



Southern, RFH repeat in NJ states; Jackson girls make history

SPORTS, 1C

TUESDAY 02.24.26

ASBURY PARK PRESS

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



WALLOPED

Jersey Shore blanketed with two feet-plus of snow

Joe Strupp

Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Shore towns are digging out from under the worst blizzard in decades as more than two feet of snow fell in parts of Monmouth County and Ocean County totals were nearing 18 inches in some spots as of mid-day Monday, according to the National Weather Service.

Gov. Mikie Sherill declared a state of emergency during the storm.

Tens of thousands of people across the Shore had power knocked out, while schools, government offices and shops closed amid travel restrictions. As cleanup continues, people are urged to use caution when shoveling. Meteorologist Steve DiMartino said the worst thing about this kind of snow is “it is like cement.”

“If you are shoveling this stuff, use caution and be careful because this type of snowfall can give you a heart attack because you’re lifting like 50 pounds of snow every time you shovel it,” he said.



Cars head home down West Bay Avenue in Barnegat on Feb. 22 as the snow starts to increase to blizzard conditions.

PETER ACKERMAN/ASBURY PARK PRESS

A man clears snow outside his Brick home on Feb. 23. One of the biggest snowstorms in history is leaving the Jersey Shore under blizzard conditions.

THOMAS P. COSTELLO/ASBURY PARK PRESS

BLIZZARD WATCH

Stay with APP.com for the latest updates, snowfall totals, closings, photos and more.

Religious exemption for vaccines sought in NJ

They’re easy to get because no verification is required here

Scott Fallon

NorthJersey.com | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

When legislative efforts failed to eliminate religious exemptions to mandatory school vaccinations in 2020, after months of legal wrangling and large protests, it began a steady but strong push by thousands of New Jersey parents to obtain the easy-to-get exemption.

About 25,000 children were granted religious exemptions during the 2024-25 school year — more than double the number six years ago, the latest state data shows. The rise comes as the anti-vaccine movement has grown in strength with the nation’s top health official being noted vaccine critic Robert Kennedy Jr.

Religious exemptions are helping drive the number of fully vaccinated children down to the lowest numbers in years — a development that has raised concerns among doctors and public health officials that preventable infectious diseases may start spreading.

About 91% of New Jersey students were fully compliant with New Jersey’s vaccination requirements for day care and school last year, down from about 95% in the 2017-18 academic year.

Religious exemptions are easy to get because no verification is needed.

In order to clear up confusion among day care and school administrators, the Health Department issued a memo two years ago outlining how exemptions should be processed and gave wide latitude to religious exemptions.

A parent does not need to identify membership with any religious organization, the memo says. A parent does not need to describe how vaccines run counter to their religious beliefs. They just have to ask for it.

“When a parent or guardian submits a written, signed request for exemption from mandatory immunizations due to religious beliefs, the statement should be accepted and the religious exemption granted,” the memo reads.

The New Jersey Coalition for Vaccine Choice, one of the biggest advocacy groups for keeping the religious exemption in place, gives practical advice on its website for parents: “In practice, if the letter contains the

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Asbury Park Music Awards return to Stone Pony

Chris Jordan

Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Hollywood has the Oscars, Broadway has the Tonys and now Asbury Park has the Asbury Park Music Awards — again.

Asbury Park Music Awards returned to the city after a seven-year hiatus Friday, Feb. 20, at the Stone Pony. The night was full of performances, acceptance speeches, and an outpouring of appreciation for a vibrant music scene.

“Thank you everyone, our community’s inclusive and warm and we’re so lucky,” said Not Yer Baby singer Carrot Volz as the band won the Punk/Ska/Alt Artist of the Year award. “There’s really no place like it in the world and I’m so happy to be a part of it.”

Fans, musicians and fellow travelers filled the Pony for the show’s four-plus hours.

“This is a wonderful night. This community is just so awesome,” said Stone Pony house promoter Kyle

Brendle. “A lot of the musicians, artists, and fans don’t realize that this scene is noted and recognized nationally and around the world. And here we are, this is some beautiful thing. Everybody here tonight is a winner.”

The Asbury Music Awards were founded in 1992 as the Golden T-Birds Awards by Scott Stamper and Pete Mantas of the former city club of the same name. The awards, which bestowed honors on Jeff Buckley, Ween, Evelyn Forever, Nicole Atkins and many more, were staged in various area venues until they were halted by Stamper, then the co-owner of the Saint nightclub, in 2018 without explanation.

The Saint closed its doors in 2022 but last year the Asbury Park Music Foundation announced that they were bringing the awards back. The foundation’s Jim Lenskold and Pam Flores oversaw the evening.

“Jim and Pam from the Music Foundation, they

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The band Gods performs on Feb. 20 at the Stone Pony as part of the Asbury Park Music Awards show presented by the Asbury Park Music Foundation.

CHRIS JORDAN/ASBURY PARK PRESS

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Volume 147 | Number 46

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