

TRANSCRIPT: COVID-19 Update May 6, 2020

GOVERNOR HOGAN: Good afternoon. 12 days ago, we launched a well thought out, safe, effective, and gradual roadmap to recovery for Maryland. It's one of the most detailed plans in the country, which utilized guidelines issued by both the White House and the National Governors Association and incorporated many of the principles of the plans produced by both the American Enterprise Institute and Johns Hopkins, along with input from our team of scientists, public health, and business experts and our recovery plan was built upon four essential building blocks which needed to be put in place before we could begin stage one of our recovery: Expanded testing; increased hospital surge capacity; and supply of PPE; and a robust contact tracing operation.

With the tests we acquired from South Korea and other progress, including increasing our lab capability, acquiring reagents and other materials, including a recent shipment of swabs from FEMA, we have been able to expand our testing capacity to cover outbreaks, clusters, and hotspots across the state. We have now completed a survey of all nursing home facilities and have trained special bridge teams to perform universal testing for all residents and staff. We expanded testing on the Eastern Shore in response to outbreaks at poultry processing plants, testing 2,300 people at Perdue Stadium in Salisbury just last weekend.

In addition, we will be conducting universal testing shift by shift at both of Maryland's processing plants to ensure that every single poultry worker is tested, and we are placing a surge tent at Easton Memorial Hospital to prepare for a spike in patients from that outbreak.

The CDC is on the ground in Salisbury to assist with contact tracing, and we continue to coordinate with our partners in Delaware and Virginia in an effort to protect the Delmarva region's poultry industry and the national food supply chain.

This week we are also expanding testing for healthcare workers and first responders at local fire and EMS departments and for state employee healthcare workers at the departments of health, public safety and corrections, and juvenile services. This expanded testing capability also allows us to expand the hours and days of operations at all of the VEIP drive-through testing sites statewide.

We set a goal of increasing our surge capacity by an additional 6,000 hospital beds, and we have exceeded that goal. We now have an additional 8,100 surge beds which includes 2,400 ICU beds across the state. With our highest concentration of cases in Prince George's County and Montgomery County, the Laurel Hospital, which we reopened two weeks ago, is expanding its operations even further by adding another new wing. New rooms at Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park are also nearly complete. Our multiagency task force has been working around the clock 7 days a

week to focus on increasing our supply of desperately needed PPE, and they are making great progress. We have recently acquired 4.5 million KN95 masks, 600,000 N95 masks, 150,000 medical gowns, 1.1 million face shields, 3.5 million surgical gloves, and much more is coming in to our warehouses on a daily basis.

This week we launched the Maryland manufacturing network supplier portal, which is an online platform that helps connect our Maryland suppliers with buyers who are looking to source PPE and other critical supplies.

Due to the tremendous and urgent demand and the serious lack of worldwide supply of PPE, states have had to go to extraordinary lengths to acquire this critical protective equipment on an emergency basis. Unfortunately across the country, there have been some cases of fraud. Last week I directed the Department of General Services to cancel an emergency PPE order for masks and ventilators, and we directed Attorney General Brian Frosh to begin an investigation of a company called Blue Flame Medical for failure to perform and for potential misrepresentation.

Today it is being reported that the U.S. Department of Justice has now also launched a federal investigation into this company's interactions with multiple states, including California, which reportedly wired a half billion dollars to this company for masks.

It is unconscionable that anyone would try to exploit this pandemic for profit or for personal gain, which is why I'm so pleased that we were able to act so swiftly to uncover Blue Flame's potential wrongdoings and to alert the authorities.

The final building block is a robust contact tracing operation. We have executed a contract with the national opinion research center, the nation's oldest and largest university-based research firm, to quadruple our disease investigation capability, enabling us to contact up to 1,000 new cases per day. The hiring of those contact tracers is already well underway, with more than 900 applicants across 20 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions.

I want to thank our entire team for working so hard and making so much progress, putting all four of these necessary building blocks into place in order to help us to better attack this virus from all directions all across the state.

When this crisis began, I said that we were home to some of the top health research facilities in the world, and I hoped that we might be a part of developing treatments and perhaps even a vaccine for this deadly virus. Yesterday the very first patient in the United States were given a test vaccine at the University of Maryland's School of Medicine in partnership with Pfizer and BioNTech as part of a global COVID-19 vaccine development program.

We're also pleased to announce that Gilead has donated 1,600 doses of remdesivir to the state of Maryland. This is the only drug proven in a clinical study to help with COVID-19. We will be immediately deploying these initial doses to Prince George's and

Montgomery Counties where we had the highest number of cases. All of this puts us much closer to being able to launch stage 1 of our reopening.

When I introduced the roadmap to recovery, I said that if Marylanders continued staying home and continued practicing social distancing, I was hopeful that the key numbers we were tracking, the rate of hospitalizations and the number of patients in ICU, would potentially plateau, perhaps as early as early May. We said if we did start to see a leveling trend in those metrics, we would be in position to begin stage 1 of the recovery plan.

Fortunately we are beginning to see those encouraging numbers. Over the past 7 days, we have seen a good trend in hospitalizations, with five straight days downward, and then a little bump up yesterday. But overall we are down slightly from where we were a week ago. Even more encouraging is that our ICU numbers have been basically flat, level, at a plateau for eight straight days.

If these trends continue into next week, we will be ready to lift the stay-at-home order and to begin stage 1 of our recovery plan. As our plan has spelled out, that would mean the reopening of certain types of businesses and lower risk community religious and quality of life activities.

Yesterday we had another call with our coronavirus recovery team, which includes some of the smartest scientists, public health, business, and labor experts in the world. This team is advising us and guiding Maryland's reopening and recovery process. We have also received reports from 15 industry-specific business advisory groups, including small businesses, along with churches and nonprofits. Each of these work groups has collaborated on proposed recommendations and guidelines to help determine how they can prepare to reopen in ways that can keep their employees, their customers, and members of their congregations safe. We continue to work very closely with them as they prepare for their phased, safe, and gradual reopenings.

Marylanders have made incredible sacrifices in recent weeks, and because of that, thousands of lives have been saved and the numbers of infections are so much better than they would have been. And while we still do need several more days of good metrics, our coronavirus recovery team, including our doctors and scientists, has agreed that there are some additional things that we can do safely right now prior to the lifting of the stay-at-home order and the beginning of stage 1. As long as Marylanders continue to take personal responsibility, continue to practice social distancing, and continue to follow the guidance from public health officials, one of the first actions we took was to stop elective surgeries and procedures at our hospitals and healthcare facilities in order to protect hospital capacity and to preserve the supply of PPE. Now that we have both of these building blocks in a better position, Maryland Department of Health will immediately issue guidelines to allow for elective procedures at the discretion of local hospitals and healthcare providers. Many Marylanders may have put off important procedures, screenings, and other things that they really need to attend to. If there's something that you've had to delay, like a PET scan or a biopsy, an angioplasty or

orthopedic procedure, you should be able to now take care of those important time-sensitive procedures now.

Mother's Day weekend is coming up, and I know how anxious people are to get outside, both for their physical and their mental well-being. And we also know that outside activity is safer than inside activity. After much discussion yesterday, all of our doctors and scientists are now in agreement that we are able to move forward with resuming some additional lower-risk outdoor activities. So effective tomorrow, at 7:00 a.m., the list of safe outdoor activities will be broadened to now include golf, tennis, boating, fishing, camping, and other activities. We are opening closed functions at our state parks, including all state beaches for walking and exercise, as well as safe playgrounds at state parks. And local governments will have the flexibility to take similar actions at their discretion.

However, it will remain critical that you continue to follow public health guidance, continue to practice physical distancing, and most of all, that you continue to take actions to keep yourself and your fellow Marylanders safe. Now, I realize that these are only small steps and that they may be of little comfort to those who are out of work and who are struggling financially. But it is thanks to all of you and your incredible sacrifices that we are making great progress, we are flattening the curve, and we are preparing to launch our reopening plan in order to safely get people back to work, to safely get our small businesses back open again, to get our economy back on track so that Maryland and our nation can defeat this virus and come back stronger and better than ever.

With that, I'm going to turn the podium over to Dr. David Marcozzi, who is the COVID-19 Incident Commander for the University of Maryland Medical System and a member of our coronavirus recovery team.

Dr. Marcozzi?

DAVID MARCOZZI: Good afternoon. Governor Hogan, thank you for your leadership. Thank you for keeping us safe. Thank you for developing a sound, smart approach through your Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery plan.

As the Governor announced today, it is a welcome step forward on a path towards our state's recovery. But it must be done with the necessary steps and precautions in place and, frankly, some common sense.

As the weather warms up and we move to more outdoor activities, we need to keep a few things in mind. Number one, this virus is still with us, and we need to be sensitive to any concerns we might have with regard to spreading this virus amongst all of our citizens, particularly those who are more fragile. So therefore, we need to maintain physical distancing. We need to continue practices like hand hygiene and cough hygiene appropriately. When we congregate, we need to congregate in small group sizes so that this virus doesn't have a chance to spread amongst us easily. If possible, please wear masks. It decreases the spread of the virus from me to you if I'm wearing a

mask. And as I mentioned, it is important to protect those at high risk from this virus, whether indoors or outdoors.

To continue to flatten the curve, we as Marylanders need to be consistently making the right choices for ourselves, for our friends, and our family. This is the time to take care of ourselves, both physically and mentally. Let's make sure we do both. We can and we need to. And the opportunity exists in the healthcare system to do just that. I want to emphasize, there is no reason to delay time-sensitive care, particularly for conditions that you're concerned about having an emergency. Maryland's hospitals and doctors' offices are able to or are taking steps so that they are able to care for patients during this pandemic through new standard operating procedures, through more PPE, personal protective equipment, and staff education.

In addition to going to the doctor's office, doctors are actually using telehealth as an opportunity to engage their patients, and you can actually see a patient for mental health concerns or physical concerns right now through your phone or your computer. Complaints like minor physical ailments can be addressed through a telehealth portal, and your provider is able to do so right now.

I want to make sure I give an opportunity to thank during nurses week all the nurses that are on the front lines of our healthcare system in our state. Thank you for being there for us. Thank you for being there for our patients. We support you in the work that you're doing through the next few weeks and months.

Also thank you to all of you who went out and went to work, in the grocery stores or the trash collectors. Those of you allowed the healthcare providers to continue their work to make sure that we're on the front lines and able to care for our patients effectively.

In the end, hospitals are the right place for you if you need to go for care. They have taken the necessary steps to make sure they are safe, so that if you need help, you can get the care that you need.

Again, Governor, thank you for taking the right steps. Thank you for making our state safe. Thank you for being cautious and being deliberative with the actions you are taking right now towards our recovery.

GOVERNOR HOGAN: Thank you very much, Dr. Marozzi.

Now we are going to hear from Dr. Karen Salmon, state superintendent of our school system. We'll have some announcements.

Dr. Salmon?

KAREN SALMON: Thank you, Governor. Again, it's a privilege to serve under your leadership.

I would like to start this afternoon by giving a few updates on our efforts regarding childcare and our meal distribution program. We've been able to describe you're \$34 million in payments to over 3700 childcare providers serving children of essential personnel, and all payments are now up-to-date. Our early childhood team worked around the clock to deliver more than \$29 million in payments to our providers just in the last week.

This monumental effort completed the first round of invoice processing. We will continue to work diligently with our partners at the comptroller's office, and each of our essential personnel childcare providers to keep these payments up to date.

I want to thank our providers for their continued service to Maryland's children and families and for their patience as we all work together through these unusual circumstances.

Our meal program continues with success. Since the beginning of school closures in March, we served nearly 8 million meals to school-aged children in Maryland. I want to thank our local food directors for this ongoing effort as well as our partners at the National Guard led by Colonel McGowan, for assisting our school systems with delivery and distribution. We could not continue this undertaking without everyone's contributions, and I am very, very proud of the work being accomplished.

Today I am announcing the closure of schools for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic school year. After extensive discussions with the Maryland State Board of Education, the Maryland Health Department, and additional health experts advising the Governor, I am convinced this is the appropriate decision in order to continue to protect the health and safety of our students, educators, staff, and all members of school communities throughout Maryland.

Although we will not see students and educators return to the classroom before the scheduled end of the school year, online and distance learning opportunities will continue. To guide school systems and communities on a path forward, the State Department of Education is releasing a comprehensive plan for long-term recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The Maryland Together: Recovery Plan for Education was drafted in collaboration with the state board, local school superintendents, and with input from stakeholders throughout our state. This document lays the groundwork for the coming months as we maintain and improve online learning opportunities and identifies methods for recovering any lost instruction time that has occurred as a result of COVID-19.

The plan also establishes the foundation for school systems as they begin to consider how they will bring students and educators back into school buildings once they are able to in a safe way. I want to emphasize that the recovery plan we are sharing with members of the public and the education community is not prescriptive, and nothing included indicates any mandate or requirement that school systems must follow. However, it outlines a set of options and considerations developed from best

practices and available research across the country. Our plan identifies several sample schedules and calendar ideas that could be used and dovetails into the Governor's Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery plan. At this point we do not envision that schools would be included in stage 1 of the Governor's plan, but different methods of returning to school could be included in stage 2 and 3. For example, some strategies for small group learning with proper social distancing in school buildings could be included in stage 2, such as bringing various groups of students back on an alternating A and B day schedule or alternating weeks of in-person attendance with distance learning between different groups of students.

School systems could also choose to bring students back to address specific students' needs such as students with disabilities and English language learners.

A full return of the student body to in-person instruction would be a part of stage 3. Schools will restructure their day-to-day operations to be in concert with public health guidance. As is referenced in the plan, schedules for instruction, meals, and transportation may all require modifications. Any return of students and staff to the classroom depends on the circumstances in each school system, and local school systems will have the flexibility to adapt the model to best serve their needs.

We will continue to update this document while addressing additional issues as they come up related to the recovery process for schools, and we will be certain to engage stakeholders for their input.

As I have previously stated, for our high school seniors and their families wondering about graduation ceremonies, those decisions will be made by each local school system superintendent and school board. However, I have been assured by each superintendent that they are collaborating with their local community to be certain that recognition is moving forward and that seniors will have the opportunity to be recognized for their exceptional accomplishments.

I have reminded superintendents that however they choose to honor the class of 2020, they must remain in compliance with the Governor's executive orders.

I certainly understand the significant challenges that we face as we move forward to restore public education in Maryland. However, I'm confident that with the leadership from local superintendents and the collaboration among educators, parents, and members of our school communities, that we can get through this crisis together and come out stronger than ever for all of our Maryland students.

Thank you.

GOVERNOR HOGAN: Thank you, Dr. Salmon.

With that, we'll be happy to take a few questions.

(Question off mic).

So the unemployment site has been completely fixed for at least 10 days. There's been no wait I think since last Monday. So the news is a little late catching up.

It was very slow for about 5 days. I promised at a press conference a week ago that we were going to get it fixed, and we got it fixed within a matter of days. So it's now functioning. Unfortunately it's still very frustrating because people — look, this was a brand-new program that was instituted at the federal level about two weeks ago. Most of these people have never had to file unemployment before. These benefits were not available before. Hundreds of thousands of people were trying to file at the same time. There was no site capable of handling it. We were one of the first states in America to develop a site. It wasn't fast enough to handle that at first. A couple of other states tried to do it. They're still down. They still haven't even gotten it functioning at all. Some of them still haven't even tried to do one. Ours is now completely fixed and functioning very well. No wait times. But it's frustrating still for the people who haven't gotten their checks. We've gotten seven different changes of instructions from the federal level on new rules, new sets of guidelines, since this new program came out. Each time that new regulation comes out from the federal level, that website has to be updated and changed. New information, our folks have to go out and ask 200,000 people for new updated information. It's very frustrating. I said we would get the website fixed. We got it fixed. But it's still, the program is very difficult to get hundreds of thousands of people money in a brand-new program when the rules keep changing and when the money isn't flowing very well. So I understand the frustration of the people, but I think we're performing better than just about anyone in America.

(Question off mic).

I thought you were just going to be happy to play golf.

[Laughter]

SPEAKER: If this phase continues, stage 1 will kick in next week? That's what you're telling Marylanders?

GOVERNOR HOGAN: Well, yeah, exactly. 12 days ago I said if the numbers continued to have these kinds of trends, you know, for over a two-week period, we would be ready to move into phase 1. We now have a pretty good trend for 7-8 days. We'll look at that next week. I'm not committed to it because the numbers could spike back up, and we could say, sorry, we're not moving forward. But if the numbers continue to show these positive signs, we could be ready to move forward, which would be in the same time frame, my optimistic hopeful from almost two weeks ago, we'll be there, we'll be ready.

SPEAKER: With opening up more outdoor activities, opening up the beaches, are you concerned that it might draw crowds?

GOVERNOR HOGAN: We are concerned. That's why I said two or three times and Dr. Marcozzi said, all of this is predicated on people taking personal responsibility, on following the public health guidelines, on maintaining social distancing. We're still encouraging people to whenever possible wear masks, to avoid crowds of more than 10 people together congregating together. Staying 6 feet apart.

But whenever you have more people outside doing more things, we run the risk of people not listening to that kind of advice.

But Ocean City made their own decision about opening up. We've opened up the beaches. We're encouraging people to walk on the beach and walk on the boardwalks, but crowds of people all congregating together and going about their normal way that they would go, we're not quite ready for that I don't think.

(Question off mic).

We don't even have a total yet. It's hundreds of millions of dollars. And we've never been faced with this kind of a thing before, where the state is not normally in the business of, you know, needing to immediately buy instantaneously supplies for hospitals that they don't have that aren't available anywhere in America or around the world, and buy ventilators and masks and gowns. We don't do this on a normal basis. But if we didn't find them, people were going to die. So we had to find unusual sources of ways to get them. 50 states were competing with one another and with the federal government and countries around the world. It's been a terrible situation. It should have never happened. But it's what we were dealt with. And it's what every state has been dealing with. And we were lucky to catch this one situation. Hopefully there are others. There have been problems and there are a lot of states much worse off. California and New York had a situation, couple of situations. But you know, you can't go through a procurement process and take 18 months to go through a process when we have to have stuff by tomorrow or hospitals are going to have to shut down.

SPEAKER: The numbers you've seen so far, you're hopeful for phase 1, looking forward a little bit, when do you think phase 2 can happen?

Also, several governors have been in the Oval Office and met with the President about this pandemic. Have you been invited to the White House and what was that conversation?

GOVERNOR HOGAN: I've led 19 calls of all the governors. 12 of them have been with the President and Vice President. So I kicked off every one of those calls and spoken on behalf of all 55 governors of the states and territories. And I haven't been yet, I haven't taken the time to go down into the Oval Office. I was in the Situation Room twice when the Vice President was leading the coronavirus task force. But if I feel like I need to go down, I'm sure I will. We've been focused here.

But we've certainly communicated at least once, usually twice a week, with the President and/or Vice President and the other governors. And I've had calls every couple of days with them, with the White House. But you know, there's nothing I haven't wanted to say that I haven't already said.

(Question off mic).

They also made their own decision to close the beaches and boardwalk. Had nothing to do with any of our orders.

(Question off mic).

No, you know, the boardwalk is just like any other street you can walk down. The mayor decided to close it, and then the mayor decided to open it. But the businesses aren't open. It's, you know, people — he decided a while ago on his own accord that he didn't want people walking on it, and then he decided he would let people walk on it. It didn't have anything to do with any order.

(Question off mic).

We do have plenty of body bags because FEMA responded to our request for body bags. I do not know how long the ice rink will be needed. Hopefully it won't be for very long. Hopefully — I was hoping we wouldn't need it at all, but it is being utilized. I don't know how long the lease is going to be needed.

(Question off mic).

We had a great call yesterday with Governor Northam and Governor Bowser. We are all working together. Look, we all have different things in our different areas. They're not all the same. Mayor Bowser, for example, doesn't have any rural areas as part of D.C., whereas Governor Northam and I both do. But we have had great cooperation. We had a very good, productive discussion yesterday. But there's little differences about the timing of when we close things or what orders we took.

For example, Governor Northam, all of his beaches remained open for walking and swimming, but they had certain other restrictions. We never were completely in sync. And I think he's going to do things on a regional basis, where I think Northern Virginia will remain closed but rural places may open. People are making independent decisions, but we're working cooperatively. We had a great talk about federal workers and metro and the metropolitan area and how we're impacted and hospitals.

(Question off mic).

It's really devastating. It's hard to — I don't think anybody has an exact answer to when all the jobs are coming back. I mean, if today we opened every business, we're not sure how many of those businesses are still — you know, are people going to start

attending all of the things they used to do? The federal government doesn't have answers to this. None of my colleague governors have answers to that. The hospitality industry, things like sports, large venues, movie theaters, large restaurants, are people going to go? That's the question. Some of these sectors are hurt worse than others. Are people going to attend conventions? Are people going to go places where they normally would go with thousands of people? You know, some industries might not ever come back. Some things might evolve and have to do things differently. But there's certainly, some have been hit worse than others. But even when we are at phase 3 and we open every single thing and some businesses are going to have a difficult time recovering or they're going to have to evolve. Because until we get a vaccine, I think people are going to be afraid to do certain things.

SPEAKER: Last question.

(Question off mic).

GOVERNOR HOGAN: I discussed that earlier. We've already done the survey of all the nursing homes statewide. We're the ones who called for everyone to be tested. We appointed somebody, we have strike teams, and multiple teams going in to take over these nursing homes when they were not able to do it themselves, which is why we're taking over. It's not going to be done overnight. We have 24,000 patients in nursing homes, but per symptomatically going through as we said when we announced this. We're going through it symptomatically with the hottest ones, the biggest problems, and working our way down the list. But we'll get to all of them. We're not just handing out tests to all the nursing homes. The state will be going through and testing them all as we work down the list. And we're making great progress.

Thank you.