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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. When you think about what we've all been through, you think about the eyes of the world, the eyes of the nation have been on New York City and all of you in this time of unprecedented crisis. When the nation at the end of all this thinks about what happened here, when they try and put together the essence of what happened, and what New Yorkers did to try and summarize how New Yorkers confronted this extraordinary moment. I think the simple way to put it will be New Yorkers found a way through thick and thin, no matter what was thrown at you, you found a way. New Yorkers, we know for a long time, for generations, we've been a driven people in the best sense of the word. People who get things done, people who set a goal and then go and achieve it. That's who New Yorkers are. It doesn't matter where you come from, how much money there is in your bank account, it's something we all have in common. And think about the way that folks, even against extraordinary adversity found a way. Our teachers found a way. Our educators found a way to reach 1.1 million children without the benefit of school buildings and classrooms. Our entrepreneurs found a way to manufacture lifesaving supplies and equipment right here in New York City. Things that were not built here even just a couple months ago now being produced in New York City to protect our health care heroes and our first responders. And those extraordinary frontline heroes found a way through the toughest circumstances to keep going and keep saving lives.

You certainly deserve to know that your city government has found a way and will always find a way and that's what I intend to do. And all of us here at city hall and all the city agencies intend to do. So, finding a way has taken many, many forms I assure you. Sometimes things we didn't expect and help from places we didn't expect. I never would have expected that we would need to seek test kits for the coronavirus from Carmel, Indiana, but that's exactly what has happened, and that's helping us now to save lives here. I never would have expected to meet a pair of very, very good guys, EMT's, paramedics from Kalamazoo, Michigan drove through the night to come here and help out our EMT's and paramedics in their hour of need. Never ever would have anticipated the Brooklyn Navy Yard turning back the clock and becoming a wartime factory again. World War II it was a legendary shipyard creating the vessels that helped to protect us and save us. Today in the Brooklyn Navy Yard wonderful people, from the folks who own the companies to the folks who are sewing the surgical gowns and making the face shields by hand, creating those lifesaving products for our first responders, and our health care workers. Never could have imagined any of it, but each and every time New Yorkers found a way, and there've been some areas where it was hard to find a way to be very honest. Something I, like most of us, didn't know much about surgical gowns, isolation gowns. When we came to realize how crucial they were to protecting our frontline heroes in the hospitals. We set about trying to find a supply

anywhere in the world only to find that it was very, very difficult. We needed this armor for our health care heroes, and we looked under every stone, and obviously started producing them right here, but it was nowhere near the number we would need.

Well, it often felt like we only had a few days before we were going to run out. That was the reality we were facing, but today I am happy to share some very good news, and this is one really important piece of the puzzle, because having those surgical gowns is so important to protecting the people who are protecting all of us. And I'll tell you, I want to as I say this, tell you that the local businesses that stepped up so brilliantly, they're now making 125,000 of these surgical gowns each week, right here in New York City. Again, zero were being produced two months ago, 125,000 a week and growing right now. And one company that was part of that, BCI Brands. They've been working closely with the city's Economic Development Corporation. One day, not so long ago, they shared a very important piece of information with the city. They said they had a sister factory in Vietnam that was capable of much greater production. The factory is called Viet Thanh Garment and we immediately knew we needed this help. Again, we had to find a way, but it was not going to be easy. The logistics were not going to be easy. It was not like getting something from just down the street. This was going to be a whole other endeavor, and the questions were many. How would we get the massive quantity of fabric needed to create the gowns far away in Vietnam? Could we get the, the planes put together? We literally have to find 747's to bring these products back. Could we do it all immediately? Because the need was immediate. And I want to thank everyone at the city's Economic Development Corporation, because when presented with all these questions, some of which seemed extremely daunting, the answer to each and every one of them was yes, and they found a way.

So, we now have, for the first time in this crisis, a large-scale provider of surgical gowns for New York City. Over a million gowns are now on their way as we speak to the city. Another 900,000 will be on their way next week, and 3 million more are being produced as we speak. We're sending fabric to the factory in Vietnam so they can make even more. Now, this is something that I have to tell you, we've been measuring our supply of surgical gowns, isolation gowns. We've been in all these similar protective garments. We've been measuring our supply in days. That's how tight it has been, whether we could even get through any individual week. But now, because we have this strong production right here, and because of this extraordinary partnership with the factory in Vietnam, we are now confident that we will have enough surgical gowns to get us to the middle of May. And that's, I have to tell you compared to any other point in this crisis, that's the best we've been able to achieve, not out of the woods for the long haul, more to do. And clearly want to emphasize to all the frontline health care workers, this is not the ideal standard. We're still operating at that crisis standard where we're providing the PPE's, but we'd like to provide even more, but at least for the first time in quite a while we can say we have a secure supply for the weeks ahead. And now we can get the hospitals, the nursing homes, what they need on a much steadier basis, and that is very good news for protecting our heroes and helping them save lives.

Now, another place where we had to find a way was when it came to testing. Testing, this has been the central issue during this whole crisis. The absence of testing from the beginning. The fact that testing is still so hard to get now, and the unclear as a charitable term, the unclear role of

the federal government, the absence of the federal government as the driving force throughout this whole process when it comes to testing. Remember, testing is how we get to that next phase. Testing is how we get out of widespread transmission of the coronavirus and onto the next phase where we can start to get life back to normal. Testing is key to everything. So, for so long the testing we had was very limited, and the focus had to be on saving lives in the hospitals on protecting our health care workers, knowing who had the disease, who didn't, who needed to get home or get treatment, who was able to stay at work, and the same with our first responders. But in recent weeks, the last couple of weeks, we finally had the testing capacity, and the personnel, and the PPE's to actually go out and do community-based testing the way we want to do a lot more of. We finally are getting this to grow into something much more important and bigger at the community level.

So, just a few weeks ago, there were literally no sites that weren't attached directly to a hospital. Now, there are 11 community sites open. Eight at Health and Hospitals clinics all over the five boroughs, three at New York City Housing Authority sites. And those three sites are now open at the Jonathan Williams Houses in Williamsburg, at the Woodside Houses in Woodside, Queens, and Saint Nicholas Houses in Harlem. So, that has been a big step forward. We're now going to go a lot farther. This fits beautifully with what we have to do to build up a much bigger test and trace mechanism. So, this is the first of many steps we're going to take. I'm also pleased to announce there will be new sites opening as part of this community testing initiative. Two more Health and Hospitals sites will open this weekend at the Ida G Israel Clinic in Coney Island, and the Dikeman Clinica de Las Americas in Inwood in Manhattan. Starting next week, we will also provide community testing on a broader scale at all 11 Health + Hospital hospital locations as well. So, as you can see, this is really growing rapidly, and it is the precursor to a much bigger test and trace operation that's going to grow throughout May. Again, we're here to serve the communities that are hardest hit, and we're going to be growing out from there to reach more and more New Yorkers across the whole city, every community. And I want to remind you, the first priority always is folks who are older, and folks who have those preexisting conditions, and particularly if someone fits both those categories. So, more and more testing in the communities that are having the toughest time, the coronavirus that then will blend into a true citywide test and trace operation reaching into every corner of the five boroughs.

So, when you add in everything that we have planned, we'll go from the 11 sites now to 30 sites tripling the number by the week of May 18th. So, this is now really moving fast, testing dynamics are changing, thank God, we talked a few days ago about the self-swab test that's going to simplify things and speed up the testing process. We still have more work to do with the labs to extend lab capacity for that test and we need more lab capacity overall, this is still the big missing link lab capacity and the products that go into the lab process like the reagents. This is still where we need help from the federal government on a big scale, but more and more since we're finding more and more sites we can use, we have more and more personnel and PPEs we can apply. We're able to use this simpler self-swab test, the expansion is really moving, so 11 sites now will be 30 sites by the week of May 18th, and we'll be able to triple the number of tests given each week, so now we're at about 14,000 tests per week. Again, getting faster, the more we do it more efficient, the more we do it, by the week of May 4th it'll be 35,000 tests a week, by the week of May 18th, 43,000 tests a week, and we want to go a lot farther from there.

Now, want to talk about the way we link up the things that we've achieved so far. Getting more and more of the PPEs, getting more and more of the testing link that concept up with what all of you have achieved by your extraordinary devotion to social distancing, to shelter in place, to the things that have been working. Another piece of this that has clearly been working is face coverings, talked about this weeks ago when the evidence came in that was time to tell New Yorkers, everyone needs a face covering outside, I want to thank you because overwhelmingly New Yorkers took that instruction and ran with it. When the City gave that guidance initially New Yorkers really moved fast to take it and make it a part of your everyday life and it's helped and it's helps protect everyone and again, face coverings means a scarf, a bandana, anything you can create a home, not a fancy medical grade mask, just anything that you can create at home. A lot of people are getting mask from a hardware store or something like that, whatever just keeps your nose and mouth covered, people have been doing this really, really well, but we know there's some people that still don't have a face covering and need one or some people that need to be reminded energetically that this is now a rule that everyone needs to follow. So, with more folks going outside the warmer weather coming, we want to keep limiting the time outside as always, but we know as it gets warmer, people will come out for their exercise, that's fine, get your exercise and get back home. We want to keep people safe; everyone needs to have a face covering on. Now, a place where you particularly have to be attentive and I want to remind people these rules, when you go into a grocery store or supermarket, a pharmacy, you have to have that face covering on. You have to, you have to do that out of respect for your fellow New Yorkers, you have to do that to help protect everyone. Remember when this disease is not spreading, it's also protecting you and your family, everyone you love, that face covering helps reduce the spread of the disease. So, you need to do that and if you don't do that, you're actually putting people at risk and if you don't do that, we've made very clear to the owners and managers and employees of those grocery stores, those department stores, excuse me, those supermarkets, those pharmacies that if someone comes in and is not wearing a face covering of course, it's great to remind them, Hey, you don't have your face covering put it on right away, please. If someone doesn't have a face covering with them or isn't willing, they need to get out of the store, let's be abundantly clear. We've said in the City will back them up and if the store owner or manager needs support from any city agency, including NYPD, we will be there right away. No one goes into a grocery store, a supermarket or a pharmacy without a face covering on. If you try to, the people in the store have every right to send you right back the other way out and we will back them up a hundred percent so again, really clear rules, let's all follow them, it's just for the protection of everybody.

Now, again, want to make it easy for people to have face covering, so we're going to start to give them out free in our City parks. We know it's going to get warm; we know people to go to the parks, again, want people to keep some real limits on that, but I want everyone to have a face covering. Sometimes someone just forgot at home that we understand, some people are having trouble finding one, okay, we're going to start giving them out for free. So, a hundred thousand will be given out starting this week and we'll keep going from there. We're going to focus on parks where we expect a lot of people to be, we're going to focus on communities that have been the hardest hit by the disease. Anyone wants to know where these face covering distributions are going to be, you can go to [nyc.gov/facecoverings](https://nyc.gov/facecoverings).

Now, social distancing has been absolutely crucial, it's working, and another type of heroism has been the quiet heroism of so many of our city employees who have been out there, our public servants, educating people, reminding people that it was really important to practice social distancing. And it took some time, it's not normal for New Yorkers we understand it's taken a lot of adjustment, but a whole lot of our city employees have been out there doing a great job educating people, very persuasively, reminding them that this has to happen. The NYPD has been in the front line of that effort, I want to thank all our officers who are doing that work and all the members of all our agencies who have been doing that work. Look, we know this isn't easy sometimes and it certainly wasn't what people thought would be part of their regular job, but we need it and it's making a big difference. So, NYPD has been in the frontline of this, we're going to bring more and more other agencies to this effort and we now have over a thousand non-NYPD city workers who are being assigned to patrol parks and public spaces. They're from the Parks Department, the Office of Special Enforcement, Sanitation, Fire Department, Environmental Protection, and the Sheriff's Office. So, this is a big group, a lot of them have been out there already more will come and we're going to keep building this ability to be out there in public spaces, educating, patrolling, but also enforcing. At the same time these public servants will have a lot of face coverings with them and they'll be able to distribute them to anyone that needs them for free. Every time we give out these face coverings, I emphasize it will be for free and they'll be distributing 275,000 face covering starting this week. So, it's going to be really easy to get a face covering and everyone needs to stick with using those face coverings all the time when you're outside.

Now, let's talk about some good news for the heroes who have been doing so much for all of us, our health care workers, our first responders. Something very good happened earlier on this crisis and I want to thank everyone at Citi Bike. They did, they created something called a critical workforce program, they gave first responders, transit workers, health care workers, a free month of membership and 5,500 of them signed up and took advantage of that and were able to get around using Citi Bike. I want to say with great appreciation, the Citi Bike is now expanding this to a one year free membership and it will be offered to an even broader set of essential workers, I want to thank folks at Citi, which provided and MasterCard, both Citi and MasterCard have provided tremendous support, a million dollars to fund this program. This is going to be fantastic for helping people get around who need this alternative. And on top of that Citi Bike, we'll be expanding with a hundred new stations, docking stations in the Bronx and Manhattan, including key locations that have been the frontline of this crisis, including Lincoln Hospital and Harlem Hospital. And it will help everyone, these new stations of course will be open to all and they'll give more and more options to more and more people, so that's a great, great step forward. I want to thank Lyft, which is a company that now owns Citi Bike, this is a great step forward, thanks to everyone at Lyft, thanks to everyone at Citi for investing in this program. And again, MasterCard as well for investing in this program, we appreciate this initiative that's going to make a big difference. And while I'm giving some thanks out, I'd like to thank some more organizations that have, and it's just wonderful when people step up from New York City and it really shows that a lot of people, a lot of organizations that have for a long time benefit from their connection to New York City are remembering that and honoring that and stepping up from New York City and we are very, very appreciative.

First of all, our friends at the NBA have donated over a thousand N95 mask and 30,000 surgical mask and we thank them for that. American Eagle has donated 175,000 surgical mask, that's fantastic and the Consulate of Egypt has donated 200,000 surgical mask, 3000 protective suits and 2000 surgical gowns. We are very, very appreciative to all now that's in the category of the protective gear, there's been some other great donations. AT&T donated a hundred thousand dollars to our food for heroes effort through the Mayor's fund. Fresh cosmetics has donated \$205,000 worth of personal cleaning products to our Health and the Hospitals locations and to the isolation centers, working on behalf of our homeless New Yorkers. And Facebook – this is really fantastic – Facebook is helping out our small businesses that are going through so much right now. We need all the support we can get and most especially we need the federal government to keep stepping up and putting real money into supporting our small businesses, but this is a great example and we're going to be doing more and more of this to get in every conceivable source of support for small business. Facebook has launched a \$6.5 million grant program for New York City small businesses specifically, and it is help our small businesses richly deserve. I want to thank everyone at Facebook. This is a great initiative - any small business owner wants to apply, can go to [facebook.com/grantsforbusiness](https://facebook.com/grantsforbusiness).

Now, on that same note, obviously the key here is the federal aid and we know the first round of the federal support for small business – the Paycheck Protection Program – it did not work as planned on many levels. A lot of big businesses tried to usurp the money; it was a hard process to make sense of. A lot of businesses couldn't get their applications in time; a lot of businesses didn't have the relationships with the banks that made it easier. There were a lot of problems that came up in that first program granted, it was an important program. It was put together quickly in a crisis, but the good news is that, especially through the leadership of Senator Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Congressmember Nydia Velázquez, the Paycheck Protection Program got replenished with \$310 billion and made more available to businesses that don't have those traditional big bank relationships; businesses that use local credit unions more, smaller mom and pop businesses, community-based businesses, businesses in communities of color. A lot was done to improve the program. So, \$310 billion, an astounding amount of money, but we need to make sure it goes to New York City small businesses – it's going fast. So again, every small business who needs that help, if you haven't applied - apply immediately. Go to [sba.gov](https://sba.gov) – for the Small Business Administration – [sba.gov](https://sba.gov) that's where the federal application is. Get it in as quickly as possible and as I announced any small business that's having trouble navigating the application process can call 3-1-1 and our team at Small Business Services and other agencies will help small business owners to navigate this process, but we've got to get these applications in right away to help our small businesses. So, please pick up the phone if you need help.

Now, let's go to the daily indicators. This is what we talk about every day and so important to track them all together. And so today we have a very good day. We don't have a perfect day, but a very good day. And again, I constantly see progress here because of everything you're doing. I want to get to those days where we hit all the notes and keep hitting them, but, overall, we still see real progress. So, daily number of people admitted to hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – down 136 to 129, so small amount of progress, but still progress. Daily number of people in ICUs across Health + Hospitals for COVID-19 – down 734 to 705. Percentage of people who are testing positive citywide down 23 percent to 22 percent, again small progress, but progress nonetheless. Public health lab, this is again the toughest measure in many ways – went up, not by

a huge amount, but it went up 29 percent to 36 percent. So, overall a good day overall moving in the right direction, keep doing what you're doing because it is clearly working.

So, I'm going to close and a few words in Spanish and then we'll turn to our colleagues in the media, but, but just want to come back to that notion of finding a way. Again, it's a very New York City idea; it's a New York City way of life. You know, New Yorkers for generations have known how to make something out of nothing; how to take what looked to be impossible odds and turn them around. It's happening over and over and over again in this crisis. It's been amazing to watch. My respect for all of you was intense before this crisis. It has grown even more because I've watched this city somehow fight back this disease and do it with an incredible strength and a compassion for each other; that's what New York City's all about. So, we're going to find a way, and I can tell you what we're all going to do here at City Hall. One way or another, we're going to find a way to get more testing; we're going to find a way to create the biggest testing and tracing program this city, this nation has ever seen. One way or another, we're going to get those supplies, that equipment that protects our heroes. We will find a way, we will find a way to restart the city and we will find a way to recover. And we actually will find a way to come back in many ways stronger, and fairer, and better. I have absolute faith in the people in this city. So, we know how to find a way that's who we are and we will find a way to beat this disease.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that we will turn to our colleagues in the media. And as always, please let me know the name and the outlet of each journalist

**Moderator:** And a quick reminder to folks that we have Dr. Barbot and Dr. Katz on the phone. And the first question goes to Juliet from 1010 Wins, Juliet.

**Question:** Oh, hi. Good morning all, how are you today?

**Mayor:** Hey Juliet, how are you?

**Question:** I'm okay, so I have a question. I've seen and reported a chronic rat infestation. It has been a swarm of rats coming out of the sewer and crawling on garbage bags left on the street on Sixth Avenue and I was informed by 3-1-1 and then the Health Department that pest control teams are not responding due to social distancing regulations. Now, I don't know whether you've seen the situation in New Orleans where the rats are out in the streets in droves. So why isn't pest control responding and are you concerned about a rat problem getting out of control here?

**Mayor:** Juliet, thank you for the question. I have to say it's a very graphic question, but thank you. As New Yorkers, unfortunately we know way too much about rats and we are certainly not going to ever let it get to be a worse situation. We're going to fight it back. Look, in the beginning of the crisis, Juliet, a lot of the normal way we did business had to be changed. Remember that for weeks in March going into the beginning of April, it looked like this was going to become an even deeper health care crisis and everything was about making sure the disease didn't spread, making sure we were really forcefully keeping people inside to the

maximum extent possible. And we had to be smart about our public employees because everyone that could be kept in and could socially distance, we had to do that. But now we have a situation that's improving. We got still a long way to go, but we have a situation that's improving so we cannot let that situation with the rats you describe get out of hand and we will address it head on. I'll follow up today with the Health Department; we'll assess the right way to address that while still being mindful that we have to use only the minimal amount of city personnel while still trying to keep everyone in who we can, but we're certainly going to address that problem.

**Moderator:** Next is Andy from the Gay City News, Andy?

**Question:** Yes, hi Mr. Mayor. Good to see you.

**Mayor:** How you doing man?

**Question:** Yeah, I'm okay. I'm 66 and overweight, but, you know, we'll hope to get through this. Two questions, you proposed a rent freeze and renters being allowed to use their security deposits for rent, but the Rent Guidelines Board has always had the legal power to lower rents. The group Housing Justice is calling for a three percent decrease in rents; a roll back given the severity of the crisis. Might this not be the time to roll back rents? And second, the United States Navy Ship Comfort – the hospital ship – is going back to Virginia. What then is the need for Franklin Graham Samaritan's Purse in Central Park? And are you at all concerned that they've been filming dying patients and using them in their fundraising ads on television and online and proselytizing for their religion while caring for the patients?

**Mayor:** Well, Andy, that one, this is the first-time hearing anything like that and I would be deeply concerned if that was happening. I mean, look, when we all first heard about a field hospital near Sinai Hospital, you know, it was in a moment where the disease was growing rapidly and it was part of an effort to provide more and more care for people as the situation got worse and worse. And honestly, when I first heard about it, I had no idea about the history of the organization. The more I learned, the more concern I got. There've been a number of efforts to make clear, and I want to say everyone at the hospital has been very clear about this, that that no discrimination was acceptable in any way that everyone who worked there had to serve anyone and everyone equally and from everything I've heard that was enforced. I'm going to leave it to the people at Mount Sinai to determine if they still need the help to protect lives; that is the first concern here and whether that, whether that field hospital is still needed. That's something I want them to first pass judgment on. But, on the question of using footage to promote an organization that clearly has exclusionary values, I would be very concerned about that. And I would ask that Mount Sinai lay down the law about that and make clear that that's not something appropriate. They came here in principle to help save lives- that is good. That is something we all agree on, but we do not want to see the experience here in New York City used in some way to proselytize for any kind of exclusionary values. On the question of the rent, look, rent freeze to me makes a lot of sense given what people are going through. The Rent Guidelines Board needs to look at the, what the sheer totality of what tenants have experienced – it's overwhelming, it's unprecedented – the only comparison is the Great Depression. The people that are hurting the most in this equation are the tenants. I am certain, a lot of landlords are going through a lot too, especially smaller landlords. I don't belittle that at all, but rent freeze is the way to go because it



protects the interests of renters but also recognizes that the buildings have to keep running and renters need that too. So, that, from my point of view, is the right balance to strike. I certainly think the Rent Guidelines Board should consider all the facts. There's other proposals on the table, they should look at them, but I think the balanced approach is a rent freeze.

**Moderator:** Next is Julia from the Post. Julia?

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor and to everyone else on the call – just two questions. One, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams said yesterday that the City needs to create a bereavement committee to deal with the surging deaths due to the coronavirus that would bring in more funeral directors, morgues, MEs, and clergy to assure the deceased are treated in a dignified manner. That's after police found dozens of bodies being stored in unrefrigerated U-Haul trucks outside of a Brooklyn funeral home. And then secondly, you mentioned the ramping up of testing. I was looking for an update of New York City's homegrown testing effort given that it's now April 30th and you said it would start producing 50,000 tests a week at the beginning of May. Can you say what labs, universities, or other companies are involved?

**Mayor:** Yeah, that testing effort is moving forward, Julia. I'll confirm with folks, I don't have all the details in front of me now, but I got an update yesterday. It is definitely moving forward aggressively and we will be able to confirm very shortly the exact participants in it, but they're doing good work. We'll get that out on the proposal by Borough President Eric Adams. I think it's a good idea. Now, this horrible situation that occurred with the funeral home in Brooklyn. Absolutely unacceptable. Let's be clear about this. Funeral homes are private organizations, private businesses, they have an obligation to the people they serve to treat them with dignity. I have no idea in the world how any funeral home could let this happen. The City historically does not have a direct working relationship with funeral homes. They are regulated by the State of New York.

So, it's not an area that we work with a lot, but again, we all have to work together to solve problems. I don't understand in this case, if the funeral home – I heard something about a driver didn't show up or something like that. Why on Earth did they not either alert the State, who regulates them, or go to their NYPD precinct and ask for help, do something rather than leave the bodies there. It's unconscionable to me. So, we will all work together and I think what Borough President Adams has said is smart. Get everyone talking to each other. Bring in our clergy who obviously brings so much perspective about what families need in this moment. So, I think that's a good idea and we'll find some way to create something like that, get everyone communicating and working together.

**Moderator:** Henry from Bloomberg is up next. Henry?

**Question:** Hello, Mr. Mayor, good to see you again. I'm going to go back to the question I really asked yesterday because I think it got deflected into the problems with social distancing and that incident in Brooklyn with the funeral for the rabbi. And the question that I'd want to focus on is how do you assess the risk to New Yorkers in trying to come back to some semblance of everyday life, whether it's playing a game of tennis, whether it's shooting foul shots on a playground, whether it's, you know, just meeting up with your relatives for some kind of social

interaction? When does the City decide to give New Yorkers some kind of break, some kind of relief? And of course, overriding this whole thing is the question of opening the school at a time when we're getting contradictory evidence of whether kids are contagious or not, whether they spread the disease. There are conflicting studies on that, whether asymptomatic kids spread the disease or not. How do you intend to go about assessing the risk and making a move back toward the life that we knew six weeks ago?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Well, Henry, again, very fair, good question, and a very real-world question. I appreciate that. First of all, we are going to get back. The how and the when are still unclear and the facts are not all in and the science is still – you know, we need a lot more scientific understanding of this disease to get to the point where I would say we are fully normal and obviously what we all pray for, a vaccine and even better a cure. But I think the way you put it's important, sort of, thinking about the stages, thinking about the things that might be more appropriate to do or less dangerous to do versus other things. So, first of all, when I think of schools, schools mean a lot of people in a close space. That's just the reality. This is New York City, 1.1 million kids in our school system. I saw a picture a few weeks ago of a preschool in Denmark. I think they were the first country in Europe to try and bring back at least education for the youngest kids. And the picture had a big open space, a big open yard, and a few kids and they were distanced, and I thought, that's wonderful if you're in Denmark, but that's not what we have here. We have schools, so many of them, that are just filled with both kids and adults.

And in fact, we've been building a huge number of new schools all the time because in many of our communities we still have overcrowding in our schools. So, the notion of bringing back school, to me, that is one of the most sensitive decisions because it inherently means putting a lot of people in the same place. And I think it's absolutely right to say that can't happen until September and it's going to take a lot of work to get it right for September, but that's the right goal. But on other things like you mentioned, you know, I think we're going to see the combination of what does the science bring because there is always the possibility of real innovations, either new information that tells us how to better fight this disease or the possibility, obviously, of something like a vaccine would be a game changer. So, the science is one of the X-factors.

Our own efforts, how New Yorkers stick with social distancing and staying at home is going to have a lot to say with what we're going to be able to do because the more they do that, the more we'd beat back the disease, the more we get back to normal. So, it's – the painful part about fighting our way through is actually the part about also liberating ourselves. We're not going to fall for these cheap slogans about being liberated. The way to liberate ourselves is to stick to the plan, fight our way through, and get to the point where people can start to resume more of their lives. So, it's following the current rules and then the test-and-tracing program, which is really going to be a big offensive thrust, if you will, to go out there and change the dynamics on the ground with a much greater amount of testing and then the tracing of the contacts and the isolation, quarantine. We do all that right, the day's going to come where we're going to start to lift some restrictions. When you think about how you lift the restrictions, then your question becomes very pertinent. Are there things you can do, piece by piece?

So, I spent many a day as a child shooting foul shots. Sometimes alone, sometimes like with one other friend, or playing Horse or something like that. You think about that, you're like, oh, that'd be okay. The problem is you put back up, you know, the rim and the net and then it's going to be very, very tempting to kids to start to play full games with lots of kids, and then you got a problem on your hands. So, we have to be really smart about it. We've talked about something like the beach – you say, well, what if we just invite a few people, if you will, and they have to socially distance. It's going to be very hard to do that and not turn into a lot of people, not socially distanced. We're going to have to do this very carefully.

So, what we will do, Henry, is present the next stage as we're getting close to it, we're not there yet, and you can see from the indicators, we're just not there yet. But when we get close to the point we can do some loosening up, we're going to literally delineate what it's going to be and it will be, do some, a little, try it, see if it works, and then try and do more, but stage by stage, piece by piece. But even the examples you give, unfortunately, they rarely end up being linear, if you will. That something that first seems like wouldn't that be a great individual activity, it could lead to group activities, and that's what we're not ready for. And then the last thing we're ready for is, of course, huge gatherings. That's going to be one of the last things to come online. We're just going to have to do this in stages and be disciplined and the indicators are going to tell us when it's time for that.

**Moderator:** Marcia from CBS-2 is up next. Marcia?

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

**Mayor:** Good, Marcia, how are you?

**Question:** My first question has to do again with the homeless on the subways. I wonder if you think that cleaning the subways every 24 hours is really the way to get the homeless off the subway since it seems that they're just going to get back on again anyway. I wonder if the solution is to send teams of outreach workers and NYPD cops to each of the ten end-of-line stations you spoke of, every night to try to convince them to leave the subways and get into some form of shelter or hotel. And my second question has to do with the unrefrigerated bodies. I'm wondering if there's anything the City can do to help these funeral directors. I don't know whether there's anything like a portable crematorium or you can do more temporary burials at Hart Island, but something to relieve this burden that they're all facing.

**Mayor:** Yeah. Marcia, look, I always am very careful when I speak about this very sad topic and I don't go into a lot of detail, but my strong impression – I've asked this question a number of times – is that the funeral homes know that there's a lot of support available if they need it. Overwhelmingly, they've been doing their job under tough circumstances. You know, I think this was abhorrent. I think this horrible incident, which again, I think it's unconscionable, I just don't understand how they let this happen, but that funeral home shouldn't have let it happen. Like I said, if they really were out of options, they should have called the precinct and we would have found some way to help them. But I do not see that as a widespread reality. They've gone through a lot, but they've managed to keep providing support for people. You know, overwhelmingly the funeral homes have done a very admirable job in this tough situation. So, I

do not get the sense that those kinds of extraordinary measures are needed. We will support them anyway we can and we'll keep watching for what they need. But I think they're doing a very admirable job, the vast majority of them.

On the question of the subway – yeah, the idea that I absolutely believe in is the combination of NYPD and homeless outreach workers. It's proven to be very, very effective both above ground and in the subways. But the problem has been when homeless individuals are able to just go back and forth all night on the same train. We've got to disrupt that. What I proposed is have those ten key stations shut down in the overnight hours, have a shuttle bus instead. And that's exactly when we would surge NYPD and outreach workers to those places when the last train comes in and deal with all homeless folks who are there and just use every tool we have to convince them to come into a Safe Haven and stay in and not go back to the street. More cleaning is good. Let me emphasize, Marcia, more cleaning is always good, but I think the notion of the disruptive strategies, this is what we really believe in, to encourage homeless folks not to follow the same old pattern they've been following bluntly for decades, but to recognize that a lot of help is there for them and we're going to provide them whatever it takes. If some need mental health services, some need to kick a drug habit, need substance abuse services. Some of them, if there's just enough conversation, enough trust building that they can be safe in a Safe Haven and get medical care, get food, they will become convinced to come in and I'm absolutely convinced if we do that enough times, we're going to change the reality of homelessness on our streets once and for all.

**Moderator:** Dave from ABC-7. Dave?

**Question:** Hey, Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Dave, how you been?

**Question:** Yeah, I've been fine. I wanted to ask you about something that you said during your presentation and that was this thousand City employees who are going to be backing up police on enforcing social distancing and helping out to distribute some of the masks. I found it ironic that we're bringing this up today when one of the messages coming from the White House is to relax these social distancing rules and the requirements that people should wear masks when they're outside. I just wanted to get your thoughts on that, that how the City seems to be going in one direction while the rest of the country seems to be going in another, at least the direction from the White House.

**Mayor:** Dave, you used an interesting phrase in a very charitable phrase, 'direction from the White House'. We have not gotten direction from the White House since January. We've gotten the biggest moving target in the history of the United States of America. No two days are the same. I mean, you watch the briefings and it's the magical mystery tour. So, you know, in the end it's sad, it's really sad, but it's incoherent. And the notion – you know, the President of the United States was tweeting those, liberate Michigan, liberate Virginia, all that – incredibly dangerous. So, telling people, open up, there's nothing to worry about, when we see the horrible things happening at the meat packing plants and the horrible stories of nursing homes around the country – what is he thinking? It's unbelievable. So, here's what we know in New York City, we know we have not beaten this disease yet and we're going to take a tough line and hold the line

until we do beat this disease because that is the only way to come back safely. It's the only way to protect people's health and safety – is to hold the line and then when we actually do those steps towards restarting the economy, they will hold, they will work. We won't have that boomerang. Dave, that is not to say we won't have some good days and bad days. You know, as we start to open up, we may have some setbacks, but if we're tough about it, those setbacks can be kept to a minimum and we can ultimately get to something normal again.

What I fear, Dave, is when the president tells everyone to loosen up and we're already seeing, you know, people flocking to the beaches in some of these states and, you know, congregating again, there's going to be a flare up and it's going to set them back. But I'm also worried for New York that the more the disease starts to spread around the country, just as we're beating it back, that puts us in danger again. So, no, it is no time to loosen up. There are some places in the country that have real evidence that they can take certain steps, but they should take the first step and then watch to see if it works. Second step, watch to see if it works, and always be ready to pull back if it's not working. But the places that are just saying go with it, you know, good luck out there, they're going to – I fear they're going to pay a steep price and the president is not helping with that kind of language.

**Moderator:** Katie from the Wall Street Journal is up next – Katie. Katie, can you hear us?

**Question:** Can you hear me?

**Moderator:** Yes.

**Question:** I'm here. Thanks for taking my question. I was hoping for an update. I know that the City announced opportunities for people to utilize hotels for quarantine. Whether it's people who are sick, have symptoms, or even just live in quarters in some of the hardest hit neighborhoods. Could you just give an update on how many families and individuals have access to the program and just an update – I know apart from some people who say they don't know how to find out about this and actually access this. So, if you have some information on that. Thank you.

**Mayor:** I have – thank you, Katie. Very good questions and very important questions. And this is – we're at a point on a continuum. So, I want to tell you where we are now versus where we're going. I don't have the exact numbers in front of me. Our team will give them to you, but it's a great question because it really gets to the heart of what we have to do with testing and tracing. So, to date, we started with – remember the hotel rooms were going to be all about hospital facilities. Thank God we didn't need them. Then we focused them first on health care workers getting what they needed, first responders getting what they needed, if they needed a place to stay and they couldn't go home to their families. Then we started opening up to families who needed a place to isolate, individuals who needed to isolate away from their family if they might be sick. Obviously, more and more, trying to reach homeless New Yorkers.

So, a lot of pieces are now moving aggressively – folks who have come out of hospitals but aren't able yet to go back to their families. There's all sorts of categories. What we have not had to date is that sort of central apparatus to do this on a vast scale. And that's what test-and-trace is going to provide. So, for example, the other day, Saturday, I was at the Morrisania clinic, the

Health + Hospitals clinic in the South Bronx – extraordinary operation. And I got into this very conversation with the doctors and nurses there about when they tested people, how did it work to get someone who needed to get to an isolation room. And they said if a test came back positive and someone couldn't properly isolate at home, the social worker for the clinic would then connect them to a hotel room. So, it was a facilitated process.

We need to do that now on a big, citywide scale that it's all facilitated. Once an individual is identified that they get that helping hand to make the arrangements and then once they're in the room, food, of course, is provided, medical support, laundry, you name it. It's a big, big endeavor. It's a costly endeavor, but it's how we beat back this disease. So, test-and-trace is going to get going really intensely in May, and a key part of it will be that direct facilitation where people know exactly where to call, or they are called, to connect them to the hotel room and make sure the arrangements are made, the transportation is there for them, etcetera. That's what's coming out soon.

**Moderator:** Yoav from The City is up next. Yoav?

**Question:** Yeah. Hi, Mr. Mayor, on the funeral home issue – this actually isn't the first case where a funeral home has struggled. The main issue seems to be the lack of storage space. And I guess I'm just wondering if there isn't more the City could do as far as perhaps coordinating with the funeral homes to address some of the systemic issues? You know, if the issue is a shortage of refrigerated trucks perhaps that's something either the City or – I recognize the State oversees funeral homes, but that's something that would be better coordinated on a citywide level perhaps than at the single funeral home level? And the other issue is, you know, a funeral home calling a local police precinct when they're dealing with an issue like this is not really intuitive. I guess I'm wondering if there's a more formal kind of communication, you know area that the City can set up so that funeral homes have kind of a known place to come with their issues?

**Mayor:** Well, Yoav, it's a fair question. Again, the – remember this is something that when this crisis began just weeks ago, this was not an area the City had relationships in. I mean, the places that we don't regulate, it's not surprising to you – we just don't have those natural relationships. And we've had to start working with the funeral homes and in fact there has been a weekly call with funeral homes and City personnel to go over the support the City was providing and to go over what the latest rules and ideas for dealing with a situation we're in. And to also offer an opportunity to deal with any problems they were having. So there has been an outreach effort.

There definitely is a substantial amount of refrigerated trucks available. The fact is, what I was trying to say about the police precinct is, if for whatever reason this funeral home had not had contact with the City or didn't know how to turn to the State folks they deal with or whatever, anyone in a just a human crisis like that, Yoav – I don't think it's so mysterious at all. If you were dealing with a horrible crisis like that, it was true that the funeral home had something break down and they couldn't deal with the situation. And you're talking about, you know, the, the deceased loved ones of, you know, families, I'm sorry, it's not hard to figure out if nothing else is working call the NYPD. It was an emergency situation. So, I'm very disappointed they didn't do that. And I'm not – they are a private business. They have responsibility here. I'm not going to say, Oh, you know, they don't bear any responsibility. No, they do bear responsibility. They

should have figured it out. But we have been able to provide ongoing information and support. We will continue to deepen that. Anything we can do, we want to do. And I think again, the Borough President's idea of a committee that not just is about funeral homes, but clergy and just all of us thinking together – thankfully, let us pray against a backdrop of fewer and fewer people being lost. I think that does make sense, that we'll pull that together just to increase the amount of information and support.

**Moderator:** Gloria from NY1 is up next. Gloria?

**Question:** Hi. Good morning. Mr. Mayor, I want to follow up on these City workers who will be enforcing social distancing. If you could just talk a little bit about which City workers they will be? Are they going to be civilians? And how are you going to ensure that they're doing this properly? There are people who have concerns about how social distancing is being enforced.

And then I wanted to follow up on the question around this incident at the funeral home. I guess on a broader scale, is there anything the City is doing or working on to help people who might be struggling to pay for services? People who can't afford to bury their loved ones or to give them a proper service, or they just don't have the money immediately available? Are there any City resources being set up to help with that?

**Mayor:** Yes. Gloria, we can get you the details, but yes we have been able to provide some help and we want to provide more. There's – it's a somewhat complex dynamic because there's a City element, there's a State element and obviously we also want to bring in private support and philanthropic support. Because it's not something obviously the City has done in the past on a large scale. And thank God it's not something we ever would want to have to do in the future. But you know, for people who need help, we want to make sure they get help. So, our team will get you the details. But we are very clear there are some people who are in a horrible situation, not only first and foremost because they've lost someone, but then on top of that they can't afford a burial. And you know, it just makes a bad situation so much worse. So, we want to be helpful or find other resources that will help them. That's something we're definitely doing.

On the civilian enforcement. So, I'll just go over the agencies again. In addition to NYPD we're talking about Parks Department, Office of Special Enforcement, Sanitation Department, Fire Department, Environmental Protection, and the Sheriff's Office. So all of these are City agencies that have enforcement powers that have the ability to give out violations. And we're talking about over a thousand employees from those agencies who already have that power being applied to enforcing social distancing. We've done a lot of education over the last weeks. We're going to be really clear with people, immediately move, do not in any way shape or form hesitate. If you are not doing something right, you got to stop immediately otherwise there will be enforcement. And there will be violations given, period. So, these workers are going to play a crucial role in that effort, augmenting all of the efforts of the NYPD. And then we're going to be doing more and more to help people in the process like giving out the free face coverings. So I think it's just constant education, making it easier with the face coverings, but then a whole lot of enforcement. And showing that, you know, at this point it's time for people to be really clear. We have got to stick to social distancing if we want to get through this. Folks who don't practice social distancing are prolonging this crisis and we certainly will not allow that.

**Moderator:** Anna from the Daily News is up next. Anna?

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. Two questions. What is the current citywide testing capacity for daily testing capacity? You said last week it was about 11,000. And then on the issue of the bodies of coronavirus victims, it's my understanding that the City is temporarily freezing these bodies, but that if a funeral home collects the body, they cannot give it back to the ME's Office? So I'm just curious if there are any circumstances in which a funeral home collects too many bodies, like without realizing that they're going to go run out of space, they could then go back to the ME's Office and say, hey, can you please take these bodies off your hands even though you already released them to us? Because you know, obviously the City is providing the freezing, so I don't understand why that wouldn't add into the dynamic?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Anna, respect the question. I know you're trying to get information legitimately. I'm just not going to answer any more questions today on this topic. I do not think this is what we should be focusing our public discourse on. I'll have the team get you the answers. Perfectly legitimate question, but I'm sorry. We are here to talk about addressing this disease and moving the city forward. So, and I just don't know the details on the question that you're asking.

On the testing, we'll get you the latest numbers. They're evolving for sure. The fact is that we are seeing some good things happen. More test kits because of the relationship with the company in Indiana. Soon with our own local production more options now that we have the self-swab method. We've seen some improvement in lab capacity, but this still remains the big X factor now. How much more lab capacity can we get going? So that ability to do more testing each day is growing. I'll get you the latest on what the daily number is.

**Moderator:** Erin from Politico is up next. Erin?

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. About the masks and the social distancing enforcers, first of all, the masks, if I understand it from the Governor's order, are in fact mandatory. So, are these – is the City actually going to be enforcing that you have to wear a mask? You know, I know some people don't have them, but there've been complaints about runners for instance, just choosing not to wear them or other people just not wearing them. So, if people just don't want to wear one, what is the City going to do in the absence of a fine? And then also you said yesterday there weren't any more warnings, but you said that applied to large gatherings, I think you said hundreds, but you also said thousands. Can you specify what's the threshold for when there's no warning and you go straight to a fine versus when you tell people to disperse? And finally, what kind of face coverings are they? Are they cloth that you're giving out or what are they?

**Mayor:** We'll get you the details on the type of face coverings. We've certainly used bandanas in some cases. And the type of masks that are not the medical kind, but the ones for other uses. But we'll get you the details on that. So, on the question of face coverings, I'm going to keep using the word face coverings because I want to never confuse people. You know, the N95s and all the medical grade masks, that's one thing. Face covering again, could be something very informal, but it still does the job. I'll go over again, the exact details of the State rule. But my interpretation is that everyone should be wearing a face covering when they go outside. We're going to remind



people of that. We're going to provide them to people for free. As I said, in terms of grocery stores, pharmacies, supermarkets, those are private spaces, they have every right to eject people or not let people in who don't have the face coverings. And they should do so. And we will back them up.

But I think at this point, everyone should be wearing a face covering. But we can come back to you on the exact interpretation of the State mandate. The central focus here, I think your question puts it in the right perspective. The first focus is no large gatherings. But gatherings in general are unacceptable. I use the point about hundreds and thousands to say that's not even close. If you even think about that kind of size gathering, you're so far over the line there's just nothing to talk about here. We've been at this for two months. Let's get real. Anyone who thinks about planning a large gathering or facilitates a large gathering or participates in large gathering, is really taking a chance with their own health and everybody else's health. So, you know, certainly anything, if you're talking a hundred or above, there's just nothing to discuss. You're going to get fined. And if you resist you're going to get arrested. When it gets lower than that it's the same concept. In a smaller gathering, let's say it is a few dozen people, that's not acceptable either. You have a situation there that if the police or the other enforcement agencies are walking up and people who immediately disperse and stay dispersed, great. You know, that's what we want. But if people try to stay together, they're going to be summonsed. And if they resist that they're going to be arrested. So those are the things, the gatherings are the most dangerous of all sizes. And then just enforcing regular, clear social distancing. Which is a lot of times a reminder to people. And I think that's mainly what people need. I think the big break line is when the difference between individuals who just need to be reminded to, you know, get that six feet and stick to it. Versus when people have made the decision to come together in groups, that's a pretty affirmative decision at this moment in the pandemic. And that's what will not be accepted.

**Moderator:** Last two, Todd from AM New York. Todd?

**Question:** Hi Mr. Mayor. Sorry, I missed you Tuesday night. My question being, well the police department did a really good job coordinating with the volunteer organization Shomrim, except that they are very young kids mostly. And they don't command the same respect as the rabbis of that community, as you know. We both go back a long way with that community and we know that the rabbis command the respect of that community. So, if the rabbis had told them, told the people in that community to stay home, they would have. So, isn't this an act of defiance? Isn't this something, did we – did your administration speak to Rabbi Niederman or any of the rabbis there? And to ask them and get an affirmative answer that they would encourage people to stay home?

**Mayor:** Look at Todd, I can't give you the exact tick-tock of everything that happened. I only know what was done wrong that needs to be addressed. And I do appreciate that some of the community leaders I believe associated with the synagogue involved, came forward and apologized for what happened and took responsibility. I found that very admirable and I commend them for doing that and also sending that message to the larger community. And I think overwhelmingly the community leadership, the civic leadership, the elected officials, the rabbis have sent a very powerful message throughout this crisis. That people should not gather even for religious observance, which is a very tough, painful message to have to give. But the

community leadership has been very clear about it. So, whatever happened here, it just can't happen going forward. And I think we've all made that abundantly clear. I think the message has been received loudly all over the city in every community. And we're going to stick to that. And Commissioner Shea said it powerfully yesterday, that everyone is being endangered, including our police officers when those large gatherings – but I reiterate, you know, anyone who loves their city and loves their community and loves their own people should not participate in something that will end up killing people in their own community. A large gathering unquestionably will eventually lead to a loss of life. It will spread the disease and people will die as a result. And the most likely people will die are our elders. So this is a matter where everyone has to take personal responsibility and not engage in that kind of activity. And if anyone does, they will be given a violation and a substantial one. And if need be, they will be arrested. Period.

**Moderator:** Last call goes to Brigid from WNYC. Brigid?

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Just to follow up on some of Erin's questions and your announcement today about the face coverings. I know it sounds like you don't know the details of what kind of coverings they are yet, but I would add to Erin's question, are they going to be reusable? [Inaudible] to clarify if the 100,000 that are being distributed at city parks are part of that whole 275 number, the 275,000 that you announced? And is this a one shot? Is this the City's going to distribute these 275,000 and that's it? Or are you looking to procure or get donations for more to continue to distribute more widely since obviously they're many more people who need them?

**Mayor:** I appreciate the question, Brigid. Yeah, to coin a phrase more is more. We are definitely going to do more beyond this. Well the team will follow up with you. I believe the 100,000 and the 275,000 are separate. Any way you slice it, it's a lot of face coverings and we'll keep going from there. Absolutely want to help people to do this. And it's a smart program to get them out regularly to anyone who needs it. The specific ones and whether they're the reusable kind or not, we'll get you all those details. But I think the bottom line here is it's just – look, once we announced this originally and said the evidence was now in that it was important for everyone to use a face covering, you know, I want to be really clear is we said that doesn't mean anything elaborate. And that doesn't mean that kind of fancy masks that the medical personnel use. This was literally something as simple as a bandana, a scarf, take a piece of cloth at home, build your own, create your own, express yourself. That's still true. It does not need to be elaborate to be effective. So I want to keep telling people to do that because it helps a lot. But we will make this supply available and then we'll keep going from there. Because you know, anytime we can make it easier on people, I know sometimes people go out, they forget it. That's understandable. We're human beings. We want to make it easy in every way we can. But I want people to think that it's not a small act to put on a face covering. In fact, it's a very generous, altruistic act. It helps protect everyone around you. It helps reduce the spread of disease. Think about the face coverings as yet another way to inhibit this disease. Which has done such horrifying things to New Yorkers. We need to fight it back. And this is a very simple, powerful way to do it. So we're going to do everything we can to help people use those face coverings. But I want to ask everyone with the people in your life, please, if you see someone not wearing a face covering, appeal to them to realize how important it is. We'll keep sending the message. But I want people

to also use their own ability to communicate and influence people and let them know how important this is.

Well, everyone look, as I said in this city, we find a way, and you know, literally in this fight we have gone to the ends of the Earth to find the supplies, the equipment we need to protect our first responders, protect our health care workers. The story I told you today, all the way to Vietnam to get the surgical gowns and then the amazing support we're getting from Indiana, from Michigan, from all over the country. Whatever it takes, we're going to find a way to do it. And I am so appreciative to everyone who has helped us wherever they are in America, wherever they are in the world, the hearts of people all over this world have poured out to New York City. Just like we have been there for people so many times before. So, there's a real love and respect for New York City already. But the admiration for New York City is growing as we speak, because of everything you're doing. People are watching and they feel it and they care about it and they admire the way you're fighting this fight. Let's keep fighting it. We will find a way. That's who we are, and we'll find a way to a better day in this city.

Thank you, everybody.

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