandate to implement, especially on little kids, even five, six, seven years old, asking them to wear a mask all the time, all day.

I think right now we have, I think it's safe to say, a few thousand kids and staff in childcare centers across the State that have actively participated in childcare over the past couple of months, probably less than a dozen-or-so cases. I'd have to go back and -- or maybe two dozen cases-or-so.

So, we know COVID can be in these facilities. We know COVID can be in schools. It's really about making sure that they're finding that balance about making sure that whatever mandates we put in place -- and we have some pretty hefty guidelines in there -- can be managed, but still allow the operations to commence in a safe and reasonable way.

Michael Graham with New Hampshire Journal:

Yeah, one question for the Health Professionals and one question for the Governor. The health question is: as of now, what do you anticipate will be the time turnaround for on-campus testing at UNH? How long from a time a student's tested until you anticipate getting results? And are those possibly going to change over the next month? Many parents are wondering. And for the Governor, as you know there are tens of thousands of New Hampshire residents who, in the past, worked in Massachusetts, but, during the COVID lockdown, have been working from New Hampshire, from here. And yet the State of Massachusetts has continued to collect the commuter tax and income tax, despite the fact that the New Hampshire work is being done in New Hampshire by New Hampshire residents. Have you taken any steps to address this unfair treatment of New Hampshire workers? Do you anticipate speaking to Governor Baker? Will there be a challenge of this abuse of New Hampshire workers who should not be taxed under normal guidelines?

Governor Sununu:

Well, thank you. I think there are two questions in there, and I'll repeat them for the audience. The first of the question has to do with the turnaround time with some of the on-campus testing, specifically around UNH. I think the university system is meeting to look at all the different guidelines and documents, that the Keene and Plymouth, and UNH, and even Granite State College are always slightly different in their approaches and their protocols.

UNH is currently setting up and validating their own testing, so they can do it inhouse. And in talking to President Dean as early as yesterday, they expect a turnaround time of two to three days, which I think is great.

There will be some reliance on external testing facilities, whether it be LabCorp or through ConvenientMD, or Quest, whatever it might be, for some of the other colleges. But I think the capacity that UNH is trying to build to help support Keene State and Plymouth, and some of the students at Granite State are very valuable to making sure that those turnaround times are fairly minimal. And that should be up-and-running, I think, around mid-August. As of yesterday, they were still on track.

Your second question had to do with the attempts, or I guess the law in Massachusetts that allows them to charge an income tax to New Hampshire residents that work in Massachusetts. That's been in place for sometime. But a lot of those folks aren't even commuting into Massachusetts, and they're being charged income tax out of Massachusetts.

Look, all the more reason why New Hampshire doesn't have an income tax, shouldn't have an income tax. And all those businesses should move up here, frankly. Just another aspect of the New Hampshire advantage; I think technically they may be allowed to do it per their law.

But, every worker and every business that comes up to New Hampshire gets basically a 6% raise on day 1. That's a pretty good deal. And you're seeing a lot of a deurbanization right now across the country. We see families and businesses coming in from California, Washington, Minnesota, Texas, Massachusetts, frankly. Some of the businesses that want to expand right now are looking at New Hampshire as a home. And we're happy to provide that opportunity.

Rick Jergen with The Valley News:

Yes, thank you. Recently Vermont, which had sent a couple hundred prisoners to Mississippi and had been basically relying on a symptomatic testing program to monitor COVID there discovered, I guess, so far, 85 cases through a more extensive testing program of prisoners. So my question is: what is the current regimen for testing prisoners, and folks in prison or in jail in New Hampshire? And is this a time where it might consider moving to a surveillance monitoring program for inmates?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you for that question. So right now our testing around incarcerated persons, either the State Prison or the County Jails is really based on symptomatic symptomology. If they test positive, or if they have symptoms, or if they've been exposed, or they have close contacts, then we will certainly do testing. And we have done testing at different facilities.

The counties have contacted me recently to start having the conversation about having a surveillance program. I think it's fair to say that we've concentrated our efforts in surveillance program

around those that have been most affected by COVID in our State. And that would be people over the age of 60 and people that reside in long-term care facilities.

So we're happy to explore other surveillance programs. I think that the State Prison and the County Jails, based on what I've seen and heard, they quarantine everybody that comes in, in a special area so that they don't have interaction with the general population of those jails. I think they're doing it correctly. But it's something that we're certainly willing to entertain, as we button up our surveillance program for seniors in our communities and our long-term care centers.

Governor Sununu:

Thank you, Commissioner. Great. That's it for the phone. Any last here?

Just one follow-up, Governor, I guess there's some type of event planned in New Ipswich at a property of a State Legislator that's they're talking about tonight as the Select Board. It sounds like it's some type of religious or Evangelical gathering that there could draw in lots of attendees and camping in crowds, things like that. Have you heard of this? Any particular concerns about...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. No, I've heard there is an event in New Ipswich. It could draw a few hundred people is my understanding. We've reached out and simply said, look, anyone, whether it's the New Ipswich event, whether it's Hampton Beach, whether it's Bike Week, whether it's NASCAR, there are guidance documents in place. We've told them very clearly, you need to make sure you're maintaining that social distancing. You're encouraging folks to wear masks when they can't do so.

I believe it might be a semi-outdoor event. I think I mean that sounds good. But obviously if it were to rain or something like that, they'd have to be prepared to make those types of stipulations. The good news is, is that the State has provided guidance documents in each of these situations. And they need to follow those guidance documents, absolutely.

There's a reason that we put them into place. And when you do follow them, the results in this State for the past four or five months have been very, very positive. And so, we all need to understand that we have the responsibility to be disciplined in our distancing, to be disciplined in our mask wearing. It really does matter.

It is not an accident that we're still sitting at less than 1.5% positivity. It is by design. And it is really a credit to the individuals of the State that have taken the mandates and the guidelines that we've put forward very seriously. And we just need to keep doing it all the way through. You got to see this thing -- like Bill Belichick says, you got to play the full 60 minutes in the game. Anything can happen towards the end. And there's still a lot to play here. We still have a long way to go.

But if we stay disciplined and we stay focused, I think we can be successful. Again, whether it's this event or the thousands of people you might see on Hampton Beach, or the thousands of people that we will likely see during Bike Week, we're taking those guidance documents very seriously.

With regard to the State of Emergency, Governor, do you anticipate keeping it in place until there is a vaccine? And if not, what would you have to see in order to lift it?

Governor Sununu:

It's a great question. I think about that all the time. When can we lift a State of Emergency? My sense is it will likely be until -- it'll probably here in some form until we get a vaccine and maybe shortly thereafter. But we really don't know.

I think we just have to take it -- there's no playbook. No one's ever gone through this before. When there's a vaccine, how fast it comes out, how many people actually get it, when does I think the deep concerns that we have that this can spread and become unmanageable? We don't think it will, but that's really the fear. That's why we do these press conferences every day, because we want people to have confidence that we can manage, even though the cases may rise.

But I think we will just have to kind of see where it goes. But definitely in the indefinite future, I think we're going to be in a State of Emergency for some time, because the State just has to react. We have to be able to move quickly, whether it's from funding that might come in, cutting deals on PPE, getting schools testing materials, being able to enact guidelines.

Remember, when the State of Emergency goes, if that goes away, all the Orders that are attached to it -- I think we're up to about 60 now -- would disappear, as well. And some of those are really, really important Orders, if you go back and look at them all. Some are really vital to making sure that we have flexibility to not just keep people safe, but keep our economy moving forward, and provide the opportunity that families and businesses expect.

On that note, Nevada voted on Sunday night to send all of the residents an absentee ballot to vote for State. Your thoughts on New Hampshire?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, well, I mean, one thing that we take a lot of pride in, in New Hampshire, is when it comes to our elections, we do them right. I don't mean to sound lib or crass. I don't really care what Nevada does or Texas does, or Vermont, or any of those other States.

We do it very, very well here. And we have a very robust absentee ballot process. It's incredibly easy to get an absentee ballot. We made some changes to allow for that flexibility, given the COVID crisis. We've already seen the number of absentee ballots drastically increase here. And so, we know it's very easy to do.

So, we have a good process and I support Secretary of State Bill Gardner. He's got more experience with this than pretty much anybody in the country. And I think the entire State has worked very well as a team to make sure that we're providing that opportunity to all the potential voters.

Governor, can I ask Dr. Chan a question on team sports? Obviously, Dr. Chan, schools are still formulating decisions and talking about what to do. And there's a lot of different players involved here from the administrative side and whatnot, in terms of people involved in making the decisions. What further guidance do you have on contact sports and whether or not that is a safe thing to do this fall?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so good question. And this is a question we are getting more frequently now that the schools are looking to reopen around sports, specifically contact sports. And there are some potential difficult decisions to be made on the part of schools around what to do with sports.

The State has issued guidance around how to conduct sports safely. That guidance allows for sports to be conducted, ideally in a safe manner, trying to maintain social physical distancing to the extent possible. And where social physical distancing is not able to be maintained, looking at implementing cloth facemask use, which I think we acknowledge can be difficult.

And so, these are the same kind of guidelines that you're seeing in the sports guidance documents that are out there, similar to what we put in other guidance documents. But we want people to be safe. The recommendations around trying to maintain physical distance and cloth facemask use generally is still in effect. And that still applies to sports, as well.

At the same time, we want kids, adults to be able to be outdoors, physically active. And so, I think there's going to need to be some creative ways that schools and colleges and athletes, Athletic Directors, look at how to conduct sports this fall for how to conduct them safely.

Certainly, practicing skills, training, all is possible. When you get into some of the closer physical contact sports, there may be some new innovative ways that need to be considered for how to conduct sports to limit groups from mixing.

But we want to encourage people to remain physically active. Sports activities are allowed. And we ask that people look at how to conduct it safely and maximize physical distancing. Where physical distancing is not able to be maintained, look at cloth facemask use and other ways, grouping and cohorting, other ways of trying to prevent COVID from spreading between students, between teams.

Just to drill down there a little bit, you're saying they would have to get creative. Essentially is that another way of saying that contact sports are probably too dangerous to play in their original form?

Dr. Chan:

I think that's perhaps a fair statement. And if you look at what other sports groups are doing, national sports groups, for example football, I've heard that some football teams are looking at how to build in facemask protection into the helmet, for example.

So, I think that we're all trying to figure out how to maintain the functions in society that are important for not only our prevention of COVID, but maintain our physical health. Maintain our mental health and emotional health. And I think that we're all in this position of having to find new, creative ways to conduct activities in society which are important. And I think sports is included in that. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Okay. Well, great. Well, thanks, everyone, for joining us. We do, again, have a tornado warning and watch in various parts of the State, and we will likely be under one form or another for the next four or five hours. So we just want people to be safe.

If you don't have to be out, be inside, especially on the western part of the State. Keep your eyes to WMUR or whatever your news network might be for those updates. And again, we just want everyone to be safe. And hopefully by tomorrow morning, the sun will be out and we will be back at it.

Well, thank you, guys, again. Hopefully, General Hospital will be back on. I did not interrupt it today. I just want to be very clear about that. We will be back on and we will see everyone again on Thursday. Thank you very much.