



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu  
Press Conference  
Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

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**Governor Sununu:**

Well, good afternoon, everybody. Good to see everyone. I think we're going to first thank everyone for joining us. It is Thursday at 3:00. I think we're going to kick it right over to Public Health for an update.

**Dr. Chan:**

Great, good afternoon. Just a brief numbers update for today: we are reporting 433 new people diagnosed with COVID-19 in the State. As I'm sure many of you are aware, the last couple of weeks we have been seeing increases in the number of people diagnosed with COVID-19. And so, in the last week, we have average between 350 and 400 new infections every day. And the number of people with current or active infection is at 3,287.

Similarly, the test-positivity rate has also been slowly increasing. And the seven-day average is at 4.8% of all PCR and antigen tests combined that are positive for COVID-19. And the number of people currently hospitalized in the State is 81, which is about the same as last week.

Unfortunately, there are seven new people that we are announcing that have died from COVID-19 in the State, none of which are associated with long-term care facilities. But that brings the number of people that have died during the pandemic in New Hampshire to 1,245.

So we continue to see an increasing number of new infections statewide. As mentioned, the test-positivity rate is also slowly increasing. And the decline in hospitalizations that we were seeing has stalled. These numbers point to increasing levels of community spread of COVID-19.

We continue to stress the importance of people wearing their facemasks and practicing social distancing, when in public locations, and avoiding the crowds and gatherings where we know COVID-19 can spread very easily. And certainly, please, get vaccinated at the earlier possible, or available, appointment. All three vaccines that we currently have available in the State are safe and effective at preventing COVID-19. And with that, I will hand things over to Dr. Daly. Thank you.

**Dr. Daly:**

Good afternoon. I'm going to provide a vaccine update. To-date, in New Hampshire, 663,000 doses of vaccine have been administered here in our State. This includes 447,000 people that have received their first dose, which is 33% of the New Hampshire population. Of those, 228,000 have been fully vaccinated, which is 17% of the population.

In the last week, we administered over 70,000 doses of vaccine in our State. This week, we received 45,000 doses. And next week, we expect to receive about 55,000 doses. And again, that's first doses of vaccine, meaning that's how many additional people we can vaccinate.

Our Regional Public Health Networks are wrapping up the regional vaccination clinics to vaccinate school, childcare, and youth camp Staff. To-date, they have done 92 different regional clinics and vaccinated 19,000 people through that program. They will also be following up with second-dose clinics, as needed, in the coming weeks to get all of those Teachers, Childcare Staff, and Camp Staff fully vaccinated.

I'm going to just turn to a update, in terms of the rest of the population. The number of locations you can schedule an appointment at has significantly increased over the last few weeks. There are now more than 45 different pharmacy locations offering vaccination appointments in VINI, in addition to our other public vaccination sites. We're going to be adding more locations in the coming weeks, as well. And again, to register for vaccination at any of these sites, including the pharmacies, you do still need to register and schedule through our centralized registration process, VINI.

Tomorrow, we're really excited to be opening up vaccine registration to all New Hampshire residents who are 16 years of age and older. So I wanted to provide some specific information on 16- and 17-year-olds.

First, there's currently only one COVID-19 vaccine that's approved by the FDA for use in children 16 and 17 years of age. That's the Pfizer vaccine. Not all vaccination locations have Pfizer but many do. When registration opens tomorrow, there will be a list of which locations have Pfizer. You can see those on the screen. So you can go ahead and select an appropriate location if you're 16 or 17 years old.

Second, we want to make sure you're aware that a parent or legal guardian does need to come to the vaccination site with their child for those 16- and 17-year-olds. And then, finally, if your 16- or 17-year-old does not have their own Driver's License or Non-Driver's ID, they will need to bring a Birth Certificate or Passport as proof of age. And then, the parent needs to bring their own License or another accepted document in order to prove that New Hampshire residency.

And then, finally just want to encourage everyone to go ahead and get vaccinated. Starting, again, tomorrow everyone 16-and-up will be eligible. And there are plenty of appointments available still. So we just encourage everyone in New Hampshire who's eligible to go ahead and get vaccinated. The vaccines are safe and highly effective, and they're really the best way to protect yourself, your family, your community, and will help us all return to a more normal life. Thank you. So, I'll turn it to Commissioner Shibinette.

### **Commissioner Shibinette:**

Good afternoon. Just a brief outbreak update: we are closing one outbreak. Bedford Nursing and Rehab Center is now officially closed. We are opening three new outbreaks: one at Coos County Nursing Home with four residents and six Staff cases; one at the Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility with five resident cases; and one at Rockingham County House of Corrections with five residents. That brings our total of institutional outbreaks to five: two being long-term care facility; one being a recovery center; and two correctional facilities.

## **Governor Sununu:**

Great; well, thank you, Commissioner. A couple different things to talk about today and then we can open it up for questions. So, as I think a lot of folks know, earlier this week we started rolling out, on Monday, the 40-and-older could register for a vaccine. About 62,000 signed up without any issues at all in our VINI System. That was followed on Wednesday with the 30-and-up crowd. Another 50,000 individuals have signed up for vaccine through that. And then, as Dr. Daly was talking about, tomorrow, 16-and-up, pretty much all adults across the State, 16-and-older, will be able to register for an appointment into that same system.

It's been just going very, very well this week and we don't anticipate any problems. And we just thank everyone for not rushing into the system, using one device. Those little things really did make a difference, as opposed to a couple weeks ago. Oh, my pen. Couple weeks ago when I think we had lots of different devices and hundreds of thousands of people rushing into the system; the system is a little bigger, little wider, and is handling all the requests, as they come in. So it's really done a great job.

So this week's success with the VINI System leads into the State launching a real comprehensive PSA campaign that will continue throughout the summer months to encourage folks to sign up for the vaccine. We know that COVID-19 is our shot to get back to normal, as they say. So you'll see billboards like this one, digital ad campaigns, television ad campaigns, really pushing all across the State.

So all those folks who may have waited or just have been a little hesitant to come in and get their vaccine, it really does work. It is far and away the best way that we know to get back to normal, as we like to say. Really protect ourselves and our communities, the folks around us. So you will see billboards start to go up across the State as early as tomorrow. We think it's a great campaign and hopefully we will get more people into the system, which is working very, very well.

We're also announcing some additional flexibilities today, based on the recommendations of the Reopen Taskforce and the Division of Public Health. So, specifically around lodging, retail, and golf, these recommendations were reviewed and approved by all the various groups. It's just a more simple and streamlined approach for these venues. And all these documents will now kind of live and can be viewed within the universal guidelines. So, if you go to our website, you'll see our universal guidelines. All of these venues are really following those universal guidelines now that allows them to be a little more flexible, but still be safe. And that's the most important thing for their Employees and their customers, as well.

Another one more significant item to touch on, school reopening. That kind of leads us into the more ability to be flexible. Obviously, reopening schools and getting kids back to school, very passionate issue for a lot of individuals, a lot of parents. And we just want to provide some clarity and assurances, and transparency, most importantly, as we start to get kids back into the classroom.

Back in February, I announced that all K-12 schools would need to start offering in-person learning at least two days a week before March 8th. And we did this to allow for school districts to ramp up for an eventual return to fulltime in-person learning, while also providing some flexibility for districts as they undertook that effort. And it went off very, very successfully.

Today, we're here to make the next step and announce that, starting on April 19th, all K-12 schools must return to full in-person learning for five days a week. We're providing about another 2 1/2 weeks' lead time from today to allow them to ramp up. That'll mean that, for those schools who haven't already

-- about 60% of schools are already going five days a week. But for those remaining schools, that still will allow a few more weeks to work out details, work with the Department of Education if they have any question, and really make sure that kids get back to fulltime in-person learning.

And we're doing this for a couple of reasons, frankly. We have said all along, and it has been proven that schools can reopen safely. And that remains as true today as ever. In a few short weeks, all Teachers and School Staff who want the vaccine will have received their second dose. So we're well underway. And providing that rollout for the vaccine for Teachers and Administrators has gone very, very successfully.

Third, we're providing plenty of time to allow districts and parents to plan. So we're not asking folks to do this tomorrow, by any means. But when you look at over 2 1/2 weeks from now, to ask folks to come to full five-day in-person learning would roughly coordinate with the week before April vacation.

And fourth, we just all know we need to get our kids back into schools not just for educational reasons, for mental-health reasons, for socialization. And during the crisis, remote learning was a good backstop, but doesn't come nearly close to providing the fulfillment and enrichment that being in the classroom not just a couple days a week, but five days a week can really allow.

And it is a blessing, frankly, that children remain at such low risk for extreme symptoms. So when you put all of these reasons together, now is really the time to make sure that we're fulfilling that commitment to these kids, fulfilling that commitment to the educational process, and at least allowing them to get back in for six, seven, eight weeks before the schoolyear ends.

The flexibility to provide a remote option for parents and students who do not wish to return to the classroom just yet, that will remain in place at the State level. And there are still millions of dollars available to school districts to provide this remote option for kids. So if there are a few individuals, or families, that still aren't comfortable coming back into the classroom, most schools already have this remote option. There's a lot of money out there that can provide different services with technology or whatever it might be. So that, again, providing for the aspects of COVID still, they still can provide a remote option for those families who choose to do so.

And then, finally, one other piece, only because it's come up just in the past day-or-so, we aren't just focused on getting kids back into in-person learning. But as we move through the spring and look towards the summer months, which I have said many times we should all plan for a very big and very robust summer, we're looking to provide some more clarity for summer camps, both day camps and overnight camps. They're all trying to ramp up now and make their plans.

We know this year has been tough for many, but especially kids who look forward to spending time at camps and getting back to that socialization piece here. We want our summer camps to reopen. We have heard some concerns from these camps about the current guidance, specifically around testing campers and Staff before and after arriving to the camp, the cost of that testing, specifically. We know that cost can be a barrier for those camps.

We want those folks to know that no camp should hold off preparing for a great summer over financial concerns about testing. We're going to make sure that overnight camps have access to any of the required testing. We will use Federal dollars to cover those costs of any testing that might be required for the Staff or those kids. And we are going to be reaching out to camps directly so that they understand how to go about receiving and accessing those funds.

And as case numbers go down and vaccinations go up, we all know that things can change. We may end up changing the testing requirements, or the quarantine requirements, whatever it might be. We're not making that announcement today, per se. But we want folks to know that, as we get closer and

closer to summer, things may evolve. But we want these camps to know that they should plan to open. We don't want those costs to be a barrier. And we can help them with that financial opportunity. And with that, we can open it up for questions.

### **Q&A Session**

*Adam is not here today, so we're going to...*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure, hold on. Give me 30 seconds.

*It's right.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Oh, I got it.

*Yeah, there you go.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Thank you.

*So, with cases going up, you mentioned that briefly, what do you attribute that to? Is it to contact tracing, St. Patrick's Day, travel, businesses opening back up? What do you think?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, all of that. Look, I think the fact that cases are going back up, it's nothing we did not anticipate. I call it the spring surge, very similar to what we saw at this same time last year. You do have more people vaccinated. You do have more testing and more protocols in place.

So, it isn't just -- again, it's not just the case number going up that we look at anymore. It's everything from hospitalization, fatality, the rate of vaccines being administered. I think there's a little bit of COVID fatigue. A lot of folks -- I think the State has done very well with wearing masks and social distancing. But there are times in the day where COVID fatigue sets in and we might forget to wear your mask, or be a little extra close, or take something for granted.

So, I think it's just natural mixed in with that spring surge that's coming, a variety of different reasons. And we're not immune from any other State in the northeast. Every single State in the northeast is seeing relatively the same rate of increase as we are in the cases. I think all of us are seeing that death rate and that hospitalization rate stay low, which is a really good sign. So you're kind of seeing those two datapoints diverge a little bit, as we hoped that they would do.

But, again, we've always said cases could be high, up-and-down. Think they're going to go down in the summer; they're going to come back up in the fall. But it's really not just about cases anymore. It's

about the timing and the speed that we're going that allows us to vaccinate our most vulnerable population. That's the real key metric for us when we look at reopening and providing flexibility for our citizens.

*And with that said, is there less of a concern about the cases rising, because you have vaccinated most of the more vulnerable people?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, I mean, I don't want to say that we're not concerned. Don't misunderstand; it's not the key datapoint. I think at this time last year, we were really focused on cases, fatalities, infections in long-term care. Now that long-term care has been vastly vaccinated, as you can see, unfortunately we had seven more fatalities today. None of them were long-term care, because we have such a high rate of vaccination within long-term care. So, not that we don't pay attention to it, but we focus on some of those other more dire metrics, if you will, whether it's the overall fatality rate in our communities, the hospitalization rate, and obviously the rate that the vaccine is going out to protect that vulnerable population.

*With the vaccination numbers rising, I know obviously there's three different types of vaccines. So, when should people feel confident that they're fully protected, once they had their vaccine?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Two weeks after receiving their second shot, the CDC and the FDA recommends that that's when your antibodies have built up. I'm going to look to Dr. Chan. I think it's still a two-week -- yeah, come up.

**Dr. Chan:**

Or after the single-dose Janssen.

**Governor Sununu:**

Or two weeks after the single dose of Janssen, that's correct, the Johnson & Johnson, or after the second shot, not the first shot. There actually have been unfortunate cases of folks getting that first shot but still contracting COVID with some pretty drastic results. So you really need that second shot.

There's some studies that might show that your immunity gets a little more boosted after the first shot. But you are not fully protected like you need to be. And there have been some unfortunate cases there. So, you need the second shot, plus a little extra time for those antibodies to build up.

*And then, for the Pfizer vaccine with the teenagers, for people who've already had their first shot, adults, if they want to bring their plus-one, can they bring one of those teenagers with them as their plus-one?*

**Governor Sununu:**



That's a good question. Perry, I'm going to look to you. Is the plus-one just for the spouse, or is it...

**Commissioner Plummer:**

It isn't. No, they can bring someone in their household. But they have to be registered and eligible. So, if they now want to become eligible, yes.

**Governor Sununu:**

So, as long as it's somebody within their household and they are registered and eligible. Yeah, that can be the plus one.

*Okay.*

*Just to backtrack just a moment to the vulnerable population, I know seven deaths today, none of them are in long-term care facilities. But I know there have been some days where there still have been deaths in long-term care facilities. Why is that happening? I mean, are these people vaccinated and you just talked about...*

**Governor Sununu:**

I can tell you, through the month of March, it looks like there's about 15 individuals that have unfortunately passed away from COVID in long-term care facilities. About half of those did not choose to be vaccinated. About half of those either were vaccinated and contained [sic] COVID in the middle of the process, prior to being fully vaccinated, or even cases of folks getting COVID. They had some COVID symptoms even before they were vaccinated. So, nobody had been vaccinated fully and then contracted COVID. But I think in December -- no, bear with me. January, that number was about 135 -- no, sorry, about 150.

**Commissioner Shibiante:**

That's for January and February.

**Governor Sununu:**

January and February, there are about 150 individuals. In this last month, there were only about 15. So the number is drastically dropping, which is wonderful. Unfortunately, a lot of folks in long-term care, for whatever reason, just chose not to get the vaccine. And that attributed for about half of those 15 deaths.

*Pfizer came out with a new Report that their vaccine's effective for at least six months. Is there any plan starting about possible booster shots in the fall, if that's where it stands?*

**Governor Sununu:**

We're not planning on that now. But of course we're going to be stockpiling and getting prepared for it. We will be prepared by getting the stockpiles ready and really making sure that not just the State has a stockpile, but your Doctors and your Pharmacists, and those in the regular more traditional healthcare community have the vaccine, have access to the vaccine, and could provide it if a booster were to be necessary.

*Any update, Governor, with regard to the delivery of Johnson & Johnson vaccine here in the State, given what's happened with the destruction of so many doses?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, so a lot of folks heard there were 15 million doses that had to be thrown out effectively from one of their factories in Maryland. Without a doubt, that'll decrease the amount of vaccine we're going to get long-term. We have been given assurances that, over the next week-or-two, what we've been told will likely come from Johnson & Johnson will be what we get.

Johnson & Johnson, I believe, is still committing to about 25 million doses through the end of April, I believe. Is that right? I think so. 25 million is what they're still committing to. So, that's not 40 million, as it potentially would have been. It's 25. So there were 15 million doses lost. That's a lot, not just for New Hampshire but for the entire country.

But over the next couple weeks, we anticipate to get a pretty decent-sized shipment. And then, we will see how they ramp back and what kind of toggles and controls they kind of pull back on. But I suspect we will keep getting something, but maybe just obviously not as much as we would have.

*Governor, we are hearing some complaints about wait times at some of the State-run sites: Nashua, Belmont, and today in Concord. Any specific reason for that? I don't know if you or Perry may know.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Specific reason, maybe Perry knows.

**Commissioner Plummer:**

Do you want me to go...

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, if you want to.



**Commissioner Plummer:**

There's a number of reasons why they would create wait times. One has been weather. We had the wind storm that came through and that really was challenging for our vaccinators outside. So that created some wait times.

There's some wait times because of second doses coming due the same time as other second doses. So we had to increase capacity. So there's been some wait times. And as we ramp up capacity and build out our vaccinators, there has been some wait times. There probably will be some wait times along the way.

But certainly everybody gets vaccinated. Everybody that shows up gets vaccinated. And we try to minimize the wait time. We have diverted some of those busier sites to sites that aren't as busy. So they don't have to wait in line.

So, some of those things have had some wait times. Sometimes, if there's a medical emergency within there, that'll create a wait time. We've had some power outages, short-term, that have created some wait times. So there's a variety of reasons why there may be some wait times. But overall, some sites don't have any wait times during the day. And some have a little bit of a wait time during the day, depending on what's going on at the site.

*And was there anything specific to Concord today? Some people said an hour and a half for some of them.*

**Commissioner Plummer:**

Yeah, there's some wait times in Concord. We're looking at why that wait time was that large. But we sent more vaccinators right away over there to drive that wait time down. When there is a wait time, we get notified and we make every effort to try to bring that wait time down. And usually, we can bring that wait time down relatively quickly by sending more vaccinators or redistributing some of our folks.

So, we did hear there was a wait time in Concord and we did send more vaccinators there to get it down. And we're still looking at what caused that initial spike of wait time, whether it was people showing up early or they had a medical emergency. I'm not really sure.

*Adam Sexton's not here today for the Governor. But he did submit a couple of questions about the State Veterans Home for you. He is asking, regarding the State Veterans Home and the Report on the VA document that provides observations and recommendations about infection control practices during the outbreak, it's his understanding that the VA document was distributed to elected officials, including your office.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, it's an email.

*It's an email with their recommendations?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, I believe it was like an email with bullets.

*Okay.*

**Governor Sununu:**

It wasn't like a formal study or Report. I mean, you have to appreciate the Federal VA was doing investigations all across the country. So they did come in. They took a look. I think this was in early December. But there was no formal study or Report. It was kind of an email with kind of a list of recommendations.

*Okay. And then, he was just asking, in the State's recent Report, the form specifically asked for the VA's recommendations to be listed. And that section is blank. Why was that?*

**Governor Sununu:**

I think this is the same question that he asked last time. Lori, I'll ask you to take that, sure.

**Commissioner Shibinette:**

Thank you. The Department doesn't have access to that Report. If the email may have gone to the Governor's Office or elected officials, but the Department of Health and Human Services has no oversight over the Veterans Home. And the Federal Government has no obligation and no reason to really send us a copy of that Report. So, the reason why it would be left blank is because they didn't have access to the Report.

*Okay, thank you.*

*Governor, I know we've asked you about this before. But, out-of-state college students, right? So, today, you got a letter from a bunch of Mayors in different communities asking you to extend that opportunity. And I mean, also, just looking at census data, I guess students would technically be...*

**Governor Sununu:**

That's not true. Students are not included in the U.S. Census data. I know the letter says that. But that is not true. I think I'm correct in saying that. Students are not included in our census data. I know the letter says that.

No, so look. If the Biden Administration wants to send us vaccine for out-of-state college students, awesome. That would be great. We will put a whole system together right for them. But they send us based on our permanent residency number.

That's why most States are not vaccinating. I don't know of any States that are currently vaccinating out-of-state college students, because they're of the lowest risk. We don't have an allocation for them. We do everything based on risk level. And I think we have stuck to that and we will continue to stick to that.

Look, if down the road all the residents that want a vaccine have gotten into the system, of course we could look at opening it up. But our residents just have to come first. Yeah. I mean, I think, of the current cases of today, let's 430-something cases, less than about 2% were out-of-state college students. And they are of one of the lowest-risk populations you have. And we're not allocated vaccine for them, per se. So, it's not some sort of dig at college students, or out-of-state college students. They're just not included in the mathematics that the Federal Government uses to provide us vaccine.

*I mean, they could be asymptomatic carriers. Does that put New Hampshire communities at-risk...*

**Governor Sununu:**

No, it doesn't, because, remember, even if these college students were to get in the system as of tomorrow, they're probably going to get their second shot in May or even as they're leaving. I think even the letter that was sent referenced the fact that most of these kids would only get one shot. And then, they'd probably get the second shot back home. So it's not like they're a significant piece of the overall community immunization and community protections that we like to see with vaccine distribution.

So, the timing, that's just yet another one of the many, many factors that come into play. The timing just doesn't make sense, unfortunately. I think maybe if it were December or January, or something like that, that would be a possibility. But, again, we're not allocated vaccine. Our residents have to come first. The Federal Government's very specific about every last dose. If we had infinite vaccine, of course we could give it to anybody who wanted, as fast as we wanted. But we don't have that opportunity right now. We just have to give it out as we get it.

*With the K-12 returning April 19th, have you talked to the Teachers Unions? Do you know if they're comfortable with that date? Or is that just...*

**Governor Sununu:**

No, I haven't talked to the Teachers Unions. Again, all the Teachers will have gotten their second shot. Children are a very low-risk population. 60% of our schools are already in 5 days a week. 40% are in 2 days a week.

So, it's just the next logical step. And they've had plenty of time to really be able to ramp up and prepare for this. And we'd like to do it before vacation, that way schools can kind of work out some of the kinks and identify any of the additional changes they may need to make while on that break. That gives the schools a little bit of a break to adjust, if they need to make some additional adjustments.

But this also goes back to, this was preplanned way back in July and August, when we were working with Dr. Chan and his Team to provide schools flexibility and not be so rigid and fixed in what

we do. Every school's different. So, those schools still have all that flexibility. WE try not to be very rigid, whether it's on transportation issues, or in-classroom issues.

We want them to use best practices and we want them to take all the precautions. But even the CDC has really relaxed a lot of those protocols and recommendations. And we've always provided that flexibility. And given that most of our schools are already there, there's no reason that we can't get there with everyone and make sure that -- it's not going to be easy. Don't get me wrong; it can be a challenge for schools.

But when you look at the opportunity of kids coming back in the classroom, the mental-health aspects of kids re-socializing, that far outweighs some of the challenges that schools will have to undertake to actually make this happen. So it's not just easy for schools. I appreciate that. But it's so vitally important for our communities.

*With understanding that Teachers have the access to the vaccine now, but then the cases are rising, do you kind of balance that and factor that in at all or...*

**Governor Sununu:**

No, not as much. I mean, we've had cases. We've gone through really high numbers of cases in November and December with the fall surge and all of that, and even the schools that were in five days managed very, very well. Sometimes they might have to take different stipulations and precautions. Right now, we have certain quarantine requirements. But even those may become more flexible, as we get further down the road with our overall population. So, things are always influx. And so, this is just the next logical step. And I think the overall benefits with our communities is going to be huge.

*Governor, when Commissioner Edelblut created the Working Group that came up with the guidelines for reopening a school last summer, there was discussion about, at some point, creating some sort of test, or assessment, new metric to determine how much kids have lost through this hybrid/remote learning. Is there any...*

**Governor Sununu:**

Plans on that, yeah, absolutely. So, for those at home, the question really is about looking at the different testing and assessments that we could look at to use with our kids to make a determination of what really has been lost. We know remote learning was a good backstop in a crisis, but definitely not ideal, far from ideal, frankly, and, in some cases, very detrimental for a lot of kids.

So, being able to assess that -- don't just take it for granted but really assess that -- that's something that we will be looking at, I think, as we end the schoolyear and over the summer. But really, you can only do it when the kids are all back in the classroom, another reason you want all these kids back in the classroom. You don't want to wait until September. They have to come back in so we can see really how they're doing. Put eyes on that student; that one-on-one connection you get with a Teacher is just so important for their overall wellbeing.

And I think that will give us a lot of data and understanding about what else we need to assess with this entire population of kids. We don't want it to be a lost year. And I don't think it has to be a lost year. There's a lot of Federal money and opportunity for our schools.

So as we make these assessments, as the year comes to a close and over the summer, even leading into next September, we will have resources available to supplement what's going on, whether it's additional afterschool programs, additional tutoring, or whatever might be needed, additional dollars into special education. There's literally hundreds of millions of dollars available to our State to allow for these opportunities to get these kids back on track, and those ones that fell through the cracks.

I mean, a lot of these kids really fell through the cracks, have had a hard time with remote learning. And we just want to be there for them on a one-on-one level, not just talking about it at 30,000 feet in Concord. That doesn't help a kid. Really making sure we're providing services in that classroom for those children. Do we have some on the phone? You bet.

***Kathy McCormack with the Associated Press:***

*Hi, thank you. I have two questions. If I can revisit the issue of out-of-state college students and the vaccine, some neighboring States are planning to expand eligibility. Vermont, for example, said today it's now expecting to expand eligibility as of April 30th to those students and to second-homeowners returning to Vermont for the summer. Governor Scott said that would happen based on current vaccine supply forecasts, and as long as doses continue to be allocated at the current level. I know you're concerned about supply. But would this be an ongoing conversation? Could you envision when you might be able to revisit this issue? And my other question is: have you scheduled your own vaccine shot yet? And if so, when would that be?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure; so I'll answer the second one first. I have scheduled my own vaccine. I was on VINI on Monday afternoon. And I got right in. It's scheduled for next week. Also, having to do with the out-of-state college students, yeah, we're absolutely open. I mean, April 30th is a month away. I imagine, boy, if you're a resident of New Hampshire and you haven't signed up into the system by then, of course we would look at opening it up to secondary home residents, out-of-state workers. We're going so fast that, again, I think we're going to have that opportunity.

But, similar to Vermont, that's a month away. And I think things are going to be very, very different in a month. And that opportunity very well may be there, of course. But just like Vermont, our residents have to come first. We're not really taking a different path there at all.

***Teddy Rosenbluth with The Concord Monitor:***

*Hi, thanks for taking my questions. So my first question is for Dr. Chan. Can you update us on how widespread the U.K. variant is in New Hampshire, and whether you think that's contributing to the surge in cases we're seeing? And then, my second question is for the Governor. Whether you think, given how quickly cases are rising, New Hampshire relaxed vaccine restrictions too soon, and whether you'll reimplement restrictions if cases continue to rise at the current rate.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure; I'll have Dr. Chan answer about the U.S. variants.

**Dr. Chan:**

Yeah, great question about the variants. And just a reminder, when we talk about variants, we simply talk about variants of concern. As any virus, like the pandemic Coronavirus, spreads, there's expected changes and genetic mutations that are going to occur. We see this with other viruses, like influenza.

So it's not a surprise that, as we had gone through this pandemic, we have seen other -- we've seen genetic change in the virus. But there are some genetic changes which have caused certain variants of the virus to be more transmissible or more easily spread person-to-person.

And one of these is what we call the B117 variant, which is a variant of concern that originated out of the United Kingdom. So we oftentimes refer to this as the U.K. variant, although this is the predominant variant of concern that is circulating across the country. And I think it's been found now in almost if not every State across the country, and is the primary variant of concern that's identified in New Hampshire.

But just to be clear that this is not the majority of infections that we are identifying in New Hampshire. We are increasing the type of genetic testing, or the genetic sequencing that's required to identify these variants. I think today we've sequenced probably well-over 1900 positive specimens, have been sequenced. And we have identified just over 100 specimens that are positive for the B117 variant. 101 specimens that are positive for the B117 variant; so this is not the predominant strain that's circulating.

The concern certainly is that because these variants of concern appear to be more easily spread, or more transmissible, that they can spread more easily person-to-person. The CDC has estimated that, at some point over the coming weeks to months, this variant very well could become the predominant strain. But it's not yet in New Hampshire, or most other places around the country.

And I think it also highlights the need for people to get vaccinated as soon as possible. We know that the vaccines we have available, all three vaccines remain highly effective against this variant. And so, it's important for people to get vaccinated sooner rather than later.

We continue to also stress the importance of people wearing facemasks and practicing physical distancing, which is also an added layer of protection to control spread of not only this variant but all strains of the virus. Thanks.

**Governor Sununu:**

Thank you. And as to your second question concerning the flexibilities around the guidance that we've provided, no, I think we're taking the exact right approach. I mean, we've had to make decisions in this State to provide guidance, whether it's on essential versus nonessential businesses last March, the Mask Order in November. We've made some very tough decisions.

And I think because of those decisions, New Hampshire has fared very well. We still have one of the lowest fatality rates due to COVID in the entire country and yet we have one of the strongest economies. So we really found the right balance here in New Hampshire. And we will continue to use data to make those decisions, which gives me a lot of confidence that, as we go forward, the decisions we make are for the long-term.



Once everyone in the State has the ability to access the vaccine, there really is no need to ever come back to reinstitute restrictions again. I mean, that's really the endgame is getting vaccine to everyone who wants vaccine. And we're well on our way to achieving that in a matter of weeks.

***Nancy West with InDepthNH:***

*Thank you for taking my questions, Governor. I have two today. And the first one revolves around something we talked about a few weeks ago. I know InDepthNH.org and some of the legislative leaders have been looking for Spending Reports and disbursements for all of the Agencies and private organizations who benefitted from the \$1.25 billion CARES Act money. And I understand that there was a letter that was received today saying that there was a lot of private information, exempted information from the Right to Know Law, so they would not be released. And my question is: doesn't the Right to Know Law mandate that the documents be released, just with that certain protected information redacted?*

**Governor Sununu:**

No, again, we provided a lot of transparency in how all of the dollars have been spent. You said you want to see who has benefited. You can go on our website and see all the different organizations, all the different businesses that received dollars. All of the informational items that were presented to the Executive Council every other Wednesday in our open and public meeting had all of the Agency requests and how the Agencies were spending those CARES Act dollars. So that has all been made public already.

Again, if you're looking for a receipt from Fred's Flower Shop to see exactly how he spent the \$2,000 he received in the Main Street Relief Fund, that is not required. Under revenue replacement and the rules of revenue replacement, we just need to see that he lost revenue. That is how the Federal Government designed the rules around that opportunity and we followed them to a T.

The Federal Government is incredibly stringent. We have a whole Team of Auditors that audit all the dollars that go out to ensure that everyone who received money was following the rules exactly as both we prescribed and the Federal Government prescribed. They'll continue to do that work over the next couple months. And so, we have a whole Team that just makes sure that everything was adhered to and followed to a T.

We do it really, really well, frankly. And so, that's the checks-and-balance on the system to ensure that no one was abusing money. No one was misusing any of the dollars. And everyone followed the rules as the Federal Government prescribed.

***Nancy West with InDepthNH:***

*Well, I guess I'm unclear. So there are Audit Reports that are also public information but are not on the website?*

**Governor Sununu:**

No, they're not. They're not Audit Reports. We have Auditors that basically work with individuals, individual businesses, the nonprofits, the Agencies, whatever it might be, to again make sure that whatever they signed -- when you take dollars, you kind of sign on the dotted line. When you take some of the CARES Act money, that you're going to follow all the rules.

And then, we have Auditors that kind of go through and they do everything from spot checks to one-on-one assistance with a lot of those organizations. And if any dollars need to be remitted back to the State, because maybe the revenue losses weren't as big as the business had projected, that's actually a good thing, right? And when we were giving out a lot of money in April, May, and June of last year, if things didn't turn out as badly for businesses -- and that was the case for a lot of them, which is very, very good -- they would technically have to potentially remit some of that money back. And that money is coming back into GOFERR. And then, we can redistribute it to other folks that still might have needs based on CARES Act losses.

So, there's not a specific Audit Report, per se. But we have a Team of Auditors that are constantly working with individuals to make sure they're adhering to the guidelines and remitting back any dollars that might have to get remitted back.

***Alli Fam with New Hampshire Public Radio:***

*Great, thank you. So I have two questions. I'll just cover the first one. So, we understand that Public Health Networks have been tasked with distributing the State's equity allocation of the vaccine. And we're seeing just that the different Public Health Networks are kind of offering that to different populations across the State. And I'm just curious. What is the State's guidance for these Regional Public Health Networks around the allocation? And then, is that going to be changing at all, now that all New Hampshire residents 16-and-older are about to become eligible tomorrow?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure; I'm going to have Dr. Daly come up. She's been really leading the charge on a lot of our equity populations.

**Dr. Daly:**

Great; so the question was around what type of guidance was given to our Regional Public Health Networks in terms of the equity allocation. This is our allocation, 10% of our vaccine coming in, where we target clinics for communities who are vulnerable.

So the guidance we given them is the information on which communities are vulnerable in New Hampshire. And you'll recall that we used the COVID Community Vulnerability Index. And then, they work with their community partners to identify different options for how they can use that vaccine.

To-date, so far, they've done 180 clinics and vaccinated 16,000 people. The majority of these have been low-income and senior housing, as well as through organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness, and then also some residents for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. So those are the types of locations they're looking at going into. Again, those census tracks are identified as being most vulnerable to COVID-19.

And then, we give them the amount that they can order up to, in terms of those doses. And then, they propose what type of clinic they'd like to do, what the population is that they're trying to reach. And then, we approve that or not.

Going forward, we do expect that we're going to have to continue to do these special clinics to reach vulnerable populations, because there's all kinds of different various barriers to getting vaccine. And some of that might be related to vaccine hesitancy. It might be transportation. It might be other

resources that are available to that person to get vaccinated. And so, we want to decrease barriers for these vulnerable populations. And we do expect that we will continue to make this a priority.

**Governor Sununu:**

Okay, great.

*Governor, just I know you don't want to do a victory lap of any sort just yet, but to have the...*

**Governor Sununu:**

Or ever, I mean, really.

*16- and 17-year-olds have access to the vaccine. And to get to this point, I mean, just how does it feel just to be at this point now?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Wicked awesome, it really does. I mean, we've had a lot of tough days and the Team has literally done -- I mean, I've seen Perry and his Team go 48-hours straight sometimes to make sure that these systems work well and the vaccine is getting out as fast as it is. So, I think I speak for everyone to know that the signup system, so to say, once we got to our State System, just worked so much better, especially this past week.

We're going to put 150,000 people into the system this week with virtually no problems. I mean, it took me about three minutes to register and signup, which was just fantastic. And I think that's not just a relief for us here, because we get to really focus on the next phase and other things, it's a huge anxiety lift for parents, for all of our citizens who have just been waiting to have access into that system: the 20-somethings, the 30-somethings, the 40-somethings.

If you remember, we stood here, oh, just a few months ago thinking that the 20-something, the 16-and-up, yeah, maybe in June or something like that. It's April 2nd and they get this. I mean, that's really awesome.

So not only is it, I think, a sigh of relief that we're there, but it's a sigh of relief that we got here so fast and so efficiently. And we are getting it out. I mean, even to the previous question, yeah, we had a delay of about an hour, hour and a half at one of our sites today. I mean, I know it's frustration. But, if we're really -- if the questions for the Governor are, how do explain a one-hour delay, that's not a good problem to have, but it's better than most other States. We're not sending people away. We commit to, when people show up, they get their vaccine. And the few times we have to maybe move a vaccine site, we have great communication that comes out that allows people to move easily.

Operationally, it's just going super, super well on the vaccine side. And again, as fast as the Government can give it, it's the fastest we get it out. And that's one of the reasons our Team has been so successful.

So, we just want people to keep getting the vaccine. We have very high uptake of vaccine in our long-term care. I think we still have the highest uptake of vaccine in our Healthcare Workers of the entire

country. We're number 1 in the country for that. And that's great, because I think that gives a lot of confidence to our citizens. They want it. So hopefully we will have as high of an uptake as possible.

We understand, though, at the end of the day, 30% to 40% maybe might not get the vaccine. We want 100% to get it. But you could have a maybe 30% to 35% not get it. And that's just a reality. So we want to keep making it available. That's why we have the PSA campaign. Talk about its safety and its efficacy, and talk about each individual having that responsibility of being that community shield against it, even for younger individuals that are less vulnerable and less vulnerable especially to severe symptoms. It's really important that all of us really participate in that process. It is safe. It is effective. It works. We're seeing that fatality rate go down. We're seeing that hospitalization rate level off and even go down.

And we're still going to have COVID. We're still going to have cases of COVID. I can't say that enough, unfortunately. I mean, they might go down in the summer. But my guess is it'll be back up in the fall. But this is all about not letting the healthcare system get overrun. This was all about making sure we had bought ourselves some time to get to the vaccine, while minimizing that fatality. We did a great job with that. And we just want to keep on it. So there's no victory lap. We're in those final miles of the marathon. But we're feeling good. We can almost see the finish line from here, which is pretty exciting.

*And then, one last question: \$41 million for surveillance testing, do you know how that's going to be...*

**Governor Sununu:**

Specifically around the schools, are you talking about the school money?

Yes.

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, so there's a variety of opportunities and ways that those dollars can be spent. That's a lot of money for surveillance testing for schools. It'll be interesting to see. We're going to provide it in a variety of different ways and hopefully schools will take it and use it. It's not mandatory. Some schools may choose just not to use surveillance testing.

I know in a lot of other States, it's not as strong of an uptake as a lot of folks would have liked, whether it's just the Teachers getting vaccinated, or the low extreme incident rate to children. A variety of things can lead to that.

So we will just, again, put out the information, create the opportunity for these districts, and encourage it, of course. But there is also testing fatigue. And that's just a reality. If you're in a workplace or an environment where you're constantly being tested, I think, during the height of COVID, a lot of people were willing to do it and they did it very, very well.

I think, as we get to fully vaccinate the population, we get to the summer where the cases are likely going to go down, I think it's going to be hard to encourage folks, unfortunately. So it's on us to keep pushing as hard as we can. Testing is a very, very powerful tool to reduce the spread of COVID.

So I just say that only to be cognizant of that potential barrier that's out there. And we will just make sure that, I mean, all these dollars that are available, that's an immense amount of money. The money is not the problem. There's a lot of money into the system. I mean, it's really an unbelievable

amount of money coming into the system. So it's just more on us to make sure we're educating folks and creating a variety of different ways to have that opportunity.

Okay. Did you have one? You're all set? Okay, great. Okay. Well, thank you, guys, very much. We will be back next week. Again, the 16-and-older crowd can sign up as of tomorrow. We should see a decent increase in vaccine coming in next week. That's very exciting. And we will just keep on doing what we're doing, because so far it's going really, really well.

And spring is in the air. Is it here? I think it is spring. It's officially spring. I'm losing my dates. So, again, we want people to wear the masks, maintain social distancing. We have a few more weeks here before we really get the final pieces of our most vulnerable population vaccinated. But things are definitely looking on the right path and we're going to have a great summer. Thank you, guys.