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N.J. police pursuits rise sharply as lockdown lifts, threatening to set new state record

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The number of New Jersey drivers fleeing police has increased sharply, officials said Monday, putting the state on track to set a new all-time record.

There were 153 State Police pursuits the first eight months of the year, according to Col. Patrick Callahan, acting superintendent of the State Police. Only 102 occurred during the same period last year.

Crashes have increased 34%, and fatalities are also up, he said.

“Getting out of a traffic summonses is no need to put everybody’s life at risk,” Callahan said at the governor’s coronavirus press briefing in Trenton.

If the pursuits continue at the same rate, New Jersey could log 260 by the end of the year, which would be a state record and about 100 more than in 2006, Callahan said.

Gov. Phil Murphy blamed the rise on a “cocktail” of factors, including “lighter traffic, folks being pent up” and stress.

The numbers include all roads patrolled by State Troopers, who also oversee 89 municipalities.

Callahan said digital highway signs would soon carry new warnings for drivers to watch their speed.

Traffic deaths originally plummeted near the beginning of the statewide shutdown, but returned to pre-pandemic levels earlier in the summer.

Three hundred and forty three people have died on the road so far this year, according to state data.