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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. We are facing down right now a second wave that is trying to assault New York City – a second wave of the coronavirus. We see all over the country, we see a lot of places really, really struggling. But New York City continues to hold on. New York City continues to fight back. And, today, we're going to talk about all the things we need you to do to join that fight, to be part of holding off this second wave, because it still can be done and we need to all work together to get that done. Now, look, it comes down to the basics. We'll talk about it, getting tested – nothing more important at this point than everyone getting tested. And, of course, the simple steps like wearing a mask, it's having a huge impact and New Yorkers are answering the call and we need even more. So, it's as simple as this. Nobody wants to see a second wave hit New York City. No one wants to see a lot of restrictions. There's something you can do about it. It's up to you. You can make a difference right now, and that's what we're calling on everyone to do.

Now, I want to give you an update, because it points out, once again, the power of every-day New Yorkers to make a difference. In the last days, more and more people are getting tested – that is having a profound impact. It's helping us understand exactly what's going on so we can best address it. So, we're going to go over the indicators in a few minutes. But let me now announce the good news that, once again, our indicators prove that we're below the threshold that we set regarding our schools. And that means that not only are schools open today in New York City, schools will also be open tomorrow in New York City. So, another day where we've stayed below that threshold because of everything that you have done. And, remember, this is a one piece of a bigger puzzle that explains why New York City has managed so far to do so much better than the rest of the country, because of the huge levels of participation of every-day New Yorkers, because we put in place the things that would make a difference. The fact that so many people are getting tested is because there is so much testing available for free. And now, we're seeing record participation. The fact that when someone tests positive, we go and immediately find their contacts and make sure that they get the proper support and they're addressed is because we have the largest and most effective test and trace corps in the country. The fact that we're talking to each day about how to keep our schools open is because we opened our schools to begin with, unlike most of the major cities in this country. And the reason we were able to open our schools is because New Yorkers work together to drive down that positivity level to a point where we could safely open schools and everyone's been participating in the things that have kept schools safe. Everyone has been wearing their masks in the school community. Everyone's been taking the precautions. Parents have been keeping kids home if they're sick. All the things we've asked people to do, they're doing, and we need to keep doing that to do our very, very best to keep schools open and keep this city moving forward. So, it all

comes down to what you can do. All those little small acts add up. When you do each one of those acts times 8 million people, it has a huge impact.

Now, let's talk about testing because this is, I think, one of the best examples I've seen in a long time of the power of New Yorkers to make an impact. Last week, over 300,000 New Yorkers went out and got tested – 75,000 on Friday alone. That has changed the reality. That has helped us to get a much better take on what's happening. And as more and more people are getting tested, we're seeing the truth of what's happening and that's allowed us to have the confidence and to stay under the numerical threshold so we could have our schools open again today and tomorrow. It is so important that everyone get out there and get tested. And for the folks who test positive, we immediately provide a lot of support and we do that contact tracing. And we know that that contact tracing has stopped a lot of other people from getting infected. So, you see every time someone gets tested, it gives us the good news that they're okay, or if it's the unfortunate news, they test positive, it still gives us the ability to act as quickly as possible to stop the infection from spreading. So, this is where everyone needs to get involved. So, it's Get Tested Tuesday. This is a great day for folks who have to get tested. If you haven't in a while, go get tested. If you've never gotten tested, go get tested. If you get tested and Test and Trace Corps. needs to talk to you, you want to have that conversation, because it's going to help protect your family and your community and your city. So far, we've had tremendous cooperation from folks working with Test and Trace Corps. And that's a very, very good story, but we've got to do a lot more now. So, we're going to have a testing blitz to get more and more New Yorkers tested. And here to talk about it is the head of our Test and Trace Corps., doing a great job with his team, Dr. Ted Long.

Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps.: Thank you, sir. The fight against COVID begins with testing. In April, we were the epicenter of the COVID crisis. Since then we have built out a massive testing system and that has enabled us to achieve one of the lowest and sustained levels of the virus of anywhere in the country. Every time you go out and get tested, you're doing your part to stop the spread of the virus. Now, as the Mayor said, we're seeing new cases rise across New York City now. It is more important than ever to come out and get tested to fight back. What we're doing, working for you, is bringing testing to you. Since October 1st, we've started 240 new locations across New York City to bring testing to you wherever you, wherever you live. We've done that through starting self-swab stations where you come in, actually do the test on yourself, done in a matter of minutes, and then we'll call you with the result. Or, by deploying our mobile fleet where we're needed across the city. The result of all of that is that we can now do 60,000 tests per day, which we did last week, and 300,000 tests a week.

Moving forward, we're continuing to innovate. We, this week, have unveiled our new weatherized mobile units, which were former ambulances, where we're able to park them and do testing through the window. We'll be able to use these units throughout the winter to continue doing testing and to bring it to where you live. We've mobilized the first part of this fleet this week. We're in Brooklyn, we're in our NYCHA developments – we're at the Marcy Houses or at Cypress Hills. In addition to that, we're continuing to build out two large new rapid testing sites every week. Today, we're going live at 51-30 Northern Boulevard in Queens. And then, on Thursday, we're going live at Mount Loretto with Catholic Charities in Staten Island. At these

rapid testing sites, you come in, have your test done, you'll have your result back within 15 minutes. And, as the Mayor said, we'll have a team that will do accelerated contact tracing with you immediately, right there on the spot, ask you who you could have infected when you were infectious with the coronavirus, and then we'll call them, your contacts, that day and offer to bring them in for testing immediately. No delay.

Finally, I want to make the point that today is Get Tested Tuesday. We're in East New York, we're on the streets with our teams. We're here to help you find a fast, easy, and free way to get tested. Please come out and we look forward to seeing you in East New York today.

Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Ted. And thanks to everyone at Test and Trace Corps. They're working so hard and they're making a real difference. So, testing matters so much and everyone can participate and help this city move forward. But let's also talk about another area where we need everyone to do all they can do, and that's when it comes to fighting the flu. Remember, the flu is always an issue every year. We talk every year about getting our flu shot and we wear the big buttons that say I got my flu shot. That would be important in any year. Flu is dangerous. We want to protect people from the flu. But the combination of the flu season overlapping with the fight against the coronavirus, that's been worrying us for a long time. So, we've been saying from the beginning, we need to have the strongest effort to get people, to get that flu shot. And we need people to answer the call and I have good news, which is that New Yorkers really have been answering the call. So, so far, more than 1.5 million New Yorkers have gotten the flu shot already. It's a huge increase from what we had even last year and other recent years. So, people are hearing about the importance of getting a flu shot and they're doing something about it. And I just want to make it really clear, this is the most important flu shot you will get in your life. If ever was a time to get a flu shot, it is this year, because the flu and the coronavirus are happening at the same time. And we have to protect everyone and we have to protect our health care workers and our hospital system. When you get that flu shot, you're not only helping yourself and your family, you're protecting a lot of other people at the same time. So, everybody, this is another example of something that you can do easily for free. Of course, it's quick, it's available in so many locations and it makes a big difference. So, as simple as this, if you haven't gotten the flu shot yet – look, it's simple. call 3-1-1. You can text, you can go to nyc.gov/flu, in this case – F-L-U – flu. So, the fact is you can find a location immediately. You can go out today, get that flu shot, be done in a matter of minutes, and it's going to help everyone. So, really want to urge people that recognize what an impact that can make.

Look, when we do what we can do as New Yorkers, he gives us the time we need to get through due to the bigger changes that we expect to happen really soon. We have now two vaccines we're hearing very promising news about. A lot moving on that front, a lot moving to prepare, to distribute those vaccines, get everyone who wants it – those vaccines as quickly as possible. We're waiting for that day. But, in the meantime, by going out and getting a coronavirus test, by going out and getting a flu shot, your getting us the chance to get through safely to the time when we have the bigger solution, which has the vaccine.

So, now, let me go over today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID 19, threshold 200 patients – today's report, 102 patients. So, again, interesting, the number has gone up from where it was a few weeks ago, but still not going up intensely. That is a good sign. We continue to see a good situation on hospitals in terms of our ICU – is not seeing a great expansion of the number of people ending up in the ICU. We're watching this literally every day, but if there is a silver lining, right now, it's that this piece of the equation is acting differently than the other piece of the equation. And this, in many ways, is the most important in terms, of course, life and death. If we can keep hospitalizations low and keep people out of the ICU, it means we're saving lives. That's the good news in this indicator. The news I'm watching that I don't like as much, of course, is the confirmed positivity rate among the people who go into the hospital. That's now at 45.19 percent. That's gone up a lot. That was down, you know, at least half as much or lower for much of the time the last few months. On the other hand, the crucial question there, again, is do people end up in ICU? Do they end up with their lives in danger or not? So far, thank God, we've seen a lot of stability in our health care system and people making it through and that's crucial. On the – number two, new reported cases on the seven-day average, threshold 550. Again, we've gone way past that in these recent weeks, 1,117 cases. Tremendous concern, but also related to the great increase in the number of testing. And if this number goes up because more and more people getting tested, but our positivity levels do not go up intensely, that's a good sign. That testing continues to tell us a good truth. We're watching to see what the correlation of those two pieces is, but what matters is, every single person getting tested. So, let's go to positivity. Number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, threshold five percent – today's report is 3.2 percent, but today's seven day rolling average is 2.74 percent – 2.74 percent. So, again, a number higher than we want, but a number that we have seen is being positively in a good way affected by the high levels of testing. The more we test, the more we are finding that there are, thank God, not a massive increase in that positivity level. We need people to go out there and get tested. It makes a difference.

Let me do a few words in Spanish. And, again, we want to talk about the flu and the focus on the flu shots.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. 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 Dr. Ted Long, by Dr. Chokshi, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today, it goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you today?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Juliet. How are you?

Question: I'm okay, thank you. So, the Police Commissioner was on 1010 WINS this morning, and he said there is a close to 100 percent increase in shootings this year compared to last. What is your response to that?

Mayor: Juliet, look, this is something that is painful for our city and it's something we can and will resolve. I don't have a doubt in my mind. This was a horrible time. It was a perfect storm. We've talked about it. Everything happens simultaneously. People were out of work, kids weren't going to school, houses of worship are shut down – a lot of things that we depend on to keep people safe and stable weren't there. And, of course, NYPD went through so much, including so many members of the NYPD who were sick with the coronavirus for months. We went through so many things, but what we found in recent weeks was all of the strategies that were put in place over the summer to work closely with communities, police, and community working together, which is what neighborhood policing is all about, that started to have a real effect. Gun arrests have gone up greatly. We're seeing improvement with every passing month, but we've got a lot to do. And I think that the fundamental reality, Juliet, is we've got to defeat this disease and go into next year able to regain the momentum we had for years when we kept pushing crime down. We can and we will do that again. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay. Thank you. Well, the Rockefeller Tree is now in place, and I was wondering how people will be able to go see the tree without being in a large crowd? Or, is there a plan for public viewing for the tree?

Mayor: Yes, we are working on that right now and we'll have an announcement very shortly. We certainly cannot have large crowds. We want to give folks an opportunity to go by and see it, but, you know, with all the right precautions, distanced and wearing masks and no large crowds. We'll talk about the way to regulate that. We're particularly concerned, obviously, once it's lit that that's going to be a time when more and more people want to see it. So, we will have that plan out very quickly, next few days. And, obviously, the focus will be on keeping everyone safe.

Moderator: Next is Matt Chayes from Newsday.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing?

Mayor: Good, Matt. How have you been?

Question: I've been all right. Thank you for asking. For Drs. Choksi, Long, [inaudible] all of the above. Can the current rise of the citywide infection metrics be connected back to those zoned hotspots that were identified by the State in late September or October?

Mayor: I'm only going to say as a layman, that certainly started some things in motion. That was a good swath of Brooklyn and Queens. But, obviously, you know, since then we've seen a lot more. So, which doctor wants to jump in?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: I can start Mr. Mayor. This is this is Dr. Chokshi. And thanks for the question. The Mayor is exactly right, you

know, we did see increases in cases and the infection rate in those cluster zones earlier. What's happening in the city – it's important to distinguish – is beyond those cluster zones. So, the increases in cases, as well as what we're watching with respect to that percent positivity, is a broader based phenomenon. And that's why it's really important for all of the things that we're talking about to occur across the entire city.

Mayor: Okay. Matt?

Question: Mr. Mayor, on a different topic, what's your direction, if any, to the NYPD about referring crimes ordinarily prosecuted the locally to the federal government?

Mayor: So, Matt, I'm only going to say this broadly, because, obviously, it very much depends on the specifics of the case, but we do have a reality right now where our court system has been obviously profoundly slowed down. Real good progress was made in September and October, and, obviously, now that could be threatened. So, there's a massive backlog. And I think when we have a case, particularly of it involves, you know, a high level of violence, some of the bigger gang cases, for example, if the federal government is able to take them on and move them, that's in everybody's interest. So, I think it is very much a question of what will get the job done. If something that normally would have gone through our local prosecutors simply can't move because of what's happening with the coronavirus, but the federal prosecutors can move it, well, then we have every interest in seeing that happen.

Moderator: Next is Amanda Eisenberg from Politico.

Question: Good morning. Can you hear me okay?

Mayor: Yeah, Amanda. How are you?

Question: I'm doing well. How are you?

Mayor: Thank you.

Question: Great. So, I had a question about the rapid testing – and this could be for yourself or Dr. Long – but I was wondering why contact tracing is being done immediately on-site? I was wondering if there's something that contact tracing hasn't been able to identify that they're looking to do on-site versus maybe after the fact.

Mayor: I'll start – I always like to give the layman's interpretation – and Dr. Long can jump in. Remember, that, for a long time, rapid testing was a question mark. And the quality, the availability did not allow us to use as much as we ideally would have wanted. That situation's getting better. And, obviously, if you can get a result and have a conversation with someone right there in front of you, you're going to have a much greater chance of having effective communication, timely communication, and acting quickly to find those contacts. I had a great conversation with some of the Test and Trace Corps. members in Staten Island when I was out at the pop-up site, the testing site at the Staten Island Ferry. And these are extraordinarily devoted people who feel urgency about reaching each contact immediately and making sure that they're

getting tested, they're getting the help they need. So, I think if you can do that right there with the person in front of you, that's the ideal. Dr. Long?

Executive Director Long: I completely agree with the Mayor. The two principles of contact tracing are – one, building trust; and, two – speed – how fast can you intervene to get somebody that's been exposed to quarantine? And I'll give you the example of Soundview. , in Soundview we had in-person contact tracing there, Amanda, that spoke seven languages and I practice in the community adjacent right there in Morrisania. So our ability to talk to people in Soundview in their language, do immediate contact tracing, and then bringing anybody that they exposed oftentimes that same day for testing so that they could quarantine and get tested right away, enabled us to fairly quickly drive down the percent positive by two thirds in that community. We saw the same thing in Sunset Park and now we're taking the model based on that success and applying it everywhere. But it is something that we've seen to be very effective. So that's why every site where we're using rapid testing, we are now building in accelerated contact tracing.

Question: Is this a model that you're hoping to expand out? And I know Dr. Long, you just mentioned that you're doing it at certain sites, are you looking to continue expanding this maybe to Health + Hospitals facilities or other ways to reach people and find out maybe who they've been in contact with that aren't immediate family members?

Executive Director Long: Yeah, thank you for the question. What a lovely idea. Yes, we are doing exactly that. So at any site where we have rapid testing, because we need to have the result back in order to do the contact tracing right there on the spot, we will be doing accelerated contact tracing. So as we expand our rapid testing, we'll be expanding that symmetrically. Thank you.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

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

Mayor: I'm hanging in there, Henry, how you been?

Question: Good, I guess every day that it's below three percent, you're a happy man.

Mayor: Very true statement. I wait for those indicators impatiently every morning and a good day to day, but again, a good day because people did the hard work and went out and got tested. So that makes me proud in New York City, but the floor is yours, Henry.

Question: Here's my question. It has to do with that three percent threshold which is such a – it's a kind of a – it's a manufactured number in a lot of ways, and it changes with the denominator and the denominator is the number of people who are tested. So isn't it really not a very good indicator for determining the risk of infection in the schools? Isn't a better number, the amount of new cases that are appearing in the city every day, or some other way, some other standard, other than expanding the denominator by testing 65,000 people a day?

Mayor: Right, I'll start. I'd like Dr. Varma to jump in after me. In one way, Henry it's fair to say everything with the coronavirus has been the best choices available, they are not perfect choices in general. We are still trying to understand this disease. When we set each of the kind of markers we've set, the threshold levels, the six-foot distance, everything is based on the best available data and science, no one is saying it's perfect, but we have to set standards. And the three percent standard was out of an abundance of caution. There's no question about it and we stated it as such. Remember that you go back to July and August a tremendous number of people were concerned that schools couldn't open safely. That was the growing assumption. And I kept trying to fight back against that because I thought it was not fair. I thought it wasn't true, but I understood that lots of people were afraid and it was important to give people faith. So we did all these extensive precautions in the schools, most notably having everyone wear masks, kids and adults alike, which all over the world is not the standard even in school systems that have successfully reopened. And we did intensive testing and cleaning, and, you know, the ventilation work, you name it, but there was still a tremendous concern and I said, look, we'll set this rigorous standard at three percent. We'll do all these other things we promise to do. You can trust us, but people were trusting us with their health, with their child's health, we had to show it would work, we have shown it was work, but keeping faith with people that when we set a standard, we mean it. we live by it, it is important.

The – I don't think it's fair to say that positivity is not our best guide, Henry, I'll tell you why. It is, the denominator point is crucial in that we want the largest number of people tested possible because that tells us the truth. Let's say 75,000 people got tested today, 100,000 people got tested today, and the percentage of the positivity went shooting upward. That tells you a very painful truth. But if –as more and more people get tested, the numbers keep going lower and lower, that says something very important in a good direction. So I actually think that the maximum number of being tested is the greatest truth and the positivity level tells you more than just the raw number of cases because it really tells you how expansive the impact of the coronavirus is. But I want – Jay can give a much more erudite explanation of why positivity is the ultimate measure.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Yeah, thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. I think the – you know, one way to think about this is that all of our indicators are bad and some are less bad, you know? And the reality is everything we measure has imperfections associated with it. But what we've learned in this epidemic, not just here from, you know, New York City, but looking at data from around the country and around the world is that there are a few key metrics that are useful to it, even though they have imperfections. So the case rate, the number of new cases diagnosed every single day is a measure of the amount of new infections that are occurring, but it's not accurate because we know some people don't get diagnosed, but the trend over time is very consistent, and so that's why you follow it. The test positivity is a marker for what we call prevalence. So what that is like, because one person who is newly infected stays infectious for several days, it gives you an idea about how many people have this active infection at any given time. Again, it's a proxy for that, it's not a perfect indicator because we know that if you test more people, you're going to potentially lower it because the true prevalence is lower than that. So I think the only way to sort of answer this is the fact that you have a few options. You can take all of these indicators together as a composite and make a decision based on those, which is how we make our decisions for the city. But when it comes to the schools, as the Mayor has said very clearly, we needed to instill trust. And so we needed to come up with an indicator of what we think

represents the high level of transmission in the community, and that three percent is proven useful in that regard, because as we see, as we get closer to that, it's really measuring the transmission in the community right now.

Mayor: Go ahead, Henry.

Question: All right. Thank you very much for that, I guess was very helpful to me. My second question is a question you've been asked often, and I'm still going to ask it, which has to do with the quality of education in remote education. There are literally thousands of students who don't have effectively operating devices. The internet is spotty to say the least not just for homeless kids and poor kids, it's spotty for a lot of people who don't have broadband and the city has been trying, but very slow in trying to meet the demand for this stuff. And then beyond that, you have these staff problems in which a lot of parents are reporting, my kid doesn't have a social studies teacher for remote, my kid doesn't have an English teacher for remote, my kid has a one hour with the gym teacher during the remote days. It's a lot of this is not working well and I keep hearing these kinds of glossy descriptions of you know, we're doing the best we can, or, you know, kids are really enjoying this blended program. I'm not hearing this. The more parents I speak to, the more teachers – frustrated teachers I speak to, there are very serious problems with the quality.

Mayor: Look, I – sometimes when I hear that kind of question and I don't mean to at all underestimate the meaning of the question, because I do feel it. I feel it for everyone. I understand the frustrations of parents. I understand the frustrations kids. The frustrations to educators. But sometimes that question sounds like, you know, why is the coronavirus here? And, and that's, you know, the reality that we need to just come to grips with, the coronavirus changed everything. It created impossible equations in many cases, just like the previous question that Dr. Varma answered, we don't have the perfect model for any of these things, because we have been still trying to adapt in an ever-changing situation with very imperfect resources. And, you know, if this was just one thing I've talked about before, if it was, you know, just a health crisis that wasn't also wrapped in the economic crisis and all the other problems, we might be having a different discussion, but this is all of those things and a disease that we still don't fully understand, that the medical community doesn't fully understand, it has thrown us plenty of curve balls. That doesn't excuse anything, Henry, it just puts in perspective that everyone's trying their damndest at the Department of Education right down to the school level to figure it out. But it's a very hard equation. And so what I have heard consistently is that there are better and worse experiences with remote. I know very few people who are fully satisfied with remote, but I think that is first and foremost because there's no way remote could be as good as what happens in a classroom. I know it is evolutionary, meaning I know every day schools are trying to make it better, and the DOE central operation is trying to make it better, and I truly believe it gets better with every passing month, but I think it's an imperfect equation.

I would say on the internet service point. Again, your question is honest, but I – if you listen to the question that sort of points out, let's, let's have a little serenity prayer here, what can we fix and what can we not fix? The broader problem of internet service in our society and the disparities in internet service and the imperfections of the technology, I can't fix that today. The specific problem of a family needing a device, I can fix that. And I would disagree with you

Henry, that that wasn't addressed aggressively, when 300,000 devices we're putting kids' hands for free. I'm sorry. Let's not denigrate that achievement. I give the DOE a lot of credit. They did that very fast. They made it work. They're a high quality, top of the line devices, handed over to people for free. That's pretty enlightened where I come from. Now, there's more to be done and I get it. Some kids - the service was wrong, we have to switch the service. Some kids machine broke. We had to give him a new -yeah, I get it. But I don't want to act like there hasn't been a massive effort here to put the technology in people's hands and anyone who doesn't have it just has to call 3-1-1 and they will get it. They absolutely will get it. Hopefully very quickly, in some cases there may be a supply problem that has to be addressed, but they'll still get the device, and that's at least something to keep people going, keep kids getting educated while we try to solve the bigger problems. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Jeff Mays from the New York Times.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, hope you well.

Mayor: How you doing, Jeff?

Question: I'm good. Thanks for asking. My question today is about the limit on private gatherings. I'm wondering how the city is going to enforce the Governor's limit on private gatherings? Do you expect that the Sheriff's Office will be responsible for this? Commissioner Shea, I believe said today that the NYPD would not be breaking up Thanksgiving gatherings. You've been very forceful and repetitive and telling people not to say not to gather and not to travel to, you know, keep their gatherings small, so what are you going to do to make sure that that happens?

Mayor: I think the important point is to educate people. I really do. And, Jeff, look I remember you said a few months back that you grew up in Coney Island. So, you know, life in New York City, I think New Yorkers, New Yorkers are tough, New Yorkers are creative, sometimes New Yorkers bend the rules, but ultimately the vast majority of New Yorkers have heard these messages and acted on them, and you can just see it on the streets. The again -is it perfect, the amount of masking usage? No, but is it one of the best levels in the country? Absolutely. And when we have said to people here are restrictions that we need to protect everyone, overwhelmingly people abide by them. So I think the education on the front end, telling people how important it is not to travel, if they do travel to follow very closely the state guidance about how they come back and either go through the right testing or quarantine, keeping their gathering small. I think these these warnings, these standards, really do affect behavior. For everyone? No, but for a very, very substantial number. So of course when it comes down to individual families, we're not going to enforce on family gatherings. We will on bigger gatherings. You've seen the Sheriff's Office, it's usually thank God only a few a week, but the Sheriff is out there and they have to break up some bigger gatherings and penalize the people who put them together, those have been relatively rare. But of course, when it comes down to the family level, our best effort is to educate people and know that most people will listen and most people will follow the guidance. Go ahead, Jeff.

Question: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. My other question is about the three percent threshold for closing schools. I'm wondering if you do – if we do hit that threshold schools do close, is there any thought that you will reevaluate that threshold? And I'm wondering if Dr. Chokshi and others could talk about what a new threshold might be?

Mayor: That absolutely, there are discussions happening right now, Jeff, with the State, with a variety of stakeholders in our school system, and remember we have many different types of unions representing our food service workers and the folks who keep the buildings clean, the folks that provide the school safety, educators, all forms of staff, administrators, we're talking to all of those stakeholders. We're talking with parents and parent organizations and obviously most especially with the State that ultimately has the key decision-making ability and we're talking through the right way to handle this. And if we hit that threshold, not a foregone conclusion, but if we hit that threshold, how we can turn around and come back as quickly as possible and what it's going to take. So those conversations going on, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and I'll just say before turning to him, we can't give you any details, Jeff, would love to, if anything had been settled, but it's still in discussion and it's a lot of stakeholders and we have to get it right. But what we can tell you is we want to figure out how to take advantage of the strength of schools, which have been they've been incredibly safe and everyone has done what was asked of them, which is a blessing, but also recognize that we have some new challenges because of what's happening around us with the coronavirus and figure out the right approach to this next phase. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. The only point that I would add is that the Mayor has, you know, very clearly charged us to bring the most current scientific understanding and take a very data-driven approach to thinking through these important questions. And I will just point out that, you know, as the only large school district around the country to have been able to successfully open our public schools, we are at the vanguard of contributing to that scientific understanding and knowing precisely how that a rigorous approach to health and safety that commenced with at the beginning of the school year can continue, but how we can also build upon it for the possibility of a school reopening if we do hit that threshold.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Andrew Siff from NBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. So taking a look at the numbers a little more closely here, it looks like that Saturdays daily positive percentage was over three. Sundays was over three. Today is over three. And yet the seven-day average is 2.74. I know that what you guys do is you sort of backfill as you go, because you get more testing data. I know you said that it's not a foregone conclusion that you'll hit three percent, but to your health officials, are they giving you a probability and essentially a forecast that it's likely that tomorrow or Thursday, most likely you will hit that three percent?

Mayor: It's a fair question, Andrew, but I will tell you there's been a lot of unpredictability in this whole process over these months, and one of the things I've found talking with my health colleagues is that folks are quick to say, there are some X factors here. And the biggest X factor

is how many people come out to get tested. We saw that surge on Friday, which is clearly affecting things. I mean, that's just staggering that 75,000 people came out. I think those numbers are going to stay high and that is going to affect the outcome. So it's, it's impossible to say anything more than this. I've warned parents on Friday, get ready, because I think that was the responsible thing to do, to say, look, this could happen, there's a decent chance it will happen. Get ready, have your plan be ready for how you want to make sure your kids are taken care of right if we have to close the schools for a period of time. Obviously, also very clearly said, the goal if we even had to close, is to come back as quickly as possible, and we hope for a quick turnaround. But I wouldn't get into the probability business because every day depends on the sheer number of people getting tested and what it tells us. I mean, that is – those are facts on the ground. And several times we were absolutely certain, you know, a certain number was going to be hit and then it didn't happen, and we just got to recognize it really depends on what everyday people do. Go ahead.

Question: Second question has to do with holiday travel and general advice to New Yorkers. You have urged people not to travel for Thanksgiving. You've urged them to avoid gatherings. Have you considered and or are you planning to ask New Yorkers to reconsider whether they should be going into the office? Are we close a time where you'd recommend that people work from home, if at all possible?

Mayor: We're considering a whole range of options and working closely with the State. Look, I think everyone needs to be aware that we're dealing with a challenge. I never have any hubris about this, Andrew, because this city was hit so hard in the beginning, we went through so much pain, but I'm very proud of New Yorkers at how far back we have come, at how well we did this summer, and even as we faced recent challenges, remember Brooklyn and Queens was a huge challenge. It was beat back, which is extraordinary, and a lot of changes happened on the ground. A lot more people got tested, a lot more people wore masks, a lot of participation from the community. We're seeing that again now on a really big scale. Again, this testing number we're seeing now says a lot about the level of participation.

So I say that Andrew, to say, we know we're dealing with something really tough right now. We know a second wave is bearing down on us, but we also know New York City has consistently performed better than other parts of the country because of the sheer level of participation of the people. So we still have time to fight back a second wave and you look at that hospitalization number, and that to me is the really interesting part of this equation that that's still remains lower than one might've expected, and we need to keep it there. So the answer to your question is everything's being discussed, but it's all being discussed with an understanding that there's a chance to fight back the second wave still, and we've got to figure out the right combination of features that will give us the best opportunity to beat it back while also trying to, of course, protect people's livelihoods and protect our kids' education.

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

Question: Morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Nolan. How have you been?

Question: I'm alright. Previously you and your health experts have said that you've linked approximately 10 percent of the coronavirus infections in the city back to travel, and another 10 percent back to large superspreader events, which leaves 80 percent of those – 80, another 10 percent—

Mayor: That second 10 percent is not accurate. You finish, but I'm going to just tell you your second assumption isn't accurate. Go ahead.

Question: Well, it was 10 percent linked back – we'll haggle over the 10 percent, whatever, but there's 80 percent of the infections that you guys have not provided much of any information, and I'm wondering what sort of details can you provide about the outstanding forfeits of cases? Are these people who, if a direct connection can't be drawn to something were engaging in risky activities in the run-up to becoming positive, where they dining indoors, where they're going to gyms, what sort of information can you provide about their behaviors and the run-up to contracting the disease?

Mayor: I'll start, and I suspect several of my colleagues may want to get in on this one. Nolan, the question is one that makes a lot of sense because people want firm, specific answers and understand that we would like things to be sort of clear and neat, and that's just not what the coronavirus usually gives us. So to clarify, the way you started, the 10 percent related to travel that is accurate, the 10 percent, that next number of what I remember was between five and 10 percent, Dr. Long will give us the specific was related to specific sites, but it's not accurate to use the phrase “superspreader events.” None of the sites resulted in that many cases, and that's the interesting thing, Nolan, we just don't have sites or activities that led to anywhere near the number of cases you would think. We're talking about sites that led to single digit cases, typically, maybe a few cases, double digit – a few instances, double digit cases, but nothing that gets even close to the word superspreader and nothing related to large events of late. The different – a few moments back in the summer, but not of late.

So, the challenge here is just how diffuse this is, and when it's this diffuse, it isn't always as simple as, Oh, you know, I went to a restaurant or I went to a gym. A lot of times there isn't an obvious place because there's a substantial amount of community spread, and it doesn't always fit neatly into a package as it were. So I think what we're seeing here is something more generalized. As we make decisions with the State, we are still thinking about what the larger data tells us about places that might present challenges, but the specific is an immense amount of information has come out of Test and Trace, and it's not showing, by and large, specific, actionable situations, and, and that's something we all need to understand. So let me see if Dr. Long wants to add any clarification, then offer Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi a chance if they want to add anything.

Director Long: Yeah. Thank you, sir. This is an important clarification, as the Mayor said, we are not seeing 10 percent of cases related to superspreader events. We're not seeing superspreader events. What we're seeing is five to 10 percent of cases we're able to link back to gatherings or small events. The Mayor gave the example of last week of a family gathering. We are seeing things like that. But the reason this point is really important to drive home is because

as the Mayor also said, you go outside, you see New Yorkers wearing masks, New Yorkers are making sacrifices to prevent super spreading events and they're very successful, and that's why, even though we're seeing a rise in the new number of cases, we still have one of the lowest rates of the coronavirus of any city, especially any big city in the country. It's because of all of the sacrifices that New Yorkers have made and are willing to make same thing with coming out and getting tested. New Yorkers are proactive here.

To give a backdrop to this, we do know a fair amount about what's going on in terms of people that are contracting the coronavirus. Contact tracing by definition is a forward look, we look for contacts that we reach out to. It is not about where somebody got infected. What we do, it's in terms of figuring out where somebody got infected is we look for first off, clusters. So if you've a person that went to a restaurant and a gym hard to know whether they got infected in the restaurant or the gym or somewhere else, but if you have multiple people that spent time in that gym, we do an investigation. This is where I'll defer to Dr. Chokshi, the Department of Health, does an investigation offers a notification to that facility. We've done thousands of these to date, and we have – we keep very close look in detail on these different small clusters as they develop.

But before I turn to Dr. Chokshi, I just want to really draw the drive the point home: while we look into where cases were likely infected the purpose of contact tracing is a forward look to identify, contact, and prevent them from going out and infecting others, and we've been very successful there, and that's one of the key reasons how we've achieved one of the lowest levels of the virus, and two, I think it's important that New Yorkers have earned where we are now, and that's why we haven't seen super spreading events is because of the sacrifices New Yorkers have made every single day. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Dr. Long. Just to take the baton there. Dr. Long is exactly right. We do cluster investigations in places where there are multiple cases, and the purpose of that is not just to find out what high-risk settings are. But also to make sure that people remain protected, both the individuals who may be cases associated with a specific cluster, but also for us to ensure that people are following public health guidance across a range of different settings. But before we get too deep into the details, I do want to just pull it back to make sure that we're sending the clear messages, you know, to the general public which you know, Dr. Long stated for contact tracing the goal is to help people who need to isolate or quarantine to do that, because that helps us to break the chains of transmission and the Test and Trace Corps has been quite effective in being able to do that, and is a major part of why our cases are not increasing to the same degree that we're seeing in many other places around the country. We have to keep those efforts up, but redouble them with a focus on what we know both from our own experience, but also from the broader scientific understanding that we have about what are high risk settings, and I'll just highlight two categories. One is high-risk settings, particularly where people are indoors and not wearing a mask, and so that's why we want to start a campaign this week to make sure that people are wearing masks indoors as much as possible anytime you're outside of a household, and it's a big part of making sure that particular settings where it's more likely for someone to be indoors and unmasked are as safe as humanly possible. The second part of it is around smaller social gatherings. As the Mayor has mentioned before this is again around the

country, a major source of transmission of the virus, and a big part of the reason that we have been very clear about our holiday guidance to try to prevent further spread.

Mayor: I want to turn to Dr. Varma, but just a point off of what Dr. Chokshi said, look, we've had this very robust Test and Trace capacity here. We had to create it ourselves. When we go back to look at the whole history of coronavirus, a big question's going to be what would have happened if the federal government had created a national Test and Trace plan and funded it and organized it everywhere? How different the trajectory of the coronavirus would have been in this country. Remember we put ours together in May and June. If that work had been done around the country, we very well may not be going through this extent of second wave right now, everywhere. So an opportunity I think is going to be recognized after the fact that was the lost opportunity for the country, but thank God, New York City did act. Dr. Varma, you want to add to any analysis here?

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: Yeah just two really quick points to emphasize. Absolutely what the Mayor just pointed out that one of the reasons that you see coronavirus rising throughout the country is because there are many places that are not imposing restrictions, and of course we have the changes in seasonality, but what you see in New York is that while the cases have been increasing and they worry us, that rate of change, that trajectory has not been as steep as it's been in many other places. Some of that is absolutely attributable to all of the behaviors that everybody's following, but some of it is also attributable to this very impressive and large Test and Trace program that we have that other places around the country are consistently asking us for guidance on what to do. So it's just very important, I think, to emphasize that we need to continue our efforts of testing and tracing and need people to participate in them because it is one of the things that's helping keep the rate of change slower than it would be otherwise.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: Yeah, and then to change gears for a second. The Post published an investigation on Monday that found the New York City Police Department. It's used its administrative power subpoena more than 200,000 times over the last decade, that power is supposed to be reserved for internal probes of misbehaving cops, but we found the Department has used it much more broadly, potentially invading the privacy of members of the public, including members of the press. Seven years into an administration that's promised institute reforms to help protect constitutional liberties, why is the Department behaving this way?

Mayor: Well, Nolan, I'm concerned on this issue for sure, and I'm going to look into it right away. Look, the particular issue of freedom of the press calls out to me here. We understand how important it is and certainly believe deeply in the NYPD investigating any officer who may have done the wrong thing. That's part of keeping the public trust, and that's part of making sure the NYPD does what it's supposed to do for the people. So those investigations are really important and obviously investigations a serious crime, but freedom of the press is sacred in this country, as it should be, and we got to make sure that there are the right guardrails there. So I'm going to get briefed on this. I'll have more to say on it soon, but I take it very seriously as a concern, and I've got to make sure we are striking the right balance. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today, it goes to Arthur from FOX 5. Arthur, do we have you? We can swing back to Arthur. We'll go to Yehudit from Boro Park 24 News.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, how are you?

Question: Good. So on Friday, Governor Cuomo said that COVID is not really spread in schools, but in bars, restaurants, and gyms, and Dr. Varma has said that the COVID transmission is actually surprisingly low, especially in the elementary schools. So I'm just wondering, just in terms of priorities, why wouldn't the city focus on closing the bars, restaurants, and gyms and prioritize keeping the schools open for the 1 million public school children as many European countries have done?

Mayor: I appreciate the question. First of all, the decisions on the bars and restaurants, gyms, obviously, you know, the, the central reality there is the State's role, and that's why we're having constant conversations with the State about what that correct mix of actions might be. I've talked to the Governor about it several times. Our teams are talking constantly. We're all cognizant of wanting to protect people's livelihoods, which have taken such a horrible hit this year. We want to be fair to people after everything everyone's gone through. So that's in our minds, but obviously what's going to keep us safe as most important and following the data, following the science.

So those conversations I'm sure are going to result soon and some clarification. On the schools, look again, we have about 300,000 kids so far who have attended school in the public schools this year as things get better and they will get better because a vaccine is coming and, you know, we're finding out more and more every day about how to fight back this disease. We're going to see more and more kids come back to school over time, but for the 300,000 or so, who are now there, we want them to stay in school. I'm the person who wanted to open schools against all odds. You know, there's plenty of people told me not to do it. I believe it was the right thing to do, and it would really benefit our kids and families. It has – I want to keep them open. If we have to close them, it would be temporarily, to reset the equation, given the new conditions we're in. You're certainly right that elementary schools have been a particularly bright spot and that's important. But I'd say that what we learned was having very stringent standards for our schools, kept them safe, and if we're entering a more challenging period, what is that next level of health and safety measures we need to take to respond to the moment we're in, and that's what we're sorting out right now with the State and with other stakeholders. Go ahead.

Question: Okay, and then also I'm wondering, how does the three percent threshold affect the city's private schools? And if they're allowed to stay open, I was wondering if they will be given resources for testing of students, teachers, and staff?

Mayor: A very important question. The three percent was a standard that I set with the health team related to our public schools. The State will set the ultimate guidance related to non-public schools. We do support in a very material way the testing efforts of non-public schools. The Department of Health has been in touch constantly with a variety of non-public schools, offering

test kits that we get from the Stat, so we provide them for free offering the support to help schools, to figure out the best way to do testing, and we do that in a very hands-on manner to help non-public schools. Ultimately every non-public school is responsible for its own testing approach. We're very clear that, something we've looked at very carefully legally, that that is their legal obligation. But we'll support it in the ways we can. We'll try and be helpful in the ways we can, and I will tell you when our Department of Health has engaged non-public schools, and there's been a rigorous dialogue about the best way to get things done, we've seen some really good results, and I want to credit Dr. Chokshi, who's been deeply involved in a lot of these conversations and his First Deputy Dr. Torian Easterling, and also Mitch Katz got deeply involved with a number of the school conversations, and so many others. We found a lot of common ground, even if you know, there's imperfections, at least everyone is communicating and trying to figure out how to keep our kids safe, and it doesn't matter what kind of school it is, we want to keep our kids safe and our families safe.

Everybody, as we conclude today, look, the thing to remember here is that every day matters. Every single day matters, and every day we hold the line, keeps people safe and saves lives and helps us hold on to that day that's coming soon when there's going to be a vaccine, and look, we can literally say those words now. The day is coming soon when there will be a vaccine, we know the vaccines have now been developed. They've been tested and proven. More work to be done to finalize them and get them distributed. But that work is happening every hour of every day. So let's hang on, let's do all that we can do to hang tough. So I conclude with the same basic point, go out there, get tested, wear that mask, take the precautions, and it's going to make a huge difference for the city. So we can get to that day when the vaccine arrives and we turned things around. Thank you, everybody.

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