



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Tuesday, May 18, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon. Good to see everybody. I apologize, silencing the cellphone. Anyway, a few different things that we want to talk about before we open it up to questions concerning the pandemic. We will kick things off, as usual, with a Public Health update from our good friend, Dr. Chan.

Dr. Chan:

Thank you and good afternoon. So, today, we are reporting 139 new people diagnosed with COVID-19. Our daily incidence of disease continues to decrease. In the last week, we have averaged about 150 new people diagnosed with COVID-19 each day. And currently, there are 1,118 people with active or current infection.

Our test-positivity rate, that's the percentage of all tests that are positive for COVID-19, also continues to slowly decline. Over the last seven days, our seven-day average test-positivity is now below 3% at around 2.9%.

Hospitalizations also continue to decrease. There are 48 people currently hospitalized statewide with COVID-19, which is a decrease from last week. And then, unfortunately, one new person to report who has died related to COVID-19 this week -- or in the last week -- sorry, in the last day, bringing the total number of people who have died from COVID-19 during this pandemic to 1,334 total deaths. This individual was not associated with a long-term care facility. And the high vaccination rates in our long-term care facility population has prevented more disease and deaths.

Over the next several weeks, especially as we look to transition from relying -- transition to relying on vaccination for pandemic control and to keep everybody safe, want to continue to strongly recommend and encourage everybody who hasn't already taken advantage of the opportunity and the appointments that are out there to sign up for an appointment, to get vaccinated.

If you've gotten one dose of the Pfizer or the Moderna vaccine, you need two doses to be fully vaccinated. If you've been previously infected with COVID-19, it's important still for those individuals to be vaccinated, as well. Vaccination produces higher levels of protection and longer lasting protection. And vaccination is where we need to be moving in this pandemic, so we can transition to a more normal societal functioning. With that, I will hand things over to Dr. Daly for a vaccine update. Thanks.

Dr. Daly:

Great, well, good afternoon, everyone. I have a few quick updates for you on vaccines. To-date in New Hampshire we have administered 1,310,000 doses of vaccine. This includes 765,000 people that have received one-or-more doses. That's 56% of the total New Hampshire population. And then, 593,000 people have been fully vaccinated, which is now 44% of the population.

Last week, the Pfizer vaccine was approved and recommended for use in children 12 to 15 years old. So far, we have had around 5,000 children in that age group get their first dose of vaccine. We encourage all parents to get their child 12-and-older vaccinated. And there are three ways that children can get vaccinated. This includes registering in VINI to be vaccinated at clinics across the State; or by getting vaccinated at a school-based clinic, if your school is offering one; or through your Healthcare Provider, if your Healthcare Provider has vaccine to offer their patients. And we are starting to provide those vaccines out to the Provider community, as we're able to.

When registering in VINI for your child, be sure to pick one of the locations that is on the list offering Pfizer vaccine, specifically. And as a reminder, you can now walk into one of our State-run vaccination sites and get vaccinated without an appointment between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. each day, except for Sundays. Yesterday was our first day of offering these walk-in appointments. And more than 250 people took advantage of this really great opportunity. So, we encourage all parents to make that choice to get their child vaccinated through one of those different opportunities.

And then, lastly, I just wanted to remind you that, along with Elliot Health System, we are hosting a vaccination clinic for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and their family members and caretakers. This clinic will be held on Saturday, May 22nd, in Manchester and will have onsite ASL interpreters. Appointments are required, so you need to contact us to sign up by May 19th. You can do that by videophone. The number's here on this slide: (603) 546-7882; voice at (603) 271-9097; and then email at equityvaccine@dhhs.nh.gov. At this point, about 68% of people in New Hampshire who are age-eligible have already made that choice to get vaccinated. And we hope you will, too, if you have not already. Thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon. Outbreak update: we have no new outbreaks. We have no outbreaks to close. We are still at two institutional outbreaks: one at the Federal Correctional Institute in Berlin; and one at Sullivan County Healthcare. Our Homebound Program is on-track to be completed the end of May. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Okay, great. Well, thank you, Commissioner and Beth, and Dr. Chan -- Dr. Daly, excuse me. So, a couple things to talk about, then we can open it up for questions. Today, I want to start by providing an update on unemployment benefits, something we talked about a little bit last week. And we're looking at in terms of timing, finalizing the plan, and making sure that whatever we do, it's something that we can operationalize and make sure that folks have a runway and a pathway, and good communication, in terms of what is expected, as it pertains to unemployment.

As a reminder, we're very proud in that, in many ways, New Hampshire really led the country with issues surrounding unemployment, the expansion of benefits. When the pandemic first started back in March of 2020, New Hampshire was one of the first to provide enhanced unemployment insurance for those needing to stay at home due to COVID-19, whether it was caring for a sick family member, staying at home due to remote learning. We did provide that unemployment insurance before the Federal Government even stepped in and stepped up. And in fact, we did extend eligibility just before the CARES Act was initiated.

And in those days, help from the State and the Federal Government, it was essential to the response surrounding COVID. It was essential, given that there was so much we didn't know about COVID. We wanted people to be safer at home. We wanted to help mitigate the spread. And it worked. And New Hampshire has actually recovered better than almost any State in the nation. And we're very proud of that. And we thank all the folks over at Unemployment Security -- at the Department of Employment Security and the Unemployment Group that really tried to take a one-on-one approach to people's needs, their situations. And we, I think, put hundreds of people at one point in our call center to be able to help folks on a one-on-one basis. And it was very, very successful.

In March of 2020, when we had our first confirmed case, our unemployment rate was down at about 2.7%. And within a month, it was -- oh, yeah, as you can see from the chart here -- and within a month, it was already over 16% and that was quite drastic, nothing that the State had ever seen before. So, it was a shock to all of our systems.

But, as you can see where we've come since then, it's been not just a gradual return, but a precipitous return to very normal levels. We received word today that, as of this month, our unemployment rate is back at 2.8%, again one of the lowest in the nation. And we're very proud of that.

We have a very robust economy, lot of workforce opportunity. Wages are as high as -- far and away higher than anything we have ever seen, and our average wages remain to be some of the highest in the country. So, our economic recovery is outpacing the region and the country. And that means there are frankly tens of thousands of jobs -- high-paying jobs that are available today. And this is an interesting chart, if you look.

This is pre-pandemic, the availability of jobs. Business was roaring at about 2.7% unemployment. And you can see where the availability of jobs kind of tends to cycle a little bit over the seasonality, given our tourism industry and some of the waves that we saw through the pandemic. And now, you can see where we are today.

Over 14,000 jobs available today, more jobs available today than really at any point in the State's history. Everyone is looking to hire. Like we said, wages are, in some cases, starting at \$15 or \$20 per hour. It's really an awesome opportunity for our citizens to get back to work and be economically successful for themselves and their family.

So, we, right now, according to the numbers that were released this morning, the number of people employed is about 15,000 below the number of people employed prior to the pandemic, and which is about the same number of people currently filling in -- I'm sorry, filling in the Federal Expanded Programs with Federal bonuses.

So, today, we're announcing some changes to help right the course, get people back to work in New Hampshire. So, this morning, I wrote a letter to the United States Labor Secretary, Marth Walsh, former Mayor of Boston but now Secretary of Labor. We're informing him that New Hampshire would be terminating the temporary pandemic-related Federal Unemployment Compensation Programs.

There is a 30-day notification requirement. So these programs are not ending today or tomorrow. There's a ramp to that, and we want to make sure people understand what is expected. All of these temporary Federal Unemployment Programs will end at the same time in New Hampshire -- there's a couple different programs -- on June 19th, 2021, so that's approximately 30 days from now.

Moving forward, our focus will continue to be on getting people back to work. There are many opportunities here, Granite Staters, that they might be looking for in a variety of different industries. So plenty of jobs and we want folks to get back out there.

So, that brings us to our next significant announcement. Today, I'm committing \$10 million in funds to get our citizens back to work in what I'm calling our Summer Stipend Program. Starting today -- today the program actually starts. And that's an important key point for folks -- anyone on the unemployment rolls that returns to work starting today for eight consecutive weeks will be eligible for a Return-to-Work Bonus: \$500 bonuses for part-time workers and \$1,000 bonuses for fulltime employment.

The process is actually fairly simple that we're committing \$10 million in the bonuses. And eight weeks from today, the application process will begin. So you have to show that you've worked for those eight consecutive weeks. Then, the application process will begin.

So it's kind of a first-come, first-serve. Whether you're fulltime or part-time, the \$10 million is committed. So, we know that at least 10,000, if not more, Granite Staters will have an opportunity for some type of stipend and bonus, which I think is a great chance for folks to get out there. The timing works really well with our summer tourism season, a lot of jobs opening, restaurants opening up, attractions opening up. There's a variety of different ways with, obviously, a lot of still -- still a lot of needed healthcare and other areas of the industry.

There is a cap on the program in that anyone who returns to work on a job that pays more than \$25 per hour will not be eligible for the Return-to-Work Bonus. We're really trying to provide the stipend for folks on the under-\$25 an hour scale. That's still a very big scale, again, whether it's part-time or fulltime work.

We will have more details on the application process to be released over the next week. But those who start work today, tomorrow, and in the very near future are going to have a great shot to get their chance at this Return-to-Work Bonus. And everyone's looking for work. I mean, every Employer I talk to out there is looking for workers. They're desperate not just for obviously the \$300 to go away, which it will as soon as it can on June 19th, but also now we're kind of reversing course a little bit in a very positive way and adding a stipend, an incentive to get folks back to work that everyone can partake in.

Just as also another reminder, on May 23rd, this is an announcement we made a while back, everyone filing for unemployment benefits will be required to complete a weekly work search as a condition of future benefit eligibility. So that requirement starts about a week from now, just over a week from now, I believe. And so, again, we just want folks to get out there, start looking for work.

We're already seeing a lot of trends in the right direction. We have a lot of job fairs. We have more job fairs going and more jobs available than ever before. Again, the folks at Employment Security have done a great job creating these job fairs all across the State in all different types of industries.

So you can go to virtualjobfairs.nh.gov, virtualjobfairs.nh.gov. And you can find out where all these opportunities might be. I think you'll be shocked at how many great jobs are available right in your town, right in your area, a lot of flexibility. Lot of Employers not just paying high wages, but they're providing a lot of flexibility, anything to get those workers in the door.

I guess that's really it. I mean, we're not going to -- this is Tuesday. It's a little weird to be doing this on a Tuesday not a Thursday. But we're not going to have a press conference this coming Thursday, just due to some conflicts. But we are still planning on continuing the press conferences likely at least through June and on a weekly basis, at least. And then, we will kind of see where things go from there. So, with that, we will open it up. Adam?

Q&A Session

Governor, can you take us through your decision-making process on the unemployment, because you'd said before you thought we'd probably continue, and obviously things have chanced since then? And on top of that, I guess, what you've been hearing from businesses about the need to get that workforce back.

Governor Sununu:

Well, businesses need to get the workforce back. I apologize. The first half of the question, I said before what?

We talked about this maybe a month-or-so ago. You were kind of like, well, I think that should continue.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

And I'm just curious how your thinking evolved over the last few weeks.

Governor Sununu:

Well, it's not just my thinking hasn't evolved. I think our situation has evolved all for the better, which has been really great. Vaccinations are going out much quicker, a lot more flexibility in the economy. We've gotten rid of the workplace restrictions. Everything is just really opening up the way we envisioned for summer. We haven't quite hit Memorial Day and we're just way ahead of schedule.

So because the State is ahead of schedule, I think we can look at these opportunities. More Employers are opening up faster than we even envisioned. And the need for that \$300 incentive, or opportunity, for folks not to have to be at work, the need for that is drastically dwindling. And that's, I think, agreed to by most everyone across-the-board.

So, we don't just want to -- you could just pull that away and take that off. That's fine. I think a lot of States are going to do that. We have an opportunity in the State to create a stipend in the opposite direction. Incentivize folks to get out there, get off the unemployment rolls, and still capture, I think, a great financial opportunity, as well as taking advantage of some of the very high wages that we see out there.

Will you be revisiting the State of Emergency Declaration, especially given what Charlie Baker has announced in Massachusetts?

Governor Sununu:

Well, what Charlie Baker -- and every State's very different with the State of Emergency. He has different tools at the ready. So we always revisit the State of Emergency Declaration every 21 days. What is needed, what the timing is, the stipulations that go with it, what are the Emergency Orders that lived within it?

So, I've always envisioned the State of Emergency, or at least the vast majority of the Emergency Orders within the State of Emergency, to go away at the close of the legislative session, which is the end of June. That'll give the Legislature some time to decide what they want to take up and take on for the long-term.

We're still trying to figure out and understand, given our situation here, whether the State of Emergency has to exist, whether there's other tools or opportunities. We don't really have the same system that Massachusetts has. So I probably can't do what Charlie Baker did. But we have our own -- kind of drive our own path, anyway.

So we always are revisiting and seeing what the need is. No one wants to be in a State of Emergency. Nobody wants to be there. I mean, I can't wait to be just the normal Governor again, not the COVID Governor. We're getting closer every day. But when you look at the Federal dollars coming in and we just want to make sure we're not cutting ourselves off from any opportunities by inadvertently or unintentionally closing down the State of Emergency too abruptly.

More of a legal issue, I guess.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, it is. The Attorney General, the Lawyers, everyone's kind of looking at it, and working, trying to get better communication out of the Federal Government about what their expectations are, as well. But, as much flexibility they'll give us is as much as we will definitely use.

So just to be clear on the \$500 and the \$1,000, someone currently has to be on unemployment and get off of unemployment. You can't just say, hey, I was working for the last eight weeks. You can't.

Governor Sununu:

No, the program starts today. So if you're on the unemployment rolls today and you get a job going forward, today or going forward, then you would qualify.

Okay. And then, with everything basically open and masks becoming more of an optional situation, is the pandemic over in New Hampshire? Or...

Governor Sununu:

No.

It's not. What's left? What are we...

Governor Sununu:

No, look. Well, COVID isn't over, whether you want to call it a pandemic or whatever. I think the crisis has kind of gone into we're still in an emergency situation, I believe. I think the crisis of the pandemic has passed us in that we know so much more. We have so many more tools available to us. I think when you talk about the pandemic, in terms of the crisis and the COVID crisis, that's really where we're living in a lot of unknowns. We have so many more knowns to us now, which is incredibly helpful, everything from knowing about variants, how the virus is transmitted, our ability to vaccinate, the efficacy of those vaccinations.

So, that's why I think we're still in an emergency situation. There's no doubt about that. But I don't think we're in kind of the peak of the crisis mode, whether you want to call it -- are we still working with a pandemic situation? Absolutely. Are we still having emergency decisions that have to be made? Undoubtedly. But are we in a crisis mode where we're having to just more react to what's coming at us as opposed to be proactive? No, I think we're more -- we've transitioned more to be given the tools that we have and the knowledge that we have.

Question for Dr. Chan.

Governor Sununu:

Oh, sure.

Bless you. Seeing as though we've been at this for a little while, I'm curious. You're talking about your frustration with the CDC last week and lifting those restrictions. Is it reasonable to infer that we might see a small bump in cases, or like a little mini-spike, due to people essentially unrestricting themselves, again unmasking, things like that, as a result?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so the question, I think, is what's going to happen over the coming weeks, even, especially as some of the guidance has changed from the CDC? And just to be clear, I think it was Thursday last week is when CDC released their updated guidance recommending that even fully vaccinated people can go without masks, indoors and outdoors. And I think we expect that the numbers will continue to go down.

The issue is that numbers will go down faster, and we will be able to exit from the pandemic or pandemic response more quickly with a combination, with a combination of high vaccination rates and continued use of the mitigation measures, like facemask use and social distancing. When we look at how we implement some of these mitigation measures -- the facemasks, the physical distancing -- really we have to look at this at a population level, right? These are measures that are most effective when they're not left necessary to individuals choosing.

We want the freedom of choice out there. But, at the end of the day, these measures are most effective when they're implemented at a population level, right? And so, when we look at pandemic control, we need to consider how we're going to most quickly exit from a pandemic response, right? And

I think that's going to continue to be a combination of increasing vaccination, continued attention and use of facemasks and physical distancing, especially in the indoor environment. And that also has the added benefit of protecting people in our community who maybe are unable to be vaccinated, out of their age or a medical issue, or who have gotten vaccinated but maybe are not able to mount a full immune response.

So, I think, going back to your original question of are we going to see a bump in cases, not necessarily. I think certainly we're on the watch for that. I think we expect the numbers to continue to go down. But certainly continued use of some of the mitigation measures, like mask use and physical distancing, as we work to increasingly get more vaccines in arms, is going to help us control the numbers more quickly and bring the numbers down faster.

Should businesses be asking people to wear masks, indoor businesses?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so we actually just, this morning, released some updated Public Health guidance, which can be found on our website, in response to the CDC guidance, where we are recommending a slightly different approach from what CDC has recommended. Anytime the Federal Government puts out guidance, we always review that and we always look for how we can adapt that and adopt that for New Hampshire. And so, it's not uncommon for us to review Federal guidance and then take a slightly different approach.

And so, Public Health continues to recommend in New Hampshire that everybody, including fully vaccinated people, continue to wear facemasks and practice physical distancing in indoor environments. And part of that recommendation continues to be for businesses and organizations to look to implement the multiple layers of protection, the layered mitigation measures outlined in the Universal Best Practices document that we created, again regardless of a person's vaccination status. And I think, again, there's several reasons for that.

One is that these mitigation measures, as I mentioned, are intended to be implemented at a population level. And so, continued use of facemasks and social distancing in these higher risk indoor settings is going to help us exit the pandemic more quickly. It's going to help protect the vulnerable populations who may be in some of these public settings. And then, frankly the CDC guidance was difficult, if not impossible, for businesses and organizations to figure out how to implement. And so, we need to help our businesses and our organizations figure out how to implement guidance and protective layers in the interest of protecting their Employees and other patrons in the store.

And so, we have more recently taken a stance and deviated a little bit from the CDC guidance, where we continue to recommend that people vaccinated, unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, if they're going to be in indoor environments where other people are around who are unvaccinated, or maybe their vaccination status isn't known, if it's a public location, that everybody should continue to be wearing facemasks and practicing physical distancing. And I think the last thing I'll add to that is that this is meant to be a transitional measure, right?

The goal is to transition to relying heavily on vaccination to control the pandemic and to protect people's health. So we're going to be reviewing the numbers and looking very closely at the trend of the pandemic over the next three or four weeks and revisiting some of this guidance that we've put out. But what we released in the guidance this morning is consistent with what we've been saying the last several

weeks with our partners and the partners in the community, with the goal of trying to bring this pandemic to an end more quickly.

How do you feel the CDC has handled this pandemic overall and more recently?

Dr. Chan:

So, I think the pandemic response is something that has necessarily varied location-by-location. We have a very close working relationship. State and local Public Health Agencies have a very close working relationship with the CDC. We're on calls with them trying to coordinate the response at least a couple of times a week, which is, I think, partly why the announcement last week was a little bit of a surprise, because we hadn't heard about their updated guidance coming.

But, we're in constant conversations, back-and-forth communication. States are sharing with the CDC what's happening on the ground. CDC's sharing with States and local Public Health jurisdictions, discussions that are happening at a Federal level and potential guidance updates. And so, I think we have a very collaborative working relationship.

But at the end of the day, States and local Public Health Agencies need to make the decisions that are in the best interest of their populations. And I think you're seeing that play out throughout this pandemic at a national level. And so, New Hampshire certainly isn't alone where we have taken the Federal guidance, the science, and adapted that guidance and the science for the local situation in New Hampshire.

And then, lastly for me, summer camps, has CDC given guidance on that yet? I might have missed it. Or where are we at with them?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so CDC was developing some updated guidance for summer camps. I actually am not sure where that guidance is. I haven't seen any new or recent updates. Summer camps are another group of organizations/businesses that we have worked closely with throughout the pandemic, both last summer and this summer. We've been on calls with them supporting them, even financially, when it comes to testing for kids and campers, and staff coming in this summer. And so, I think, based on what I've heard and what I've seen, summer camps are in a good position in New Hampshire to operate this summer.

Okay. And what are the expectations for them? What should they be doing, just kind of in a nutshell, if you could?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so the guidance for summer camps, we had previously developed a very detailed guidance. The Reopen Task Force, Public Health, other -- the Association of Summer Camps had worked together to develop some guidance.

A lot of the detailed guidance has gone away in favor of the Universal Best Practices and referring people to the Universal Best Practices. But a lot of summer camps had started the process early of planning for the summer months, when that more detailed guidance was still in place.

So, many of them still have testing, looking at testing people coming in that maybe are unvaccinated to try and detect and prevent introduction of COVID-19 into the higher risk residential camp setting. Looking at cohorting is, I think, an important measure for summer camps, where you have the cabins, if you will. The overnight summer camp cabins stay together in a group, and there's not necessarily a need for strict, like, mask use and physical distancing when you're in your cohort, which allows some freedom to the campers and to the Staff. But then, you work to try and prevent the different cabins, or the different groups, from interacting with one another.

So all of the same principles that are outlined in the New Hampshire Universal Best Practices are being implemented at summer camps. And so, I think the summer camps have done a great job at planning and preparing, and are implementing the necessary protective measures to make it a successful for them.

Thank you.

Dr. Chan:

Thanks.

Governor, States...

Governor Sununu:

Sorry, give me 30 seconds.

Sure.

Governor Sununu:

I think the summer camp guidance is still there. Schools, summer camps, and Universal Best Practices, so I just want to relish in this moment that I knew something for, like, 30 seconds that Dr. Chan was -- he's got so many things going through his head. But, no, we did keep the summer camps guidance, which I find funny, because that was Dr. Chan's recommendation. And that was a very good recommendation.

But it is online. So I believe you can still go to the website and see the recommendations for that guidance still there. We did, I think, education, summer camps, and -- no, that's great. You thought this all through a while ago. You didn't give yourself enough credit.

Governor, States seem to now be trying to figure out how to create incentives for hesitant people to get vaccinated. Ohio seems to be the most extreme example.

Governor Sununu:

The million-dollar Ohio -- or \$5 million to folks in Ohio, holy cow.

I mean, our vaccination numbers seem to be pretty decent. But are you open to creating some kind of incentives, if we get into a point early in the summer where there's still a lot of healthy, younger people who aren't getting the shot?

Governor Sununu:

Look, if there are incentives that will really drive things forward, I got to be honest, I'm not a big fan of the million. If we had \$5 million, we're putting that to getting people back to work. We've, I think, had a great program and we will continue with a very strong messaging around vaccination. We've done very, very well with it.

All across the country you're seeing the rate of vaccination is no longer about how fast we can get it, or how fast we're getting it from the Federal Government. It really is, I think to your point a little bit, about folks' desire to come in. And so, we will keep pushing that message as strong as we can.

But, we have some small incentive programs. If there's other ideas on the table, we're open to almost anything. But, when you start talking about million-dollar lotteries for individuals, I'm not sure that's for us right now.

I think with 68% of folks already have chosen to get a vaccine here, so that's great. And so, that can only go up, right? So that's good news. And I think we will also see how many 12- to 15-year-olds come into the system, and then we will also be focusing our efforts around the, if we can get younger kids, the 6 month to 12-year-olds do come into the mix, and we will focus our efforts there to make sure that they, again, understand the safety of it.

Holly Ramer with The Associated Press:

Hi, thanks. I had one quick question about the unemployment benefits and then a couple of vaccine questions. In terms of the unemployment benefits, can you clarify how many people right now are currently getting the extra \$300? Did you say 15,000? I didn't catch all of that. And then -- okay.

Governor Sununu:

No, go ahead.

Holly Ramer with The Associated Press:

Did you want -- okay. And then, the other questions are: how many doses of vaccine is New Hampshire ordering each week? And then, my final question is the press release yesterday about the clinic for deaf individuals mentioned that the State has vaccinated more than 35,000 people through its equity allocation. And could someone give an update on how close is that to the 10% that was set aside for that purpose?

Governor Sununu:

Interesting, okay. I'm going to have Dr. Daly talk about the number of doses that we're currently ordering each week, as well as progress on the equity population. Currently there are approximately 34,000, 35,000, let's say, individuals collecting unemployment in the State of New Hampshire. All of those individuals qualify for the \$300. So technically all 34,000 of those individuals of a workforce of well-over 700,000, it equates to about 2.8% of the population. But everybody in our unemployment system gets the \$300.

There are two Federal Programs -- or a couple different Federal Programs, let's just say, where folks are just on the Federal Program, not on the State Program, as well as getting the \$300. And that would equate to maybe let's call it 15,000 individuals that are just on the Federal Program and about -- I'm rounding these numbers a little bit -- about 20,000 people on the more traditional State system. But they all get the \$300 stipend and all will qualify for this new Summer Stipend Incentive Program to get back to work. Dr. Daly?

Dr. Daly:

In terms of how many doses we are ordering each week, we do still continue to order all of the doses available to us. At the State, that's just under about 40,000-or-so, plus our pharmacies have access to between 10,000 and 12,000 doses each week, so about 50,000 doses coming into the State. Of our State amount, we are ordering that each week, and we are pushing all of that vaccine out into the communities at our fixed sites, our Regional Public Health Networks, and then other Providers that we've been onboarding, as well.

In terms of the equity allocation, which is that 10% of vaccine doses that we set aside to be able to try and reach vulnerable or hard-to-reach populations, that's correct. We have vaccinated around 35,000 people through that program. It is less than the 10% and I don't have the exact number available to me just yet.

But we're always looking for new ways to expand that program. Again, it's a harder program to administer, because we're really going out and trying to reach people who are hard to reach. So those clinics do tend to be smaller.

But we're looking at partnering, for example, with food distribution sites, like food banks; continuing and expanding our homeless vaccination efforts, so reaching unsheltered people there. We've been working with the faith-based community, as well, trying to establish some clinics in churches, and then also working on Employer-based targeted clinics. So we would like to use more of that vaccine in that way. But, again, just because of the nature of the work, it is harder to work through each week. Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

The only thing I would add in, we, I think, currently may be about 17,000 appointments available between now and Memorial Day. So there's lots of vaccine coming in and still at least 17,000 appointments available. So, folks can just jump on VINI. Grab a spot.

Paula Tracy with InDepthNH:

Yes, good afternoon, Governor. I have a question about the State's Unemployment Trust Fund and what it includes right now, and how it might compare to other States. And also to follow-up on Holly's question, does the State envision a time when we might start to reduce our Federal requests for doses of the vaccine?

Governor Sununu:

Okay.

Paula Tracy with InDepthNH:

Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

I'll take the first question. I'll kind of turn it over to Dr. Daly for the second. Our Unemployment Trust Fund is in a very, very healthy position. A lot of States had to -- I think the majority of States, actually -- had to borrow money from the Federal Government just to keep their Unemployment Trust Fund solvent. We never had to do that. We managed it really, really well.

Even though, as you saw from that chart earlier, we, at one point, hit 16% unemployment, we were just able to, I think, manage the program, create opportunities. We put a little bit of CARES Act money into it, because, again, I think we're very smart, if I may, with how we spent those CARES Act dollars. And so, no, it's in a good position. The Team over there managed it very well. We've never had to borrow -- or not never, but during this pandemic, we haven't had to borrow any money. And it's solvent and should be for the future.

Dr. Daly:

So, the question was whether or not the State may ever not order all of the vaccine that's available to us. And I do think that we are getting close to that point. It's really supply-and-demand. So as we vaccinate more and more people and there are fewer people to vaccinate, we may not need all the doses that are available to us each week. And we certainly wouldn't order doses that we aren't able to use.

But that's really going to happen slowly over time. As we push more vaccine to our healthcare system, it's really going to be up to those Providers to order what they think they can use in a given week or a given time period. And it's going to move more towards normal operations like we order other vaccines.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Thanks so much. A quick question for Dr. Chan and one for the Governor; Dr. Chan, you just said that fully vaccinated people need to continue to wear masks indoors, because they are putting vulnerable people who are unvaccinated at risk. Yesterday, the CDC Director said the choice is to "get vaccinated or continue to wear your mask". President Biden said get a vax or wear a mask. Are President Biden and the CDC Director putting vulnerable, unvaccinated people at risk? And Governor, you've mentioned that the communication with the White House has not been what you had hoped it would be the past few months, that

President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have not been on the calls the way that the previous Administration were. Has that improved? And is D.C. doing the things that you need it to do to help you address the remaining challenges with COVID? Thanks.

Governor Sununu:

I guess I'll just take the second one first and then I'll have Dr. Chan come up and talk about your first question. The communication has not improved very much with the Administration, as much as we've pushed as hard as we can.

Some of the things that we're always looking for is flexibility. So, in terms of the guidance that has come on the ARP dollars, in terms of -- and we have received that guidance. So that's good. But we're going to keep pushing for flexibility in terms of how we spend it.

Some of the communications, we had a good call with the Department of Treasury a couple weeks ago. We sent a follow-up letter, haven't heard anything back. But we expect to shortly. So, no, we're still kind of dealing with they have their process. And if anything, I guess we're just getting used to working in that process.

It's different. It can be challenging. But that's the Administration that we're dealing with. And so, we have to respect that and understand it. They have tough decisions to make, as well. But communication is always kind of the foundation, I think, of managing these challenging situations. So we will just keep pushing for flexibility as hard as we can.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, thanks for that question about the CDC guidance for people that are fully vaccinated. Let me just start by saying that the CDC is absolutely correct when they say that vaccines are highly effective and are highly effective at preventing COVID-19 from spreading person-to-person. The evidence is there. The science is there that vaccines help prevent both symptomatic and asymptomatic infection. Vaccination helps prevent someone when they -- if they are infected and have a breakthrough infection from spreading it to other people.

But the CDC guidance is looking at the perspective of individual risk, or person, individual-centric risk, right? So the guidance that CDC released last week comments only on a person's risk for COVID-19 when they're fully vaccinated.

We have to take the population-health perspective, as I was talking about before, and take into account for our local context, our local situation, what it means with our level of vaccination, with our level of COVID-19 in the community, to pull back on some of these restrictions. And so, we have made the decision and the -- sorry, the recommendation for New Hampshire and for businesses that for at least the next several weeks, individuals, businesses continue to look to implement facemask use and physical distancing when people are in indoor locations and public locations, when other people are around, regardless of vaccination status, so mask use and social distancing in these higher risk indoor settings for vaccinated and unvaccinated people, right?

The benefit of masks -- it's unfortunate that masks have become so controversial, because masks have double and even triple benefit for protecting people, right? If I'm wearing a mask, my mask is protecting me. My mask is protecting other people around me. My mask is also protecting my vulnerable

family member at home, who's either unable to be vaccinated or who may have some immune condition that prevents them from mounting a full immune response.

So, given where we are in New Hampshire with our level of vaccination and with the level of COVID-19 in our communities, we're continuing to recommend over the next several weeks that people look to implement ongoing the mitigation measures as we look to ramp up COVID-19 vaccination. Part of the reason we're also making this recommendation is to give people who have not yet made the appointment to get the COVID-19 vaccine the time to go out and get vaccinated, to get their first dose, to complete their vaccination series, with the understanding that we are going to be transitioning to relying on vaccination to control this pandemic.

I think we need to take this in measured steps and give people time to get vaccinated. And that's part of the reason why we are deviating from CDC guidance, at least over the next several weeks, to give people time to take advantage of the opportunity to get vaccinated, to become fully vaccinated, realizing that, at some point in the future, more masks will be taken down. And we're going to transition from relying on the mitigation measures to relying more heavily on vaccination.

I think part of the difficulty that a lot of people have had is with the sudden transitioning guidance from the CDC. So we're trying to take a stepwise approach here with a pulldown on the mitigation measures, as we scale up vaccination. Thanks.

Alli Fam with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Thank you. I've got three today. One's just a quick clarification. Forgive me if you already said this. But, on the unemployment, are you cutting just the extra \$300 or all Federal Programs? And then, I'm also just wondering what would you say to people who are collecting benefits but are still hesitant to return to work and may be fearful of the virus, especially if there's going to be less mask wearing? And then, my last question is COVID-related. So, we're still seeing some COVID-19 outbreaks at long-term care facilities. And should these facilities and other senior living facilities think about requiring Staff and residents to be fully vaccinated to limit breakthrough cases and outbreaks?

Governor Sununu:

Okay. So, let me go in order. We are phasing out of all the Federal COVID-related stipends and programs. So we're going back to our traditional, pre-pandemic Unemployment Program as of I think June 19th. We're doing a 30-day phase-out as is required. But, at the same time, today, we're creating the Stipend Program that we've also created to incentivize people to get back to work. As we discussed, that also starts immediately today, which is great.

The second question was -- I apologize. Could you say it again? What about folks that are concerned about going back to work? Was that the question? Yeah, well, look. If folks are concerned about reentering the workplace because of COVID, go get vaccinated. I mean, that's what the vaccine's for. It's a key mitigation measure, not just for yourself. But, I mean, that's what it's about.

If you're not willing to get vaccinated and you're still concerned about reentering the workforce, if not now then when, right? So, I mean, at some point, this is that transition period. And vaccines are readily available. You could go on VINI today and get your first shot today if you have concerns about that. And I appreciate that.

I've talked to a lot of folks that have that hesitation, right? And we empathize with that. But we've really worked through this process, I think, in a very, very positive way, created a lot of opportunities.

And there are a lot of workplace opportunities where folks are making various accommodations for individuals. You can get vaccinated very easily. So, all that has been very available for quite some time, which is a very positive thing. And then, I think the last is long-term care question for, yeah, Commissioner.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you. The question was around the outbreaks, breakthrough infections in long-term care. We only have one long-term care facility that is currently in outbreak, and that's Sullivan County. Whether to mandate a vaccine, obviously that's an Employer choice, not something that we're going to recommend or require. So individual Employers can make that decision on how they want to recommend or require a vaccine.

When it comes to residents, absolutely not. You should not require a vaccine. The residents that live in nursing homes have the same choice as anybody in the community when it comes to their healthcare. And if they choose not to get it, that is their choice. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, thank you, Commissioner.

Kimberly Haas at Seacoast Current:

Good afternoon, everybody, Kimberly Haas with Town Square Media. Governor, the big announcement you have today is the \$10 million in funds for your Summer Stipend Program. I am curious. How is that being paid for? And what do you plan to say to our readers and listeners who may roll their eyes at this concept because they've been working throughout the pandemic themselves?

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so, the Program will be paid for. We have a couple different opportunities with some of the Federal assistance that has come, whether it be CARES Act money, some of the ARP money. There's different pots out there that can pay for it. We're not the first State to do this. Other States have absolutely done it. Again, the Program is starting today, because we're really at that transition point.

I don't think anybody should -- well, first, nobody should roll their eyes at a \$500 or \$1,000 stipend. That's a great opportunity and great incentive for folks to get back to work. We're just creating this opportunity today knowing that we have such high demand in the workforce. Folks are getting great wages, of course. And so, again, it's just something to hopefully incentivize folks to kind of move quickly, given the timing, given where we are with opening up. It's appropriate to try to encourage folks to get back to work, as we transition out of the \$300. I'd be surprised if anyone rolls their eyes at \$1,000. Yeah. Okay.

Governor, what's the message to businesses that might be struggling now with dealing with sort of the anti-mask and the pro-mask crowd, and trying to satisfy these two very different groups of the economy, that they want to all serve and do business with but have very conflicting views now?

Governor Sununu:

Well, every business is very different, right? Every business has different customers. They have different times they work. They have different densities within their facilities. So that's the whole point of having the universal guidance, so folks can make the best judgment call, given their situation.

What is appropriate at Dairy Queen might be very different -- not different in terms of its appropriateness and suitability at a manufacturing facility, right? And so, you have to appreciate those differences and dynamics. And I think the Department of Public Health and our Team have just laid out a tremendous menu, if you will, of opportunities and good measures to help mitigate, and also understanding that 68% of our State has also chosen to get vaccinated. That's a really positive thing.

The vast majority of people in New Hampshire -- we want more, of course, but the vast majority have already made that choice. And if your customers are concerned coming in, well, they've had the opportunity to make that choice for themselves, as well, which is why, again, the State isn't coming down with mandates. We're always going to provide guidance. Public Health is always going to, I think, push exactly what they should do, which is always their mission is solely focused on Public Health, anything we can do to mitigate, all these new strategies and ability to do that. We've never just followed the CDC. We kind of always go our own way and we've been very successful doing that. But businesses can and should be making the best decision for their dynamics that they're dealing with every day from both an Employee and a customer perspective.

May be the same answer for this one: what's your faith level in the honor system that we're now kind of in of, if you've been vaccinated, you don't have to wear masks? But some people never wanted to wear a mask and never wanted to get vaccinated. So they may be taking their masks off and not be vaccinated.

Governor Sununu:

So, I'm sorry. What's my confidence in the faith level that people are going to be...

Being in the honor system now, there's going to be a lot of people out there who are worried that, how do you know who's vaccinated and...

Governor Sununu:

If somebody is worried about someone else being vaccinated, they can be vaccinated, themselves, right? I get you want to make sure and hopefully be in a situation where you're the most comfortable. But, folks shouldn't be walking the streets worried about whether the next person next to them is vaccinated or not. You've had that option for yourself. You've had it for quite some time, and you can take those mitigation measures for you and your family, if you can choose.

So it's not about a faith level of individuals. I think most people, either they're going to get vaccinated or they're not. We're not going to be testing people and asking people to show their vaccine passport. That's not what we're going to be doing here. I think most States aren't, frankly.

But remember, the vaccine now allows you to protect yourself. Before, when we didn't have the vaccine, it was all about doing certain mitigation measures to make sure we're protecting others, as well, wearing masks and whatnot. But the vaccine protects me, as much as anybody else. So, that's the opportunity that's there.

So, I just don't think folks should get so wrapped around the axle whether the guy walking down the road towards them is vaccinated or not. If we live like that, we're going to be paralyzed, right? I know that I could get a vaccine and hopefully have chosen to do that. Well, I have, but hopefully everyone else does, too.

Can we hear from either Dr. Chan or the appropriate DHHS person on this? And I'm not sure if it's an outbreak or a cluster in SAU 7 in the Monadnock School District. Are you working at all with -- they're going remote for two days.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, Dr. Daly, do you want to?

Dr. Daly:

Is there a question, Adam?

Yes, hold on. This is coming through.

Governor Sununu:

Did you just hear about it?

Yeah. Yeah, I guess, or to what extent is the State working with these folks? And when we see this little blips now pop up in these institutional settings, how involved do you get anymore?

Dr. Daly:

Sure; so we are still contact tracing. And whenever there is a case in a school, we do work with the school to do that contact tracing. And so, we are working with a number of schools. We continue to share the information we know about on the Dashboard. We continue to operate in the same way, I think. And in terms of that particular school district, they do have a small number of cases, which is still consistent with what we've been seeing throughout, is that there are small clusters that occur in schools, but they tend to be limited. And we will work with them to make sure that they have the right precautions in place.

Great, thank you, Governor. You recently asked the Federal Government to give New Hampshire permission to use Federal money designed to help people pay rent during the pandemic, to instead build new rental units. Can you explain what you specifically requested, how many units you'd like to see made available, and maybe locations that you're looking at?

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so the State has been given hundreds of millions of dollars, primarily built around a Rental Relief Program. We created one in the CARES Act. We've gotten more money even on top of that. And again, it's provided a great opportunity.

There's very little chance we're going to use those hundreds of millions of dollars, which is why we've gone back to the Federal Government. There's just not a demand out there, right? People have jobs. We're talking about 2.8% percent unemployment, very high wages.

So, where there is a need, it's being used. But the fact of the matter is we're not going to nearly get enough people even applying for those dollars to spend hundreds of millions. So we've asked for flexibility in terms of either creating incentives or building new housing units.

We haven't asked for a number. We want to build this many units. It's just saying, look, you gave us a whole pot of money. Let us design a system around housing relief that best fits the need of our communities. And so, I believe that our needs might be very different than Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, California, whatever it might be. I think every State should have the ability to do that.

Right now, they've been very strict about how we can spend those dollars. And it doesn't really match the need of the State. It helps a few folks, of course. And that's wonderful. But it doesn't, given the amount of money and the amount of opportunity that's there. It's not really lining up with the needs. So, more State flexibility is always a benefit. And we have not heard back whether that's going to be allowed or not.

What else can the State do to address this, the workforce housing crisis?

Governor Sununu:

Well, the heart of the workforce housing crisis -- not to get on my soapbox, though I have a tendency to do that here. Get on Commissioner Shibinette's soapbox. I'm just kidding. The heart of the housing crisis is about getting units developed.

We have Investors that want to invest. We have Builders and Developers that want to build. We have a lot of barriers in the permitting level. I tried with a Housing Bill to create more incentives at the local level. That Bill got held up again unfortunately.

But, it's not -- you don't do it with a stick. You do it with a carrot. You do it with incentives. You do it with having businesses go in and advocate with the local Planning Boards. I'm a big believer. Local control works in this State. It can be frustrating at times. But it really does work.

But you can't go out and say I'm pro-business, but I don't want more apartments in my town. I'm pro-business, but I don't want to invest in workforce housing. You can't have one without the other. You can't have it both ways. If you don't have the workforce housing, you're not going to drive more Employees and young families into the State. If you're not doing that, then businesses are going to suffer.

So, it does have a domino effect, when you say -- no, some towns are really, really good at it. Yeah, well, what I think Londonderry has done, Rochester, some of the small, more rural communities have done a great job making these types of investments to a very successful level. And some towns, they almost take like a not in my backyard, a NIMB approach to it, which is to their own detriment, unfortunately, in the long-term.

So, we just want every city and town to look at the opportunity, hopefully, if we can create incentives for those investments. But the cash is out there. The Developers want to build it. There's just a lot of permitting barriers at the local level that tend to create some issues.

Finally, can you talk about your plan to make more mental-health substance-misuse services available across the State?

Governor Sununu:

So, mental-health and substance-misuse services, there is a little overlap there, of course.

We know that during the pandemic, opioid overdoses have been up, and I don't know about New Hampshire, but...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, New Hampshire's one of the only States in the country where overdoses are down. We're, I think, one of only States where, during the opioid crisis, our number of overdoses actually continued to drop. We implemented the Doorway System, a whole new, I think, approach to looking at it from a community-based level a couple years ago. And that's been incredibly successful.

So, we need to keep with that. Even though we're on the right trend, I guess for some of us it's never enough and it's never fast enough. We're still losing individuals to opioids, and not just opioids, by the way. There's new drugs and new combinations coming on. And we've taken a whole new approach to treatment services, recovery services that are designed to be flexible around the different types of substances that we're seeing out there. But, there's no doubt the pandemic exacerbated that. So, we just didn't see -- while we still saw a drop, probably not as aggressive of a drop as we would have, otherwise.

Mental health, somewhat of a different story, and as I spoke at the press conference last week, we're taking a very, very aggressive approach to mental health. I signed an Executive Order that really empowered the Commissioner to do a variety of different things not tomorrow but like five days ago. She was on it right away.

Commissioner Shibinette and her Team have just done a phenomenal job, immediately doing everything from opening new beds; moving folks into more community-based services; creating financial incentives to not just open new beds but to create these opportunities and doorways; increasing rates for some of our community Mental Health Providers; looking at outside Private Providers coming in traditionally that maybe haven't come into the State to come in and be part of the solution.

We had a very robust meeting today with a lot of the Advocates as part of this Mental Health Group I put together a couple years ago. They were the ones that helped stimulate the success we had in 2017. They were the ones that helped drive a lot of the new legislation that happened 2019. And they're the ones that we're working with to make sure that what we implement is something real and tangible.

At the end of the day, success with mental health is not about the number of dollars you put in, or just the rates, or the stipends, or even the number of beds. You need all of that, of course, right? The only measure of success is when we get to a point where a mom or a dad isn't panicking about that point where they have to bring their kid in, in a moment of crisis. Is a bed going to be available? Are they going to get appropriate services?

We need folks to know and have complete confidence in the system and be able to deliver on those results. That's it. That's what matters. Until we get actual better mental-health results, we can't claim victory on anything.

It's not about signing Bills or just saying we're putting more money towards it. Those are all steps. But those aren't the results that we're going for. And then, when you get there, you look at better data systems, predictive analytics, prevention, like real prevention in the homes and in the communities, so folks don't hit that point of crisis.

So, we're kind of attacking it all very aggressively at once. And I think there's just some amazing opportunities. What we're going to put together between last week and the next two months over mental health, I mean, we've already done so much in the first four years here. But just in the next two months, with this Executive Order, it's just going to open a whole world of opportunities. It's very, very exciting. It's a lot of work. It's a whole different approach, frankly. But it's very exciting stuff and I think we're just -- to have that community support from hospitals, community Mental-Health Providers, Private Providers, the State, local communities, everybody needs to own a part of that solution, because if it's not a collective solution, it's not going to work.

Philosophical question for you, here, Governor.

Governor Sununu:

Philosophy?

Yeah.

Governor Sununu:

We have a lot of philosophy jobs opening up. We have a philosophy factory opening up. Sorry, that was my dig at a lot of Philosophy Majors out there. I apologize.

Why is a financial incentive appropriate to convince someone to go back to work, but not appropriate to convince them to get a shot?

Governor Sununu:

Okay. So why is a financial incentive appropriate to go back to work, but not to get a shot?

As an incentive for -- to incentivize workforce...

Governor Sununu:

Because getting a shot is a healthcare decision, that's very personal, long-term decision. There's different ramifications that can come with that for an individual. Everyone, I mean, your health is what folks really protect and covet the most. And if folks, for whatever reason, don't feel comfortable or safe, you don't want to be offering cash, if you will. I don't want to use the word "bribe", but cash, if you will, to do something that they inherently at their core might not feel comfortable with. And we just have to respect that. I want everyone to get the vaccine. But I also very much understand that there's a lot of folks that just aren't going to be comfortable with it for some time.

Getting people back to work is a whole different story, right? These are people that are on unemployment. They're able-bodied working adults that have been on unemployment. They have to be looking for a job. We want them to get back to work.

We also know that they've had this extra stipend and we appreciate that, while that goes away, we want to give a little nudge, especially given the timing and the need that we're seeing. The need is so high right now to get our economy on-track.

So, we always talk about the balance in COVID with Public Health and safety, safety of the individual, and economic success. And I think we've been very, very successful in that. I'd say the most successful in the country. But they're two very different things, right? You kind of have to take them a little bit individually.

Incentivizing someone to pay someone to make a healthcare decision, incentivizing them for that, that they might have hesitancy on, I just don't feel comfortable with that right now necessarily. I mean, we will do small incentives here-and-there. But that's why this whole million-dollar thing, I just -- I'm hesitant on it, because it is healthcare. Look, the vaccine is safe. It works. There's no doubt. But we just have to appreciate that a lot of folks just don't feel comfortable with it for their health and safety of their own body.

Okay. Well, I think we might be all set. That's great. We almost cut it -- we just barely got it under four -- under an hour, not four hours, of course. No press conference this coming Thursday, lot of opportunity out there. Take advantage of the Program, if you're part of that 2.8% on unemployment. There's a great Program that we are starting. Anyone who is currently on unemployment is eligible and it's for the first \$10 million of -- that's your money. Go get it, right? There's a great opportunity. And so, we hope to, and I think we will see a good shot in the arm in terms of folks returning to work over the next couple of weeks.

Summer is here. Things are going very, very well. We will be back likely next week, I guess. Oh, I'm getting the wave-off. No? Maybe. I got to find out when we're going to be back. I guess I'm not 100% sure. So, if not next week, on Tuesday or Thursday, we will let folks know. Have a great weekend. Thanks, guys.