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Video, Audio, Photos & Rush Transcript: Amid Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, Governor Cuomo Announces Sixth Region Hits Benchmark to Begin Reopening Tomorrow

Western New York Joins Central New York, North Country, Finger Lakes, Southern Tier and Mohawk Valley Regions, Which Have Met the Seven Metrics Required to Begin Reopening

State Department of Health has Granted Erie County Medical Center a Waiver to Restart Elective Procedures

Announces New Efforts to Bring More Tests to Nursing Home Facilities to Help Meet New Guidelines Requiring All Nursing Home Employees Be Tested Twice Per Week

Encourages Major Sports Teams to Plan Reopening Without Fans

Confirms 1,250 Additional Coronavirus Cases in New York State - Bringing Statewide Total to 351,371; New Cases in 44 Counties

Governor Cuomo: "On reopening overall, we're opening regions that have hit the data points, hit the metrics. Western New York has one metric that they have to hit which is the number of tracers. They need 521 tracers. They've identified 525. Great piece of work that they did over the weekend. I want to thank the Mayor, I want to thank the County Executive, all the regional officials who found people to serve as tracers. They're going to be trained tomorrow, and that means all the metrics will be hit and Western New York will open tomorrow. It's been a long painful period but we start to reopen tomorrow."

Cuomo: "We have done a phenomenal job in reducing the spike, reducing what could have been cataclysmic - you see that incline on that curve. No one could tell you when we were in the midst of that incline where would stop or if it would stop. We had the highest number of cases in the country. New Yorkers responded with great unity and great discipline, and that's why that curve turned."

Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Cuomo announced that Western New York has met all seven metrics required to begin phase one of the state's regional phased reopening plan starting tomorrow, joining the Central New York, North Country, Finger Lakes, Southern Tier and Mohawk Valley Regions. Western New York has now identified enough contact tracers to meet the state's guidelines, and the tracers are being trained today in preparation for Western New York entering phase one, which includes construction; manufacturing and wholesale supply chain; retail for curbside pickup and drop-off or in-store pickup; and agriculture, forestry and fishing. Business guidance for phase one of the state's reopening plan is available [here](#). A guide to the state's "NY Forward Reopening" Plan is available [here](#). The state's regional monitoring dashboard is available [here](#).

Governor Cuomo also announced the State Department of Health has granted Erie County Medical Center a waiver to restart elective procedures.

The Governor also announced new efforts to bring more tests to nursing home facilities to help these facilities meet new guidelines mandating that all nursing homes and adult care facilities test all personnel for COVID-19 two times per week. The state is connecting nursing home facilities with labs to get more tests to these facilities, and so far the labs have reserved at least 35,000 tests per day just for this purpose. The state is also sending 320,000 test kits to nursing homes statewide this week.

The Governor also encouraged major sports teams to plan reopening without fans and offered the state's help on this effort.

VIDEO of the Governor's remarks is available on YouTube [here](#) and in TV quality (h.264, mp4) format [here](#).

AUDIO of today's remarks is available [here](#).

PHOTOS are available on the Governor's Flickr [page](#).

A rush transcript of the Governor's remarks is available below:

Governor Cuomo: Good morning. Good to be with all of you today. Pleasure to be in Buffalo. You know the people who are with me but just in case, you have been living under a rock to my far right, Robert Mujica, Budget Director of the State of New York, to my immediate right, Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul who has done a great job statewide but she's taken a special role in coordinating Western New York, so we thank her very much for what she's done. To my left, Melissa DeRosa, Secretary to the Governor, to her left, Gareth Rhodes who's been working with us through this crisis. It's a pleasure to be at Roswell, Dr. Candace Johnson, thank you very much for the hospitality. Just thinking about our trip to Cuba and your great accomplishment. It was fun, it was fun, and it was productive. And it's always a pleasure to be with my friend, my partners,

the great Mayor of the city of Buffalo, Byron Brown and the great County Executive of Erie County Mark Poloncarz - thank you for everything you've been doing to get us through this.

I'm pleased to report that I took a COVID test yesterday and I am negative from that test. So, that is good news. You take one of those tests, it's very easy. I showed people how easy it was yesterday. And when you find out you're negative, it's actually a nice sense of relief. I didn't have any symptoms or anything, but you know, you don't need to have symptoms and you can have the COVID virus. So, you take the test they tell you you're negative, 24 to 48 hours. And it is peace of mind. There's no reason why people shouldn't be getting testing - we actually have now more testing capacity than we are using at many of our sites. And we've expanded the number of people who are eligible for testing - anyone who has any symptom for a COVID virus, any symptom includes basically the symptoms you would have if you had the flu. Same symptoms, if you have any symptoms, get a test. Get a test. Protects you, protects your family, protects your colleagues, so get a test. If you were exposed to a person who you find out is positive for COVID, get a test. Get a test. Takes 30 seconds - we have 700 locations across the state. So, there's no reason why you shouldn't do it - you go right to the web. It shows you right where the location is, you can sign up and go.

Let's give you some facts on today. Number of hospitalizations are down. So, that's good news, not down a lot but down - I'll take it. Net change is down; net change in intubations is down. The number of new cases per day is down by one. Not great. But I'll take it - it's going in the right direction. So, that is good news. The number that breaks my heart every day - the number of deaths is still painfully high at 106, but it is down. And in this world where we're looking for good news on a daily basis, that is good news. Although in our thoughts and prayers are those 106 families today.

And if you look at where we are, we have done a phenomenal job in reducing the spike, reducing what could have been cataclysmic - you see that incline on that curve. No one could tell you when we were in the midst of that incline where would stop or if it would stop. There was no global expert who said if you do this if you close this and close this and close this, then we can tell you with certainty it can it will stop the spread of the virus, nobody said that. All they could say was do your best,

try to close everything down, and then hope for the best. And New Yorkers responded - we had the highest number of cases in the country. New Yorkers responded with great unity and great discipline, and that's why that curve turned. We hit the apex and we're on the way down - you also see how slow the way down is. That's why all the experts always say be careful of this spike because it's a long time coming down from the spike. We want to avoid the spike because you can't reverse it in a matter of days. It takes a long time to get those numbers back down. And this is with everything we did and with all the loss and pain we suffered this is how long it took to get those numbers down.

We now have a top priority, which we have from day one which is our nursing homes. We were introduced to this virus in Seattle, Washington where it attacked a nursing home - the most vulnerable population in the most vulnerable place. Senior citizens in a congregate facility, that's how we were introduced to this virus, and I'm afraid that's how we're going to leave this virus. So, protecting our nursing homes and seniors has been a top priority.

Last week, we put in place a requirement to test all staff at a nursing home twice per week. Why? Well, number one, it keeps the staff safe. Number two, if you see an increase in the positive among staff people it's an alert that you probably have a real problem in that nursing home because chances are the staff are getting it from the nursing home or giving it to people in the nursing home. So, if you watch what happens with the staff, it's a canary in the coal mine for what's happening in the nursing home. And third, it clearly keeps the residents of the nursing home safe. Now, to help nursing homes do this we've worked with all the private labs, identified a number of tests that we can send just for the purpose of testing people in nursing homes, that's about 35,000 per day. We're sending 320,000 test kits to the nursing homes today to help them do this.

With everything we're doing, I know the nursing home operators are not happy about this. I get it. It's very hard to administer. The staff all have to be tested twice a week. Okay, we're giving test kits, we've set up a lab capacity, but it is still an operational issue. I understand that and I understand that no other state is doing this. And I hear that quite often from the nursing homes. No other state is requiring that the staff be tested twice a week. I understand that. I understand we have the

most aggressive standard in the nation, but I also know that it is necessary. And look, from day one, we said this was going to be hard. And we said we drew bad cards in this hand.

New York did have the highest number of cases, not because we did anything wrong, but because the virus fooled everyone and we were closing down China and the virus had already left China and gone to Europe. And by the time we closed Europe 3 million Europeans had come from Europe and landed in New York airports. That was happening and we didn't know, close china, was already gone by the time we closed China. And it had left Europe by the time we closed Europe. That's why New York had that cluster. Those flights from Europe come here. They land in JFK. They land in Newark. People take connecting flights. They're coming here. So, that brought the virus here. That's why we have the numbers we have.

Okay, but we said we're going to do what we have to do and we're going to do what we have to do to protect the lives of New Yorkers. Who's in a nursing home? This is your mother, this is your father, your sister, your brother. This is our family who are in nursing homes. That's who they are. And they're our senior family members who we owe nothing but gratitude and respect. And the one thing we need to be able to say at the end of this is we did everything we could. We did everything we could. 106 people died. How do you live with that? How do you sleep with that? Because we did everything we could. We still can't save every life but we can do everything in our power that we can do to try to save every life. And that's why I'm comfortable with what we're doing on nursing homes. I know it's hard and I thank them.

On reopening overall, we're opening regions that have hit the data points, hit the metrics. Western New York has one metric that they have to hit which is the number of tracers. They need 521 tracers. They've identified 525. Great piece of work that they did over the weekend. I want to thank the Mayor, I want to thank the County Executive, all the regional officials who found people to serve as tracers. They're going to be trained tomorrow, and that means all the metrics will be hit and Western New York will open tomorrow. So, that's exciting. It's been a long painful period but we start to reopen tomorrow. New York State Department of Health is also granting a waiver to restart elective procedures for ECMC. We want to make sure hospitals are in a position to provide care for people who need it. So, this is a good step. I also have been encouraging

major sports teams to plan reopenings without fans but the games could be televised. New York State will help those major sports franchises to do just that. Hockey, basketball, baseball, football, whoever can reopen we're a ready, willing and able partner. Personal disclosure, I want to watch the Buffalo Bills but I'm still objective. I'm acting as Governor. There is no personal agenda here. Yes, I do want to watch the bills but that is not subverting my role as Governor. I think this is in the best interest of all the people and in the best interest of the State of New York even though I do have a coincident personal agenda because I want to watch the Bills but they are separate agendas. At least some would say I have a conflict of interest, I want to disclose it.

The judges and staff will be returning to courthouses in the 30 upstate counties that are open this week. What will reopening mean? That's a big topic of discussion now. What does reopening mean? This is not a subject that is a political subject or where political opinions really matter. I don't care if you're Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, Independent, I don't care. I don't care. This is not a political exercise that we are going through. People say, well I have a personal opinion. I don't even care about your personal opinion. I don't think you should care about my personal opinion because it's not about a personal opinion. It's not about an ideological opinion. It's not about a geographic opinion. It's not even an opinion that's relevant. This is about facts and science and data these decisions are being made as a matter of math. It's numbers. It's math. That's all it is at the end of the day. You start to increase economic activity, you have more people coming out of their homes, more people contacting other people and then you measure the impact of that increase with numbers - not with opinions, not with politics, not with partisanship. With numbers, and then you just measure the impact.

Make sure that you don't go above 70 percent of your hospital beds so that if a large number of people get infected you have the hospital beds to take care of them. You make sure you don't go over 70 percent of your ICU bed capacity because when these people are infected with COVID they do need ICU beds. We learned that the hard way. You have testing up and running, 30 tests per 1,000 residents. Where did that come from? That's the White House Coronavirus Task Force, Dr. Birx.

You have 30 tracers ready for every 100,000 residents. That comes from the experts, and then you watch the infection rate and you make sure that you don't get near 1.1 on the infection rate. It's math and there's a liberation in that. At a time of such division in politics and elections and all this garbage this is an exercise in science and math and it's data that we can all share and we can all participate in. I encourage people to go look at the data and look at what's happening in your region because that's how we're going to get through this - on the numbers on the math, on the facts.

We're going to bring in advisers to the State, advisors who are international experts, global experts who have dealt with these kinds of diseases. This is not just a State of New York issue. It's not even an American issue. It's a global issue and I want to make sure we have people reviewing and then reviewing the reviewers and then as many opinions of experts that we can get are the best path forward. Dr. Osterholm is a nationwide expert in this field and he has agreed to review our data, what we're doing, what's happening, and to advise us as to how our progress looks on the numbers. I want to thank him very much. We to have Dr. Samir Bhatt, Senior Lecturer at Imperial College, who has agreed to serve as an advisor to the State of New York. Dr. Bhatt is the senior lecturer in geostatistics at the Imperial College in London. Geostatistics is not my field of endeavor. I never heard of geostatistics before, doctor. That's why we need you to advise us, Dr. Bhatt, because I know nothing about geostatistics. But Dr. Bhatt is joining us, I want to thank him very much. The Imperial College in London, we have had a number of projection models that were done early on by a number of very prestigious universities.

And we've been watching all these projection models since this started. As you know, many of the models were not 100 percent accurate because they couldn't calculate the effect of the social participation and what people actually did to change the curve. And in a State like New York, what the people did dramatically changed that curve so it affected the projections. But, the Imperial College model, as we've been following this for weeks, was the best, most accurate model. And therefore, I think Dr. Bhatt deserves all our thanks because they really helped us all through this to date, and I want to thank him very much for taking the time to advise us, not just on how we constructed our model to date but what happens

going forward as we increase the economic activity and we start to see numbers change. So, Doctor, thank you very much for being with us, and it's a pleasure to welcome you today.

Dr. Samir Bhatt: Thank you, Governor. It's a professional honor to work with New York. I think your state has already shown what can be achieved when policies are driven by science. And I think the sacrifices people have made and will continue to make deserves an applause. The leadership shown in New York during this crisis should be commended and I think yours is an approach for others to follow. At Imperial College London, we have a huge COVID-19 response team collaborating with scientists and government agencies globally. You in New York have successfully contained the virus for now, but New York is not out of the woods yet. No state, no country is. As you reopen, New York must continue to watch the data and follow the science. We are really eager to work with New York, as they're approaching this crisis from a scientific perspective driven by data. New York is leading the way with data collection, and this will help tie together as many sources of evidence as possible to reach a scientific consensus which can then be used for decision-making. Our team is focused on rigorous modeling to track R , or RT , as you have put it, as well. The reproduction number of the virus going forward. If R goes above 1, this means the virus is no longer contained, and we need to track the spread of this virus and the disease using the best data possible and as much of it as possible. We're committed to open science, so policymakers and citizens understand our conclusions, limitations, and of course, the uncertainties. To date, my team at Imperial has released reports for Europe, Brazil, Italy, relying on data from Google, as well as open source statistical tools developed at Columbia University. Thanks to these tools and our research network, the code is available to everyone to see, test, and to improve. As countries around the world and states around the U.S. start reopening their economies, we will see cases rise once again. And so, New York must continue to be vigilant and to follow the data. So, I think, I say, you know, Governor, thank you for this opportunity, and truly, thank you for the work you've been doing and you are doing.

Governor Cuomo: Thank you. Thank you very much, Doctor, thank you for being with us. Thank you, I look forward to speaking to you in the days ahead. I want to thank the doctor very much and the whole college. Look, I'm a parochial New Yorker. I was not all that eager to seek the advice of a college in London, but I can tell you this. This is a global pandemic,

and what we're now doing, other countries have done before. We tend to think we are always the first. We're not the first. We're not the first to deal with this virus. Other countries have dealt with it, other countries have gone through reopening, they've learned all sorts of lessons on reopening. I want to make sure that what we're doing is the best-informed approach. So, I want to thank the doctor very much, and they'll be looking exactly at what happens at our data, our metrics, going forward. And then the last point is, what's the impact of the reopening? We don't know yet what the road ahead looks like. It is a function of what we do. So, you tell me, how responsible are the employers in following the guidelines that have been put forth, right. We talk about reopening, and contracting, and agriculture, and fishing, and manufacturing. And there are safety guidelines that those employers must follow. How scrupulous they are in following those guidelines will matter. You tell me if the store owners follow the guidelines and I'll tell you what happens. You tell me if the employees are following the guidelines, and wearing the PPE, and using their hand sanitizer and I'll tell you what happens. You tell me how individuals react now that the weather is getting warmer, are they wearing masks, are they acting socially responsibly, are they staying within social distancing requirements and I'll tell you what's going to happen. You tell me how effectively a local government enforces the guidelines and I'll tell you what is going to happen.

So, none of this is predetermined. This is all a function of what we do today going forward. The smarter, the more disciplined we are the lower that infection rate will climb. The lower the infection rate climbs, the more you increase the economic activity. It is a formula. It is math. At the same time, it's liberating because it takes the politics out of it, it takes a personal opinion out of it. But it's also something you can measure and track and you will know exactly what's going to happen because it's a function of what we're doing. It's up to us. It's up to you. It's the collective, we're going to decide the future that starts today.

We should also set our goal high, right. We're coming back, we're coming back from the closing. All right, so what is our goal? I say it should not just be about we're going to reopen. Reopen suggests you're going to go back to where you were before the closure. We're going go back to the day before the closure. No. Life is never about going backwards. Life is never about I want to get back to where I was. It has to be about building back better than before. We want to go forward. We want

to advance. And that's what we have to think about going through this. Yeah, we took a hard blow and we got knocked down. No fault of our own. Whoever created that virus, mother nature, god, whoever. No fault of our own.

Welcome to life. Things happen outside of your control that you couldn't do anything about, but it just happens. And then the question becomes are you strong enough to get back up once life knocks you down? And are you smart enough to learn from what you went through in life? And when you get back up you will be the better for it. I believe that. That's my story. That's our story. That's the story of Buffalo. Getting knocked down, change in the economy. All right, but we're going to get back up because we're strong enough and we're going to learn from it, because we're smart enough. That's the story of Buffalo. That's the story of New York. That is the American story, right. It's what made this country the best country on the globe. Not that we didn't get knocked down. We got knocked down plenty, but we were smart enough to learn and strong enough to get back up. And that's where we have to set our sights. Not about reopening.

We're going to make this place better than ever before. Because what we went through is a transformative experience in life. On an individual level and on a social level. We're not going to be the people we were the day before. We're going to be better. We're going to be smarter. We're going to be stronger for what we went through. We're going to be a stronger society for what we went through. I believe that. And we're going to have a stronger Buffalo, a stronger New York, and a stronger America. And that's what it means to be New York tough, smart, united, disciplined, and loving.

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