



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

Governor Sununu:

Well, good to see everyone. Thank you for joining us. We haven't been here for a while and definitely we're a little bit of a different setup, back here at the Emergency Operations Center. A couple things that I wanted to review a little bit of, and then I'll hand it over to Public Health for an update, just in terms of where we are with COVID.

But, just to kick things off, this is the first time we've addressed the public in quite a while. And it's the first time we've addressed the public since we've crossed the 100,000-case number here in New Hampshire. It's a bit of a grim milestone. I suppose you could look at it that way. But let's also remember there are 1400 lives that have been lost since the beginning of this pandemic, 400 [sic] individuals that are not with us anymore. And so, it has been a very hard year.

Clearly, the case numbers are slowing down. But COVID is very much still with us, especially the Delta variant. And I just want to kick things off by making the same plea you've heard us make countless times for the last 18 months. You're hearing a stronger and stronger plea across the country. Folks really need to get vaccinated.

The Delta variant is very severe. It's very real. It's having a very significant impact, specifically with the unvaccinated populations and significantly with the younger populations, those 20-, 30-, and 40-somethings. You've heard a lot of those individual cases all across the country, tragic cases of folks who just simply said I never thought it could happen to me. But it's very real. And it's not going away anytime soon.

We have the power. All of us have that individual power to really beat this virus back. And you do it with the vaccinations. It's safe. The information is there. Talk to your Doctor. I think there's about 500 locations, or ways, to get the vaccine out here in New Hampshire. And that's a very powerful thing. It's convenient. It's literally down the street wherever you are here in the State of New Hampshire. And we want to really encourage folks to get the information that they're looking for, do their research, and make sure that they're taking the right precautions for themselves, for their family, their community. Something that we've always said is that just everyone really has that individual responsibility to be part of the collective solution to all of this.

So, look, New Hampshire's, I think, done a great job, frankly, with not just the vaccines, with managing COVID. But that doesn't mean we're out of the woods. We all have a very important responsibility to this larger solution. Get vaccinated. There's lots of ways to do it, lots of opportunities, and we just want folks to take advantage, the sooner the better, right? With that, I will bring up Dr. Chan to give us a Public Health update.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. Thank you, Governor. So, brief numbers update, we are recording 48 new people diagnosed with COVID-19 today. And there are 308 people currently with active infection. In the last week, we are now averages about 40 new infections per day. This is an increase -- a small increase from about a month ago, when we were averaging around 20-or-so new infections per day.

Similarly, the test-positivity rate is also showing an increase. Test-positivity's averaging around 1.9% over the last week. And we are currently at 22 people hospitalized statewide with COVID-19. Unfortunately, there's one new person who has died from COVID-19 that we're reporting today, bringing the total number of deaths during this pandemic due to COVID-19 to 1,385 people. This new individual is not associated with a long-term care facility. And in the last week, there have now been a total of three new deaths from COVID-19 reported. And so, while we continue to average less-than-one new death per day related to COVID-19, any death from COVID-19 is unfortunate and preventable.

As highlighted in the numbers, COVID-19 is slowly increasing in New Hampshire. The daily number of new infections has been slowly increasing over the last few weeks. The test-positivity rate is increasing. The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 has been trending up, particularly in the last week.

Overall, however, most areas of New Hampshire continue to have a low level of COVID-19 and a low level of community transmission. And despite some of the increases we've seen, New Hampshire, in fact, has one of the lowest rates of COVID-19 currently in the country.

But the increasing trends highlight the need for people to get vaccinated, as the Governor said, as soon as possible, to prevent further increases, prevent outbreaks, and to prevent some of the surges that are being seen in other parts of the country due to the Delta variant. We still need to take steps to prevent, and control spread of COVID-19, especially with the more infectious Delta variant circulating and, in fact, increasing in the New England area, nationally, and even in New Hampshire. With that, I will hand things over to Dr. Daly for a vaccine and outbreak update. Thanks.

Dr. Daly:

Great, good afternoon, everyone. For our update on outbreaks today, we are currently following two institutional outbreaks in New Hampshire. This includes Laconia Rehabilitation Center. They have 10 resident cases and 2 Staff cases; and Epsom Health Center with 5 resident cases and 1 Staff case. So we do continue to identify and respond to outbreaks of COVID-19 in these types of institutional settings, if the virus is introduced. However, these outbreaks tend to be small and come under control quickly, due to the high vaccination rates in these facilities.

In terms of our vaccine update today, we have administered 1,515,000 doses of vaccine in our State. This includes 818,000 people now who have initiated vaccination and gotten at least one dose, and 749,000 people who are now fully vaccinated in our State. And while the number of new people getting vaccinated each day has slowed down over time, we still have about 1,000 new people each week who are making that choice to get vaccinated. So progress does continue and people continue to build protection against COVID-19 in our communities.

There's plenty of vaccine available nationally. And New Hampshire is no longer allocated a specific amount of vaccine by the Federal Government. Our Providers can order vaccine as they need it. And we currently have just over 500 different entities across the State that are offering

COVID-19 vaccines. This includes our pharmacies, outpatient Healthcare Provider offices, urgent care locations, hospitals, and our mobile vaccine Providers.

We are wrapping up our Homebound Vaccination Program, which has served now 5,223 homebound individuals through this Program. And we have actually just 15 people left to vaccinate through this Program. And in addition to going to people's homes, we've also arranged transportation for 387 people to a vaccination site, too.

Our mobile van now is up-and-running and it's able to provide free vaccination clinics in our communities across the State. All three of the FDA-authorized vaccines are available on the van: the Pfizer, Moderna, and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. And we also provide translation services, as well, in the van. So groups of any size in New Hampshire can request the van and we've been offering vaccine clinics to Employers, religious organizations, community groups, Event Organizers, or even for a neighborhood block party. To request the van, you can visit vaccines.nh.gov and click on the Book the Van button. So far, we've received more than 100 requests for the van and we have events scheduled through September at this time. And we've been running the van now for about a week. And we've gone to five different locations and vaccinated about 50 people through the van. So if you've not gotten vaccinated yet, there's plenty of opportunity for you to access this vaccine. And we hope that you will make that choice. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, thank you, Dr. Daly. I noticed I think they did a couple dozen vaccines at the NASCAR race this past week, which is kind of exciting. I know they set up a tent and they're wondering if anyone would show up, and I think 20 or 30 people actually went and got vaccinated as part of the NASCAR race, which is pretty neat.

So, you never know what the trigger will be, in terms of folks making that decision. And we just want to make sure it's available at the whim that folks are ready for it. We want to make sure that the system is ready and can handle that need and that demand.

Couple things to talk about that are COVID-related, mostly on the kind of the things that relate to GOFERR and things of that nature. So, we announced our Summer Stipend Program earlier this year. Back on May 18th, actually, we announced. And we created that to coincide with the State's decision to end the Federal pandemic unemployment benefits. Anyone who was on unemployment as of up to that week and that moved on and was able to get employment either part-time or full-time for eight weeks, could then apply for the Summer Stipend Program, up to \$500 or even \$1,000.

Those Applications actually opened up this past week, because it has been eight or nine weeks now since we announced that Program. And so, we have our first individuals, a few dozen-or-so, have already come into the system to apply for their stipend. And that number will keep growing over the next coming weeks, as more and more of those that went from unemployed to employed over that time period are now eligible for those stipends. So that's fairly exciting.

We do have the two programs that were asked about earlier today, directly as it relates to GOFERR. So we have a Hotel and Lodging Relief Program as well as the Live Venue Assistance Program. Those Application periods have ended and the \$10 million to the Hospitality Providers, those ones that were really hardest hit by the pandemic, there are about 130 entities that will receive awards covering approximately 12% of their losses, which doesn't sound like a lot. But some of these individuals lost hundreds of thousands or up to millions of dollars in COVID losses. And so, to be able to recoup some of

that, there'll be literally hundreds of \$1,000 checks going out to some of these entities. About 130 in all will be receiving awards, and those will be being released very, very soon. I believe that that entire process has been finalized.

There's \$2.5 million as part of the Live Venue Assistant Program that was allocated. And there weren't many that asked or even qualified for that Program. But there were, I think, at the end of the day, about six of the more major venues in New Hampshire could receive awards up to \$750,000, or about 75% of their unmet operating expenses. And again, those funds will be going out, I believe, early next week or sometime next week. But those Programs have both closed successfully. And so, the good news is we have more relief money coming, which is great.

A lot of these folks were hard-hit last year. We're not forgetting about them. We're really making sure they're still a priority for us, so they could be successful not just this year, but in the years to come, as well.

We have a Business Recoupment Relief Program. Those Applications are open until August 12th. And again, you can go to goferr.nh.gov/apply. Our GOFERR website, the same website as everyone has always gone to.

So basically if folks potentially owe money back to the State because the Federal Guidelines that, again, we tried to break ourselves free from, but we weren't able to do it, we're allowing folks to come back for another shot to keep their money just by showing us and attesting to some of the expenses, as they pertained to COVID.

And then, finally, the New Hampshire Emergency Rental Assistant Program, again, we have a lot of money available in that fund. That's a Federal Program. We've provided about 26 million in relief so far. Over 4,000 Applications have been approved. We still have 1,000-or-so in the queue. We're moving those as fast as we can. And again, we'd just encourage anyone who is looking for some rental relief the ability to qualify that is pretty large, actually. It's easy to do. Contact your local CAP Agency, or just go to the GOFERR website, and we can direct you to the Application process.

It's a Federal Application. Can be a little sticky, at times. But it can be done. I think it's about a six- or seven-page process. If you'd just take about a half-hour, you can get through it. Get in the queue, and get relief for your rent, your utilities, a very of different things. Broadband, in some cases, can be recovered, and not just this month, but I think for quite some time moving on into the future. That Program is very robust, and there's a lot of money in it. So we tell everyone to go get it.

The last thing I wanted to end on is something that I was asked about just shortly before I came out here. I'm ending on a bit of a fun note is inaugural activities. So there was no inauguration for the Governor in this past year.

But what we are doing and what we're announcing, we kind of have been looking at it a little bit and we're waiting for the right time. But we're really kind of using our inaugural celebration that did not happen as a way to go out and say thank you. I call it the Super 603 Thank You Tour to the State of New Hampshire.

The reason this State came through so well not just during the pandemic but also through the vaccine stage is because the citizens. They just did a phenomenal job protecting themselves, providing that balance, understanding that some restrictions had to be put into place. And they responded very, very well. And we asked folks to come forward and get vaccinated. We were one of the fastest States in the country to be able to provide that. And that let us open up even earlier.

So, collectively, I think we all did a phenomenal job in responding to COVID. And so, what we're doing is we're raising money from corporate partners all across the State into this nonprofit. And we're

going to use that not for an inaugural celebration, but a big thank you. And we're doing three events across the State for the public.

We will be doing something on August 29th. There'll be a lot more information to come on this. But just to give a little bit of a teaser, on August 29th, we're going to have an event for folks at the Conway Scenic Railroad. On September 18th, we are going to invite thousands of people to come to a baseball game with us at Fisher Cat Stadium, just to bring their family. Come on out for a great night of fun. And then, on October 3rd, we will be doing a Harvest Fest Festival at Allison's Orchard over in Walpole.

So we've tried to kind of spread it out across the State, provide kind of some different opportunities for families just to come together, come out on our dime, and basically just say thank you for all that they did for getting us through this. But, there will be more information. Ultimately, we have a website called super603tour.com. That's super603tour.com. I think it's just a splash page right now. But in the next week-or-so, we will have more information on how to get tickets and be part of what we think will be a really fun thing, as we hit the fall season. So, I guess, with that, we can open it up for questions. Adam?

Q&A Session

Governor, can we hear from you and Dr. Chan about your outlook on schools? Obviously that's a population that is mostly if not almost all unvaccinated. They'll be going back to the classroom sooner rather than later. And what's the level of concern, I guess, with the variant out there and the potential for, I guess, more COVID spread?

Governor Sununu:

Well, anytime you're going to have a congregate setting, especially with folks that might be unvaccinated, there is a level of concern there. So I commend Dr. Chan. I know him and his Team -- I'll let him speak for his Team. But I know they've been working very closely with the Department of Education and the other folks in Public Health to make sure that schools understood we're not putting out new guidance for schools. We have some Best Practices that are out there and we encourage schools to use those, as appropriate, and as it would be applicable, given the level of community spread that they might be seeing.

Again, we want kids to come back in. We want them to feel safe and feel comfortable. Again, I don't want to speak for Dr. Chan. But right now, given the level of COVID that we have, we're not saying kids have to wear masks. We're not even recommending that at this point.

But, again, as levels might rise, as we may see a fall surge, schools will have to make, as they did last year, make decisions to best fit the need and that balance of making sure the kids are getting the highest quality education in the classroom in the safest possible setting. We don't know where vaccines right now might come and when they might come for school-age kids. So that could obviously play into some of the decisions that the local districts may make.

But, right now, as Dr. Chan said, we have an incredibly low level of COVID. We likely will continue with a very low level, well into September. But that could change down the road. So you want to give them the flexibility to simply provide the best education possible for those kids. I'll let Dr. Chan add his two cents, of course.

Dr. Chan:

Great, thank you. Yeah. Great question about schools, that's one of the hot topics the last couple of weeks, since CDC released their guidance for schools. The American Academy of Pediatrics put out, or updated, their guidance. And I think, going back to sort of the big picture, the first and the best, and the most important line of defense against COVID-19 is vaccination, right? And this is why we continue to stress the importance of vaccination for people that are age-eligible in the community.

It's important, I think, to recognize that what happens in a community is going to trickle down and affect the institutions in that community: the schools, the childcare agencies, the long-term care facilities. And so, we continue to start from a point of stressing the importance of vaccination, because more and more people getting vaccinated in a community will not only protect the individual getting vaccinated, protect their family, it'll protect the community. It'll protect the schools. It'll protect the childcare agencies. It'll protect the vulnerable in the communities.

Now, you're absolutely right that, entering school, you're dealing with mixed populations, or largely populations in the school who maybe are not eligible for vaccination yet. And that is where there needs to be some assessment at the local level on what mitigation measures, or prevention strategies, need to be implemented to protect people in the school, right?

As you've heard, COVID-19 is not going away. Numbers are increasing. We have the new Delta variants. There is still a need for schools, childcare agencies, to implement prevention strategies. And there's a whole list of different prevention strategies that we've talked about before in our New Hampshire Universal Best Practices. There's a whole list of prevention strategies. And that was reiterated in the CDC guidance. So the guidance and the experience for schools to draw upon is out there.

There are questions that are coming to us about, well, how should schools operate for New Hampshire? We had a call with our school and childcare partners yesterday. Actually, the details of that call, the PowerPoint slide, the video is all available online. So, people can go and see what we said and communicated to schools. It was a little bit dense and there's a lot of details. So it's hard to distill down into discrete soundbites.

But, I think, at the end of the day, the key messages here are COVID is still around. There's still a need for prevention strategies. That's going to start with achieving high vaccination in the community. And then, as we have always done, or tried to do throughout this pandemic, schools, childcare agencies need to do an assessment of their own situation, their own ability to implement the various prevention strategies. The risk from the community, based on the level of community transmission of COVID-19; and then look to implement the various prevention strategies.

It's not all about facemasks. It's not all about physical distancing. Those are considerations. And so, we have discussed and encouraged schools to -- and talked through some of the guidance that's out there, encouraging them to think through the risks from COVID-19 in the community and how best to implement those prevention strategies for their specific situation, for their specific school. And so, prevention strategies are going to vary location-by-location and school-by-school.

Governor Sununu:

Great.

Governor, do you foresee any changes to the State's approach to COVID, when we reach the fall and the winter months? And what are you anticipating when we get out of summer and more people start to head indoors, and theoretically cases could go up?

Governor Sununu:

You mean in terms of restrictions and things of that nature? Is that where you're going?

Yeah, restrictions and...

Governor Sununu:

No, right now we're not anticipating any of that. I mean, we're really pushing to -- and I think the message is getting out, especially over the past couple weeks, folks should be getting vaccinated. They really should. That is the key to all of this, and that's how we're going to keep our numbers low in the future. So that is, as Dr. Chan said, our first part of our message, topline all the time is we have, as individuals, the ability to control this virus, as we need to. But we all have that individual responsibility to take that on ourselves and be educated, and get vaccinated. It's safe and it works. It really, really does work.

The surge that we talk about that is likely to come in the fall, the vast majority, my guess is 99% of that is going to be of the remaining unvaccinated population. And now, they are taking that on. That is their choice. But right now, we're not anticipating any new restrictive measures. I think the strongest tool we have in the toolbox is the education, and the safety, and the messaging around the vaccine. How are you? Excuse me.

CDC Director Walensky earlier this week said 83% of the new cases nationally are the Delta variant. Based on the number of Delta-variant cases we have in New Hampshire, we're significantly lower than that percentage. Why is -- could you speak to why that may be so? Is it because our vaccination rate is higher than some of these other States?

Governor Sununu:

I think, without a doubt, one of the reasons -- let me take a step back. Remember that when the CDC says certain things and they derive certain things, they have to -- they're making their recommendations -- the Federal Government is -- based on where they see the entire country, right? So they're looking at hotspots specifically in the south. They're looking where the Delta variant's very high. And as you pointed out, it doesn't always apply directly to New Hampshire.

So we kind of tend to kind of drive our own path. And Dr. Chan and his Team, and Dr. Daly have done a phenomenal job looking at our data, where we are to help us make our best recommendations and best decisions.

Why haven't we seen the Delta variant at such a high rate here in New Hampshire? A couple things; I think we got the vaccine out very quickly. I think there's an argument to be made that we're kind of at the end of the line, if you will, in terms of geographically in the country. So there is still a chance that

we see a Delta-variant surge later on this summer or into the fall. We shouldn't be ignorant to think that it can't happen here.

Overall, I think folks that can take extra precautions in congregate settings, or settings of large gatherings, we tend to do so. We tend to make sure that we're vaccinated. We have a fairly high vaccination rate.

We've just, I think, done a very good job as a Team, being right on top of the message from the beginning, not veering from it one bit, since back when we first heard that vaccines might be available. We've been 110% out there, driving the message and, I think, giving folks confidence. And the more people that get vaccinated, the more they see that their neighbors are vaccinated, the more that they see that it's safe -- are there some potential side-effects? Yes, absolutely. But, are the side-effects so severe and so rampant that it would prevent people from getting the vaccine? No.

The vaccine is incredibly safe. In fact, if anything, the side-effects are less than what we anticipated them to be back in December, which should give folks some relief. And if they have any further questions, talk to your Doctor. Talk to your Pharmacist, understand what those are.

So I just think we've been very strong with the message. And that has kept us a little bit ahead of the game. But we shouldn't take that for granted. We just have to keep pushing and making sure that people understand how important it is for themselves, their community, and ultimately, when it becomes available for children, to get their children vaccinated, as well.

Governor, we're hearing more talk nationally about a potential booster shot somewhere along the line. What planning have you done necessarily? Will the State be involved in that? I know you've pushed this mostly to healthcare now. And also, once you're done, can we hear from Dr. Chan about the potential necessity of a booster shot?

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so I think we've been very engaged with let's call it the private sector, the Providers, the Pharmacists to say, look, if and when a booster might become available, can you handle it? We don't want to say, sure, we're all set. The private sector, the Healthcare Providers are going to take it. And then, there's just too much of a demand there.

We feel very confident in the feedback that we've received that we can, whether, as an example, long-term care facilities. Again, there'll be plenty of vaccine available. They'll be able to give their booster, no problem, to their population. With over 500 locations now that are available to give it, it's not like we're trying to push a lot of folks into just a couple small funnels, where we only have 10,000 vaccines a week or something like that.

We're going to have plenty of vaccine available at plenty of locations. And I think that gives everyone a lot of comfort that it can be handled. And whether it's for the entire general population, or just for the elderly, or whatever it might be, we're constantly interacting with the Healthcare Provider sector. And we feel very confident that they can handle it, as they should.

If there is a larger surge than expected in the fall, can the private sector handle that? I guess is the potential out there for the fixed sites to come back, because we did see, when it was the private sector handling the long-term care, there were some slipups and they weren't as fast as you guys were on the stateside.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. Could the fixed sites come back? Well, of course they could. We can get one up-and-running in 48 hours. Do I think we're going to need them? No. I don't think we're going to see the onslaught of 5,000 people wanting to come in on a given day to get the vaccine, like we did before.

We have about 1,000 people a week. Even if that double or tripled, that's more than -- we can more than handle that, multiples of that. So, just because so many folks have already received the vaccine, it wouldn't be anything like we saw in the spring. And of course, we could do that if we had to, and we can get it up-and-running quickly, but nothing that we foresee the need for.

And can we hear from Dr. Chan really briefly about the potential need for a booster, whether he -- Doctor, do you think that's going to be something that's on the horizon?

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, I think, likely, in the future, there will need to be a booster for some segments of the population. I think whether everybody is going to need a booster is still being studied and still remains to be seen.

There are very active discussions at the national level. You've probably heard that the pharmaceutical company, Pfizer, was talking about submitting their vaccine to the FDA for consideration of, as you said, the booster. So there's that discussion ongoing.

The ACIP, the Advisory Committee to the CDC, is actually meeting today. And I think part of what they were going to start to take on is this discussion of boosters and what kind of data is needed to make decisions about boosters.

But, given some of the emerging literature, publications, particularly looking at immunocompromised people and whether they mount a full response to two doses of the vaccine, I think there's going to be a very active discussion and a high likelihood that certain populations, like people who are immunocompromised, may need boosters.

Nothing is recommended yet and none of the vaccines have received authorization for use as boosters. And so, for right now, there is no recommendation or need for people to get a booster. But this is one of those areas that's actively being studied, looking at multiple lines of science and evidence to try and come to a determination about it in the future, if a booster might be needed.

Governor Sununu:

If I could add one more thing, Dr. Chan brought up something very important. This is still technically EUA, right? This is still technically, I believe, experimental, as they're calling it. So as that gets finalized, it would be great. I was talking to a lot of Governors this past week and anything we can do, and we're pushing very strong for the Federal Administration, the FDA, to finalize the entire process. And maybe that helps folks feel confident coming into get the vaccine. I think that could be a potential big step. Yeah, Dr. Chan, I didn't know if you wanted to jump on that a little bit.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, sorry, should have mentioned that before. Right, so both -- so Pfizer has submitted their vaccine for full licensure or full approval. Right now, the vaccines are under emergency use authorization. But Pfizer and I know Moderna is going to be submitting their vaccines for full licensures, full approval.

So we're getting a lot of questions, also, about, well, when is that process going to see itself through? And so, what I've heard is that the FDA has until January to fully -- to make a decision about full licensure or full approval for the Pfizer vaccine, although I'm hearing talk that that could come as early as a couple of months from now.

So, certainly, by the fall-time into the winter, we could be looking at, at least one, maybe more fully licensed, approved, COVID-19 vaccines. And just to be clear, there aren't new studies that are coming out that are needed for full licensure or full approval, right?

Emergency Use Authorization was granted. There weren't corners cut in terms of studying these vaccines. They're very safe. They're very effective. Emergency Use Authorization is simply a way to get the vaccines out more quickly and to cut red tape, so to speak.

So, the pharmaceutical companies are going through that process now. It's a little bit more of a lengthy process. But I think we could be looking at a fully licensed or approved vaccine by fall or wintertime.

Governor, we're still hearing from restaurants and some small businesses that are still struggling with staffing issues, having to cutback hours and whatnot. I know you have the Summer Stipend Program. But do you have any optimism that things are going to turn around for these small businesses?

Governor Sununu:

I think in the -- it's going to be tough for the next -- I think, as we -- to get through the rest of the tourism season, not just in the hospitality industry but really everywhere, I don't know anyone who isn't really struggling to find workers, manufacturing, everything. And they're paying great wages. It's an Employee's market, without a doubt, which is just phenomenal.

I stick to kind of what I had referenced maybe a couple months ago. I think you'll see a pretty strong surge of folks reentering the workforce maybe this fall. I think a lot of folks are spending time with their families. They're enjoying the vacation that was stolen from them last year, because of COVID. They're reskilling. We have a lot of opportunities to reskill, to take classes online.

The example I give is maybe there's the Accountant out there who's been doing accounting for 20 years, and he finally says, you know what? I don't want to do this. I want to be a Nurse. I want to go back and do something else. And so, I think there's a lot of transition, and maybe that's the silver lining, if you will, in terms of the workforce. So a lot of people are transitioning to something else is our hope. And I think kids will be back really fulltime in school in late-August/early-September. I think you'll see a lot of whether it's single parents, or that second parent getting back to work, as well.

Our workforce right now is only about 2.5% from its all-time high, and maybe about 20,000 workers shy of our all-time high in folks engaged in the workforce. So, we know there's about 20,000 folks out there that had a job before. They're not applying for unemployment. No unemployment insurance, that unemployment's still at 2%, 2.5% to 3%. But there's 20,000 folks that had a job a couple years ago and we're kind of waiting for them to reengage, along with some of the other folks that we know have moved into the State.

So, I think there will be a surge. I don't know if it's going to be in the next few weeks to close out the summer tourism season. But more -- maybe more, in terms of the long-term fare, whether it's in manufacturing or the more of the fulltime professional field. Yeah, hi.

Yeah, just circling back to the Delta-variant conversation, do we have like a -- in the last few weeks kind of a percentage of cases that we're testing for variants that are the Delta variant? And then, when we look at that percentage, what's kind of the lag time there? And do we have kind of a more accurate estimate at all?

Governor Sununu:

A great question, I'd have to defer to Dr. Chan or Dr. Daly.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, let me get out my numbers sheet here. Yeah, I'm not sure I have exact answer for your last question about lag time. We might have to get back to you on that. I know that I had seen a question come across before the press conference. But we will have to maybe clarify that afterwards.

In terms of the number of sequencing results that have been done in the last two weeks, we only do genetic sequencing on positive specimens. And so, there were, in the last two weeks, 33 total specimens that were positive and underwent the genetic sequencing. About 12% of these were identified as the Alpha variant; 10%, the Gamma variant, which was the P1 variant; and then about 18% were the Delta variant.

So we are seeing an increase in detections of the Delta variant. I think we're up to a total of 23 specimens that have tested positive for the Delta variant since we've started -- since the Delta variant emerged. A week ago, that number was at 15. So, you're thinking about it. In the last week, there have been a number of new Delta-variant detections. So, not a high number, but definitely increased from what we had been seeing. And this is not unexpected, giving the increasing proportions of infections due to the Delta variant that are seen nationally, the predominant strain nationally, and then also on CDC's updated data this week, it is actually the predominant variant regionally within the northeast.

So, this is the unfortunate trend that we're seeing because the Delta variant is more infectious. It's more easily to be spread -- it's more easy to be spread person-to-person and it highlights the importance of people, if they haven't already taken that step, people getting vaccinated. If they've only gotten one

dose of a two-dose series, they need to get the second dose to have really that higher level of protection, especially against the Delta variant.

Governor Sununu:

If I could, Dr. Chan, are all cases tested for this genomic [sic] sequencing? Or do we know what percentage are actually tested of the positive?

Dr. Chan:

Oh, yeah. So, there's a whole process to doing the genetic sequencing. Not every single positive specimen undergoes the genetic sequencing. What I'm being told is that maybe about 25%-or-so of the specimens that are positive, at least right now, or in the last few weeks, end up undergoing the genetic sequencing. That includes specimens that test positive in our Public Health Laboratory. In fact, every specimen that is tested in our Public Health Laboratory that tests positive, we do the genetic sequencing on.

But then, there are also specimens that are testing positive at National Reference Labs and other places. And so, when you take -- or estimate taking all those into account, this estimate's around 25%-or-so.

A couple of quick -- I have a couple of quick data questions while Dr. Chan's there. Is that okay?

Governor Sununu:

Of course.

So to follow up on what you just answered, her question, do you -- is the State or anyone else doing contact tracing with any of the people who -- okay, so you found out six people have the Delta variant last week of all of the positive cases. That's 18% into 33. So did you find out if they were in Provincetown or in the outbreak setting in St. Louis? Or they're in the White Mountains. I mean, how does that connect in any way?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so I think your question is more about contact tracing and what contact tracing finds, relative to the Delta variant. We are still performing contact tracing. We ask about a number of different factors: travel, where somebody might have been exposed, who they might have gone onto expose, in turn. I don't have a lot of details, though, in terms of what you're asking specific to individuals in the Delta variant. I don't know if Dr. Daly might have more to add in a minute. But, I don't know. Yeah.

And so, one of the things that you said at the beginning was that the community transmission in this State is very, very low and one of the lowest in the country. So if we're to -- that's with all of the cases, right? So, if we're seeing that and we have this concern about the highly contagious variant, is the State following up with where this is coming in? Is it naturally here? Or is it people who are visiting? Or is it people who went to St. Louis for visits and then flew back to Concord?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah.

I mean, how is that?

Dr. Chan:

We ask those questions. I don't have a lot of the details on that. We can always loop back. I can say that some of them are travel-associated. Somebody comes -- goes out of the State and comes back, or comes in from -- or -- but not all of them. Those cases are not all associated with an outbreak, for example, right? These are cases that are scattered across multiple counties throughout the State.

So, I think it simply highlights the fact that the Delta variant is here. That's not surprising. And that, consistent with what is being seen regionally and nationally, we can expect increases in COVID-19 in our communities, due to the more infectious Delta variant, and I think that goes back to the importance of people getting vaccinated to help break those chains of transmission.

One of the other things I was noticing on the data was that this time last year, say the first three weeks of July of last year, we were seeing similar numbers that we're seeing this year.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah.

We had really low, a dozen counts in June 2020. And then, we hit 35. Then, we hit 46. And now we've seen 55. And now we're 60.

Dr. Chan:

Yeah.

So I mean, it's almost as if everybody got let out in June, right, and then July, we all had our July 4th parties and the handful of people got infected and infected more people. I mean, but it's like we've seen in these national headlines and these stories these kind of shocked 287 people in Provincetown infected on July 4th. I mean, we're not really seeing that here, when your test results say 60 people were the other day. And then, July 23rd, 2020, it was 55. We're actually seeing almost an exact replica of what happened last year, right?

Dr. Chan:

Well, it's a interesting question. And when we look at the numbers, we are certainly comparing it to what we saw last summer, right? And so, we've been seeing slowly increasing numbers now for a number of weeks.

Now, some increasing -- some increase in cases are expected and we would say within normal change or normal variation, right? Numbers are going to go up. Numbers are going to go down. Small increases are not necessarily concerning.

What would be more concerning is a sustained, continual increase, higher levels than what we saw last summer, as a comparison, just as a comparison for a baseline, a more dramatic rise in cases, like another surge. And just to be clear, we're not seeing another surge. What we're seeing is more of a slow, steady increase in the number of COVID-19 infections.

But I think your question really is a good one. Is what we're seeing right now out of the realm of ordinary to what we're seeing last year? And you know what? I think the last few days we've seen, if you've looked at just the last three days, maybe 50 to 60 new infections per day. That's sort of getting outside the realm of where we were last summer. And so, I think part of the message here is we're watching the numbers very closely.

There's expected to be some ups-and-downs. But if the numbers go up or keep going up, or have a sustained increase, that's consistent with what's being seen nationally, which is being driven by the Delta variant. So this is one of those areas we're watching and we're investigating real closely.

One last follow-up, take all of what I just asked about the last year's July and this year's July, and now, on top of that, we have over 56% of the State fully vaccinated. Most of the long-term care facilities, you've got all kinds of checks-and-balances. There isn't anywhere near the number of outbreaks there were last summer at this time, even with all of the low cases. That -- even though there -- all of these numbers are -- I mean, the death per seven-day rate is a third of what it was this time last year. All those things are positive, right?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, so, New Hampshire has done very well, in terms of, I think, controlling the virus and having much higher levels of vaccination than are seen in other parts of the country. But there are still big differences in vaccination, when you look town-by-town, right? And that's some of the data we're hoping to put out more publicly in the near future.

But there's still a large variation of vaccination rates, when you look at the data in New Hampshire at a town-by-town level. So the towns and cities that have 70%, 80%, full/single-dose vaccination rates are going to be much lower risk for increases and another surge in infection compared to cities and towns that have 46% of people vaccinated, right? It's the 40%, 50% vaccination level that we are more concerned about and is more similar to what's some of the vaccination levels seen in other parts of the country that are now experiencing surges in the Delta variant. So, now, it's important to also, again, look at this at a town-by-town, community-by-community level, because the risk is going to vary community-by-community.

Why do you think that some communities, say Hooksett, which was at 20 -- 76%, I think, on the NHPR Report, versus another town that's 40%, why do think there are that variable?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, I'm not sure we can say. I think every population is different.

Do you have some idea?

Dr. Chan:

But I think the goal here is to try and get vaccine to the point where people are, not rely on them to come to us to get the vaccine.

Governor Sununu:

Not to give a glib answer, but it's statistics. In a -- when you have a range of 220 cities and towns across the State, some are going to be high and some are going to be low. I mean, not every town is going to be the same. If every town was the same, at 56% fully vaccinated, that would be weird, right? You're just going to have different variables that come into play.

But, everyone has equal access to it. It's very easy to get. So if we didn't have complete equal access to it, or something like that, or there were disproportionate populations, that would be one thing. But you're just always going to have some variability.

Overall, the State has done very well, though. And we just want to continue pushing the message and have folks, I mean, take it seriously. If you haven't been vaccinated, look at some of these stories out there. Very few of these tragic stories you're seeing -- maybe more in the south and in other parts of the country -- there's a lot of, gee, I never thought it would happen to me. I never thought it would happen to my son. I never thought it would happen to my daughter. They were young and healthy.

But it's real. It really is real. And you just don't know. We all have the stories of, gee, I can't believe -- you see stories of someone that's 100 years old has emphysema. They got COVID and got through it just fine. And then, you see folks of younger individuals that are incredibly healthy. And for whatever reason, it hit them really, really hard, sometimes ending in fatality. It's real. But we all have the power to stop it. That's the most important part of all of this. Okay. Do we have a few on the phone? Great, okay.

Holly Ramer with The Associated Press:

Hi, thank you. I know that this is more Dr. Daly's area. But one of my colleagues is specifically looking for comment from Governors. So if Governor Sununu could take this one, that would be great. Beyond the mobile van, are you planning anything new, in terms of getting more people vaccinated, in terms of incentives or public information campaigns, or more outreach? What does the next couple weeks or month look like?

Governor Sununu:

Well, again, it's messaging. I think right now it's messaging, working with Providers, working with Pharmacists, as we've been doing. Right now, it's folks' individual responsibility. If someone hasn't been vaccinated at this point, they've made that conscious decision not to. So, again, I think it's really asking their Doctors and their local Providers to have that discussion, right, from a health standpoint, to kind of allay and address their concerns, and make sure we move forward.

At some point, all the incentives and pushing in the world is -- people are making this choice. And it's their right to do so. It is. We want them to just have the information and make the best decision. But right now, that's our strategy going forward. And I think it's going to be the most effect.

I can tell you I've talked to other Governors who had incentive programs and all of this sort of thing that they work in the short run, but then they really peter out, right? So -- and it mostly worked in States that had much lower vaccination rates than we did.

So we just had a very high vaccination rate early on. And at some point, you just hit kind of this very tough threshold to get over, when you get past the 65%, 70% range. That last 30% of folks, they're making a decision for themselves and their families. And you have to respect that. But, at the same time, you just want to make sure they have as much information as possible. They understand what's out there. Show them the stories. Show them the repercussions that can happen from that decision. It's very serious. And hopefully they can make the best choice for themselves and their community.

Paula Tracy from InDepthNH:

Thank you. Good afternoon, Governor. I have a question about, of the 308 current cases that we have in the State today, how many of them are breakthrough cases of people who have been fully vaccinated? And do we have a number on how many deaths have been associated with breakthrough cases? And I have another question related to the Governor's position on private high schools and colleges requiring students to show proof of vaccination before they return to school. And my final question would be, do you foresee at all a time in the future where we would have a statewide Mask Mandate again?

Governor Sununu:

Okay. So I'm writing all that down. So, couple things; of the 308 current cases we have, I don't think we have exact numbers on breakthrough cases or deaths that were from breakthrough other than to say extremely low. There's no doubt that those numbers are extremely, extremely low.

I think nationally I think they're saying, of the current cases that you have, I think 99% are of the unvaccinated. So maybe you have a 1% or 2% breakthrough case, if that. I think the numbers here traditionally have been even much lower than 1%, if I'm not mistaken. So, maybe Dr. Daly has more information and more exact numbers. But it's low.

Dr. Daly:

So, regarding how many people have died who have vaccine breakthrough infection, it's 10. So that number is very low, as the Governor said. There are around 500-or-so individuals who have vaccine breakthrough. Is that correct, Dr. Chan? You have the number.

Dr. Chan:

505.

Dr. Daly:

505; so -- and the other part of the question was, how many of the current cases are vaccine breakthrough? We don't have that information available. But basically, that's just an artifact of how many people have had vaccine breakthrough infection in the last 10 days. And if you'd like to follow up with our Public Information Office, we could get you that.

Governor Sununu:

Great, so it's about a half a percent for each of those. Private high schools, so a couple things. For private high schools and colleges, the Legislature passed and we're signing the really for the public settings and public institutions not mandating and enforcing vaccinations. We're not going to do the Vaccine Passport.

Private institutions always have that right and ability. And so, if a private high school or colleges choose to make that choice, that's their choice. They're a private setting and they have the right to do that. And no, I don't foresee a Mask Mandate being implemented in the future.

Again, if we keep pushing our vaccines and folks are making that choice for themselves and their kids, as they become more readily available, we've been able to maintain a very low level. And you have to remember, at this point, if folks are getting sick and they are not vaccinated, that's -- unfortunately, that's their choice. And so, again, we're very proud of the very good rate we've had so far, and we know there's more work to do. Yeah, no plans for a Mask Mandate at this time.

Annmarie Timmins from the New Hampshire Bulletin:

Thank you. I had two questions. One about the 22 people who are hospitalized and recent deaths, how many of those people are unvaccinated? And then, my second question relates to the rental relief. The moratorium on evictions ends July 31st, within days. There's about 3,000 Applications pending with GOFERR. Where are those people at? If those aren't processed by the end of the month, is there any help for those folks? And then, how are you trying to get word out there's lots of money left? So, thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so, I'll take the second one. I don't know about of the 22 hospitalizations if we know how many have been vaccinated or not. No, I don't think we have an exact number for those 22 individuals, whether they were vaccinated or not unfortunately.

I think, at one time, we had over 300 folks in our hospitals with COVID. And the fact that we're at 22, it's 22 that you don't want to see. But obviously it's a very manageable number in that we have the services and the Staff. We don't have the workforce crunch or the nursing shortage that we had, and the lack of ventilators or anything like that. So, the good news is, is that the hospitals are very geared up and very prepared to give the best quality of care for anyone who does require hospitalization.

As far as the Rental Relief Program, again, it is a drawn-out Program. It is a federally driven Program. It's a federally driven Application. I know the CAP Agencies, we've been talking to them and providing as much assistance as we can for them to move those Applications forward.

Folks are not being evicted, or anything like that. They are in process. And the good news is, this Program, you can work directly with the Landlords. You can work directly with the Tenants, themselves.

You can work for rental assistance or utility assistance. A lot of those Applications are for a variety or all of those things. And so, we're constantly working with them, not just the GOFERR Team, but the folks at HHS, New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority, who is kind of the backbone of driving this with the CAP Agencies. So, a lot of folks, a lot of hands on deck to make sure that we're processing these as fast as we possibly can.

Kimberley Haas with Seacoast Current:

Good afternoon, everybody. My question today is similar to many of the questions that have already been asked. I know, Governor, you just said that you do not intend to have a statewide Mask Mandate. But seeing that we are seeing a lot of COVID-19 fatigue amongst our readers and listeners, what are some things that you're recommending? Are you still recommending masking up and socially distancing, particularly if you are not vaccinated? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Well, look, we're recommending that you get the vaccine, first and foremost. I mean, that is the number 1 recommendation. Get vaccinated and this really doesn't -- the chances of this being a problem for you are very, very miniscule. And people have to understand it is a really effective vaccine.

It'd be a totally different conversation if this were a traditional 60% effective vaccine. But these vaccines work really, really well. And that is a wonderful silver lining of this whole process. And then, folks just have to -- the recommendations are out there. People know what they should be doing. They know the value of social distancing or wearing a mask in settings, or in settings where they don't know who may be vaccinated and who's not. And folks have to make that choice for themselves.

We're not looking to institute more mandates and restrictions, and all of that kind of stuff. There is no State of Emergency right now. There's no State of Emergency. So, we'd have to enact a whole new Stage of Emergency and all of that.

At this point, it really is individual choice, and we're just trying to educate folks, so they make the best choice for themselves. We're not at the position, nor do I see us being at the position, where we're making the choice for those individuals. That is a real line to be crossed when it comes to Government.

I know Washington has a different opinion on a lot of that. I think I stand with most citizens in New Hampshire where we understand the value and the power of individual responsibility. So, it's the Government's job just to provide that open door of, if you want the vaccine, here it is, nice and easy. If you need more information on the vaccine, here it is, so you have every tool in the toolbox available to you and your family to make that decision. And I believe that, if we continue to do that, that we will continually to see more and more people come in to get the vaccine. They'll realize that it's safe.

We will get out of the emergency use. I called it experimental. I misused that word. It's emergency use. And maybe that gives folks a little more confidence, more -- I've talked to a lot of folks that say, well, I go in for my yearly physical in August. I guess I'll talk to my Doctor about it then. Some people might just be waiting until they have that traditional physical with their Doctor and they're not going out of their way to make an appointment. But they're going to wait until they go in and have that discussion with them. So, I think, over time, we're going to continually see people come through the door and look for that vaccine. And every person in the door is another day closer to really putting this fully behind us. Great, great, do we have anymore?

Governor, when you hear someone or talk to someone who has not decided to get the vaccine, but, in the course of the conversation, becomes clear that they've received misinformation or disinformation, how responsible do you feel to try and correct something like that or even fight back against that, because you know that's out there?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, I always try to correct it. Yeah, absolutely. Look, and I don't say, just listen to what I'm saying. I'm the Governor. No, that's not the approach. It's, look, if you need more viable information, I always say, talk to your Doctor, right? Talk to your trusted Healthcare Provider. They know. And I think 99 times out of 100, they're going to have that conversation, and the Doctor will be able to talk to them. That's the most trusted voice here. And so, that's the number 1 piece of advice I always give.

I mean, I think we can keep -- we're going to keep pushing it as best we can, whether it's social media ads, and television ads, and just good information through contact with people. But the best conversation, I think, will happen with your Healthcare Provider. And that's the number 1 piece of advice I give.

Do you think it's time for a new ad with a Doctor like Dr. Chan? I don't know. I'm a football fan. So, I'm not sure if I just...

Governor Sununu:

See if one of us can pick up Dr. Chan and...

Right, I'm not sure if I would (inaudible) or a different one, or not, because...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, of course. No, look, I think, I mean, there's national ads. There's a huge a national campaign that happens. We try to -- there's been Doctors that have done ads here in the State, Nurses that have done ads here in the State. The trusted voice of Dr. Chan and Commissioner Shibinette have been on ads. And I've been there, just because I've been kind of the voice and -- of COVID, if you will, over the last 18 months. And so, we just try to put everybody out there, right, because everybody might have a different idea of who they're going to hear and maybe who might -- what message might work with them. Everyone's different.

So, we're going to keep throwing everything we have at it, all truth, all the time, all the information. The data speaks for itself. I mean, it really does, when you look at the effectiveness of the vaccine and the lack of -- I mean, there are some side-effects for individuals, of course. And we have to acknowledge that. But it's very, very minor. It really is. And there have been some more severe cases. But they really are rare, when you look at other vaccines that might be out there, or other medicines that are taking [sic]. The net benefit is huge to you and your family, and the risks are very, very low, when you look at the viability of this vaccine. It works. It works.

Okay, great. Well, thanks, everyone, for joining us. Again, not sure when we will be back. It probably won't be next week. But we are going to continually be coming back over the course of the summer and into the fall, as the Delta variant moves forward.

My sense is you're going to see a continual rise, a slow rise in cases in the State for the next few weeks, at least, similar to what was discussed earlier. I think there's an aspect of seasonality. I think that, sure, we have about 2/3 of our population, let's say, maybe less, that's vaccinated.

But when you look at the contagion level of the Delta variant, it's much, much higher. So that kind of offsets in why you're seeing numbers move like they are. And I suspect they'll continue to move in a similar fashion. And again, the more folks we can get vaccinated, the more we can keep that suppressed not just this summer, but going into the fall, because I still anticipate there to be somewhat of a fall surge in the unvaccinated population.

That has to be recognized and we just want all those folks who are susceptible to that fall surge to make good decisions for themselves and their families today. Great, thank you, guys, so much. We will see you in a couple weeks.