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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN'S THE SITUATION ROOM

Wolf Blitzer: As the coronavirus vaccine rolls out across the country, New York City has begun vaccinating frontline health care workers with more than 40,000 doses expected to be available today. Let's discuss with the Mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio. Mayor de Blasio, thank you so much for joining us. I understand you were there for some of the very first vaccinations in New York City – about how many vaccines have already been administered? What sort of pace do you expect for vaccinations, going forward?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Yeah, Wolf, I was there at NYU Medical Center, it was an amazing moment. I mean, literally, watching history unfold before your eyes as this vaccine goes from something that we just dreamed about to something that's really happening. And, you know, when you see a needle go into someone's arm, it's not just a medical moment. In this case, it's a shot of hope. It's a reminder that we're finally going to get liberated from this disease. So, it was very powerful. Right now, we've had – yesterday, you know, the few hospitals got it. Something like almost a hundred health care workers got yesterday. But today and beyond, you're going to see that number grow and grow constantly, and thousands and thousands in the days ahead. And we really have, you know, a huge distribution network ready to go as we get the vaccine in.

Blitzer: The willingness to get the vaccine is on the rise, but according to a new poll 27 percent of Americans still say – it's hard to believe, but they still say they wouldn't get a vaccine. When do you, Mayor, expect to get vaccinated? And will you get that vaccine on camera to set an example and encourage others to do so?

Mayor: Well, Wolf, absolutely, I'm going to get the vaccine. I'll absolutely do it on camera, because I want to show people it's safe, it's something they can believe in. The important thing I think for all leaders is to respect what our health care experts say. So, my Health Commissioner is going to tell me when – he's going to tell me when I actually am in the priority category to get a vaccine. I don't think I should get it until, like any other New Yorker, I come to the right point in line. But I'll tell you something, that number you cite, that 27 percent, I think we're going to be able to improve upon that greatly. We have a command center we've set up to distribute the vaccine. We focused on equity, because a lot of that distrust, a lot of that doubt is coming from communities of color that bore the brunt of COVID, that have real concerns – you know, distrust the government to begin with. We're going to show them every day, very transparently that the communities are getting their fair share of the vaccine, that it works – community leaders, clergy coming forward to get the vaccine. We're going to encourage that trust. And I think with every passing week, people are going to see people in their lives get it, and they're going to see they're safe, and I think people are going to end up being a lot more willing to do it.

Blitzer: Yeah, I'm certainly ready to do it. Despite all the very encouraging news about the vaccines, you are warning New Yorkers about another shutdown that potentially could be coming for New York City. But you say that should happen after Christmas. The numbers are already going, as we all know, in the wrong direction. So, why wait until after people gather to celebrate the holidays – Christmas, New Years, Kwanzaa, folks are celebrating Hanukkah right now. Why not do it now?

Mayor: Wolf, I think there's certainly an argument for that. Look, the State of New York makes this decision. I've had this conversation several times with Governor Cuomo. He's going to make the ultimate decision. But what I would say is, we've seen the numbers go up, we are concerned about our hospitals protecting the ability of hospitals to serve people. Clearly, we're going to need a pause. We're going to need a shut down. And I think the sooner, the better. I suggested Christmas as, sort of, an obvious point when the shopping's over and, you know, a lot of things are closed down at that point anyway – it's a very good time to, you know, stop activity. But if it was something the State wanted to do even sooner, I would certainly support that as well.

Blitzer: How long do you think a shutdown might be necessary?

Mayor: What our health folks always say is, it takes between two and four weeks to really see the effects of any kind of restrictions. So, the sooner we start, you know, the sooner we will reap the benefit. But I think that's the right way to think about it, somewhere between two weeks and a month is typically when you can have a real impact and knock down the infection rates substantially.

Blitzer: You guys had earlier in the year a lot of experience – bad experience with this, so you've learned a lot. What about schools? How would it affect kids going back to school?

Mayor: Look, the schools have been amazing, Wolf, and I credit our parents, educators, staff, our health care folks. Our schools in New York City are really the safest places to be in all of New York City right now, incredibly low level of infection, testing every week, constant cleaning, social distancing, mask wearing. The healthiness, the safety of the school system has been one of the bright spots during this crisis. So, I want to see them stay open. Obviously, we have to be sure we can keep them safe – and the kids, and the staff, everyone in them. So, right now, I think the key point is, continuing to test every single week, make sure our schools are safe. That's how we should make the judgement.

Blitzer: Yeah. You guys have got a lot going on. Not just you, mayors all over the country. This is not just one hot zone here or there, it's all over the country right now even in the face of the encouraging word about these vaccines. Mayor de Blasio, good luck to you. Thanks so much for joining us.

Mayor: Thank you, Wolf. Take care now.

Blitzer: And good luck to everyone in New York as well.

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