



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Thursday, March 11, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good to see everyone. Good afternoon. I think we have a variety of, I think, really interesting things to talk about today. So let's kick it right off with a Public Health update with Dr. Chan.

Dr. Chan:

Great, thank you. And good afternoon. So just a brief Public Health update for today; first the numbers. We are reporting 341 new infections in the State today. Over the last week, we continued to average about 200 to 250 new infections identified per day. This number has been relatively stable over the last couple of weeks. And currently, there are 2,114 people with active infection. This number is slowly trending down.

The test-positivity rate is currently at 3.4%, as reported on as a seven-day average. This number also continues to slowly trend down, as do the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 statewide. That number currently is 78 people currently hospitalized, which is also down from last week.

Then, unfortunately, four new deaths to report today, bringing the total number of people that have died from COVID-19 during this pandemic to 1,191. Only one of those four individuals is associated with a long-term care facility. And so, we're seeing the number of people dying from COVID-19 in long-term care facilities continue to decrease, as we roll out vaccines to those settings, and as we have a higher proportion of our long-term care facility residents vaccinated. But still, in the last week, there have been a total of 13 people that have died from COVID-19 in New Hampshire. That number remains too high. We want to see that come down further.

So let me end by just saying that we have now currently three different COVID-19 vaccines. All three vaccines are effective at preventing COVID-19, highly effective at preventing severe disease, including hospitalizations and deaths. And so, it's important for people to take the first-available vaccine offered to them.

It's also important for people to complete the vaccine series that they may have started, and to get vaccinated. Vaccine will become increasingly important and will allow us to relax restrictions further in our State and in our communities, as the pandemic progresses. But as we look to rapidly increase the number of people vaccinated, we continue to recommend that everybody practice the mitigation measures and continue to wear a well-fitted facemask, and practice social distancing when in public places, continues to avoid group and social gatherings, and practice good hand hygiene. With that, I will hand things over to Dr. Daly. Thank you.

Dr. Daly:

Good afternoon, everyone. To-date, here, in New Hampshire, we've administered 406,000 doses of vaccine. This includes 280,000 people that have received their first dose and started that series, which is 21% of the New Hampshire population. Of those, 132,000 people have been fully vaccinated, which is 10% of the New Hampshire population.

As we announced last week, these data are now updated daily on our COVID-19 dashboard. Additionally, we have been releasing a detailed Vaccine Summary Report weekly on Fridays. Going forward, we will release this Report on Tuesdays, so that we can include complete information on the week prior.

In the last week, we administered more than 60,000 vaccines in our State, including both first and second doses. This week, we received 31,250 first doses of Moderna and Pfizer vaccine. We did not receive any of the Janssen Biotech vaccine this week. And next week, we expect to receive a similar amount of vaccine.

Phase 2A regional vaccination clinics start tomorrow, March 12th. Our Regional Public Health Networks have scheduled 39 regional clinics through the end of the month, with plans to vaccinate 17,000 school, childcare, and youth camp staff. Phase 2A people who are not invited to one of these regional clinics will be able to register to get vaccinated at a State- or hospital-run site beginning March 17th on vaccines.nh.gov. People working in these settings should look for information coming from their organization as to whether they will go to a regional clinic, or if they should register to get vaccinated at the State- or hospital-run clinic.

Vaccination of Phase 2A will be through a combination of these regional clinics, as well as our fixed sites. Don't worry if you're not invited to one of the regional clinics. There will be plenty of appointments available for people in this group at our fixed sites. And we will get you all vaccinated very quickly within a few weeks.

We're also quickly moving to Phase 2B. Registration for Phase 2B will be open on March 22nd at vaccines.nh.gov. Remember, Phase 2B are people who are 50 years of age to 64 years of age. And again, if anyone who was in Phase 1 did not get vaccinated yet, they should call us at 211 to get that scheduled. And you can choose to get vaccinated at any point going forward, as well, if you have not made that decision yet. But we do encourage everyone to accept that vaccine at the first chance that it's offered to you. With that, I'll turn it over Commissioner Shibinette.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon. I have a short outbreak update. We are closing two outbreaks today: one at Dover Center for Health and Rehab; and one at Merrimack County Nursing Home. We are opening one outbreak today at Alpine Health Center in Keene who have 11 residents and four Staff cases of COVID-19. That brings our total of institutional outbreaks to five. We have three long-term care facilities still in outbreak status. And we have two correctional facilities in outbreak status. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great; thank you, Commissioner and Dr. Daly, Dr. Chan. Doctor, Doctor, Doctor, everyone's a Doctor but me. But I play one on television sometimes. Okay. So, a variety of things to talk about today, which are all, I think, really good stuff.

First, obviously, as a lot of folks know, this past weekend the State did host the vaccination site in New Hampshire Motor Speedway. I just want to take a moment and just underscore a big thank you, what a phenomenal job everyone did from the Team, from the logistics end to all the volunteers actually making it happen on the ground. Everyone just with -- there were so many smiles coming out of there. It was a good feel-good moment. But it was also great to see over 11,000 of our citizens walk away with kind of a one-and-done one-shot vaccine that they didn't even have to come back for their second shot. And that was wonderful.

A lot of folks, again, were going to get that. They got their first -- were scheduled to get their first shot in late-April and maybe the second shot in May. And now, it's early-March and they're completely done. So, a great job, specifically, the Capital Area Public Health Network, Concord Hospital, the New Hampshire Motor Speedway, themselves; I mean, it was very cold on Saturday. So we had computers that weren't necessarily working in the cold. The Team quickly moved to a paper, more manual process and were able to catch up very, very quickly. And even on Sunday and Monday, we were able to actually finish early. That's how fast the system was working. So, that was pretty phenomenal.

Over 1300 people were involved, 100 different State, local, and private, and volunteer organizations. And the fact that it all came together in just a matter of a couple weeks, it really speaks volumes to the New Hampshire spirit and knowing what we can do, when an opportunity presents itself in the future. We can definitely rise to the occasion.

And that success allows us to easily slide into our next vaccine undertaking, as Dr. Daly discussed, Phase 2A. And we can move there in very rapid time. So, thanks to good management, we've been able to move folks in 1B up. 2A will be starting this coming week, which is very exciting.

And as to repeat some of the numbers that Dr. Daly said, nearly 40 school districts are going to begin the process of vaccinating Teachers. About 17,000 right now are already in queue to have their own pods and to be vaccinated. And starting tomorrow, Manchester, Salem, and Dover schools will have their own first closed pods beginning through that process. So it's very good news.

The State's new vaccine appointment system that we've been kind of hoping would rise to the occasion, that is going to go live on Wednesday, March 17th. School, childcare, and youth recreation Staff, as part of Phase 2A, that might not currently be scheduled to receive their vaccine through one of the Regional Public Health Networks, will be able to sign up for an appointment next Wednesdays with first shots to begin very soon thereafter, on Monday, March 22nd.

Those 50-and-up will be able to schedule their first shots starting on March -- the appointments on March 22nd, with the first shots beginning on March 25th, as you can see here next to me. And we do know that a lot of individuals had problems with the -- initially with the federally run VAMS System. You've heard us talk about VAMS a lot.

And today, we're here to walk you through the steps on how to go about scheduling your vaccine on the -- our Vaccine and Immunization Network Interface, or as we are affectionately calling it VINI for short. VINI can always get the job done, right? So, let me walk you through it. The process is very simple and streamlined. We have a couple screenshots here for you.

Early next week, before the site goes live, we're going to launch some instructional videos, if folks want to walk them through the steps, so they kind of have confidence in registering with the system and scheduling for an appointment. I've actually already gone through it, myself, just to test it. And it is just a world of difference better and simpler than the older system.

So there's really, I guess you could call it, five steps in total. Step 1 is simply going in. And we call it the screening and preregistration. There's some basic questions, all the same questions that you probably -- that folks would have seen during the original VAMS preregistration process, just to make sure that folks are eligible. Are you 50 years old? Do you have underlying conditions? Are you a School Teacher? And you'll be able to choose what district or school that you actually work for, which is great.

Step 2's very simple. You schedule your appointment. You can simply pick a date. And so, we've tried to make it very easy. You can pick what day you want. You can pick all the times that might be available in your area for any number of -- you can search for sites within a certain radius of your home, just a whole lot simpler and user-friendly.

And then, you'd show up for your appointment and you receive either the Moderna, Pfizer, or possibly even the Janssen vaccine. And then, if folks want to go in, they'll be -- again, we've always made that promise that we will preschedule their next shot for them. Or they can go into the site and change the date, if they so chose to do that for their second shot. Go back to your second shot, when the time comes, and off you go.

So, it's a very simple process. We've really tried to streamline it. It takes a whole of 10-or-so minutes really to kind of do that preregistration, wait for an email back, go in and pick your time. We've tried to really make it simple.

So we're not going to bore everyone today with all the little details there. But, again, we just wanted to give people a feel for the site, as it comes up-and-running. We will, again, have Fact Sheets, videos, different documents to walk people step-by-step through the process and answer questions.

The other big -- I think the big difference in this process is, in the previous process, you had to -- if you wanted to change your appointment, you had to go in and cancel your original appointment, which could be kind of an anxiety-filled risky thing. In this new system, you can pick a new appointment before anything automatically gets canceled for you. So there's no risk in constantly trying to move yourself up. And that's really what the system is designed to do: put a lot of the reliance on the individual. As we get more vaccine, you'll always be able to go in, very easily move yourself up with no risk of losing your original appointment, I think, which, again, is going to be a big sigh of relief for everyone who has taken the calls on 211 and everyone who kind of got jammed up in the system over that very tough week, as we worked out some of those kinks.

And again, the other big piece of this, finally, is that VINI was built and will be managed right here in New Hampshire. We're not relying on the Federal Government, as part of this system. We're not relying on the CDC. And therefore, we, in very real-time, can make any adjustments or amendments to the system. We can add additional times as vaccine becomes available. We can add new sites. It's just much more flexible to the operations that we want to see and that will best suit the needs of the citizens of New Hampshire. And so, we're obviously very pleased to officially introduce VINI next week. And we think it'll just ease a lot of anxiety around that process.

Going to open it up for questions in a minute, but one last thing revolves around our guidance documents. Obviously, as our numbers trend down, both in hospitalizations and fatalities, as vaccinations trend up, all very positive steps, so we want to provide additional flexibilities based on that data that we're seeing here.

There's no doubt that the numbers continue in the right direction. And it is important to note that we are still keeping the Mask Mandate at this time. It has proven to be effective. Masks work. Social distancing works. I keep repeating the very clear datapoint that virtually no one in the State has the traditional flue. We really are doing the right things and a lot of the other indirect benefits are being brought to bear. So, that's a good sign.

But what we can do is safely flex open some of the opportunities and industries around the State. So we've looked at the COVID data both regionally and nationally. COVID cases continue to decline across the country, while vaccinations go up. And so, following similar announcements made very recently from other northeast States, like Connecticut and Maryland, effective immediately we will be transitioning out of our -- we will be transitioning, I should say, our out-of-state travel restrictions from a requirement to a recommended advisory. And again, this follows along with our essential travel guidance. So we're really marrying together the more recreational nonessential travel with essential travel. Now they all kind of live under one streamlined approach. We still recommend folks to quarantine. We recommend folks to be tested, if they are on extended trips. But it is no longer a requirement going forward.

Likewise, residents from outside of New England no longer have to quarantine prior to arrival to New Hampshire. So this change applies only to domestic travel, not to international travel. So we're only looking at domestic travel, because that's where we feel very confident about the data. The trends are very positive all across the country, which gives us some flexibility going forward.

So, why are we doing this? For a few reasons: first, our most vulnerable citizens are getting vaccinated. The vaccination process is moving very, very well, not just here, but across the country. This does bring us inline with other States across the country.

Third, we are keeping our Mask Mandate. We're still keeping a lot of the, I think, important pieces in place to make sure that we have a handle on the spread of COVID. And fourth, we want to help businesses plan for the summer. We know it's going to be a very good summer and we know a lot of folks across the country and the region are planning now for what their travel plans might be. And so, we don't want the tourism industry to suffer. They took the brunt of the hit, if you will, last year. And we just want to make sure that we're kind of preparing. We're staying ahead of the game a little bit, in terms of the opportunity this coming summer. And so, we just see this as a commonsense move.

So, today, we're also flexing open a few other areas, as you can see next to me, not just travel. But also effective immediately, capacity at retail stores may increase and return to 100% capacity. Barbershops and salons may choose to allow walk-in customers without reservation and resume the in-person waiting rooms, obviously with some restrictions there. And the guidance has been updated to reflect that.

Restaurants and bars can resume things like karaoke, pool, darts, and other bar games at their establishments, as well as small bands of three-or-less members, again, as long as they maintain that 10-foot buffer from the audience. But allowing a little more entertainment within those venues we see is a smart and safe move.

At hotels and lodging establishments, we're making a few minor changes. And they can see those to things like the lobby area and whatnot. And you can see some of those on our website. And then, finally, we're -- I'm going fast, so I appreciate David keeping up -- we're modifying our guidance surrounding our overnight and day camps to add flexibility for our operators. They came in and were -- I think there was a great discussion and a lot of really good ideas put forth I think our Reopen Committee. And all of these have been authorized and approved through the Reopen Committee.

So I just encourage folks to go to the website to see any of the details of those guidance documents. But, it's just another logical first step. Things are going in a good direction. We're not just going to rip the Band-Aid off and open everything up, wide open. That would not be a very smart thing to do. We're just not there yet. I think we all hope we will be at some point. My goal has always been to try to get there before Memorial Day, and I think we're on target for that.

But we really just need to take these commonsense steps to help these industries. We can do it in a safe way. We know so much more today than we did just even back last summer, when we were creating a lot of these flexibilities and guidance documents for our businesses. So, we just used that data and that knowledge to create opportunity for our citizens. With that, we can open it wide open for questions. Adam?

Q&A Session

Governor, can you explain again why it was that you didn't make a website like this sooner?

Governor Sununu:

We've been working on it. We really have. I think it wasn't that we took our eye off the ball. But at some point, we made the decision, well, VAMS seems to have what we need. We've been told by the CDC it would work. So we made the commitment there and we tried to -- that's when you have to start inputting the data and the sites, and all of that. We put our effort there.

It turned out not to be as successful as we wanted. So we quickly pivoted back to make sure we could complete the task of the State site. So I think we were kind of going down both tracks. But, at some point, I think we kept getting a note of confidence from the Federal Government on VAMS. We went with it. And it turned out not to be the right choice. But, we're pivoting now, and, again, whether it's Group 2A, 2B, and beyond will be able to use a much simpler site.

What's the capacity? Have you been able to stress-test this? I mean, I guess nothing is ready until it's ready.

Governor Sununu:

Great question.

Commissioner Plummer:

You want me to come up?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, come on up, Perry. Perry and his Team have been working on it. So I'll defer.

Commissioner Plummer:

So, it's really two pieces. The registration piece that we used at the very beginning was part of this system. That was the system that we were able to register 80,000 people in the first half and hour and 120,000 people the first day, uneventful. It went very simply. So that's just an extension of that piece. So we've stress-test that really big piece.

And then, certainly, we've done all the testing and all the -- in the test environments to make sure that this is going to work and make sure that it is going to be smooth and seamless, as people try to book their appointments. So, the big bulk is that first few days when everybody already registers, and that's already been stress-test, and was very successful.

All right, Perry. Do you have a sense of how many people could be coming in, in those first 24 to 48 hours with hitting that lower-age group, the 50 to 64?

Commissioner Plummer:

Yeah, well, first, we will be rolling it out for the 2A group. So that'll be a much smaller group. So that will be another stress-test to make sure that it works okay, and make any adjustments, which we think it's going to be perfect.

And then, it'll be similar to the other group. I mean, we suspect that there's more vaccine, so it's not quite as competitive. But we will probably register 80,000 people in the first day. We thought that we'd register about 68 the first day last time. We did 120. So, it all depends on the uptake and how many people want to register the first day. But, there's plenty of appointments. There's plenty -- the vaccine going out those weeks, so it's not as competitive as it was before.

Governor Sununu:

Great, thank you, Perry. Hi. Oh, sorry.

Sorry.

No, go ahead.

This one might be more for Dr. Chan, just about schools and I know a lot of the schools are seeing more in-person, maybe all in-person classes now. Does that affect quarantine with maybe less space in between desks now? Is that something you guys are thinking about with...

Governor Sununu:

Well, yeah, I don't mind answering. Every school has to adjust. If schools are increasing from two or three days to five days, I think most schools have been working on that plan. This is nothing new. If they were in a limited hybrid mode, now they're looking to go fully in-person. And they've had plenty of time to design to that.

Some schools might open up their cafeteria for classrooms, if they need more space. Some schools do shared classrooms, right? They take down their partition. Maybe with the nice weather, they'll do a little more outdoor classes and we've heard of things of that nature. So I think there's a lot of opportunity there. But they can be very creative with it.

And then, again, the schools that are now going from fully-remote to more of a hybrid model, there's a variety of options there. Some kids might be in five days, but only for halftime. Some schools are bringing in kids one week and then the other half of the school the next week.

So there's just a variety of different models. But it's been proven to be managed to be possible and to be managed successfully for 90%-plus of the schools in the State. And so, those that haven't quite made those final moves, that's what they've been working on the last couple weeks.

So we've heard very little feedback that it's not going. It's all moving forward exactly as we wanted it to. And hopefully somewhere down the road, as more vaccine kicks in, as we get -- as the numbers go down a little more, hopefully we can get to the five day a week as soon as possible.

And just a quick follow-up: if students are less than those 6-feet apart, just because they're in there, does that change quarantining, or sending entire classrooms home if someone gets infected, or anything like that?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I'll have Dr. Chan talk to that point, if that's okay.

Okay.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, thank you for that question about quarantining. And let me also stress that we continue to do contact tracing -- Public Health contact tracing on each person diagnosed with COVID-19. And we continue to prioritize investigations in congregate settings and schools -- K-12 schools. And so we continue to work with schools on a daily and a weekly basis.

Our definition of close contact and CDC's definition of close contact hasn't changed. And so, we still use that 6-foot designation for identifying somebody that -- if they're within 10 feet of somebody -- sorry, within 6 feet for 10 minutes or longer, that would qualify somebody as being in close contact and potentially needing quarantine.

At the end of the day, we work with the schools to help identify who would qualify as potentially needing quarantine, and working with the schools to identify individuals and do the contact tracing. But there are measures in place and recommended to be in place to try and minimize the number of people that might need to quarantine, if somebody with COVID-19 is in the school or the classroom setting. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

Kevin, do you have a question?

Yeah, Governor. We've heard for months talk about these karaoke and pool hall meetings through the Reopening Taskforce. Is it -- I guess I'm wondering, is there a real economic boost to doing this relaxing? Or is more of it psychological, that people can have some assurance that they can go back to a place they always hung out at and many of the amenities that were there prior to the pandemic could be there again?

Governor Sununu:

I think you're very astute with the question, because the answer's yes to both, right? There's definitely some economic benefit. Things like Pool Leagues or whatever it might be can commence. I think with some of the few places that might offer this indoor bar-type recreation, you still have to maintain 6 feet and social distancing, and all that. But to allow it to happen in a safe way, without a doubt, gives folks a lot of confidence that things are getting back to normal.

And there is a psychological opportunity there. I don't know anyone who didn't walk outside today in 65-degree weather and think, wow, this is what we've been waiting for. We're coming out of winter. We're coming out of COVID. We can all breathe a little easier and have a little more freedom. We don't need to feel so cooped in. And that's a little bit what this is about, as well.

Governor, speaking of difficult psychological situations, we all felt terrible for the high school graduates last year. And arguably, those juniors who became seniors this year have had a rough time, too. What's the outlook for things like prom, graduation? Is there going to be any glimmer of hope there that some of these gatherings can happen?

Governor Sununu:

Yes, yeah, absolutely. I mean, I guess it depends on the timing, because, when you're talking about proms or graduations, particularly, you're talking about that May/June timeframe around Memorial Day, or just thereafter. But I think there's a lot of opportunity to do it and to do it safely.

We're still going to keep a lot of recommendations, regardless of where we go with the requirements around the State. We're just always going to recommend that people take certain precautions just to be safe, depending on where we are with the vaccine presentation.

If everyone in the country has been offered vaccine by the end of May, I mean, that's the real ultimate goal. We're not sure. I mean, we've heard that from the Federal Administration. I'll kind of believe it when I see it. I'm very hopeful we can get there. But things like that would come into play in determining how fast we can get to that type of flexibility. But without a doubt, we're going to have a much more successful year, in terms of those type of events, than we did last year. And there's going to be a lot of opportunity.

Now, schools can decide to do what they want to do. And we hope they take our recommendations. But the opportunity to do those types of events will be there, whether they're indoors/outdoors. I thought a lot of schools got really creative last year with what they could do, and whether it was a graduation or a prom, or stuff of that nature.

Can we get an update from Dr. Chan on the tracking of variants and what's here, and what might be on the horizon?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so good question about tracking of variants. Let me just remind people that there are three what we call variants of concern. And these go by different designations. The primary variant of concern that's being identified around the Country, and I think has been identified in probably almost every State across the Country so far is the B117 variant, which is also the variant that emerged out of the United Kingdom and has since spread. This is a variant that is actually being seen now, you know, widely spreading in areas across the United States.

The other variants, what we sometimes refer to as the variant that emerged out of South Africa and the variant that emerged out of Brazil, are found in much smaller numbers and in many fewer States across the Country. So the primary variant that's out there is this B117 U.K. variant.

Public Health jurisdictions across the Country, CDC have been ramping up sequencing, including New Hampshire, to identify these variants. And so, I can say that, to-date, we've probably sequenced, through a combination of the multiple labs doing the genetic testing, the sequencing that's necessary, we've probably sequenced probably close to 750 specimens. And out of those 750 specimens that have undergone the necessary genetic testing or sequencing to identify variants, we have identified nine specimens that were positive for the B117 variant, none for the other two variants that I mentioned.

And these are specimens that are not located in any specific region. I think there's four out of Hillsborough County, three out of Strafford County, one out of Merrimack County, one out of Cheshire County. I think that comes to nine.

And some are associated with travel but not all, right? And so, I think that's an indication that, given what we've seen here in New Hampshire and what we have seen across the U.S. is that this is one of the variants that is circulating, is not just related to travel. But certainly, out of the 750-or-so specimens that we've sequenced, we've only identified nine. That's around 1%. So this is not the predominant strain, or the predominant variant of this virus that we've identified in New Hampshire.

But we do know that these variants are of concern, because they are likely more infectious, more transmissible, and continue to stress the importance of people not only getting vaccinated -- again, vaccine has been shown to be highly effective still against this one specific variant, the B117 variant. But we also need people to continue to practice the social distancing, wear facemasks, avoid large group gatherings, especially until we get a much higher level of our population vaccinated. Thanks.

Governor, out of the Stimulus Relief Bill that's coming out of Washington this week, that has allocation for vaccines. What does that sort of mean here in New Hampshire? Will that give more money to push out more vaccines here?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, there's not a lot of money that deals with COVID out of that bill, unfortunately. But some of it does deal with vaccines. And so, that's an opportunity for us. So, when it comes to vaccines, funding for contact tracing, testing, I think we feel very secure that both within the existing dollars that we have, as well as the dollars -- because there was also some dollars in the December Bill that was approved, plus

this one. So I think we feel fairly comfortable that, as of right now, we have enough funds on the healthcare side. Do we have some? Oh, sorry, go ahead, Kevin.

But we had one week here that Dr. Daly indicated without a J&J delivery? Is that just -- are we probably going to resume with that? The President just earlier this week called for production of 100 million more of those vaccines. Are we likely to get more of those soon?

Governor Sununu:

I hope. We heard right from the President, I heard on a phone call, that there was going to be 20 million doses of J&J released in the month of March. We got 10,000 and then it stopped. So they just didn't come through. So there's, I think, don't think anything this week, or maybe 1,000 vials or something like that. Did we get anything? No, we ended up not getting anything.

So maybe next week something will come, and maybe by the end of March it'll ramp up again. But, what was promised to the State did not come through from the Biden Administration. But that doesn't slow us down. We have plenty of capacity where every vial that comes in, it goes out.

And obviously the J&J vaccine is, I think, a huge opportunity, because it's just that one shot. That's the type of vaccine that I think a lot of folks are looking for, for certain reasons. They're all just as effective equally across the board in preventing people from going to the hospital, or even from fatalities. So, that's really the key here. So I hope that they start coming through. Once again, Washington making promises and not delivering.

But what did they promise in the first 11 days of March? What was the promise?

Governor Sununu:

Well, they said 20 million to the -- America for March. And then, they came back and said, well, that's clearly not going to happen. So we got our 11,500 vials-or-so. And then, that was it. Then, I was on a call and they said, well, we might have a few hundred thousand out this week, but maybe not. I'm hearing now that we didn't get any.

So, we usually get our numbers on Thursday. Is that right? We're usually informed on Thursday of what we will get. And unfortunately, we were told none today. We're hopeful we would get at least something, but nothing. So, it's all good. It's all good. We will make do. We will make do. We've learned. If anything, we've learned to be flexible around Washington. So, okay, let's take a few questions on the phone.

Kathy McCormack with the Associated Press:

Hi, thank you. The Reopening Taskforce today also had approved guidance for performance arts venues, amusement parks, and tourist trains. Do you anticipate being able to make a decision on those soon, especially with arts venues having to plan and book performances?

Governor Sununu:

Yes, usually it goes through that Committee first and then both my office and Dr. Chan's office takes a look at it and goes through. And so, obviously, we don't want to hold anything up too long. And so, we will take a look. I haven't seen what came out of the meeting, myself. But we will take a look at whatever they approved and obviously try to move it forward as quickly as we can.

Nancy West with InDepthNH:

Governor, thank you for taking my call. I'm filling in for Paula Tracy today. And I remember two weeks ago I asked for the Spending Reports that Agencies and private organizations must file if they received Federal CARES Act funds. And you said the GOFFER website was fully transparent. But those Reports aren't online. And we at InDepthNH.org have been unable to get them. Now, I see, on WMUR, that State Lawmakers have been told that these are not public. So I guess my question is: will these Spending Reports be made public? And if not, why not? And I just have two quick questions.

Governor Sununu:

Okay. Well, let me answer that one and then we will get to the next two, if I could.

Nancy West with InDepthNH:

That would be good.

Governor Sununu:

So, how we have spent the CARES Act money is transparent in a whole variety of ways. First, all the letters that we originally signed in terms of allocating all the different dollars to the funds are there. Then, you can go on the website and actually see who actually got the dollars. All the information is provided at the Executive Council meeting in an informational packet. So there's a whole variety of ways that you can get there, in terms of understanding where the dollars actually went.

As for the audit -- as for the Spending Reports, I think those are more to an audit document. I'm not sure if those are allowed to be public. I'm not sure what confidential information is in those, Tax ID numbers and that sort of thing. So, those are -- I think that's what you're referring to is kind of the Audit Report back that folks either used the dollars, because they didn't come in with a certain amount of revenue, or maybe they exceeded their revenue goals and therefore have to remit certain dollars back to the State by the rules that were set up as part of the CARES Act funding.

So I think we will see a variety of different folks remitting some money back to the State, as they file their taxes in the month of April. And again, we will have the opportunity to take those dollars and reallocate them out, again, in a transparent way.

I mean, and then we're here talking about it all the time. So there is a lot of transparency here, Nancy. And I don't know the details around those individual Business Reports. I'm not sure exactly what you're looking for. And again, if it's confidential information, I don't know what the State can release. But, I mean, I can look into it. But I think you're referring to Audit Reports.

Nancy West with InDepthNH:

I think if you could look into it, it would be great, because this is Reports -- these are Reports that say where the money was spent, not where they thought they might want to spend it, but where the dollars actually went.

Governor Sununu:

Are you talking about actual costs that each individual business would use each of their dollars for? That isn't necessarily going to be -- that's -- the dollars were given to businesses for those that wouldn't come up to certain revenue thresholds.

Nancy West with InDepthNH:

Yes.

Governor Sununu:

It wasn't specified how they -- exactly how they had to spend it. They had complete flexibility in how to spend those dollars to replace lost revenue. So, there's not going to be an Accounting Report that says, Joe's Flower Shop spent \$27 on paper towels. That is not required by the State. So if that's what you're looking for, that level of detail was never required.

Nancy West with InDepthNH:

Well, perhaps we could discuss that again. The other two questions I had quickly -- not to waste your time -- is how do you feel about the legislation that would continue Zoom meetings be held online, even when COVID-19 is no longer a danger? Hopefully, that'll be soon. And I know the Governor and Council meetings are by phone call-in only. And I can tell you it's often hard to figure out who's talking. Sometimes the words are a little bit garbled. Would you consider holding the Council meetings on Zoom? Last question: how much is New Hampshire getting from the new Stimulus Bill? And thank you very much, Governor.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so a couple things there. In terms of the legislation about the Zoom meetings online, I have to be honest. I don't know about that piece of legislation. So I really can't comment on it. I think you're referring to something that would require the Legislature to do certain things online over and above, after COVID is done. I can't comment on that only because I'm not aware of it. I apologize.

As far as the Executive Council meetings, we haven't gotten any complaints. We do them remotely, in terms of allowing people to dial in, if they want. And then, of course, we have all the Councilors and all the Commissioners, and all those actually at the meetings are testifying. So that's a lot of in-person. I

don't know how you'd put that in Zoom, because, while we are all maintaining social distancing and we're trying our best to wear the masks, I think everyone's doing a good job with that.

It's a large room with people kind of moving around. So I just don't know how it would be logistically possible and if you'd get a better outcome by doing that on Zoom. By doing it at least over the phone, we bought a whole new phone system for it. It seems to be working pretty well. I apologize. I will try to enunciate my words a little better, I suppose, at the Council meetings, or at least make sure that everyone has an active microphone in front of them. We can check on that.

Oh, and finally, so the -- how much money is the State getting out of the \$1.9 trillion? There's a lot of pots of money coming out of that \$1.9 trillion. And we have folks really digging in through every page of the Bill.

A lot of things were added at the very last minute. I'll tell you this. Some of the bigger dollar numbers are this. About \$950 million -- \$966 million, to be exact, looks like it's coming to the State for what they're calling the State revenue replacement. But that can really be used in four different ways. It can actually replace lost revenue of the State, which we had very little. It can go into some capital investments. It can go into COVID costs. It can go into additional stipend funding or dollars for essential workers, if you wanted to use it that way. So there's a variety of different ways, and we're unpackaging that.

There's another \$450 million that will go just to cities, towns, and counties. Every city and town is going to get a very big check. Every county is going to get a very, very big check. And again, so there's a lot of opportunity there. But, again, we're trying to figure out how exactly not just the State, but the cities, towns, and counties will be allowed to spend those dollars per the Department of Treasury Rules.

And then, you have things like the \$200 million that we're enacting from the previous Bill on housing. There's some additional housing money here. There's a little bit of money to deal with COVID and things of that nature. It really wasn't a big COVID bill, unfortunately. And then, of course, the really good things in it, like the stimulus checks and things of that nature, so there was some very good stuff in there. It's just \$1.9 trillion is a lot to unpack.

Alli Fam with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Thank you, Governor. My question is: while the State has prioritized Healthcare Workers, Teachers, and Childcare Workers, some other essential Workers like restaurant and grocery store Workers here in New Hampshire, some of them are wondering if they will be a priority in the vaccine distribution, as the State gets more vaccine.

Governor Sununu:

So, you say "other essential Workers", but that means there's other nonessential Workers out there. And I don't know if you're going to find nonessential Workers. So I bring that up because, at this point, we're not prioritizing. We've been very clear. It has to be on risk level alone. We've always done that. We're going to maintain doing that. And therefore, it just simply goes by age, in terms of risk level.

So, I know everybody wants to be prioritized. But we've made it very clear over the past three months, frankly, that the prioritization is as it is. It was the right way to do it. I think that's why you're seeing our numbers of hospitalization and fatality come down so aggressively, why we're still a Top 10 State in the Country when it comes to fatalities per capita. We are still one of the lowest in the Country. We prioritize for the health and safety of the individual, not just because of what you do for a living.

Tony Schinella with Patch:

Oh, thank you. Governor, the Capital City Public Charter School in Concord recently surrendered its charter after a financial audit found \$129,000 in unsupported Federal Grant reimbursements. Some of those included tens of thousands of dollars spent on personal expenses, checks written to relatives of the Founder, and other issues. The Founders of the school, it turned out, had dozens of criminal charges and civil complaints against her in court. And the Trustee of the school, who was also a relative and is a State Representative have received a couple of those checks, too. Considering that you've just secured tens of millions of dollars in Federal money for charter schools for at-risk students who really need those opportunities, is it time for the State to approve, say, background checks for future Founders and future Trustees? And what could be done to prevent this type of nepotism with charter schools being founded? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Well, interesting, couple things there. I mean, this was a very unfortunate event. First, I'm going to say a real hat's off to Commissioner Edelblut, the Department of Education, and the Board of Education for digging into this issue very early on, and really making sure that they didn't leave it behind. They turned over every stone and, if it wasn't a surrender of the charter of the school, it was going to be withdrawn by the State, which would have been the appropriate action to take.

I don't think one school defines an entire system or any individuals even define an entire school. So if there are other steps to be taken to mitigate in the future, the unfortunate and potentially nefarious things that happened with this one school, obviously that's a decision for the Board of Education. That's something that the Board of Education takes up at the State level. They're the ones that typically approve the charters at the State level. And I imagine they'll be discussing that.

But they're the real ones on the frontlines, the experts of it. And of course, if the Legislature wanted to take anything up, that would be appropriate, as well. But, I -- again, hat's off to them for looking into it. They didn't let this one get by them.

Alex Lacasse with Seacoastonline:

Hi, thank you, Governor. A rare non-COVID question from me, but it's just two parts. I had seen that you endorsed all of the recommendations from the State LEACT Committee. I wanted to get your thoughts on the Senate Judiciary Committee voting to send a couple provisions from Senate Bill 96 back to a Study Commission. And those provisions were putting racial identifying demographic information on Driver's Licenses and have the Police record that same racial identifying information when they have interactions with members of the public. And so, just want your thoughts there. And then, just a quick follow, just what is your expectation for how Police Departments will keep those records, if those provisions don't make it into the final Bill? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so, I mean, the LEACT Commission had dozens and dozens of recommendations, all of which we endorsed and supported. Some were done by Executive Order. Some are being taken up by the Legislature, which is great. Clearly, some need a little more study and understanding.

I can't comment too much on those individual ones. I haven't heard the testimony at the Senate other than to say I think it's rare. I don't know if any other States -- maybe one or two others alone -- record any sort of racial information on their Driver's License. So I think that was one of the concerns. The idea was that, well, let's go out and talk to other States, some of the pros and cons of doing that, and how that information would be recorded.

So, to the point of your question, I think there's just a lot of unknowns there. I think there's some very good intent. But we want to make sure that it's done the right way and it can actually be fulfilled all the way through, not just at the State level, but at the local level, if it's something that we were to put into law and enact.

So, some of these were great ideas, things that had never been even considered before last August. So I commend them for, at least on some of these, for taking a pause -- not a pause, but taking a step back and saying, let's make sure we understand this and can really fulfill on it, because we don't want to set an expectation that we can't meet. And so, sometimes you just have to, again, take a little more time. Get the data and make sure that you can follow all the way through. Okay, great. Adam?

Can we get an update from Dr. Daly just on long-term care vaccination and sort of what happens in the weeks and months ahead, if it's going to continue to be pharmacies or if, at a certain point, the State has to step in, if they're not going to do the clinics continuously?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Dr. Daly:

So, the Long-Term Care Facility Pharmacy Partnership Program, the Federal Program has now completed all of the first- and second-dose clinics at the facilities that were enrolled with that Program, which was a little over 200 facilities here in New Hampshire. And right now, they have completed about 75% of their third clinics. They've gone in a third time just to catch up on anyone who maybe decided to get vaccinated at the second clinic and then needed their second dose. So that Program is scheduled to wrap up at the end of this month. And it's on track to do that.

And then, going forward, in order to make sure that we have vaccine available to those communities, we are working on establishing a mechanism with four pharmacies that specifically serve long-term care facilities. This is how these facilities typically get their medications, through these pharmacies. And we will provide that vaccine to those pharmacies, and the long-term care facilities will order the vaccine from them and be able to administer it to their patients and Staff. So we will make sure that long-term care continues to have access to these really important vaccines, as they admit new patients or residents and have new Staff.

How close are we, Doctor, to crossing that 80% vaccination threshold in long-term care?

Dr. Daly:

So, I think in terms of uptake in these facilities, the resident vaccination rates are around 80% across the board. And then, for Staff, it's lower, maybe 65% to 70%-or-so. There isn't a magic threshold, though. We will continue to potentially have some cases of COVID-19. The vaccines aren't 100% effective, nor do we have 100% uptake. And there isn't really a magic line that will put us in a better condition. Obviously, we want everyone to be vaccinated and have as high vaccination rates as possible.

Governor Sununu:

I'm going to add onto that just a little bit. Dr. Daly knocked it out of the park on long-term care. Just fundamentally, we're looking at transitioning all of our vaccine into more hospitals and pharmacies, and your local Healthcare Provider, typically as you'd get a vaccine of any other nature.

So, as we go through 2B, as we roll into Phase 3, which would effectively be everybody else, that's one of the transitions, the State kind of moving away from our fixed sites and just opening up hospital opportunities or pharmacy opportunities, or whatever it might be. Our partnership with Walgreens, by the way, continues to be phenomenal. They've been a great partner. They're doing a great job. They're even doing some mobile clinics, going out and helping the Teachers get vaccinated, as part of their pods. Going out, like where some of the Teachers are coming into Walgreens and some of the Walgreens are going to the Teachers. So it's just been a really good partnership, a lot of flexibility there. And that's exactly, I think, what's giving us a lot of confidence that we can transition into more of a traditional vaccination process, where it isn't the State controlling everything, per se, but really making sure that the opportunity lies with the Healthcare Provider and the patients, as individual.

But this uptake rate here in New Hampshire's been pretty high. Do you think it will go down at any point, as we reach the 40-somethings, the 30-somethings, the 20-somethings, or not necessarily?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, without a doubt, unfortunately. We want everyone to get the vaccine. We can't say that enough. We've heard stories in one -- I think the Manchester district, there's hundreds of Teachers not getting the vaccine. And that was kind of anticipated. It's unfortunate. But I think, as you get to those next level, 2A, and then we're going to say it same in 2B, especially that younger 20-, 30-, 40-year-old demographic where there just haven't been -- thank goodness -- nearly, if any, fatalities. Symptoms are always a little bit milder, not nearly as many hospitalizations. It's natural to assume that some folks are going to say, well, I don't need it. You really should be getting it. You got to get the vaccine. But I think it's just natural to assume that the uptake is going to decrease as we get into the bands of lesser and lesser risk.

Quick follow-up, Governor. I'm sorry. Did you say hundreds of Manchester Teachers are refusing the vaccine?

Governor Sununu:

Well, not refusing, but they haven't signed up. Just like, I mean, I think, in long-term care -- even in long-term care, our most vulnerable citizens, maybe 80% or 85% of the most vulnerable citizens who are at such high-risk, even they only took it at about 80% or 85%. It's a good number. But you want 100%, right?

And so, as you -- it's not about Teachers, per se. I'm just bringing up Teachers, because they're the next band here in Group 2A. But you're going to see not every Teacher in every district's going to get vaccinated. They're just going to choose not to. And not every individual above the age of 50 is going to get vaccinated. It's going to be less and less.

And so, we just have to take that into account, both as we distribute, and as we -- that'll probably allow us to move faster, in some ways, through some of these age groups and bands, because we just -- instead of having, we think, 200,000 come in, maybe only 150,000 people come in at a time. And then, instead of 150,000, only 100,000 come in.

So it's going to allow us to move faster. But we really want to emphasize, no matter what your age is -- other than kids 16-and-under, I know under 16 it's not approved for yet. Hopefully, it will be soon, by the way. That's an important piece here. But everyone else, I mean, should be taking the vaccine, as they can.

When do you think you're going to get your shot?

Governor Sununu:

Well, when I'm allowed; yeah, I'll sign up, just like everybody else on -- I'll go to VINI. VINI will take care of me. I'll sign up on VINI. But I'm 46. I'm not 50 yet. I'm 46. I know sometimes I look it, with my lack of sleep. But, yeah, when my time comes up, we will sign up like everybody else.

You thinking April/May probably?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I'm guessing before May. Yeah, I think the -- or I should say at the end of March we will go to 2B. Yeah, so, sorry, early-May. Probably early-May is when I'm guessing the under-50s will open up. But, again, we will see how fast they keep bringing it to us. Hopefully, the Johnson & Johnson finally starts coming in again. And folks take the vaccine. It's two important pieces there.

And with Johnson & Johnson, is the plan to keep the Speedway rolling? You want to keep doing mass vaccination with those?

Governor Sununu:

If we can, I think the mass vaccination site at the Speedway went incredibly well. And if there's an opportunity to do that again, we will. It was very efficient. And with even warmer weather, there's even better opportunity, I think.

So, if we can do it and we get kind of a big, what we call kind of a bolus of vaccine all at once, we could definitely look at that. And we would be happy to do it. But, right now, we have enough for our fixed sites. And that's doing pretty well for the next few weeks, and the pods, making sure we have enough to give some to the Teachers in the pods in the SAUs.

Okay. Well, thank you, guys, very much. Enjoy the weather for another couple days. The tree sap is running, which is nice. The maple trees are running. And there's some syrup out there. I took about 6 gallons, 7 gallons of sap just in the last 24 hours. So that was pretty exciting. I'll be steaming up the kitchen later tonight, which I know my wife won't appreciate.

But, the weather is great. We hope folks can get out and enjoy it a little bit, before it gets cold again. But spring is on its way and everyone's doing a great job, when it comes to maintaining. They're wearing their masks, getting their vaccines, social distancing. A little while longer; we're getting through this very quickly. And we just can't thank everyone enough for being part of that success. Thank you.