



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu  
Press Conference  
Thursday, August 12, 2021, at 3:00 p.m.

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**Governor Sununu:**

Okay. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Good to see you again here. Obviously we're seeing a lot of different movement, as it pertains to the COVID pandemic, both nationally and even locally. And so, obviously, as we're getting ready for school and different things are moving forward with Employers and all of that, that we just figured it was a good time to come back and kind of make sure everyone knows where our message was, what's the most important things that we see here in New Hampshire. Obviously, it might be a little different from other States. And just kind of get us back together and be able to take questions and, again, help make sure people understand where we are and where we think we're going as a State. With that, I will hand it over to Dr. Chan, who can give us a Public Health update.

**Dr. Chan:**

Great, thank you, Governor. And just a brief numbers update for today, we are announcing 310 new people diagnosed with COVID-19 in the State today. In the last week, we have averaged between 160 to 170 new infections per day. And currently, there are 1,513 people with active infection in the State. So our numbers continue to increase over the last few weeks.

Our test-positivity is also increasing. We're currently at about 4.5% of all PCR and antigen tests combined for COVID-19 that are positive. And then, hospitalizations are also slowly climbing. There are 58 people currently hospitalized with COVID-19 statewide being announced today. And unfortunately, one new individual, one new person who has died, related to COVID-19, bringing the total to 1,394 total people that have died from COVID-19 during this pandemic. This was an individual that was associated, unfortunately, with a long-term care facility.

So, as highlighted in the numbers, COVID-19 continues to increase consistent with regional and national trends. And the increases that we're seeing, I think, continue to highlight the importance of people getting vaccinated, getting vaccinated as soon as possible. And if they have not become fully vaccinated, taking the step to become fully vaccinated to have the highest and longest lasting protection against COVID-19, particularly with the new variants that are circulating. With that, I will end and hand things over to the Commissioner.

**Commissioner Shihinette:**

Hi, we're going to do a short update on outbreaks. So, we currently have three institutional outbreaks in New Hampshire: Epsom Health Center with 7 residents and 3 Staff; the Federal Prison in Berlin with 33 residents and 1 Staff; and Rockingham County Nursing Home with 2 residents and 3 Staff.

What we've seen as a trend over the last several months as our vaccinations have picked up is that the rate at which COVID-19 is spreading in nursing home has slowed dramatically. If you remember,

about a year ago, we would see 1 case, then we would see 30 cases. And now, we're seeing 1 or 2 cases, and then it peters out and it's gone away. So, great progress in long-term care, great job overall just controlling COVID-19 in the long-term care setting.

Our homebound population, we're closing our Homebound Program out this week. We've vaccinated 5,260 individuals in their home throughout this program. We have one person that is still kind of on the schedule to finish out their vaccination series. But, other than that, we've served everybody that's contacted us over the last several months to have their vaccination done at home. That's all I have.

**Dr. Daly:**

Great, good afternoon, everyone. I just have a few quick vaccination updates. To-date, we have administered 1.5 million doses of vaccine in our State, which includes 822,000 people now who have received at least one dose of vaccine, and then 752,000 people that have been fully vaccinated. And while the number of people getting vaccinated each week has slowed down, we do still have 1,000 new people each week who are making that choice to initiate vaccination, which is great to continue to see our communities build protection against COVID-19.

There's plenty of vaccine available and we continue to have over 500 different entities across our State offering COVID-19 vaccinations. This includes our pharmacies, Outpatient Healthcare Provider offices, urgent care locations, and hospitals, in addition to our Mobile Vaccine Providers.

Our mobile vaccine van has been working really hard out in our communities to provide free vaccination clinics. To-date, they have provided over 200 vaccine doses at 27 different sites. And they have around 75 more clinics scheduled in the future through September. Any group can request that the van come to their event by visiting [vaccines.nh.gov](https://vaccines.nh.gov) and click the Book the Van button. And then, just finally a reminder that if you haven't gotten vaccinated yet, now is a great time to do so. And there's plenty of opportunity in our State. Thank you.

**Governor Sununu:**

Great, thank you. Thank you very much. Good to see you, David. You ran all the way here from Vermont. It's great, great to see you. So, starting off, just kind of starting off on the tail end of what Dr. Daly was just talking about, giving a bit of a little more of an update on our mobile vaccine van, so far it's the mobile van that you can just click on that button and request. It's held over 30 clinics across the State, administered hundreds of different doses to individuals.

It's clear that the word is out. They are fully booked through September right now with another 70 clinics lined up, which is great news. Folks are asking for the van to come to their place of work or their community, whatever it might be. And every single vaccine we give out is just another step closer to giving us just that real true community protection we need against the COVID virus.

But building off those successful efforts, we are bringing in a second mobile vaccine van. We're going to bring it online just to help double our efforts, getting out to those communities. So, again, you can go and click on the button. We will bring another van out there. We're not losing momentum on the vaccine. We're really doubling down on the message and availability to make sure that that's the key here. It's all about the vaccine really, as we go here on out.

Another piece on the vaccine and the messaging, our messaging, I think, has been very effective. Obviously we're still one of the top-10 States in the country, in terms of folks that have been vaccinated. We want to maintain being one of the strongest places in the country that has a high vaccination rate.

So, we're going to be having our second phase of what we call our PSA content. I know a lot of folks have seen our TV commercials and our radio ads, and social media, all of those different efforts. As we go into the school year, we're kind of pivoting to a Phase 2-type of messaging, trying our best to think outside the box.

So, you'll be seeing a lot of our messaging, everything from signage at bus stops and bus wraps, community hubs, restaurants getting involved, anywhere where folks can really double down on that message, because, again, this is really -- the vaccine is the way out. And you got to get the vaccine. You got to get the vaccine.

I know there's some hesitancy out there. The information's there. Talk to your Doctor. Talk to your Pharmacist. So people will see a lot more messaging around the availability and ease of getting the vaccine here in New Hampshire. So, we will keep boosting our numbers.

I want to just talk about -- and then we can open up for questions -- some folks are asking, what's the new normal going to look like? This is the new normal. And that's a very important message that I want to stress to folks.

Every State is a little bit different. No State is immune. We know that. What we do and have been doing is looking at what is going on in other parts of the country. We see what's happening in Florida. We see the very high hospitalization and death rate, Louisiana, Texas, places like that.

We want to make sure that while we hope that some of those extreme numbers that they are seeing in the south don't happen here, we know that it can happen. And so, we still have time. Individuals still have time to get vaccinated to make sure that those high hospitalization rates that they're seeing down there don't happen here. And that's really always going to be our focus: hospitalization and fatality. That's really what we're trying to minimize. We know we could have high cases.

So, what we're also trying to do is making sure that we are prepared and that we're ready, whether it's making sure that all the hospitals and all the care centers have all the therapeutics that they may need. Making sure that we're shoring up our staffing as strong as we possibly can; making sure that whatever tools or equipment hospitals and folks might need is there and ready, and prepared.

So, again, we feel very confident where we are. But our job is to hope for the best and, unfortunately, plan for the worst. So we want folks to know that we are gearing up. We know that our fall surge, maybe in November/December timeframe, could be as bad as anything that we've seen. And so, we are going to be very much prepared for that.

Again, the best way for all of us to prepare is through the vaccine but making sure that some of the tragedy that we've seen in other parts of the country, that we can manage what might come to us. And we want folks to have confidence in the systems that they may have to rely on, if they were to need it.

We know the vast majority of individuals in hospitals, the vast majority are the unvaccinated. That's really the key here. There's still very few -- there are breakthrough cases, of course. But even the breakthrough cases, it's pretty rare that those even would require hospitalization. And we know that the less-vaccinated populations tend to be a little bit younger. And we're just asking those folks -- those 20-, 30-, 40-year-olds -- to really think hard about what is going on in other parts of the country and making sure that they're protecting themselves not just for themselves, but for their community, for their schools, for their places of employment, and really being part of that community solution. It is a responsibility, to be sure.

So, the other piece I want to talk a little bit about is that where we see our accelerated community transmission, we're seeing higher community transmission in New Hampshire. And as I just said, we may keep seeing that.

We may see seasonal ups-and-downs of community transmission for years to come. We hope that's not the case, of course. But it may be for years to come. And that's why I'll reiterate what I started with. This is the new normal. And so, whether you're talking about what mitigation efforts that a school might put into place, or a place of employment, whatever it might be, whatever mitigations you're looking at -- and every place is different, depending on where you are and what you do, and not just your community transmission but congregate settings or whatever it might -- you have to look at those variables.

I think for the past year and a half, I think the Department of Public Health has done a great job throwing a lot of different options of mitigation methods and efforts at folks, so they can make the best decisions. But whatever those decisions are today, understand they may be in place for quite some time. And so, I think we want to think long-term is we're not just putting mitigation efforts in, in our communities, in our places of work for the next month-or-two, hoping that COVID will be gone by Christmas. It is not going to be gone by Christmas, not by any means.

So we really want folks to think long-term about what you're putting into place and making sure that it's sustainable. And communicate, we really want folks to not just make decision silos, but talk to your Employees. Talk to your students. Talk to your parents, whatever it might be, and listen to them. They have very valid points.

So our State is one of the most informed States in the country when it comes to COVID. That's one of the awesome things about the transparency and the public trust, I think, that we've built. What we know, you know, and we try to transmit that data to the community as much as we possibly can. And that's why we have a lot of confidence in the local control and community decisions that are being made, because individuals do have a lot of information at their hands. They know what variables may work or not work with their family members, or work or not work with their Employees. And so, we just encourage folks to make those decisions, think hard about them, but know that they may be here for quite some time.

We got to play for the long game, to be sure. And we hope. Look, if this all gets eradicated somehow and we get to a certain point of herd immunity down the road -- who knows what that number is -- that would be wonderful. But you got to kind of plan for the long game here and know that where we are today with up-and-down levels of transmission is likely where we could be for quite some time. Okay. With that, we can open it up for questions on whatever folks like.

### **Q&A Session**

*Governor, when you say that the fall could be worse than anything we've seen, does that mean that you're open to bringing back potentially a State of Emergency if it gets bad enough?*

#### **Governor Sununu:**

Again, the State of Emergency was put into place when individuals really had very few tools to protect themselves, right? That's where the Government kind of had to step in, in a very rare circumstance, to say, look, we're going to help provide PPE.

We didn't have a vaccine yet. We didn't have rapid availability of all these other mitigation tools. We didn't have the availability of therapeutics that we have now, or hospitals who were being stuck with staffing shortages, whatever it might be. We didn't want to overwhelm the healthcare system. All of those things really come into play, where the State had to step up and say, we have to, again, provide some of the controls that individuals can't.

Right now, individuals have every bit of control in managing this virus and the viral spread for themselves and their community by getting that vaccine. 12-and-up, that's 90% of our State-or-more, right? If everyone got the vaccine, it's in their control to do so.

So, unless something became out of the individual's control, out of the public's control, which they have a lot of control of right now, I don't foresee instilling another State of Emergency. I mean, look, I suppose if the hospital system became overwhelmed again, or something like that, God forbid, but that's why we're talking today about making sure we're putting every effort we can to make sure that we have as robust of a system as possible to take on whatever might come. And if it doesn't come, that would be great. But we're going to be as prepared as we possibly can be.

*What's your level of frustration right now with where we are on vaccines, because we started this summer? You had an optimistic outlook. You were saying, hey, let's enjoy the summer. We're going to try to get back to normal. But clearly not enough people got vaccinated to make that last, essentially.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Well, look, we want everyone to get vaccinated, right? I think we've had a great summer. I think we've had a very flexible summer. I think we've been one of the most open, flexible States. We still have one of the lowest rates of community transmission. Most other States have much higher rates of COVID than we do now. That could be seasonality. That could be because of some of, I think, the smart mitigation measures that folks have put in with local control and that is within their control, not because the State is putting more mandates on folks.

So, I'm always frustrated when I hear folks say, well, I'm just not going to get vaccinated. Well, okay. We will talk about that. And I'm happy to give them whatever information that I can or encourage them to go visit their Doctor. So, I guess, in that sense, it can be frustrating.

But I think the State has done a phenomenal job. I'm not frustrated with where the State is. My job is just to continually keep my foot on the gas and making sure that we're not taking our eye off the ball, and we're prepared for whatever might come. But I think it's been a phenomenal summer so far.

*Dr. Chan, can we hear from you real quick, just about the trend lines? And when the Governor's talking about the fall being potentially worse than anything we've seen, are we on that ramp up to an exponential increase in the unvaccinated population?*

**Dr. Chan:**

Right; so I think a couple important questions, or points, there. First is that still the majority of infections are occurring in unvaccinated people. And certainly unvaccinated people are at risk for severe complications of COVID-19, like hospitalizations and deaths.

It's always hard to predict what's going to happen in the pandemic. We were largely expecting there could be a fall surge or a fall increase. And what we're seeing now is an increase, or a surge, sooner. Whether that levels out, comes down, then goes back up again in the fall, I think still is largely unclear at this point.

What we do know is that the increase we're seeing in New Hampshire now and regionally in the northeast, and nationally is largely due to the Delta variant. The Delta variant is estimated to be at least twice as infectious, or easily spread, as earlier versions of the virus. And we just keep going back to the point that the best way and the best way to control this virus long-term is for people to get vaccinated. And so, the goal with vaccination is to get as many people vaccinated as possible, to protect themselves, control spread of this virus, and try and limit any increase we might see in the future.

**Governor Sununu:**

Oh, hi.

*So, with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services investing more money to ramp up screening testing to help schools reopen, New Hampshire's gotten a little over \$40 million. And I'm wondering how you guys are planning to kind of allocate those funds.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, again, I didn't want to answer anything that the Commissioner may be able to add. But I think we did a great job building up a system with our schools and our local districts, in terms of making sure that they had all the resources that they need, whether it's a screening technique, messaging, whatever they might need, whatever tools in the toolbox that we can provide them.

I think we've done a great job in New Hampshire. And we've got a great connection one-on-one with our school systems, if that's what you're specifically asking about. And again, we're going to kind of lean into those systems, and the systems that we have into place, to make sure that whatever resources are available -- it's amazing.

Sometimes we talk to school districts and we talk about making -- there might be funds available and they haven't applied for them. And so, we will, like, pick up the phone to, like, individual schools and saying, you need to apply. Doctor, sorry.

**Dr. Daly:**

Can we add little bit more?

**Governor Sununu:**

Oh, yeah, Dr. Daly, you wanted to add in a little. Sure.

**Dr. Daly:**

I'll just quickly say that we are using some of those funds to support testing in schools for schools that wish to establish a screening program in their school. And we have an email that they all have already that they can reach out to if they'd like to leverage that. And basically, we're paying for that testing for them.

*Right, yeah. On that, do you know how many schools are involved in this screening program so far?*

**Governor Sununu:**

No. Do you guys know? I don't have an exact number, but we can find out. We can. We would be able to find that out.

**Dr. Daly:**

Yeah, we haven't had a lot of interest yet.

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah.

**Dr. Daly:**

So it's a small number. But I don't have the exact number.

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah.

*Governor, sorry, go ahead.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Go ahead, sure.

*And then, I'm also wondering with kind of updated masking guidance for schools, what you guys might be doing to support schools following that guidance who might be dealing with some pushback from parents.*

**Governor Sununu:**

What we're doing to support schools? Look, what we're doing to support schools is similar to what we did last year. We're talking about all the different mitigation strategies that are out there. It's not just about masks. It's not just about social distancing. It's not just about what happens in a classroom or what happens in the cafeteria or afterschool programs, or what happens on a bus.

There's so many pieces to the puzzle. And as Dr. Chan has talked a lot about that Swiss cheese, right? There's all these different pieces really have to come into play. And there's a lot of different strategies. And what happens in the one-room schoolhouse out in one town might be very different than what a large high school in Downtown Manchester does.

So you got to give them that flexibility. And that's why implore folks, listen to parents, right? Those concerns of inner-city Manchester might be very different than the concerns of a small school in Coos County. And it's not just on where the viral transport is and obviously some of the masking or potential recommendations look at the viral transport within a county.

But when we talk about local control and local voices, it's not on the county level, per se. It's really school-by-school, parent-by-parent, sometimes. And that's why our system is so awesome, because we -- the Head of the School Board, or a Principal, or a Teacher can have that one-on-one connection with folks that have a voice. And parents, I think, still have the -- are the best tool in deciding what is best for their kids.

Understanding, look, a parent knows remote learning had a lot of problems last year. I mean, and we absolutely had to do it. Without a doubt, it's a great stopgap. But, boy, I think a lot of folks understand that it just wasn't the best thing for most kids, in terms of the educational process.

So I think a lot of parents are excited about getting the kids back into classroom and seeing the faces, and getting the best educational -- robust educational experience they can for their kid, not ignoring kid, but really making sure that it's about education. And sometimes that may not work as well with a mask. That may not work as well with certain social distancing. That may not work as well with certain programs. So schools have to adjust and find those adjustments based on their localized need.

So, it's not just about a mask mandate and what are we going to do? We're not doing mask mandates. Local districts, I guess, technically could. But I really implore folks, people are smart. They've had -- again, I'll repeat what I said about 10 minutes ago. People have a lot of information. They understand the risks. They understand a lot of the pros and cons of being able to be vaccinated or not vaccinated, the risks that they take, and what's best for their kids.

So listen to the individuals. This can't be a top-down Government, we're saying one size fits all. Washington tries that. They stink at it. And so, we try to learn a lesson from there and say, parents and Teachers, they're going to be the best designers of the systems that are going to work for them. It's not just about masks. It's about all the other pieces that come into play.



*Could we just revisit that \$41 million for the testing in schools again real quick? What's going on? It doesn't seem that there's any demand. And it just seems like it's a ton of money. And the State could theoretically set up some kind of program, although you can't really invade the schools and start testing kids or anything like that. But, I mean, what? I don't understand what's going on. If you have all that money and it doesn't seem like they're asking for it.*

**Governor Sununu:**

So, a couple things. I'm going to have Dr. Daly come up. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the program really works, which would be great. This is one of those things where, again, the money is being allocated for a very specific purpose, not a ton of flexibility in terms of what it can and can't be used for, which is a little frustrating, because, again, what might be good for New Hampshire maybe might be different for Florida or Texas, or California. So we're trying to, again, get the word out. Make sure that the schools know that the opportunity is there. But do you want to talk a little bit about the program, itself?

**Dr. Daly:**

So, if a school's interested in establishing a screening program, which would allow them to test both students who might be -- or Staff who might be symptomatic, before sending them home, for example, if they're sick, or to do asymptomatic screening on a regular basis, like we've done in other facilities, like long-term care, there is a program in place that can support them, if they would like to do that. And we would pay for the contracted testing. But they have to enroll through our program first. And all this information has been sent out to the schools.

There's a protocol that they can follow if they want to set up such a testing program. There are a lot of considerations. It might be logistically a heavy lift for a school. You have to get consent for testing for the students and set up this mechanism with us to do the testing. And it's a consideration for them.

There's a number of different considerations, I guess I would say. So we haven't gotten a lot of interest yet. But certainly, we will support schools that would like to participate in the program to be able to do that early identification of cases and try to keep more kids in school.

*Governor, is it possible that some of that money -- again, \$41 million seems like a lot for testing.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah.

*Could you do a Testing Team, like you've got with the vaccines? I mean, is that something where a mobile unit -- I mean, it just seems like this is a ton of money. And if there's no demand for it, it seems like you got to do something with it.*

**Governor Sununu:**

I would love to do a lot of different things with it. Yeah, I think we're waiting to see what the real demand is. And you know, schools might be waiting to see where they fall with their protocols and all that sort of thing. So I can't speak for exactly why some schools might be choosing to do it and some might not.

I'm a big believer when it comes to COVID, I think every dollar should be super flexible. So we will see what the uptake and the flexibility are. There's multiple contractors that schools can actually contract with. But the State kind of provides that. We're kind of the thruput for that. We're kind of the doorway for it. But, I guess, yeah, at some point, we can always try to revisit, whether it's with Federal dollars or local dollars, better ways to use the money. I'm always for flexibility in trying other things, to be sure.

*And I know you can't predict the future. But can we hear from you and Dr. Chan about what you expect to happen in school districts that are deciding to go back no masks? And most of these young children are unvaccinated. What's sort of the forecast for how long they might be able to stay open, though I know the recommendation is if there are clusters or outbreaks to mask or to...*

**Governor Sununu:**

Well, look, if last year is any sort of telling, I think we can be super successful, right? The schools that were open...

*With the respect everyone was masked at that point, so this is going to be a different situation.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Not everyone was masked. Not every school district had a mask mandate, to be sure. But, again, you're assuming that masks or not masks are the end-all, be-all of success. They're not. They're just one piece of a much, much bigger puzzle. And that's what I'm imploring districts or Employers, or whatever to understand. It's just one piece. It's not some end-all, be-all. Well, if we just mask the kids, we will be fine. It's just not that simple, because all those other variables come into play.

So, I think, overall, I would say this State, local districts handled -- and the ones that stayed open -- handled it very, very well. They really did. I don't think they necessarily need all the same protocols, because, again, when you look at the potential impact that the virus can have, 2/3-or-so of -- almost 2/3 of the State no longer has such a severe risk, especially on the most vulnerable population.

Well, that changes the dynamics in your town, or in your school, or whatever it is. And schools have to consider that. But I'm a believer that whatever the schools decide, if they're listening to parents, if they're getting the right input, they're not just defaulting to we're going to be the most restrictive we

possibly can be for the sake of being restrictive, but really looking at the dynamics of how to get the best education in the classroom.

When we made sure schools had all the flexibility to do that, we were very, very successful in this state. And again, I'd just implore it's not about -- I really warn folks. If you think this is about mask and no mask, you are missing the boat. And this is where I take a little bit of umbrage with the press, not just locally but nationally, right?

The more we just sit here and debate mask or not mask, every discussion we have about that we're missing the importance of vaccine, vaccine, vaccine. Masks are not the solution. The vaccine is the solution, right?

So that's why it's so important. And when it comes to the mitigation methods, masks are just one piece of that. It can be a very important piece, depending on your setting and your dynamic, of course. But it's just one piece.

So it's not an end-all, be-all, mask/no mask. If we have masks, we can stay open. If we don't, we can't. No, no. It's just it's much, much bigger than that, and our districts have the information and they have the data. And I completely trust that they can use it and take the input of the parents and their Teachers, and make the best decisions to stay open.

*Can we hear from...*

**Governor Sununu:**

I don't know if Dr. Chan wants to add something to that.

*Can we hear from Dr. Chan a little bit about, what do you expect maybe in a place like Coos County? You've got 14.5% test-positivity rate up there. If you're going back into a school in that setting without masks, or without any mitigation measures, what happens?*

**Governor Sununu:**

You know what? I apologize.

**Dr. Chan:**

Yeah.

**Governor Sununu:**

If you'd just give me 30 seconds? You bring up a really, really good point. And before I -- Ben's going to give a really smart answer in a second. 14% positivity rate, partially because we have a single outbreak in the Prison, right?

*Yeah.*

**Governor Sununu:**

So, should a school in Littleton that has nothing to do with the outbreak at the Prison be only subject to that one high county transmission rate because of one locality? So, that's actually a great example you bring up of, look at the data and where it is, and the hows and the whys, and make the best decision at a local level.

So, I'm not trying to overly correct you because you're right. Technically, you're right. But that's really because of a single outbreak. And so, we don't want people making huge grandiose decisions, as I said before, that might be in place for a long, long time based on a single point-in-time outbreak that'll likely and hopefully be cleared up in a couple weeks. But I'll let Dr. Chan make even a smarter answer than that.

**Dr. Chan:**

No, I'm probably going to echo several points that the Governor made. First, I think we've always started from a standpoint of kids need to go back to school, right? We experienced remote learning last year, both personally as a parent, as a community, as a society. And I think broadly New Hampshire Public Health, CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics all recognize that the goal should be to get students back to fulltime in-person learning. And with that being the starting spot, then the question is: well, how do we balance minimizing the risks of COVID-19 and maximizing the educational benefits, so that there aren't so many restrictions in place that kids are not getting the full maximal benefit from being in in-person learning. And as we've talked all throughout the pandemic, this is a balancing act.

A lot of the factors that schools might implement is going to depend on the local context. And so, we keep going back to talking about multiple layers of prevention. It's not all about masks. Masks certainly are one layer of protection. Social distancing, cohorting, some screening testing we were just talking about, first and foremost vaccination. We keep coming back to vaccination.

So, if there are grades where there are students 12 years of age and older, the first and strongest recommendation we would have is to get vaccinated. Become fully vaccinated as the best way to protect the school, protect the classroom, protect the community.

We've now had a couple of calls with schools to talk through general principles of prevention and how schools can look at implementing the multiple layers of prevention. And just to be clear again, New Hampshire Public Health, New Hampshire State Government is not requiring any set of measures for schools to take. This is a local decision that needs to take into account local context.

What we suggested to schools yesterday on our call was one suggested approach to what schools can consider as metrics for looking at potentially how and when to recommend facemasks. But ultimately, that is only one layer of protection and needs to be implemented and considered in the context of multiple other -- or the ability of a school to implement multiple other layers of protection.

*While you're up there, Doctor, can we just ask you a little bit about severity of illness you're seeing in the breakthrough cases?*

**Dr. Chan:**

So, I can't speak specifically to New Hampshire data. What I can say is that vaccine breakthrough infections do occur. They're still the minority of infections that we're seeing. When somebody does develop a vaccine breakthrough infection, it's not an indication that the vaccine has failed. Even when people do develop a vaccine breakthrough infection, we believe they're less infectious. We believe they're less prone to serious illness, less prone to hospitalization, less prone to death. And so, if somebody is vaccinated and develops a vaccine breakthrough infection, largely the vaccines are doing their job.

Even against the Delta variant, the vaccines we have -- the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccine -- are still estimated to be 90% to 95% effective at preventing severe disease, like hospitalization and death. We don't have as good of a data for the J&J vaccine, because, well, a lot of the J&J vaccine was behind the Pfizer and Moderna.

But the vaccines are doing their job. They're preventing severe infection. They're preventing hospitalizations and deaths. And so, when somebody -- if somebody is fully vaccinated, has an infection, they can expect that it will likely be a more mild infection than they otherwise would have had, if they weren't vaccinated.

*Dr. Chan, when the State updated its dashboard recently, one of the things we saw was that rates of vaccination, especially for black and Asian Granite Staters, dropped pretty notably. And I know you guys were (inaudible) able to pull out nonresidents from your count. But I'm wondering was that what was driving the change, or what are kind of some other factors...*

**Governor Sununu:**

I'm not sure. I'll have Dr. Daly answer.

**Dr. Daly:**

So we recently released a very robust vaccine dashboard, which provides a lot of really great information. Some of the metrics did change from earlier versions of our dashboard. This is very high-level because we're now able to separate out residents and nonresidents. So when we provide a proportion of a population that -- what the vaccine coverage is, we're now referring just to New Hampshire residents. So that may be impacting what you specifically asked about, which is race and ethnicity.

But we would really have to dig into that a little bit more and could follow up with you offline about what we think about that. I'm not sure that that was any more impacted around race and ethnicity than age or any of the other different variables that you can analyze the metrics by.

*I'm just going to follow up on that. I'm not sure if this a Dr. Daly or Commissioner ShibiNette question. The Office of Health Equity, what's the role of that office right now? And I know Dr. Kay [ph] has left either at the end of last year or the beginning of this year. Is there someone who's filled in that position? And what are they doing, I guess, as part of this effort?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure, I'll have the Commissioner come up.

**Commissioner ShibiNette:**

So, yes, our Office of Health Equity has been at the table throughout the entire COVID-19 process, making sure that we have equitable access to testing, vaccine, therapeutics, everything. Right now, we are in the recruitment process to find the Director of Health Equity for DHHS. Associate Commissioner Ann Landry is filling in, in that role, for right now, and has been the voice of the Health Equity at the table for most of our Public Health discussions on pretty much everything, from testing through vaccination.

*And how long has that position been open? Is it now we're on eight-months-ish now or...*

**Commissioner ShibiNette:**

It's been several months, for sure. And I know that we've been through at least a couple rounds of interviews. So we're close.

*I guess, why is it hard to find the candidate you're looking for?*

**Commissioner ShibiNette:**

Anytime we're looking for leadership candidates, we put a high level of scrutiny on those candidates. These are the people that are leading the path for DHHS in the future. They're impacting policy. They're impacting decision-making on a very, very high level.

So, we often take our time and it often takes several months. Even the Assistant Commissioner positions that I recently filled, we went through at least four rounds of interviewing for those positions. They are in a position and that includes the Office of Health Equity Director, that shapes the policy of this State going forward with the recommendations and the information that they give out to our Elected Officials and in our public bodies. So we like to take our time and vet our candidates very thoroughly.

**Governor Sununu:**

It's all about having the right Team. I mean, it really is. So, we have one of the best Teams in the country, because we're pretty picky about who we bring in, and make sure it's the right fit. It's not always just the smartest person or something like that. It's got to be really the right fit and someone that can feel comfortable adding input and it's not just taking direction but helping inspire their Teams to

come in, especially in a leadership position. But we have, I think, some great candidates. So my hope, we fill it pretty soon. There's a lot of competition out there, by the way, too.

*No question the work's being done, but that's somebody who needs to be there, right? I mean, that's a position that needs to be filled.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah, I got to say Ann Landry's done a phenomenal job filling in. It's not like we've had a gap in service or anything like that. We continued on without missing a beat. It's always been a rock solid Team where people are able to step up and fill in, not just in that role but in a lot of roles in HHS and other Departments. So, takes a point of pride here that we can make the temporary fill-ins while we make sure we get the right person for the long-term. Do we have some on the -- we can take some questions on the phone.

***Paula Tracy with InDepthNH:***

*Governor, I was interested in getting the number of breakthrough deaths that we might have. And also what percentage, if possible, the Delta variant represents in the 300-and-more cases that were reported today, and whether we do have contact tracing efforts still underway.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Well, we definitely have contact tracing efforts still underway. I can answer that one. Dr. Chan, do you know the number of breakthrough deaths or even the percentage of the Delta variant, if not for today but maybe even -- maybe over some time period? Yeah.

**Dr. Chan:**

Yes, so, yes, contact tracing is still underway, as the Governor said. So there have been 10 people who died, who had vaccine breakthrough infections, 10 total. In terms of the -- correct, over the entire course of the pandemic, or since vaccination was rolled out, which was around since January.

In terms of the percentage, I believe you asked about the percentage that were the Delta variant. We're currently around, for the last two weeks, currently at around 40% of specimens that have been sequenced that identify the Delta variant.

So, to put some numbers on that, over the last two weeks, a total of 186 specimens have undergone sequencing. 20 of those were identified as the Alpha variant. That's the B117 variant. Then, 73 of them were identified as the V1.617.2 variant, or the Delta variant, which equates to 39% of all specimens that were sequenced that were positive for Delta. Thanks.

**Governor Sununu:**

Now, and I'll just state the obvious, too. The Delta variant probably isn't the last variant, unfortunately, right? We very well are going to see some other variants come out. There could be new variants that we haven't even seen. And that's why, again, I just encourage everyone to think for the

long-term. It's not just about beating the Delta variant back. It's about really making sure that we have stability in our systems over the next couple months or couple years.

***Annmarie Timmins with the New Hampshire Bulletin:***

*Thanks for taking my question. I have two, both related to reaching the unvaccinated. One, is there a value, do you think, in communicating the effectiveness of the vaccine by showing that it's mostly unvaccinated people dying and getting infected? And then, second, how is the State really studying messaging? Like, what works now, because the messaging is thought to change? Like, what's effective? So I know where you're putting your messaging. How are you thinking about what to say to reach specific audiences? Thank you.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure; so, two things. I think we talk a lot about the -- we have repeated a couple times here. But the vast majority of issues and the most severe issues are far and away the unvaccinated population. We do see some breakthrough, of course.

But this is -- going forward, this really is about those that are unvaccinated, which is why we keep telling folks to talk about the safety of the vaccine. Are there potential side-effects? Sure, there are some minor side-effects. There's no doubt about that.

But when you look at the risks of not being vaccinated, some of the very tough stories of individuals specifically that we've seen recently in the south of folks lying in hospitals saying the biggest regret they have in their lives is not getting vaccinated. Those are real stories that we do try to transmit, unfortunately, and learn from those lessons. And again, hopefully allow more robust conversations between individuals and their Doctors about why it's so important to be vaccinated. So, of course, there's value in always showing a bit of a differential there.

In terms of State messaging, that's actually a really good question. I was just talking to Trish Tilley, who runs the Public Health Department, technically, about our messaging, about what other States are doing, looking at some of the messaging that other States have, that have been effective in other States, and making sure we're talking to our counterparts, which we have been, which is good.

Taking our messaging to not just a Phase 2, just doing it again, but looking at, look, schools are coming back into play. More folks are going back to work. So pivoting our message to really encapture [ph] where some of our more dynamic areas and where we can really grab people the most, as we enter the fall. What we're doing in the summer might be very different than the messaging that we promote in the fall.

Obviously it's hard to really track if this message worked really well and that message didn't. But I think one of the best things we can do is kind of trade ideas with other States, other regions, other localities, so that we're just putting everything on the table. We're not holding anything back when it comes to messaging about the efficacy and the need for folks to get vaccinated.

***Kimberley Haas with the Seacoast Current:***

*Good afternoon, everybody. It's good to hear everyone's voices. Of course, today, we're talking a lot about the message about getting people vaccinated. And we certainly hear you encouraging people to do that. But during the course of this conference call, I received confirmation from the Director of Communications and Community Relations at Wentworth Douglas Hospital in Dover that all Employees at their Dover facility will need to be vaccinated as a condition of employment. Now, of course, that includes the entire workforce. And*



*there is an opportunity for medical and religious exemption. Governor, what do you think about having Employers mandate Employees to get vaccinated, especially since it's a very personal choice? Thank you.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Sure; of course, that is the right of all Employers in the State to make that decision, whether you're a Healthcare Worker, whether you're in long-term care, where there are other risks and variables to consider, or whether you're running Fred's Flower Shop, as I always say. The most important thing, I think, that we encourage Employers to do is to talk to their Employees. Don't just make a decision in a vacuum. Talk to the Employees, make sure the Employees understand the values, the hows, and the whys that that decision is potentially being made. Get input from your Employees, and maybe that can adjust some of the decision-making to make sure that whatever that transition to getting folks vaccinated is goes as smooth as possible.

Again, it's a decision by those Employers and it's really a -- and as you noted, it is a very personal decision. And so, there'll be kind of a transition there. And I'm a big believer that communication and transparency is the best mode of building public trust, whether you're talking to the people of the State, or whether you're just talking to your Division, or your Team, or your Employees. Just have the discussions as robustly as possible. Know the pros and cons. But ultimately, those folks do have the right to make that decision, if they so choose, and hopefully with some pretty (inaudible) conversations, it can go smoother. Yeah?

*So the new UN Climate Change Report says that humans have unequivocally caused almost all of the increase in global temperatures that we've seen in the last century and that the types of flooding and kind of extreme heat that we're seeing on a day like today is likely made worse by climate change. And so, what will New Hampshire do to help the country lower emissions and hopefully avert catastrophic events that future events...*

**Governor Sununu:**

So what is New Hampshire going to do to lower the emissions around the world?

*No, just in this part.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Oh, in the country?

*Here, in New Hampshire.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Okay, that's a big question. So, a variety of things; let me kind of get my COVID -- turn my mindset a little bit, wasn't expecting that one. There's a bunch of things that I think New Hampshire has done. Obviously, New Hampshire's always been a very environmentally conscious State.

I always take a lot of pride. I was an Environmental Engineer. I grew up kind of understanding and trying to design systems to help whether it's mitigate effects of climate change, or renewable energy, or clean up hazardous waste, whatever it was. That was my career for quite some time. So I've emersed myself in it.

I think that there are things that we can do here in New Hampshire that might work here, that might not work in other States. And there are some things in other States that work better that might not work as well here.

I've been a huge proponent of offshore wind. I think some of the strongest winds that you're going to find in the country are offshore. I think we can do it effectively. I think we can do it cheaply. We can take -- use a lot of that power to offset baseload generation from fossil fuels.

Doesn't happen overnight; I don't think -- if you push too hard too fast, it's not like we can change that paradigm simply in a couple years. But starting that process, making those investments, designing those systems and making those investments is, I think, a big part of where we can be.

When you talk about solar power, for example, again, all part of taking some of our need and dependence off fossil fuels, which is really one of the driving emitters of emission and potential climate change, whether it's what you're seeing regionally or globally. We might not have giant solar fields like the State of Arizona.

I'm a big believer that the solar investments we need to make here should be prioritized to the individuals that get hardest by the subsidies that are required to pay for them. So, in other words, every time someone turns on a light switch, whether you're a millionaire or you're below the Federal Poverty Level, you're paying a subsidy for that electricity. And there's no doubt about it.

So let's make sure that, whether it's an apartment building, or mobile home parks, or folks that might be on the lower income scale, let's make sure that they have the solar power to offset their direct electricity costs. And we all get the environmental benefits, as opposed to just giant solar arrays, or giant solar developers make all the money.

We're about to sign a huge Net Metering Bill that allows towns to join together to build these solar arrays to offset their local costs, not that just reduces some of the property taxes and the taxes to individuals in their town, but again has better opportunity for a more global approach to offsetting the baseload generation of fossil fuel.

So, I mean, I can go on and on. But I think these are just some of the things that we're doing most on the forefront here in New Hampshire. But there's carbon sequestration. That's a very interesting technology that's just come into the forefront. We're looking at it here in New Hampshire. We want to be a place where people will come and experiment. And we've talked to some folks at MIT about how to use that technology. Well, come and try it out here, right? We want to be kind of that offshoot where folks can experiment a little bit, try new things, and be a place where folks can develop some of those technologies.

So, I think we're doing great here in New Hampshire, because we are so environmentally conscious, not just the Governor, but I think all of us, right? That's one of the reasons why we're here, one of the reasons why we have such a wonderful quality of life. So, yeah, we all have a responsibility in that.

*Can we hear from Dr. Chan about gatherings? I know that we had guidance before. We're in a different setting now, and it's just a different reality now with we've got half the population vaccinated, a little more than that. If someone's going to have a gathering at their house and invite a lot of people over, I'm just curious what Dr. Chan thinks, how they should approach that. What's the safest way to do something like that?*

**Dr. Chan:**

So, again, we don't have specific guidance targeted for gatherings. We have generally been pointing people back to, for example, the New Hampshire Universal Best Practices, which outlines a multilayered approach. We're going back to the topic of multiple layers of prevention to prevent COVID from spreading, no matter what the setting, whether it's a business or a private gathering.

But ultimately, we can't weigh-in or comment on individual private gatherings. That's going to depend on what the setting is. And if there's a gathering at someone's house, it's going to be up to that individual to decide who to invite, for one thing, and how to have that social gathering safely.

Certainly, we continue to recommend that people take steps to prevent spread of COVID-19, and continue to stress the importance, primarily, first and foremost of vaccination in doing that. And when you have gatherings of people who are fully vaccinated, or most people are fully vaccinated, those individuals are well-protected against COVID-19. And so, that is one of the primary factors, I think, to having private social gatherings.

**Governor Sununu:**

Maybe every time you have a big social gathering, you can click on that button on our website, get the mobile van over. Make it a vaccine party. Why not?

*You can join it. Yeah.*

**Governor Sununu:**

I'll come for a third shot. Whatever it takes, whatever it takes to get people motivated, right?

*Have you explored that? You got the Johnson & Johnson, right?*

**Governor Sununu:**

I did.

*Have you explored the idea of whether you're going to need a booster or anything like that, personally?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Well, if they make a booster, of course I would get the booster. I mean, I don't think we have any definitive information about boosters, the timing of it, or what populations would affect. Do you want add to that? Sure.

**Dr. Chan:**

Yeah, so, again, a hot topic, talking about booster doses for the COVID-19 vaccine, either because of waning or decreasing immunity, or because of increasing variants that the vaccines may be less effective against, like the Delta variant. So let me start by saying that the vaccines we have right now are still estimated to be -- like the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines -- are still estimated to be about 80% effective or so at preventing infection with the Delta variant, so still very effective. And then, 90%, 95% effective at preventing severe disease, like hospitalizations and deaths. So, the vaccines that are out there right now are still highly effective at preventing infection and preventing severe disease with this more infectious Delta variant.

With that said, though, there are certainly -- there certainly is a lot of research and discussion going on right now about the potential need for boosters in the future, either for everybody, because of new variants or waning immunity, or for selected populations, like immunocompromised individuals. What I will say is that the CDC's Advisory Community on Immunization Practices, the ACIP, is actually meeting tomorrow to discuss this exact issue of the potential need for booster doses, particularly for people who are immunocompromised.

So I think what we're going to see is that, over the next week -- certainly over the next few weeks, there's going to be a lot of change and potentially new recommendations coming out around this. So, stay tuned.

But the ACIP is going through their process. And at the same time, the FDA is going through their process, looking at potentially fully licensing or approving the Pfizer vaccine first, which will allow more flexibility to give booster doses.

So, two different things happening at the same time: the FDA going through their regulatory process to try and fully license and approve first the Pfizer vaccine, which is expected potentially in the coming weeks; then the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is meeting tomorrow. And there's expected to be a recommendation at some point here for booster doses, particularly for specific populations, like people who are immunocompromised.

*Governor, question for you on a big-picture thing here. You just said this fall could be worse than anything we've seen. Obviously that's open-end in the future. But a lot of people saw this summer as a real optimistic thing. Maybe they thought, okay, great, this is behind us. What's your message to those people who see potentially this dark cloud on the horizon, the potential for something worse with the vaccination rate where it is? And they say, I don't know if I can handle another round of this.*

**Governor Sununu:**

If you're vaccinated, you can handle it, right? If you're vaccinated, chances are you're going to be just fine. If you're unvaccinated, then, yeah, you may have a lot of concerns, legitimate concerns about what it's going to mean, in terms of your health and potentially getting infected, and how severe it would be.

So, yeah, I think it really boils down that. If you're vaccinated, you're in really good shape, right? And then, that isn't a dark cloud. I'm not worried. I mean, look. When I see the numbers potentially rising, I don't worry about me, personally, because I'm vaccinated. I worry about the care of the State and the 1.4 million people that are -- I want to make sure we can continue moving forward and keep everything open and all that, which we have all the plans in the world to do. All the power is in the individual's hands to get rid of that dark cloud, whether it's for themselves or their family, or their community.

So it's not really a dark cloud on the State or a dark cloud of what might come with the rising numbers. If anything, it's the -- I think a lot of individuals are going, gee, if this is going to get a lot worse then you have time. That's the beauty of where we are in New Hampshire right now. Everybody has still a little more time before this potential -- we're already seeing a summer spike, right? We know that. Not as severe as you're seeing in the south, but it's real and it's there.

We know that just from the seasonality, when we start going indoors more in the fall, in that November/December timeframe, that's typically when these types of viruses move very, very rapidly throughout our population. So there is time.

But take advantage of it. Don't wait, right? Don't be that individual that says, why did I just not get it last month? Why did I not take advantage, when I really had time? So there is time to do it and it is safe. And it is effective. And that's how you kind of can get rid of that worry and that dark cloud.

I'm not worried about it, personally. I'm worried about it from the State. But the folks that are worried for their families, make the right decision and be proactive about it. Get the information you need, be proactive and get it taken care of. Oh, sure.

*I'm back, sorry. Only three people in the room today.*

**Governor Sununu:**

No, it's great.

*The deadline is next week, Governor, for the municipal aid coming from the American Recue Plan Act.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yes.

*I mean, August 18th.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah.

*We know there are a number of communities -- 250 now -- that have not gotten their Applications in yet. The number's going down, but some might not be able to make the deadline. Would you extend that deadline to allow them more time?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Well, there's no plans to extend the deadline right now. But if they need more time, then absolutely. We're always going to be flexible. I think a lot of towns were hesitant, because of all the Federal reporting requirements that came with it. And so, we're trying to provide as many resources as we can to give them confidence.

We want every community to take the money. I mean, we don't want to say no. So absolutely, that is always on the table to extend deadlines for extenuating circumstances, to make sure communities get their money.

We don't want the money at the State. It is your money. It is the town's money. It is the county's money. Take the money. And we -- again, I think we've done a pretty good job of showing all the different ways that they can spend those dollars. And if we can help with those reporting requirements, they can be very onerous from the Federal Government. We get it.

But obviously if we can help the locals work through that and feel confident about how to make sure that they can live up to those standards, because, if you don't, technically we'd have to give the money back. That's a big fear for a lot of small towns that don't have all the Staff and Personnel -- the fulltime Staff and Personnel that other towns do. So, we're going to work with each one individually and hope that we get everyone taking their dollars.

*So you're allowed to do that on a case-by-case basis. You don't have to actually issue a blanket extension?*

**Governor Sununu:**

I think we will decide. I think what we will do is kind of we will wait to see where we are, as we approach the deadline. But I think a lot of folks, they just tend to come in at the last minute. And if there's just a few one-offs that we can work with individually, we will do that. Or if we want to extend the whole program for a little more to give more people time, we're going to provide as much flexibility as we need to, to make sure no one gets inadvertently cut off from a system that can help you provide a lot of resources.

*And what's your reaction to the Town of Dummer rejecting the funds?*

**Governor Sununu:**

Well, any town that just says we're absolutely rejecting the funds, I guess I'd just keep reaching out to them, frankly, and saying, look, what can we do to help you take the money? If it's their choice, it's their choice. I mean, if a town really is that adamant about not taking the money, I get it, because I've seen the onerous reporting requirement there. And I don't know exactly what their issue is. But I think that's...

*Just based on the Federal deficit.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah.

*It's on principle.*

**Governor Sununu:**

On principle, well, again, that's their choice. And again, we would just make sure that hopefully they're talking to their citizens, and they understand the impacts of that. But if a town chooses not to take the money, they don't have to take the money, I suppose. We're not going to sneak it under the door while they're not looking, or anything like that.

*Get another van for that.*

**Governor Sununu:**

Yeah. So -- okay, well, great. Look, I thank you guys very much. We will be back, I don't know if maybe next week or the week after. I'm not 100% sure. We will kind of see where things go. But I just want to reiterate I think what the most important message is.

There's a lot of tools in the toolbox. But the most important one is the vaccine. That's how families and individuals get through this. We're not out of this by a long shot. This could be with us up-and-down for potentially years. And we just want folks to really look at all the different potential mitigation measures for their workplace, for their school, their family, whatever it might be, because this could be with us for a long time. And whatever mitigation measures we put in place today could be with us for a long time, as well.

So, we want folks to -- our citizens are incredibly smart. They're incredibly engaged on this issue. They know what they can and have to do to keep themselves safe. But we want folks to know vaccine, vaccine, vaccine. That's really where the messaging has to be.

We're going to keep pushing it as hard as we can. And hopefully folks will talk to their Doctors, their Pharmacists and keep engaging. And we will keep seeing that vaccination number rise as we go over time. And that way this potential, very severe fall surge that could be coming, we can, again,

mitigate that as a whole State, as we go forward. So, thank you guys very much. We will see you in a couple weeks.