



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Thursday, June 10, 2021, at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Well, good afternoon. Well, good afternoon. Thanks everyone for joining us. I guess we will kick it -- not a whole lot on the agenda today. I know there's quite a few questions. But we will start by kicking things off with an update from Dr. Chan and the Department of Public Health.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. Again, just another brief numbers update for today. We are announcing 51 new people diagnosed with COVID-19. In the last week, we have averaged approximately 50 new infections per day. And currently there are 345 people with active COVID-19 infection throughout the State.

Our test-positivity rate continues to slowly decline. And over the last week, we've averaged about 1.6% of all antigen and PCR tests combined that are positive for COVID-19. Hospitalizations, there are 31 people currently hospitalized statewide with COVID-19.

Then, unfortunately, three new people to announce that have died from COVID-19 in the State, one of whom is associated with a long-term care facility, but overall the number of deaths from COVID-19 continues to be down. And over the last week, we've averaged less than one new COVID-19-related death per day in the last week that we've had to announce.

So, community transmission statewide continues to decrease. A majority of our counties throughout the State are either now in a minimal, or a low, or a moderate level of community transmission.

But, we continue to strongly recommend and encourage people to be vaccinated. Vaccinated will continue -- vaccination will continue to help us control spread of the COVID-19 virus and will help prevent further increases or future surges in infection. So, it remains critically important for everybody who's eligible to take advantage of one of the COVID-19 vaccines that is out there. With that, I will hand things over to Dr. Daly for a vaccine update. Thank you.

Dr. Daly:

Great, good afternoon, everyone. Going to provide a quick vaccination update: to-date in New Hampshire, there have been 1.5 million doses of vaccine that have been administered. This includes 817,000 people that have received their first dose of vaccine, and 700,000 people that are now fully vaccinated.

We continue to have access to around 50,000 doses of vaccine each week, between what comes into the State and what comes in through the Federal Programs. And at this point, our supply is exceeding the demand and there's plenty of vaccine available.

There are over 450 locations now across New Hampshire that has access to vaccines. This includes our hospitals, pharmacies, some Outpatient Provider offices, community health centers, as well as those community clinics that are being run by our local Health Departments and the Public Health Networks.

We also continue to bring on additional Healthcare Providers that would like to offer vaccine to their patients. And any Providers that are interested in offering vaccine can visit our website for more information. That's all I have today. Thank you. Commissioner Shibinette?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon. There's no new outbreaks to announce today in long-term care. We are not closing any outbreaks today, although we do anticipate closing Sullivan County. We are just waiting on their last round of test results. In our Homebound Program, we've vaccinated 4,879 people in their homes. And we have just about 100 people in the queue to get their first shot through the end of June. That's all I have. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, well, thank you, Commissioner and Dr. Daly, and Ben. Few quick things to talk about today, not as much as a typical Thursday press conference, but a couple substantial things. So, we've been spending a lot of time talking about not just seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, but we really are there. We're kind of at the prespitous [ph], if you will, of the end of the tunnel.

We still have a bit to manage, to be sure. Every day, we're vaccinating more people. Every day, our cases are dropping. And we have fewer and fewer people hospitalized and face the potential of death due to COVID.

Just a few short months ago, we know where our numbers were. And they were very, very high and very daunting, to be sure. But we've really moved ourselves into a really positive position. The days of April 2020 and January 2021, those were tough months. But those days are well behind us, thank goodness. And while we know COVID will be around for some time, the State of Emergency is no longer necessary to manage the remaining pieces of the pandemic. And as such, so the COVID-19 State of Emergency will end at midnight on Friday night, and I will not be renewing that State of Emergency.

The State will continue to remain at work and under what we call a Public Health incident. We have been for quite some time and that will stay in effect. And that's necessary for Health and Human Services to employ Staff and Volunteers, as needed, in addition to some of the other needed flexibilities and liability protections for our Healthcare Providers. That's very important, specifically as it relates other the vaccine rollout.

This coming weekend, the State will no longer be in that state and we can talk about how we got to this point and why now, and what was needed. But what I do want to focus on is just frankly that big thank you. It's not just our Team. I think our Team did a phenomenal job. But the citizens of this State have responded just tremendously, everything from the vaccine, the volunteerism, managing that balance between safety and still having a strong economy, and moving things forward. And it's just the last six months has really gone pretty much as well as we possibly could have expected, and I think that people of this State deserve a lot of credit for allowing us to be able to move officially out of the State of Emergency. And it's a big deal. It is.

I can remember going back to the moments before that day where we said, wow, I hope we don't have to get to a State of Emergency. And then, things were moving so fast in that March 2020 timeframe. And it weighs on you as a Governor, knowing that you really have to make this move and you hope that it's just for a few weeks maybe, or something temporary. And it'll all calm down somehow.

But obviously that unfortunately was not the case. And so, I think we all take a big sigh of relief. And I can say with confidence no one breathes that sigh of relief more than myself that we get to move truly out of the State of Emergency today -- or I should say tomorrow at midnight, technically.

Moving on, as announced last month, New Hampshire also will no longer be participating in the Federal Unemployment Assistance as a effort to get folks back to work. Over the last few weeks, we've heard anecdotally that businesses are truly starting to see more Applicants. That's really, really positive. People are heading out. They're looking for work. And we want to make sure that the data backs that up.

So, I was going to give an update about what we're seeing on the ground. And so, since announcing our Summer Stipend Program, where we're offering \$500 to new part-time Workers and \$1,000 to folks that get a fulltime job after coming off unemployment after May 18th, our unemployment numbers have been dropping at really an amazing rate.

Nearly 5700 people have stopped filing for benefits, taking advantage of the State's hiring frenzy, and rejoining the workforce. That's about a 17% drop in unemployment claims in just the last few weeks. That's really phenomenal. And for those who haven't made that jump yet, there's still plenty of jobs available, plenty of high wages today, right now. They're all out there. A lot of them are available. You can work remotely. You can work in-person, all different sets of skills, all different industries, and all different regions across the State. There is need everywhere in terms of workforce. And Employers, to their credit, are being very flexible in what they can offer and some really, frankly, enticing packages, especially in the hospitality industry, as we gear up for summer.

Our virtual hiring events, they've seen a tremendous growth in popularity since that announcement, as well. Typically, we might do an event that might have 200 Job Seekers. We did one on the seacoast region that I mentioned a couple weeks ago. And those same events are now drawing up to 2,000 Job Seekers. And there are Employers there to meet that demand and that need, which is really exciting. So, we're making a lot of one-on-one connections with folks. So, we just fully anticipate that those jobless claims will continue to drop over the next couple weeks, all headed very much in the right direction.

And in closing, I just want to also provide a brief update on these weekly COVID-focused press conferences. We have been doing them at least weekly, if not two or three times a week, sometimes, early on. And we said that they would be held with less frequency, specifically after July 4th.

But because there has been so much progress, we are able to -- I think next week we will have a press conference. Next Thursday will be our last weekly press conference. We will probably do one shortly after July 4th. And then, we will do them periodically on an as-needed basis, frankly.

So, I mean, we just know that we're not out of this yet. There is still a lot to manage. The pandemic crisis and emergency has passed us, but there is still a lot to manage, working with Providers, providing some of the -- whether it's relief that might be coming through the Federal dollars that are coming, all those go through the traditional processes now, through the Legislature and the Fiscal Committee, and all that stuff. But it's important that folks know what resources will continue to be out there for them, as there are a lot of resource opportunities.

So, next week, we will have a press conference. And then, we will take a few weeks off. And then, we will come back, as needed, following the 4th of July, all good stuff. So, with that, we can open it up for questions, whatever you might need.

Q&A Session

Governor, can you just explain sort of the process of winding down the State of Emergency? I know a couple months ago, you had said, we have to keep all these things going because sort of the logistics aspect of it, the money coming in. How does it work now that that expires? What have you been able to put in place to ensure...

Governor Sununu:

Well, a couple things, we really needed the State of Emergency to do everything from giving reciprocity and fast-track authorization for Volunteers with our mass vaccination sites; with reallocating State Employees, as necessary; with having the ability to move funds very quickly through Health and Human Services; to stand up the -- most recently, at least. I mean, we could talk about PPE and testing, and all that, early on, most recently with the vaccine and things of that nature. And we've been able to do that quite easily, frankly.

We're now hitting a point also where we have guidance on the ARP money. So, we're waiting to see what kind of guidance came out of the Federal Government. And we feel very confident there that we understand maybe not all the final rules, but enough of the rules that we're not going to be limited in how we can spend FEMA dollars or something like that. All those rules remain in place. And we still have a Public Health incident that will allow at least the Providers and HHS a lot of flexibility to do what they need to do to keep administering the vaccine. So, that's kind of the nice transition there. And I've always said, as soon as we know we don't really need the State of Emergency, we're going to get out and that's exactly what we're going to do.

Based on the numbers that they are now, what's the projection for the level of vaccinations you expect to hit by, say, middle-summer, by the time school ends? And is it sufficient to what a layperson would call herd immunity?

Governor Sununu:

I think it's safe to say it'll definitely be over 70%. And folks will keep trickling in. I mean, theoretically that number should keep trickling up all the way into the fall, potentially. So nobody really knows what the true number of herd immunity is: 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%. Not just the folks here but even Dr. Fauci, everything's a little bit different.

So the message from the State is we just want as many people to get vaccinated as possible. Herd immunity isn't defined by the boundaries of the border of the State, right, because there's so much crossover. So it's community-based. Certain communities might have higher uptake. Certain rural areas just have more natural barriers.

So there's a bunch of different variables that come into play there. But it's great to know that well-over 70% of the State should be fully vaccinated by mid-summer. And we're well on that track. And if we can get it higher, we're going to keep pushing to get it higher.

And critics who say that the State should have done more, offered incentives like other States who've seen the numbers plateau the past six, seven weeks now, very slow growth, you say...

Governor Sununu:

Oh, in terms of not providing -- we didn't need to provide incentives. Yeah, we were ahead of the game. I get every State's a little bit different. They wanted -- other States needed to -- I don't want to say catch up to where we were, but I think catch up to some of the positive results that we were seeing. Other New England States, I think, have done a very good job, as well. For whatever reason, the Northeast, as a whole, I think, has done a very good job with the speed of the vaccine rollout.

Ultimately, remember, now it's no longer a function of how fast the State is putting it out. Supply is far exceeding demand, because we were very quick to that. So everyone's going to naturally kind of come back to around the same range as...

Why not increase demand by offering incentives, which is the strategy other States are trying?

Governor Sununu:

Again, if you haven't chosen to take the vaccine by now, we're not going to pay you to do that. I'm not going to use the bribe word or anything like that. But, we're not going to overly incentivize you to making a healthcare choice based on money. I kind of have a fundamental block with that. And we've just done a great job without it.

On that subject, Governor, what about people who are apathetic?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Who it's not a moral objection or anything like that, they're just sitting on the couch and they're like, yeah, I could get vaccinated but I'm not doing it today. So far, if that messaging hasn't worked, shouldn't you do something different to try and reach them, and say, hey, come on, get into this?

Governor Sununu:

Well, I think we're trying a lot of different avenues, whether it's advertising, whether it's having different voices promote the message and the positive aspects of vaccine. I think we are trying to reach them as much as we can.

The good news is that's a fairly small percentage, right, when you have 70% of your adult population fully vaccinated and willing to take it? And you know that number's going to keep trickling up.

We haven't seen really how it's going to affect those individuals with their Primary Care Providers. When they go for their regular checkup every year, I'm sure there'll be a question asked with their Doctor. And maybe the Doctor can talk about some of those positive aspects of it. So we could still see significant jumps with that more apathetic crowd as it goes more to the private sector and you have more of that one-on-one connection with your traditional Healthcare Provider.

Governor, Dr. Daly had told us the other day that the State's given out about 4,000 initial vaccine doses each week in the last two weeks. That's kind of a sizable drop-off from recent weeks.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

Any concern about that? Is there a way to get those...

Governor Sununu:

No, it's exactly as expected. Look, we were just fasted than everyone -- ultimately, it simply becomes a function of not how fast we get it out, but how fast folks want to take it. My sense is most of the Northeast, regionally, will end up in around the same range of overall individuals fully vaccinated, let's say, by mid-summer to late-summer. And then, as more and more of the State's programs go to the -- to be administered by Healthcare Providers, themselves, you could see small upticks there.

So, I think it's just natural to know that everything was going to ultimately plateau a little bit. And we still don't know whether you'll need booster shots. We don't whether ultimately the six-month to 12-year-olds will be allowed to get the vaccine, that next stage of vaccine. So those are all next steps we will take. But I think we've done a great job and the people have responded very well.

And the State having access to 50,000 doses, that means that we have those in the State. What does that exactly mean?

Governor Sununu:

So we order the doses based on pretty much what we need. And I think last week was the first week that we weren't ordering our fully allocation, because we weren't going to need it. As I think we've talked about a little bit, I offered to pull down all the vaccine we could and send it to Canada. And I've been told I can't do that.

There are some States talking about doing vaccination centers on this side of the border for Canadians that are essential Workers, maybe. So we're looking at that as a possibility. It probably won't affect that many folks. We just want anything we can do to open up that Canadian border. They just haven't done as well with the vaccine up there, of course.

It looks like, I believe, the next time the international -- that agreement to basically close the border would have to get reupped on June 22nd, I believe. So hopefully, if it does -- I hope it doesn't get reupped. But if it does, it has maybe more flexibilities and stipulations for more recreational-type travelers. So we're not quite sure what that will look like. But if they're willing to open it up, we're willing to provide vaccine, if that gives them some level of comfort.

Governor, what's the venue you'd use up north? Is there a location where you'd set up a fixed site?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, we have a couple different ideas. So we haven't permanently decided. One idea would be to send it to them, right? It might be easier to just do that, to send it right over the border to them. One idea might be to do something in conjunction with Vermont. The big border crossing is really -- the most major one is in Vermont. We could do something in Littleton or something like that, so maybe a joint-State effort. I think most States are on the same page as we are, in terms of wanting that border open. So, we have a variety of different options, if they were to allow us to do that or ask us to do that. I think we could whip something up pretty quick. We're pretty good at improvising here.

So are you only ordering the amount of vaccines that you need? I mean, how much are you ordering?

Governor Sununu:

That's a good -- about half, is that right?

Dr. Daly:

For the first week, and then this week we didn't order any.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so -- okay. This week, we didn't even order any, because we have some left over. So we ordered about 50% of our allocation last week. This week, we haven't even ordered any. It goes bad if it sits on a shelf. So we don't want to take it out of the hands of other States that need it. Again, I think just a testament to us being ahead of the game, on the ball, very fast with what we're doing, and we get to reap some of those benefits economically now, for sure.

As you talk with folks in the tourism industry, have they noted a sharp decline in Canadian tourists to New Hampshire for the summer, given at least right now folks still have to quarantine up there for a couple weeks if they do?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so the question is as it relates to the tourism industry, have businesses seen a sharp decline? We've been talking to them and the answer is undoubtedly yes. The tourism is definitely being affected. The good news is there's more tourists coming in from other parts of the United States, but very, very few tourists coming in from Canada, if at all. It's really only essential Workers that are allowed to be, maybe taking an extended day-or-two, or something like that.

We were opening up the Laconia Bike Week. We had the press conference today to launch the Laconia Bike Week. And that's going to be a phenomenal week this coming week. And everyone should partake. Check out the schedule. It's all over the State. It's very exciting.

But one of the larger contingencies of individuals are motorcycle enthusiasts that come out of Canada that likely won't be here for this one. So that's probably the one area and one reason why some of the crowd might be -- that pocket and contingency really won't be here for that. But it's still going to be a strong crowd. A lot of indications there's a lot of interest from folks all over the United States.

As a whole, as a reminder, United States has just really done very, very well. There is still very much a worldwide pandemic of COVID. And as a whole, the United States is just far and away ahead of everybody. And I say that only because I think we need to appreciate all the other issues happening around the world. They're in a much different situation and obviously our hearts go out to them. We want everybody to get through this. It's causing everything from supply chain dynamics, material shortages, and all of that. So while our economy's opening, we're feeling the pinches of that, if you will, economically a little bit, with some higher costs.

So when you walk outside, and especially here in New Hampshire, we're one of the most flexible, open, strongest economies in the country that is the most flexible, and open, and strongest economies in the world. So we're blessed to be here, to be sure. But there still is a pandemic going on in most of the other parts of the world. And I think it's good to be cognizant of that.

I got a couple questions for Dr. Chan.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, what's the question?

The Emergency Order ends Friday night. Is the pandemic over? And do you have a specific number that you use in your mind, because based on the reading I've done there is no specific pandemic infection number? But like for you, what was always the number that you were kind of working towards where you said, okay, we've gone from pandemic to this is just a thing we have?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, thanks for the questions. So I think the similar question was asked maybe last week about the pandemic. And so, I think the response was the same. New Hampshire and the United States don't declare pandemics. Pandemics are declared by the World Health Organization or the WHO. And so, the pandemic is still very much out there, just looking at what's happening in other countries around the globe.

I think what people are seeing and experiencing in New Hampshire and nationwide, though, is a pullback on the pandemic response. Our response to this as a pandemic crisis is decreasing. But COVID-19 is likely still going to be with us for weeks, months, years, potentially into the future. And so, COVID-19 will be with us. And so, we need to learn and figure out how to manage this as we would other potentially infectious diseases. And I think that's the transitional process that people see us going through right now.

In terms of what constitutes an outbreak, if maybe I can use the term "outbreak" instead of pandemic, the outbreak in New Hampshire, an outbreak is simply to find a level of disease above a baseline, right? And so, we previously had no COVID.

So, right now any COVID we have is above our previous baseline. The question is: what's the baseline that we're going to see going forward, in terms of COVID-19 in our communities? And that remains unknown. That's something we're only going to know over time, as we do surveillance on infections and look at what level COVID-19 continues to circulate at within our communities.

So it's a hard question to answer, in terms of when the COVID-19 outbreak in New Hampshire is going to be over. But certainly we've seen dramatic reductions in the levels of community transmission. And so, we're, in proportion, transitioning our pandemic response to something that's going to be more manageable going forward into the future.

Did you have like a number, like, man, if we can just get to seven-day average of X, then we will be in the place that you are? There's lots of diseases where they're out there and you have to manage them, etc. Was there a number in your mind or...

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so I think, as you pointed out, there are no numbers specifically that have been put out as a target for where we're trying to get to with management of COVID-19. What I'll point you to is some of our community transmission metrics and what I was referring to these in the beginning around minimal, moderate, and substantial levels of community transmission. And our metrics differ a little bit from CDC's metrics. And other States have different metrics.

The goal is to get to as low of a level of COVID-19 as possible. But to be clear, the goal's not to eliminate COVID, right? We don't believe COVID is going to be eliminated in the United States. And so, how we manage it going forward is going to depend on how low we can get it, that level of community transmission as a category, and how high we can get vaccination.

I think it was asked last week at the press conference: are we going to see numbers go up again in the fall or winter? Very likely, we may. And we need to be prepared for that. And we need as many people as possible to be vaccinated.

So, even while we're looking at how to pull back on some of these mitigation measures, we continue to stress the importance of people still getting vaccinated, because we believe COVID-19 is going to be with us. Thanks.

Governor, we're hearing from the businesses specifically, like restaurants and lodging, they have a lot of jobs available, right?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

You're hearing the same thing. And how do we get people back to work?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, that's what we've been talking about. I mean, there's so many jobs available, incredibly high wages. We have some of the highest wages in the country right now, which is just phenomenal.

Both my teenagers are working and they're loving it. One's in hospitality. One works in a factory. And I think you're seeing a lot of folks just try to take advantage of the high wages. A lot of flexibility, I think it surprises folks. They're like, well, I'm not ready to go back to work because I have kids, with childcare. And that's a big need across the State, to be sure. But when you talk to Employers, themselves, a lot of them say, well, that's fine. You can work from home X number of days a week, or whatever it is, or Employers always seem to be more than ever willing to work around the Employees' schedule. It's an Employee's market, so to say. And so, that's an opportunity we want to emphasize and hopefully encourage more folks to get out there.

Obviously, with the Federal stipends and stipulations coming off, especially here in New Hampshire probably faster than in most States, and that'll just allow our Workers to get back and to take advantage of those high wages. I think it'd be a very different story if we're trying to get everyone back to work and we somehow had went back to really low wages or something. We've never really had low wages in New Hampshire. But now they're higher than ever.

So people want to take advantage of that. They want that financial independence for themselves and their family. People want to get back to work, the vast majority, which is wonderful. It's just the Employees are going the extra mile to find those flexibilities that everyone needs to make it fit for them, work for them, and that way the Employer benefits. The business benefits. And that family benefits.

Governor, I'm wondering if you could describe your position on the language in the Senate Budget about implicit bias training and teaching on racism? You were critical of the House's approach to the issue. And I'm wondering, have you reviewed the Senate's language? And are you supportive of it?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so I've said that the House's approach, the original HB 544, which I think you're referencing, they didn't even have enough votes to get that out. That never even left the House. That was problematic for a variety of different reasons.

It tried to get very specific. I think it really set up a potential system where people are saying, well, that was divisive and that was this. And that was that. And you were going to get into kind of a tit-for-tat thing down the road. And I said, that's a very dangerous slope to go under. I think it also -- there were some First Amendment and freedom of speech issues that it would potentially overrun.

What the Senate and Senator Bradley have done -- and I give them a lot of credit -- is said, look, we have great -- we have good Regulations and Rules on our books to ensure that no one is discriminated against in the classroom or in the workplace, based on race or sexual identity, or gender, or whatever it is. And we're going to enhance and strengthen those. We don't need to create new Laws. We need to take what we have on the books, which is pretty good, and make it even stronger. Make it better, and allow our new Civil Rights Unit to come into play. If folks have a complaint, they have a concern, whether it's with their child or their Employer, there's accountability in that system now. So, I think they've done a very good job just to strengthen something that is workable for everybody.

And then, just kind of continuing with that, the Senate provision would make implicit bias training optional for all public sector Employees. And last fall, you had signed an Executive Order endorsing all recommendations from your own Police Commission, which included requiring that implicit bias training for Law Enforcement.

Governor Sununu:

Um-hmm [yes].

So does this mean now that Officers will no longer be required to...

Governor Sununu:

Well, those are two separate things. One deals with all public sector Employees. And one deals with Law Enforcement. So, no, I still stand by. I think all Law Enforcement should have some type of training.

You can call it implicit bias training. You can call it whatever you want. You can put whatever title you want. But training and understanding, and it should be ongoing, as well. It's not just a one-time, check-the-box thing, but to have that allows that open discussion to happen, which I think is very important, specifically for Law Enforcement. But I think the provision you're looking at talks about all public sector Employees.

Right.

Governor Sununu:

And say, look, we're not going to mandate that. No. But if they want to have it, they can have it.

And then, one more specific in there, what about the ability to do school districts that's built into the Senate's Bill? I know several school districts have raised some real concern about that.

Governor Sununu:

Sure; well, I think -- so, I'm sorry. Who raised concerns? School districts have? Yeah, well, that's understandable, of course. It's about having accountability in the system. It's whether a district or a Teacher, or whatever it might be, whatever's happening in that system where someone feels like something is happening that is against the law, someone's being discriminated against. It doesn't help to say, well, my child's being discriminated against and there's nothing you can do about it, right? You have some accountability in the system. That's all. Do we have some on the phone?

Holly Ramer with The Associated Press:

Thank you. I have two questions, one about the emergency declaration and the other about vaccines. You mentioned a few weeks ago extending the declaration just long enough so that the Legislature could take action on some of the Emergency Orders. Can you give some examples of that? For example, was insurance coverage for telehealth part of that? And then, my questions about the vaccine ordering, I apologize, I couldn't quite hear some of what Dr. Daly was saying earlier, can you clarify? What is the State's allocation and did she say that we didn't order any this week? And has the issue of returning vaccine to the Federal Government come up? And if so, like, how does that work logistically?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so I'm going to answer the -- if you don't mind, Holly, I'll answer the second part first. We ordered about 50% of our allotment last week and we didn't order any this week, because we have some on the shelves. It hasn't expired or anything, but we can keep using what we have.

I think that Dr. Daly and her Team have just done a very good job of seeing what we need and meeting that need, maybe making sure we have -- always having a little bit of extra so we never fall short. And so, therefore, I don't believe we've ever sent any vaccine back to the Federal Government. We've never had to do anything like that.

In terms of the Emergency Order, yes. So, the budget is on the verge of passing, which is great. A lot of other Bills have already passed, which provide a lot of flexibilities. We've seen where ARP, the American Rescue Plan, has provided some guidance. So we know what is allowable.

We received also guidance from the Federal Government specifically around FEMA, which was really good. That came in late-April, I think. So that gives us a better understanding and security around using FEMA dollars. That's a big one. I mean, and we drew down, I think, well over \$100 million in FEMA money, or around \$100 million. So we wanted to make sure that whatever we might need and can qualify, we still have the ability to do that without losing it.

As far as telehealth, we have, I think, in the last session, we passed some Bills on telehealth back in 2020, which would provide some flexibility. We're still pushing the Federal Government for more flexibility on telehealth, especially as it revolves around Medicare and mental health. There are still Federal barriers on Medicare and mental health. So that's really nothing unfortunately that we can pass a Bill for here in New Hampshire. But we're making a strong pitch to the delegation and to the Administration to hopefully provide more telehealth flexibility, as it pertains to that. And we're working on that. And we will see where it comes up.

So there's a variety of different things that really come in. But we work directly with the Attorney General's Office and Health and Human Services in particular and said, okay, if and when the State of Emergency goes away, what are the repercussions? And we've kind of checked all the boxes and we feel very confident that moving away from it tomorrow still keeps us in a very strong position to manage, because we have an official Public Health incident, as it's called, which gives that flexibility to both HHS and Healthcare Providers, themselves, liability protections and things like that, so they can do what they have to do on the Public Health side of the emergency without it being a full State of Emergency. Hope that helped.

Paula Tracy with InDepthNH:

Good afternoon. I have a question for Dr. Chan, and perhaps Lori Shibinette, as well, related to the health prospects for the State's elderly, particularly those who live in long-term care facilities, now that we have seeming to turn a corner here with COVID. What would you say now about the health prospects for these residents and the things that you might be looking for to ensure that they do not suffer the brunt of any future outbreak? And I guess I would direct those to those two individuals.

Governor Sununu:

Sure; well, I'm going to throw in my two cents, and then I'll bring them up. It's about vaccination. I mean, we have a very high rate of vaccination with both our Healthcare Staff and the residents, themselves, which is great. And we're going to keep encouraging that.

We have a good system, as new folks might come into long-term care, where potential outbreaks can happen, that folks can get vaccinated through those healthcare facilities' Pharmacy Providers, which is really good. I mean, I'll let Dr. Chan and Doctor -- or Commissioner Shibinette, whoever wants to add. But I think that's the -- you got to use the tools that have been so successful for that population to-date, and for the State, and make sure that they're in place and easy to access in the long run.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thanks for the question on long-term care. So, vaccination, that is correct, is the best line of defense. And really it's about balance, right? The maximally protective strategy for long-term care would be to close their doors and not allow anybody in, and to put more or less a bubble around their residents.

But that has significant negative outcomes for the residents, themselves. The residents deserve to live a life of high quality, being part of the community, having frequent visitors, from their kids and their grandkids and their friends, and being able to socially come together and enjoy their life in their long-term care facilities.

So, as much as we default to wanting to protect the residents, there has to be a balance between both physical health and the psychosocial health of the people that live in long-term care. So I think what you're going to see from us a very strong push and recommendations to get not just the residents but the Staff vaccinated in long-term care facilities, both new residents and anybody that hasn't chosen to go forward. We still want to encourage that. But we are going to continue to recommend keeping those doors open, keeping visitation plentiful, and keeping the social and interactive social life of the residents alive and well in long-term care facilities.

Governor Sununu:

Great.

Kimberley Haas with Seacoast Current:

Hello, everyone. Congratulations, the light at the end of the tunnel is finally here and we can all enjoy a great summer here in New Hampshire. My question is for the Governor today. And I'm curious. What does the dropping of the State of the Emergency mean for the average person, our neighbors, our friends? Outside of changes to unemployment, are there any other things that will affect individuals when the State of Emergency is dropped tomorrow night? For example, are there any moratoriums on rental payments, or things like that, that will be affected by this change? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

The vast majority of citizens won't even know that the State of Emergency has moved on. We've provided so much flexibility, I think, over the past few weeks. That's why it's going to be just a very smooth transition.

I don't want to say just a matter of paperwork, it's a very significant document to be sure. But, no, I think the Team has designed it such that it's going to be incredibly smooth. And again, we've tried to really address any flexibilities that will be needed.

I think here-and-there we may have -- I talked to all of my Commissioners over the past few weeks and I had them go back and really dig into their rules or regulations, or flexibilities that they were using to fast-track certain things or to move certain things, and just to make sure that they understood that we really are back to a pre-pandemic process and really what that would mean. And again, if there were issues that had come up over the past few weeks, we addressed them either legislatively or through rules, or something like that. And some things just we had great flexibility and we just don't have that anymore. We have to go back to more of a traditional process, which is the right thing to do. But that's more on the Government-management side of things.

When you talk about the moratoriums on rentals or the Rental Relief Programs, the Rental Relief Programs are still there, right? We don't have a whole lot of evictions in this State, because the Rental Relief Program is there. It's a really -- especially if you're being evicted because of nonpayment, that really shouldn't happen at this point, because there's so much money out there to help citizens and Landlords to do that.

So I think enough of these backstops have been put into place that we needed early on. If you remember, early on, when we did the State of Emergency, we were one of the first States to actually make changes to our unemployment rules. We were one of the first States to be able to enact our CARES Act

money. We were one of the fastest States to do CARES Act, one of the fastest States to bring in PPE, and the State of Emergency allowed us to do that and was very, very useful. And that really impacted people's lives, without a doubt.

But now, we're just at a place where I think it'll expire and there'll be very few bumps in the road. We might see things here-or-there that were unanticipated, but very few bumps in the road. And it's really just back to the pre-pandemic management.

Quick follow-up on that: some people are suggesting that the decision to end the Emergency Order now has less to do with the spread of COVID and more to do with the legislative calendar and that you wanted to see the budget come through with the rules and restrictions on future Governors, and that now is a propitious political time to end the...

Governor Sununu:

Well, obviously, it has nothing to do with that, because those Bills are still undefined. I don't know where some of that's going. But enough legislation has passed that did provide flexibility. So it's not political.

It's just a matter of, we've always said, towards the end of the legislative session, we will have a lot of the flexibilities we need in place. It happens to coincide with the fact that the State is out of the vaccine game for first shots at this point. We are out of the pandemic, as we have defined it, the pandemic, the crisis, if you will. We're not in a Public Health crisis. We are in more of a management mode. All that stuff has really lined up.

We don't need the flexibilities on unemployment, because we have so few folks on unemployment. We want to get folks off unemployment to take advantage of the very strong economy. All that is coming together literally in the past couple weeks. So that's exactly why we're doing it. So, as for the budget, I don't know what's going to happen to the budget. That's still very much up in the air.

It is very different from what it was just a few weeks ago, and...

Governor Sununu:

Oh, sure.

And a different issue that you have highlighted.

Governor Sununu:

In the budget, or are you talking about 417?

The sausage (?) that's being made as we sit here today.

Governor Sununu:

And I can't tell you where that's going to end up. I really don't know. So, no, it has nothing to do with that, because I don't know where that's going to end up. Oh, great. Okay. Yeah, Alex?

Today, the House approved a Bill that would release the Laurie List to the public. And I'm wondering if you plan on signing that measure.

Governor Sununu:

I have to be honest, have not seen the final wording of that Bill. Laurie List is a very important issue. I don't know what changes that might have been made. So I will absolutely, when I -- after I read it, I'm happy to get back to you right away. But that's one of those things where just a word here or a word there for the legal implications of what might have to be released, the timing of it, I apologize. I haven't seen the Bill. So I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Yes?

There is Tyler Shaw's Law, a young man from Concord who was killed in a DWI accident. The Offender had had two previous DWIs. New legislation that just passed the House, on its way to your desk, would increase the penalties for those multiple-time Offenders who then kill in a subsequent DWI. What are your thoughts on this?

Governor Sununu:

And as long as it's the same language I saw before, I fully intend on signing it. Yeah.

This is your last regularly scheduled press event. Throughout the time you've been doing them, some Democrats have...

Governor Sununu:

Well, I'll do one next week.

Oh, yeah.

Governor Sununu:

Sorry.

Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

The upcoming one is the final one.

Governor Sununu:

We're coming to the end.

(Inaudible) or expect that by the way of a shock ending, like the (inaudible), so we will be looking forward to that, a great plot twist for the last episode.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

But as long as you've been doing them, Democrats have complained that you've used it to help you politically, when you're running for Governor. You had these regular appearances of open press events where people just come in and put you on TV. Some people say you may run for some office next year. I hear rumors. I don't know a lot about that, that there's some race of some kind. And they're complaining again this week that you were having these TV events. My question is...

Governor Sununu:

I'm having a TV event?

No, no.

Governor Sununu:

I mean, really if people are saying I'm having some sort of TV event in terms of across this crisis, let me tell you, I take issue with that.

Well, there are Democrats that say that it has played to your benefit, intentionally or otherwise, for you to have these regularly open, media events, once a week. When are you going to lift the Order that's preventing Senator Hassan, Senator Shaheen, Congressman Pappas, and Congressman Kuster from having their own open events, which they have not had one during the COVID event? We would have happily covered it at New Hampshire Journal. In fact, we've been covering here for three years now. They've never had an open press event like this. Is this part of the Emergency Order or something?

Governor Sununu:

I'm not going to answer the question. But I will say, look, we come out here early on, I mean, every day, right? Sometimes we're like, I think we need two press events today, because it was moving so fast. And it was tough. It was a really tough time. And I sincerely mean it. I hope no Governor ever has to go through this. I really mean that. And it was really hard for a year.

There were a lot of sacrifices made. The Team did an incredible job. And you just got to know that through 2020 we had riots. We had pandemics. We had insanity with elections. And New Hampshire kept it together every day, super transparent. You saw the data every time. And we were just -- that was the key, because you had to have public trust. And you had to -- when we say we're in it together, we had to know that the people of the State were truly with us in this, and they understood what we understood. And we could justify every decision we made.

So, I really hope no one ever has to go through that again. And for anyone insinuating that we somehow used this for our political advantage, shame on them. Shame on them. I don't care whether it's an individual or a Party, or anything. Shame on them.

This Team knocked it out of the park, and we made sure that the State of New Hampshire, all 1.4 million people, knew exactly what we were doing and why. And because of that, the citizens responded. They knew what we were doing. They knew they were part of it. And they're the reason why we're so successful.

Governor, we're hearing anecdotally just about some students who may be struggling children socially, dealing with that self-isolation, acting out in some cases. Besides getting them back in the classroom five days a week, how can the State support them and get them back on track, and if Dr. Chan wants to...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so one of the things that we knew very early on is the issue with DCYF. All of a sudden, the complaints and concerns to DCYF plummeted back in the spring. But that wasn't because there weren't issues of abuse happening. That was because we didn't have kids in schools and a second set of eyes, and we weren't quite sure what was happening in some very tough, anxiety-filled positions behind closed doors. And so, it really is making sure that our Employees are back, and they are.

We have training. We're hiring. We're increasing staffing there. We've had open positions at DCYF for quite some time. We're putting more mental-health services into schools and classrooms and making those services available to entire families.

So, one of our big mental-health pushes here really does involve schools and kids, and socioemotional learning. The Choose Love Program, it is so popular and going so strong in schools we have Police Departments. We have Hockey Teams. We have groups all over the State taking those types of programs onto themselves, because they see the benefit of what's happening with the kids. And so, look, it's something that you can't take your eye off the ball. But, without a doubt, I think what Commissioner Shibinette has put forward, in terms of the mental-health push, if you will, it's an all-encompassing, right, from 6 months to 99 -- or 6 months to 106 years old, whatever it might be, those services and those opportunities are available for everybody.

The legislation headed to your desk now targeting the For the People Act, this would create potentially a system, if that passes in Washington, of two elections here in New Hampshire, Federal and State. I'm guessing you're not a fan of the For the People Act. But would you really, I guess, light the fuse on this and wait to see what happens?

Governor Sununu:

Well, the question highlights how bad the For the People Act in Washington really is. It's forcing States to take defensive matters that could -- in this State, in particular -- could effectively split up the election into two elections. That's a horrible solution to an even worse potential oncoming from Washington, all the more reason why anybody from New Hampshire would vote for that, House or Senate, is not looking out for New Hampshire's interests.

We've got a great system here. We have one of the best election systems in the country, a gold standard, if you will, some of the highest participation rates. We don't -- this would force people to -- I mean, Town Moderators would have to manage the ballot boxes two weeks beforehand. We wouldn't know -- some races wouldn't even know who won until 10 days after-the-fact. You'd have third parties coming in here and ballot harvesting.

These are all the things that create problems in other States, right? Other States go, how do we get like your system? Why would we take on any of that? And the result is, okay, well, we need to protect our system, because it's New Hampshire's system designed by New Hampshire's citizens and New Hampshire's volunteer Legislature. They do a very good job with that. It's managed at a local level, right, by our friends and neighbors at our Town Halls. It's a really good system. And so, obviously, we want to protect that.

Well, one of the only ways to protect it could be this Bill that potentially would divide things up, because the For the People Act would take care of the Federal races and we'd be able to manage the State races, as we want. It's just a big mess. It's a big mess, which is why I'm praying that that just gets shot down in Washington and we don't have to deal with any of it.

But the legislation, you're going to have to make a decision on that potentially before Washington acts or doesn't act.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, potentially. I'm not sure when it's headed to my desk. I'll probably sit down with Bill Gardner and Legislative Leaders, and some of the Town Moderators, some of the Town Clerks, those folks that are on the frontline, and talk about all of it, in terms of what the Bill looks like, and making sure that -- you always want to make sure that the remedy doesn't outdo the problem that you're trying to fix. So, we will sit down with the people on the frontlines to make that decision.

Governor, some States have new reported concern that large amounts of Johnson & Johnson vaccine (inaudible) may go to waste, as demand for that vaccine has really lagged. And I'm wondering. Is New Hampshire finding itself in that situation right now, as well?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, we are. I think every State is. I got to tell you. When the White House came on the phone call with all the Governors and said that, yeah, we paused the J&J vaccine, but it's not going to affect people's willingness to take the -- I mean the fact that they would say that to us and now know the obvious, that it was going to have -- and it's turned out to be even worse than we thought.

The J&J vaccine is safe. It's reliable. It was proven to be. But because they were so rash in their pulling it, I don't know what the future of that is. And yeah, there's Johnson & Johnson vaccine that is at-risk of going bad here, so to say, because we just don't have the demand. Nobody wants it when we try to give it away to other folks. I imagine all across the country you're going to see Johnson & Johnson vaccine potentially go to waste. I got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. It's good. It's safe. It works. It's fine. But I also understand that they created a real PR problem, if you will, by pulling it off the shelf unnecessarily.

And do you have a sense of how many are kind of in danger?

Governor Sununu:

Dr. Daly, do you know how many?

Dr. Daly:

We have 10,000 at the State.

Governor Sununu:

10,000 and they'll expire in the next week-or-so, couple weeks?

Dr. Daly:

Yes, the next 10 to 14 days, and then we're waiting to hear from the Federal Government if there'll be any extension of the expiration date.

Governor Sununu:

Right, so in the next 10 to 14 days, potentially 10,000 vials of Johnson & Johnson will go bad here in New Hampshire. It could be that they do some more research and say it -- you can keep it a little longer. We don't know. But I have no doubt that some of it is ultimately going to go bad, because we just don't have that kind of demand right now.

With the emergency ending, for example Dr. Chan just issued a recommendation that schools let the kids take the masks off because it's hot out there, yet there's still school systems like Londonderry that are using them. They're hearing advice and declining to take it. The Exeter prom was they were marking kids with a marker if they had the vaccine or didn't have the vaccine.

Governor Sununu:

Unbelievable.

Are you going to be using the bully pulpit, as they say, to try to influence? And have you rethought your position on local control after what you've seen in the past 16 months?

Governor Sununu:

No, look. It's one of those things where I heard a lot of people, yesterday in particular, after what happened in Londonderry. I heard the stories in Exeter. Those things absolutely should not have happened. And again, if you have a School Board that's taking action that you don't agree with, then all those parents need to go vote and vote all those people out. That's the beauty of local control.

You have so much more control at a localized level to impact those that have a lot of influence, whether it's on your town, or your Planning Board, or your School Board. And so, it can get frustrating in that you have folks who are diehard advocates of local control. And I am, myself, saying, well, you need to go. Governor, you need to.

It's like, whoa, either we believe philosophically in that, and I strongly do. And so, no, the State shouldn't be putting their thumb in changing the rules out of local control just because we don't like the results. That's up to the people.

We have a great process and a great pathway for folks to make that change. One gets elected every couple years, or -- and/or few years. And so, you can really change the dynamics of your town huge, if you rally and galvanize around an issue, or whatever it is.

It's a very powerful thing. And so, you just have to let that take its course. I appreciate everyone's frustration. But we're not going to change and I'm not going to advocate for changing the rules around local control. It's one of the thing that really separates us from the 49 other States, in terms of having nimble, flexible, and responsive systems, because so much of it happens at that local level.

Did I see one? No. Sorry. Okay. Great, all right. Well, thank you, guys. We're going to do one more next week. Next Thursday, we will be back. And then, we will kind of take them as-is following the 4th of July. Everyone have a great week.