

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 14, 2021, 9:00 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. It's a beautiful day out there. And I want to let you know we're starting early today. That's obvious. We're starting early today because today, a great tradition continues, coming back here in New York City, Medal Day for our Fire Department, for our heroes at the FDNY. So, this is a great celebration of really extraordinary individuals who do so much to protect all of us. And, obviously, like so many other things, it was thrown off by last year, but it's back. So, we expect a really joyous day today celebrating our heroes. But let's get into the things we're doing right now to bring this city back. And that always begins with vaccination. So, the most important thing we can do to bring New York City back is to continue to deepen our very strong vaccination effort all over the city. So, right now, we've – well over five million doses have been given from the beginning and we're going to keep going no matter what. We have over 600 sites now, vaccinating New Yorkers down to the grassroots, every neighborhood continuing to build out more and more sites. And last week records set, over 100,000 doses last Thursday, 104,000 last week, biggest week we've ever had. 550,000 doses given in one week. So, really important, positive things happening. But let's be blunt yesterday, we were thrown a curveball. The news about Johnson & Johnson, which I hope and believe will be a very temporary pause. But yesterday we were thrown a curve ball and our job is to hit that ball out of the park anyway, to just keep going, keep moving forward. New Yorkers do that no matter what, the vaccination effort has built and grown, no matter what. And we're going to keep building it. And here to talk about that and here to talk about the latest on the Johnson & Johnson situation, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. As the city's doctor, I like to tell New Yorkers what I would say to my own patients. When it comes to vaccines, there are no bad questions. My starting point in answering them is empathy followed by the facts. Over the last 24 hours, we have fielded a lot of questions about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. You could say, indeed, Mr. Mayor, yesterday was a curveball, but it's a pitch that we look for. Adverse events are reported to a national database precisely so that we can monitor for patterns that call for greater study, which is what the federal government is doing right now. This monitoring acts as a highly sensitive warning system. The decision to pause means our government is following the science and making safety the utmost priority, a position we strongly agree with. Vaccines usually carry a small risk of side effects, but it's also important to keep in mind the other side of the equation, to remember that authorized vaccines protect us from diseases that threaten us so much more.

While our federal partners are doing their due diligence, the pause in administering the J&J vaccine will have some impact on our operations. First, the vast majority of New Yorkers who

booked appointments for the J&J vaccine will keep the same appointment and receive Pfizer or Moderna instead. Second, we did have to reschedule about 4,000 people yesterday. Those New Yorkers received messages about new appointments for later this week. Third, the homebound program is suspended through this Sunday. We are currently working on rescheduling appointments and helping to arrange transport to a nearby vaccine site by taxi or by ambulette, where that's possible.

Now, for New Yorkers like me and like the Mayor who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, I do want to assure you that it is extremely unlikely you will experience anything like the adverse events that have been reported. If you experience symptoms like severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath within three weeks of having received the Johnson & Johnson vaccination, please do call your doctor. But to put a new twist on an old idiom, we may have more to fear from fear itself. The vaccines are life-saving and here in New York City, we are starting to see them have the real-world benefit that has been observed in Israel, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. Consider the example of older adults who were prioritized earlier and receive vaccinations at nursing homes and in community. As more of these New Yorkers were vaccinated over 61 percent of our seniors have received at least one dose, we are starting to see hospitalizations drop.

The average rate of admissions into hospitals for COVID-like illness among those 65 and older has fallen by 51 percent since mid-January compared to 29 percent for those under 65. But we should not mistake progress for victory. This virus has shown us time and again, just how deadly it can be. We have to keep that in the front of our minds, even as we follow the science on the safety of vaccines. So, check nyc.gov/vaccinefinder, or call 877-VAX-4NYC to make an appointment. We now have over 600 sites open to the public on the vaccine finder. These include vaccine hubs, community clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies. And I'm pleased to report that 99 percent of New Yorkers now live within one mile of a vaccination site. So, with vaccinations, face coverings, and keeping our distance, we can control this virus and recover as a city. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Dr. Chokshi and I want to focus on a point that the Commissioner made, the hospitalization among seniors is going down intensely and that's such good news. The folks who are the most vulnerable, many, many fewer are ending up in the hospital because of the vaccine. So, yeah, we have challenges along the way, but what's been proven now very, very clearly is the power of this vaccine to protect our seniors, to protect everyone, but particularly those who are most vulnerable, and we are seeing really powerful evidence in terms of reduction of hospitalization. So, yeah, there's always more to do, but this is working and we're going to double down our efforts to reach every New Yorker who's ready to be vaccinated. Now, where do we stand overall, to give you the update on the number of doses administered from the beginning, 5,328,696 doses from the very beginning. You want a comparison? Here it is. That is more than there are people in the entire State of South Carolina. And this vaccination effort is going to continue to grow and it's going to be what brings us back as a city. And, yes, we are on track to our goal, five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated in June.

Okay. Now, this is all about how we bring our city back. It's about a recovery, but you know what I'm going to say, it's a recovery for all of us is what we need, a recovery that really reaches every part of the city, every New Yorker, and is a recovery that helps us do things differently

than we did in the past. Yesterday, we talked about something new and different and powerful, a different approach to helping our young people. Summer Rising, not summer school like we used to know, something much more inclusive and inviting and something for all children that's going to help them, not just through this summer where we really need to address their deep needs and help them make that great comeback as we go to school again in September, but that's something that's going to be around permanently, making summers something much more wonderful for a lot of kids and for free.

Well, now let's talk about our seniors because a recovery for all of us has to involve our children has to involve our seniors, has to involve our families, has to involve everyone. Our seniors have been through so much. You know, they're our grandparents, they're our mothers, our fathers, our aunts, our uncles. They've been through so much and they've been the most vulnerable in this crisis. And then to make things worse, they haven't been able to be with the people they love so much of the time, they haven't been able to hug their grandchildren and take the joy from being around their families. And the way to overcome that, of course, is to get everyone vaccinated. But we also need to realize we've got to do a lot more for our seniors now and for the future. And we've got to reach them in new ways. And there's lots of communities where there's just not enough support available to our seniors.

So, today we announce a new vision for seniors, and it is a bold plan to take us someplace we've never been before, a different approach to helping our seniors, particularly in some of the communities where there's the fewest services. Our Community Care Plan is a five-year plan that focuses on universal and equitable access to services, 25 additional sites around the city, whether it be services or whether it be senior centers, a variety of approaches, and helping to ensure that when seniors need a range of support and services, it's there for them. This is a \$50 million investment in the people who made New York City great, the people who gave us life and gave us the opportunities to do all that we do today, and they deserve our help. And we had to do it in a different way. And this is another case where the pandemic led us to rethink the approach and do things in a way that will reach seniors more deeply. Here to tell you about it is someone who worked so intensely to create this plan, it has been a labor of love for her, for sure. And I know she's excited to share it with us, our Commissioner for the Department for the Aging, Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez.

Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, Department for the Aging: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, thank you, that we've got to this day. It's a great day for New York. So, not only as Commissioner, but also as an adult woman, caring for my 92-year-old mother, I have faced the challenges that many New Yorkers and families have in making sure that the family receives the support they need with dignity in their homes, in their communities, and to avoid institutionalization. Simply put there're not enough services, in-home services, to support the growing number of older adults with the community assistance that they need. The pandemic highlighted the detrimental effects that living in an institution had on both adults, older adults, and their families. Study after study has indicated that older adult health and mental health fare much better if the older adult lives at home, rather than institutions. We need to shift to a Community Care Plan and this Mayor has done.

This is the first phase of a five-year plan. No, for those of you who may not know, there are 1.7 million older New Yorkers, one in five older New Yorkers, I mean, New Yorkers are over the age of 60, and that's going to grow in the next decades. This five-year plan, this Community Care

Plan with this initial investment will lay the foundation needed to build on and expand the current network of services and resources so that we can make sure that older adults live with their friends, their neighbors, and participate in their religious community. As the Mayor said, this initial investment will add 25 senior centers or what we call Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, NORCs, in underserved communities with large growing aging populations. For clarification, senior centers and Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities are the community foundation where older adults receive health and social services, wellness activities. They're essential to every community in this city. The Community Care Plan enables us to have many more of those throughout this city. We'll also provide additional staff and transportation services for those older adults who live in hard-to-reach neighborhoods. They can go and keep their appointments with their doctors, and we'll also help them with shopping assistance. We also build, as the Mayor said, we build on the lessons learned during this pandemic where we had to pivot thousands and thousands of educational, cultural, and wellbeing services to a virtual model. It will build on that experience.

In years two to five, it expands home care, home delivered meals, case management services to meet the growing number of older adults. It would also include a robust outreach plan to expand services to many more older New Yorkers. During this pandemic, we found 125,000 older adults who had lived independently, did not require services, who had to raise their hand and say, I'm in need. And those individuals continue to need services. This plan will incorporate those adults. This plan is groundbreaking. It is future forward and benefits everyone, older adults, families, and you, all New Yorkers since all of us will eventually reach the age when we need supports to remain in our homes and live with dignity and respect, the respect that all New Yorkers deserve. I want to thank you, Mr. Mayor. I can't thank you enough for laying the groundwork. This is a major breakthrough. The dollars that you are investing change the culture of New York, but also changes the City of New York and its individuals. As usual, New York City is ahead of the curve and paves the way so that New York is an age-inclusive city where people can reside with dignity. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Lorraine. And Commissioner, I just want you to, I can tell, as you're speaking, I know this is something you've really devoted yourself to making sure that we reach seniors better, making sure we reach a lot of seniors who are being left out, and who needed to be reached in their own languages, through their own cultures. This is really exciting to know that we're going to be able to reach our seniors in a whole new way. And it's another way that we recovered together. The most powerful idea is all the generations working together. What we did yesterday with Summer Rising, what we're doing today reaching seniors in many more communities, they all go together. Now, Commissioner Cortés-Vázquez worked so hard on this plan and she and her team deserve a lot of credit and they feel deeply about it. But I can also tell you something, there is no one more passionate on this topic than our next speaker, because I've talked to her not ten times or a dozen times or a few dozen times, I would say I've talked to her hundreds of times about her passionate views on serving our seniors. And she is an extraordinary advocate for seniors, not only in her district in Lower Manhattan, but all over the City of New York. So, I am very pleased to bring forward the Chair of the Committee on Aging in the City Council, Council Member Margaret Chin. Welcome.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much. And Council Member, I want to tell you, seriously, I make – we make fun, you and I joke around a lot, but you have really been an incredibly effective advocate. Because whenever I see you coming, even if it's 100 feet away, I know what it's about to happen. I know what you're about to say, you make me – you're my conscience. You make me think about, are we doing enough for our seniors today? And today is a day we can definitely say we're doing a lot for our seniors. And I want to thank you. I know your term is coming to an end, and I just want to thank you for a lifetime of service to the people of Lower Manhattan, but also to this whole city. You've been an extraordinary champion for seniors and a very effective one. So, I want to thank you for that.

Council Member Margaret Chin: Thank you, Mayor. I am going to enjoy all the services that New York City has to offer.

Mayor: Yes, we'll make sure they're ready for you. But the other point that the Council Member -

Council Member Chin: But this is truly the year of the senior. We keep talking about the year of the senior, Mayor you finally made it to this strong, healthy year for the seniors.

Mayor: I thank you. I will say Commissioner, for the last eight years, Margaret Chin has said every year is the year of the senior. So, she's very consistent. But the Council Member made a crucial point also, aging in place, helping our seniors to stay in their homes, stay in their apartments, stay with their families, stay in their community, especially after the horrible situation we've seen with the nursing homes last year. It is time to reevaluate our whole approach as a society, federal level, state level, local level. And this is the kind of new initiative that will help us to help seniors age in place and live the right way. And not have only a nursing home as an option. So, this is a good step forward. Thank you, Council Member.

Council Member Chin: Thank you.

Mayor: All right, everyone let's do indicators today. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report, good number today, 174 patients. Confirmed positivity, 55.49 percent. And hospitalization rate, this is striking again. This picks up on what Commissioner Chokshi was saying. This is the lowest I've seen in quite a while, 2.99 per 100,000. We still have a way to go to get below the threshold, but very good trajectory as you can see there, downward trajectory on the hospitalization rate. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report 2,637 cases. Also a good downward trajectory. We want to keep that going. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19. Again, we like what we see today. Today's report on a seven-day rolling average 5.30 percent. So everyone, we have a long way to go. We all know that. But look, once again, a number that's getting close to that threshold that we want to get below and stay below. So, we're really seeing some movement. It's all because of the vaccinations and the smart things that New Yorkers still do – the wearing the masks, practicing the social distancing, stick with it because it's working. Okay. Few words in Spanish, and I want to talk about the new Community Care initiative for our seniors.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that. Let's turn to our colleagues in the media. And please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Commissioner Chokshi, DFTA Commissioner Cortés-Vázquez, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Marla from WCBS Radio.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. As you were speaking, we learned of the death in federal prison of Bernie Madoff. What is your reaction to his passing?

Mayor: I'm just hearing it now from you Marla. Look, very sad episode in the history of this city. And a lot of people unfortunately were hurt. So, the day someone passes is not a time to dance on a grave, but let's just be honest, many, many people were hurt by his actions. And now it's time to hopefully turn the page and move forward. Go ahead, Marla.

Question: How was the NYPD preparing for the verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial?

Mayor: It's an important question. We're in constant, literally daily conversations. Obviously, so much will happen based on what the verdict is and how it's expressed. But we're preparing. We would be ready for a variety of protests and we're going to use the approach that's been working. Which is to put a heavy emphasis on our community affairs officers and being respectful of protest. And, you know, we've, I think learned some very, very important lessons about the right way to do it. And that's what we'll be looking to do.

Moderator: Next is Courtney from NY1.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Courtney. How have you been?

Question: I'm good. Thank you. First question is on the J&J fallout. I'm slightly confused because yesterday you all said that New Yorkers who'd been scheduled for J&J vaccines would be rescheduled. And I understand the 4,000 appointments that were scheduled for yesterday were rescheduled or in the process of being rescheduled. But now you're saying people who have appointments for J&J later in the week are just going to keep them and get a different vaccine? So, if I'm a New Yorker that has an appointment for this afternoon, what do I do?

Mayor: I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. I don't know – we weren't as articulate as we should have been yesterday. But no, the point all along has been to, I think we tried to say yesterday, keep getting people appointments and the vaccines that are available now, obviously proven effective, Moderna, Pfizer. We're just going to keep getting people to those appointments. And then as soon as we get an all clear on the J&J, we'll start using that again.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thanks Mr. Mayor. And you're exactly right. Our first preference of course, is to honor appointments as they're already scheduled. So, for the vast majority of people who had been planned to get the J&J vaccine this week, they're keeping their appointment as is and just getting the different vaccine, either Pfizer or Moderna. So, either we have communicated with people about that shift to a different vaccine. Or if someone has any

questions, they're always welcome to call the specific vaccine site, to get some clarity. There are some people, as you mentioned for whom particularly if they had appointments yesterday, we've had to reschedule them to a different time or a different place. In those cases, those notifications have gone out with both the new appointment information along with a phone number or a contact if someone has any questions about that new appointment.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Courtney.

Question: And then the second – the second question is about the shooting spike and how, you know, for weeks, if not months or more than a year now, you've talked about how the shutting down of the court system is partially to blame or to blame for the increase in shootings and crime all across the city. We reached out to the court system yesterday and they sent us a statement saying, listen, we've had resumed in-person jury trials for three weeks. We've been working all along. And they said specifically, and I'm reading here, quote, this is a quote – the Mayor should remember that the way shifting blame works is to be cognizant as to how another branch of government is actually functioning before doing so. The reality is that every one of the judiciary judges, non-judicial staff, and court officers have really stepped up in this past year. And that was why uninformed, gratuitous remarks like the Mayor's, are unjustified. Can you respond to that please?

Mayor: Sure. First of all, Courtney, I think the cause for all of this is a global pandemic. And I've said that, so respecting your question. No, I have never said it's one factor. I have said it is all about the many, many horrible consequences of the coronavirus. And I've said, I think more times I could count, the perfect storm of people, almost a million people losing their jobs, school shut down, houses of worship shut down, communities just not having all the things that normally glue them together. Many things have resulted from that. One of the things that's resulted, that's been particularly problematic is not having a normal functioning criminal justice system. You know, public relations people will offer their quotes and that's normal, but let's be honest. There's been very few trials for the last year. So, I'll just send it right back to them. I'll say, do you disagree with this statement? There's been very few trials and we have a large number of people awaiting trial. And if you can't have trials, you can't move the system. So, let's just get together and move it. We'll do whatever it takes, if they need additional space, if they need additional help with vaccination, whatever it is. I've been saying that for weeks and weeks now. And it's saying the priority, should get everyone in the court system vaccinated and get going. But we can give you exact numbers. There's just not been trials and that's holding everything up. When there are trials, if someone's guilty, there's a consequence. And that's what makes everything else work in the system. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Jeff from the New York Times.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I have a question on behalf of one of my colleagues. Yesterday the first responder union withdrew their lawsuit over disciplinary records. The court had issued an injunction. The City said it prevented it releasing those records from a category known as command discipline. And that category is much larger than what the NYPD has already released. Now that the injunction is out of the way, do you plan to release those records as well as the negotiated pleas that were never an issue in terms of their release?

Mayor: Yeah, I want to see exactly as a result of this, what we can release and what makes sense to release. I certainly think it's going to give us the opportunity to do additional release of information, which I'm looking forward to. But what exactly it will be, I need to get some more detail on. So, we'll get that to you quickly. Go ahead, Jeff.

Question: Back to the gun violence issue. Historically summer you know, has been at a difficult time in terms of dealing with gun violence. You know, what plans are being made right now to – as we already see an increase in gun violence, what's being done to make sure that this summer is not something that's really terrible in terms of gun violence?

Mayor: Yeah, there's a lot of work going on right now. We'll be talking about it more and more in the weeks ahead. Obviously, you know look across the range of approaches that are going to help turn this around. Bringing community and police together is absolutely essential. We need community members to feel connected to the police, that they have a common mission. The reforms that we've announced over the last few months, the discipline matrix, the effort to bring the community into the selection of precinct commanders, all the reforms that we announced in March working with the City Council, all of this is to re-bond police and community. That is crucial to fighting crime. That's something we didn't have in strong enough position in 2020. That's not a surprise to you, Jeff. That's something we had to do better at. And I think all of those reforms will help. Second, gun arrests. Literally we're at the highest point in the last 25 years in terms of gun arrests. NYPD is moving really effectively. A lot of effort, a lot of smart work being done on the gun arrests. Third, Cure Violence movement, Crisis Management System. We keep adding more and more. It's working. We need to deepen the investments. We've said a lot of that in last few months, about the way we're going to do that, more to come. Deepen the work at the community level to stop violence before it happens. These are all pieces of the solution. Absolutely, we need a fully functioning court system. We need an economy to keep coming back. I think based on the estimates from OMB, we're going to add hundreds of thousands more jobs this year. That's going to help, bringing back schools in September fully, that's going to help. So, a lot of work happening, a lot of pieces moving. And we're going to be adding to that in the coming weeks.

Moderator: As a programming note, we're joined by Dr. Katz. Next we'll go to Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah. Good morning, everyone. Wanted to ask a COVID question. The Times did an analysis that very starkly illustrates how the B.1.526 and B.1.1.7 variants have come to be the dominant strains in the city. That's something that you and Dr. Chokshi have spoken a lot about, but could we just hear your latest thoughts on what the implications of that rise in those two strains is for the City's efforts to return to normalcy?

Mayor: I'll just say something quickly and then turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi. Shant, it's a very, very important question. It's one of the most important questions we can be asking ourselves. The – clearly the variants, you know, have created a dynamic where we've had to work even harder. If the variants hadn't existed, I think we'd be in a much better position. And we are concerned certainly in case of one variant of the particular negative effects it has. That said, we've talked about this analogy for a while now, you know, running a race, you know, having a race against the variants. I think we're winning that race right now. And you look at numbers I just went over with the indicators, we are winning that race right now. We got to keep

going and we got to keep our guard up. But the strategy remains the same. Vaccination works. That part is clear. And that's where we just have to put all of our efforts to once and for all beat them back. Dr. Varma, then Dr. Chokshi?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Thank you very much for the question, Shant. I think, you know, the Mayor has really summarized kind of the critical issues here. We have known for several months ever since you know, November, December when the U.K. started flagging the emergence of a more infectious strain that we would be at risk of having that here. And the good news about all this is that the same measures that we use to prevent the sort of classic strains of COVID, also work against these strains. You just have to be more diligent about using them. And that's why we've been so strident in our morning conferences about really emphasizing the importance of wearing a well-fitting mask, potentially wearing two, continue to do all of the safety measures. And as the Mayor has just highlighted, getting vaccinated. We continue to evaluate our data closely. Obviously, this is not the first time that, you know, the virus has mutated. Viruses mutate all the time. That's what they do. And it won't be the last time. And so that's why it's really important for us to continue all of these measures. Particularly getting vaccinated, particularly getting tested. And we can assure you that we're continuing to analyze this data daily to make sure that we don't need to change. You know, if we find in the future that you know, something has to be done differently, we're going to let you know. But everything we see right now points to keep up what we're doing, get vaccinated, and we're going to get through this.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. I'll just add the Health Department put out a summary report on the current situation with respect to the variants in New York City. One of the major findings is that the two variants that you mentioned in your question, B.1.1.7, first identified in the United Kingdom, and B.1.526, associated with New York. Those two variants now represent about three quarters of all specimens that are being sequenced in New York City. And put simply these variants do make our job harder because they are more infectious. And you know, because it's part of the reason that we haven't seen cases plunging as much as we would like. With all of that said, we are making progress and I'll just underline the points that both the Mayor and Dr. Varma have made which are encapsulated in the safe six of what we're advising New Yorkers – masking, distancing, staying home if you're not feeling well, washing your hands, getting tested, this is particularly important, even now with vaccination, and then finally getting vaccinated when you're able to.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah. So, thanks for that. On an unrelated note, I wanted to ask about a video making the rounds on social media of NYPD robot dog. It's seen coming out of what looks like a public housing building. It's kind of creeped people out because, you know, no one's really seen these things before. And I guess there've been a couple of instances of this. The NYPD says it's testing out the robot dog's capabilities. But given that, you know, people – this is new to people, the NYPD and you say you've been working to improve ties with communities. Why kind of, I don't know – it feels like people are being used as Guinea pigs here? Why test this kind of creepy technology out in this way?

Mayor: Okay. I haven't seen it, but I certainly share the concern that if in any way it's unsettling to people, we should rethink the equation. So, I don't know what is being done to test it. I'll certainly talk to the Commissioner about it. I don't want people to feel you know, that something is happening that they don't know about. So, we'll work that out. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, everyone. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Juliet? How have you been?

Question: I'm okay, thank you. I did want to follow up on the shooting and daylight crime and the innocent bystanders. And I know you've mentioned often, even this morning, about the influence – the Violence Interrupters and the Cure Violence Program. I want to know, is there a way you're quantifying or measuring the work that they're doing and their effectiveness?

Mayor: Absolutely. Our team can get you some of that information. It's quite striking. There's a legendary example from Queensbridge Houses, which is the largest public housing development in America of hundreds of days that went by without a shooting, largely due to the work of the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System, but there's many, many other examples and quantifiable facts about this approach. So, we'll get that to you. It's also important to note, Juliet, that President Biden has really focused on this now as a national strategy, and a lot of the best work of the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System all over the country actually happened here in New York City. So, I want to give a shout out to the organizations, to the community groups, to the leaders who built this movement in this city, because it's now become a national model. And, in fact, if you look in the infrastructure plan, and then you look in some of the announcements the White House has made recently, they are now focusing on community-based solutions to violence in a way the federal government never has before. And a lot of that is based on the evidence that came right here from New York City. Go ahead, Juliet.

Juliet, can you hear us?

Question: Okay, great. Yes, thank you. Oh, great – I look forward to that information. So, my second question is on behalf of a 1010 WINS listener who has been very persistent about this. And so, I'd like to ask you, based on the fact that you're talking about aid to seniors, when can, or will senior centers open?

Mayor: Okay. I'm going to turn to the Commissioner in a moment. And, Juliet, I was missing some of your words. I think you used different phones or different – different technology, different times. So, I'm just letting you know we had a little trouble hearing you here today. So, senior centers are obviously so important. I've spent a lot of time in senior centers, as every good elected official does, and I know they're part of the glue of the life of seniors. But, obviously, last year, we also had to be particularly careful to protect our seniors. They were the most vulnerable New Yorkers. And the last thing we want to do is congregate people in small spaces together. Now, thank God, the situation's improving, so we're working on the next steps, going forward. Commissioner, give us an update.

Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez: I think you said it rather well, sir. We have been working daily with the Department of Health. Science will lead our decision, always. We're very, very hopeful given that 64 percent of older adults have received the first dose. And we're very hopeful that they're – the decline of hospitalization amongst this population has also given us a pathway. But size will dictate this. And my partner in this is Dr. Chokshi, and we've been working diligently on this. We believe that we will soon be talking about a plan. It will not be a reopening as Margaret Chin asks me every day, and every other older New Yorker asked me every day – when am I going to be able to go back? But as we phased it before the shutdown, we will phase a reopening in the same way. So, we will see some information soon.

Mayor: Thank you. Thank you very much. Doctor, you want to add, or you're good?

Commissioner Chokshi: Just to add briefly, sir, if I may, to say – first, we know how important senior centers are, particularly to support the health of our seniors. But the point that I really want to make is that there's one thing that we can all do to help accelerate the timeline, not just for reopening senior centers, but so many other things, and that's to help people get vaccinated. So, I would say, you know, for your listener, but for everyone who's out there, if you know a senior who hasn't been vaccinated yet, please reach out to them. We're accepting walk-ins for those 75 and older at 26 City sites. And so, all you have to do is bring them to one of those sites and we will get them vaccinated on the very same day. So, everything that we can do to accelerate progress in our vaccination campaign is tied to the reopening of the city.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Sydney from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I had a question about Johnson & Johnson and the curveball that you spoke about at the beginning of the press conference. Just given so many people are kind of processing this news and may just be looking at the top line and the headlines, just because they're too busy to get into the details and the weeds of what this really means. And because there is a concern that this pause is going to make people reluctant or confused, maybe, even, if they that they don't have the right details. I'm wondering, what proactive work is the City Health Department is doing to try to combat that and make sure that the materials and information in different languages is really getting to people on the ground, like getting to CBOs to distribute that information, you know, kind of immediately. Is there a proactive work to turn that around quickly for people who aren't watching these press conferences?

Mayor: Yeah. Sydney, very important question. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi in a second. I just want to say, first of all, you know, you watch the news hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute. I think it's fair to say the vast majority of people, you know, get some news some of the time. And so, I think the fact that this has no implication for the Moderna vaccine or the Pfizer vaccine is the most important thing to say. We have two vaccines that have now been in play for months and months. You know, over a hundred million Americans vaccinated with almost no negative effects. I think that's the big story here and we have to keep reminding people, we're just moving forward with those vaccines. We also have to say very clearly, we really need the federal government to resolve this J & J situation quickly. It was very frustrating. We understand abundance of caution. Basing their decision on, I think, it's six or seven individual cases – I get abundance of caution, but, you know, we really need to keep vaccinating people. So, it's

incumbent upon the federal government to come back with a quick answer on the J & J situation, because that's really what people need to hear the most. But yes, I think, that said, with those points made, I think you're absolutely right. The more we can inform people, the more we can proactively remind them of which vaccines we're using and that they are safe, answer their questions, the better off we're going to be, and yes, in multiple languages. So, Dr. Choksi, talk about those efforts.

Commissioner Choksi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. You covered all of the high points. What I would say is that, first, our bottom-line message remains the same. The vaccines against COVID-19 are safe, effective, and lifesaving, and we have two that we continue to use, Pfizer and Moderna, for that purpose. And vaccines remain the most important tool that we have in our arsenal against COVID-19. As new information does emerge, particularly from the review by the FDA and the CDC, we will make the appropriate updates to our materials, both for the public as well as for clinicians, for doctors, and other health care providers around the city. We've already started to do that. We have dozens of town halls and other events each day to keep people informed. We have sent out notifications to the thousands of providers who are already administering vaccination, that happened yesterday. And I'm really glad that you pointed out the point about language, because we do take pains to translate all of our materials into the dozens of most common languages spoken around New York City. So, this is a critical moment for us with respect to further building vaccine confidence. And so, we'll pull out all the stops with respect to communicating to all New Yorkers about what we know and how that's changing.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Sydney.

Question: Thank you. Thank you. And I have brought this up before, but I am wondering if the City is still planning to release data on where vaccine doses are going – like, which sites. Now that we're four months into the rollout, I'm wondering if the City still plans to do that and if you have a more clear timeline from the last time I asked about this?

Mayor: Yeah. I mean, I understand there's so much going on and data is takes real effort, but I've said for a while now I want us to get past the ZIP-code level and show how we're distributing among sites. It changes a lot. A lot of adjustments are made according to need and supply, and we're obviously setting up lots of new sites and pop-up sites, but I think it's just helpful to show how we're distributing vaccine. Dr. Choksi, can you talk about when we can get that out?

Commissioner Choksi: Yes, sir, Mr. Mayor. This is something that we're continuing to analyze the data on. We have a sense of, of course, how vaccine is being allocated within larger systems. We have to figure out, you know, precisely how that's distributed across sites within the system. But we can tell you right now that, you know, the major places where vaccines are being distributed remain our community-based clinics, our vaccine hubs, and other City, you know, mass vaccination sites, pharmacies, and private doctor's offices as well. So, with respect to, you know, that specific data, that is something that we can continue to compile and analyze and share in the coming days and weeks.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayo. How are you doing today?

Mayor: I'm doing okay, Marcia. How have you been?

Question: I'm okay. So, I'd like to go back to the increasing gun crimes. I continued to be puzzled by your belief that the gun crimes and shooting incidents will go down once schools open, once the economy comes back, and the courts are operating more smoothly. I wonder what evidence or what facts you're basing your comments on. And if you have any – any statistics to show that once all this happens, people are going to stop taking out their guns and shooting people.

Mayor: Marcia, years and years of evidence. Six straight years, 2014 through 2019, we drove down crime consistently. We drove down shootings. We drove down murders. We deepened the relationship between police and community. It's a proven approach, six years – and then a global pandemic disrupted it. And even with the effects of a global pandemic, you can see the city coming back strong in so many ways. You can see the NYPD out there doing extraordinary work to get guns off the streets. You can see the impact of the efforts to bring community closely together with the police. You can see the work of Cure Violence and the Crisis Management System growing. Of course, we're going to turn it around. I literally think it's inconceivable that we're not going to turn it around, but it will take a lot of time and effort and it does mean getting all those pieces back – get jobs, back schools, back court system back, and that's exactly what we're doing now. Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: So, I wonder what your reaction is to some law enforcement experts who say that that's not the solution, because the bad guys still have the guns and the bad guys don't have – don't believe the cops are going to come after them and that they're still going to shoot. What do you say to people who say that?

Mayor: I think that they have a particular worldview, but I would say the facts suggest otherwise. There've been too many guns in this city for a long time and that's something I'm very, very sad about and troubled about. And that's going to be the case until we have gun laws in this country that stop the constant flow of guns into New York City. This is something we've been talking about for decades – it's not new and you know it. The question is, how do we get those guns? How do we stop people from using those guns? Neighborhood policing, for six years we proved it worked and we are now doubling down. And, obviously, we've got to get our society to work in all the ways it did before. So, yeah, there's been guns present, but what worked was police and community together, ensuring that people didn't use those guns, and, whenever possible, getting guns off people. And that's why I'm really emphasizing – and I don't see it getting the attention it deserves, NYPD is at a 25-year high for gun arrests. They are out there doing the work, and every time there's an arrest, it makes an impact. Now, we need a court system that does something about those arrests. People who use guns need to suffer the consequences. That's what we need to see. We need that court system fully functioning again, so that we can really turn the corner.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning. It is still morning, isn't it, Mayor?

Mayor: It's definitely morning, Andrew.

[Laughter]

Okay. Andrew, I want to know something your life that you're questioning whether it's morning. Were you up late, Andrew?

Question: It's just work. 24 hours a day, seven days a week – it's work, Mayor.

Mayor: Okay. Good comeback.

Question: Here's the first question – on the homebound seniors initiative, beyond Sunday, is there a contingency plan after that if this pause ends up lasting longer than anticipated?

Mayor: Well, I'm going to start by saying – and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but I'm going to start by saying we really need the federal government to move quickly. This is – again, this is a big curveball based on very few cases. I do respect the concept of abundance of caution, but now it's incumbent upon the federal government to come to us decisions quickly and give us instruction so we can get to work. I believe they feel that urgency. The bottom line is, getting Johnson & Johnson back in play with whatever appropriate guidance is the best solution. That's the best way to do the homebound work. It's very hard to do the homebound effort with a vaccine that takes two doses. If we had to, we would start that approach. But, right now, I think it's fair to say, plan-A is what we still want to get back to. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, you're exactly right, Mr. Mayor. The only thing that I'll add is that, you know, so much depends on the results of the federal review of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, but we expect to have some clarity about what that yields within the next two to three days. You know, I anticipate by the end of the week, we will have a more firm answers about how we can proceed. And so, our plan for homebound seniors, which we are so passionate about will depend on what we find from that.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: The question, you may recall, it was last week I asked when you thought we'd reached that point where the supply outstripped the demand, and both you and Dr. Chokshi thought maybe that would be in May. But based on your highlighting today that you have 600 vaccine sites and that there's plenty of Moderna and Pfizer to fill these Johnson & Johnson appointments, and that folks are getting appointments right now pretty much by searching the vaccine finder, have we already reached that point where now supply outstrips demand?

Mayor: No. And Andrew, listen, I appreciate your intellectual curiosity, but I would say, geez, I'd love to have a press conference where we talked about, you know, no one needs a shot anymore and we're all done here. We're not going to be having that press conference anytime soon. Every appointment we put up gets taken and gets taken quickly. There's no question in my mind, we're going to hit this goal and we've got to get this Johnson & Johnson thing worked out. Both Johnson & Johnson things – the factory issue too. But we're going to hit this goal, 5 million New Yorkers vaccinated in June. But that still leaves, you know, millions more people we'd like

to reach. Now, some of them are kids, and that's its own issue, developing the vaccine for kids, younger kids. But I think the next frontier, if you will, is deepening our efforts to overcome the hesitancy that still exists.

And I'll finish on this, Andrew, and also conclude this morning with this – I've seen extraordinary progress, convincing people that vaccines work for them. You can see the numbers are changing all the time. A lot of folks who were hesitant are now willing. They're talking to people in their life who had a good experience with the vaccine. They're seeing the positive impact the vaccine is having. So, more and more people coming forward. But we know there's still a lot of New Yorkers we have to reach, particularly in communities of color with positive outreach, not just waiting for them to come forward. And, yesterday, I was up at 125th Street, and out on the street with our Public Engagement Unit and the Test and Trace Corps., both of whom deserve a lot of credit – I want to give a shout out to Test and Trace Corps. and Public Engagement Unit for the incredible work you do, going out to people, connecting with them, getting them to help they need. I talked to three people right there on the corner who were not vaccinated, who, when we got into a conversation, they were willing to go over and sign up right then and there. They all happened to be younger. They all happen to be people of color, who hadn't heard what they needed to hear about why it was okay to do. They needed some encouragement. They needed some support. And then when they had a conversation, there was someone right there with, you know, an iPad ready to sign them up. They're ready to go. We're going to have to do that with hundreds of thousands of people, just go to them, connect with them, make it easy, answer the questions. But we can do that. So, I think you're going to see this effort go full bore through May, into June, and beyond, because we want to reach every single New Yorker we can. And that's how we create a recovery for all of us, really making sure that everyone gets the answers and support they need so they get vaccinated, so they're safe, so their families are safe, so we bring this city back. Thank you, everybody.

###