



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

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining us, another beautiful day out there. We're going to get started before we open up for questions with a Public Health update from Dr. Beth Daly. Dr. Daly?

Dr. Daly:

Great, good afternoon, everyone. As of this morning, there have now been 34 million people globally who have been infected with COVID-19, with 7.2 million here in the United States. And this includes more than 207,000 people who have died.

The number of cases here in the United States has mainly plateaued with around 40,000 new cases each day. And then, likewise, in New Hampshire, our case counts, while slightly increased from a month-or-so ago, have plateaued and we're seeing, on average, 35 to 40 cases each day.

Today, we will be reporting an additional 52 new infections. This will bring our total case count to 8,317 people. We're not reporting any new hospitalizations. So that remains at 738 people who have been hospitalized with COVID-19. And sadly, we will be reporting two new deaths today. These are people associated with a long-term care facility. And this brings our total number of people who have died in New Hampshire to 441.

More recently, some of the infections that have been reported to us each day have been associated with institutional settings, such as long-term care facilities and schools. However, many are not and they serve as a reminder that we should all continue to take our COVID precautions in order to prevent transmission in our communities.

During our case investigations and contact tracing efforts, we have interacted now with more than 30,000 people in New Hampshire. And the vast majority of these individuals have been completely cooperative with this process and want to do the right things. However, we've also observed that people have become more weary with COVID-19 and sometimes more difficult when we've asked them to stay at home.

We obviously recognize that COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on all of our lives, and especially when you're asked to stay at home for a long period of time due to either illness or exposure. These people are presented with very significant challenges, either financially or personally, and otherwise.

So, what we're asking, though, is that we all need to continue working together to prevent COVID-19 in order to keep our schools and economy open, and then allow us to all go back to our normal lives as quickly as possible. So we need the public to do their part by answering our phone calls and then following our guidance, if you are diagnosed with COVID-19 or identified as a close contact so someone with COVID-19. And this will help us all to protect our family, friends, and our community. Thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon. I'm going to do a long-term care update today, and then do some testing updating today. So we still have Mountain View, which is still in outbreak status. They did have a final round of testing yesterday. So we are waiting for their results to come back before we clear them. So we're hopeful there.

We also are announcing two new additional outbreaks today at long-term facilities: one at Bedford Hills Center. Bedford Hills Center has 33 residents and 14 Staff for a total of 47 that have tested positive. And then, also Warde Health Center in Windham that has had three residents and one Staff, for a total of four that have tested positive for COVID-19. Both of these are new since last week, and we are working with them to do serial testing on their facility.

Excuse me. For a testing update, some good news to share, we have a testing dashboard that's going to go live today. We're very excited about this. We are always striving to improve our dashboards so that you have the most up-to-date information at a click of a button. And it's very interactive. If you haven't been on our dashboard, I definitely suggest that you take a look.

Our testing dashboard is going to be definitely interactive today. It will have some information both around the testing by community, like by county. And then also it'll have a separate link for UNH. Now, UNH, we are reporting out separately right now. And we expect that in the next week or so that it will be automated into our dashboard.

Additionally, we've heard over the last couple of weeks that we've seen more antigen-based testing coming into New Hampshire, both through all of the nursing homes getting their machines, and in the last couple of weeks they've been ramping up the use of their machines. Some of our assisted living facilities have already received the BinaxNOW cards. And we have a variety of different independent Providers that are using antigen machines now over the last couple of weeks.

So prior to today, antigen-based machines have been considered probable outcomes, right? We've often done an antigen-based test and then followed that up with a PCR test. Because of the widespread distribution of our antigen-based tests, we are now going to be considering those antigen-positives a positive in our system.

So, although we've always treated an antigen-positive the same as a PCR-positive, we've never counted them in our numbers. The number was extremely small. But what we've seen over the last two or three weeks is the use is going up. So as of today, we are going to start counting all of those antigen-positives into our numbers. And you will see overnight that our number of positives, our case numbers are going to go up by 126. And that is from folding in those antigen-positives into our case numbers.

Now, the antigen-negatives are a little bit more difficult, because they're point of care. So what we're doing is we're building a platform so that our Providers that are using our antigen machines, specifically around the BinaxNOW cards that'll be coming out, we expect to be receiving hundreds of thousands of those cards over the next several months.

So we will have a portal where they'll be able to electronically submit those negatives into our system. So we expect that over the next couple of weeks. And that should really give the public and anybody that's looking at our dashboards a really complete picture of both our PCR testing and our antigen tests, which will be culled out separately. You'll see it. It's very transparent, when we're going to be reporting our antigen numbers.

So it really will be a complete picture in its great progression as we progress the technology of how we test people. Really being able to fold that into everything we're reporting is really, really important. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

So, great. Thank you very much, Commissioner. And thank you, Dr. Daly. A couple things that we want to talk about, and then we will open it up for questions, first to really start as an expansion of what Commissioner Shibinette was just discussing, in terms of the antigen tests and a lot of the news surrounding the incoming shipment of more rapid tests into New Hampshire, as we have reminded citizens throughout this pandemic, New Hampshire really has done, I think, an incredible job of setting a high standard, a gold standard, if you will, of making sure that everybody that wants a test can have a test.

We have our very low percent-positivity rate because we're able to test at such a high capacity here. And obviously, that's a huge credit to both the team at the Department of Public Health, but our partners from the hospitals to the community centers, some of the folks within the mobile testing sites, and the men and women of our National Guard that helped stand that up, some of the State Employees that have given their time. So, a lot of folks have really come together to make sure that we do have a lot of this testing capacity.

This past week, we found out that the State is set to receive 25,000 what they call the BinaxNOW antigen rapid tests. First 25,000 come in next week with a total of 400,000 tests coming to the State of New Hampshire by the end of the year.

As has been discussed by the Commissioner and Dr. Chang, and Dr. Daly, we do have a very good system of community testing sites set up currently here throughout New Hampshire. And we're going to rely on those testing sites to assist getting all of these new Binax tests out to our citizens. The community testing sites, they have their procedures in place. They have their PPE available. They have the training to perform the tests, and they know how to segregate individuals, if they're symptomatic.

So folks will be able to use one of the 25 testing locations around the State to make sure that they can have access. And that access is what really testing is all about. It's great if you have hundreds of thousands of tests. But if citizens can't easily get the tests and easily get those results, the system tends to really break down.

These Binax rapid tests can be done for anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, including primarily we're focusing on our K-12 students and Teachers, frontline Healthcare Workers, Emergency Responders, other folks in what we call those high-risk populations. But again with 25,000 tests per week coming into the State, it's going to provide a lot of opportunity and really take a lot of burden off the traditional PCR testing system that, in theory, should help a lot of our turnaround times for PCR tests to go down, and again allow folks to get results in about 10 to 15 minutes. I mean, it's really that fast and that simple of a test that folks can have for their kids.

And it is a gamechanger in terms of flexibility, specifically for families. So if you have a child, for example, that might have symptoms of a cold or a flu, or COVID, you're not sure what it is. We don't want those families to have to keep those kids out for weeks on end, potentially. To be able to go and get, and utilize one of these Binax tests, have the results in about 15 minutes, and hopefully comes up negative, and you're kind of back on track for that student to go to get back into the school system a lot quicker and sooner than maybe a traditional PCR turnaround.

So it's a very noninvasive test. We're going to have them located all across the State. And I just think it's going to be an awesome gamechanger for families that are just looking for flexibility, so kids don't have to be out of school, or our workforce doesn't have to be out for extended periods of time.

Two other issues we want to talk about nonrelated to testing, first one being GOFERR opportunities. One is more of a reminder than anything. The State is still accepting applications for our Farmer Relief Program. This is one of the first relief programs we created. But it's very important, especially now. A lot of farms are bringing in harvest. The farms are actually -- both the large and small farms are, I think, doing fairly well. But there is still a lot of COVID impact there.

And so, there is financial opportunity for nondairy farms to apply for relief for COVID-19-related expenses, or lost sales related to COVID: cleaning, sanitizing costs, whatever it really may be. These farms can go to the second round of applications. That can be found at goferr.nh.gov/apply. You see it on the screen right there, goferr.nh.gov/apply. And that will be open until October 15th. So there's about two more weeks for the farmers to get in onto that program.

And then, finally, there's actually one new program. As we enter the fall, we're really focusing on schools: how the schools are reopening; the opportunities that we're trying to create for those students that might be in either a fully-emersed program in class, a hybrid program, or those very few districts that have gone to a fully-remote program.

But something we always try to talk about is just ensuring that those kids do have adequate access to student-enrichment programs. We know that these can make such a difference in student lives. These could be afterschool educational programs. A lot of these programs require some funds, require some extra effort that might not be there right now. And they're just so important. That socialization, that team connectivity can be done in a safe and, I think, productive way, and allow a lot of these opportunities to really flourish in our communities.

We've talked a couple months ago about the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club, and some of these programs over the summer that we've put millions of dollars in so that some of their programs were up-and-running over the summer for those kids that may have been feeling a little isolated and wanted that additional opportunity. And a lot of those programs have bridged into the schoolyear, which is a very good thing.

Well, today, we're announcing an additional \$1.5 million. Oh, look, we just added a half a million to it. It's actually \$2 million. I literally just added a half a million on the way over here. But it will be \$1.5 million because, in talking to the Department of Education, there's just a lot of programs there. We don't want to leave anybody behind.

So these could be programs, afterschool or enrichment programs that schools work with that could be for problem-solving skills, technical skills, personal development for our kids. A couple examples that came up this past week, which I think just really hit home, one was the Girls at Work. Girls at Work is this incredible program run out of Manchester that provides young girls real-world skills, if you will, hands-on skills, building things. They built the bench in my backyard, frankly. They opened up a new location in Downtown Manchester, which is great. And they allow hundreds of girls to come in and really not just have the social interaction, but real-work skills that give them confidence, give them that teambuilding, working with others, that peer-to-peer support; phenomenal, phenomenal program.

There's funding shortages that may limit their ability to get some of the programmatic opportunities out to these young girls. And what they're really doing now is providing these kind of workshop kits to these kids all across kind of the Greater Manchester area.

Well, we don't want that to go unsupported. And we do have a lot of flexibility. We've been very smart with spending our CARES Act money. And we have some flexibility right now, as the school year opens up. And so, again, we're going to make sure we provide all the funding to get hundreds and hundreds of those kits out.

Another similar program would be FIRST Robotics. I think a lot of folks know I'm quite passionate about the FIRST Robotics program. It was founded right here in New Hampshire. It's now a worldwide program, one of the most successful enrichment programs that you can find across the entire planet, frankly, founded right here in Manchester.

Our announcement today is very simple. Every school that wants a team, every school that wants a kid, we will pay for the kid. We don't want anyone to be left behind in this process. And so, folks, whether at the schools or Boys & Girls Club, or whatever it might be, they can go to firstnh.org, F-I-R-S-T-N-H.org. That's the FIRST website and find information on now how to get your team organized, signed up. But, again, the State is now going to pick up the cost, because we just don't want cost to be a barrier to the few opportunities that may be provided.

And schools may have a lot of other ideas. And working with the Department of Education, we think that there's just a very big opportunity to keep those doors open. And so we're going to be releasing an application process for that fund in the next couple days-or-so. But we just wanted to give a couple examples of what we're talking about. And again just really whether you're in a fully-remote school program, or you're actually back in class, we just want a lot of these extracurricular programs to be successful, because they are so important for so many kids across the State.

And then, finally, one last comment just on school reopening, we got some good data. We're always looking at different data around the country, and specifically as it is the fall. We're looking at how schools are reopening: the K-12 system, university system. Are we successful? Is the testing where it really needs to be?

A national survey that was released this week did rank New Hampshire public schools in the top five safest in terms of reopening. And I think that's a real testament to the folks at the Department of Public Health, a testament to the guidance documents that we've put in place, and a testament to those communities who really kind of tailored the best operational plan for themselves, the parents, and the kids to be successful as we opened up.

So the fact that New Hampshire is now ranked as one of the safest States to reopen schools is a real point of pride. But it didn't come without a lot of work. And I think, going forward, we have to stay very vigilant and disciplined both in the classrooms and in our homes, and in our communities wearing our masks, maintaining social distancing, doing right by the system that we set up so that we can be successful not just today but really going into the future.

Opening the schools -- I always said opening the schools on day 1 is easy. Keeping them opened and maintaining low levels of COVID, that's the real skill, if you will. And that's, I think, where we've been very, very successful.

As of today, for someone who was asking me a little bit earlier, but as of today about 60 out of 192,000 total students in New Hampshire, about 60 have unfortunately come down with positive cases of COVID. So it's literally a fraction of a percent-positive, which again has allowed a lot of that flexibility to happen within schools, allowed schools to manage when a case does come up.

There've been instances where schools might close for a couple days and make sure that they're cleaning and quarantining kids appropriately, making sure that the Contact Tracing Team has time to do

their job. But overall, we think through this first month of school openings, it has gone very successfully, frankly. And the overall rates of transmission remain minimal statewide.

I want to say I think Stafford County might be the only county where it's deemed moderate. But that's, again, because UNH is in Strafford County. And we obviously have some higher levels over at UNH, nothing that can't be managed. But overall, statewide, the schooling still remains in a minimal stance.

Over 80% of our schools are open in some form. And that's another really good sign. And so, for those who are in a fully-remote learning situation, hopefully they've seen some of the successes that other schools can have, maybe brought some ideas forward in their own districts that can be deemed as successful to allow that opportunity to happen for their students, as well. The sooner, the better; I've found very few students, if any, that have said they're not dying to get back into the classroom.

Teachers want to be back into the classroom. And I think we've shown here in New Hampshire, it can be done very safely and it's just all about creating opportunities for the students. It's all about outcomes for those kids. And again, hat's off to everybody, the entire team across the State, for making it a success so far. We just got to keep it up, right? Got to keep up. So, with that, we can open it up for questions.

Q&A Session

One for the Commissioner about the antigen testing.

Governor Sununu:

Ethan, haven't seen you in a while.

My hair is the same as always. Just a question on the antigen tests, Commissioner. So, just to clarify what you said earlier, you said that by incorporating them into the test count, did you say the daily number has gone up to 126?

Commissioner Shihinette:

It will go up 126, because we're going to take all of the positives from the past several weeks to the last month and incorporate those. So, prior to machines like the Quidel, so if you think back to, like, Abbott ID, right, when there was a negative test with Abbott ID, it was followed up with a PCR test. So we captured every person.

But now that we've moved -- we're still using Abbott ID and we still follow up with a PCR test if needed. But the newer machines like the Quidel and the BinaxNOW, they don't require a follow-up PCR test for a negative test. So that's why it's so important to get those numbers into our numbers, because we're not going to have that follow-up PCR test.

Okay. So, just to clarify, there haven't been any positives that have been missed through the process?

Commissioner Shihinette:

No, there's been no positives. And we treated every positive as if it were the same as a PCR-positive. But we haven't been counting them in our daily count because they're considered probable and not confirmed. So with the mass distribution now of antigen tests, we want to make sure that we have the most accurate numbers that we're reporting out.

Governor, with Mayor Walsh in Boston declaring a holding pattern and putting them into a red zone, how closely are you watching that, certainly given what happened in the spring and how connected we obviously were to the outbreaks there in Boston?

Governor Sununu:

We watch the data in New England and across the country very closely, especially any time there's elevated levels. So, for example, you brought up Mayor Walsh's putting Boston in a red zone. So we kind of look at, okay, what does that mean? How have the numbers in the Greater Boston Area really moved?

I think overall, in Massachusetts, the numbers have been fairly stable, similar to New Hampshire. I think they might have ticked up a little bit, as expected. Boston is really the higher concentration right now of a lot of those areas.

So, no, we watch it very, very closely. And again, it's why I really emphasize. We get these good datapoints. We're ranked one of the safest States to open schools and all of this. Our economy's very strong. But nobody should be relaxed.

I think Dr. Daly brought it up that I know everyone is tired of COVID. And believe me. No one is more tired of COVID than me, trust me. But it is here and it is very serious. And we have to, I think, maintain that vigilance.

So, it's watching other folks' numbers. But I think we've done a phenomenal job. I mean, there's probably a few other things we could do. We don't want to get to a point where we're contracting and restricting, because we've been very successful with our model to-date. But it's really incumbent upon all the citizens to take it very seriously. Wear the masks, maintain the social distancing, and get as much fresh air as possible, hand hygiene. I know Dr. Chan talks about hand hygiene all the time. It works. And our model bears it out, right? I mean, it really worked here.

New York City has seen kind of an increase in the percentage daily. New York has traditionally, throughout this, been kind of a leading indicator, at least for New England, of kind of where the rest of the States will fall. Are you worried that as New York City starts to see an increase that that might spill over to New England in the coming weeks?

Governor Sununu:

Well, I've always said I have no doubt that our numbers will be increasing. I don't think they're going to go up at the level of a Boston or a New York, because of the density and populations that we have, by any means. But our numbers will likely go up.

I'm kind of surprised they haven't gone up more, frankly. I assumed they would have been a little higher than they are now. But, again, I've always said my job's to plan for the worst and really hope for the best. But we are planned and we're ready.

So even if I think our percent positivity's still well-under 1%, unless it got to 4%, 5%, 6%, 7%, like you're seeing in other parts of the country, you're seeing percent-positives well in-excess of that, if you look at what's happening in North Dakota or South Dakota, Iowa. Utah is really spiking, Montana. The reason I look at those States quite a bit is because they have more rural populations but their numbers are still going up. So, they have smaller cities with rural populations, very similar to New Hampshire, on a bigger scale but very similar, as well.

So my point is we're not just watching Boston and New York as the high-density areas. We're watching about how this virus has been able to spread through the fall in some of the more rural States, as well.

Governor, could you and the Commissioner provide any update about the cluster of cases that were found at a Greek Orthodox Church in Portsmouth? And in particular, respond to what the Boston leadership to that church has said that they're going to continue to share a spoon and chalice during services.

Governor Sununu:

Well, I guess I would refer -- there is a cluster over at -- is it St. Nicholas, I think the Greek Church over in the Portsmouth area. And I know both the Department of Public Health and the Attorney General's Office has been in contact with them, making sure they understand the guidance documents and the protocols, and just really encouraging them to follow the guidance and again follow the idea that they really should be isolating and just maintaining as just much physical distance and separation, and just using a lot of those practices that we put in as much as possible.

I understand that the Methodius down in Boston disagrees with some of those protocols and we respect that very much in terms of that separation. We don't want our guidance to interfere with how people practice their religion. But we are going to make sure that we have the guidance there to, again, make those encouragements, make them understand some of the risks and the protocols that can bring a higher level of transmissivity.

And unfortunately, we saw it in this one church. But, like everybody else, we're going to continue to work with them and hopefully encourage them to maintain the safety protocols that would help mitigate the spread of the virus.

Hi, Governor.

Governor Sununu:

Hi, how are you?

How are you? Good. Good to see you.

Governor Sununu:

Good to see you, Paula.

I have a question about hospitals. The hospitals throughout the State, through its representative, Steve Ahnen, spoke to the GOFERR Commission this week and indicated that they're facing \$300 million as a hole before the end of the year. With our issues related to what we've got left in COVID CARES Act money, do you expect a majority of that freed-up money to be able to help those hospitals? Or what's your plan with that?

Governor Sununu:

So the latest data that my office received showed that if you look at the hospitals as a whole, their costs in the State equal just over \$3.6 billion. Their losses, as relative to that cost, is about over \$500 million short. But when you add back in the support that both the State and the Federal Government have given, it comes out to about \$187 million in the red, right? So a few hundred million have now been put back in.

There is about 30% of the Federal money that has been given out to these hospitals still available at the Federal level. So the good news is there's still many, many millions of dollars, maybe hundreds of millions of dollars, frankly, still available across the country. And then, depending on the formulas they might use and how much might get apportioned to New Hampshire is still a bit unknown, because they do change their formulas from time-to-time. So the Federal Government still has a huge opportunity to come in.

But if you look at that delta right now, overall hospitals, according to their own data, are about 5% in the red. It's not nearly as bad as some industries, sure. But we also want to make sure that it's not so bad that folks are closing their doors or anything like that.

I think the good news is, is that our critical access hospitals are actually in the black, if you add back in -- according to their own data are actually in the black if you add back in the grants and the opportunity that the State and the Feds have provided. There are really two hospitals in the State that drive the majority of those losses, unfortunately. And we've tried to provide as much support.

So the long-and-short there is that there is a small shortfall. I think it's manageable. And the State and the Feds will still be there for these hospitals, as it is needed, probably not in aggregate, because in aggregate it's not so bad. But there's just some that are just a little -- were having a little harder time than others, frankly.

But it's something that they could forecast finance, the losses over time, or is there...

Governor Sununu:

You mean with the State funds?

Well, didn't we have already, before the CARES Act money came in, we had a slice of State money, right?

Governor Sununu:

Um-hmm [yes].

Is that all?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I kind of made the promise that we'd put State money up even if the Feds didn't help out. The Feds then came in and really allowed us to use some of their dollars for that same purpose. One thing I don't want to do is ask hospitals to borrow more money. I do believe in grants. You can get yourself overleveraged. It limits their ability to work with their banks in other ways.

So if we do anything, I believe -- and I think the Federal Government would agree with me -- it should be in a grant form. So we don't want to force them to overleverage themselves. But my point is, just to be -- we're going to be really targeted about where those efforts need to be, and work with them very directly, not just as a whole in terms of an organization, but with the specific hospitals where the need is really there and where the costs of COVID have been most impactful.

Hi.

Governor Sununu:

Hi.

Talking about PPE for schools, we keep hearing that schools are in need of more PPE. And I think you've said that there's some CARES Act money for that. Have districts been reaching out to the State? Or is there something they should be doing more?

Governor Sununu:

There have been a couple districts that have reached out to the State. But every time they reach out, we are there for them. I mean, PPE, if there's a need, we can fill it almost immediately. So that should not be a limitation.

I've heard the same thing. Well, we can't open because we don't have enough PPE. That's just simply not true. We can always provide an opportunity, whether it's helping them facilitate the purchases with the State money, or getting them some sort of short-term bridge, while they're waiting for their purchases of PPE to come in. But both funding and PPE are not barriers to opening schools in this State, absolutely not.

I'm going to follow-up and ask about the FEMA money, because a lot of school districts have complained that they budgeted under the understanding that FEMA would provide reimbursement for PPE and other things to open up. FEMA's now said they aren't doing that.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

There was some discussion at the GOFERR Commission this week over whether money from the rest of the \$1.2 billion should go towards schools to help plug those gaps. Where do you stand on that?

Governor Sununu:

Absolutely, there's an opportunity there, sure. So just to rephrase your question for the audience, FEMA originally had made indications and I don't want to call it a commitment, but at least indications that they were going to be there to help pay up to 75% of the schools' costs. Then, they backed off, one of my many frustrations with FEMA. We could sit here with a whole press conference on my FEMA frustrations, frankly.

But that's okay. I think we were very smart with how we managed our dollars. We still have a couple hundred million dollars that we've held knowing that the fall could bring a lot of unknowns. We really tried to plan ahead. And not that we planned for this exact scenario, but we planned for the unknown.

And so, yes, we can be there with our CARES Act funds in making sure we're helping schools pick up those costs. We don't want those costs to be burdened by the schools or by the property taxpayers or anything like that. We have the Federal funds and we're ready to use them.

Governor, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

No.

Your Commission recommended and you approved racial bias training for Law Enforcement.

Governor Sununu:

The LEACT Commission.

Right.

Governor Sununu:

Yes, sir.

Do you think that kind of training should extend to other parts of State Government, such as DCYF Workers or other State Agency Workers that come in contact with the public on a regular basis?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so the question revolves around our Law Enforcement Accountability Commission that came out with their 48 recommendations last week or the week before, a couple weeks ago, which we agreed with all 48. I think all 48 can be implemented, both either through an Executive Order or legislatively.

The question really revolves around the racial bias training that we're going to be implementing as part of Police Standards and Training. And I'll just say John Scippa, who runs Police Standards and Training, has really embraced this, working with the stakeholders and Black Lives Matter, and the County Prosecutors, and all the folks that really had, I think, a great voice in this process, Law Enforcement, itself. It really was a very positive process. And I think John Scippa has a couple ideas and plans on how to get that moving very quickly.

The question is: should we take some of that racial bias training and implement it into other parts of our communities? I think the answer is: sure. I think we should always strive to have more training and more understanding, talking about implicit bias, talking about what's happening in our communities, understanding that just because we're not faced with something today doesn't mean we shouldn't be training for the unknown tomorrow. And just because we think we know how to deal with a situation doesn't mean we truly do know how to deal with a situation.

So the only caveat there is that the training that probably happens with Police Officers and Law Enforcement is probably a little bit different than might happen with Elected Officials or State Workers, or DCYF, or any other parts of our community. But I think the concept of having racial bias training in a variety of different areas of our communities or our State is a very good one and something that we can definitely look at.

Governor, how much PPE is left for the schools? If they were to say, hey, we need help, what do you have in storage?

Governor Sununu:

Well, I can tell you maybe next week we can do kind of a summary of where we are with our stockpiles. We've been building up essentially a two-month stockpile. Essentially we had nothing before. We're building up a two-month stockpile. And most stuff that you're looking at, whether it's gloves or gowns, or things like that, we have a great stockpile for it.

So I guess my rough answer, because I don't have the exact numbers, is we got a lot. We really do. Bringing in PPE is something we've been very, very good at. We still bring it in for the Federal VA, we've gotten so good at it. So we do have a lot of things.

Sometimes hand sanitizer or sanitary wipes, or whatever, might go down one week. Or maybe gloves go down another week. Maybe the hospitals call and they need a whole bunch of gowns, and we got to make another order on those.

But we have a really great system that kind of brings stuff in, able to be replenished, and making sure that we're trying to build to, and in most cases I think we have about that two-month supply. So there's a lot available.

Can you or Dr. Daly provide some more specifics about what's going with this kind of quarantine fatigue? Or people just not listening? I guess we're just trying to figure out what's going on with that problem.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, I'll have Dr. Daly answer that.

Dr. Daly:

So, I think overall what we're seeing is people being tired of hearing about COVID-19. And when they're asked them to quarantine, specifically, not so much isolation -- I think people understand that if they're sick, they need to stay home. It's more the process of staying home when you've had an exposure. It creates lots of challenges for all of us.

I would say overall still the vast majority of people are very fully compliant. But we're just starting to see a little bit increase of people pushing back on that. Sometimes people, they have a tough time accepting that news initially. They might not be very nice to the person who's calling them. We try to have another person call them. And eventually we get people to comply with that.

So, it's not so much an issue of compliance, because we can work through that with the person. It's just more the initial reluctance to quarantine, or pushing back on having to quarantine, for example, with household contacts, because if you stay in the same environment as the person who has COVID-19, you have to stay at home then while they're sick. And then, once they're recovered and they're allowed to go back out in public, because their last date of exposure, then, was the last date that person was infectious, they have to extend their quarantine for 14 days. So they could be in quarantine for a long period of time, and even longer than the person who had COVID-19. So just very difficult and challenging, so we just want people to hang in there and stick with our guidance, working with us to make sure that we're not allowing for a spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

Governor Sununu:

I think we have a few on the phone. Do we have some phone questions?

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Yes, I've got a couple of math questions for the health folks before I have one quick question for the Governor. So maybe we could walk through those one at a time, because math is not my best subject.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Okay. So the rate of infection for students is around 1%, according to the data. Is that higher or lower than the positive test rate for the State, as a whole?

Governor Sununu:

Believe it's slightly lower. Yeah.

Dr. Daly:

Yeah, sorry. Do you mind if I...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I was going to answer and then Beth was going to correct me. But we might as well bring Dr. Daly up.

Dr. Daly:

May I ask if you're referring to the schools dashboard, where it says 1% statewide?

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Yes, I am.

Dr. Daly:

Yeah, that positivity rate on the schools dashboard is actually referencing all of our test data. So that is the statewide overall positivity. It's 1%. But remember, that does not include the UNH data yet. So it's actually much lower than that.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Right.

Dr. Daly:

It might be 0.5%. That's not specific to schools. What you heard the Governor mention earlier is a rough approximation, based on how many school children there are in the State and how many cases we've had recently.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

So the rate of positive tests is smaller among school-age kids. And you mentioned UNH. UNH data shows that the students are far less likely to test positive than the faculty and staff. And I'm wondering if you think that the schools, about one in five, that are yet to offer any in-class instruction, should take into account the actual data showing how demonstratively lower the risk is for these younger people as they make decisions.

Or is there some other risk factor that the schools aren't telling us about, because many parents are contacting us and asking the question, we're the fifth-safest schools in the country, why aren't more of our schools open for classroom instruction?

Governor Sununu:

Well, I think your question brings up a very good point. Now that we have a month's worth of data under our belts for the schools that have been in -- for the kids that have been in school, as you've brought up, it is a very, very low percentage rate, even relative to our already low percentage rate in the general population.

And the hope is that, exactly what you're referencing, that some of the schools that are in a fully-remote position right now will look at that data, look at the guidance that we've laid out, look at the -- we have the when-to-change metrics that Dr. Chan and his team at Public Health put out, as well. We've put out a lot of guidance documents, not just to how to manage a classroom but the data to look at to make decisions at the local level.

And so, hopefully, if they're using that, they're realizing that their counties are either in a green or what we call a yellow position, based on overall transmissivity, based on the fact that kids right now, at least the data shows, there are about 60-or-so kids out of 190,000 that we have in the State that currently are positive. That is a very, very low percentage.

And hopefully, they'll use that data to make the decision to maybe advance into a hybrid model, or maybe even back into a fully-remote model sooner than later, especially given the fact that so many folks are looking for that to actually happen. And I think we know we've often discussed all of the other ancillary benefits of allowing kids to come back into the classroom, actually meet the Teacher, allow the Teacher to, I think, have a better understanding of their learning styles, allow some of the socialization to happen, allow some of these extracurricular activities to happen.

So there's a lot of positivity to bringing these kids back, while managing the guidance documents and while managing the social distancing, and the mask wearing. And I think the majority of the schools that are open in the State have shown there is a model to be successful. Okay. Michael, did you have another one for us? Did we cut him off?

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Yeah, just one more quick math question. Were all of the deaths in September long-term care facility deaths? Or were any of them outside long-term care facilities? And then, I have a question for you, Governor, if I can.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I can tell you there were, I think, into the month of September -- I'm doing this off memory. I want to say there were only about eight or nine fatalities, which are unfortunate, of course.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:
Seven.

Governor Sununu:

But that was a much lower number than we saw in August. I don't know. We could get you the information as to whether they were all connected to a long-term care facility or not. But I don't know, unfortunately. And I don't know if you have another one.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

So you had about \$40 million for nonprofits to distribute in COVID CARES relief funds. And your opponent in the Governor's race, Senator Feltes, has made an issue of the fact that one of the organizations that got those funds was a pregnancy crisis group that is prolife. And even though the money is handed out by a system where you apply and there's a whole series of bureaucracy there, he says that he would step in and stop that group from accessing the funds that they applied for and qualified for, due to their viewpoint. Number 1, do you, as the Governor, have the power to decide in this process, who does and does not get the COVID money? And two, do you agree with that stance on that's how the money should be handed out? That's my last question.

Governor Sununu:

So, through the COVID process and working with the GOFERR Team, all the different funds that we've created -- and I want to say we've put maybe 40-or-plus different types of funds available across the State -- one thing we always insist on is that we define eligibility and we make it equitable across the entire field. There are no litmus tests to opinions or political viewpoints or anything like that. Everyone gets this equal shot at the money. And I don't think any Politician, or Governor, should be picking winners and losers based on whether they agree with their philosophical positions or not.

In the specific case of the Nonprofit Relief Fund, we call it the NRF Fund, we really -- I created the fund because so many of our nonprofits provide key services in our communities on the frontlines. We didn't want to see those organizations deteriorate. We weren't sure where the charitable giving end of things was going to be. And there is a huge employment. I mean, there's tens of thousands of our citizens are employed by those organizations, just like in the private sector.

So we really wanted to make sure that we stood those up and we allowed the decisions and the formula, if you will, to be determined by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, working in concert with the Charitable Trust. So they were the ones that really defined that formula, allowed everybody to come in and participate. And as long as you were eligible under that formula, everybody got an equitable share.

And again, yes, I strongly disagree that any one individual should be picking winners and losers, and having litmus tests, especially when these funds are so important to keeping really important frontline services moving forward all across this State. Great, excellent. Let's go to Ethan.

I have a question about the debate this week. So, there was a moment...

Governor Sununu:

Sure, the Presidential Debate.

Presidential Debate, yes, there was a moment in the debate where President Trump urges supporters to "go into the polls and watch very carefully". And it was among his comments about how the absentee ballot process, he says, will be defraud. What is your reaction to that? And there's been some concern that those comments will lead to voter intimidation in the polls.

Governor Sununu:

Well, I don't know what those comments mean, frankly. Go into the polls and watch carefully because of the absentee ballots. Look, I'll tell you in New Hampshire, we got a great system. Our absentee ballot process is tried and true. We're going to have some of the highest voter turnout, as we always typically do. You can't go into the polls and watch the absentee ballot -- I mean, you can, but you -- yeah.

Sure, I talked to the Secretary of State's Office today. It is legal to observe outside of the voting area.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, we have observers in all of our polls. I mean, that happens. And both Republicans and Democrats observe to make sure it's a fair and equitable process. And it works. It works really, really well. The people of the State -- I've always said it but I really mean it -- you should be very excited, frankly, that you have a Secretary of State like Bill Gardner and an Attorney General like Gordon MacDonald that are making sure that the system just works.

And our Primary bore it out. We had a huge number of absentee ballots come in, and a lot of folks, record numbers of people coming into the polls and the process. It worked really well. We counted all the ballots with very little issues. We had our winners that night. Some of the closer races, as we always do, I think there were some recounts maybe the next day.

But our system works great. It really does. And we're just going to be prepared knowing that those numbers will increase in November, right? The number of absentee ballots, the number of folks coming into the polls will increase.

But we kind of had a trial run just a few weeks ago. It went well. And I think we all feel very confident that working with some of the cities and towns, I mean, they're constantly working with the cities and towns who have asked for a little more flexibility, because the absentee ballot number will be so high. And they're working with them on an individual basis to find out what flexibilities they can provide, just to make sure it's successful everyone.

But the process aside, some local Election Officials in New Hampshire are expressing concerns that the President's words will cause people to cross the line from peaceful observation of the election process to intimidation, and that that could be a problem on election day.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, look.

But I guess, what would you say to Election Officials who are worried that there might be more antagonism at the polls that might kind of disrupt the process?

Governor Sununu:

Regardless of anyone's comments either in the State or out of the State, the President, the Governor, or anything, if any Election Officials in any city or town in the State of New Hampshire have any concerns -- and they might -- over comments that are made, intimidation, anything of that level, they have direct access to the Secretary of State and the Attorney General.

One of the benefits of being somewhat of a smaller State is we have that personal connection with all 220 cities and towns. And they should let those concerns be known. Work with the folks at the State level who help manage and ensure the integrity of the system, and I think, in doing that, we still have four, five weeks to go here. And in doing that, I have no doubt that all of their concerns can be allayed. But obviously, any comments that are made that could be interpreted as being intimidating are not acceptable, by any means.

I have a question about the long-term care update you gave, Commissioner Shihinette.

Commissioner Shihinette:

Sure.

And a concern about the numbers that you described, and if you could give me a little bit more detail on both the case in Bedford and in Windham; we had been on this really nice, slow and steady. And these just jump up. What happened?

Commissioner Shihinette:

Sure; so specifically around Bedford Hills, I would imagine you're talking about, because prior to last week, their numbers were zero, right? And in the run of about a week to 10 days, they went from 0 to 47, between Staff and residents. That is a testament to how quickly COVID-19 moves.

Now, this facility participated in the surveillance program. And just 7 to 10 days prior to their first positive, they had tested all their staff and they were negative. So it really is quite remarkable, when you look at how quickly that moved to having a full surveillance testing day done, where everybody was negative, to 10 days later having -- and it wasn't 47 the first day, obviously. We had one go to six. And

then, we went through and tested all the residents, tested all the Staff. And in very short amount of time, a week, it climbed to 47.

So it is very concerning, for sure. We were on a great track. But what we have seen historically through this pandemic is that, as community transmission increases -- and we have seen an increase in community transmission -- that increases the risk for getting into nursing homes. Our caregivers in nursing homes shop at the same grocery store. Their kids go to the same school. They go to their kids' soccer practices and go to the gym, and all of those things. So the possibility, as we become a more mobile society again, that someone's going to bring it into a facility gets higher, as community transmission gets higher.

The other one, small, three residents, one Staff, so still very early on in that outbreak. But, again, southern part of the State down in Windham, we went through. We're testing all of the residents and all of the Staff. And hopefully we will be able to contain that very quickly.

Symptomatic, asymptomatic, or...

Commissioner Shabinette:

A little bit of both, especially in the Bedford facility, we have a portion. I'm not going to say it's even. But we have both, asymptomatic and symptomatic, both residents and Staff.

I have one more non-COVID question for the Governor.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

So, on the topic of the White Supremacists, you made a comment this week that said that you have been kind of attacked for your stances over the summer by White Supremacists. I believe you made it the WMUR. Can you elaborate? Are there these groups? Are they individuals? Are they in New Hampshire?

Governor Sununu:

They were some very negative comments made towards me and my office, and I'll leave it there -- it actually went a little bit beyond that -- by some of these White Supremacist groups that didn't like that we were talking about the importance around whether it was the Black Lives Matter message. I think some of the original attacks against me came after the Charlottesville incident down in Virginia a couple years ago.

And again, just I think one of the comments I made and I stand by today is you cannot equivocate those that are fighting for racial justice with white supremacy. I mean, and some of the White Supremacists don't like that. Well, tough, that's the fact. There's no place for that. There's no place for those individuals. There's no place for that thought process.

I mean, I think in this State, I'm very proud of what we've done in this State, and not just talking in the last six months here. I'm talking in the last four years, right? We finally have a Civil Rights Unit. We didn't even have that at the AG's Office. We have our Commission on Diversity Inclusion.

What our LEACT Commission just did is just phenomenal, because it was done the right way: working with Law Enforcement, the Attorney General's Office, the Prosecutors, the stakeholders as part of Black Lives Matter, the ACLU. They were all there in the room together at every meeting. Well, they were on Zoom. But they were together in every meeting having these discussions, hearing the public input, and then coming out in concert with 48 recommendations that addresses a lot of these issues.

So, yeah, I'm sure the White Supremacists don't like that we're taking a very proactive stance on it. We're being aggressive about it. We don't tolerate riots and hate in this State. I've always said we have elements of racism throughout our entire State, in different parts of our communities. It's there. Sometimes it's implicit. Sometimes it's explicit. Sometimes it's overt. Sometimes it's indirect.

But I think, to Kevin's earlier question, there's always an opportunity to have better training, better understanding, taking it to the next level. And just because we don't have the riots and the controversy, and a Charlottesville happening today, we shouldn't become so complacent to think that that couldn't happen here. So we're going to be progressive on it. We're going to be proactive on it. And we've done it in such a positive way. I think we stand as a great model for the rest of the country, frankly. And hey, if the White Supremacists don't like it...

Are there organized elements of white supremacy in the State? And is the Department of Safety...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, my understanding, there are organized White Supremacist groups in the State.

And who's monitoring that? Is that the Department of Safety?

Governor Sununu:

I think a combination of Safety and the Attorney General's Office have had interactions with various groups over time. I mean, unfortunately, this is nothing new. I think there are elements that have been here for quite some time. I think individuals, some of the leadership that was part of some of that Charlottesville rally and some of those groups that were involved in that may have even come from New Hampshire. I'm doing this on memory now. I think some of that might have come from New Hampshire.

So, again, it might not be overt in our communities. It might not be something that's overt that we see every single day. But there are elements that are there. And we're going to challenge ourselves to always be better, be that standup model. And I've been attacked by them. And I imagine they're not going to like some of my comments today. But that's okay, too.

And last question, what did you -- sorry, sorry, a question -- what did you make of the President's response during the debate, when he was asked to condemn white supremacy in general? Do you think it helped or hurt New Hampshire in this...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I have to be honest. I had shut the debate off after about 30 or 35 minutes. I didn't see that part. I saw his comments the next day. And obviously I stand by my comment. I think the entire debate was a big embarrassment. I mean, I was sitting there watching it with my 14-year-old daughter and I had to shut it off and explain to her that this is not how Presidential Debates should go on either side, by any means.

So, in terms of those specific comments, I was pretty clear that you cannot equivocate one to the other. You can't be in a gray area when you talk about these issues. You really can't. You have to be firm about it. And again, I didn't see exactly what the President said. But reading his comments the next day, I think you just have to be firm about it. You have to set it there. And maybe I think that's where he definitely fell short.

So, Governor, you're disappointed that he wasn't as forceful in his condemnation as you were?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, yeah. Look, I'd be disappointed if anybody wasn't as forceful in their condemnation as being absolutely there's absolutely no place for that, not by any individual, not by any group, not in New Hampshire, not in the United States, and frankly not in the world, right? We just have to be unequivocal about that and be firm about it, to be sure.

You still support President Trump for reelection?

Governor Sununu:

Yes. Hi.

Question about food insecurity and unemployment, changing ears, we've seen unemployment numbers get a little bit better. People are getting back to work. But the New Hampshire Food Banks had to increase their weekly mobile food pantry. Do you think that could speak to people being underemployed? Is there anything that can be done to help these people while they're getting back to work? They don't seem to be making enough to support their families.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so the question revolves around food insecurity in New Hampshire. We have a phenomenal New Hampshire Food Bank run by just a very dedicated group of individuals. For a long time, we had the men and women of our National Guard helping support those efforts, especially as more and more families were facing unemployment.

Now, as our unemployment numbers have come drastically down, we're still sitting at 4.5% unemployment or maybe -- yeah, about 4.5%. That's low, relative to where we were a couple months ago. But it's almost twice as high as where we were just a year ago. So that, in itself, would indicate that the demand should be approximately twice as high.

You have a lot of folks that were relying on the Federal Stipend, the \$600 and then the \$300. That extra benefit, I think, was allowing a lot of folks to not turn to the Food Bank or some of their local food pantries. I think there was an expectation that Congress was going to pick up the mantle, a little bit, and allow that program to continue. They did not, I think, to everyone's disappointment, frankly. And I think that, over the past couple weeks, more and more families realize that extra \$300 isn't coming in. And I think that has put a little more pressure on those food pantries.

So it's really a combination of things. Our economy is strong. But there are still folks in need. And we got to make sure that those safety provisions are there. We've put a lot of money into the New Hampshire Food Bank. I've told Elaine, who runs the New Hampshire Food Bank, that if there is more of a need there, they got to just come and ask. That's one of the key areas where we want to make sure that we don't fall short on it by any means.

I think we allocated an initial \$5 million to the New Hampshire Food Bank. I don't know how much they've actually used to-date. But, if they need more, it's going to be there for them, because they are always there for our citizens. Sorry, did you have one? Oh, sorry. You're all good? Sorry, Paula.

Just one last question.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, whatever you need.

Today marks 200 days we've been doing this.

Governor Sununu:

Does it? Is that right?

Yeah, well, pretty close, if it isn't.

Governor Sununu:

I didn't know that, 200 days since we've been in the pandemic. That's a...

March 2nd, I remember being the first time we sat together. Is that right?

Governor Sununu:

Wow, March 2nd. Oh, for the State of Emergency is 200 days. We're 200 days in...

We've been through a lot of this. We keep having that thing kicked down the road.

Governor Sununu:

I know.

Every couple, three weeks, we get another one.

Governor Sununu:

I see.

Can you just give us sort of an idea where you think -- how many days we're going to be doing this?

Governor Sununu:

Where are we? Yeah.

Yeah, just where are we?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, well, a quick assessment without boring everyone, I think the first 200 days has been a novel, in itself, to say the least. I think this State has done tremendously well. I think everyone feels a lot more confidence that a real vaccine, they're -- we know multiple vaccines are in their third stage of trials. We know the FDA is overseeing that. They're not shortcutting the process. They're speeding up the process, but they're not shortcutting it.

So I think there should be a lot of confidence that if and when a vaccine becomes available, it is going to be a safe vaccine. And we're going to make sure that it gets out to those of highest need first, whether it's the elderly or some of our frontline Healthcare Workers, or whatever it might be. And we have a Commission going through and making sure we set those priorities using our Public Health Network getting to be able to get that vaccine out.

I think that looks like it'll be available sometime end of 2020, early '21. And I think that will be the first giant puzzle piece to getting to an end. And I think that comes to the point of your question. When is the end of this thing?

The vaccine's going to be the first giant hurdle. And until we really get there, I don't know if there'll be a lot of confidence that the end is really in sight. It is in sight. But how do we actually get there? And I always use the analogy of being in a train tunnel. You can see the light at the end of the tunnel. That's great. But it's really hard to figure out, are you really at the end? Or are you only about halfway there?

I think we've done phenomenal through the first 200 days. I don't want to be doing -- and I hope that -- I feel very confident the next 200 days will be a lot better than the first 200 days, a lot more flexibility, a lot more economic opportunity. But we still have to stay vigilant. We have to stay on top it.

I think the numbers are going to go up, to be sure. But it nothing that we can't manage, whether it's in our schools, our universities, our workplace. Our testing capacity is huge. Our contact tracing is huge. All the tools are there to be successful, until we get to the end of this. And there is an end in sight.

So, whether it's 100 days away, 200 days away, or 30 days away, I'm not quite sure. I'm definitely not one to say. We are not going to be at a place where we're saying mission accomplished on COVID for quite a while.

I think even once the vaccine comes into place, that is going to take months, not just to implement, but it could be a two-shot vaccine. It depends on how fast it's released, how much we have available to us from the Federal Government, what the results are. And again, I think it's going to be safe and my sense is it's going to be successful. But even that takes time. It's not like a million people line up, get a shot, and we're all set. It's just not the way it's going to roll. So even that will take some time.

But my sense is, by the time you get to spring or summer of 2021, hopefully this is just a nightmare in the past. And we're really in a much, much better place. Okay. Well, thank you, guys. Thanks, everyone, for bearing with us, a lot of great questions and great announcements today.

We will be back next Thursday, I believe, at the same time, we think. If anything changes, we will let folks know. It's going to be a great weekend out there, beautiful fall weather here in the State of New Hampshire. Enjoy everything that New Hampshire has to offer. Thank you, guys.