



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon. Thanks, everyone, for joining us, back on a little cold and snowy Thursday, so that was a little surprising for a lot of us. But couple announcements today, but first we will kick it off I think a Public Health date [sic] with Dr. Chan.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. Good to be back with all of you this week. Just a few brief updates for today; we are reporting 515 new people diagnosed with COVID-19 in the State today. It's important to note that over 100 of these cases are actually associated with the outbreak in the Federal Prison up in Berlin, New Hampshire, which is causing the numbers to be higher on today's report. But in the last week, we have been averaging around 350 new infections per day, which is a decrease from where we were even a couple of weeks ago.

Currently, there are 3,233 people with active infections. And our test-positivity rate -- that's the percentage of all tests that are positive for COVID-19 -- is down to 4.5%, which is also a decline from where we were even a week-or-two ago.

In terms of hospitalizations, 112 people statewide currently are hospitalized with COVID-19. And then, unfortunately, one new person to announce that has been confirmed to have died from COVID-19, bringing the total number of deaths during this pandemic from COVID-19 to 1,274.

So, as seen in the daily incidence numbers, the test-positivity numbers, and even the hospitalization numbers, the last week-or-so, the COVID-19 numbers are starting to come back down. This is a trend we hope will continue, but just to stress that the levels of community spread continue to be high. And so, getting the COVID-19 vaccine is one of the most important things people can do right now to protect themselves, to protect their families, to protect their communities.

We continue to also stress the importance that people continue to wear facemasks when out in public locations, especially if they're in indoor places where they may come into close contact with other people. We continue to stress the importance of social distancing and avoiding large crowds and gatherings, in order to bring the numbers down further.

There is data that shows that vaccination combined with these community mitigation measures will help us control the pandemic more effectively, bring the numbers down more quickly, and help us get back to normal at a more rapid pace. And with that, I will hand things over to Dr. Daly. Thank you.

Dr. Daly:

Hey, good afternoon, everyone. I'll provide a vaccine update. To-date in New Hampshire, we have administered 984,000 doses of vaccine. This includes 637,000 people that have received their first dose. This is 47% of the total New Hampshire population. And of those, 387,000 people are fully vaccinated, which is 28% of the population.

We continue to receive around 50,000 first doses of vaccine each week, between the doses that are allocated to us at the State, as well as our pharmacy partners. And at this point, over half the people in New Hampshire who are age eligible have already made that choice to get vaccinated. This is a great start, and we'd love to see more people make this choice. We still have thousands of open appointments available across our State at over 200 different locations where you can get vaccinated.

This weekend, we do have a supersite event at the New Hampshire Motor Speedway. It's on Saturday, April 24th. Originally, we had planned to have this event be on Saturday and Sunday, and it's to provide second doses to people who were vaccinated at the end of March at a supersite that provided Pfizer vaccine.

All of the Sunday appointments for this weekend's supersite at the Speedway have been moved to Saturday. So, we're only operating the supersite for one day this weekend. And again, it's only for individuals that received their first vaccine dose at the New Hampshire Motor Speedway at the end of March.

Since we've opened more vaccination sites and have made many more appointments available over the last month, many people had actually gone into VINI and moved up that vaccination appointment. And so, that meant that we have less people to vaccinate as part of this supersite. And so, we're able to do everyone in one day, instead of two days, so just sharing that information with you about why we have moved to a single day of operation at that supersite.

We have let everyone who this schedule change affects know, by either email or text. It went out to those individuals who had Sunday appointments and moved them to a Saturday appointment. If, for some reason, your Saturday appointment time doesn't work for you, you can go into VINI and change that, yourself. Or if you have any issues at all, you can certainly call us at 211 to reschedule.

So, just want to reiterate that no appointments have been canceled. Everyone who wants to get vaccinated this weekend at the supersite who was vaccinated at the prior Pfizer supersite will still have an appointment and can get vaccinated. And with that, I think I will turn it over to Commissioner Shibinette.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon, just a brief update on institutional outbreaks. We are closing one institutional outbreak today. The Rockingham County House of Corrections is closed. Their outbreak has closed. We have no new outbreaks to announce. That leaves our current total of institutional outbreaks at two: the Coos County Nursing Home and the Federal Prison in Berlin. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, well, thank you very much, Commissioner. As I mentioned, we have a few short announcements today. Some good news stuff; as we work to fully reopen our State over the next few weeks, we obviously continue to urge folks and create that opportunity for people to get back into the workforce.

At a 3% unemployment rate, as was reported recently, New Hampshire continues to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. It's good news. It means our economy is very, very strong. And it also unfortunately means that we're, if anything, facing a workforce shortage.

Traditionally, you had to prove that you were searching for gainful employment while collecting unemployment benefits. Last year, we waived that need to look for work while on unemployment. We wanted to make sure that individuals could remain safe in their home to slow the spread of COVID, if they so chose. And we also knew that, given the very uncertain economic crisis that was working hand-in-hand with the COVID crisis, there just weren't nearly as many jobs available, of course.

But our economy has come absolutely roaring back. And today, there are, as was mentioned, thousands of job shortages. So, in response, we're announcing that, over the next month, we will be reintroducing our work search requirement at New Hampshire Employment Security. It does not mean that if you can't find work, that you'll lose unemployment, not at all. All it means is that, starting on May 23rd, about a month from now, you'll be required to look for work while on unemployment. It has always been this way before COVID and we're just returning back to our traditional, more normalized system.

There are tens of thousands of high-paying jobs across the State available today. It's just an awesome opportunity. Since last summer, the State has hosted 15 virtual job fairs to help Employers find Employees to get back to work. The folks at New Hampshire Employment Security do a great job with these job fairs. They've done some virtually. They're starting to look at doing more of them in-person in more of a traditional way.

Just last week, we did a virtual job fair, as a bit of an anecdote. We did a partnership over at the Seacoast United Sports Center. We had 100 Employers with over 3,000 jobs available as part of that virtual job fair. And we only had about 140 people, actual jobseekers, show up. So that's just one anecdote to show the very high demand for workforce right now.

We are always helping people get back to work. And those unable to return to their old jobs can utilize the State's Job Board, the job fairs to find employment that is right for them, a lot of opportunity out there.

And we are announcing this early. This is announced kind of a month in advance to give folks time to plan and prepare. This return to the normal process, again, will be effective on May 23rd. The date really correlates with our rapid pace of vaccination, when you look at how fast we're getting the vaccine out, where we will be with full vaccinations on May 23rd. And that's just, again, just all a function of the opportunity we're trying to create to get people back to work and get things more normalized, as we come out of the COVID crisis.

So, in order to support and facilitate the get back to work effort, we do want to highlight all New Hampshire Works Job Center. So, we have New Hampshire Works Job Centers all across the State, and all of them will be opening up to the public by May 10th. There are still some that have remained, and you can still access them virtually. They've had limited ability for folks to come in, one-on-one, and use some of their resources, their computers, whatever it might be to look for a job. Some of the one-on-one work

that those amazing Staff from the State just to help get resumes prepared or even prepare folks for job interviews, things of that nature.

So those have been limited over the COVID crisis. But, as of May 10th, they will all be open so folks can come in, and sit down, and kind of have a little more of that one-on-one interaction to help them find the job that's going to most suit their and their family's needs.

New Hampshire Employment Security will also continue to host job fairs. There's a few coming up that we are hosting here. You can see on the screen next to me. The State has a virtual event on May 6th focused on helping Veterans find employment. We have two upcoming events on May 11th, in partnership with Pinkerton Academy over in Derry. It's focused on students, graduates, and individualized using a lot of the adult education programs. Again, that's on May 11th.

We have an event on May 13th focused on construction employment in partnership with the Associated Builders and Contractors of New Hampshire and Vermont. So, again, that one's a little more focused in the construction industry, which we think there's going to be an immense amount of opportunity over the next coming -- or next few years, as a lot of infrastructures investment across the country. And again, that one will be on May 13th.

And lastly, of course, we will be scheduling additional events specific to each county throughout May and June. But you can go to unemploymentbenefits.nh.gov. You can see the website right here. That's a great place to go just to see where the job fairs are, what areas they may be specializing in. But every one of them has been a huge success for folks walking through the door. So, we really encourage folks to take advantage.

Again, not to be the bragging Chief Executive, but our folks at Unemployment Security -- or I should say the New Hampshire Department of Unemployment Security, whether it's dealing with folks on unemployment benefits or providing job opportunities for individuals on a one-on-one basis, they really do an outstanding job. So, again, overall, the change for making sure that you are looking for work will start on May 23rd.

And then, lastly, a really quick -- as a lot of folks know, a few days ago we opened vaccine appointments to anyone, regardless of where you lived, what your residency was. Some worried about a rush on the system, but, again, VINI did a great job, pulled through. We've heard a few anecdotal cases of folks signing onto VINI weeks ago to find an appointment in May.

We want to remind folks that they can constantly check in and move their appointments up. There are appointments today in the State of New Hampshire going unfilled. So, sometimes it might be an extra 5 or 10 miles, or a different location than what you're used to. But there are a lot of appointments available still throughout our system, thousands, frankly, over the next week-or-so, and over 50,000 appointments available still in May, so lots of ability for folks to move up and get their vaccine a little sooner than originally anticipated.

And again, just vaccines.nh.gov, that one takes you to -- book now, there you go. [Vaccines.nh.gov](http://vaccines.nh.gov), just for folks to register in the system, or just go into the system and see kind of where you are and see if there's another opportunity opening up.

Obviously, we want everyone to get vaccinated. It really is a tremendous opportunity to get back to normalcy, get out of the COVID crisis. And we've really come out of the crisis, if you will. We're more in kind of that emergency management phase. And I think that folks in the State are just doing a tremendous job of making sure that we can provide that protective bubble, if you will, that shield around the most vulnerable population and anybody who wants to get vaccinated. With that, we can open it up for questions.

Q&A Session

Governor, what's the latest on the Johnson & Johnson pause? Have you heard anything from the Federal level in terms of when that might be reversed?

Governor Sununu:

I think everyone is hopeful that it could come in a matter of days. We had a call with the White House earlier this week. They were working diligently. They were trying to get the final checkoffs, if you will, from both the FDA and the CDC to rerelease that Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which is such a powerful tool. They're looking at everything, I think, from additional wording and warnings, and things like that, that might come with the labels of it. But we're all very, very hopeful, in the next few days it will be released. And we will kind of get, again, back to normal, in terms of providing that opportunity. It's an awesome tool.

And even if they lift that, do we know, in terms of shipments, when those might start to step back up again?

Governor Sununu:

Unfortunately, it doesn't look like those shipments are going to step back up anytime soon. That question was asked very directly of the White House. And frankly, there was not a very good answer, in terms of if they had continued producing the vaccine over these past few weeks. They didn't give any clarity that that had actually happened, which was quite surprising, I think, to all the Governors.

So, they were clear that, over the next few weeks, we should not anticipate a large influx of Johnson & Johnson into the State, even after it has been reapproved. So, that's a bit unfortunate. But hopefully, over time, they can still meet their commitments and provide it by either the end of May -- or probably not the end of April, but hopefully at least meet some of the commitments through the month of May.

Can we ask a question of Dr. Chan?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

This might be a little bit of review, but you weren't here last week. So, we wanted to get your perspective on the rescinding of the Mask Mandate. Can you take us through how you advised the Governor on making this decision, and whether or not you were in favor of it?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so a question about the Mask Mandate. And first off, apologies I wasn't here last week. I was gone with my family on vacation. And so, that was not meant to be reflective, and my absence was not meant to be reflective at all of that announcement last week.

Excuse me. But, look. I think that myself, the Governor, Public Health, in general, are all in agreement with the importance of mask use continuing as a layer of protection. We have evidence -- more and more evidence that masks are effective at preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19. And so, regardless of whether there's a Mask Mandate or not, we, Public Health, and the State will continue to recommend that masks be used whenever people are outside of their homes in public locations, especially in indoor locations, where people may be coming into close contact with one another.

One of the challenges during this pandemic is how to get people to change their behaviors, right? A lot of the community mitigation measures, the nonpharmaceutical interventions that we have been recommending ultimately come down to behavior change. And that's the great challenge here.

A Mask Mandate is one way, I think, to get people to change their behaviors by requiring people to wear masks. But we know that even with Mask Mandates, people choose not to wear masks. And so, Public Health tends to operate -- and I think we're most successful when we operate -- from a standpoint of looking at how we can engage communities, collaborate with individuals and businesses, and get people to understand that we're still in the midst of the pandemic.

Masks continue to be important as a control measure, and that, regardless of whether there's a Mandate or a requirement for people to wear masks, that we continue to recommend that people wear masks. And even as we're ramping up vaccination, strongly encourage people to do so. So, I think the Mandate has gone away, has expired. But the recommendation for people to wear masks remains.

And the contagiousness of these variants is pretty high. And we're seeing more of the variants as the percentage of the whole. Do you expect the variants to skip the track at all, in terms of the seasonality of Coronaviruses? Or will we start to see a seasonal decline, along with our vaccination?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so interesting question about what the trajectory of the pandemic might be, especially with emergence of the variants. The seasonality of the Novel Coronavirus, I think, still remains a little bit unclear. We've seen multiple peaks and multiple spikes and surges over the last 13, 14 months.

What I will say is that there is actually data that has suggested this second sort of peak that we're in right now. We're actually second, third peak. That we believe likely is at least contributed to by the emergency of the variants, right? I'm thinking back to some modeling that the CDC did early in January, looking at the emergence of the B117 variant. That's the U.K.-source variant, which has now become the predominant variant, or strain, of the virus across the United States.

And because these variants are more infectious, because they're more easily spread person-to-person, they're going to be more difficult to control. And so, I think that the -- some of the modeling studies have shown that there's another smaller peak expected, but that, with continued high-level vaccination, with continued attention and adherence to social distancing, and facemask use, and avoiding crowds, that we can bring these numbers back down.

And hopefully the trend that we've been seeing in the last week, in terms of the declining incidence of COVID-19, the declining test-positivity, that the beginning of the hospitalizations maybe starting to go down, that we can continue to drive those numbers down further, drive community spread down further with increasing vaccination and continued attention to social distancing and facemasks, etc. Thanks.

Governor, as far as vaccine hesitancy is concerned, where is New Hampshire at with that? Where's the uptake of the vaccine and the acceptance level of the vaccine in the State of New Hampshire?

Governor Sununu:

Well, I think it's very good. Yeah, especially when you compare us to where we are with other States. And I base that on, first, where we see our uptake within long-term care, where we've seen the uptake in our healthcare workforce, which is very important to instill confidence in our communities, and the uptake that we've seen in the bands of the 50-and-up, 40-and-up, 30-and-up, 16-and-up is all about where we expected it to see.

To be -- and I think it'll keep increasing. I think our general sense is that even though everyone's had weeks now to be able to get into our system and get a vaccine, there's still some folks that might wait until the summer, some folks that might wait until it's more convenient, some folks that just might wait until they feel more comfortable, or maybe some folks do want to get it through their direct Doctor, right? And we're going to be transitioning more over the next month-or-so, so that your Primary Care Physician, or the Hospital Associations, they have much more control in the distribution of this, as they should. They're our Healthcare Providers and they do a great job of that, pharmacies, as well.

So, we think that, over time, it's not going to end, even though everyone's had -- even though our system may go more to a healthcare system, I think folks are going to keep trickling in and getting the vaccine for the first time all through the summer potentially, but obviously not at the high rate we're seeing right now, which allows us to make that transition.

Do we have a number, as far as who's eligible to get the vaccine that's actually gotten the vaccine?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, Dr. Daly, do you...

Dr. Daly:

It's 56%.

Governor Sununu:

56%, there you go.

56%, okay, of people who are eligible have gotten the vaccine?

Dr. Daly:

Correct.

Governor Sununu:

Yes.

Okay.

Governor Sununu:

They've actually had a needle in the arm, so to say.

Okay, got you.

Governor Sununu:

Correct? Yeah.

The CDC put out a map of talking about estimated vaccine hesitancy. And New Hampshire, Coos, Grafton, Sullivan, and Cheshire Counties were the highest estimated hesitancy rate in New England. What can be done about that, if anything?

Governor Sununu:

Well, there's a couple different -- potentially a couple different reasons for that. Those tend to be more of our rural communities, of course. It's not about access. We want to provide as much access as we possibly can, and I think the State has done a very good job of that, given that we have such a high rate of vaccine uptake. We have one of the highest rates of distribution of the vaccine in the country, frankly. So, I think, overall, we've done a very, very good job of that.

I don't want to say that this county is better than that county, and this county's doing a good job. That's not fair to that county. It's not really county-specific per se. It's just about getting the messaging out as strong as we can. And I think with the new PSAs that we're doing, whether it's the billboards or the digital ads, all of that, talking about the safety of it, the efficacy of it.

In those counties, they just haven't experienced as high level of COVID as other areas, which might be a contributing factor for why some folks are a little more hesitant to get it. They don't see the immediacy of it, which, of course, it is an immediate need. Everyone really has to be a part of that community solution.

But I wouldn't separate it county-by-county. At the State level, when we supply PPE, we supply testing. We supply vaccine. We don't look at it at a county-by-county level. We just get it out as fast as we can wherever we can. And I think the State's done a very good job of that.

I know with the Prison outbreak, that's a Federal Prison. But is there concern, given the surrounding area, that there's members of the community going in-and-out of that facility obviously?

Governor Sununu:

Well, the Federal Prison situation is very frustrating, because it's kind of an island unto itself. We don't have any real interaction with that facility. We don't provide the vaccines. We don't provide the testing. The Federal Government was supposed to take care of all of that. And frankly, they didn't do nearly as good of a job as the rest of the State.

The only silver lining of that is I believe the number of actual Staff that has been infected, as opposed to inmates, is four. So, it's a very, very low number. So that would be your gateway to community transmission or interaction.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of residents of the Federal Prison that were either not fully vaccinated or not offered the vaccine, whatever those reasons might be. We really can't answer to that, because it's not our system. It's the Federal Bureau of Prisons that handles that. They do things very differently in the Federal Bureau of Prisons than the New Hampshire Prison System. I think the New Hampshire Correctional System does a very good job, when it comes to vaccines, interaction with Public Health. Federal Bureau of Prisons is very different from that.

Governor, is there going to be a new universal best practices document that's going to be in play after May 7th? And if so, how's work going on the document?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so that's a great question. The Reopen Committee that has looked at all of the documents that kind of have provided the guidance and the regulations around the emergency is looking at taking a lot of those and putting them into a single, universal best practices. It's very similar to the universal guidance we already have now. And I know Dr. Chan and Public Health have kind of had their input on it. Our Office has had their input on it.

And I believe if not this week then maybe tomorrow -- is it tomorrow? Oh, tomorrow, they're going to be taking that up at their meeting. And then, they'll kind of send to us some of their recommendations. And we will put the final touches on it and hopefully get it out next week, if it's ready for primetime.

But, that group does a terrific job at looking at all the details and talking to the specific industries. We want to make it more as universal as we can, because it's not going to exist for one month or three months. It might exist forever, right? So, we want to make it as broad and universal as we can, try to get away from the 42 different specific industry guidance documents that we currently have, because you never know what could change down the road for a specific industry. You never know what new industries could come up. We just want to make it as encompassing and as easy to manage as possible for whatever the business situation would arise.

Will this allow a business industry association to decide on its own, we want to go beyond that document? And you talk with these industry folks all the time. Do you get any sense any industries are looking to go beyond what you're probably going to recommend?

Governor Sununu:

I don't think so. And by beyond, I just want to be clear, like more restrictive?

More restrictions and less capacity than you say is okay to have, or...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, an industry could always do that, if they chose to do that. An individual business, though, always has the flexibility. So, we're simply saying again it's just not State-mandated rules that the end all, be all, absolute, and must.

It's a little bit -- I think it's a very similar situation as we did with schools. Early on with schools, we provided kind of a universal guidelines for schools. It wasn't fixed Mandates on any of the stipulations. But schools did a phenomenal job managing kind of themselves, understanding where they could and couldn't necessarily meet certain stipulations. They still provided a lot of flexibility to be successful for those kids. And by and large, I think they were, given that we didn't have any major outbreaks in our school system over the course of the year.

So, overall, I think we all have a lot of faith that this is definitely the right step. We do everything stepwise. We do everything data driven. When we make the decision on removing the Mask Order or pulling back on the business restrictions on May 7th, it's all data driven. And frankly, when we're telling that story, that's a very important part of it.

That fatality rate, down 95%, that's a huge part of the story that has to be told. The fact that vaccines are going up so rapidly, a huge part of the story so folks know that we're not just doing this on a whim or putting our finger up into the wind and hoping for the best. We're really looking at all of these trends and those data markers as they come together.

Is it concerning to you at all, Governor, that the supersite had to be scaled back to one day? And is that indicative of us starting to plateau from this sort of rocket takeoff on the vaccine?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, no, no. The supersite being scaled back to one day is more of a function of people interacting with VINI and moving themselves up to get their second shot. I believe that's safe to say. And so, people took the opportunity to move themselves up, instead of waiting four weeks, three weeks. They were able to do it.

So, I think it's an awesome sign that people are kind of taking their vaccination in their own hands, so to say. And we can just be a lot more efficient with it. So, no, it's actually a really great thing that we could cut it down to one day.

As we start to eventually see that trajectory flatten out a little bit, will there be greater intervention at all in terms of PSAs, or trying to really drive the message to get that last, I don't know, tranche, if you want to call it, of people who might be able to be willing to get vaccinated?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I mean, I think it'll be a consistent message, if anything. I don't know. We're pushing as hard as we possibly can at this point. That's all really people talk about right now is vaccines. So, I mean, the word is out for sure.

I really do believe that as we transition into the healthcare system, as a whole, taking over the responsibility of distributing vaccines and working one-on-one with their patients, and patients being able to -- individuals being able to work one-on-one with their Providers, you may see a higher increase and uptick in it, because you get to talk about the pros and cons, the side-effects of each of those vaccines and the potential.

And we will have more options in terms of when vaccine outpaces demand, I think we will just see more options of I want that vaccine. I want this vaccine. I want it at this time. I want it at that time. And that kind of flexibility hopefully will provide more opportunity for people to get it, and more comfort in their willingness to get it.

Will the fixed sites come back, if we need a booster in the fall?

Governor Sununu:

We're not planning on that. I think what the hope is, we've talked to the Hospital Association and the hope is that the Hospital Association will be able to take up the need, if a booster were required. Right now, there's no indicator that a booster is required.

Remember, folks were getting their initial vaccines in December. So, if there were a six-month requirement, per se, as was initially discussed, I think we'd know about it by now, because that'd be coming up in May and June.

So, I think the hope is that, if that were to happen, it would be in the fall or next year. Or it would just be to a part of the most vulnerable population, maybe the elderly or something like that. So, again, I think all within the management scope of the existing healthcare system, as opposed to everybody ask -- asking everybody to rush into the system at once, when there was a limited amount of vaccine.

We will also just have so much more of it, right? It won't be the State kind of controlling the -- or I should say the Federal Government controlling the distribution and the State getting it out won't be as much of a priority, because the healthcare system, the hospitals, themselves, the pharmacies, themselves, will have hopefully plenty of it. And folks can make their appointment and come in, as they like.

What's your reaction to us all learning about these breakthrough cases, where people who are fully vaccinated get COVID-19? Sullivan County Nursing Home announced that they had a resident vaccinated come down with COVID-19, just your reaction to hearing this.

Governor Sununu:

Well, it's expected. We know there's going to be breakthrough. The vaccines were never 100% against getting any symptoms or catching COVID, right? They were, I think, 94%, 95%. So, 1 out of 20 people that have been vaccinated are still susceptible to getting COVID or even being symptomatic to COVID.

I think with the Johnson & Johnson, it's even slightly a little bit higher. The key for me and I think for a lot of folks is its very strong efficacy, the 97%, 98%, 99%-plus in terms of protecting against fatality and the most severe symptoms of hospitalization.

So, folks getting COVID, even though they're fully vaccinated, isn't a shock. That was always kind of built into the numbers and the expectation, unfortunately. We knew that that could happen, just like folks might get a flu shot but still get the flu. We heard a lot of stories like that.

This is even more viable than that, which is the good news. But, folks getting COVID isn't an absolute shock. The good news is, is that for the vast, vast, vast majority of folks who have been vaccinated around the country, there's very, very little, I think far less than 1% in terms of a fatality rate, or severe hospitalization rate, which is exactly the numbers as they were predicted. So that's all good news.

In regards to employment, is there a particular -- I saw the construction job fair -- is there a particular industry in New Hampshire that you're concerned about being underemployed at all?

Governor Sununu:

All of them, I don't know anyone who isn't looking for workers right now. I've heard from all the industries, especially tourism industry right now is a big one, as folks try to get at least that seasonal worker. A lot of folks are having some luck getting the seasonal workers in. Some of them come from out-of-country, which is a great opportunity.

But just getting other folks into those, travel and tourism is a big deal for us. And all those businesses, restaurants right now, especially, are gearing up; hotels that might have been closed longer than normal are all gearing up. I don't know anyone who isn't looking for work. And then, you add on top of that all these new tech companies and these new manufacturers that have moved in here over the past year, we confirmed.

I went back to, if you remember, there was a stat that we gave out about towards the end of last year. And I went back to the Department of Revenue Administration and I confirmed. Less businesses closed in New Hampshire in 2020 than they did in 2019. Think about that for a second. Through all the economic tribulation and hardship, and unknown, because what we did with the CARES Act, because we put so much money back into the economy, because we, I think, maintained a lot of -- we put a lot of restrictions in, in terms of business. But we also were able to keep those businesses open and flexible enough to be successful where they could be, or as successful as they could be in such trying times. The

fact that less businesses closed in 2020 to 2019 is nothing short of a miracle and an amazing testament to the Team and finding that balance.

We have one of the lowest fatality rates in the country. Massachusetts and New York have one of the highest. But we were able to maintain one of the lowest, even though we're effectively their suburbs, and still have far and away the strongest economy in the northeast and provide a lot of opportunity.

So, we didn't have those unfortunate business closures. Some did close, of course. And there are stories out there. And they were tough stories to hear, of course. But, overall, economically we're really booming here. And that's great news for the future.

Do you have concerns with school vacation week and people traveling?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I mean, I think anytime we see a holiday, right, we get a little bit concerned. Dr. Chan and I were talking about whether it was Thanksgiving or Christmas, or even the 4th of July, even our numbers were so low over the last 4th of July and Labor Day, if I remember. Numbers were very low, but you saw a little bump there.

There's always a bump when folks travel, as they come-and-go. And they're just more social when they travel. It's not just the act of traveling. I think airlines have done a very good job of -- I think they all require masks. I think that's a national standard right now. And I think they've done a good job managing the crowds and keeping people socially distanced in an airport for the most part.

But when you vacation, you're just more social. You're hanging out with your family, your friends, or whatever it is. You're visiting folks. And so, obviously, there's that tendency to see a natural bump post-holiday. And I imagine we're -- I suspect we will see that, as well.

But, again, if that bump, as we have over the past few weeks, exists in a younger population, a population that is more -- has a bit more strength to manage the symptoms that could come with that, that's exactly why our fatality rate is just so low right now. And so, if we have to get a bump, hopefully it's in that population. If they haven't chose to vaccinate themselves by now, it's with the population that's either making that choice or can withstand the symptoms a little better. Do we have some on the phone? All right.

Kathy McCormack with The Associated Press:

Hi, thank you. This is a question for Commissioner Shibinette. Can you give us an estimate on the percentage of residents and Staff at long-term care facilities who are vaccinated now? And what efforts are being made to ensure that new incoming residents and Staff get vaccinated? Are pharmacy partners still involved in getting the vaccine to those groups?

Governor Sununu:

Great, I'm going to have Dr. Daly take that.

Dr. Daly:

Great, and thank you for the question about the vaccine uptake in our long-term care facilities. So, as you know, the Federal Pharmacy Partnership Program vaccinated the majority of our long-term care facilities in a big push at the beginning of the year. And so, the data that came out of that program showed that 85% of our residents in those institutions, and 75% of Staff, chose to be vaccinated. So those are really great vaccination rates. And I believe we're among the highest in the country.

Going forward, we absolutely want those residents and Staff to be able to access vaccine. The way that they can access that vaccine is through our State Programs and our partnerships with the pharmacies that serve long-term care facilities in our State.

So, we're not using that Federal Long-Term Care Pharmacy Partnership Program anymore. That has ended. And instead, the institutions, the facilities can access the vaccine through other pharmacies that they normally access medications through.

Governor Sununu:

Great.

Paula Tracy with InDepthNH:

Yes, good afternoon, Governor. Hello. I have two questions today. One is if we know how many out-of-state residents have signed up to get the vaccine in New Hampshire, and whether that supply may be limited for residents, because of that. And the second question is the Vice President is coming to the State tomorrow. Are you planning to greet her? And do you have a message or a request for her?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so, right now, about 10,000 to 12,000 out-of-staters have signed up into our system to receive a vaccine in New Hampshire. So, it's far less than we anticipated. I thought it could be upwards of 50,000-or-more. We have plenty of vaccine to handle that. Those could be out-of-state residents that don't live here. They could be folks with second homes, out-of-state students, whatever it might be for any reason.

So, no, there actually wasn't that high of a demand there. So therefore, it really doesn't -- won't affect our overall vaccine distribution. We still have a lot of vaccine available. And we'd encourage everyone to -- resident or not -- to sign into the system and take advantage of it.

The Vice President will be -- we have the honor of greeting the Vice President and hosting the Vice President tomorrow. It's always an honor when the President or the Vice President chooses to visit the State of New Hampshire. And yes, I'll absolutely be greeting her there. As far as the message, I haven't really thought of it much other than the most important message, which is welcome to New Hampshire.

Annmarie Timmins with the New Hampshire Bulletin:

Thank you for taking my question. I have two questions. The first is -- and Dr. Daly maybe addressed this -- there's a discrepancy on the CDC site between how many vaccines we've been given and how many we've given to folks. And there's more given than we've gotten. But I'm thinking we might be counting them

differently. So, if Dr. Daly could address that? Second question for the Governor, it's regarding the workforce shortage. The Student Loan Repayment Program has about \$5 million in it that could lapse at the end of the year. Community mental-health centers especially say they really need that money. Do you support letting that remain in the hands of the program, or do you think it should lapse back into general fund?

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so, let me deal with two very separate questions. Let's talk about the numbers. First, I think I speak for everyone. The CDC, we don't know exactly how the CDC gets their final numbers. There are other Federal Programs that the Government contracts with directly. Maybe it's through the VA, the program to distribute vaccines through the Prisons. There's a whole bunch of them, the FQHC Program they have, their Direct Pharmacy Program.

So, the new Administration has done a lot more with direct Federal Programs that the State has no real contact with. So, I don't think it's -- I'm not sure exactly where the CDC gets all their data. I can tell you, in terms of getting the vaccines out, we keep track of our data, our numbers that come in. I think they're very accurate and the folks have done a great job. And New Hampshire keeps crushing it. So, unfortunately, there's just a lot of other Federal Programs there that the CDC tracks directly through the Federal Government that we don't have our -- that it doesn't really come through the State.

As for the Student Loan Repayment Program, absolutely, I love the Student Loan Repayment Program. And I hope that our recommendations as part of the budget, which would put another \$10 million in student loan repayment, doesn't cost taxpayers a dollar, by the way. It's a great idea and a great opportunity to expand student loan repayment to all aspects of our economy, all different types of workforce opportunities, whether they be community-based mental health, whether they be Nurses, whether they be Doctors, whether they be in biotech manufacturing.

For me, I think there's just a lot of money, a lot of opportunity out there. There's a lot of innovative ways to do it that doesn't put a financial burden on our system but incentivizes students to stay and work in New Hampshire while paying down their student debt, which we know can be much, much higher than normal, if you come out of either the community college or the university system here. Another reason why I want to join those two systems together and find a lot of synergy, I think that programs like that can be that much more effective when doing that.

So, anything to broaden that program, it's something I've been advocating for, for three years now. The Democrats took it out of my budget last time. I'm going to work with the Republican majority to try to get that reinstated this time.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Governor, thank you. You've spoken at these COVID presses quite frequently about social justice issues, the George Floyd case. In fact, about a year ago this summer, you stood here and encouraged people to participate in the Black Lives Matter marches, even though they were in violation of the Lockdown Order. You declared Derek Chauvin a murderer a year before the trial. And you put a Black Lives Matter Activist on your LEACT Committee. This week, the New Hampshire Black Lives Matter Chapters declared, along with the New Hampshire ACLU, that Police reform is no longer a realistic goal. "The system can't be reformed. We're not asking for reform. We are asking for abolition." Given calls for abolition of Police and the treatment of the Police Officer who saved a woman two days ago in Ohio by shooting the person who's trying

to stab her, do you think the push for reform has gone too far? Has the pendulum swung too far? And do you think you played any role in that?

Governor Sununu:

I missed the last half of the question there, Michael. Do I think the pendulum swung too far and did I play a role in it? Oh, dear Lord.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Do you think you played a role in it?

Governor Sununu:

Well, that needs to be very clear. I think there's a lot of opportunity for positive reform, not just in law enforcement but in all aspects of our community. And I've always said, we don't have systematic racism throughout New Hampshire. But we have elements of implicit bias and racism in all parts of our communities. And it's something that I think we have to be very constructive about.

The LEACT Commission came up with 40, 50 different recommendations unanimously. And we took them all up. Some we did with Executive Action. Some have to be done through a legislative process. And a lot of those will get completed through a legislative process.

And I think it's just the beginning of a very good opportunity for the State of New Hampshire, not in a combative way, but hopefully in a constructive way, working with Law Enforcement, Community Leadership, folks on kind of all aspects of this issue, to enhance our community policing, enhance the training opportunities at Police Standards and Training, enhance what happens with all aspects, whether it's in our schools, our libraries, our Police Force, local Police, State Police, whatever it might be. There's always an opportunity to do better.

And I think, while we didn't see some of the violence you saw in other parts of the country, I think, for all of us across America, it was a moment to take a pause and say, okay. We can talk about doing better or we can actually do it. We can actually just kind of put pen to paper, whether it's on a Policy change, find a funding opportunity.

I just think it's an immense opportunity. And again, we're going to do it, regardless of what any individual might say on any given point at any given time. This State is moving forward, I think, in a very progressive and constructive way. And by constructive I mean all hands on deck.

Does it mean we're going to get everything done that I think we can get done on day 1? No, probably not. But that shouldn't be a surprise to anybody. Sometimes you got to go back to the drawing board, get everybody together. Some things are easier. There's always some low hanging fruit out there. And some things are just more challenging to find out what the maybe unintended consequences of a certain action might be, making sure you hear all sides of the issue. And they just take longer to get done, and there's nothing wrong with that. Working a little harder and taking a little longer on a few of the tougher issues to get it right is more important than rushing it just to say you got something done in the first place.

I don't know how -- if anything, I think -- I'm not trying to pat myself on the back. But, I think as a Team in New Hampshire, right, from the Civil Rights Bureau that we set up over at the Attorney General's Office, to the Commission on Diversity and Inclusion that we set up a few years ago to really talk about

these issues in a community spread, we all are kind of -- while we don't agree maybe on every last point and dotting every I and dotting [sic] every T, I think, as a whole, we've done a great job promoting these things, talking about these things, and going about it in the right way.

Alli Fam with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Great, thank you. I got through today. So, first one is, according to the data provided by DHHS, a little under 22,000 doses were allocated through the Vaccine Equity Program as of last week. And that would appear to be below the State's goal of using 10% of its available vaccine supply for vulnerable populations. Can you tell us what share of the State's vaccine supply has gone to equity clinics? And is the State adjusting its strategy or directing Regional Public Health Networks to change their strategy to make fuller use of the equity allocation? And then, my second question is -- and we did touch on this a little bit. But just those breakthrough cases which I know were to be expected, but I did want to hear a little bit more about how the State is tracking them, and if we know that if any have been variants, and if any fully vaccinated individual has died of COVID-19 here New Hampshire.

Governor Sununu:

Okay. Dr. Daly, I think I'll let Dr. Daly. I think she's got most of these answers for you. But, again, what she can't fill in, the Governor will figure it out.

Dr. Daly:

Great, so the first question was around our equity allocation, which you'll recall we have committed to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccine in our State. And we have set aside 10% of the vaccine that comes in each week for our Regional Public Health Networks to work with the communities and identify great opportunities to reach very vulnerable populations, people who have barriers to accessing vaccine, either low income, transportation barriers; people who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, either due to age or race and ethnicity.

And so, we've been working with them for many months to set up these clinic opportunities to get vaccinated. And so far, they have coordinated 280 clinics and have plans to vaccinate 26,000 people through those clinics.

Yes, this is less than the 10% that we have set aside and have wanted them to vaccinate. However, we've always understood that these populations are going to be harder to reach. We might be doing clinic events in partnership with a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter, and might be doing fewer people than our mass vaccination clinics, of course, right? So, it's harder to reach population, harder clinics to set up and get established. They've done a really great job doing it. That's almost 300 clinics and thousands of people vaccinated through the program.

So, it doesn't really require any type of change of strategy. We've realized this is going to be our hardest populations to meet, which is why we've dedicated resources to this work. And we want them to keep setting these clinics up. And I expect that they'll continue to do this, even as we move forward with our vaccination efforts.

And we don't want vaccine to go unused. So, when they aren't using the full vaccine each week, we will go ahead and make sure that vaccine gets used in other settings. But we'd still make that vaccine

available to them in future weeks, if, for example, they did have a big opportunity to do, for example, a low-income housing unit or something really large. So, I think that answers the first question.

And then, regarding the second question, vaccine breakthrough, we are monitoring the vaccination status of the COVID-19 cases that get reported to us. We ask for this information to be reported when Providers report a case to us. And we also collect this information when we conduct case investigations.

And so, we verify any vaccination information that's provided to us. So, if someone says they've been vaccinated, we do verify that information to make sure that all the dates line up and that they would meet our definition of vaccine breakthrough. And that means that the person tested positive more than 14 days after they had completed the vaccination series, whether that's a two-dose series or a one-dose J&J vaccine.

So, we're tracking that information. These are coming in as reports to us on a regular basis and we have many under investigation. But so far, to date, we have confirmed 24. So, 24 breakthrough infections, we are aware that two individuals did die. And these both were associated with long-term care facilities. And unfortunately, again, as the Governor said, these are not unexpected. However, they've also prevented many, many infections, as we've seen the case counts and deaths come down in our long-term care facilities and even statewide. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

As usual, she nailed it, 100%. All set on the phones, okay.

I have one quick one about high school sports. Gilford High has 100 people in quarantine, and the Superintendent says it's largely connected to spring sports. Do you think schools consider taking a pause with spring sports, or...

Governor Sununu:

No, no. Look, I think schools have done a great job through the fall, through the winter. And I think they have the right kind of program in the spring. It was unfortunate that there was kind of this outbreak, if you will, through this one spring sport event. It happened a few weeks ago. But I think schools, overall, have done a great job throughout the State managing it.

Kids -- whether sometimes it means kids might have to practice with masks or that sort of things, but, no, we wouldn't tell everyone across the State that you got to start stopping spring sports, especially when the vaccine is available, especially when the symptoms are so low. And so, again, it's one unfortunate event. But it doesn't define the State. I think overall the State has done a phenomenal job with sports.

And we want kids to get out, right? We want them to play sports and get out in Little League and soccer, however they can in safe ways, because across the State, when you talk to maybe some of the Youth Recreation Leagues in towns, or the schools, themselves, they're taking a lot of precautions. They are really a doing a great job, but still providing that opportunity for kids, which is so important.

And then, with April vacation, I know you said there's maybe possibly a bump to come with that. So -- and I know the vaccination rate is going well. But do you want people to stay home and not travel? Or what would your advice be for April vacation?

Governor Sununu:

My advice to folks would be to be smart about it, right? You know in your family, for example, who's vaccinated, who's not, who's more vulnerable, who's not. And we're really at that point where, because vaccine is so readily available, because we've been able to protect the most vulnerable part of our population, it's really up to individuals to make that choice for themselves.

And there's nowhere -- for example, if you're going to travel on a plan, you're going to be wearing a mask. There's a lot of stipulations in place. You're going to be doing those things. It's hard to not at least be doing those things.

And as Dr. Chan talked about, kind of getting folks to understand the importance of behavior, the importance of their habits, of good habits, whether it's wearing masks, social distancing, good hygiene, they're all still so, so important. And I think a lot of folks, either they're going to do it or they're not, right? So, we just want folks to be safe and be smart, and I think by and large people do a very good job with it, hence our incredible data that we have here that allows us to make more decisions on flexibility.

Given the real small numbers here, you think for you and Dr. Daly (inaudible), are we ever going to be able to conclude there's a type of person who's more likely to be breakthrough than other types of people? Obviously with two passing away in long-term care settings, are people with cooccurring serious medical conditions more likely than the average person to perhaps get a case of COVID, despite being fully vaccinated?

Governor Sununu:

I would turn to Dr. Daly. That's a very Dr. Daly question.

Dr. Daly:

So, the question is, are some people more likely to have vaccine breakthrough infection? And I think the answer is that we're actually still just learning about this. They're still aggregating the data at the national level. There have been just under 6,000 reports of vaccine breakthrough reported nationally. And CDC is reporting this on their website, if you're interested in that. And about half of them have been in older persons, people I think 65-and-older or so. So, I think we're learning about it as they collect this data.

Governor, how would you gauge public reaction to the lifting of the Mask Mandate? I know you recommend that people continue to wear masks.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Seems like a pretty good number of people took it as kind of a checkered flag.

Governor Sununu:

A checkered flag as in we're done, oh, I would disagree completely.

We've seen a lot more people just not wearing masks.

Governor Sununu:

I would disagree with that. I think very little has changed. I think when I go into Walmart, I'm still wearing my mask. When I go into a Dunkin Donuts, we're still wearing our masks. When I walk into the State House or we do our business in meetings and groups, by and large most people are still wearing their masks.

When you look at the poll, I think UNH, or somebody did a poll. I think overall people understand it. They understand that what we do here -- I'm not speaking for the rest of the country and other States. But here, we look at data. We look at trends. We look at science. And that's exactly why we've made the decisions we've made, and we show the charts right here, right? We're very transparent about the hows and whys of what we do. And I think folks understand that. And I think folks have done a very good job of understanding the importance of their -- I'll go back to that term -- "behavior" and habits of protecting themselves and the most vulnerable.

But, no, I walked down the street of Concord the other day. Everyone's still wearing a mask. A lot of cities still have their Mask Mandates in place. So fundamentally, I don't think a whole lot changes, other than the State having a -- the thou shalt, must. I think our habits are pretty good and I think people understand the importance. And I think there's a lot of respect for understanding that, well, maybe someone I'm nearby didn't get vaccinated.

But as more and more vaccine comes out, it's just going to be -- and as we get to better weather, folks are just more out and about. I think overall, yeah, people will find a little more flexibility in their own lives to have that. But, I think in the last week, not a whole lot has changed. And I don't really look at polling. I think the poll said, yes, people understand the hows and whys of what we're doing.

It's not like some of the other States that you saw where there was massive reactions one way or the other, the politics of it and all that. We don't do any of that here. So, I think folks -- we've had a year to really make sure that folks -- when we say that they're with us, they're with us, because they can see the data. They can make good decisions for themselves. And they understand the hows and whys of what we do, the importance of Public Health, having those strong messages around, that responsibility for yourself and others.

Okay. Great, well, thank you, guys, very much. We will be next back next week. News just keeps getting better and better, but we're not at the finish line yet. We want folks to, as was discussed, be responsible. Be smart. Be safe, if you're taking vacations or long weekends. Hopefully the weather will warm up a little bit from the snow we saw today. And we will be back next Thursday. Thank you, guys.