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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO VISITS SCHOOL MEAL HUB ON LOWER EAST SIDE, HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY ON COVID-19

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Everybody, all along I've said this would be a tough fight against the coronavirus and it's important we understand more and more we are fighting this war on two fronts. First, in our hospitals to save lives, but the second front now is more and more an economic one as well, where folks are struggling to make ends meet, running out of money, New Yorkers who don't have enough money to pay the rent to get the medicines they need, to get the food they need. So, we're going to talk today about our efforts to get food to New Yorkers who need it because this is a growing problem. This is a problem that's going to more and more affect the people of our city as they run out of money. And even though there is some federal help coming, it's not that much and it's going to take too long for many people. So just as we deal with the most important moment in the fight against the illness in our hospitals to save lives, there's a new front opening up and we have to be there for people who need food, cannot have any New Yorker go hungry.

Since we're talking about two fronts, I want to open on the first one and I'm going to say to all of you, it is way too early to draw any definite conclusions. I want to really make sure none of us in public life tell you we have turned a corner until we are absolutely certain. We are not there yet and I want to make sure no one stops practicing social distancing and shelter in place. We must continue those strategies if we're going to protect lives, but I can say in the last couple of days something is starting to change. We don't know if it will be sustained, but it is meaningful now. We projected to you even on Sunday that we had seen a little bit progress in terms of when we were going to need ventilators. We've seen more progress now. That means the number of people showing up in our hospitals who need a ventilator, that situation has improved a bit in recent days. I'm hopeful, but I'm not drawing conclusions until I'm 100 percent sure and my health team is 100 percent sure, but the good news is it is giving us some more time. It is giving us the opportunity to get more ventilators in and know we get farther into the week, so that's very good news. Just the fact that we know we've bought a few more days and we can absolutely protect lives because ventilators will be there. That's crucial news.

We'll have to see in the days ahead if it's something sustained and something that deepens, we will give you daily updates to tell you what's going on, but I want to at least note a little improvement last few days and thank God for that. But as I said, when it comes to the economic battle, when it comes to battling to make sure that people have the food they need, that situation is not getting better, it's getting worse, and think about why, because all of those people lost jobs. All those people still work, but not as much. All those people not getting a paycheck or getting reduced paycheck. The number is staggering. The initial projection is at least half a million New

Yorkers are either already out of work or soon will be. That is the kind of level of unemployment and economic distress, the only comparison you can make for that is the Great Depression, which scares me to death to even say that and, and it's right where we are here. Here in Manhattan I am reminded of what this city went through in the Great Depression. I'm reminded of it because of the stories I heard from my family, my older relatives who went through the depression right here in this part of New York City. And the stories they told about how difficult it was, how painful it was, how disorienting it was, we have to understand that what we're going through now and what we will go through, that's the only parallel we can look at and we cannot underestimate the problem for everyday New Yorkers, especially when it comes to food. We're having a lot of people literally having to ask that question, where is my next meal coming from? More and more people are in that situation, so we have to act very aggressively to address that.

Now I want to be clear, I've given you the extent of the problem, but I want to be clear what the mission statement is. I want to be clear what our resolve is. We will not let any New Yorker go hungry. Literally, we will not let any New Yorker go hungry. We have been planning from the beginning of this crisis to address the hunger problem and because we understood that this would be a profound part of what we faced, and this is something that we had seen in other crisis as well, but this is a whole different scale, but we knew this was something we had to prepare for. I named a few weeks ago, an extraordinary public servant, Commissioner Kathryn Garcia, as our Food Czar with the responsibility to come up with a system that we've never had to have in decades in this city, but a system to feed people on a mass scale if it came to that. She has been working closely with Department of Education, Department for the Aging, and Emergency Management to immediately put into action a food plan, but also build for anything bigger we may need to do.

The Chancellor and I had opportunity, a very special opportunity to spend some time with the food service workers here at P.S. 1. They've served 3,100 meals in the past week to people who need it. They're good people. I said in there, there are another kind of first responder they've showed up to help people in need and they've been a lifeline for people in this community. So, 3,100 meals in the past week for children and families right here in the Lower East Side. This is a part of something much bigger and I want to thank of course everyone at P.S. 1, all the teachers and staff, everyone who's been part of this effort here, the food service workers, the principal, Amy Hom, everyone who has done this work and this whole team that has come together focused on food. Chancellor Carranza again, from Department for the Aging our Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, of course our Health Commissioner, Dr. Oxiris Barbot, all of them, our Emergency Management Commissioner, Deanne Criswell, working under the leadership of Kathryn Garcia who's been helping to coordinate all the agencies and common cause. And as always, our elected officials are helping us spread the word, helping us find people who need help, helping us to make sure we have the resources we need. Thank you to state Senator Brian Kavanagh, who's with us now for everything he's done.

So, I want to give you a sense of the scale of this effort and this is just the beginning. In the last three weeks, the efforts of Department of Education, Department for the Aging, Emergency Management, all coordinated by Commissioner Garcia, those efforts have provided 2.6 million meals to New Yorkers who needed food. 2.6 million meals in the last three weeks and that is just the beginning. Now everybody, the site you see here, there are 434 other sites around the city just

like this where anyone can come get breakfast, lunch, dinner, all three if they need it for as members of our family as they need. So, we're asking for students or students with their parents to come earlier in the day, 7:30 to 11:30, we're asking adults who are alone to come later in the day, 11:30 to 1:30, but it's the same exact standard everywhere. No one is turned away. No one has to pay anything. You get as many meals as you need. This is about making sure people have food.

Now there's a different initiative for those, for the senior citizens who need help for folks who are homebound, for folks who are vulnerable and that the only solution for them is a delivery. There's also a growing delivery system. This is something Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez has been working on from the beginning and it's building all the time. So, anybody who truly needs a home delivery can call 3-1-1 and we'll get them that delivery. Or they can go to nyc.gov/getfood to sign up. There's a lot of different things that we can get for people. We've got these grab and go sites at the schools. There are a lot of food pantries. The home delivery, we can make sure people who do not get food stamps sign up if they're eligible. Lots of different things we can do to help people. So again, anyone who needs help can go 3-1-1, you can go to nyc.gov/getfood or text the word FOOD or in Spanish they can text the word COMIDA to 8-7-7-8-7-7 to find the site nearest to them. So, if anyone needs it, you can use that text. Again, the word FOOD or the word COMIDA to 8-7-7-8-7-7 and find out a site near you where you can get the food you need for yourself and your family.

Now that's about helping all New Yorkers, anyone in need, but I also want to mention something very particular about our heroes, our health care workers who are at the front lines dealing with this crisis. It's been a very, very difficult month for them. The month of March into April has been very, very tough. These folks are working so hard, under such adverse circumstances. They often don't even have time to go outside for even a few minutes. They don't have time to go to the deli like they used to in the hospital, or the cafeteria. They need help in every way they can get it and we want food to get to them. So many people are responding in communities all over New York City and getting food to hospitals, helping our health care workers directly. But I want to mention some very special efforts, really appreciate these efforts. For example, Lavazza Coffee, that company is helping hospital staff. They're donating 60,000 bags of coffee for doctors, nurses, and hospital workers. And we all know how important it is to have coffee in the middle of this fight. So, I thank them deeply for that.

On a very big level, amazing announcement today. This is something I'm announcing as brand new: I want to thank Deborah and Leon Black, two New Yorkers who are showing extraordinary generosity. They have teamed up with the Mayor's Fund. They have donated \$10 million to help get food and crucial household supplies for the families of the health care workers. So this initiative is called Health Care Heroes and Deborah and Leon Black had put their \$10 million forward. They are looking for matching donations from others who can help. If more comes in, they're ready to provide another \$10 million to match up to \$10 million in donations from other donors. So an incredible, incredible effort. I want to thank both of them on behalf of all 8.6 million New Yorkers. They teamed up with the Mayor's Fund and in turn they have partnered. Everyone's partnered with the company, Aramark that does food services. They will be putting together at least 300,000 packages of food and household supplies for doctors, nurses, hospital workers of all kind to ease their burden and to help their families. The Red Cross will be doing a

lot of the deliveries for the Health Care Heroes. The Robin Hood Foundation will be managing the matching funds to make sure that as other donations come in, we activate that match. This entire initiative will be beginning to deliver these crucial supplies and the food to the families of the health care workers hopefully no later than Monday, maybe even sooner.

So that's an amazing effort. We also have an effort by New York Road Runners. They're a wonderful New York organization. Last week they have 20,000 pairs of gloves to help our health care workers. Now they're donating 10,000 meals for doctors and nurses and frontline staff. So, we see so many different efforts coming together. Every day New Yorkers standing up, people doing everything they can to help our heroes.

Now, one more point I want to make before some quick summary in Spanish. I talked to you over the weekend. It was very moving to me that the Governor of Oregon, Kate Brown, volunteered ventilators from Oregon to help New York. See another great act by a governor, Governor Newsom of California who has taken 500 ventilators that they were using in California, had a very tough time, we know it in many parts of that state. They're taking 500 ventilators returning them to the national stockpile so they can go to places like New York and the other places that are hard hit. So, I want to thank Governor Newsom. There is something happening all over this country where people are pouring out their hearts to New York. They're standing with us. People all over the world are standing with us and I think New Yorkers are feeling it more and more. We're in a deep, deep fight, but New Yorkers know we can win this fight. We see more and more people helping us and our own toughness as New Yorkers. Our own resiliency is coming through more and more, but look at all the ways that people are lifting each other up. It's absolutely amazing. So, we're in a fight, but we will not lose this fight. We will prevail and I have great faith that with all the help we're getting, we're going to see this through together. A few words in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, and again, with great gratitude to everyone who's helping us in all my colleagues here for the amazing work they're doing. Want to take questions from our colleagues in the media.

Yes?

Question: So, we've been talking to Fire and EMS folks and they're telling us they're not getting dedicated [inaudible] there's no 12-hour shifts to sort of alleviate how long they have to be working. N95 masks –

Mayor: Wait, just speak up a little more. I'm sorry.

Question: Supplies are scarce for Fire and EMS. I know we talked a lot about hospitals getting resources, but what about for EMS. What about for paramedics?

Mayor: Yeah, I spoke to Commissioner Nigro yesterday. He affirmed – every time he has said they need additional N95 masks or any PPEs, they're getting them instantly. It's a priority to support our first responders. Everyone is working on a crisis standard. I keep saying this, it is so

important. There's an ideal standard we'd all like to be at. We're not there now because we're in a crisis, because of the shortages is all over the country. So the standard, the crisis standard held by the CDC is what we're matching consistently and Fire Department, EMS have those N95 masks to meet that standard. Anything more they need, they will get period. Dan Nigro calls and says, I need something more. It will be immediately provided from everything that we have. So we want to make sure that happens. Testing has been prioritized for first responders and we're continually trying to add to the amount of testing. We all know that's been an uphill battle from the beginning, but as we get more testing capacity, first responders, health care workers are a priority. So I think literally with every day particularly, we get a little bit of relief here in the progression of disease, we'll be able to get more and more supplies in and be able to help more and more people. But there's no question in the world. They are priority.

Question: Did Commissioner Nigro ask for [inaudible]?

Mayor: Commissioner said he had the N95s that he needed. I said, whenever you need a resupply, you'll get it immediately. Period.

Yes?

Question: You mentioned at the beginning seeing something start to change [inaudible] and I was hoping you could go into some more detail about that? [Inaudible]?

Mayor: I spoke to Dr. Mitch Katz and obviously Health + Hospitals has been the hardest hit. Elmhurst has rightfully been focused on as this – kind of the epicenter of the epicenter. But we know that Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, Bellevue, Queens Hospital, many others have borne the brunt. For the first time in many days we did not see a major increase in the number of ventilators needed in those hospitals yesterday. Very striking when you go back about two weeks, every day there was a substantial increase. Some days more, some days less, but every day there was a substantial increase. We needed more ventilators than the day before, every single day. For the first time yesterday, they were pretty much breaking even. That's not the end of discussion there and there's going to – again, we have to watch out. This is a disease that, you know, if you take your eye off the ball, there's nothing that stops it from reasserting. So, we have to be careful. And no one should let down their guard, no one should stop taking the precautions. But just on the sheer numbers, some improvement was evident yesterday. Again, that's buying us some time to get more ventilators in and get ahead of things. That's encouraging, but we've got to see it happen for a number of days before we can declare it a bigger trend.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: The number intubated, I believe he said they were around 830 across their system. So, they're about 20 percent of the health care capacity of New York City, is Health + Hospitals in terms of hospital beds. They had about 830 people intubated, so that number was pretty stable from Sunday into Monday.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Correct.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: We are tracking the State – the State information is what we are using. And so, we agree with the State on that, but also – and I think the State's in the same place – we want to report something good just like we have had to report the tough stuff, but it's too early to call it a pattern or trend because we don't want a situation where you know you could see something change rapidly the other way and we don't want to give people the wrong sense of things. Also, really crucial, this is a testament to the fact that social distancing, shelter in place clearly is having an impact. We've got to keep it tight if we're going to consolidate our gains here. If people suddenly start loosening up, you're going to see those numbers shoot right back up.

Yes?

Question: We're talking about social distancing, what is happening in laundromats, supermarkets? I see people, like, into laundry, like four people without wearing a mask. And this is getting like, people not getting the message. What do you think about this? Because I know that laundromats are essential –

Mayor: Yes.

Question: So, there isn't a limit for the people that can be outside, but can the government do something about the implementation of more rules, because nothing is being done –

Mayor: Well, I don't think nothing's being done. You've seen some examples, I'm concerned about that, I think, in general, because, look, our enforcement agencies – NYPD, FDNY, Sheriff's Office, Buildings Department, you name it – they've been out there constantly now for weeks. Hundreds of thousands of times they've gone to businesses, they've gone up to everyday New Yorkers to do enforcement and what we're finding consistently is people do respond to the enforcement. If they're told break up, if they're told, spread out, they do it with very, very few exceptions. What we've got to keep tightening up is that if you see something, call 3-1-1 and that enforcement is supposed to come rapidly. I had this conversation with Commissioner Shea and the other commissioners – that has to be very fast. So, yes, people need the laundromats. They were kept open for a very specific reason. We want people to have clean clothes. The cleaning of clothes actually kills the coronavirus, that's a good thing. But you can't crowd into a laundromat or a supermarket or a pharmacy or anything like that. So, it means that the people who work there, I have to remind people, and if they're not getting cooperation, they need to call 3-1-1 immediately. I need you to say this, please, everyone – anyone who sees crowding or people are not socially distancing, call 3-1-1 right away and we will send enforcement agents immediately. And again, we're going to warn people, if they don't follow the warning, they can be fined now and those fines can be very substantial. But what we want to do is, if someone shows up to the laundromat, it's too crowded, hold back, you know, form a line. If you can't wait, come back another time. People should be really smart, only go to laundromat as little as you can. You know, don't go all the time. Go as infrequently as you can. The same with the grocery store, go

as few times as you can, stock up, and then stay home. But that ability to send enforcement over quickly is what will make all the difference here. Who has not gone? Okay, Jeff?

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: We are releasing data this week. The data in an atmosphere of crisis is less precise. This won't surprise you, Jeff. Gender is immediately available. Age is immediately available. The ethnicity data in a crisis atmosphere where health care is being provided rapidly to everyone that can be reached, that's been less of a focus to get the ethnicity data in that environment. So, we have enough data to put out, I'm not sure it is as perfect as it could be and I think it will take time to make it better, but we're going to have something out this week for sure. And what it will show, and I've already spoken to this from the maps that the Health Department's put out – this is clearly tracking health disparities in general. I've said that before, I'm going to say it again. I cannot be more blunt. This disease is affecting people disproportionately in lower income communities, in communities that have had more health problems historically, and in communities of color. The extent of that disparity we're still trying to fully understand and the data we'll give you will help us understand, but it will not be the final word because again it is preliminary and imperfect data in the middle of a crisis. But there's no question in my mind, we've already put that out publicly, we've already said there is a disparity dynamic here. It is real, it is meaningful. Now, how do we keep addressing that? First of all, on the question of beds, there is no question, we've been tracking beds to [inaudible]. Beds have been available, are available right now. I've had this conversation with Mitch Katz literally every day with a whole team of people at OEM. We projected the worst-case scenario, we prepared for the worst-case scenario. We are not experiencing worst-case scenario right now. Thank God. There is no place in our public hospitals – and, Jeff, you would agree that public hospitals are explicitly the place where so many people experience those health disparities go for their care – that's the number-one venue. There are beds in all of our public hospitals. Some have had to transfer patients at times, at peak times from one public hospital to another, but there's always a bed. So, we know there's disparity. The whole effort to keep ahead of this with the ventilators, with the PPEs has been for everyone. But clearly, if this is tracking health care disparities, it means that all this herculean effort that all the health care workers are putting in, all the supplies around the country is explicitly to help everyone in need. And therefore, if it's in an atmosphere of disparity, thank God, all of this effort is being expended for everyone. And that's not showing disparity. Where we're not seeing disparity is the full court press to help everyone in need everywhere. The amount of help has gone to Health + Hospitals, that's gone to Elmhurst in particular has been overwhelming – the number of health care personnel that have moved over there, been sent over there, the supplies – there's no disparity in that. The military, when I made the request of the military to send medical personnel, it was explicitly for our public hospitals, for frontline work in the ICU and emergency departments. We've gotten about 300 military medical personnel. I'm expecting more, but that's going right to where the need is greatest, so all of that speaks to the situation. The testing issue, this is the –has been the worst part of the equation from the beginning. If we had the testing, January, February is when it could have made a huge strategic difference. Once it finally started to arrive, we essentially found out that within days it was too late and we already had community spread. Testing now cannot allow us to change the basic trajectory. At some point, there may be a role strategically for testing again, but right now it does not allow us to fundamentally change the reality. It does allow us to ensure the maximum

number of health care workers and first responders are available to save everyone else. It does allow us to focus on the more severe cases, which are still very numerous. It does not allow us to stop the vast majority of people out there who will get infected from getting infected – testing doesn't do that, because, obviously, if you got tested one day, it could be your negative and the next day you could be positive. Testing is not prophylactic. It's not preventative. If you had 100 percent universal testing, that would be a different matter. We're nowhere near that right now. So, I understand why people are yearning for testing and they see what feels like disparities in the provision of testing, but I want to say – and there are, clearly, but that's not the same thing whether the testing would save lives the way we need lives saved. That train left the station a long time ago. But we're going to try to figure out if there's anything else that we can do and I'll have more to say on that in the course of the week. I do think there's strategies that we might be able to innovate to try and figure out where we can get particularly more education efforts and more multi-lingual education efforts to communities that need them.

Let's see over here, if there's anyone, going back over here –

Question: Have you talked to Commissioner Shea about how the department's doing today with the number of the officers that are sick or the ones that still need testing? And do you know if there are any specific testing sites that have been opened around the city for cops, firemen, paramedics?

Mayor: I don't know. And we can get back to you today on specific locations. I do know that both police and fire, from talking about commissioners, report a substantial number of their members coming back from the disease. What we've talked about before, their frontline forces are overwhelmingly younger, healthier people, officers on patrol, firefighters, EMTs, paramedics. Any of those that are getting sick, the vast majority are coming back rapidly after a week or two each, some not. And we're very, very concerned about anybody who's suffering or anyone whose life is in danger. But the vast majority are coming back quickly. But the absentee level, the sickness level is still very high. Both Commissioner Shea and Commissioner Nigro are absolutely consistent in saying they have the forces they need to have a deep bench. They're able to make moves to keep things moving, to keep providing the service that we needed to provide. We'll get you the specifics on how testing is done. Clearly when first responders need testing, that is a priority. Okay. Way back, I'm sorry –

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Little louder, can you take the mask down so I can hear you? There you go.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Couldn't hear the beginning.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Yeah, so we've talked about this before – and I'm looking at my lineup, yes, you can join in Dr. Barbot – Dr. Barbot, behind your bandana. I wasn't sure for a moment there. The City is

continuing, the Health Department, Health + Hospitals continue to look at this issue and try to determine how helpful it could be. What Dr. Katz said, I believe it was yesterday or Sunday, is that it is being administered to certain patients who are COVID positive because of the extremity of their sickness to see if it would be helpful. But that is in reaction to a particular dynamic that individual is having with the disease, not a broader effort because so far as I understand it, Dr. Barbot will comment, there aren't the kinds of studies to clarify what you would gain from it versus the dangers and the negative side effects. As I understand it, there are side effects that could be very severe, particularly for older or more vulnerable people. And so, trying to strike that balance has been a big question in the health care community. Dr. Barbot let me, hold on, I'm going to go back, get out of your way.

Commissioner Oxiris Barbot, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: So, I want to echo what the Mayor said in terms of the use of hydroxychloroquine. I think the main point here – I think the main point here is that Health + Hospitals, in collaboration with other hospital systems throughout the city, have been looking at any and all potential therapies to help save as many New Yorkers as possible. And hydroxychloroquine is one of those early medications. I think that there have been, to date, very few patients actually able to take the medication. So, it's too early to say what the clinical benefit has been. Dr. Katz has been clear that the focus of using hydroxychloroquine has been to try and have individuals who are currently suffering respiratory distress from having to keep them go on ventilators, which I think is a really critical component. But, again, it's still too early to know what the efficacy of hydroxychloroquine will be. And again, that's why it's really so critical for us as a city to adhere to social distancing because what we're trying to do is not only slow the spread but reduce the potential impact to individuals who may be adversely affected, especially those above the age of 50 with chronic underlying illnesses.

Mayor: Okay. Anyone else? Erin –

Question: [Inaudible] number of deaths undercounted [inaudible] –

Mayor: I'll start and then if Dr. Barbot, you'll let me know if you want to add. Look right now, and I want to say this as a non-doctor, I am assuming the vast majority of those deaths are coronavirus related. It's understandable in a crisis that being able to make the confirmation is harder to do with all the resources stretched so thin and with the central concern – Erin, I think you would agree that the concern, the first use of all of the everything we've got our professionals, our health care workers, our resources, the first thing we are focused on is saving the next life. So, we do want to know the truth about what happened in every death at home. But I think we can say at this point, it's right to assume the vast majority are coronavirus related. And that makes it even more sober the sense of how many people we are losing, how many families are suffering, how real this crisis is. So, again, why I'm trying to be very careful, even while saying we see some good news that we not overrate the good news. So, I think we'll, over time, be able to get a clearer picture. But I don't even doubt for a moment what that broader reality is and how we should think about it to drive our action to keep saving lives. If you want to add, you're good. Okay. Last call. Anyone else? Yes.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Again, I'm going to be very clear that I'm just going to draw a line on this question. I'm going to say what I said last night on NY1 and I really am not going to keep getting into detail. We have the capacity we need. We don't want – you know, we are hoping and praying we never have to come near using it. We're getting tremendous support from the military and the federal government. Everything we have asked them for, they've given us. We have a lot of capacity to deal with it. But remember, this is about human beings. This is about families that are suffering. And the reason I don't think it's something that we should dwell on is I think every time we talk about it, we're talking about families that are going through a lot of pain right now. To them, it's their loved one. It's not some bigger discussion. It's about the person in their life they've lost. And we want to be really dignified and really respectful in our support for those families. So, we're going to do everything we can to handle each case one by one respectfully. And we will be able to deal with whatever's thrown at us, but right now that's – I just want to leave it at that and say the focus is on being respectful to those families while always putting everything we have into saving the next life. Last call.

Okay. Thank you, everyone.

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