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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. We're going to talk today about really tough realities we're facing and the ways that all New Yorkers have to participate in addressing this situation. We're going to be very clear about the things that we have to do to protect our city, our communities, our families, but before we go into some of the things that are going to take real resolve, let's also take stock of some of the things that are working in our favor, because it's really important to see that part of the equation too. Just in the last days, we've gotten some extraordinarily good news about the vaccine situation. For the first time we can certainly say with some confidence that a vaccine's coming very soon, going to take a lot of work to distribute, to say the least, but we have the most tangible evidence we've ever had about the vaccine timeline. That's good news. We're seeing some real progress in terms of the use of antibody medications, antibody medications that are helping to protect those who are most vulnerable and reduce the impact of COVID on them. These are big tangible realities that really can change the trajectory.

But in the meantime, we're dealing with a clear upsurge in the presence of this disease in this city and the way to address that is the way we have done every time before, whether it was back in the spring when the whole city dealt with this extraordinary challenge out of nowhere, or even more recently in neighborhoods around Brooklyn and Queens, where we had a major uptick and people work together to fight it back. That's what we have to do again now. Now, of course, in the last 24 hours, we've gotten new guidance from the State of New York and I've talked about this with the Governor in detail. We're working to ensure the City and State are always closely coordinating on these issues. So, the new State rules include having bars and restaurants closed by 10:00 pm each evening, although takeout and delivery can go later. Gyms as well must close by 10:00 pm. There's a limit on certain gatherings to 10 people and these rules will be put into effect this coming Friday, tomorrow, at 10:00 pm. And of course, the City will work to enforce these new rules and all the existing rules effectively. Enforcement is a crucial part of the equation. The most important part of the equation is everyone being bought in and following through on these rules. So, we need to take them to heart because it's all about protecting all of us and this is where New Yorkers have excelled, taking the approaches that have been put together by our public health leadership and putting them into action. That's why we had all those months when we were doing so well.

These specific measures, they're the kinds of things we know can make a huge difference and now let's talk about the other decision we heard from the State yesterday, the decision to indicate certain parts of Staten Island as a yellow zone. Now, again, this zone approach is something we've seen work in Brooklyn and Queens, work actually in a matter of weeks, that's really good news. We're dealing with a bigger challenge now, unquestionably, but we also have evidence that these focused approaches can work. So, in Staten Island, a huge outreach effort underway now, a lot of information being provided, masks being provided, more and more testing. The kinds of approaches that have worked time and again in recent months in other parts of the city can and will work in Staten Island. We're going to need to work with all Staten Islanders with leaders, clergy, organizations, everyone to protect the people of that borough, and here to talk more about this effort and what we need to do to keep Staten Islanders safe, the Borough President of Staten Island, Jimmy Oddo.

Staten Island Borough President James Oddo: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for allowing me to take a few moments of your platform to speak about Staten Island and to Staten Islanders. I think it's fair to recognize that to varying degrees, many of us are enduring COVID fatigue. For me, it's the distortion of time. I can't tell you how many moments when it took me a good three to five seconds to remember which day of the week it was. Chronological order seems out of balance. But despite that I have a date and a time etched in my head, and that is 8:00 pm on April 2nd, because that's when I emailed you one of my many emails in those days and said to you, a switch has happened. It's no longer about chasing PPE. It's about chasing staff. And I remember that moment, and I remember those early days and weeks of this pandemic. I remember talking every day to the leaders of our two hospital systems, as we chased equipment and we chased PPE, as they converted their hospitals as they serve this pandemic, as they stripped away the burn unit and the therapy unit, and they took every possible space and turned it into standing ICU's. I don't want to go back to that. I don't want to go back to close to that.

And we can't allow some sort of warped self-fulfilling prophecy that we resist controlling what we can control. We resist these steps because some feel it's too much that eventually leads us to more onerous restrictions. Control what we can control, wear the mask, keep at a safe distance, be smart about social gatherings. Mayor, I am a born and raised Staten Islander, so that gives me certain privileges, and I can talk about my home community while others can't, and I can admit we are a unique lot. We can be abrupt. I swear we would cut off grandma to get 10 feet ahead on Hylan Boulevard during traffic, but we are at our best in crunch moments, post 9/11, post Sandy, the selfishness that we have is stripped away. We are quickly approaching, if not at that moment, Staten Islanders. Let's rise up to the occasion yet again. I will close with this, Mr. Mayor, and you may think this is corny, or you may not. In these moments, we get inspiration where we can, you're reading a book about John Lindsay and some other things, I've cultivated a nice list of podcasts and books, but it is in re-watching the West Wing for the umpteenth time that I caught a line that I had not heard before. And it's Jed Bartlet, the president, arguing with his wife about a homily in the mass, and they talk about Ephesians 5:21, be subject to one another. That's the message. Be subject to one another, wear the mask, be subject to one another, keep a safe

distance, be subject to one another, don't – don't have the gratuitous gatherings, be subject to one another, be smart about the holidays coming up. That's the message that I have for Staten Island as it echoes yours, I appreciate you giving me the time to look into the camera and talk to my fellow Staten Islanders.

Mayor: Thank you. Thank you, Borough President. Look, I want everyone just to reflect on the passion and the sense of urgency you're hearing from Borough President Oddo and we – when he said the part about what Staten Islanders do in a time of crisis, it brings me back to the many times we've been together on 9/11 at memorials, the beautiful memorial at the Postcards Monument that you do every year, the gathering you do every year, which is in solidarity with families who lost their loved ones on 9/11, but is also attribute to the strength of Staten Island and the incredible sense of public service that pervade Staten Island, a borough with just amazing number of public servants, first responders, teachers, sanitation workers, you name it. People who are there for us every single day and do that selflessly. That is the spirit of Staten Island. I think the Borough President's right, everyone's going to have to dig deep at this moment, but it can be done. Staten Island's overcome huge challenges before. There's a lot of heroism, a lot of spirit, and we can do it again. We just saw it happen in Brooklyn and Queens, and again, we're going to have a lot of questions today and I keep coming back to it. If we were having this conversation a month or six weeks ago, we'd be talking about how tough the situation got in Brooklyn and Queens, and yet today, even in the midst of other challenges, we've seen an extraordinary improvement in the very same neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens because people got involved and people work together. We're going to do that again on Staten Island. Thank you for your leadership, Borough President.

Okay, now everyone, look, these next days are going be crucial. And again, I want to echo another point the Borough President made, I don't want there ever to be an air of “inevitability” that takes away people's agency, that takes away people's ability to make an impact that tells us we don't matter. In fact, everything you do does matter. Every single thing you do matters because you can stop the disease from being transmitted by doing the right thing, or you can inadvertently transmit the disease by doing the wrong thing. So, every single New Yorker matters. We talk about that core four, these are the basic things that make such a huge difference. When we tell people, go out and get tested it's because it tells us what's going on and what we need to do and helps us protect everyone. So, these approaches work, but it's – this is a participatory reality. They work when people really own it.

And this takes me to another topic that is absolutely more crucial than ever, which is what happens if someone tests positive? What happens to protect their family, what happens to make sure that if they were in contact with other people, we reach them, and then when we find the need to protect someone to safely separate them from their family, make sure that they get what they need. We don't just leave them out there and say, good luck. We, in fact, engage even more. And here's a time where we're telling people how important it is not to travel. Really want to keep emphasizing that. We're urging people not to travel for the holidays, but we know some

people have to, or some people will choose to despite the warnings. What you do thereafter, when you come back, becomes crucial. And following the rules that require you to quarantine, unless you have gone through certain testing, is crucial. All of this works when people know that they will be supported. If you have to stay home, there's going to be help available to you. If you need medical help, if you need support, if you even need another place to stay. This is going to be more than ever in our effort to stop the spread of COVID. So, here to talk about this, what we call our Take Care effort. And again, it is going to loom large now because we need every single human being to honor the need to safely separate when that time comes for a quarantine to honor it and to know they'll be helped. The person we put in charge of making sure the support is there for every single New Yorker who needs it, is Dr. Amanda Johnson from Health + Hospitals and our Test and Trace Corps. Dr. Johnson –

Director Amanda Johnson, Take Care New York: Thank you, Mayor. I'm going to start out by talking a little bit about household transmission. We know that household transmission is a significant concern for New Yorkers. We know that many of us live with roommates and it's not uncommon to have households where you have children, parents, and grandchildren all sleeping under the same roof. We have emerging data from the CDC that shows us that in households where one person has tested positive for COVID-19, 53 percent of those households go on to have a second person test positive for COVID-19. And we also see that that transmission happens very early on. Of those 53 percent of households that went on to have a second person develop COVID-19, 75 percent had those infections happen within those first five days after exposure. So, time really is of the essence here. We want to know that the Take Care program is here to support you in doing the things that are going to keep your family members safe. So, what can you do? I want to put out upfront that you don't have to stay in your household, posing undue risk to the people that you live with. We've served over 2,500 New Yorkers, to date, from the inception of our Take Care hotel program. I'm going to tell you a little bit more about how to connect with that program toward the end of my remarks.

I also want to remind people that once you complete your interview, your first phone call with that contact tracer, we're going to ship you our Take Care package. I was here a couple of months ago, and I shared with you the contents of that package, but just to recap, it includes personal protective equipment, it includes monitoring equipment, such as thermometers. And if you are a COVID positive case, it includes a pulse oximeter, which is critically important for managing and watching your trajectory during your infection. It also includes cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, and very recently, we started to include an at-home testing kit. If you are a contact household, you'll start seeing this in the take care packages that arrive on your doorstep. So, why is this kit important? When you know your status, you're going to take the right steps to protect your household and your workplace. And you're going to reach out to us for help. And when you test, we have the information that we need to continue fighting the virus, to continue identifying where it's spreading so that we can break the chains of transmission. I'm going to take a moment to go over just how to use this testing kit.

So, you're going to get a box like this in your Take Care package. And it has a couple of items in it for you. On the day that you decide to complete your at-home testing kit, you're going to want to go online and create an account, and you'll need this gift code because we're giving it to you for free in your Take Care package, as well as this activation code. So, this kit is linked with you

specifically. The first thing you're going to want to do is find a flat surface and open this vile. This little plastic tube is where you're going to eventually put your specimen after it's been collected. I like to lean it in the box itself so that it stays up right. You also have a swab in your testing kit. This little plastic Q-tip-like instrument is going to be used to collect your specimen. You're going to put it inside each nostril, swirl it around about four times, and then take that same swab, put it in the other nostril, swirl it around four times. It should not be uncomfortable. Do not insert it more than an inch into your nostril. Once you've collected your specimen, you're going to take your tube and you're going to put the Q-tip into the medium, into the solution, and there's a little indentation so that it snaps off very easily. You're going to recap it. You're going to make sure that it's on tight and that it's not leaking. You'll put it in this bag. You'll seal this bag. You'll put it in your box. And then there's a sticker so that you can seal it up in your box as well. Once your box is sealed, you're going to put it in the prepaid mailing bag. And you're going to call the number that's included in the instructions in your Take Care package so that someone can pick it up for you and deliver it that same day. So, test on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, because this needs to get to the lab on time so that your specimen can be processed appropriately.

You should have your results within 48 hours. You get an email notification saying that your results have been imported into your account and they're visible for you to view online, but regardless of the results of the tests, it's critically important that you stay in touch with your monitor. Your contact tracer is the only person who's going to be able to save for you when it's safe to exit isolation or quarantine. And regardless of whether you've tested, if you have symptoms, if you've been in close contact with someone who's tested positive for COVID-19 or has had symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19, don't wait, separate. The Take Care program is here to help you do what you need to prevent the spread of transmission of COVID-19 to the people you care about are the people that you work with. So, what does this look like? Call 212-COVID19 so that you can get connected with the hotel program. Press four for the hotel, and you'll speak immediately to somebody who can complete your intake, get your information, schedule a pickup, and get you to the hotel that evening. And if you decide that the right thing for you is to separate at home, we are still here for you. Call 212-COVID19, press fives so you can get connected to one of our amazing resource navigators. Resource navigators can help you get food delivered to your household, medication delivered to your household. If you're someone who uses methadone to treat opiate use disorder, we can help you get that delivered to your household. Find out how to get a quarantine order so that you can pursue paid sick leave or paid family leave if you're eligible. Let us know what it is that you need. The Take Care program has your back. We want to support you, we want to keep you safe, and we want to get us out of this situation. Thank you, Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Johnson, and I'm going to amplify a point. First of all, 212-COVID19, that number opens up a lot of doors. And I keep saying, if people need to talk to a medical professional and just consult with what's going on and get clarity, you can get that kind of help plus all the types of help that Dr. Johnson just outlined. What's crucial here is the fact that this City will go the extra mile every time to help someone who needs to navigate the situation. And this really needs to be fully understood. I think sometimes people feel alone. I think sometimes they feel they don't know where to turn for answers, or they feel overwhelmed by everything we've gone through. As Jimmy Oddo said, this has been a long, tough time, but when

you call 212-COVID19 you get answers, you get help. It's all for free. We need to keep saying that. And I also want to thank Dr. Johnson, that quick display right there of what it takes to do the test and send it back all live on television. I give you credit, you went through all the steps there very nicely. It's a reminder of how simple we're making things. So, wrapping all the pieces together. And thank you, Dr. Johnson, to you and your team for really making this an exceptional effort and one that any New Yorker who needs help can turn to anytime for free.

But this is also a reminder of how we do things in this city. We're up against a big challenge. That's true. We see what's happening all around us in the country. Most places doing very sadly much, much worse than New York City. We see a lot of what's happening around the world. We've seen a bunch of European countries lately go into lockdown, but we're different. I want to emphasize that because New Yorkers have been so disciplined and we need to get even more disciplined because people have been paying attention, have been helping each other, watching each other's backs, because we have a Take Care initiative to help people whether at home or they go to a hotel, because we have Test and Trace Corps on a huge level. All of these things help, but nothing helps more than what you do. So, continue to remember the power of just the basics. And remember that this year it's not going to be with us much longer. I know we could all count our blessings, but I think we all would agree we are going to be really happy when we turn that calendar page to 2021 and put 2020 behind us. But the good news is that's not too far off. It's only weeks away. We have to tough it out now. We have to do everything that we're capable of doing so we can get to that point where the vaccine is here, and the help is here we need.

So, everyone let's go to today's indicators and I'm going to talk about them as I go through – and they are sobering, but they also tell us there's still a chance to turn things around as always. So, number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. That threshold is 200 patients. Today's report is 100 patients, with a confirmed positivity level of 36.19 percent. So, again, 100 patients, we don't take that lightly. We want to always have that number be lower, but it has still remained lower than might've been expected. That's something we're watching carefully. The positivity level has gone up, still a lot less than what we experienced in the spring. So, this is an area that we're going to be very carefully watching, very concerned about, but one that still remains well within our threshold. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average. Threshold, 550 cases – obviously over the last couple of weeks, we've gone well past that. Today's report is 870 cases, a cause for real concern. And then number three, percent of the people testing positive citywide for COVID-19. The daily report, 2.3 percent; the seven-day rolling average report is 2.6 percent. So, again, we've seen growth there, but we have still a chance to turn this around before it starts to have more of an impact on our daily lives and on our city as a whole. And this is where each and every one of us have a role to play, including going out there and getting tested. And I'm going to keep saying it, if you haven't been tested in a while, get tested. If you've never been tested, get tested. Folks in Staten Island, particularly in that yellow zone set of neighborhoods, we need you to get tested. It makes a huge difference in our ability to fight back this disease. A few words in Spanish –

[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: Good morning, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by a Borough President Oddo, by Dr. Ted Long, by Dr. Amanda Johnson the Director of Take Care, by Dr. Dave Chokshi, by Dr. Mitchell Katz, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today goes to Brigid Bergen from WNYC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I want to start with a question about schools. In the past you've said that when the city hits a seven-day average of three percent positivity, that's the trigger for a system wide shut down in schools. And as the daily indicators make clear, and we're very close to that. Are you still planning to shut schools down citywide immediately upon crossing that threshold?

Mayor: Yes, Brigid, and it's something – look, no one wants to see that happen. I don't want to see that happen. And this is still – there's still a chance to turn that around, obviously, but we're preparing for that possibility. It's a rule we've put out there very clearly. And if any day we see in the morning, the indicators come out and have reached that level then we will move immediately. The next day schools will be shut down. But there's still a chance to do something to avert that. And that's why it's so urgent that everyone does what we're calling upon them to do, to help protect our schools, which have been extraordinarily safe, thank God. Go ahead.

Question: Some experts have pointed to the lower transmission among younger students. Is there any chance you would consider, you know, just keeping elementary schools open, if you were to cross that threshold or reconsider the number or make it more targeted, or is this just sort of, once we hit three percent, the system shuts down?

Mayor: Brigid, we've put out a clear standard. We're going to stick to that standard, but I think there's another piece to this equation that needs to be considered, which is what happens next. And we do have to factor in that we've had an unbelievably low level of transmission in our schools. That's a great blessing and everyone deserves a lot of credit, the educators, the staff, the parents, the kids, you know, everyone's done what we needed them to do. So, if we get to a closure point, we're then going to assess what we need to do to come back as quickly as possible. And at that point, we'll look at a variety of options because we have something now we didn't have before, evidence about how schools would actually end up being in this and how things would end up working in this environment. And so, now we'll take that information and that will determine – if we get to that point, it will determine the road back.

Moderator: The next is Emma Fitzsimmons from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. First question about the schools. So, the World Health Organization says five percent, even the Governor has said nine percent should be the threshold for schools in other parts of the state. Can you help New Yorkers understand why you're sticking to the three percent threshold? Is it about the teacher's union? Why are you so committed to that standard?

Mayor: The standard was put forward, Emma, to really create a bond with the whole school community to say to parents and students to say to educators and staff, that we would act out of

an abundance of caution to really protect our school communities and so that people could come back with confidence. What everyone has done has really exceeded all of our expectations. The extraordinary strength and discipline of our school communities has played out, and the numbers are amazing, how few kids, how few staff have tested positive. But we put a standard out to say to everyone we'll have your back. We're going to do this in a very rigorous fashion. We need to stick to that standard. But, again, if we get to the point where we have to close, that is for a limited period of time by definition. Big picture, vaccine is coming, but even before we talk about vaccine, if we get to a three percent or above level, then what we all need to do is fight it right back and get it back down again. So, we're going to be talking with everyone in our school communities about what it's going to take to come back in that instance. But I do think people needed to have faith that their safety came first and we provided that faith and that's part of why our schools worked as well as they did. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks. And then back on to the second wave, so are you and Governor Cuomo and other leaders around the country, having a difficult time figuring out how to prevent a second wave without going into a full lockdown which, you know, you believe the public won't tolerate? And it seems like you've always been sort of more hesitant on indoor dining. If schools are closing, should indoor dining also close? And can you talk about, sort of, the bigger question about the challenges you're facing in terms of warding off the second wave?

Mayor: Sure. Everyone's having a tough time. I mean, it's a very fair question, Emma. Everyone's having a tough time. I spoke to the Governor at length yesterday. I mean, we're all trying to figure out how to address a crisis that keeps changing and the obvious and legitimate fatigue that people are feeling. But that said, we also see the same pattern in this city, and this is different than a lot of other places. You know, you could have seen a lot of places after what we went through in March and April, a lot of places just could have given up. New Yorkers fought back and were extraordinarily disciplined. Even the recent situation in Brooklyn and Queens, those numbers got very high in certain ZIP codes. There was a lot of angst. There was a lot of emotion about it, but you ultimately saw people band together. You saw the testing levels go way up. Folks were very disciplined about addressing the situation. That situation got turned around in basically a month. So, as much as it is really tough it doesn't mean we don't have options and it doesn't mean people aren't listening. There's a lot of pain out there, but still most people when, you know, their government leaders say, here's what we have to do, most people actually really do take that seriously and act on it as best they can. So, you know, tough, yes. But we still have a lot of tools at our disposal.

The indoor dining is something the State has to make that ultimate decision, obviously. It's an area I've always said we have to look at really, really carefully because of what we've seen around the world. So, I know the State's assessing the situation. But what I want to do is focus now on what everyone could be doing, because whether there's indoor dining or not is not the central question, the central question is everyone doing the maximum we can all do to fight back this disease. When we do that, it works. When people go out and get tested, when people use, you know, hand washing, masks, you name it, it works. And that's where we need to get things.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

Mayor: We're fighting on, Henry. How are you doing?

Question: I'm hanging in there. Let me ask you a question about these test kits. Are they intended to permit someone to leave quarantine? When exactly are the test kits put in use for someone?

Mayor: I'll turn to Dr. Johnson, with the preface that the whole idea, again, maximum communication, maximum guidance, getting people to engage, not ignore a problem, but engage it to the maximum extent possible. And so, this is an innovation to actually get the test kits to people directly to give them the best way to get the response we need right away. Dr. Johnson.

Director Johnson: Thank you for your question, because I think this is something that merits clarification over and over again. Having a negative test for someone who's truly in a period of quarantine – that means you've been exposed, you've been a close contact of someone with COVID-19 – a negative test does not permit you to exit quarantine. We still need to monitor you for that full 14 days to ensure that you don't go on to develop symptoms. And that's why being in touch with your contact tracer is so important. Now, I think a reason that this can get even more confusing is because we also use the term quarantine to talk about travelers. So, for travelers, there is a different set of requirements for them to exit what is also being termed quarantine. And that does use a test-based strategy. But if you're a New Yorker who is engaging with one of our contact tracers at the Test and Trace Corps, the negative test is an important part of, piece of information, but it is not the whole picture. And it's not a free ticket to get out of the safe separation period that we are imploring New Yorkers to abide by.

Mayor: And then I want to add to that real quick, Henry, that close contact is a different piece of evidence than you just happened to be in another state. I think that's the central point here. The standards are even higher, if you know you've been in close – not just incidental contact, close contact with someone who had already tested positive. That's why it's so important to have this level of engagement. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: All right. Well, I'm going to have to follow it up because I'm still unclear about what the circumstances are under which someone receives one of these test kits and uses the test kit? Who gets this test kit? When is it used and why is it used?

Mayor: Okay, let's do it. Fair questions. And it's always good to clarify. So, Dr. Johnson, perfect the who, what, why, where, when?

Director Johnson: So, you'll see these test kits in a variety of situations. I came here to talk about the inclusion of this test kit in the Take Care package for households that contain a contact,

so that they can have yet another way of getting a test, of having a COVID test to understand whether they're positive or negative. If they're positive, that's really important information to know, because we want to go out and further trace their contacts. The conversion from being a contact to a case is a vital piece of information in our efforts to break these chains of transmission. You'll also start to see the Fulgent kits in other situations. You may have heard about our self-testing stands. So, you'll see these in these, in the community. And one of the advantages of having such kind of a light resource light model is being able to extend access to testing for people who still might not be comfortable or able to attend one of our other many different types of testing venues.

Moderator: The next is Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

Mayor: Hanging in, brother. How are you doing?

Question: I'm all right. So, a couple of questions on the levels here and what we've been kind of talking about. So, if we hit that three percent threshold can you give us some more specifics? You know, for instance, will there be some in-person support as far as schooling or something else for essential workers, like we saw last spring? And you know, what is, you know, talking about if we close and then getting to how we reopen, what would be the threshold there? What is the range of threshold for talking about in that situation?

Mayor: Yeah. So, look the way we're handling the schools again, we had a particular challenge to really make sure we could open school safely. Remember of, you know, you look at a long list of major cities in this country that have not opened their schools at all, that have been remote the whole time. New York City made the bold choice to reopen our public schools. It's proven to be a huge success in terms of keeping people safe. But we set that very strict standard, really to give people confidence in the kinds of safety measures that would be in place. That is a different question than what's happening with the city overall. Because again, even though we're seeing an uptick, New York City is still doing far better than most parts of the United States of America. Far better than what we're seeing, sadly, in a number of European countries right now. And we do see this difference in our three indicators between the hospitalization levels that still are lower and the case and positivity numbers that are higher. So that is to say that this situation with the schools is particular. And we do have to figure out how we're going to support essential workers in that situation. We'll come back with more on that quickly. But I want to emphasize this is for a

period of time, and then our hope would be to make it a very brief period of time, Michael. That our schools would be shut down if in fact that ever happens. We're going to look at that now what it would mean to come back and this time we have a lot more information than we originally projected, standards for what might require a closure. Now we have a lot more information about what's actually happening in the schools. A lot of valid questions, like what it might mean for younger kids versus older kids. We're going to work through and talk to all the stakeholders about what the comeback strategy would look like and how quickly we could achieve it. So that's something we'll have more to say on, and also on the essential worker approach. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: My next question is for both you and the Beep. You know, Councilman Borelli tweeted yesterday evening I believe, about you know, basically flouting the Thanksgiving gathering situation. You know, he was kind of a tongue in cheek tweet. I'm wondering, you know I'm imagining both of you are aware of this at this point. How do you react to that? This is an elected official, basically putting out this example to the public. Like I'm not going to follow the rules that are being put out now regarding COVID?

Mayor: I'll just start really simply and turn to the Borough President. Look, everyone's feeling a lot, everyone's feeling a lot about this situation and it's so frustrating and is painful, meaning the whole, you know, eight, nine months we've gone through now. But the idea is simply to protect each other, protect our loved ones. And I've talked about the holidays several times already. I'm going to be missing some of the people I'm closest to in the world for these holidays. I hate it. But I also know it has to be done to protect everyone. So I understand the frustration, but I think this is just about what, what will keep us all safe? Borough President?

Borough President Oddo: Yeah. Well, first I would say having broken bread with Joe Borelli on many occasions and following his social media feeds I know there'll be lots of good food at a Borelli holiday feast. But on this one my friend Joe and I disagree. I went six weeks without stepping foot into my mom's home during this pandemic. I spoke to her from outside, standing on the hill on Old Town Road. She's talking to me through a window and I'm screaming at her. I can't hear, she can't hear, but that's the steps that we took. And then mom decided to prune a tree one afternoon in May, tripped, fell, fractured a hip, had surgery and made it absolutely clear as they were wheeling her into the ambulance, that she was not going to a rehab facility. So we had surgery and we brought it home. And I went from not stepping into my mom's house to becoming a primary caregiver along with my three brothers going there multiple times a day, doing exercise. Every single time since then that I've walked into my mom's house, which is my childhood house, I have had a mask on. She has had a mask on. I will not be spending Thanksgiving, my brothers will not be coming in, sitting around the same table. You have to live your values. And to me, over the last eight months in this hyper opinionated age, my North Star is science. I'm going to rest with that. I feel comfortable in living true to those values. And that

means avoiding gatherings inside when you can. And being really smart when you do get together. So, I love Joe, Joe's a friend of mine, a good friend of mine. But to quote another Republican Dick Cheney on this one, we disagree big time.

Mayor: And I'd only note that I think we learned something there about Jimmy Oddo, that if his mom was giving instructions from the stretcher, adamant, clear instructions, I now know where you've got some of your personality from. Okay, go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Paul Liotta from the Staten Island Advance.

Question: Hi good morning, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Borough President. So my question is obviously regarding Staten Island. The Governor's orders don't go into place until Friday. Obviously that's his prerogative, but I just wanted to get a sense if you thought that was appropriate given the urgency of this issue?

Mayor: Yeah. Look, Paul, the Governor and I have been aligned overwhelmingly throughout this whole crisis, that we have to be very, very careful to protect the people of this city and this state. And none of these decisions are made lightly, but they're made based on real facts. Look at just look at this city. If we were talking in September or October, we'd be talking about Brooklyn and Queens. We weren't talking about Staten Island at all, Staten Island was doing fine. Then Brooklyn and Queens got better. We have a challenge now in Staten Island. We got to shift our attention there. So, what we know is when we send in more testing it absolutely every single time has made a huge difference. When we go out and do a lot outreach and get a lot more information in people's hands, it makes a huge difference. When we engage community leaders, this is the biggest X-factor in a lot of cases, community leaders, elected officials, clergy, community, organization, trusted voices, talking to their fellow neighbors, and saying this really matters. It makes a huge difference. So, it's worked before. I truly believe it'll work again on Staten Island. Go ahead, Borough President.

Borough President Oddo: Well, I would just add that I – Paul, I do share the Mayor's sense of urgency. I do believe the Governor made the correct decision in designating 80 percent of Staten Island a yellow zone. If you look at the rules of the game under the yellow zone, this is a statement more than anything. It's a statement that says if we don't control what we can control that things will get worse. And then there'll be much more onerous restrictions coming on down the pike. The only exception and the Mayor and I had a conversation prior to going on live was the decision made by the Archdiocese – which we can talk about offline, about the Archdiocese

to close some of the Catholic schools on Staten Island. But the yellow zone designation is a statement that says we're going in the wrong direction and we have to alter our behavior. And I concur with that.

Mayor: Paul just to add, I talked to the Governor about this, but also talked to Cardinal Dolan about everything that needs to be done to protect people. And I respect the choice of the Archdiocese. We will support them with the schools, whatever they choose to do. But I also want to thank the Cardinal. He's been a very clear voice saying to folks how important it is to take the precautions, to practice social distancing, to wear the masks. You've seen in Catholic churches exemplary safety approaches. And his message, which has been very public about, is that everyone needs to realize this is what works and gathered together, you know, with that meaning come together with the understanding that we have proven tools to fight back this disease and protect everyone. And that's what we need to focus on. Go ahead, Paul.

Question: For sure. Thank you, guys. Just to follow up on that. I guess my question, maybe I didn't phrase it correctly, but the fact that we're waiting until Friday to put these rules in place and that were announced Wednesday, do you think that that delay is appropriate? And just related to [inaudible]?

Mayor: Paul, I couldn't hear that last part. Do we still have him?

Question: I think I got cut off.

Moderator: Paul, you're okay.

Question: I'm good? Oh, sorry. And just regarding the schools in terms of shutdowns, the Governor has repeatedly asserted his authority over those decisions. I just wanted to see how you square that regarding the City's plan?

Mayor: Yeah. So, Paul, first of all, you know, the State made their announcement yesterday on a Wednesday and they said it would take effect Friday at 10 o'clock. I think that's been very consistent with the State's done before. They usually give a couple of days for people to make

adjustments. In terms of schools, I talked to the Governor about, you know, the standard that we set a long time ago. The State's general approach to school districts all over the state has been to make sure they had clear health and safety plans, but to also provide a certain amount of leeway to local realities. So, you know, it's quite clear this three percent standard has been out there for quite a while. Again, we, I think it's absolutely crucial to abide by it now, but then to also recognize that we need a strategy for comeback as quickly as possible. If in fact we ever get to that shutdown point, and I think that the State understands that, and they'll be working with us on that.

Moderator: The next is Andrew Siff from NBC.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, and all on the call. I know you've been addressing this so far today, Mayor, but I want to sort of press you on this. Have you reached out to Mike Mulgrew at the UFT and asked whether or not he'd be willing to move the threshold, given how safe the schools have been and how important you went on and on for weeks about the importance of in-person school? Given how safe they've turned out to be why wouldn't you try to move the threshold before you close them down?

Mayor: Yeah. This isn't about one person or one organization Andrew. I really wanted to understand this. This is a standard we set that was about keeping faith with everyone in all school communities. So on the bigger question, you know, I've been in touch with Michael constantly since school opened. We talk about, you know, a whole host of issues. But this goes far beyond one institution, because we said to everyone, we will keep you safe. And we will hold very, very stringent standards. I've talked about that gold standard for the schools. That meant everyone wore a mask, you know, students and adults alike all the time. And it meant social distancing. It meant constant cleaning. It meant all sorts of things in combination that, you know, are far beyond what's done almost any place else in the world. And we had to prove to people it would work and we have been able to do that. But we also said, if this situation changed in the city we're going to have a very, very tough standard and we're sticking to that standard. We're not there yet, thank God. And we don't have to be there. If everyone joins in, I think we still can avert this. But if it does happen, then we'll get to work quickly to bring the schools back. And that will be its own discussion about what those standards should be. Especially in light of some of the success that we've had. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Time table, if it should reach that threshold where schools might be closed for say December and January? In your mind is there a target goal for when they could reopen?

Mayor: Yeah, I don't – I think this is the fastest possible turnaround. Families need schools open whenever they can be open. And kids need it. Parents need it and it's working. So our goal would be the fastest possible turnaround based on the facts that are going on in the city as a whole. And obviously what we've seen and what we've learned now from the actual experience of running the schools. So again, we are not there. Everyone's worried, everyone's preparing. But we're not there. Our schools are open today. We're going to maintain hope. If they do close, I want to see them come back the first available opportunity. And we'll be having that conversation with a lot of different stakeholders and the health experts especially to figure out what's the right way to do that.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Nolan Hicks from the Post.

Question: Good morning, everybody. I want to follow up on Andrew's question. In Europe most of the major cities are once again under lockdown. But public officials there have taken you know, precautions and great pride in keeping their public schools open in spite of that. Is there anything to be learned from their example? Why are we still looking at closing the schools at three percent, if other major cities under lockdown have kept theirs open?

Mayor: It's a different reality in my mind. I don't – I can't speak for the European situation. I can speak to what we went through in this city and what we've seen in the rest of the country. So Nolan, we went through a horrible time. Obviously we were the epicenter of the crisis. And you will remember there was so much concern over the summer about what it would take to bring back school safely. And we strongly believed we could make it work. But until you do it, until you prove it's a different matter. So now we have proven that can be done. But that was when the positivity levels were much lower. We need to now figure out what makes sense going forward. But I think one thing that's crucial here is parents, educators, staff, have all seen there's been a consistent standard in terms of health and safety, it's worked. We're sticking to what we committed to, but then we're also, if we get to that point, we're going to figure out what it takes to come back as quickly as possible. And I remind people the history of this city and even the recent situation in Brooklyn and Queens, every time it looked dire in New York City, people rallied and fought back. Like it's been an absolutely clear pattern, whether it was what we saw earlier in the summer in places like Sunset Park or Soundview, bigger problem in Brooklyn and Queens. Every single time that fight back occurs. So I hold out that real hope that even if we get to a shutdown moment, it's just how quickly we gather our forces. And come back. Go ahead Nolan.

Question: And on that point, obviously there's been a, you know, the coronavirus has caused a great deal of disruption in everyone's life. There's a lot of parents who are trying to figure out

what their kids are going to do for high school. We've been told that the high school admissions workshops have been canceled at least so far. When are they going to be rescheduled? And if they're not, how are kids applying for high school this year?

Mayor: Yeah, Nolan we obviously have to address all that. And we will. To say the least we've been dealing with a lot of moving targets because of the coronavirus and absolutely unprecedented situations. And our central focus for the last few months was getting school up and running safely and effectively and trying to make things work well in this new environment. But we've got to start to turn more and more focus to next year and therefore the admissions process. So we're going to have a lot more to say on that soon. We're going to make it clear to people even under these conditions, how we keep going with it. So parents can rest assured they're going to get guidance on that very soon.

Moderator: Last question for today, it goes to Christina Veiga from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi Mayor. Thanks so much for taking my question. I was hoping you could share more about how if we get there, a shutdown would actually happen? Would remote learning start immediately the next day? Or which teachers have time to transition? Are plans being shared with principals about how logistically this will work out? It seems like the last shutdown understandably was pretty abrupt. And so people are just wondering how logistically this would happen?

Mayor: Yeah. Christina really important questions. Thank you. Well remember, I want to put in perspective, not only the last shutdown, which was a very painful situation. But we've said throughout that, you know, now as we go into the colder months, if we had what used to be called a snow day, the new version of a snow day would be the physical buildings would be closed, but online learning would be available to everyone, to every single child, whether they're blended or remote. So we're already in a situation where principals and teachers knew that we could teach every child remote at any point, if we had to literally the next day if we had to. Everyone is being alerted to prepare for something that might be obviously longer than a single snow day that might go on for days or weeks. So we're preparing that now. But the simple idea would be if in the morning, any morning we saw that we had unfortunately reached that three percent level on the seven-day rolling average or higher, that school day would be completed. The next day school would be shut down and everything will go all remote. Go ahead.

Question: And what about for pre-K centers that are run by CBOs? Private schools, independent schools, and also like State-run special education schools, are they subject to the City's shutdown order or can they continue to do what they think is best?

Mayor: Yeah. And again, we're not there yet and let's pray we don't get there. But this is another good question like some of the ones earlier about the essential workers. We have to figure out now that unfortunately it's something that might happen, we have to figure out those standards. So we will get that guidance out right away. We do look at each situation differently. We're also particularly concerned about special education kids and the needs they have, which is even more important that some of that be in-person. So those are areas we're working on right now. And we'll be able to give you an update on that real soon.

So, everyone, look, as we conclude today just want to say we have something that is different this time. Some people may tell you, Oh, you know, we're about to go through the same thing we went through in March and April. I don't think that is at all true, honestly. I think we have a challenge we're facing right now, but we have a profound difference to begin with. Experience. We've all been through this and we proved that we could fight back and overcome it. The experience also means our hospitals know a lot more about how to manage this fight against the disease. Our people know a lot more. It's a very, very different reality. And so I really want people to remember, to always keep hope. It's been tough, but now we know a lot more and we actually see a vaccine coming for the first time, an actual, real, tangible vaccine. We know that when that vaccine arrives, we'll be able to start distributing it right away. We know that new medications are actually working in protecting people, even the most vulnerable and saving their lives and stopping this disease from taking their lives. There are a lot of things that are very different in November, then the situation in March and April. So let's take some hope and some energy from that. The most important point is New Yorkers won the battle before, we can win the battle again. But we need everyone to be working together to get it done. Let's do that. Thank you, everybody.

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