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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everyone. It is a beautiful Tuesday morning in New York City. It's June. And we're going to remember this day, June 1st, 2021, because we have hit an extraordinary milestone today here in New York City. Listen to this, this is the level of COVID positivity today in New York City – 0.83 percent – 0.83 percent, the lowest we've seen ever since this pandemic began. Since we started testing and measuring, this is the lowest level that we've had. And it's absolutely amazing. This is a testament to the power of vaccination. This is a testament to the willpower of New Yorkers, fighting through this crisis, doing the right things to keep each other safe, going out and getting vaccinated in huge numbers. This is another clear fact, another clear piece of evidence that New York City's coming back strong. There's no stopping New York. It is clearer than ever. So, congratulations, New Yorkers. This is a crucial milestone today, and let's keep going. Let's keep going, because that's what we do. We get something done and then we go even farther. Let's drive COVID out of New York City once and for all.

Okay. Now, yesterday, an important day, powerful day of remembrance. So many of us participated in ceremonies or families had their own private moments at cemeteries, thinking of their loved ones, thinking of those that lost. We, on Memorial Day, we honor those who fought for us, fought for our freedom, and we think about the meaning of that sacrifice, and what we need to build together – a better society, a more unified society. I was at the Intrepid yesterday, very, very moving ceremony, and it remains enemy me that we need to be there for each other and then we certainly need to be there for our veterans. And so, today, I'm happy to announce something really good, that New York City is waiving the fee for the civil service exam for folks who want to be members of our public service who are veterans, who have served our country before, now want to serve the City of New York – they want to become firefighters, or police officers, or municipal workers. We need you. We appreciate you. We appreciate all you bring to the table. And we want to say thank you by waiving the civil service exam fee. So, we welcome our veterans to come join us in the service of New York City, bring all your skills, and talent, and determination, and it's going to help New York City move forward. This is one of the things we do to build a recovery for all of us.

Okay. Now, Memorial Day, a somber day, but Memorial Day also means to all of us something else. It means the beginning of summer. And we didn't get the Memorial Day we were counting on – way too much rain, got a little nice towards the end the Monday – but it doesn't change. The fact that summer is here, this is something we've all been waiting for, to push back COVID, to regain our freedom, and then enjoy the Summer of New York City. And this is going to be an amazing summer. And I want you to see this beautiful backdrop. This is one example – you're

going to be seeing banners like this around New York City. Here's one with a Brooklyn theme. You're going to see themes for each of the five boroughs. But it's going to be the Summer of New York City. You're going to experience things as summer that are absolutely amazing. The energy coming back, the events, the life in the streets, the outdoor dining – it's all going to be here in New York City. New Yorkers are going to enjoy it. Folks are going to come in from all over the tri-state area. But more and more, what we're seeing as people are coming from all over America to be part of this, to be part of the Summer of New York City – something memorable and further evidence of the comeback, the historic comeback we're going to make this year.

All right. Now, how do we make sure we have a great summer? How do we make sure our comeback has strong? How do we make sure we have recovery for all of us? It's simple. Get vaccinated. If you get vaccinated, all other things are possible. It's really clear, if you want this amazing summer – one, get vaccinated; two, Summer of New York City. It's going to be amazing. And New Yorkers have done so much to get us to this point, let's double down. Vaccinations equal freedom, it's as simple as that. And people are heeding the call – so far, from the beginning of our effort, 8,289,469 doses – unbelievable. By far, the largest vaccination effort in New York City history. And what does it yield? You know, the famous phrase, what have you done for me lately? Well, I'll tell you what vaccinations have done for us lately. We have the lowest positivity rate we've ever had since this crisis began, because people got vaccinated. So, it couldn't be clear. Let's keep going.

Now, one of the ways we attract people, particularly young people to get vaccinated – we need our young people get vaccinated, we need all New Yorkers to get vaccinated, so we have great contests going on. Last week, I announced a really amazing contest – three-day passes to the Governor's Ball. I know for so many New Yorkers that's a really big deal and that's going to be really attractive. We also announced one-year free membership to Crunch Fitness. We'll be announcing the winners of those contests this coming Thursday. And a reminder to everyone, we're going to have every week new prizes and what you can do is go get vaccinated. Just by signing up for your first dose, you qualify at any City-run site. Any City-run site, you can join this contest simply by signing up for that first dose. This will be going on this month and into July. And now, we have some more prizes. For this week, for everyone to sign up to get vaccinated or gets vaccinated this week, here we have 20 of these available, so the chances are pretty good – 20 of these available, two-night, two-night – not one-night, two-night staycations at hotels in New York City. Really great hotels that want to support this great effort, want to help New Yorkers get vaccinated, want to help people celebrate our own city. So, if you like the idea of a staycation, if you want a little break and you want to stay in a great hotel, go out there and get vaccinated. If you want to find out where and also what specific prizes you can win, go to [vaccine finder.nyc.gov/benefits](https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/benefits).

Okay. Now, number-one thing, get people vaccinated – that's moving – that's really moving a pace. But as we build a recovery for all of us, there are so many pieces that matter. We always talk about bringing it back our jobs, keeping people safe, bringing it back our schools. But a recovery for all of us also really depends on making sure we support families, we support our youngest children, we make our lives, the lives of our parents easier. Parents – I've always said, parents have a tough time in New York City. It's the greatest place in the world, but it's a tough place to be a parent. We need to lighten the burden of our parents. And so, when I talk to parents,

you'll always hear parents talk about childcare, particularly for their youngest kids. This is a challenge anytime. It's even more of a challenge now, because folks are starting to go back to work more and more. They need to know that childcare will be there for them. We've achieved a lot in this city, more than any other place in this country. We've achieved a lot in terms of reaching our youngest New Yorkers and lifting the burden off of families. Pre-K for All, amazing success. 3-K for All, will be an all districts – all 32 districts in our school system in September. The next few years will be 100 percent universal, a right for every parent to get education for their three-year-olds for free. But let's go farther, let's reach even younger kids. And to do that, we need help from our colleagues in Albany. This is an area where the State can make such a big impact. And we're going to be talking about today, how we do more to get affordable childcare for the working families of this city.

So, right now, we all know childcare is hard to find. For the youngest kids, it's expensive. There are some crucial opportunities in Albany. There are bills being championed by progressive leaders in Albany that would make it easier for parents to get affordable childcare. We want to focus on this today. First, the affordability of childcare all depends on your ability to qualify for childcare that's right for you. The eligibility requirements are just plain wrong in this state. If you're making even just a decent wage, you could be shut out of childcare. People who make right now, \$50,000 as a family, \$60,000 as a family, cannot get childcare, according to some of the rules of the State. We need to change that. We need to raise that bar so working families qualify for affordable childcare. And the idea here is, it's the right thing to do for folks who have struggled through this pandemic. It's also the right thing to do to help people get back to work. Now, second, the childcare system in this state penalizes parents who work part-time, and that doesn't make sense. We need to ensure that, whoever you are, whatever your work schedule, you have access to affordable childcare, particularly if you don't make a lot of money. What we need the State to do is act on legislation. We need the State to also release over \$2 billion in childcare funding that was part of the stimulus that could help working families right now. So, release that stimulus money, change the eligibility requirements so they aren't so strict and they reach more families, cut the red tape. Right now, too many families aren't getting childcare who need it. Let's fix that. I want you to hear about this from two folks who are really leading the charge. And one has been a leader as an advocate for children for many years. We worked closely together way back when I was in the City Council on efforts to protect kids, support kids. And I want to thank her, because she's been in the forefront, even when these issues were not on the front pages or the things that other folks were talking about, she kept pushing to make sure that elected officials focused on the needs of families and kids, and the kinds of things we need more of like childcare. My pleasure introduced the Executive Director of the Citizens Committee for Children Jen March.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Jen. And thank you for all you do. And your colleagues, always fighting for kids, and especially kids and families in the greatest need. Really appreciate it. And thank you for acknowledging the leaders in Albany who are doing extraordinary work. Want to give a special thanks to State Senator Jabari Brisport. Senator Brisport has made this, as a new Senator, something that he's focused on as crucial to needs of his constituents and everyone in this city. So, thank you, Senator. And now you also mentioned Assembly Member Andrew

Hevesi, what a joy to have him with us. He has been one of the great progressive voices in Albany for years, and he is constantly looking out for New Yorkers in greatest need and recognizing the State can and should do more to help. And this is particularly true with families who need childcare. My pleasure to introduce Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Andrew. And you've been a real champion. Seriously, you just never give up on these issues, and thank you for that. And I loved what you said about how important it is – our kids have been through so much. They have been through just extraordinarily challenging circumstances last year. Giving them support, nurturing them, showing them love, making sure they're well cared for, it makes all the difference. And thousands and thousands of kids will benefit. So, keep going, brother – keep fighting. And let's get this done this year. And, everyone, you also heard what the Assembly Member said, New York City is leading the way on these issues all over the country. President Biden, to his great credit, is now focused on making sure early childhood education reaches the whole country. And, obviously, the success of New York City with pre-K with 3-K is helping to animate that movement to reach kids, and now reach them younger and younger, and make early child education something that expands constantly and childcare expanding constantly. This is how we create a better society. So, our colleagues in the Legislature have a historic moment, and we thank them, and we're calling on them to act quickly so we can get this done for the families of New York City.

All right. Now, we talked about the youngest New Yorkers. Now, let's talk about our elders. Let's talk about the people who got us here. Let's talk about our senior citizens who fought through so much to make New York City great, who gave us all everything we have. We know our seniors have deeply missed the opportunity to be together. And we also know seniors bore the brunt of the COVID crisis, they were the most vulnerable. And we all had to do everything in our power to protect our seniors. And we're so happy that now vaccination rates with seniors are so high. Our homebound vaccination effort reached thousands and thousands of seniors. It's time now to move forward. So, I've heard from so many seniors, they're ready to go back to senior centers, and I'm happy to announce our senior centers are coming back in New York City. For outdoor activities, they can resume immediately. For indoor activities at our senior centers, they can begin again in two weeks on June 14th. So, senior centers coming back – they mean so much to so many members of our families, a positive place, a nurturing place, a place where people get fellowship and great food and activities and healthcare support, physical and mental health care support. That's something we've really focused on through Thrive, realizing seniors have been through a lot too and they need mental health care support in their senior centers. So, senior centers are a place where so much happens for our seniors. They are coming back, another great part of a recovery for all of us happening right now in New York City. Now, what I can tell you is, we'll be careful. We'll be safe. We're going to make sure there's smart distancing and all the right precautions to keep our senior centers safe, but the time is now. And there's going to be a lot of excitement out there among our seniors, knowing they can get back together. And I wanted to bring you a very passionate voice on this topic. I literally don't know a stronger, louder, more passionate voice on behalf of seniors. She chairs the Committee on Aging in the New York City Council – back with us, Council Member Margaret Chin.

[...]

**Mayor:** I love the fact that even in a press conference, you take the occasion to do live lobbying. You are a picture of consistency. Council Member, thank you. So, there's no question in my mind, every day you are fighting for our seniors passionately. And thank you for acknowledging the great work of Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, and our Commissioner for the Aging Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, and our Health Commissioner Dave Chokshi, and their whole teams, who really worked hard to make sure we had everything right, everything ready for our seniors. So, congratulations – senior centers back, and we'll certainly be talking more throughout the budget process as well. So, thank you.

Everybody, good news there. And now, more good news, because it's time for our indicators. So, number-one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 72 patients. Confirmed positivity level – this is amazing – 9.72 percent – under 10 percent confirmed positivity, that's fantastic. Hospitalization rate is now down to 0.59 per 100,000. So, these numbers really look strong. New reported cases on a seven-day average, 271. Again, we're seeing really steady progress, vaccinations making all the difference. And finally, I'm going to repeat it, percentage of people testing positive city-wide for COVID-19 on a seven-day rolling average, the lowest since we began keeping these figures, the lowest since the testing went in place, and we were able to measure our city, the lowest since the beginning of the pandemic – 0.83 percent and going down. Let's keep it that way.

Okay. A few words in Spanish, I'm going to go back to the topic of childcare that means so much to so many of our families.

[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. We will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we are joined by Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Mel Hartzog, ACS Commissioner David Hansell, Commissioner for the Aging Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Dr. Jay Varma, Senior Advisor on public health, and Dr. Mitch Katz, President and CEO of New York City Health + Hospitals. Our first question for today goes to Andrea Grimes from CBS New York.

**Question:** Hi. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for taking my questions, I appreciate it. My first is about the senior centers. Do the seniors need to be vaccinated to participate again? And I'm curious why they do – if they are vaccinated, why they still need to physically distance if the CDC says they no longer need to distance or wear masks if you're vaccinated?

**Mayor:** I am going to start and then let Deputy Mayor Hartzog, Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez, Commissioner Chokshi, whoever wants to answer on the specifics of how we're going to manage the centers and the standards. But what I want to start with is this, our seniors were the most

vulnerable in this crisis. I want this to be really clear. We were really careful and cautious about coming to this moment where we can reopen the senior centers. We wanted to get right. We want to work out of an abundance of caution, because we understood our seniors were really bearing the brunt. So, that's been the ethic guiding everything. In terms of specifics, who wants to go first?

**Commissioner Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, Department for the Aging:** I can start if you don't mind. First of all, thank you, this is a great day. It's a great day for New York. And, as you said, the key point is vaccination. We will not give in the City's requirement not to discriminate and the Older Americans Act requirements that all older persons get served. We cannot distinguish between vaccinated and unvaccinated. So, the centers will be open for all, which is why the social distancing [inaudible] all of the guidance that has been developed between the Department of Health and the Department of Aging are extremely important to follow. I want to commend the team at the Department of Health, who has worked so closely with us to make sure that we have guidance. And, of course, as you know, this is an unpredictable pandemic, so it will change often. But Dr. Chokshi, you can take it from here if you want to add anything?

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you, Commissioner, and thanks Mr. Mayor. Not too much to add. I will emphasize that the rates of vaccination that we're seeing among seniors – with about 72 percent of New York City seniors haven't gotten at least one dose and about two thirds of seniors being fully vaccinated at this point – is what has allowed us to, you know, to take this remarkable step in the city's recovery that will benefit seniors across the city. At the same time, we do have to remain vigilant, particularly in indoor settings where both vaccinated and unvaccinated people may be congregating and mixing together, and the way that we'll continue to make progress is to drive the rates of vaccination even higher than they are right now.

**Mayor:** Amen. Thank you. Go ahead, Andrea.

**Question:** The question is regarding turning Third Avenue in Brooklyn into a truck route. Can you explain a little bit more about that and how you decided on Third Avenue for that?

**Mayor:** Andrea, I want to get a fuller explanation for you from our DOT Commissioner Hank Gutman. You know, we're constantly trying to look at what will both keep people safe first and foremost, with Vision Zero and also move things around properly in the city and that we make adjustments all the time, and we are – particularly Third Avenue has been a really important area of sensitivity, but I want to make sure we get you the exact correct answer. We'll get Commissioner Gutman to you right away.

**Moderator:** Our next question goes to Andrew Siff from NBC New York.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Maybe you can give me a sense of where we are June 1st in terms of restrictions that are still in place. We just heard about social distancing will remain in senior centers, but you had talked, Mayor, about July 1st being the day when essentially everything was lifted, and it's as though we didn't have COVID, effectively speaking. So, what we know that restaurants right now still have to follow the CDC guidance,

which means they have to have partitions if the tables aren't six feet apart. Are there other aspects of New York City life that will exist for the next 30 days or so before being lifted on July 1st?

**Mayor:** I'm going to let Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi speak to the specifics, Andrew, but again, framing the big picture. We said July 1st, I think in so many ways it's coming true. Step-by-step things are opening up more and more. Now, obviously we work within CDC guidelines. We work within state rules. We've always understood that, but what I wanted to be clear about was I could see how much success we were having with vaccination, how much we were driving down COVID how much it was time to bring back the life of our city and have the summer of New York City and July 1st brought together all those strands as the date, we'd be ready to end the vast majority of restrictions. We also said at the time, there may be some very individual situations with individual institutions, businesses, et cetera. Of course, we would honor that, but I actually think it's coming together pretty organically. In terms of what continues with restrictions from the different levels of government. Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, you want to speak to that?

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Great, thank you very much, Andrew, for the question, and it is one that we continue to look at and evaluate. I want to highlight just a couple of important issues. First, is the point that the Mayor made about selected settings – we do have to remember that there are settings in which populations are either particularly vulnerable because they're in a congregate place or because they are not yet eligible for vaccination. So, that includes any facilities that primarily serve young children, and any facilities where people are highly vulnerable, such as hospitals, shelters, jails and prisons. So, we, in all of those settings, we're going to continue to need to have restrictions that are more similar to where we've been in the pandemic than where we hope to get to in the future. So, I think that's the one key, very important point.

The second point is that regardless of the official legal requirements, that there are on places we do expect, you know, businesses any type of establishment to continue to follow good guidance about how they want to proceed. We know that many places are going to prefer that if it's an indoor setting where people are sharing indoor air for a prolonged period, they may want to require proof of vaccination, or proof of a negative test recently, as we've seen in various sports arenas. So, we're going to continue to provide guidance, to allow facilities to follow the best available evidence that matches the risk event in their situation.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Nothing to add to that, sir.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

**Question:** So, the 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular. Are there any limitations on that this year, or will it be the full million people gathering for fireworks or have you not decided yet?

**Mayor:** Well, I'll say this we're going to make a full announcement soon with the details. Obviously, things are moving in the right direction to be able to have something much more like we've had historically, but we still have to be smart about it and we have to structure it for this

kind of transitional moment we're in. So, definitely much more like what we've had before than what we experienced last year, but we'll have a full announcement on it soon.

**Moderator:** Our next question goes to Katie Honan from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Hey. Good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Katie. How have you been?

**Question:** Good, thanks. I wanted to see if you had seen the video or and wanted to comment on the woman who was sucker punched just walking on the street in Chinatown. I know that the suspect was arrested, but he had for 40 prior arrests. I'd seen some people kind of call for increased mental health assistance for people like that. I don't know if you have any comment or if you've seen the video?

**Mayor:** Katie, I'll always tell you whether I have or not in this case. I have not, but I certainly am deeply concerned. We've had a spate of horrible attacks against Asian Americans. They're unacceptable, we have encouraged everyone to come forward. We've got to stop Asian hate. That's the bottom line. We have a very strong Asian hate crime task force in the NYPD that's doing really powerful work, including undercover work, which has captured several assailants, and yes, we're always expanding mental health outreach. We talked about that last few weeks. A lot of new pieces are coming into play now, but I'm asking every New Yorker to participate in the effort to stop Asian hate and anyone who witnesses an act of hate, we need that reported. Go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** I guess just to follow up, you know how do people stop Asian hate if there are suspects – this is what some people are saying – if there are suspects out on the street who can just punch someone in the face after being arrested multiple times and released, and clearly not getting the intervention services that they might need. So, I think the phrase like stop Asian hate, but along with all other hate attacks, it seems kind of hollow when it doesn't seem that the people who are doing these hateful acts and doing, you know, committing acts of violence against people randomly are getting the services they need. So, do you have a comment on that?

**Mayor:** First of all, respect the question, but I don't think it's anything but sincere when we say "Stop Asian Hate." It means it is crucial for everyone to participate, and a lot of those reports have led to arrests and prosecutions. There are some cases that are very, very frustrating. I agree with you, and we got more work to do in the combination of our criminal justice system and our mental health system. We've got to glue those two together better. There's no question. That's why we're making a lot more investment in dealing with mental health issues out in our streets. I do think it's crucial that the entire criminal justice system recognize the special place, the special, horrible place held by hate crimes and acts aggressively to address them.

**Moderator:** Our next question goes to Henry Goldman from Bloomberg.

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



**Mayor:** Good, Henry. How you been?

**Question:** I am good. Nice long weekend. Very nice.

**Mayor:** There you go.

**Question:** So, we've talked about this before, but I still don't understand what the distinction is between requiring vaccinations of some communicable diseases like measles and having a very laissez-faire attitude towards vaccinating people against COVID. Can you explain to me why the city can't compel students, teachers, people who are entering senior centers that they'd be vaccinated?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Henry, look, I do appreciate not only a sincere question, it is an important and honest question about the different historical moments. I think there was a long time where vaccination was regarded as a necessary, and there was a near universal understanding. I think we've had different realities in recent years. I'm not happy about that, honestly. I think there's been a lot of misinformation, a lot of rumor mill going on that has obscured the fact that vaccination is crucial, and it works. But we've got to pay attention to the fact that there is deep concern out there, and I think when we get in the business of mandating, we create conflict that we don't need in this better to solve the problem through education and patient work to convince people the power of vaccination and setting standards in place to keep people safe. I think we've got to keep doing that work, and I think it does work. You see more and more over time, people come forward willing to get vaccinated. So, it's an imperfect reality, but I think that is the balance we need to strike. Go ahead, Henry.

**Question:** Well, I'm looking at the daily doses administered yesterday, and of course it was a holiday, but still that means a lot of people have time off, and there were 6,170 vaccinations administered yesterday against the peak back in April of 116,000 vaccinations. So, I'm just wondering, is there a limit to how much persuasion, and rationality, and all that other stuff can overcome hesitation if vaccination is freedom, doesn't that mean that you should be free to enter your senior center without wearing a mask, without being socially because you're vaccinated, and all the other reasons why freedom equals vaccination – if vaccination is freedom. Why can't people be vaccinated and then be free? I mean, there's still all these restrictions on vaccinated people.

**Mayor:** Yeah. Again, I appreciate it. You know, it's a, it's a big question. I want to see if in a second of Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi want to add, but I'll say something else. I, first of all, do not think looking at a holiday is the best way to measure. I think what we've seen is, yeah, of course, we had a very, very intense period in the beginning when it was something brand new and available, people have been waiting for it for months and months. So, I don't think it makes a lot of sense to say at the very peak you know, we had one amount and we're going to keep that amount the whole time that, that, that wasn't ever going to happen. I think the question is, are we continuing to make progress? So, as of today, 4.3 million folks have had at least one dose that's now over half the population of the city. And we know that when people have at least one dose, they overwhelmingly come back and get the second. The combination of the fact that we're now at the point where we can say, we expect well over half the people in this city to be vaccinated in

a very brief period of time in the scheme of things, plus we see the COVID rates plummeting, because each additional vaccination is depriving. COVID have someplace to go. I think you just keep at it. You just keep at it, and I think more and more people are going to come forward because we make it convenient. We make it accessible. We make it fun. They see people in their lives experiencing greater freedom and it makes people want to get vaccine and we just stay at it. This is this is all about persistence. Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, you want to add anything?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** [Inaudible] I can start really briefly. I think Henry you're raising a very critical question and I do think there is going to be a time in the future where vaccination for COVID is similar to what we do for measles and many other infections, it's going to be required for certain types of work settings or school settings, and we're seeing that already, obviously with many colleges and universities, making that decision, as well as health care facilities. We also have to be realistic and recognize that it does take time for when a vaccine is first studied and made available for people to accept it as something that they want to use, and we want to give people the information and the incentive to make that choice willingly. So, there's that period, and then the period where you say, well, we really have done everything we possibly can, and the only way we're going to get to the high levels of vaccination, we need to drive cases as close to zero as possible, is to have them be mandated, and so we're in that transitional phase right now, and there are going to be some important steps to get us to that next phase. One is the full licensure of the vaccine for all age groups, and we know that those applications, at least for the adults are still pending with the FDA. So, we are in this transitional period where I do think, as the Mayor has said very clearly, there is an important pathway that we have to provide incentives to provide information, to provide outreach. But we are keeping our eye on the future about when that turn may change, and it may be required along with all the other vaccines that are normally required and to enter that same requirement list.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thanks so much. I'll just add by saying that in this transitional period that we're in it's so important that we focus squarely on trust on ensuring that we answer the questions that people have, and we think, you know, not just about the messages, but also about the messengers and that's why we've enlisted so many partners in our vaccination efforts, whether it's community-based organizations, or faith leaders, or the family doctors and other clinicians that people turn to for advice, and as we get into these later stages of our vaccination campaign, that will remain central to our effort to getting more and more people vaccinated over the coming weeks.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** Our next question goes to Steve Burns from WCBS 880.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Hope you enjoyed your holiday weekend.

**Mayor:** Soggy, but wonderful, Steve. How about you?

**Question:** Yeah, same here. Had a long drive through all the rain. It was all right. I wanted to first ask you and the health experts here kind of a future of COVID question. I mean, we're talking about vaccines, we're still kind of seeing a tale of two cities, if I could borrow a phrase when it comes to vaccines. We, as reported by Councilman Levine, 19 ZIP codes are at 70 percent or more vaccinated. That's mostly white, mostly wealthy neighborhoods, 27 ZIP codes at 40 percent or less. That's mostly low-income communities of color. So, even if we do start bringing some of those numbers up, I'm sure those disparities are going to continue to some extent as we get into the future. Should we still see those disparities come fall when seasonality might be less of a factor? What do COVID outbreaks look like at that point? Are they more localized? Are there enough vaccines to cut them off? And what would we see come fall? Should we still see these vaccine disparities?

**Mayor:** I'll turn to Dr. Varma in a second on what the future will look like, and I will say as a layman, I think we're going to, at some point, experience COVID the same way we do the flu. It's one of the diseases out there. We have to take it seriously, but it is something that we have a real ability to manage, and we're getting closer to that with the extraordinary success we're reporting today in driving COVID down. So, I think that's the future. I think the work against disparity is constant in all that we do. But what we're finding is the best way to close that gap is a lot of education, a lot of information, getting trusted messengers out, talking to people in their own community from their own community, doctors and pediatricians talking to their patients directly. The incentives also obviously help with just attracting people to focus on getting the vaccination, but it's persistent work because we all have known from the beginning, the greatest concerns about the vaccine existed in the places that were hardest hit by COVID. A horrible catch-22, but that's been the reality. But I absolutely believe persistence will matter here. We're going to stay at it, and that's, I think, ultimately going to win the day.

Dr. Varma, you want to speak about what COVID looks like in the future?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, no, of course. I'll start with the most important caveat, which is that you know, this is a virus that continues to surprise us and do things that we may not have thought were high likelihood. So, with that important caveat in mind, I think there's some important uncertainties that play into the different scenarios. The first uncertainty is will immunity from vaccination continue to be as strong as it is a year or two years out. So, if that immunity, you know, is weaker in some way, like it is for some vaccines, that you need boosters, that may change the dynamics. The second is we know that some people have declined or delayed vaccination right now because they were infected at some point. We also don't know how long and how broadly protective their immunity will be. And the third is we don't know for sure what the virus' evolution will be. We've seen variants emerge that are more transmissible, that provide a little bit of escape possibly from the vaccines, but overall, we've seen how effective the vaccines are protecting against them. So, if you look at all those three things together, the most likely scenario, at least for this coming fall, is that, as you mentioned, there will be sort of localized clusters. I mean, any place where people share indoor air and large numbers of unvaccinated people are present.

So, it's going to be very important that we continue to message to people that if you don't have symptoms, you should continue to get tested regularly for COVID, and we, as a city, are going to

continue to provide those testing services for people so that you can continue to get tested and screened. The second is that if you have symptoms, even if you've been vaccinated, it's going to be important to get tested for COVID just as you might get tested for the flu or other things, and the sooner that we have that information, the more rapidly going to be able to respond. And then the next point is I think our response to these epidemics is going to be, to really try to push hard on vaccination in certain neighborhoods. You know, we have a template for that. We've had measles outbreaks in selected communities, you know, over the past 10 years, and our response to that is a very comprehensive one that tries to identify people, separate those who are potentially infected or infectious to others, and then vaccinate as many people at risk along with very intensive community engagement. So, I do think that we're going to be able to follow a template that we have used for many other diseases, but of course are open to things changing as we learn more about the virus and immunity.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Steve.

**Question:** I very much appreciate that. I want to switch topics real quick and ask about what's happening in Washington Square Park, there seem to be conflicting reports of whether there are things happening there that involve the NYPD closing the park at 10 o'clock. We saw them show up in riot gear a couple of weeks ago. It seemed to be echoes of what was going on at this time last year. You see a lot of folks saying, hey, this is, you know, the #SummerOfNYC with people getting a little bit loud, a little bit boisterous, but it's New York City and that happens. So, I wanted to just basically ask why the NYPD is going with that response at this point at Washington Square Park?

**Mayor:** Yeah, you know, Steve, I want to be clear, first of all, a park I know well and love deeply. I went to NYU, so I spent four years of my life spending a lot of time in Washington Square Park. I think it's one of the jewels of this city. Look, it's also a residential neighborhood, if you get late at night and there's a whole lot of activity, that that's something we do need to create some balance on. We want to do that with the lightest touch possible. So, continue to refine the approach. Yeah, it's New York City, and yeah, we want people to enjoy the summer of New York City, no question, but there still has to be some balance in the equation. We have to respect neighborhood residents and figure out the right way to strike that balance. So, we'll be working on that in the days ahead to make sure that approach makes sense as we go into the summer.

**Moderator:** Our next question goes to Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

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

**Mayor:** Good morning, Michael. How are you doing today?

**Question:** I'm good. I've got so many questions, but only room for two, I guess. I wanted to ask you – yesterday, you know, we had a lot of shootings yesterday and you you've taken a lot of questions on this, which I'm sure we all appreciate and that the press corps. But you know, I mean, we've seen, you know, an increase in violent crime statistics sustained over a pretty long period of time now relatively, about a year. I mean, are we in a new normal, and do you worry

that that kind of the sustained increase in violent crime and more random attacks too, where, you know, that they're kind of more seemed like senseless attacks without a real kind of motivation. Does this worry you about your legacy as well?

**Mayor:** Well, Michael, you do have a lot of questions, I'm going to try and pull that together. Look very important topic, obviously. I am convinced this situation is going to change. I am convinced that we will turn it around. When I look at what happened, I've said it, I'm going to say it again, we went through a perfect storm. Last year, schools were shut down, jobs were shut down, houses of worship were shutdown, everything was shut down. People were pent up. People were frustrated. A whole lot of stuff happened that we've never seen, and we saw it all over the country in every kind of city regardless of whatever the specific approaches were in each city. So, we know that there was a COVID based problem. We are coming out of COVID, we're going to turn the tide. We're adding officers this month, another class officer's coming out. It was about 850 last month, about 600 coming out this month, that's going to help. The court systems, this is now week two of having the court system back after more than a year of its absence, finally seeing the criminal justice system start to engage again, but it's going to take months for it to get to full, full strength in terms of number of trials. Recovery – recovery is going to help move public safety, public safety is going to help move recovery. A recovery is definitely helping, more and more people coming back to the life of the city. All of these things are going to add up, including a lot of investments in communities, a lot of focus on Cure Violence and Crisis Management System. We will turn the tide. So, what I know, Michael, is for six years we drove down crime consistently while making profound reforms in the relationship between police and community. We're adding reforms, we're adding new approaches to policing, we're getting the court system back. We will turn the tide. Fundamentally believe it. Go ahead, Michael.

**Question:** Thanks, Mr. Mayor. The other question I have goes back to something Eric Adams touched on last week. It was an issue he'd raised earlier in the mayor's race and which he brought up again on this proposal to do spot checks at the Port Authority. You know, this is an idea basically aimed at reducing the flow of guns into the city. And you know, what he's proposing is that police stop people coming off of buses into the city and checking their bags in the way that the cops might do it at subways for explosives. And I'm wondering, you know, given the fact that stop and frisk was such a big issue, still is, but when you were running in 2013, does this sound like a good idea to you? Is it, is it something that that could be potentially problematic? What do you think of that proposal from Adams?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I want to look at that, Michael, it's specifically – as I understand the proposal – it's specifically aimed at shipments of guns coming up from the south. It's not from what I'm understanding aimed at anybody and everybody, it is specifically focused on shipments, you know, people bringing guns into the city. That is a very particular focus. I want to look at that and I'll talk to NYPD about that and have more to say on it, but I just want to make sure it's clear that I do not think it's broad brush. I think it's for a particular goal.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more questions today. The next question goes to Abu from Bangla Patrika.

**Question:** Hello, Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Abu. How have you been?

**Question:** Good. Thank you. How was the weekend?

**Mayor:** The weekend was not exactly what I had planned nor was it for 8.5 million people, but we made the best of it.

**Question:** Oh, good, thank you. Mayor, my question is, you know Uber or TLC license has been stopped since long time and there is – we've got a complaint from different driver. There's a company who leases the car, or there are taxis, they'd get the price, and the city is not opening for new license or new number plate. So, is there any plan that is there any plan that needed New York City and the TLC number plate registration again and people can get benefit of it, the drivers?

**Mayor:** You know, Abu, I'll have our colleagues at the TLC follow up with you. I think the important point to recognize here is that with all the huge transformations that happened with the for-hire vehicle industry, and then the horrible disruption of COVID, what we've been focused on is, of course, making sure that New Yorkers can get around, but also making sure that the people that do the work, the drivers, have the best possible chance for a decent living. We instituted a minimum wage for for-hire vehicle drivers. It's being now emulated around the country, around the world as a model for addressing income inequality and creating fairness. We've been really careful about the number of approved vehicles because we want to both avoid the race to the bottom that we saw some of the for-hire vehicles creating, where they were flooding the market, driving down the wages of their workers in the process, and we also want to be really careful about congestion. So, I think our approach has been a cautious one based on all the lessons we've learned, but I'll also have the TLC follow up with you on any plans that may be looking at going forward. Go ahead, Abu.

**Question:** The second question is affordable housing. The people who are – it's a name of affordable housing, people cannot afford the minimum standard of their minimum wage because it's like \$80,000 for one bedroom or so-and-so. So how – it doesn't make sense that affordable housing, in the name of affordable housing, you have to have a single bedroom apartment applying like in an \$80,000 income – the people, how the people can apply and how his name is it named affordable housing?

**Mayor:** Okay. Huge question. Very important question. I'll try and do the simple answer. Abu, we have affordable units that we are building or have built, and that we preserve in place for a wide range of income levels. We reach many, many New Yorkers at the lowest income levels. We also believe in reaching working class New Yorkers. If you've got a family where you have a public servant or a couple that are both public servants, a bus driver, or a firefighter, or a teacher or a custodian, we need those families here in New York City as well. And so, we've created a lot more affordable housing. When our current plan is done, it will reach 700,000 New Yorkers with either new or preserved affordable housing, the lowest income New Yorkers, and working-class New Yorkers as well. We just got to keep doing more, with affordable housing, one thing is

certain, more is more. I've been with New Yorkers when they got the keys to their apartment. I've been with veterans, I've been with folks who've worked for the city, I've been with folks who used to be homeless, and they got the keys to their apartment in their life is changed forever. We just got to keep doing more of it and our plan, I'm happy to say, is on pace, is on budget, is on target, and we're going to keep doing more.

**Moderator:** Our last question of the day goes to NJ Burkett from WABC.

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor, and all of my colleagues on the call. I want to preface this by saying that I think many people would credit you and your public health team for tackling COVID-19. I mean, I think we're, we're also fortunate to have the team you've assembled, but on a totally different topic, and I heard your answer to Mike's question, last night there were 13 people shot in six hours. One of them a teenager is dead. As you know, violent crime in the subway has been surging, recent weeks. You've urged New Yorkers to be patient saying that the city is going to somehow grow itself out of this, and you said that a moment ago. But what do you say to people who believe that the crime genie is out of the bottle, and you don't know how to stop it back yet?

**Mayor:** I appreciate the question. I also appreciate your words about our health care team, who have really been heroic during this entire crisis. Look, I think – I understand the fear, I really do. And, and there's a persistent concern, which I've heard now for decades in this city of, are we going to go back to the bad old days? And I really try my best to help people understand there are so many reasons why that is not going to happen. We went through a global pandemic, a massive disruption unlike anything we've ever experienced, and yet, see how quickly it's turning back. COVID rates plummeting, folks are getting vaccinated, the economy's coming back, the level of activity in the cities is coming back. It will not be the same as last year, period. You will see these – reality, the reality change, you will see the numbers go down, but much more importantly than the numbers are the human beings involved. We are going to reduce crime over time because we now have the tools. We needed a court system. You cannot fight crime without a court system and a functioning criminal justice system. You can't do it the way you can if you have one. It's finally back. You're going to see gang take downs, and we know gangs and crews have been creating so much of this violence. You're going to see more of those soon. You're going to see the presence of the officers that we've graduated. All of these things are going to add up. I understand people's frustration, I understand their fear, but I'm telling you that we finally have the building blocks we need to make a difference, and it will happen. We just – with so many things, it's about persistence, and every time an officer takes a gun off the street, every time Cure Violence Movement stops at retaliation. This is how we win. one by one by one, but we will turn it around. Go ahead.

**Question:** Topically, sir, I wonder whether you haven't painted yourself into a rhetorical corner? You know, you don't want to necessarily acknowledge that the police are a big part of the answer because you're philosophically opposed to that, you know, and some have suggested that that you're even downplaying the rate of violent crime in New York because it's optically inconvenient with the image of the city that you're trying to promote.

**Mayor:** Well, I understand – I appreciate the question – I understand the first part. I just said multiple times today that we have added officers in our classes which are part of the reason we're going to be able to make an impact. So, I talk all the time, and I have been talking for months now about the really powerful strategies, creative, effective strategies, NYPD with precision policing, with the gun arrests, with using the new officers coming out of the academy, to put them in the right places to help turn the situation around. Look, again, a little history, for six years we drove down crime pre-pandemic. We drove down crime year after year after year, with a better approach to policing and a better approach to the relationship between police and community. Neighborhood policing did that. the same model will work as we come out of the pandemic. No question in my mind. I talk about our approach all the time, but I also think it's crucial after everything that people have been through to focus on where we're going, because the whole reality of COVID, which brought so much pain to our families, which decimated our economy for a period of time, which unleashed these forces of violence, we are turning all that around you. You can see with your own eyes the impact of the stimulus. You can see with your own eyes, the economy coming back, our schools, we opened them when others didn't dare and now, they're coming back full strength in September. And yes, we're fighting back crime as well. It's all connected. It's all connected, but I am not looking back to a crisis, a once in a lifetime crisis beyond our control. I'm looking forward to a New York City we create together. I'm convinced we are going to turn this city around and have recovery for all of us. I can feel it in my bones. That's where we're going. Thank you, everybody.

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