

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, the worst of the storm is passed and there's actually some sun peeking through the clouds this morning. So, that's a really good sign. We're going to talk about the storm in just a moment, but first I want to talk about yesterday – so meaningful, so powerful, so emotional – being at Elmhurst Hospital, the place that was the epicenter within the epicenter of the coronavirus crisis, the place that was hit hardest all in New York City. 10 months ago, Elmhurst Hospital, going through hell, but what strong people there at Elmhurst, what good people, the health care heroes who saw us through. How amazing to be there yesterday as the first health care workers in our public hospitals got their vaccine. Talk about an amazing turnaround that the vaccine, being given to the very same people who saved lives by the thousands 10 months ago. Two health care workers were the first to be vaccinated in all of our public hospitals, Veronica Delgado, who is a lead physician assistant in the emergency department, and, William Kelly, service aid in the environmental services department. They both were wonderful and they both spoke from the heart about how important it was for their fellow health care workers and all New Yorkers to get the vaccine. And William said something that just brought it all together. He said, I hope everybody takes the shot so we can all get back together. Think about that. That's the simplest most powerful explanation of why we need the vaccine, so we can all get back together. I want everyone to be thinking about that in the weeks and months ahead, about getting that vaccine and helping others, encouraging others to do it. It means we can turn the page and start to do the things we love and get back together with our family and friends the way we've missed so much. So, the approach we're going to take on this vaccine is really to amplify voices like Williams, folks in every neighborhood. We had some of our colleagues from the clergy on yesterday. You're going to be hearing from clergy. You're going to hear from elected officials, community leaders, and every-day New Yorkers talk about why the vaccine is important, why it's safe, why it's easy, why it's effective. We need to get the word out.

Now, we have just started in the last few days the vaccine effort. It's going to ramp up much more every single day, but here's the up-to-date number of people vaccinated in New York City – 5,200; new since yesterday morning, 3,565. These numbers are going to grow rapidly with

each day as the approach to the vaccine gets refined more each day and more and more people are brought into play. So, again, first few days is going to be a slow and steady ramp-up, then you're going to see a takeoff. And, now, we have, so far, in New York City 42,900 doses have arrived. So, we have plenty of supply. We're going to be getting that out all over the city.

Now, at the same time, we've got to get people good information. Just as important as where the vaccine is, is making sure people understand it, they trust it, they get answers to their questions. We fight back misinformation. There's a lot of misinformation out there, we have to overcome that and we have to remind people of a situation we're living with. The virus keeps causing us a challenge. The rate of infection keeps going up in the city, hospitalizations keep going up. We've got a serious issue here. That's why we need the vaccine to fight the virus. But, in the meantime, we need everyone to do what you know how to do, the masks, the social distancing, no travel, no big gatherings, keep gathering small. These are the things we're going to need to do to keep fighting this virus. And a lot of people have said to me these last few days, we don't want to see another pause, we don't want to see another shutdown – nor do I, but if you don't want to see those things, do something about it. Cancel travel plans, keep the gathering small, wear the mask, do all the things that help us fight the virus so we can try and avoid some of those measures that none of us want to see.

Okay, let me go back to the storm. We were certainly braced for a major storm and already we know that the amount of we saw in the last 24 hours was the most we've seen since January 2016. So, it's really been years since we've had this kind of challenge. And we saw up to almost 11 inches in the Bronx, so far. Most of the rest of the city, somewhere in the five-to-eight inch range. So, serious amount of snow, but certainly our Sanitation Department can handle it. They have handled a whole lot worse than this, and they've done it brilliantly. I have the honor of being at the Sanitation Garage on the Lower East Side yesterday, talking to the good men and women who do this work. I want to shout them out again – thank you to all the Sanitation workers. You are heroes. You don't get enough credit. I want to keep giving you credit. You go out there as many hours as it takes, you clear the way, and, because of you, this morning, vaccine shipments are moving around New York City and people are getting the things they need. Food shipments are moving, the things people need the most. Folks are able to get to work because of you. So, thank you, to everyone at the Sanitation Department. Snow, as I said, tapering off now – just a little bit left. It'll end altogether around 1:00 PM. Lot of winds still, but we can handle it. And those plowing operations continue all over the city. So, this is a reminder, please help the Sanitation Department, help the good men and women doing this work, get out of the way to the plows. The best thing you can do, don't be out on the streets, don't drive until we get through the plowing today. Tomorrow's going to be a much better day. Help out our good friends at Sanitation by giving them the freedom to do their job. Stay off the streets to the maximum extent possible today.

Now, alternate side parking update – it'll be suspended through Saturday, December 19th to help continue the snow removal. And let's talk about schools as well today. Schools closed today, we announced that early afternoon yesterday. It's a remote learning day. Obviously, a new reality for our kids. Look, our kids need the chance to keep learning. They've been through so much this year. They have lost ground in terms of their learning. We need to help them. We have the ability to keep learning, going into today, because of remote learning. So, all kids have the opportunity to do that. There'll be a chance after school, obviously, kids love being out in the snow, so they can go out and have a great time – some sledding, maybe some snowball fights, whatever they

can do after school. But I want to make sure everyone knows, tomorrow school we'll be back in session in-person. We are good to go for tomorrow. Friday, school will be back in session in-person.

Okay. Let's turn that outdoor dining. A lot of concern about making sure that the mom and pop restaurants out there and all the people who work in the dining industry had their jobs tonight, and so many people rooting for them. Here's the update – it's going to take a couple of different stages to get the final answer today. What we can say with assurance is that in Manhattan, right now – Manhattan did pretty well in this storm. In Manhattan, we're going to have outdoor dining up and running tonight. And, obviously, that's where a lot of the restaurants and jobs are. So, we can tell you right now through the great efforts of Sanitation Department, we'll have outdoor dining up and running in Manhattan tonight. For the other four boroughs, we're going to have an update by about one o'clock today. And it could be different by borough – obviously, different boroughs had different amount of snowfall, different conditions, different realities. We're going to speak to that later on today, after Sanitation has a chance to do some more assessment and come back with the latest updates. So, we will keep the public posted and we'll keep our colleagues in the restaurant industry posted as we get that information over the next few hours.

Okay. With that, to give you further updates, I'm going to first turn to our Emergency Management Commissioner. And she and her team have done a great job dealing with all the issues around the storm, as they do with every major weather event and every challenge this city faces. My pleasure to introduce Commissioner Deanne Criswell.

Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Office of Emergency Management: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I think you've covered a lot of it, but I'll just reiterate a couple of really important points. The bulk of this storm has moved through the city, but there still is a winter weather – a winter storm warning in place until 1:00 PM. We didn't get as much snow as we thought we were going to get, but we did get a wet, heavy snow. And so, that's making for some pretty messy conditions out there. And so, with that, I want to encourage everybody, you know, as you're going out and you're shoveling today, really take care of yourself, make sure you're staying hydrated and take breaks in between shoveling because it is to be a little bit draining for you because it is a heavy snow. One of the positive things about this as we did not have as many power outages or downed trees that we thought we might have because of the wet snow and the wind. And so, because it was not as much, we didn't have the significant outages. And so, that was a really good piece of the storm.

It is going to remain breezy today, though. As the snow starts to fade away by 1:00 PM, you're going to see winds go through the evening. And as the snow melts a little bit, the weather isn't going to get much warmer. And with that wind, you're just going to see it turn back into freezing conditions later tonight. And so, I want to just caution all New Yorkers, please take care, please stay off the roads if you don't have to be on them. And if you're out walking around as these conditions may turn icy again later this evening, please take extra caution. And, as always, please look out for your neighbors, take care of one another and stay safe.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Commissioner. And thanks to you and your team for a great job. And now, also with tremendous thanks, turning to our acting Sanitation Commissioner and everyone at Sanitation – I just – I love what these guys do. I'm so proud of their effort and they're

doing it again right now out there, getting the city back on the feet in record time – amazing work they do. My pleasure to introduce Sanitation Commissioner Ed Grayson.

Acting Sanitation Commissioner Ed Grayson, Department of Sanitation: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. As the Mayor said, and as Deanne went over, we have definitely had a major storm event. We saw some depths that we haven't seen in a few years. And, more importantly, the makeup of the composition of the storm with some sleet mixing in this makes it for a difficult plow storm. However, throughout the overnight and continuing today, we have basically plowed every street in the city. We're continuing with salting operations and we will continue with plowing operations to get our streets safe and clear for everyone. Mother nature, however, is not being very kind on the backend of this storm. So, while we're seeing some clearing, we're going to have really cold temps. So, what we want to make sure everybody's doing is heeding the warnings. If you can stay off the road, please do that. We will be continuing our plowing and salting operations continually throughout the rest of the day into tonight.

Looking ahead, as the Mayor said, we will be giving some guidance later on for the remainder of the decisions on outdoor dining structures. The outdoor dining structures did well structurally for the most part from our frontline reviews, from what we saw, and our operators did well navigating around them. So, that means that the messaging worked and we can't thank the restaurant owners and small businesses enough for doing their part. And we'd like to thank all the residents who did their part by not parking near them and giving us the room we needed. We ask that to continue.

Our goal today and for the remainder of the day is to continue widening streets and salting, and we look to do that. Tonight, for those who are enjoying some outdoor dining after the final decisions are made. All I can say is this, it might not be a night to wear your good shoes, only because it's going to be a lot of slush out there, because our job is to continue throwing salt out. We have to do that because of the rate of the cold weather coming and beyond this storm. Also looking ahead, I'd like to let everybody know that tomorrow we will be employing emergency laborers. So, the shift will be 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. We're going to do that Friday and Saturday, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. We've pre-registered over 500 laborers. Consider this the first notification, although you will be formally notified to come down. And, for anybody else interested, you can go to nyc.gov/notify to find out more information. We will certainly take all the help we can get because we're about to move into a manual operation, starting tomorrow to get some of these catch basins and crosswalks and hydrants cleared to make sure that we're all healthy and safe in the wake of this event.

Once we finished clearing everything, we'll we're going to be out there, as I said, all night, for the remainder into tomorrow. We'll talk about where we're going to be on refuse and recycling. We will continue to be delayed. The snow response will take all of our efforts for a while and we hope to update shortly on where we'll be. So, that is our update for the storm. We've done a great job. The men and women continue to do a great job and we'll be out there for the rest of the day. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: I want to say our Sanitation Commissioner is doing a lot for us here, he's doing a great job and also telling us not to wear our fancy shoes tonight. I thank you, that is very good guidance. That's news you can use, everybody. A couple other things – so, obviously, it's be cold the next few days. Code Blue is in effect, that means making sure that any homeless folks who

need shelter, we go out and quickly give them assistance. If you see anyone in need a call 3-1-1. Obviously, if it's urgent, call 9-1-1 right away. And, most importantly, everyone, look, you heard the warning from Commissioner Criswell, be careful about shoveling, don't overdo it. If you've got someone who needs help in your neighborhood shoveling, if there's a senior that maybe you can chip in with or get someone to help them out, that's really great. Look out for your neighbors. Look out for someone that has any special need. New Yorkers do an amazing job looking out for each other. It's going to be cold. You know, we're going to be dealing with the snow and removal of the snow the next few days, let's be there for each other, as always.

And that's a segue to what it means to be there for each other – well, New Yorkers do it all the time, but our colleagues in Washington are not doing such a great job. There's a discussion going on right now on the stimulus. And this a new stimulus proposal simply falls short. It's just not going to do enough to help New York City in New York State. We are not going to recover without help. We didn't create the coronavirus. The federal government has an obligation to New York. We were the epicenter of this crisis – they have an obligation to help us. They simply haven't helped us enough.

So, what do we see right now in Washington? Endless discussion that now is leaving out all state and local aid. That means the City government, State government will not be able to get back on our feet and serve our people. It's just doesn't make any sense. If you sideline local aid, you sideline the recovery. There won't be a recovery. So, right now, I don't know what – how on earth these discussions are leaving out local aid. I don't find this package acceptable. It's not going to get us where we need to go. What is in the package that at least I can say is a step in the right direction, direct payments to every-day New Yorkers, every-day Americans – of course we know we need that. That is one of the things that has sustained us to the degree we have been able to keep going. We also need to see, obviously, school funding. Keeping schools going has been a huge challenge, keeping them safe and healthy. We need school funding. We need transit funding – the MTA is in dire shape. We need to keep it going, that's urgent. And FEMA aid – this is the most obvious of all. We bore the brunt. We put out a huge amount of money to keep people safe, keep them healthy, keep them fed, keep a roof over their head. We have done extraordinary things in this city. Federal government should reimburse for those direct COVID-related resource – direct COVID-related costs. When you think about things that came from the coronavirus, not something that this city ever could have been prepared for, those are federal obligations. So, FEMA reimbursement should be at 100 percent to make us whole, help us back on our feet. That's something that's still could get done here that would be crucial for New York and so many other places to have borne the brunt. So, really, really unhappy with what I see, but if they are going to do a deal, at least get it right on the things that they're talking about now and help us keep going. But we're going to need a much bigger stimulus than this. We're going to need local and state aid as part of it, if we're serious about helping people and getting back on our feet.

Okay, let me go to our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 174 patients. We want to be under 200 – today, we are. It's been a tough in some of the last few days, but at least that's a little bit better number for today. But the number that's not good, hospitalization rate per 100,000 – today's number is 3.06. We want to be under two, so that is not a good sign. New cases – this number keeps just getting bigger and bigger – probable cases and confirmed cases go to 2,739. We want to be under 550. We've got a long way to go and everyone needs to be a part of turning it

around. And then, percentage of New York City residents testing positive on the seven-day rolling average – today’s report, six percent. Again, that’s an unacceptable number. We need to get under five and keep going down for there. So, six percent is not acceptable. We’ve got a lot of work to do.

Okay. Let me do a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi, all. We’ll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Sanitation Commissioner Edward Grayson, Commissioner of Emergency Management Deanne Criswell, Health + Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Commissioner of Social Services Steve Banks, Deputy Mayor of Operations Laura Anglin, and Senior Advisor. Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we’ll go to Gloria from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Sounds like sounds like it could have been worse and it’s not that bad, so I think everyone is feeling good about that.

Mayor: You are right. Go ahead.

Question: I wanted to ask you and the Commissioner as well – I believe he mentioned nearly every street in New York City has been plowed. So, I wonder if he could go into that a little bit more. And does he have an update – I know usually we see trouble with side streets and smaller streets and some of the other boroughs in places like Queens and Staten Island that take a little bit longer to get cleaned up. So, do you have an update? And what is the – if we could get a refresher for those who need it since we haven’t had snow in such a long time, the proper snow removal etiquette, where does it go, where –

Mayor: All right. We got it. Let’s stay there, that’s a lot of pieces there. Okay, Commissioner, take it away.

Commissioner Grayson: Yes. So, with regard to every street has seen a plow – we’ve been plowing and salting, and every one of our cell trucks is equipped with a plow for, you know, all through the overnight. So, yes, we’ve seen a plow and we’ve seen a spreader for most of the city. And what I mean by that is, every street has seen a plow by now. What you may have is residual snow left in the roadway. We do not plow to blacktop. So, clearly, we’re going to have plenty of people out there who are saying, I need a plow. You sure do, and we’re coming back. So, we’ve completed our plow schedules. We’re going to reroute all plow schedules to widen streets. And we’re going to get to salting to all, even into the harder residential streets. That’s why we have all that investment over the years thanks to the administration and the small equipment and the small holsters. And we’re going to get out, we’re going to get salt to everybody. We just need the time to do that.

With regard to small snow removal and what you should do. We definitely need, once the snowfall stops. And if now, if we get a clearing and you can get out there, we definitely want you

to do your part if you are a property owner and you have to go out and do some shoveling. And we're looking for everyone to do a four-foot path so we can account for all travelers and all pedestrians. You know, get out there, do your shoveling, take your time. This is a heavy, wet, snow. Do your part to give us some clear sidewalks for the people who have to come by. And make sure when you're doing that though, please don't pile the snow in front of the hydrants. We need those clear for any other emergency access. Also don't pile onto the catch basins. Because what we want to do is if we ever do get a relief from some of this weather, with the cold, we need it to go and drain towards the catch basin in the streets. So, there's my update on that.

Mayor: Thanks very much Commissioner. Go ahead, Gloria.

Question: Thank you. Mr. Mayor, I wanted if you have an update, I know you had to shut down COVID testing sites for the storm. When will they reopen? And did any of them sustain any sort of damage that might, I know cause some of them are outdoors? So, is there any damage to any of the testing sites and when can people expect to be back to get a test?

Mayor: I'll start with what I know and then see if Dr. Katz or Dr. Chokshi knows anything different? I have not heard of any damage to a site, obviously mobile sites and sites we set up temporarily. They're easy to take down. I think that's what happened as far as I could tell. And the original concept yesterday was have them up and running at around 12 noon. I don't think anything has changed, Gloria. I think that's still true, but let me confirm and see if Dr. Katz or Dr. Chokshi want to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Yes, Mr. Mayor, you have it right. All the tents were taken down. I want to be clear that testing still went on in all our hospital emergency rooms. So that testing itself did not stop. And we do anticipate based on the weather and the site, that the sites will reopen sometime between noon and 2:00 pm this afternoon.

Mayor: Okay, great. Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Rich from WCBS Radio.

Question: Good morning. And well I guess it wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be, so that's good, right?

Mayor: Well, you know what? We finally catch a break around here, Rich.

Question: Well, I'm wondering in regard to the vaccinations. You know, Britain indicated that they were – it was a slower rollout than they had hoped because it was a little more complicated than thought, than they had thought. Is the pace of getting the vaccines out everything that everybody wants at this point? I mean, I know you're talking about a continued acceleration, but are there any complications?

Mayor: I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz. Rich, I'd say this is just the beginning of something that's going to be huge. And the first few days everyone's being methodical and careful to get it right, to really make sure they understand exactly how to handle this vaccine, which is unusual. It's different. We haven't had one like this before. But I think it's going to be just a steady, steady uptick. And when we really build out, we're going to be all over the city

simultaneously serving all different kinds of New Yorkers. So, I think this is just a natural sort of steps it takes to get started. But Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, jump in.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And yes, you're exactly right. I was at Elmhurst yesterday morning. I was at my Maimonides in Brooklyn in the afternoon and Montefiore in the Bronx in the afternoon as well, checking in with their teams on the logistics. Checking in with their pharmacy teams about what they have to do to get the vaccine out of the vials, into syringes and into people's arms. Checking in with the medical teams, you know, to understand their protocols as well. And overall, everything is going as smoothly you know, across all of those dimensions. But as the Mayor said this is a complicated and you know, a dance that we want as well choreographed as possible. Given that it is a new vaccine, it's one that requires this ultra-cold storage and some special steps in handling as well. So overall things are going smoothly. I expect the pace of vaccination will start to tick up in the coming days as more appointments are able to be booked at several of the hospitals that I visited yesterday. They started their vaccination clinics as early as six o'clock in the morning and had a night shift going until midnight. And so, I think all of those things will result in additional health care workers getting vaccinated over the coming days.

Mayor: Great. Go ahead, Dr. Katz.

President Katz: I would just add, I think Dr. Chokshi did an excellent job. I just add that we're all very careful to not waste any of the vaccine. And it's because they're in multidose vials that can only be out of the freezer for short periods of time, that especially at the beginning, we have to be super careful. But you know, today for us is just, you know, the early part of day two. And we're going to start, you know, doing way, way more in the coming days as the procedures get easier and easier.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead. Rich.

Question: And I was just wondering, I wondered yesterday. I thought I heard Dr. Katz say that they might get everybody vaccinated in his hospitals within three weeks. Is that true? And what about these adverse reactions we're hearing about, a couple of people up in the Alaska, apparently? Anything like that happening?

Mayor: Dr. Katz, you speak to your hospitals and anything you want to say on that report from Alaska? And then if Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Varma want to jump in, they should as well. Go ahead, Dr. Katz.

President Katz: I'll do the H + H and let Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma talk about the cases in Alaska. Yeah, we are committed to within three weeks getting everybody who was in the hospital vaccinated. We believe that we can do that. So, you can be sure it will happen.

Mayor: And Mitch, just clarify for everyone, you're saying across your 11 hospitals?

President Katz: Yes. All of the staff in all 11 hospitals will get vaccinated within three weeks.

Mayor: Excellent. Excellent. Okay on the Alaska cases, go ahead, Dr. Chokshi, then Dr. Varma.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you. This is an important question, you know, with respect to the more serious side effects that may occur. But let me start with the big picture, which is that the Pfizer vaccine was shown in clinical trials to be safe and effective. It was reviewed by leading scientists at the FDA and the CDC. The study that was done, the big study of the Pfizer vaccine involved 44,000 people. And there were no serious safety concerns identified among those 44,000 people. However, it's possible that there could be some adverse reactions, including allergic reactions that can occur in very, very rare cases. We're talking about, you know, one in a million type of cases as the vaccine begins to be administered to more and more people. That's why we take extra precautions when the vaccine is being administered, including an observation period of at least 15 to 30 minutes. And the event that occurred in Alaska was actually during that observation period, which allowed her to get medical attention very quickly. We have not heard of any serious adverse reactions like that in New York City. Although we will continue to monitor for them and work in coordination with the CDC, which has a system for these types of serious side effects to be reported. And so we're checking in with them about it regularly as well.

Mayor: Great, Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Nothing else for me.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I hope you're enjoying the snow. And maybe you got out to do a snow angel or two in the snow today. My first question is sort of a follow on what the Sanitation Commissioner said about clearing sidewalks. We're wondering if you're going to be finding restaurants that are already closed, you know code violations for not being able to shovel the streets in front of their restaurants during the storm? Or are you going to stop doing that?

Mayor: Marcia, unless I'm getting this wrong and the Commissioner will answer, the obligation is the property owner. Most restaurants obviously are renting the places where they are. But the property owner has to keep sidewalks clear so people can get by. And the Commissioner said, you know, and I know this from my own experience, you got to make enough space for people to get by. Folks are depending on it, you know. And so, I think that's where the responsibility lies in this place. Probably not the person that runs the restaurant. Go ahead, Commissioner.

Acting Commissioner Grayson: That's correct Mr. Mayor. We need everybody to clear their sidewalk. The responsibility does fall to the property owner. We're very cognizant of the climate with regard to businesses that are struggling, people that are struggling. And also, very cognizant to the climate of the pandemic and social distancing. However, we need the sidewalks and rights of way for the pedestrians clear for those critical workers and essential workers like nurses who also may be walking to work.

Mayor: Exactly. Right. Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: Mr. Mayor my second question has to do with the stimulus being negotiated in Washington right now. My understanding is that Senator Schumer and other officials from New York are trying to negotiate to get some money for New York City as a bridge to when they

could get to the Biden administration, which might not happen until February or so. I wonder what kind of a bind that puts you in, in terms of developing your own budget? I think you have to have a fiscal plan sometime in January? Or are you planning on pushing that off as well to see what happens after the Biden administration takes office?

Mayor: Very important question, Marcia, thank you. We're going to present the preliminary budget in January regardless of what happens with the stimulus. And we will adjust according to whether they have achieved something in the stimulus for this city or not. We'll show people what we have to do. But it's going to be based only on the facts as we have them. We're obviously going to make reference to the fact that there could be more stimulus. But I want to caution, part of why I'm so agitated about the current negotiations is I don't have a guarantee there's going to be another stimulus. We don't know what's going to happen in the elections in Georgia. We don't know what is going to happen in the Senate. We do know Mitch McConnell consistently has been standing in the way of aid to localities. So, there's cities, counties, states, and all over the country that are suffering. And Mitch McConnell keeps blocking help to them. And I'm very worried about that. So, I don't know when the next stimulus is. That's why I want to see this stimulus actually help us get back on our feet. But whatever comes of this, we will reflect the outcome in the January budget. And we're going to put a budget on the table that reflects the reality. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next we have Andrew from WNBC.

Mayor: Andrew. Andrew, can you hear us?

Moderator: Andrew, are you there?

Mayor: I think he's there, but he's not hearing us. Andrew Siff, we can hear you. Can you hear us?

Moderator: As Andrew braves the elements, we're going to Nolan from the New York Post.

Mayor: That's live. That was exciting, dramatic audio of Andrew in the elements. Okay. We'll come back to him. Who we have now? Nolan? Okay. How are you doing Nolan?

Question: Hi Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, but I'm not hearing you very loudly. Can we get that volume up? Try again Nolan.

Question: Sure. Is this better?

Mayor: There you go. There you go.

Question: I'll just yell.

Mayor: No, don't yell, you are all good.

Question: Alright. So, to follow up on the questions about the stimulus. It doesn't look like there's going to be much in the way of aid for cities and states at this moment. You've banked your 2022 budget around getting a lot of aid. What's the plan if it doesn't show up? Mitch McConnell's answer to we need to plow the streets is cities and states should go bankrupt. Like what's your plan B if the aid doesn't show up?

Mayor: Nolan, such an important question. Look, first of all, the current negotiations aren't over. So, I'm expressing my strong views, but I also want to be fair, it ain't over till it's over. Second of all, I have no doubt in my mind that President Biden will work intensely for a real stimulus. He believes in state and local aid. He also knows a hell of a lot about how to get something done with the Senate. Third of all, we don't know what the results of the election in Georgia will be. So, what I'm going to do in January is present a budget based on all the facts. When I present that budget, we will know the results of the Georgia election. And we will know whether there has been a stimulus achieved by the end of this Congress right now. And we'll present what we got to do. We all know there's lots of tough options that we can turn to if we have to, but they would have horrible impact on the life of the city. You know, it would take away the services people need and the things we need to recover. But it's not time to project that yet. It's time to see what comes of this and then make the adjustments accordingly. Go ahead.

Question: Secondly, with the stimulus package still in flux, you are asking Governor Cuomo and you've suggested to Governor Cuomo that it's time to impose additional restrictions at some point in the near future here in the city. Those restrictions would shut down outdoor dining. And with so many restaurants already hanging on by just the slimmest of threads, what can the City do to bolster restaurants if outdoor dining does close again? Is the City considering offering emergency loans through its bonding authority for instance?

Mayor: Nolan we've been working with a whole lot of small businesses, including restaurants to get them loans that are available and other forms of assistance. And we'll keep doing that. There's a lot of businesses hurting, not just restaurants, a whole lot of businesses hurting. If look, the challenge we have now is let's go back to just the beginning here. Let's go back to the core of it. It's COVID. And the infection rate keeps rising. That's a big problem. That could lead to more and more stress on our hospitals. That's going to lead to more people losing their life. God forbid, but that's what's going to happen if we can't stop this. And it's going to end up shutting down the economy more and more anyway. So, what I'm saying and I've had this conversation with the Governor. And he and I've been very much of the same view on this. Is if we don't turn this around quickly, the restrictions are the thing that stopped the situation from getting worse.

We know that from the spring, we know that from the fall in Brooklyn and Queens. The restriction stop the situation from getting worse and allow us to link up to when the vaccine has been spread around the community much more and reaches more and more people. So that's the thinking. But, no one wants restrictions. And I feel for every single small business and everyone who is depending on the job. Even under restrictions, of course, restaurants will continue to have takeout delivery as they did even in the spring in the worst of things. But look if we want to avoid restrictions, I'm going to keep saying it, if people want to avoid restrictions. I do. I want to avoid them. If you want to avoid them, anyone wants to avoid them, wear a mask, practice distancing, do not travel, do not have large gatherings, be tough, be disciplined. That's the best way of trying to avoid the restrictions and help us move forward until we get the vaccine to as many people as possible. Go ahead.

Moderator: So, we're going to try Andrew Siff again.

Mayor: Okay. Andrew? Andrew? Okay. It's happening again, winter interlude. Okay.

Moderator: We hope Andrew's okay. But we're going to go to Melanie with the Wall Street Journal.

Mayor: Tell Andrew to try someone else's phone because something's not working here. Well, let's come back to him. Who you got?

Moderator: Melanie from the Wall Street Journal.

Mayor: Melanie?

Question: Good morning, this is that question – yes. Hello.

Mayor: Hey, how you doing?

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: Thank you so much. Good morning. This is a question for Dr. Katz. Is H + H planning to suspend elective surgeries, anytime, imminently, and if not, what are the benchmarks that would trigger the suspension? And then can you please give us an update on the surgeon flex planning for hospitals? The Governor has repeatedly said in recent weeks that hospitals need to create plans to make sure no one hospital is overwhelmed and his specifically cited H + H hospitals as needing to have those plans.

President Katz: Yes, happy to answer all parts of that. So, I'm going to go backwards first in terms of level loading, which is something that we all agree with. Health + Hospitals has already level loaded over a hundred patients across our facilities so that none of our hospitals are overwhelmed –

Mayor: Mitch, would you define – I'm sorry to interrupt – define that for everyone, just because that's a term you're used to using, but help people understand what it means.

President Katz: Yes. Thank you, sir. My apologies. Level loading recognizes that patients go to the hospitals they trust, to the hospitals in their neighborhood. That's what happened with Elmhurst last March and April. It's the only major hospital in central Queens. That area of the city was harder hit than any area of the city in terms of early infection rates. Elmhurst being so well trusted in the immigrant black and Brown communities among low-income, uninsured people, so everybody went there. But the hospital then became too full and when that happens, what you want to do is to move patients from the hospital that is full to your other hospitals. It's not an easy procedure, especially if people are sick, it's not simple to move someone, especially if they're in respiratory distress. That was a major problem in March and April. Now it's easier because the patients that we're seeing are not as sick in general as they were in March and April,

and we're moving them earlier in the process. So, we're making sure that every hospital maintains adequate reserve beds.

So, to answer the middle question we currently have occupancy about 65 percent in both ICU and in regular medical surgical beds. So, I – a third more patients than the patients we have, would easily fit in without opening any extraordinary spaces. And yes, we have suspended elective procedures. We've made it clear that the only surgeries that we will be doing are those surgeries where – that come in, emergently, such as car accidents or surgeries where somebody's health is directly affected such as when somebody has an infection secondary to gallstones and they're doing poorly because of the infection and the gallbladder has to come out. So, we're doing the necessary surgeries and the emergency surgeries, but we have – consistent with the Governor's request – we have canceled elective procedures and we do have the extra 25 percent capacity the state has asked us for.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Melanie. Melanie?

Question: Can you – thank you so much for answering the question. So when did you suspend elective surgeries, is that a recent decision or is that an imminent decision?

Mayor: Go ahead, Mitch.

Question: No, it's already happened.

President Katz: It was – we worked on how it would be the procedures over the weekends and they were canceled as of Tuesday of this week.

Mayor: Thank you. Who's next?

Moderator: Next we're going to Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning. I have a question for the doctors. Pfizer has announced that it is going to un-blind the study so that people who got the placebo can get the vaccine. I'm wondering whether you agree with this decision, does the study then lose the benefit of the two-year element and whether in New York people who were part of the study will jump the line - the ones that got the placebo will jump the line for the vaccine now?

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Varma, you want to take that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sure. I can start on that. Well first let me just acknowledge that we wouldn't be here with the safe and effective vaccine were it not for the volunteers in the study including volunteers who received the placebo. So, we should all acknowledge their dedicated contribution to advancing science for all of the rest of us. With respect to un-blinding the study, what I will say is that I think there are some complicated, you know, values that are at play here. Certainly, we want to make sure that that people that did contribute to the study in that way also received the vaccination at some point and to balance that against the benefits of, you know, additional follow-up and the scientific understanding that we can get. So, this is a conversation that is primarily being had between Pfizer and FDA officials, and I know they'll be balancing the benefits and the harms in that way.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, I would just want to emphasize what Dr. Chokshi has just said about –really the courage of the people that participated in this clinical trial. When you participate in a clinical trial, you are making a sacrifice not for yourself specifically, but for the sake of society. You're choosing to the possibility of getting an injection that may have no benefit to you whatsoever, being monitored continuously over months and months without any guarantee that this is going to benefit you personally. So depending on the outcomes of what Pfizer and the FDA agree, I would never ever argue that these people are jumping the line. In fact, they took a courageous risk and there's a lot of ethical grounding in the notion that people who participated in a clinical trial and got the placebo should be among the first to receive a medication or a vaccine if they participated in a trial and it's known to be effective.

Mayor: Well Argued. Thank you. Go ahead, Reuvain.

Question: Okay. I also wanted to ask, I know it's hard to predict exactly how many companies will have vaccines and when they will, but is there a target date by which you expect all New Yorkers who want the vaccine to get it, to have it?

Mayor: Look, I'll start and let the doctors jump in. I think the – a healthy way to think about this is between now and June, just to give you an initial sense. We would like to reach the maximum number of New Yorkers. Now, let's be honest. We know some New Yorkers, no matter what we say to them, will not choose to take the vaccine, but I do believe that number is going to be small. I think the more people see it working and the more they see family and friends take it, they see the positive impact on bringing down COVID, I think more and more people will want to. We're going to move aggressively, but I think if you're talking about millions upon millions of people and reaching the whole city pervasively, I think June is a good working assumption right this moment. That could obviously change as we go along and we can do it faster, we would love to. Doctors, anyone want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, I'll just add to it briefly to say I think that that is right. The unknowns that Reuvain pointed out in his question are – will we have additional vaccines, we hope the second vaccine Moderna which is being considered by the FDA advisory committee as we speak, could be authorized as soon as tomorrow. And there are two other vaccines that are in advanced stages of clinical trials, and we'll get read out some of those, hopefully in the beginning of 2021. That really matters for us to understand just what our options are with respect to expanding vaccination. And then the second part is knowing the supply, even for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which are most likely to be authorized this year and making sure that we have enough supply for New Yorkers. With those unknowns, the Mayor has given us a very clear charge which is to ensure that we're doing everything that we possibly can along two dimensions. The first is to make sure that vaccination is smooth and as rapid as possible, so that we expedite for people who do want the vaccine for them to get it as quickly as possible. And then the second is almost equally important, getting the word out, you know, spreading the messages about how important vaccination is, particularly to reach those communities and those people who may be initially hesitant to get the vaccine so that we can have those conversations and advance vaccination along that dimension as well.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead.

Moderator: We're going to try Andrew Siff one more time.

Mayor: Third time's the charm. Here we go, Andrew.

Question: Yes, thank you folks for your patience. I was actually on the air broadcasting at 11 am for News 4 New York, and delightedly surprised to find out that you called on me. I'm happy to be joining you now.

Mayor: Andrew, where were you? Because we were hearing like outdoor sounds. Where were you?

Question: I was in Jackson Heights, Queens reporting on the fact that the children had to log-in and do their zoom school today and that they will be able to return to in-person school tomorrow. And also, segueing to my question here, reporting on some collapsing outdoor restaurant structures, this may have been asked, but I did wonder whether you've compiled sort of how much that has been a factor all across the city, structures that weren't taken down that got knocked down? Is DOT out helping folks with that, are restaurants on their own there, or what happens?

Mayor: I'll turn to Deputy Mayor Anglin and Commissioner Grayson, but let me emphasize that first of all, I think we had a lot of communication to the restaurant community to get ready for the storm, bring in everything they could bring in. We got a lot of cooperation in that generally. We have not heard of many problems with those structures. So, if there are some, of course we want to try and be helpful in every way we can, but generally we didn't hear about a lot of problems, but Deputy Mayor, you start, and then Commissioner.

Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin, Operations: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We did track through the night and it looks like the structure is actually upheld pretty well. We did give clear guidance to try to keep them clean, especially at the tops with snow, removing snow from them. So, we certainly will work with Sanitation, DOT and SBS to help any restaurants that, you know, need assistance there, but we do not think that there was a lot of widespread damage.

Mayor: Go ahead, Commissioner.

Acting Commissioner Grayson: I concur with that. Right from the boots on the ground, as we drove past them, most of the restauranteurs that had outdoor dining structures that were tarped and based in roof or tinted roofs, they were removing them or leaving a stress point open for the accumulated weight. We did have some localized reporting. So, it didn't seem like a widespread problem and for the most part they held up. But I am sure that there are some throughout the city that we just may not know about at this time.

Mayor: Okay. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: And then on the issue of whether there's a pause or a shutdown, you had been mentioning right after Christmas, the Governor yesterday talked about the possibility of January.

I'm just wondering whether you've adjusted your own thinking timeline wise or whether you're still thinking it's right after Christmas.

Mayor: Yeah. Look, I've been talking to our health care team throughout. Everyone's very concerned about the increase in the number of cases, we report it to every single day, very openly. The number of cases is too high. The, the infection levels too high. The number of hospitalizations is too high and unfortunately it's just growing. I don't like restrictions. None of us likes restrictions, but I think we need them sooner rather than later. So, we'll keep working with the State, they make the final decision, but I think it's something that has to be put into effect soon based on the very consistent information we're seeing, and certainly right after Christmas is a natural moment when the world kind of slows down a little bit. But we'll keep having that conversation with the state to figure out exactly how they want to proceed. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Sonia from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, I just wanted to go back to some of the questions about rules on snow since it's been a couple of years since we dealt with this much of it. For those property owners who neglect their stretches of sidewalk specifically repeat offenders, like sort of neglected properties, what happens there? And for people digging out their vehicles, what should they know about where to shovel that snow?

Mayor: This is news you can use. I appreciate the question, Sonia. Commissioner, help people know exactly what they should do with the snow they're shoveling in front of their home or their property.

Acting Commissioner Grayson: Thank you. With regard to repeat offenders, so to speak, it's been a pretty long while since we've had a snowfall of this magnitude. So, what we want to do is make sure that all property owners are just aware that you should begin shoveling and try to get that done as soon as you can tonight. You don't – not only for fines, just for traction. It's going to get really, really cold, the sooner you get out there, when it's safe for you to do that, the better. Today, naturally dress warm, try to clear a path that people can use, specially those who are mobility challenged. And with regard to digging out your car, well, just try to think, you don't want to throw it directly back into the roadway because when we come back down to resurface it with the plow, we're going to push it kind of back towards where you dug it out from. You want to look for some space probably in between the cars, leave it in the roadway. As the Mayor mentioned alternate side has been suspended for a few more days. There is supposedly a light at the end of the tunnel with some end of the week warming into the weekend. So, look for a place that we're not going to push it back towards your car or where you removed it from. Don't block any hydrants, don't block any catch basins, and most importantly, try to look for a safe place to put it, but definitely do your job as early as you can, as safe as you can, to clear the sidewalks.

Mayor: Very well said, Commissioner, thank you. Sonia, go ahead.

Question: Oh, just to follow up on that, just the consequences for fines, et cetera, for not shoveling, that's no – obviously it gets worse, it gets packed down if it's not shoveled immediately, but what are the other consequences for property owners who don't do it?

Mayor: Go ahead, Commissioner.

Question: The -- when, if you pass the thresholds for removal time there, there could be fines issued. At this moment in time, most of our personnel, we're actively engaged in snow fighting. So, if it's something that's dramatically egregious and it's something that's causing quality of life or -- do harm, there is the chance that you could be issued a summons in, you know, in way -- if you pass that threshold. However, right now, what we're hoping for is that people understand, we've been putting out solid messaging. Right now, it's about caring for one another. The Mayor said it, now's the time to go out and think about everyone who has to be out there, the essentials and the criticals who have to take those routes, who are trying to take an open-air approach to it and be outdoors. So, bundle up, try to get out there and make that happen. Right now, our goal is not enforcement. We want compliance. We're never looking to write a summons for that. I want everyone to shovel.

Mayor: Nicely said. Again, thank you very much, Commissioner, Hey, everybody, let's conclude with this important point. We're seeing New York City at our best. You know, here we are in the middle of a pandemic, and then here we got the biggest snow storm we've had in almost five years. A lot of other places would be thrown off the game, not in New York City. We just keep going and that's because of the strength and resiliency of New Yorker. So, I want to thank everyone. You keep fighting back. That's who we are as New Yorkers. I look around the city today, so many good public workers out there stepping up for their fellow New Yorker, Sanitation, doing an amazing job. City is coming back strong today. And as I said, the vaccine is being delivered to the hospitals. People are getting vaccinated today. It's amazing how much is happening all at once to bring this city back. So, I just always want to offer a vote of confidence and a real thank you to all New Yorkers, because you literally handle whatever is thrown at you, and that's the beauty of this place. So, everyone, let's get out there. Let's clean up. Let's stay safe and we're going to keep moving forward. Thanks, everybody.

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