

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 15, 2020, 3:30 PM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY ON SNOW
PREPAREDNESS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Okay, everybody. We have a number of updates for you on the weather situation and want to go over what we know. Obviously, this is an emerging situation. We're going to get a lot more information in the course of the coming hours. There's going to be regular updates provided by Emergency Management and other agencies. I'm going to give you a couple updates, you'll hear from our Emergency Management Commissioner Deanne Criswell, our Sanitation Commissioner Ed Grayson, and we will again also have, in the question-and-answer time with the media, representatives of a number of other City agencies are here via WebEx who will be able to help answer questions as well. So, let's begin at the beginning, the National Weather Service that we depend on to give us the best understanding of what's happening, they've issued a winter storm watch. This is a serious storm. Now we're waiting for more information as always, but we can certainly say this is going to be a serious storm and people need to take it seriously.

You need to be ready for a disruptive storm and start to make adjustments right now in what you'll be doing on Wednesday and Thursday in light of the storm. We have not had a lot of storms like this in the last few years, thank God. We've seen much less snowfall than we did a few years back. So, this could be the biggest storm in several years. Right now, we're getting a projection of between eight inches and 12 inches. We know that could change. That could become less. That could become more. That could become earlier. That could become later. We know these things change, but right now that's the range we're talking about, eight inches to 12 inches. Now, current projections, snow will begin tomorrow, Wednesday around 4:00 PM continue through Wednesday evening, overnight into the early morning hours of Thursday. Wind gusts as high as 50 miles per hour. That's very serious. For anyone out there whether you're walking, you're driving, that's serious wind. Again, I want people to right now be thinking about the precautions you're going to take, the ways you're going to change your routine. Take this seriously. On Thursday morning, in particular, we could see real blizzard-like conditions, really bad visibility, intense wind, intense snow. Get ready for that. So, our Sanitation trucks will be out doing anti-icing treatments starting tonight. Salt spreaders will be out in advance of the snow arriving. And then the plows, of course, will be in action once there's enough accumulation for them to do their work.

Now here's the most important, specific instruction and specific request I'm making to all New Yorkers, if you are planning to drive tomorrow to work or to anything else, please do not take your car into a – particularly into Manhattan or any place else tomorrow, if you can avoid it because when you get to the evening rush hour that snow could already be a major factor. So, folks particularly commuting into Manhattan or one of the other boroughs from outside the city, please, if at all possible, do not drive in. If you can use mass transit, use mass transit, if you can

work from home, even better work from home. But we are really concerned about a lot of traffic coming in and then having a hell of a tough time getting back out with that evening rush hour tomorrow. Obviously, Thursday morning's going to be even worse. So, planning ahead, if you do not need to bring your car into the city on Thursday morning, that's something you should plan on right now because Thursday morning could really be a mess. Okay, let's talk about a few other things. We're going to just go over a bunch of updates here.

Outdoor dining has been a big concern. We've all depended on it a lot to make sure people got their jobs back, their livelihoods. It will be in terms of the street dining, the outdoor dining, actually in the streets itself, the curb that will be closed from 2:00 PM onward tomorrow, and we're telling restaurant owners it's important if they can get any of their equipment out of the roadway, it's really important to that. Particularly heaters get them in. But sidewalk dining is still allowed. It may be difficult obviously tomorrow evening. So, everyone will decide whether it works for them or not. But it will be the sidewalk dining is still allowed. Thursday, we're hoping by Thursday night, that outdoor dining of all kinds will be online again, depending on the exact conditions of the snow, but hopefully everything's back and up and running for outdoor dining and sidewalk dining by Thursday evening.

Now so much on our minds, the vaccine. Thank God we are in the week when the vaccine has arrived. Vaccine deliveries will continue as scheduled. There is absolute commitment from Emergency Management, Health Department, all the hospitals, the delivery companies. Everyone will keep those deliveries happening. Storage is going to be fine, the ultra-cold storage. So, there's nothing about this storm at this point that should disrupt the supply of vaccine coming in. So far so good on that front. Other updates, alternate side parking, that will be suspended tomorrow and Thursday, Wednesday and Thursday. Food deliveries, food deliveries will continue to individual homes. Again, at this point, we believe we can keep them going consistently. If we're having any kind of problem, one of the things that will happen is people will be delivered extra food to give them an extra day or more of food in case there are any slowdowns in the deliveries. And where food is being picked up whether it's school sites or other sites, extra food will be available. Again, schools, crucial question – so both in terms of the food availability, but obviously for our kids, for our parents. So, let me give an update on that.

Tomorrow, school is open tomorrow, Wednesday. School will be in session Wednesday both in-person and online, and buses, school buses will be running Wednesday because again, we do not expect the snow to even begin until school is complete tomorrow. However, Thursday could be a very different story. We're going to be assessing the storm as it arrives. We will make a decision on Thursday once we get more information. Right now, we're keying in on the National Weather Service reports that we get around 6:00 PM each day. So, it's 6:00 PM or so on Wednesday, we'll get an updated look at Thursday. That's the time we intend to make the decision on Thursday, schools. So, parents, be ready with an alternative for Thursday in case the snow is bad enough that we have to close the school buildings. Obviously, remote education will be there for all kids so it's not like the school days of old. Kids will have that option, whether they're happy about it or not, they will have learning on Thursday either way. But the decision we're hoping to make around 6:00 PM Wednesday to let parents know that evening, what Thursday looks like. Again, everyone, expect it's going to be cold, it's going to be snowy. Visibility limited. A lot of wind. Code Blue will be in effect for our homeless New Yorkers. If you see anyone in any kind of distress, if they need help, you can call 3-1-1. If it's urgent, of course, call 9-1-1. We are going to keep you updated through Emergency Management. As always storms change. It's important

to get updated information. I know the Commissioner will remind everyone how to get that information. Just important, everyone, expect a kind of winter weather, again, we haven't seen a lot of in recent years. Bundle up, lots of layers. Of course, remember your masks. It fits in winter with everything else you wear to keep yourself warm and as always think about your neighbors. New Yorkers are always there for each other and kind and compassionate, looking out for their neighbors, looking out for seniors, anyone that needs help. Let's remember to check on anybody who might need that helping hand as we deal with this storm.

All right, I want you to hear from my colleagues now. First, she's done a really fantastic job coordinating us through a lot of challenges before, our Emergency Management Commissioner Deanne Criswell.

Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Office of Emergency Management: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And, good afternoon, everybody. You know, as the Mayor said, we are expecting a significant amount of snow to come into the city – again, eight to 12 inches through the night tomorrow. And the City is leaning forward to prepare for this amount of snow. We are going to issue a hazardous travel advisory later today, and it will be in effect for Wednesday afternoon through Thursday night. And New Yorkers are advised to please stay off the road if you don't need to be on the road.

We're taking a number of proactive steps to make that we are ready for the upcoming storm and ready to battle whatever mother nature decides to bring us. We continue to be in very close communications with the National Weather Service. We talked to them multiple times during the day and we'll continue to monitor the weather conditions with them, along with the meteorologists that New York City Emergency Management hired last year.

We've also been hosting daily inter-agency calls – those started yesterday – so we as a city could come together and coordinate all of the activities that are going to be needed to take place in order to respond and coordinate for the preparations for the storm. Beginning tomorrow, we're going to activate our Emergency Operation Center. This will, again, be a virtual operations center because of social distancing. But we have done this successfully through Tropical Storm Isaias and we will again and do it successfully for this storm as well. And it will be able to provide partners an opportunity to ensure an aggressive and very rapid responses as needs may arise.

We've taken a number of additional preparations for this storm, including placing our Downed Tree Taskforce on alert. The Downed Tree Taskforce will be able to respond to any conditions that we have with the trees because of the snow and the wind that we are expected to see overnight. This task force includes Con Edison, the Department of Transportation, Sanitation, Parks, FDNY, as well as NYPD. And we have also activated our Tow Truck Taskforce. This is a multi-agency unit that is assigned to mitigate any vehicles that might be blocking roads for critical response vehicles or to help facilitate snowplowing. This task force includes DCAS, NYPD, Sanitation, FDNY, MTA, and the Department of Transportation. I'd also like to let you know that all of the H + H testing sites are going to be closed tomorrow, beginning at 2:00 PM, and they are expected to reopen Thursday at noon. Immediately following this press conference, as I mentioned earlier, we are going to be issuing a hazardous travel advisory. Again, this will be in effect for Wednesday afternoon, through Thursday night. And this is really important because travel conditions on Thursday are going to be messy. Your safety is our number one priority, and

we want to advise all New Yorkers to please stay off the roads if you don't need to be on them. If you must travel after a storm, mass transit is your best option, but you should check the MTA information site to make sure that they are running on schedule before you leave home. And please give yourself extra time and remember to wear a face covering and social distance at all times.

And during events like this, as the Mayor said, we want to remind you to check on your neighbors and your loved ones, especially those who are vulnerable to these types of incidents. As New Yorkers, you have done an incredible job of reaching out to your neighbors, to your loved ones, to help them through the COVID-19 response, and we really appreciate that, and we want you to continue to do the same throughout this storm as well. And, finally, we want you to make sure that you are armed with all the latest information about the storm. As we know, the conditions can change rapidly, and we want you to get the information as quickly as you can. So, if you have not already, I want you to sign up for NotifyNYC to stay informed. You can follow us on Twitter @NotifyNYC. You can call 3-1-1. Or, you can visit nyc.gov/NotifyNYC. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Commissioner. Now, he brings decades of experience to this work and has been through plenty of snowstorms before and knows how to handle them – our Acting Sanitation Commissioner Ed Grayson.

Acting Commissioner Ed Grayson, Department of Sanitation: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and Commissioner Criswell. We are taking this storm very seriously. The potential depths and winds are an event that we haven't seen in about three years. We are planning, on our end, to be able to handle the worst case of the forecast. DSNY will begin – will be in split shifts, starting Wednesday. So, 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM, all personnel, all field operations, everybody in full force. Starting tonight, we will have our brine trucks out applying a liquid pre-treat to dedicated roadways that are prone to pre-icing and some critical highway ons-and-offs. The goal of this liquid pre-treat is to be out there in advance of any precipitation to get a layer down, so we could be further in advancing preparedness. We have more than 2,000 vehicles with plows available, including over 700 salt spreaders that we'll be rolling out there throughout the duration of the storm. Spreaders will be out ahead of the first flakes, right after the brining, to be prepared and make sure that we get the first passes in those critical roadways to keep roads open. Plows will be pre-positioned prior to the threshold of two inches and, once we have plowed the snow, we will be deployed to begin plowing citywide.

We can expect heavy snowfall on the overnight, that is what we're planning for. With that kind of snowfall and those kinds of winds, we will be slow and methodical. Visibility is a key component, and that's what our operators will be focused on, as well as the rate at which we plowed to control the wake of this snow should it come in at those heavy snowfall rates. So, please, stay off the roads. It's been said before, but if you could avoid traveling on the roads, please do so. We are coming. We will be there.

As the Mayor mentioned, we have been working since the summer to account for and try to plan our approach to the outdoor dining structures. We have augmented our training protocols. We have exposed our operators who are very dedicated to working with small business and being there to provide the critical roadway passage and be cognizant of these roadway structures. So, our job has been to train, to know where they are, and to do all we can to work with the local

streetscape, and that is what our operators are committed to doing. You can track our plow progress throughout the event at nyc.gov/PlowNYC.

On two final notes from my front, we are fully focused on preparing for snow and have been. You can collect – you can expect some collection delays and refuse and recycling, beginning Wednesday. And we'll get back to refuse and recycling as soon as possible once the snow subsides. And, as a reminder, the Mayor said it, alternate side parking is suspended for Wednesday and Thursday for now. So, we will be back at it once it is. But, for now, these are the preparations we've taken. This is a significant snowfall event and the men and women of Sanitation will be out there doing our best. Thank you.

Mayor: Very much appreciate it Ed. And I want to say I had the honor of visiting Sanitation garages during previous snowstorms and extraordinary commitment from the men, women of the Sanitation Department to clear our streets. We had the biggest blizzard in the history of New York City during this administration, Sanitation did a miraculous job bringing the city back really quickly after that. I remember Ed, I was in one garage and talking to some of the Sanitation workers about what it felt like to get ready for a big storm. And one of them said, and I have to say with a little bit of swagger, he said, this is our time to shine. And I know there's that pride in Sanitation for the work you do in a moment like this. So thank you, to you and the whole team there. All right, we're going to take some questions.

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q and A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin, by OEM Commissioner Criswell, by acting Sanitation Commissioner Grayson, as well as representatives from FDNY, the Department of Education, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Buildings, the Department for the Aging, the Parks Department, New York City Ferry, NYCHA, and the Department of Social Services. As a reminder, we are on topic only today. The first question will go to Jen Peltz from the AP.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah Jen, how are you doing?

Question: Fine, thanks. I wanted to ask about schools if it comes to that. Is there such a thing as a snow day in the current era of blended and remote learning? Or is it just a remote day?

Mayor: I have to say as someone who cares about education, I am proud to say it is a remote learning day for all students if we end up having to cancel in-person education. As a parent, and I was a kid once myself, I have to say, I feel a little sad that this snow day we used to all know may be gone. Because it's really not going to be a day off if we have a snow day. So we're going to let people know by tomorrow evening, if in-person learning will happen or not. But if you can't go in person, every student will be expected to log on and participate in remote learning on Thursday.

Moderator: Next we have Andrea from CBS.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor this question is for you and perhaps the acting Sanitation Commissioner. In past storms, side streets or the tertiary streets, have been challenging to plow. Now, as you guys have spoken about, we have the added element of the outdoor dining

structures. I'm curious, what kind of equipment do you have to plow these streets with this outdoor dining these structures? And is there enough of this equipment?

Mayor: I'll just start really quick before I bring up the Commissioner. Look Andrea, it's a really good question, but I want to remind you outdoor dining overwhelmingly is on commercial streets. It's not on those smaller streets, which are even more challenging. But the good news is because of those tertiary streets, we did end up finding a way to get newer equipment, smaller equipment, more agile equipment. And that's going to help us with working around the outdoor dining as well. Commissioner?

Acting Commissioner Grayson: As to the remainder of that response, the Mayor is correct. So most of the outdoor dining that's in the roadway is on much more of a commercial strip, but we do have some that would be on a tighter block. For our tighter block responses, we do have holsters, which are just a small version of our salt spreader plows. And what we did throughout the off season was we looked at where the restaurants were. You know, we worked with DOT and with New York City Emergency Management to get that listing. We went out and did site inspections to look for roadway widths. And we've adjusted our routes so that we can have smaller pieces service the areas where it is tighter.

Moderator: The next we have Angie Gonzalez from NY1.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Angie, can you hear me?

Question: Yeah, I can hear you. How are you doing?

Mayor: Good, how are you doing today?

Question: Good. So this is, of course the first time we've had any sort of snow during a global pandemic. I don't know if Commissioner Banks wants to talk about this as well, but are you at all concerned that the homeless population might use any of these outdoor dining structures as a place to seek shelter? If they don't want to go inside at all?

Mayor: Andrea, I appreciate the question. And look, you're right. When you started your question, I was thinking you know, what a year 2020 has been and how much I'm looking forward to it ending. A global pandemic mixed with snowstorm, pretty, pretty crazy to begin with. But what I'd say is throughout our experience with outdoor dining, I certainly have not heard that to be a specific problem. And again, for homeless folks in need, we're going to be out there in force to make sure if anyone needs to get shelter, we're going to help them come in and get to shelter, or they need medical attention. So I don't anticipate that problem, but let me turn to the expert, Commissioner Banks. You want to speak to that?

Commissioner Steven Banks, Department of Social Services: Thank you, Mayor. I think it's important to put this in context. Although this is the first snowstorm of the year, it is the [inaudible] to 17th Code Blue will be tonight. And we've made 500 placements. We haven't seen people taking refuge in the outdoor dining setups. And we certainly had people out 24/7 and we'll be looking for that and offering people help to get them inside.

Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Nolan from the Post.

Question: You said the goal is to have outdoor dining potentially reopened by Thursday. There are a lot of restaurants on these tertiary streets. What are you guys doing to make sure that actually happens? Are you prioritizing those streets over other tertiary streets?

Mayor: Well, again let me just start and turn to Commissioner Grayson. Look Nolan, I think again, I think most by far of the outdoor dining restaurants are on the more commercial streets. But where there are some on tertiary streets, you know we certainly want to get them up and running as quickly as possible. Now, you know, mother nature will be the key factor here, whether Thursday evening is realistic. But where we know they are, we're going to do everything we can to help them get going. I think, you know, the way it will work is that we expect a lot of cooperation from the restaurant owners, because they're going to want to figure out what will work for their customers as well. Go ahead, Commissioner.

Acting Commissioner Grayson: Good question. First thing I want to do is clarify tertiary streets. Since we did our resector plowing a few years back, while we know that all New Yorkers know the term, you're on a tertiary block. But in reality, we have a plow on every block at the start of the storm once it's a plow storm. So nobody's last in line anymore. That's one of the innovations that the Department of Sanitation has undertaken over a few seasons now. So while I don't say that to suggest that any part of the storm is going to be easy, what I can assure you is that there will be equitable plowing throughout the entire event. Because that's the way we recategorized our routes. And as far as when we can expect anything else to come after that, there is really a lot of circumstantial things that need to play out throughout this event. The rate of snowfall, the timing, et cetera. So I think that we have a lot to learn throughout the entire snowfall event before we can really say. But it is, we are hopeful to be able to go with what was originally suggested, that by Thursday evening we'll be ready. But there are no tertiaries, there's only what used to be an old tertiary we'll be there with a plow.

Mayor: Thank you for setting the record straight Commissioner. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good afternoon. My question is in regards to Sanitation's budget, which I know took a hit in the June budget and the November budget as well. But I'm curious what the, you know, if we do have a winter with a lot of snow, can you talk a little bit about the money that's been allocated to that removal? And how it might differ from previous years when we weren't in these financial straits?

Mayor: Look, I mean, obviously Katie, we are going to provide the resources to Sanitation to get the job done. We have, before this year, had some very mild winters in the scheme of things. And obviously from a budget point of view, if we didn't need that money at Sanitation, we had a lot of other needs given our fiscal challenges. But if it turns out it's a harsher winter, we're going to shift money into Sanitation and make tough choices. We just, it's not, it's not optional. It's something that has to happen. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Politico – from Bloomberg.

Question: Hello Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Henry, how you doing?

Question: Doing well. You got a pandemic, you got a blizzard. I don't know whether it's your fault or what. You're like Joab for God's sake. I can't figure it out.

Mayor: I really, I believe I'm innocent, but thank you for asking Henry.

[Laughter]

Question: My question is very similar to Katie's and I take it around a different direction. Which is, you know, you've made cuts in Sanitation Department. Isn't there some way in which Sanitation services will be compromised or reduced as a result of the demands on the department?

Mayor: No, I really don't believe that. Every department had to find savings. That is true. And obviously, you know, one of the areas we had to do some savings on was on the litter basket collection, but that's a very different reality than what it takes to address a snowstorm. In a snowstorm Sanitation converts everything it does into fighting the storm. And they take all their personnel, as you heard from the Commissioner, they take all their equipment which is an army. It's absolutely amazing how much Sanitation can throw at a storm. That's all there, that hasn't been changed. So, no, I would say Sanitation is just as able this year to fight a storm as they were last year. Going forward, we need to understand if we don't get stimulus help from Washington, then there is a danger in the future that we're not going to be able to turn to City agencies and expect the same kind of help that we have always gotten from them. We're not going to be able to do the things we need to do to keep services high. That's a real danger for the future. But right now Sanitation certainly has everything it needs.

Moderator: Last one for today is Danielle from Politico.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I'm wondering if you have any concern about the fact that overnight subway service will still remain shut down throughout the snowstorm? And whether you had asked MTA officials to resume that or have had any conversations with them about how that will impact essential workers who have to commute?

Mayor: Let me say I have not had that conversation, but I want to emphasize that I think the overnight shutdown has really been effective and important for the MTA, important for this city. Something I think the State and the MTA did, really did it the right way and we fully supported. And we're working with them on that. This is obviously, we're talking about one night. And I think given the very limited reality of one night, I do not anticipate them changing their approach. I think if we had a more prolonged event, it becomes a very pertinent question. Right now, folks need to recognize that travel will be difficult on Wednesday night, especially on Thursday morning and just adjust accordingly in every way you can. Again, if you do not need to travel, don't travel. Take mass transit as best you can. I do understand there will be sometimes

when some of the system's not up, but take mass transit as best you can. But really this is about getting through that one burst of activity from Wednesday night into early Thursday morning. And then we really hope as Thursday progresses, things will get a lot better.

So, everyone look, to conclude you've heard from my colleagues Sanitation is ready, Emergency Management is ready. All our agencies are ready. We're going to protect New Yorkers. We're going to address this storm, deal with it head on, and get past it quickly. But you, as always, as we were saying throughout the pandemic, there's always a role for you to play and New Yorkers have been absolutely amazing answering the call. So, I'm going to make the call again and say, we need you. We need you to stay off the roads tomorrow, particularly tomorrow afternoon and evening, and Thursday morning to maximum extent possible. Do not drive your car if you can possibly avoid it. Take mass transit if that's an option. Recognize that if you stay off the roads, you're going to be safer, but you're also going to allow our friends at Sanitation to do their work. When they have clear roads to work with, they do miraculous and fast work, and then everybody can get back to as normal as anything is nowadays. So, everyone, participate. And of course, look out for each other, something that matters so much. Sometimes just checking in on someone saying, are you okay? Do you need anything? It makes a world of difference. So, everyone, thank you for always chipping in, in every way. And we will get through this and we're going to keep you updated constantly over the next 24 to 48 hours. Thanks a lot.

###