



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

Governor Sununu:

Afternoon, everybody. Good to see everyone here. Again, I always get my days wrong. I was about to say happy Thursday, but I believe it's Tuesday; beautiful day out there. A few things to talk about, then we will open it up for questions, as we usually do. We're going to start kicking things off with a Public Health update from Dr. Chan.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. Thank you, Governor. So, a quick update on the numbers, and then I'm going to have a couple slides to share. So, globally there's now more than 25.5 million people that have been infected with COVID-19, including more than 6 million infected within the United States.

For New Hampshire, we are announcing today an additional 23 new infections, bringing the total to 7,297 New Hampshire residents that have been diagnosed with COVID-19 during the course of this pandemic. There is one new person who has required hospitalization for their illness, bringing the total to 715 total people that have been hospitalized with COVID-19. And thankfully zero new deaths, however we're still at a total of 432, specifically, total people that have died as a result of COVID-19, or COVID-19-related complications.

New Hampshire numbers continue to do well. We continue to average about 20 new infections that we announce per day. Our percent PCR-test positivity rate continues to be low. Our hospitalization numbers continue to be low. In fact, I think we've only announced two new hospitalizations in the last week. And there have been fewer than 10 total people hospitalized on any given day within the State. And again, those are some of the lowest numbers we've had since the beginning of this pandemic in March.

So a couple slides here about a new guidance document that we are releasing today, relative to schools; so we have been working with school and school districts for quite a number of weeks now, have been hearing their concerns and their questions. And one of the requests we have frequently gotten from schools is around helping them define levels of community transmission, and at what point schools can use data to inform decisions on transitioning between different instructional models, so thinking about in-person learning, versus hybrid models of learning, versus remote learning models.

And so, we are releasing a new guidance document today specifically targeting schools, K-12, or primary and secondary schools, that proposes some metrics to define both the level of community transmission, as you can see on the screen here, and metrics that schools can use to assess the level of individual school impact.

And so, with both of these factors, there are a number of different metrics that we're proposing. We look at both at a community level, at a county level, or in the situation with Manchester and Nashua, a city level, and also different metrics that we can look at from a school level to assess a level of COVID-19

impact transmission in communities and impact on schools. And you can see that for trying to define level of community transmission, we propose looking at exactly the same types of numbers we talk about here on a weekly basis: the percent of PCR-test positivity rate, looking at the rate of new infections over the course of the prior 14 days, and the rate of new hospitalizations over the prior 14 days.

When we're talking about trying to define the level of school impact relative to COVID-19, we are certainly going to be monitoring the number of cases, the number of infections that occur in schools, the number of clusters. We've talked about this before. We will work with schools each and every time someone is diagnosed with COVID-19 who has been in the school system. But we will also monitor those numbers and use that data to inform what's happening at a school level and a school district level.

We have the ability to monitor school absenteeism. This is a system that has been in place since around 2009, where we have schools reporting to us the percentage of students who are absent due to illness or influenza-like illness. We will continue to monitor this throughout the school season and use that data, feed that data back to school systems.

And then, we're proposing somewhat of a subjective measure, or criteria, around schools looking at their level of staffing and capacity to conduct school operations. And so, with each one of these areas, we are going to define community transmission relative to these terms: minimal, moderate, substantial community transmission, and the level of school impact as low, medium, and high.

Next slide, please. And so, we are going to take these proposed metrics and use them to suggest when schools can consider transitioning between different instructional models using what we're calling the (inaudible) matrix, which essentially is a three-by-three table. The top is listing the level of community transmission, again minimal, moderate, substantial community transmission defined at the county level. And then, schools can look at the level of school impact -- low, medium, and high -- because, really it's both of these factors that factor into how schools can safely conduct educational operations, right?

So, it's not just the level of community transmission. It's also what's happening in the school system. It's not just what's happening in a school or a school system. It's what's happening at a county or community level, because we know that what happens in a community is going to affect schools. It's going to affect long-term care facility. It's going to affect businesses.

And so, the purpose of releasing this guidance is simply to help schools make some informed decisions and use local data to help guide actions at the local level. Schools are able and should, and can, take a more or less restrictive approach as then what we suggest here, as deemed appropriate, based on the local situation and local resources, and local capacity. And certainly, with any case of COVID-19 in a school, Public Health will continue to work with the individual school and the school district, and school system to implement protective measures, regardless of what mode of learning they are currently operating in.

And just to be clear, this guidance is not meant to direct schools on how to reopen. Hopefully, most schools at this point have come to some decisions, working with their communities and their School Boards around reopening. Certainly, we have worked with the Department of Education. We've been having weekly calls with schools for the last six weeks-or-so to help address questions and the concerns arising. And we will continue to do so.

But, again, this is guidance that has been requested by schools, and we think will be helpful to them. And we will continue to adjust and modify our approach as necessary, based on how things progress during the pandemic.

And just as a final couple notes here, this guidance really is meant to be iterative, meaning as we learn how COVID-19 impacts schools, we may adjust the criteria. We may adjust the levels. We will work with schools certainly to try and implement guidance that is workable, and implementable for them.

And we have posted this online. This should be available now. And so, we encourage people to go to nh.gov/COVID-19. And if they follow the links for Resources and Guidance, there's a section specifically to schools, which has a lot of school resources and guidance documents, including a toolkit, some frequently asked questions, and now hopefully this new guidance document around how schools and when schools can consider transitioning between different instructional models.

So that is available, should be available now. And we will continue to work with schools to help make sure that schools can function in a safe manner. And we will continue to have weekly calls with our partners on the ground. So, with that, let me stop and hand things over to the Commissioner. Thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon and thank you. We have a brief long-term care update today. We are announcing a new outbreak at a long-term care facility, Mountain View Community in Ossipee, New Hampshire. They currently have one resident and four Staff Members that are diagnosed positive with COVID-19. We still continue to monitor outbreaks at Evergreen Place in Manchester and Rockingham County House of Corrections in Rockingham County. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, well, thank you very much, Dr. Chan and Commissioner Shibinette. It's great to have smart people on your team. I tell you. A lot going on, whether it's the schools or business, guidance documents, transitions, a lot happening within those districts and for families, and for Teachers. And I think the team at the Department of Public Health is constantly challenging themselves to take some of that feedback and really put forth the instructions and the guidance, depending on what the situation may carry. So, hats off to them. I think they've done a great job.

A couple quick announcements today, first we are announcing that the State of New Hampshire is set to receive approximately 230,000 cloth face coverings from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, which will head directly to New Hampshire schools. These masks will be distributed based on need and availability, and really prioritize those students who are either low income or otherwise with higher needs.

So, again, it's an opportunity on top of the 100,000 reusable cloth facemasks that we've already distributed to New Hampshire schools that went out by the New Hampshire National Guards a few weeks ago. Again, we know that masks, they save lives. They provide a lot of protection, in terms of the spread and mitigation of the virus. And anything we can do to help keep, again, the students and the Teachers, and the communities safe, this is just another very good opportunity for a lot of those local school districts and those schools.

Also, on the school front, another positive item to share is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they have now extended their waivers granting flexibility for school meal service programs. And that allows public schools to continue to provide meals to all students at no charge for the time being. It's really a continuation of the flexibilities that were granted over this past summer.

As funds allow, the flexibilities will ensure meal options for students are available, so that the students can access meals under all circumstances. And because of this extension, New Hampshire schools will be able to provide meals to any student at no charge in the short-term in the short-term and potentially longer, for both in-person learning and remotely. So it's not just for kids that come into school. It's also for those who might be on a hybrid or a remote learning plan, as well.

The action is incredibly important for our students, as they enter the new school year. And I think it's safe to say that there's going to be a lot of anxieties about whether the additional programs, the additional opportunities -- food service is one that we've always been considering from day 1 of having to go remote way back in the spring. And to have this additional flexibility and this waiver from the Government is just a huge benefit to the State.

Obviously, we want to thank the Department of Agriculture for their commitment and for that flexibility, and for our own Department of Education who has really led the nation in applying for the support going back to last spring. We were right on the frontlines here in New Hampshire, in terms of providing that support and flexibility. And again, I think it's just an all hands on deck effort, and more flexibility is a great thing for our students, especially those in need.

And finally, on schools, our COVID-19 schools dashboard is being launched today. I'd obviously like to thank the Department of Health and Human Services. Commissioner Shibinette and her team have really worked very, very quickly to operationalize, as you can see next to me.

This is a bit of a screenshot of what you'll see up there. And what it is, if you just go to the [nh.gov\COVID-19](https://nh.gov/COVID-19) website, it's the website that we talk about all the time. That's where our main dashboard is. And we simply have a new tab where it says Schools, where, under there, you can find your school, your school district, the number of cases, the clusters of illness, things of that nature, so you can see in real-time what the true status is to your child or your family's school, as it pertains to the COVID-19 pandemic.

And again, it's having that centralized website, kind of a clearinghouse for real-time and real accurate information, I think, is going to be a very important tool for everyone, for parents, Teachers, to the School Administrators, themselves. And obviously we want to thank them for being part of that, because a lot of that is getting the information from the schools, compiling with the information from the Department of Public Health, the testing data to make sure that it's all available in a good and accurate timing, so folks can make the best decisions for themselves.

And then, finally, also somewhat on the school front, another good-news story for today, I think a lot of folks heard there was an announcement surrounding Crotched Mountain. Several weeks ago, Crotched Mountain School did announce that it unfortunately was going to have to close their doors. Kind of ongoing economic stresses at that facility combined with the COVID-19 pandemic really forced the school to close, to suspend enrollment, and increase spending on safety measures, I think straining their already challenging financial situation.

So I know it was a tough decision on a lot of parts of those individuals who had to make that decision to close the doors. And I think we all shared a lot of concerns that many individuals throughout our State that had services being provided, both kids, as part of their school program, adults, as part of their daycare and long-term care programs that were there. We simply wanted to make sure that those individuals were not left behind.

And so, since the State first learned of the pending closure, we did immediately start working with leadership of the school to ensure that the services weren't going to be interrupted, that individuals could

find alternative placement with other providers were necessary. And we have a new provider coming in for that facility, which, again, is a big win.

A lot of the individuals have been placed with -- I've been speaking a bit with Senator Hassan, I know, who has taken a real leadership role in trying to help making sure that we're dotting the Is and crossing the Ts. But I think this announcement today really provides a lot of long-term sustainability for that institution. And so, therefore a big win for New Hampshire and families, and for all those folks, I think, who have had not just a day-to-day but sometimes even lifelong partnerships with that facility. I think it's great news for them and those families that those providers will be there and those services can continue. With that, we can open it up for questions, whatever you'd like.

Q&A Session

I wondered if I could get an example of how this matrix would work, Dr. Chan. Say I'm in the Town of Rumney and we have three cases of COVID, and it's a small school, but the county doesn't have many cases. And how would I, as an Administrator, rate from green to yellow to red where we stand, in terms of what we should do?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, I don't know if we can go back on the slide to the colored matrix there, correct. Right, so there's two things to factor in here, right? There's what's happening in the community. And there's what's happening at the specific school.

And these terms that we're using -- "level of community transmission", "minimal", "moderate", and "substantial" -- are actually terms that the CDC has used in their community mitigation framework guidance documents that they've put out since actually near the beginning of the pandemic. The issue has always been that these terms have not been very well-defined at a national level. And so, States, Public Health jurisdictions around the country have really struggled to try and define these for their local communities, because these definitions, these levels of community transmission, can be used elsewhere other than just schools.

And so, sort of big picture, long-term, if you look at some of the details in the guidance document we released, and some of the levels of community transmission, for example we're using a number of 50 new cases in the last 14 days per 100,000 as one of the cutoffs. Now, that number may be familiar because we pulled that number from some of our long-term care facility guidance.

So we're starting to try and better define what's happening at the community level so that local community organizations, whether it's schools or long-term care facilities, or businesses, or healthcare agencies can use this data and the structure to try and make decisions. And so, in this specific example that you're talking about, what's happening -- and again, a lot of this is at the county level. So we're looking at numbers at the county level to decide whether that county and the organizations, the schools within that county have a minimal, moderate, or substantial level of community transmission. So that's only one factor to take into account.

And so, if we look at an individual school, and I think you've suggested, well, what happens if a school has three cases, three people infected with COVID-19? I'm not sure if you were talking about that specific to the school, or just the county. But let's say there's a handful of kids in the school, itself, a specific school with COVID-19. And if you go and look in the guidance document, those numbers are

defined, right? So looking at how many cases are in the school, are they just sporadic cases here and there? Or are there an actual cluster of infections, meaning a related group of people of COVID-19? Is it just one cluster in the school? Is it more than one?

And then, using those numbers, trying to help schools see where they might fall in this level of school impact, whether it's low, medium, and high; and so it really depends on what the specific situation is. But in fact all of the counties throughout the State are in the minimal community transmission level. And by the way, that's displayed on the school data dashboard that the Governor just mentioned. And so, part of what's in that data dashboard is defining the level of community transmissions.

But all counties are in a minimal level of community transmission right now. And so, assuming that a school is in a county with minimal community transmission, what happens in that school as they reopen is going to impact whether they're in low, medium, or high level of school impact. So, if they just have one, two sporadic cases, no clusters, probably they would be in the low level of school impact.

Now, again, this guidance document's not meant to direct how schools should reopen. So some schools may have already chosen to reopen in hybrid, or even remote, even if this matrix suggests they could have open in-person. But what we've heard is that schools are wanting to know, well, if they started in hybrid, for example, and things were going well during the year, is it safe to them move to in-person?

And so, that's partly what this matrix is intended to help schools with is looking at the level of community transmission, looking at what's happening in the school, itself, and making decisions with the School Boards, Superintendents as to whether or not they might be able to relax restrictions even, if they started in a hybrid or a remote model, or the opposite. If they are in-person and they're struggling with cases in schools, clusters, they may need to consider going to hybrid or even remote, if they have, for example, an outbreak in their school.

So, it's hard to answer specific questions around this. I would encourage people to go read the guidance document. It's only two to three pages. But it details out the different metrics and the different numbers, and levels, and how we define these different levels.

You use 14-day periods.

Dr. Chan:

Correct.

Is that based on CDC? Or what is that based on? Is it the amount of time it takes to notice cases, or...

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so some of the metrics around level of community transmission are looking at data over 14 days, right? So, we know that any time we're tracking numbers, in this case tracking a pandemic, the numbers are going to go up and down. There's normal natural variation in numbers. And so, we don't want to rely on just one day's reporting of numbers, or even two, or even three.

And in fact, when you get to lower levels of community transmission, there's the possibility that there could be larger fluctuations. And in order to have a more reliable estimate of what's happening in

the community, typically we look at numbers over the course of 7 days, 14 days. In this case, we've chosen 14 days for some measures, partly because of the low numbers we're having right now.

Some of the other measures, like the percent of test positivity, we're really looking at it over a seven-day period. But that's probably because we're doing a lot more testing. There's a lot more tests being conducted. And so, a seven-day estimate is maybe a little more reliable when we're talking about testing than low numbers of people infected. Great, thank you.

Doctor, while you're up there, can you kind of go into the decision-making process of what it would look like if a positive case is identified? They've already been in the building. How will you determine that kids and staff can reenter that building safely?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, great question about what happens when a student or a Staff Member tests positive for COVID-19 in the school setting. And this is already happening, right? So, schools are already coming back, whether that's colleges and universities, or K-12 schools.

And just to be clear, I think we expect students and Staff to be diagnosed with COVID-19 and to have been in the school, right? So this should not be a surprise or cause significant fear when people look on the data dashboard, for example, and see that there's someone with COVID-19 in their school.

With each and every case, we are notified of each and every case, we are notified of each and every person diagnosed with COVID-19, whether that's from the laboratory directly that diagnosed someone, or the provider, or even from the school, which there's always the possibility a school may hear about someone with COVID-19 before us. And the school reaches out to us.

We will work very closely with the school for anybody that has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and in the school setting to identify who has been in close contact, right? Close contact being within 6 feet of someone for 10 minutes or longer.

Just because someone is identified with COVID-19 who's been in the school does not mean that an entire class or even an entire school needs to shut down. We will work with the school to identify who was in close contact with that individual. We will reach out to the people affected and have them quarantined, so that they're out of the classroom setting, in the event that they come down with COVID-19.

And then the other thing to add is that anybody who's been in close contact to someone with COVID-19, we are recommending testing for. There's been a lot of discussion around that at a national level. New Hampshire continues to recommend that people in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 get tested, so that we can rapidly identify early infection before someone may develop symptoms.

And so, that process is playing out right now. And so, it should not be a surprise that we will identify people with COVID-19 who have been in the school system. And we will work with the schools, the School Nurses, the School Administrators, the Superintendents, the Principals of schools, the Teachers to identify in what locations and in what instances throughout the day somebody might have come in close contact. We will have those people pulled out of school, quarantined at home, tested, and try and maintain normal school operations otherwise.

As the elementary school year approaches, we're seeing in other States some communities actually pulling back. New York City announcing we're not going to open for 10 more days than we were going to open. We saw in North Andover, Massachusetts, Teachers outside the school building saying we're not going into that school building until the Superintendent ordered them to. Are you encountering any of that here in New Hampshire? That is to say, School Boards or school districts feeling not quite ready for the start next week, when most go back.

Dr. Chan:

Well, I do know that school districts have made decisions. Some of them have made decisions to delay school reopening by a week, two weeks, in some situations, to give their communities and their Staff time to prepare. So, this is a decision that I think local school districts are making.

We are attempting to support them the best that we can. As I mentioned, we worked with the Department of Education to help put in guidance that we thought was protective for schools with the grades, K-12, back-to-school guidance. That still is out there. That's still in effect.

We've been having weekly calls with school partners -- Administrators, Nurses -- for the last six weeks-or-so. Sometimes a call every week or sometimes a couple a week to try and address the questions and concerns that are arising on how to implement that guidance, how to troubleshoot problems that arise on the ground, just to be available to answer questions and concerns. So we're continuing to have those weekly calls.

But ultimately, each school is in a different location, right? Different student population, different class sizes, different facilities, different ability to implement the various layers of protection; and so it becomes very difficult to come up with a one size fits all for schools. And that's why, one, the guidance has been flexible, and, two, why we've been working with schools and districts to try and figure out how they can best implement that guidance for their local situation.

So to address your specific question, school districts are making these decisions and many have made decisions on when they will reopen, relative to their local situations. But, we have been in contact with many school districts and remain available, if they have questions or needs.

Would you have the ability to close down a school? Or would you defer to them?

Dr. Chan:

Well, I think a lot of things that we do in Public Health really is we approach it in a collaborative way, right? A lot of the guidance that we put out there is not necessarily a requirement. We're not a regulatory entity that's going to go in and fine somebody if they different follow our guidance. But in all things, we want to work collaboratively with our partners on the ground. That includes the schools.

And so, if a school gets to a point where we feel like a temporary move to remote learning may be beneficial, because they're having an outbreak, or high levels of potential transmission within the school, we will work with them around trying to do that, or implementing other layers of protection to build in additional protection in the school operations.

I just have a question for the Commissioner about current cases that we're already seeing. We know in Bedford three students have confirmed cases of COVID-19 that the Superintendent there said was from a summer camp. Is there any -- a sports summer camp.

Commissioner Shabinette:

Yeah.

Any information on that camp that parents should know? Is there an outbreak you might be monitoring there? Were they following guidelines?

Commissioner Shabinette:

So we are following a cluster of illness with a hockey camp that occurred down in Nashua. And we were able to identify all the close contacts for the people that participated in that camp. So a combination of kids, or youth, that participated and the Staff, we had a dozen-or-so cases. Out of that not -- and it pulled people from other States than just New Hampshire, right?

So through our contact investigation and all of our tracing, we were able to identify everybody. So we haven't done any public notification. But we can confirm that there is a cluster of illness associated with it.

And then, Governor, just a follow-up question for you: given that these cases came from a sports camp, any consideration into relooking allowing sports here in the State and/or what that may bring, when you have districts mingling with each other at athletic events?

Governor Sununu:

Sure; yeah, we've had a couple cases that surround youth sports camps over the course of the summer. We've looked at both the guidance, making sure that they're being adhered to. I think in some of the cases they weren't, frankly. And so, again, I think, as Dr. Chan expressed, we always want to work collaboratively with folks, making sure they understand what those guidelines are, making sure that they're following them, making sure that if they are being intentionally ignored. There can be an enforcement action, if the Attorney General's Office were to take that path.

But we're trying to work as collaboratively as we can in those processes. Right now, we're not looking at changing anything. But we're kind of keeping an eye. The hope is that a lot of the summer camps are really -- now that a lot of the kids are going back to school, they're becoming more students as part of leagues, you went get as much of that intermingling, if you will, that we've had over the past six weeks, which has caused some concern and a few issues here-and-there.

So, again, we just want to stay on top of it. Luckily, I think we're a State where each of these individual cases can be addressed individually. It isn't just, well, we have 100 issues over here and 100 issues over there. We can really address them one-on-one with the organizers, with the parents. And as Commissioner Shabinette outlined, because of the way this stuff is structured as part of our guidance and as part of the camp structure, we can quickly identify who's involved -- parents and kids -- and make sure we identify those clusters of illness very quickly.

Is there a difference between a cluster and an outbreak? I know you said about a dozen kids. Would that be considered an outbreak or...

Commissioner Shibinette:

So, it certainly can be considered an outbreak. It just depends on the degree of transmission, where they're located, things like that. Typically, so for the CDC definition of an outbreak has changed a little bit over the course of the pandemic. But traditionally it's three-or-more with evidence of transmission, right?

And that's sometimes more difficult to figure out than what it seems. When you look at a workplace cluster or outbreak, for example, if you have an outbreak and you have three employees test positive, are they three that transmitted to each other? Or are they three disparate cases that come in? So that's, a lot of times, what we're figuring out.

And for cases like at the youth camp that we're talking about, the kids that were involved, and even the Staff that were involved, had participated in several different camps over the course of several weeks. So it was like tracking them from New Hampshire to Connecticut to Massachusetts, and where they all came up with it. Yeah, I think that a cluster is when we're unsure about the transmission within the camp. An outbreak is usually widespread transmission within that group of people. So, yeah.

Can you say what that facility was in Nashua? And have they been ordered to close or anything, or do extra cleaning? Or have you looked into that?

Commissioner Shibinette:

So I don't have the facility. It was in Nashua at a athletic complex. It was Pro Ambitions Hockey Camp was the organizer of that event. And so, right now we're really working with them to make sure that they followed the guidelines and the guidance from Public Health.

For the most part, like I said, our contact investigation is more or less done. We've identified everybody. It doesn't mean there's not going to be secondary infections that come beyond that. What that means is the youth that participated, did they pass it to household members, right? So there can still be things that come out of that. But right now, we've identified everybody involved.

Is there a breakdown of how many of those were students or Staff, and age kind of breakdown?

Commissioner Shibinette:

There were eight participants, or youth, and four Staff, for a total of 12.

And what did their illnesses look like? Were they symptomatic? Were they asymptomatic?

Commissioner Shibinette:

I don't have that information. Yeah.

I have a question about the Trump rally. Your mask rule got its first opportunity to be put before the public, where you had 100 people and cameras rolling. And not everyone that I could see was wearing a mask. First, how does that make you feel, after you've made explicit requests to everyone? And is there any recourse? Or what does that say to future events?

Governor Sununu:

So, I'll say this. From the onset, the organization, I think, was very clear that you had to have a mask to attend. I think every time I saw any form of the invitations, or any of the announcements, they always tried to make it very clear to the participants, you had to wear a mask. When you came in, they made sure you were wearing one, or you were given one. And they were making announcements while the actual event was going on.

So, from the organization's standpoint, they did quite a lot to make sure. And if you compared this rally, just from what I've seen in some of the other States, where there's been significant rallies around the President, I think we can say with certainty that more people were wearing masks at this event than any other to-date. If there was any sort of enforcement action, that's really a call for the Attorney General's Office, after-the-fact.

So what did it make you feel, when you had basically said this is the healthy thing to do in New Hampshire, and these people are not doing that?

Governor Sununu:

I guess I feel the same way when I'm in the grocery store and I see people walking around the grocery store without a mask, or just not taking it seriously, or whatever it might be. Again, we've tried to maintain a very high level around this message, in terms of its importance, whether it's in schools or universities, or protests, or rallies, or whatever it might be.

And so, I don't want to single out one event makes me feel better or worse than another. But I think any time I see folks that aren't either taking it seriously or doing everything they can do to maintain the social distancing, wearing a mask, to keep our numbers low and the mitigation where it needs to be, I guess I get frustrated with all of it.

But, I think we're doing really, really well overall as a State. I think that's a win for the State. We got a long way to go, to be sure. And so, anything we can do to keep that elevated message about wearing the masks and setting an example, I think, for others is very important, as well.

And Governor, is the State tracking any potential transmission from Motorcycle Week, or that rally, or large gatherings? And if so, is there any sort of State-level guidance on attending some of those larger events?

Governor Sununu:

Right now, we don't have any direct evidence of outbreaks or anything like that from the Motorcycle weekend. I mean, if there were either cases, or outbreaks, or clusters of illness from the weekend, as a whole, or from any of the particular events surrounding that weekend, we'd have our contact tracing. Everything would be followed up. But right now, there's no evidence of that.

And for the rally, as well?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, nothing for the rally.

And I just have one more, while you're up there. Considering school is happening and a few of those cases we've seen pop up, which I know the Doctor said is not a surprise, and a couple with the sports camps, what's sort of just your message to parents and kids, and maybe School Staff, just if they have concerns or high anxiety just about life kind of going on right now in the most normal way we can?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so I think to your point there's a lot of anxiety, lot of concerns by family members and parents around schools or camps, or whatever it might be. And that's justified, right? We see what happens in other parts of the country when guidance isn't followed or the message isn't there. You can see this virus spread very, very quickly. Commissioner Shihinette has talked about the attack rate, if you will, within a single facility. This is a very aggressive virus and can spread very quickly.

So all of those concerns are very valid. And again, individuals have to feel comfortable the situation they're in. If you or your child, or you don't feel comfortable about what your child is doing or the activities, then they should absolutely withdraw from that activity. Again, if there's clear violation of guidance or something like that, the State can always come in and work with those organizers, whether it be a facility or a camp, or whatever it might be. But parents need to make sure they're making the best decisions for themselves, and make sure that they're comfortable in those situations.

I think it's everyone's hope and understanding that this is not forever, right? There is a light at the end of this tunnel at some point. And I really believe that. I think all of us believe that very strongly. I don't think it's next month, but hopefully either towards the end of the year or as we enter into 2021. So some sacrifices will have to be made. Some traditional extracurricular activities might have to be skipped this year, so to say, if that's the path that those individuals are choosing.

I'll say that we feel very comfortable with the guidance that we've put into place. Obviously for the vast majority of times, the guidance is working in New Hampshire. Look at the results, right? I'm a big believer that talk is one thing, but results are what really matters. And the fact that we've been able to keep this COVID spread low here within our borders, knowing how bad it was just to the south of us in Massachusetts just a few months ago, ground zero for COVID, and we've done a great job as our team. And that deserves a big thank you.

But parents and individuals have to understand, at the end of the day, it's all about our personal responsibility to ourselves and our family, not put ourselves into situations where the virus could spread; to be able to react in those situations. I mean, there could be a situation where you're in a facility, or maybe you're in a restaurant or a bar, or whatever it might be. And when you walked in, there was lots of potential for social distancing and all of that. But, within a matter of minutes, a bunch of people come in, right? You got to be able to react to that and say, you know what? This is getting a little tight for my liking, right? Doesn't make me comfortable. Maybe folks just aren't following the guidance. Maybe folks aren't wearing a mask. Pull yourself out. I mean, it's okay. You got to stay vigilant, I think, as a State but

also as individuals to make sure that we keep these numbers low and we get through this as successfully as possible.

What's the State's guidance for people who attended the Trump rally or Motorcycle Week? I know in Londonderry, that town is asking its residents who went to either one of those events to get tested. Do you agree with something like that? Should people get tested?

Governor Sununu:

Well, anybody who wants a test can get a test. Anyone who was either at that rally or in a grocery store who thinks that they were in a situation where COVID might have been passed, they should go get tested, of course. But that goes for anybody in any situation. It's really not specific to that rally, or to the Black Lives Matter protests, or to any specific situation. All situations apply. If you think you might have been infected or been in a situation where that could have happened, of course we recommend folks to get a test. Yeah.

Governor, Health and Human Services now looking at potential spending reductions if we don't get more aid from Congress in dealing with COVID. At what point do you think you need to present possible spending reductions, because they could be real? Is that the end of September?

Governor Sununu:

Are you talking about the State Health and Human Services?

Yes.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so I apologize. Will you repeat the -- I thought you were talking about Federal HHS. I apologize.

No, I'm sorry. The State Health and Human Services has hired a Consultant to look at potential spending reductions. So when would you present these potential spending reductions to the people? How long can we wait for Congress to do something?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I mean, obviously if Congress can actually do something, that will be wonderful. I think everybody agreed it'd be great if they did their job, to be a little frank about it. But barring that, we're already looking at asking each of the individual Departments to meet certain metrics in terms of where we think spending reductions might be possible.

In some of the smaller Departments, those potential reductions are easy to identify. In some of the larger Departments, I mean, like Health and Human Services, you have to understand Health and Human

Services accounts for 30% to 40%-or-more of our State budget, depending on whether you include the Federal dollars or the general funds. So there's a lot there.

And I think any time you have the opportunity to bring in an outside group that has national experience and successes, looking at efficiencies, bringing in different ideas, that's always an opportunity, whether it's Health and Human services or some of our other larger Departments. And it isn't just about cutting costs. It's about finding efficiencies, finding duplicative services, making sure that we can maintain levels of programs without maybe a lot of the administrative costs or a lot of the inefficiencies that can typically come with State Government. So, in a way, it's an opportunity to look at maybe to do things a little differently, but still get the same or even better results with efficiency.

Holly Ramer with the Associated Press:

Hi. This question is for Dr. Chan. What do you advise schools about reopen cafeterias. I was told about one high school where more than 100 kids are eating in the cafeteria at the same time. And obviously you can't wear a mask while you're eating. But does that sounds appropriate with that many kids in one room?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, thanks for that question. This is actually a question we've been frequently getting on our weekly calls with school and school partners, these exact type of situations. In this case, you're talking about a school cafeteria.

And it's hard to answer questions on specific situations, because each school and each school facility is going to be a little bit different in terms of their student population and their space, size, like cafeteria size, for example. But what I can say is that our guidance and our recommendations around events like eating, where students have to let their masks down, food is going in their mouth. Possibly spit saliva is coming out; is to try and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet between students, however that's possible. Sometimes that may be possible in the classroom. It might require students moving to a cafeteria and trying to maintain spacing between students.

And in situations where it may be difficult to space students 6 feet apart, I'm aware that some school districts, some buildings may not even have cafeterias or lunchrooms, that there are other layers of protections. We go back again to the principle of trying to implement layers of protection into operations. And so, if a student classroom needs to have their lunch in the classroom and they're not able to maintain 6 feet of distance between students for letting the masks down, eating food, for example, that they could then look to implement some type of barrier, hard, plastic plexiglass-type barriers between students, and then looking at cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.

So, it's hard to comment on a specific situation. But these are the type of situations that we've been getting on a weekly basis from schools. And we've been trying to help address questions and concerns arising in these types of situations. And there's general guidance that we try and apply to these situations around incorporating social distancing and facemask use, and cleaning and disinfection, and cohorting of students to the extent possible within schools. And so, these same general principles we look to apply not only to businesses and schools, and classrooms, but also to situations like cafeterias, where people may be consuming food. Thanks.

Donna Jordan with The Colebrook Chronicle:

Yes, good afternoon and thank you for taking my question today. I have two questions. The first one is, I was wondering if you could advise us. What percent of State employees are still working remotely? What Departments that might be, and is there an anticipated timeline for when they're going to return to their offices, or if you might even have a handle on percentage of businesses in the State who still have employees still working from home? My second question is really probably a little more philosophical. The general quality of anyone's life is going to work, going to school, going to a social event like a movie, or a play, or a concert, especially in their hometown or near where they live. We still don't know the long-term fallout from the pandemic regarding the businesses that will be able to continue operating and the freedom of having a social life, where you just say, let's go out to dinner and a movie. Let's go out to dinner and a play, whatever. But theatrical organizations, concert organizers, venues, remote learning, and remote working, everything is completely different from what we're used to. So I'm wondering, especially for things like small nonprofit organizations, which we have many of here in Northern New Hampshire, it's almost too complicated for them to follow the guidelines. Are you concerned that our community life -- all of it, school, work, play -- will change radically from this? Do you think it will take an extreme amount of time to rebuild interest and confidence in going back out again? Will this redefine our lives in New Hampshire? What's this going to look like when we come out of this? And is it January? Is it July? So basically that's more of a philosophical question. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Sure. So I'll try to answer the first part first. What percent of State employees continue to work remotely? I can tell you that at one point we had well over half the State employees working remotely. I think it was something in the 70%-plus range early on, or even more. And I can tell you, as of right now, I think well under 50% are still working remotely.

Ultimately, there may be a lot of folks -- and I think this applies for State employees or even private businesses, that continue to work remotely, permanently or at least semi-permanently, because we have kind of increased our technological enhancements. I think a lot of folks have found a good comfort working remotely, while maintaining their productivity. That's a very important part of it. If folks are working remotely, can maintain their productivity, meet their goals and their metrics of their Department, and they're comfortable doing so, and their Managers are okay with that team balance, then of course then that's an opportunity that we're always willing to keep exploring.

But, just over the past few weeks, we've seen a lot more individuals start coming back into work. I think now that summer's done and children are going back to school, I think you'll see a lot of folks coming back in that were previous working remotely. I think they'll start coming back more into the office.

There's obviously a benefit in many cases with kind of that team dynamic, working with your coworker hand-in-hand -- well, 6 feet away and hand-in-hand, maintaining distancing, but again working as a team to achieve your goals within your Department or your section. So I don't know the exact percentage today that are in. But I think it's safe to say that we're under 50% in terms of still working remotely.

But long-term, like I said, that could be permanent for certain Departments or Divisions, or individuals, because the roles and responsibilities, and what we do in the State is so varied. Every Department's different. Every individual's different. There are a lot of folks who -- let's think of the

Bank Examiners, for example, at the Department of banking. They're remote almost all the time anyways, right? They're going, working with banks and individuals as part of their audit process. I don't think they traditionally come into the office a whole lot. But they traditionally work remotely. So maybe there's an opportunity to keep them more remote and again still keep their productivity high. So every individual and situation is different. But clearly a lot of folks are starting to come back in.

And again, just as a reminder, there are about 10,000 -- I'm ballparking that number -- about 10,000 State employees. And they're not all in Concord. They're not all at the State House or just in Concord. They're really all across the State in a lot of our service offices across the State: Environmental Services Office; Health and Human Services Offices; the Public Health Network; whatever it might be. A lot of folks decentralize out of Concord. And so, again, all of those situations may be a little varied, as well.

I'll do my best not to go on too long on your philosophical question. It's a good question. I don't think that we're in for a long-term radical change, as we come out of this COVID pandemic. Things in our lives will be very different. Sometimes they are simple, but impactful things, such as online buying. I think people are just going to really be buying a lot more of their stuff online. We've seen a giant acceleration of that, seen a lot more technology that is driven to that.

In terms of how we interact with our communities and our neighborhoods, I firmly believe that a lot of that will get back to "normal". I think that human nature -- and this is kind of the philosophical aspect. And I'm an Engineer, not an philosopher by any means. But I think that, as a whole, people want to see each other. They want to be in settings.

We may be maintaining our distancing and just be a little smarter about how we do things to maintain the health and safety aspects, as we slowly evolve out of the virus, hopefully, in 2021. But I think, overall, a lot of those communal events are still going to take place in our communities, especially in a place like New Hampshire where our communities and kind of our connection to our localities is so important, right?

So, my hope and my belief is that we're not going to have a lot of fundamental change. It might look a little different, but not a lot of fundamental change long-term, but maybe in the workplace environment and using some of the technological aspects that we've kind of been pushed into. And hopefully again that's not a hindrance, but has just created an opportunity for us in our communities.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Governor, last night Democrats Andre Volinsky [sic] and Dan Feltes said they'd support commuting the death sentence of convicted Cop killer Michael Addison. Do you agree with them on that? Would you make that decision? And if not, what message does that send to the Cops on the beat, the City of Manchester, and to the Briggs family?

Governor Sununu:

Well, let me be very clear. I would never support commuting the sentence of a convicted Cop killer like Michael Addison. I heard that clip. I was quite shocked by it. I think everybody in Manchester should be quite shocked by it.

And I think they are this morning, frankly. I think it sends the absolute wrong message that, when you have a convicted Cop killer, that you're going to now decide that you just might commute that sentence. It's the wrong approach. It's the wrong message. And I'd never support it.

Todd Bookman with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Yes, thank you. This question is either for Dr. Chan or Commissioner Shibinette. Last Thursday, Plymouth State University announced that 18 students and Faculty had tested positive during sort of prescreening. And seven of the students were listed as residents of Plymouth according to the school. The State's map of active cases continues to show zero cases for Plymouth. The brand-new map of school cases that you announced at the beginning of this press conference also shows zero cases for Plymouth. Can you explain why these cases aren't showing up, and what the expected lag time is going to be, when a university announces positive cases and when those cases actually get sort of included in the State's data releases?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you. So, yes, 17 students and some from out-of-state, some from New Hampshire, 7 from the Plymouth area, currently, and, as of last week, the timeframe you're talking about, I'm told that they were all recovered or off quarantine at that point. That's why they're not showing up.

But what I expect that you're going to see specifically in our school dashboard, which will also include universities and colleges, that you're going to see a daily update for everybody that tests positive at a college, a university, or the K-12 schools. So I think that the dashboard is probably your go-to place to get the most up-to-date information on schools and universities.

Tony Schinella with Patch:

Oh, thank you so much. First a quick comment and then a question: to all of the folks involved in the Reopening Task Force, thank you for all of your efforts, especially on the guidance on the adult recreational sports this summer. Many of our Coed Softball Coaches and players in the Concord area had a really good time this season playing on a limited basis. And we appreciate all the guidelines and all the work that everybody put into that. Now, for the question: Governor, since the \$300 Lost Wages Assistance Program was initiated, I've received a number of notes from readers, as well as some screenshots from a Facebook group about some of the many problems dealing with Employment Security. Dozens and dozens of people have remarked about issues that they're having with filling out questionnaires wrong, rejection letters, even though they received benefits before, for all those trying to get answers, rudeness from State employees, the gamut. What can be done about this? I mean, I know everybody's working as hard as they can. But I'm literally in the last three days, I'm stunned by the kinds of responses I'm getting from people who are very frustrated about the fact that they can't get their benefits right now.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so we've heard similar concerns. Just to take a step back, the \$600 stipend that Congress had originally authorized disappeared on July 31st. Because of that, the President initiated his own, through an Executive Order, tried to create an opportunity that Congress just couldn't get done. So he created the \$300 program. But it's actually a very different program. Technically it's done through FEMA. And so, therefore the application process is different. And we completely understand, going back and looking at it. It's only been up about a week-or-so. Going back and looking at it, they are asking questions that are confusing. It's not as simple as kind of the first time doing it, because it's just such a different program.

So we're working with Employment Security and the folks at Unemployment Insurance to make sure that we are fixing that process. We're streamlining it. We have a vendor that we've brought in to

help provide some of the teams that answer the phone calls. I think getting them educated more on what this process is, how to answer those questions, because they are all a bit new and it is a different process. So we've heard the exact same concerns. They're being addressed. And I think we will have a much more streamlined application process in the coming days. Great.

I have one more question.

Governor Sununu:

Paula, if you didn't have another question, I'd be disappointed.

Well, I've used this analogy about the Appalachian Trail in the past to sort of get an idea of where you think we are. And it seems to never work out for me. So I'm going to try a new one.

Governor Sununu:

What mile are we on?

Bingo.

Governor Sununu:

What mile? How did I?

The Boston Marathon, okay?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, well, I did that one, too.

That's why I think we should try it.

Governor Sununu:

Okay.

So, do you think we've already hit Heartbreak Hill, or are we just about there? Or where do you think on the Boston Marathon course this journey we're on is?

Governor Sununu:

Okay. 2004, I'm running. I made it on my bucket list. I couldn't run 3 miles. And I said I was going to have my son who was going to be born. I said, I'm putting it on the bucket list. I'm going to run the Boston Marathon.

So we finally get to marathon day. And you get right before Heartbreak Hill. You come around this corner. There's a Fire Station there. And I'm exhausted. I mean, I'm like, I'll be lucky to survive the race. And Tom Brady was standing on this milk carton waving at all the runners. And you get, holy cow, there's Tom Brady, very excited. And you get this burst of energy and you start hitting it. And then, you see Heartbreak Hill right in front of you.

Given how low our COVID numbers are, how strong our economy is, I feel like we're kind of seeing Tom Brady. We're getting a breath of fresh air. We're feeling good. We're in a really good place here in New Hampshire. But, yes, Heartbreak Hill is very much still ahead of us. And that's a reality we're going to have to face.

Now, when you're running your first Boston Marathon, you have no idea whether you're going to make it to the top of that hill easily. You can glide and kind of get to that finish. Or you're really going to stumble through it.

I feel like we've trained hard. We've got all of our systems in place. We got our PPE. We got testing capacity. We got all of these things to be successful and get there. But you just don't know what the fall's going to bring.

We've seen other States take the foot off the gas a little bit, to be blunt. And you saw some of their numbers shoot through the roof. And they had to back up. They had to create more restrictions. They had to do this and do that, things they weren't planning.

I think we've kept our foot on the gas the whole way. I think we're in a very good position to weather whatever might come this fall. We can manage through it, to be sure. So I feel very confident going into it. But I do know that it is very likely our numbers, as we've always said, we're likely going to see a second or third surge. Our numbers are going to rise.

We're already seeing it a little bit in our university system. We're likely going to see it in our schools. It doesn't mean we panic and shut everything down. It means we really focus on our plan. Use the tools and the training we've kind of put into place over the past three or four months. And provide that success for the State of New Hampshire.

So, I don't know if that was a good analogy or not. But that's really where I feel where we are. I feel we're in a really good place now. But we are not taking that for granted. We are not claiming victory by any means. And we know we still have some of our toughest days ahead. But we're prepared.

We got great people on the ground. We really are prepared with the guidance documents, with working with schools, the direct communication, which is one of the most valuable tools in a crisis, the transparency, very, very important, I think. And that's giving a lot of us a sense of confidence that we can really manage whatever might come.

Our hospital number is six, seven, eight people today, something like that. We could literally have 1,000 or 2,000 individuals in hospitals, if we really needed to do that. And hopefully that doesn't come, but we could even manage if it got that bad.

So we have a lot of capacity to manage through this and make sure that we can be successful. And I really do believe, come early 2021, we really are going to see whether it's through a vaccine, or other pharmaceuticals, or other solutions come to bear that just provide a lot of opportunity to get back to normal, whatever that might look like, and really be a lot more flexible. But until then, I think we really need to know that the hill's ahead of us and we're going to have some tough days. But we can get through it.

But there will be a finish line?

Governor Sununu:

And there will be a finish line. That, I absolutely guarantee. There will be a finish line at some point here. Yeah. But, look, let's face it. Even after the finish, you're still exhausted, right? Okay. Well, great. Well, thanks, everyone, for joining us. We will be back on Thursday with some further updates. And again, we know the schools are out and happening. Universities, students are coming back. So there's a lot of activity, right?

Our numbers are good, but we do have a lot of fluctuation going on, a lot of activity. We're hitting the fall. It's getting a little bit cooler. And so, we're really going to keep making sure we're keeping our eyes on the numbers, keeping people informed and transparent about all the data that we can.

Check out the dashboard, if you haven't checked out the dashboard. Kind of get used to it. It's great to kind of go in there and almost play around a little bit to see where the data and the demographics are. It's really a great tool for our citizens. So if you haven't checked that out, be sure to do that and we will see you guys on Thursday. Thank you very much.