

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON 1010WINS

Brigitte Quinn: Good morning. I'm Brigitte Quinn and let's go right to the 1010 WINS Newsline. And joining us this morning, Mayor de Blasio. Mayor, thanks so much for being with us.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: You're welcome, Brigitte. Good morning.

Quinn: Good morning. So, last hour, we got the chance to chat with the Schools Chancellor. He told us that the goal is to reopen, not just before the end of the year, but before we get to December, do you think that's likely?

Mayor: Look, we want to reopen as quickly as possible, but with some new standards, Brigitte. Look, we set very stringent standards when we first reopened schools back in September, a lot of people said it couldn't be done, a lot of people said it wouldn't be safe. In fact, it has been safe, but now we're facing a new challenge with this second wave of bearing down on us. We need tougher standards. We're going to reset the equation. We're going to come back. We'll know in the next few days exactly what those standards are, working with the State, and when we can project the reopening.

Quinn: The Chancellor told us that there is the possibility that everything's on the table, that you might be looking at a new system whereby you would look at an individual school's positivity rate versus the overall citywide number. Is that one of the things on the table?

Mayor: Yeah, we have a lot on the table now, talking with the State, talking with the different stakeholders, you know, the folks who represent teachers and staff, parent groups. We're going to look at all of this, but I think the central point is going to be testing. Brigitte, we're going to put much more reliance on people getting tested a lot more frequently. And I'm going to tell parents right now – and I was a public school parent myself. You know, this is going to require all of us

to really take responsibility for getting kids tested regularly. That's going to be one of the keys to being able to come back quickly.

Quinn: So, how might testing then, Mayor de Blasio, be ramped up?

Mayor: Well, right now, Brigitte, the system we use is a monthly testing approach in every school. It's proven to be extraordinarily successful. And thank God, the coronavirus levels have been low in our schools. But we have seen in recent days a clear uptick. We've had a number of schools we had to shut down for two weeks for quarantine. Clearly what's happening all around us does reach into the schools. So, what we need to focus on now is more frequent testing and making sure every parent gets that testing consent form in for their kids. And then looking school-by-school even more intensely at the data. There's a lot of different approaches, but they all run through data and science. So, the more testing, the better.

Quinn: So, more testing sites then, or what?

Mayor: More testing in schools, more frequently, and also parents making sure their kids get tested. It's really important because we need parents to be a part of it. Again, we need the consent forms, and we need to focus parents on understanding how important it is to get tested frequently and for the whole family. So, you know, testing was what we didn't have in the beginning of this crisis. Once we got the ability to do a lot of testing, it helped us get a lot safer in New York City. Here comes this second wave, we're going to beat it back with even more testing.

Quinn: Yeah. Mayor de Blasio, I'm sure you've heard all the arguments about, you know, why are schools closed when restaurants and gyms are still open? What do you say to that argument?

Mayor: I understand that argument a hundred percent. It's a very fair argument. And I think the answer is that the Governor's made very clear the State has the ultimate decision there, but he made very clear yesterday, sadly those closures are coming too, and they're coming soon. That orange zone status, that he made clear will be in effect, you know, in the coming days in New York City, that's going to mean indoor dining closes, that's going to mean gyms closed. I don't say that with any joy, Brigitte, I feel bad for those businesses, I really do. But the fact is I don't think anyone should over-focus on that fact because given what these numbers are telling us, given how intense this surge is you're going to see those additional restrictions very quickly. That being said, we still believe we can reset the equation with schools and get them back, nonetheless.

Quinn: Okay. And what you just said about the orange zones, Mayor de Blasio, I just want to be crystal clear here, are you saying that within days we could get the word from the State that restaurants are going to have to shut down indoor dining again?

Mayor: The State has a system they use for determining the orange zone. I don't know if it's a few days or a week or two, but it's coming. And the Governor made that very clear yesterday and, unfortunately, the numbers keep ticking up. You can see it. So, I think it's quite clear that within the next week or two, those restrictions are going to be applied in New York City.

Quinn: Okay, and those restrictions would not only put the kibosh on indoor dining, but it would limit outdoor dining, right, and closed gyms as well?

Mayor: It's about things like indoor dining and gyms for sure. Outdoor dining is obviously safer because it's outdoors and it's ventilated. But from what I understand of the State rules, that could continue so long as we can control these numbers. But the indoor dining and the gyms are the kinds of things that would be a shutdown under that orange zone status.

Quinn: Okay. All right. Well, we will certainly stay tuned for that. Mayor de Blasio, I'd just like to hear your advice on the holidays. You know, we've been hearing the health experts and people talking until they're blue in the face, telling people wear your mask, stick to your immediate household for Thanksgiving, but you kind of get the feeling, not everybody's listening.

Mayor: Brigitte, of course not everyone's listening, but I got to tell you, Brigitte, New Yorkers have been amazing. I mean, the reason we went from the epicenter of the country to one of the safest places in the country is because people really did listen and followed through on that guidance. So, I'll give it again. Do not travel for the holidays because that's just opening up the door for problems and I feel it. I'm not going to see a lot of my loved ones. I hate it. It'll be the first time in my entire life I won't see some of my close family for Thanksgiving, but you know, we just can't have people traveling because that's one of the things that spreading the disease right now. That's one of the reasons that New York saw this upsurge. We were doing a lot better than the rest of the country. Travel has certainly been a factor in increasing the amount of coronavirus here. So, don't travel, small gatherings, primarily the people that you have under your own roof, your own household. And if other folks come to the gathering, keep them small, wear the mask, except when you're eating, keep distance with people who are not part of your household. Look, it's horrible, but it's just for this year because now that we have vaccines and they are moving forward, you know, next year the holidays are going to be a lot better. We just need to get through this one.

Quinn: Yeah. Yeah, here's hoping for a good 2021 holiday season, but I suspect some college kids are going to be coming home and some of them will be arriving at our airports. Is there any way Mayor de Blasio to enforce that anybody who does come to our area gets tested and then quarantines? Any way to make people do that?

Mayor: There's a lot more testing now at the airports. That's really helpful. We have, at each of the airports, teams out there that immediately address anyone coming off the plane to make sure they're filling out the forms, either confirming they need to quarantine or that they are doing the testing out approach, but then we follow up with them and if they need to quarantine, we work really intensely to make sure they are quarantining or there's very heavy fines if you don't. So, the good news, Brigitte, is there's a strong apparatus in place to enforce that we're going to beef it up even more, but the best thing would be for people just to realize travel should be avoided at all costs. You know, right now when this thing is surging, this is exactly the wrong time to travel.

Quinn: Okay. How about New Yorkers who want to just travel as far as 30 Rock? We've been waiting to hear what the restrictions might be, Mr. Mayor, for visiting the big tree.

Mayor: Yeah. I'll give you the broad strokes because some of the details are still being worked out. Obviously, the tree lighting is coming up soon. It's going to be a limited circumstance, Brigitte. There's going to be a careful system to make sure that there's very few people at any given time in the immediate vicinity of the tree. There's obviously going to be social distancing and mask wearing. Folks who want to see it, you know, what I'd advise is it's not going to be as easy as in past years. I would be careful not to assume because I think we're going to have to limit the number of people who get to see it just because we have to focus on health and safety first. So, just – it's another example, Brigitte, of it's not business as usual, but this too shall pass. This moment in history will be over soon. And, you know, let's do some things a little differently. So, some people will get to see it in person. The rest of us will see it on TV.

Quinn: Okay, I think – you know, I think some people are really going to want to see it this year. It's been getting trash-talked a little bit on Twitter. I don't know if you've seen any of those nasty tweets, Mayor de Blasio –

Mayor: They're being mean to the tree, Brigitte?

[Laughter]

Quinn: They say it doesn't look good. They're calling it a Charlie Brown Christmas Tree.

Mayor: Well, you know what, Charlie Brown may have been the underdog but he's a good guy. So, I don't think that's necessarily an insult.

[Laughter]

Quinn: Good grief, right. All right, Mayor de Blasio. We thank you so much for being with us this morning.

Mayor: You take care, Brigitte.

Quinn: Happy holidays to you.

Mayor: Happy holidays.

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