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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. I'm still kind of feeling the glow from yesterday. What an amazing day, what a relief after all the months we've been through. And you know, this was such an important day for our city yesterday. I'm going to talk about that. But I also want to say for our nation, here was a day when things really went right in America, where things really worked in America, and people pulled together in a common cause, and that is a good feeling to feel again. It was really good to see the shipments of the vaccine coming out of Kalamazoo, Michigan, going all over the country, everyone working together to protect their fellow Americans. It was really good to see that sense that we could actually have a positive moment together. Didn't matter which state you came from or what party you're in, people were just working together. It was good to see the electoral college function like normal. It was good to feel that we could do the things that we're good at, this country could do something big and ambitious, and show the world and show ourselves what we're capable of. So, yesterday was a really profound day, a very moving day. As it unfolded hour by hour, I felt an incredible sense of reassurance and hope, and it was good to see what it could mean for our future. Today, you know, we start the beginning of a new era. This is the time when we fight back against the coronavirus now with the vaccine in our arsenal. We, today, begin the work of ensuring that the vaccine reaches as many New Yorkers as possible, as quickly as possible.

And I got to tell you, this is about, of course, the power of this vaccine to save lives and protect people. But it's also about hope. It is not just a shot you take in the arm with a needle. It is a shot of hope. It is a reminder that the war against the coronavirus will soon be over. It's a reminder of what people can do when we work together. And being there at NYU Langone yesterday and seeing Nurse Manager Tara Easter get that shot, and she was cool in the saddle and she was positive about it. And she wanted to tell people how important it was to get the shot. But it was also really powerful talking to her about experiences she had in the spring, when she was in the thick of the fight against the coronavirus, and like everybody else in frontline health care work, trying to figure out what to do with this new, horrible scourge. She talked about how different it felt now, how much people had learned, how much people were working together to apply those lessons and protect each other, and how the vaccine, to her, felt like a turning of the corner for her and her colleagues, for the people at the front line, protecting all of us. So, I wanted to thank her for the way she talked about it, and the incredible work she and her colleagues had done. Also, Frank Baez, the RN, who gave the shot. What good people, doing such important work.

Now they made history. They were part of those first – that first wave, those first New Yorkers to get the vaccine. And they will be the first of many. We have 73 health care workers who have already received their first dose in New York City. And today we're expecting almost 41,000 doses to be available at 42 hospitals across New York City. So, this is going to move very fast. We're going to talk about, in the course of the coming days, more and more vaccines coming in

and from different companies as they get their approvals. So, this is going to really speed up. But what we've seen so far is our hospitals are ready. They have been waiting for this moment and preparing, and it's incredibly encouraging to see the vaccine here and see it go into action immediately. Now, we all felt that sense of relief as we saw our fellow New Yorkers get their shots, as we saw the vaccine actually come to life and it started to, for me, give me a sense of what's going to be in the future when we can actually start to come back together, we can gather with our families again, and hug our loved ones and restore so many of the things that we care about in our lives.

Now you can see that, you can see that light at the end of the tunnel, and we need as many New Yorkers as possible to get this vaccine to help us all move forward. But we know that to do that we have to build trust. We know that there's a lot of people who have gone through so much in this crisis. And there's a reason that people are feeling hesitant. It's not surprising. There's a reason there's a trust gap that needs to be addressed. The way to address that trust gap is to give people information, to show them the truth, to show them what works, to explain the whole reality, answer concerns, to bring forward voices that people really believe in, in their communities, to keep showing the evidence that the vaccine is proven to be safe and effective., that it's easy to receive, that it will be accessible in all communities, particularly the communities that bore the brunt of the coronavirus crisis. Those 27 neighborhoods, people of color in 27 neighborhoods in New York City who got the worst of the coronavirus, deserve their fair share of the vaccine. And we're going to make that a priority.

So, we need to show that to people that, that equity, that fairness in the distribution will be there. Of course, we got to remind people it's easy to get this vaccine. It is free. And we've got to continue to express that in all the languages spoken in New York City in the community, at the grassroots, and particularly in voices that people trust and believe in. So, today we're gathered by three New Yorkers where I've – joined, I should say, by three New Yorkers who really are just tremendous examples of leaders, faith leaders, community leaders, who people trust, who they believe in, who have led communities in a way that people really see and feel, and folks who have given their whole lives to helping their fellow New Yorkers. These are the voices that will be heard the most. So, I want you to hear from these three extraordinary individuals. First from Southeast Queens, he is a great spiritual leader. I've had the joy of knowing him for many years, also a great leader for social justice, for the work he's done with the National Action Network and someone who is revered for all he does for the community. My pleasure to introduce, Reverend Phil Craig.

[...]

Reverend, thank you so much. I love that phrase, IVR. That's informed vaccine recipients. That's fantastic. And thank you, I agree with you and your suggestions are very powerful and I'm going to pursue them with our health team and make sure we get that information out. You're right, people just need straightforward answers to really basic questions. And the more answers, the more trust. So, thank you. I know you've given this a lot of thought. I know you really have your finger on the pulse of your congregation and your larger community in Southeast Queens. And we're going to be leaning on you to keep giving us that feedback and those suggestions so we can improve our approach all along. So, thank you very, very much. I want you to hear – thank you, God bless you. I want you to hear now from another great leader. I have the warmest feeling for him. I've worked with them closely for years on social justice issues like paid sick days and

living wage. He has been a strong voice for the empowerment of the Latino community and all communities. And I remember years ago, having really thoughtful conversations with him on something we both are very interested in, which is liberation theology. This is a thinker and a leader and a doer both in the spiritual sense and as a community leader. My great honor to present Bishop Raymond Rivera from the Latino Pastoral Action Center.

[...]

Thank you so much, Bishop. Thank you for all you're doing. And listen, I really want to affirm the points. One, we are going to prioritize people exactly like you, who are older and, or have those pre-existing conditions. And I want you to please make sure you take all the right precautions until the day comes that you get the vaccine. We're going to prioritize, for sure, those 27 neighborhoods, Black, Latino, Asian neighborhoods that bore the brunt of the coronavirus. We're definitely going to put out all the information in multiple languages, but a heavy, heavy emphasis on Spanish, you're right, because so many of our fellow New Yorkers speak Spanish as their primary language. And we're going to do that with every possible tool to spread the word, but we need our faith partners to do that every day because, again, you're amongst the most trusted voices in the city. So, thank you. We will partner with you for sure. Lastly, everyone, I want you to hear from someone very special and some people deserve the title, a living legend, Bishop Hezekiah Walker is one of those people. A renowned spiritual leader. When I talk to people of faith around the city, his is one of the names that people hold in particular reverence. He is the pastor of the Love Fellowship Tabernacle in Brooklyn, and he's also beloved because of the way he has spread a beautiful, positive message, and a spiritual message through music. He is a Grammy award winning gospel artist as well, and renowned for all those elements of the amazing work he does in Brooklyn and far beyond. My great honor to present to you, Bishop Hezekiah Walker.

[...]

Thank you so much, Bishop. I think it was powerful. I appreciate – I know you always speak from the heart, but what I could hear in your voice, and I hope all New Yorkers could hear it too, was the honest pain of what we've seen over decades and centuries that bred that distrust, but also the hope that if we can give people that good information, answer those honest questions, and allow leaders of the community to speak from that place of knowledge you speak of, it's going to allow us to move forward and I really appreciate your willingness to be a leader in this effort. We have to – we, as the City government, and also our colleagues in the scientific and health community, we've got to get really good information out there and we've got to answer people's questions. So, you're calling us to such an important and noble mission and we're going to answer that call. Thank you so much, Bishop.

Everybody, you've heard from three renowned faith leaders who are going to be a key part of the effort to build trust and get that information out there. It's another reminder, the day is coming when we will end this pandemic. The day is coming when we will turn the corner, but we all have to be a part of that solution. Leaders and people whose voices are heard and respected by everyday New Yorkers spreading good information, encouraging each other. In the meantime, doing all the basics, wearing the masks and washing our hands and practicing the social distancing and – I'm going to keep saying it – not traveling for the holidays, keeping those gatherings small for the holidays. We need to do all those things to give the time for the vaccine

to be distributed so we can turn that corner once and for all. And I keep saying it, anyone who feels bad about the fact that these holidays won't be the same as usual, if we do our job now together, next year the holidays will be great. We'll all be back together. It's not long to wait. Let's do what we can do right now.

And with that, let's turn to our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID 19, today's report 160 patients, and we want to be at 200 or below. And that's a good day today. We are seeing a lot of uptick lately, but we're always happy to see a lower number. But the hospitalization rate is not good, 2.89 per 100,000. We want to be under two. So, that's an indicator of the bigger problem we're still facing, and we're going to be fighting for weeks now. Next update on current new cases, again, probable and confirmed together, this is on the seven-day average – today's number 2,813. Obviously, a huge number. We want to be under 550. It's going to take weeks and weeks to get back down there, but we will, especially now that we have the vaccine on our side. And number three, percentage of New York City residents tested positive, this is the seven-day rolling average, 5.51 percent. We need to get under five percent. Again, real work to do on that one. Now, let me give you 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:** We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Reverend Phillip Craig, by Bishop Raymond Rivera, by Bishop Hezekiah Walker, by Dr. Dave Chokshi, by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, by Dr. Mitchell Katz, and by Commissioner Deanne Criswell. First question today goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

**Question:** Hey, good morning all. Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** I'm feeling great, Juliet. What a good day, how you doing?

**Question:** I'm doing fine. Thank you. My question regards the vaccine. I was wondering what the schedule is, as far as you know the rollout for the medical workers and the nursing home staff. How many weeks do you think that will take? And when do you think the general public will start getting the vaccine?

**Mayor:** I'll start, and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and it's such an important question, Juliet. Remember, as Dr. Katz said yesterday, this is the first time our medical institutions have ever dealt with a vaccine like this. So, they're quickly acclimating to it and figuring out the best way to work with it. So, the first days will take some warming up, but then you're going to see things go faster and faster. We also expect more and more shipments to be coming in, including from multiple companies. So, this is going to move quickly, but remember job one, frontline health care workers, nursing home staff, nursing home patients – that's going to take us December into January. We want to start getting it out to the communities as quickly as possible, but first we have to take care of the people who are most vulnerable and the people who take care of us. With that, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And that's exactly right with respect to the timeline. The focus for this week and next week will start with those high risk health care workers, particularly high-risk hospital workers, whom we're very much relying upon as we experience COVID hospitalizations go up. And then starting next week, we'll get to nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, both staff as well as residents in those facilities, and then expand to other health care workers and other frontline workers very soon after that. So, that initial phase will take you know, at least a few weeks for us to get through. And then we'll start expanding the circle out after that. But for the part of your question about when this will get to the general public, so much does depend on the supply of vaccine that will be available. We should have a better sense of that by the end of this month or at the beginning of next month. And based on that you know, we're hoping by mid-2021 is when we would be able to vaccinate everyone in New York who wants it.

**Mayor:** And Juliet, I just want to make sure that last point is clear. We are going to move very aggressively. So the point about taking care of the folks at the highest priority, December going into January, and then building out from there. Obviously we're concerned about all health care workers, first responders, we're concerned about folks over 65, folks with pre-existing conditions, especially folks who have both. That's just going to go more and more each month. The last point that Dr. Chokshi made is, you know, when you get to the end of the spring, we'd like to have seen everybody in New York City vaccinated. That's our goal. But each month you'll see more and more people reached. And what that means is there's less and less place for the vaccine to spread. And that's going to start to make things safer for everyone. That every additional New Yorker gets vaccinated is one step closer to safety for all of us. Go ahead, Juliet.

**Question:** Okay, great. Thank you. Police Commissioner Shea spoke on NY1 this morning, and he's saying the vaccines for the NYPD will not be required. Does this concern you? Is this City policy and will city workers be required to get the vaccine?

**Mayor:** Juliet we're going to continue to discuss that matter. But again, with everything we're doing with the vaccine, the best approach is to educate people and get them bought in, answer the questions. There's a lot of valid questions. The more this is voluntary, the better off we are. We're still talking about how we want to approach the City workforce, and there's different elements of the City workforce who do different things. But for now the approach is to focus on education and getting people to buy into this vaccine voluntarily.

**Moderator:** The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Hi, good morning Mayor de Blasio. My questions are about the forecasted snowstorm that is supposed to hit the city starting tomorrow and the structures for outdoor dining. I know that outdoor dining has been suspended by the Department of Sanitation because of the snow alert. But you spoke last night about some of these structures that have been built for outdoor dining. I know that some had been recommended to take the top – their roofs off, or whatever it may be. But I'm curious if it is a safety concern, why hasn't this been mandated? And is there any concern about plows maneuvering around, especially in some streets that are pretty tight already?

**Mayor:** Look, it's an important question, Katie, but I'd say, you know, this is something we've tried to communicate clearly to the restaurant community. I talked to Deputy Mayor for Operations Laura Anglin yesterday, who has played a leading role in Open Streets and Open

Restaurants. And, you know, we've been very clear to the restaurant community, that when we're getting a larger storm secure everything that could be secured. So obviously it doesn't blow around and it doesn't create a danger to anyone. And if you have the kind of outdoor dining setup that you can bring it all in, that's ideal. If you don't, if it's a restaurant that really has built something much more substantial, they can leave it there, but secure everything they can secure. Department of Sanitation has been for months and months preparing to work around the restaurant structures whenever needed. It's a new reality, but I think the priority is right, that we've said, look, we had to save people's livelihoods and jobs. That was worth a major, major focus. And certainly we can work around that with plowing. It'll take some extra creativity, but we can do that. So I think the restaurant world has heard loud and clear for tomorrow night. Bring in what you can bring in. If you really can't, we will certainly work around it. Go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** Okay. Yeah, To follow up, I don't know if anyone from the Department of Sanitation is on the call, but I just have a lot more questions. I know creativity can be used in a lot of instances, but looking at – you can't change the size of the street or some of these exterior buildings are pretty sturdy structures. And they've spent, restaurants have spent lots of money to build them. So I don't know if there's any other support being issued to restaurants? And if there's any – if you've spoken to the Department of Sanitation about the actual reality and feasibility of making tight turns with lots more things on the street?

**Mayor:** Again, Katie, this is a decision that was made quite a while back to support outdoor dining, with the understanding it would take a different approach to plowing. Bluntly that could be only a few times this year. I mean, last winter we saw almost no major snow. We don't know what this one's actually going to be in the end tomorrow. But you know, it could be something we need to address a few times in the course of the winter. But what we know now, we have smaller plows, you know pickup truck kind of plows that we can use in much tighter spaces. And we'll work with what's there. If it's a, I said very clearly, if it's a structure that cannot be easily brought in and it's going to stay out there, we're asking the restaurant owners to secure it to the best of their ability. And we know that Sanitation has been alerted to work around it. And I'm convinced we can make it work. May take a little more effort than normal, but we can make it work.

**Moderator:** The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

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

**Mayor:** I'm doing well, Henry. How about you?

**Question:** I'm good. Thank you. I want to get back to the discussion about closing down a little bit of essential businesses. Have you had any contact with employers around the city? Do you have more details about when this will happen? You said after Christmas, might it be after New Year's? Any businesses that would be expanded as essential that weren't included in that universe originally?

**Mayor:** Okay. Henry, fair questions indeed. First of all, of course, the State of New York will make the final decisions here. I've been having this conversation repeatedly with the Governor. Our teams are talking. Any final guidance would be, you know, written and clear and include the

answers to your questions. But look, here's what I think we're seeing. The Governor spoke about this in the Times interview the other day. Clearly these numbers that I went over a moment ago, they're going in the wrong direction. We are just on the verge of a huge breakthrough with the vaccine, but we're also dealing with a second wave. We got to beat it back. We got to protect lives, we've got to protect our hospitals. So I think, unfortunately I don't say it with anything but sorrow, but I do think it's needed. We're going to need to do some kind of shutdown in the weeks ahead. Something that resembles the pause we were in in the spring. And I think it would be overwhelmingly what we saw then. There may be some adjustments Henry, but I think it's going to very much resemble what we saw in the spring, essential work only. And look, if we implement that, my nomination would be right after Christmas. If we implement that, with some good luck and hard work and with the vaccine starting to help us, you know, we could be out of that in a matter of weeks, but having stopped the worst of this surge. So lots still to be talked through. But that's an example of something that I think could help us a lot. Go ahead, Henry.

**Question:** Okay. Thank you for that, Mr. Mayor. Here's another question about the program that isolates or offers to isolate people in hotels. These numbers are rising. You know, they're in the hundreds now. The use of these hotels is comparatively minimal and I'm just wondering, is the City paying for vacant rooms? And is the City encouraging these people to isolate because that may be part of why these numbers are increasing? These people go home and they are contagious.

**Mayor:** Yeah, Henry clearly folks being in a home environment is a big challenge. That's why we've been so adamant about wanting folks to avoid larger gatherings at home. When there's a family with a lot of people in the same home or multi-generational, that presents real challenges. We've seen that throughout this crisis. The Take Care initiative as part of Test and Trace, and that's led by Dr. Amanda Johnson and she and her team, I think have done an amazing job, helping people to safely separate. You're right, most people choose not to take the hotel, even though it is being made available for free, with lots of support. Most people would rather be with their family. There's lots of ways to help people stay at their home, but still safely separate, get the support they need and be careful about the folks around them. And a lot of work is done to educate people on that, get them support, check in with them regularly. So that can work fine. I do think people should look at this hotel option. The quarantine period in the scheme of things is brief. If that's a better option, you know, we want people to take it and use it. There has been some uptick in that lately. But I think Henry the most essential answer to your question is that people generally want to stay home and I don't blame them. But what we want is everyone to really communicate with the Take Care folks, to get the most support possible and do that in the safest way possible.

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

**Question:** Morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey Michael, how you been?

**Question:** I'm good. A couple of questions. The first one is I think directed more to the health officials on the call today. On this Moderna vaccine, do we know if it will be – will we be able to use it on children under 16, pregnant women? Are there kind of key differences in the Moderna vaccine compared to the Pfizer one?

**Mayor:** Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Varma jump in.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for the question. So the Moderna vaccine as people on the call may know, an initial FDA review of the science was published just a few minutes ago earlier this morning. And so we're pouring through some of the details of what was published. But let me tell you what we know right now, particularly emphasizing what's the same and what's different between the Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine. What's the same, and you know the most important point is that it does appear that the safety and the efficacy of the Moderna vaccine is very comparable to the Pfizer vaccine. And both are very good vaccines from that perspective. So that's the headline with respect to what we are seeing with respect to that FDA review. There are some important differences between the two vaccines. And let me just go through a handful of the points on that. First Moderna does not require storage in ultra cold temperatures. It can be stored at -20 degrees, that's in a normal freezer. And that will really help us to expand the places where Moderna can go. It also has a longer shelf life in the refrigerator once it's transferred from the freezer. It can stay in normal refrigeration for 30 days. And that will also help us you know, expand access once the Moderna vaccine is authorized. And then with respect to some of your other questions about the clinical characteristics, the Moderna vaccine was submitted for authorization only for ages 18 and up. That's another difference from the Pfizer vaccine which was already authorized for ages 16 and up. But neither will be authorized for children below the age of 16. And then finally, we will get some additional information in the coming days on the Moderna vaccine about special populations, including pregnant people, people who are immunocompromised, and others. And we'll be sure to keep the public posted on those points as well.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Dr. Varma, would you like to add?

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Nothing additional for me.

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

**Question:** Thanks guys. The second question I have is on the schools. So we see that more than 120 school buildings were shut down yesterday for a day or more because of multiple COVID cases. And you know, City Health officials have said that, you know, there are concerns about keeping schools open amid high community spread. And there's been disruption in closing these buildings. So I'm wondering how you're kind of weighing these countervailing things? How are you weighing the concern as community spread continues? And does the situation room and the Test and Trace people have you know, the bandwidth to follow through on all these individual cases we're now seeing?

**Mayor:** Yeah, there's no question the bandwidth is there. And I want to thank everyone at the situation room and at Test and Trace. They've done a really amazing job supporting every school community. Remember that they're focused now on elementary schools and special education programs and pre-K, 3K. So about 878 schools is our universe. The information as of the end of yesterday was 41 were in a longer shut down, but again they will come out of that and keep going as we saw throughout the fall. So, you know, you're going to have some schools shut down at any given point. There's still a pandemic going on. Until we really can turn the corner on the second wave and get the vaccine out there you will have some school shutdowns. But the vast



majority of schools are open and serving kids and doing an amazing job of keeping everyone safe. And we're testing constantly. So I have a lot of confidence in our school system and the ability of our health care team working with our educators to keep everyone safe. And the vast majority of schools every single day are open and supporting our kids and families.

**Moderator:** The next is Narmeen from PIX.

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey, Narmeen. How you doing?

**Question:** I'm doing well, thank you. I'm curious to know as you hear some of the faith leaders speak just earlier, what are some of the immediate points for you, that you see the City has some lapses in? Some places, some things that they mentioned that you feel the City needs to close the gap on in terms of getting the information out there in regards to the vaccine?

**Mayor:** Really good question Narmeen. I think it's kind of the thing we deal with every day that the government has to speak to the people, has to speak in a really clear, straightforward language. And really answer tough and fair questions. You heard from each of the faith leaders the kinds of questions that people have on their mind, you know, is it safe? You know, prove to me it's safe. Explain to me what this is really going to do and what the side effects may be, all of these kinds of things that people really need to understand. And they need to see proof that it works. And I think what's going to happen, this is kind of the way it always happens in these situations is you know, the very health care heroes that we're seeing get this vaccine in the last 24 hours, they're going to start telling their stories over the days ahead. And from what we've understood, most of them should have no side effects or very limited side effects, but have the great advantage of being protected. And as more and more people start to testify about that, I think it's going to give greater and greater comfort. More and more people will over time, know someone in their life who has taken the vaccine successfully. But we in government have to get that fact sheet out, that is the point that Dr. Craig, excuse me Reverend Craig made that, that fact sheet answering all those core questions and really listening to the questions that come up along the way and giving those clean answers, that's what's going to move people. Go ahead.

**Question:** Thank you for that Mayor. Also just sticking to that subject just a bit longer. We talked to several smaller community organizations that were kind of born out of the pandemic ones, mainly out of Bronx and Queens who really helped a lot of communities of color, a lot of ethnic groups get the resources that they felt the city lagged on when it came to food and such and even testing. Many of them have said that they've had found it difficult to connect with the city to help them even magnify their voices. What advice do you have to some of those smaller organizations to connect with the city more clearly?

**Mayor:** We want to connect with them, Narmeen, and please share contact information with us so that we can get our team in touch with them. Look, I think for smaller organizations, it's not surprising that they may not have as many relationships in the city government, but we want to help them build them. We definitely want to help them get what they need to be effective. We need them, just like we reached out to a lot of smaller community groups in the census, they played an incredibly positive role in helping us achieve what we did in the census which was pretty miraculous during the pandemic, we got to do that again to make sure people get good,

clear information about the vaccine, to make sure people get the help they need in addressing all the aspects of the crisis. So we want to connect with them. I would say on testing, we all struggled because there wasn't enough testing available for months and months in the beginning. One of the biggest problems in this whole crisis has been the lack of testing and particularly the lack of federal response on the testing. But when it comes to food, I just want to say, we have said from the beginning, no New Yorker will go hungry. We will make food available to anyone that needs it just by calling 3-1-1, we'll connect them to food. A lot of times that's been through schools that have those feeding programs, it's been direct delivery. So it hasn't necessarily gone through a smaller grassroots organization, but we still want to help those organizations get the food supply they need. So anyone that you're talking to connect them to us and we'll make sure we get them help.

**Moderator:** The next is Alex Zimmerman from Chalkbeat.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Alex, how are you doing?

**Question:** I'm doing well. My first question is about enrollment in public schools. I'm wondering if you can provide the number of students who are enrolled in city public schools right now, or if you can commit to a timeline to providing that?

**Mayor:** Yeah, we can certainly get you updated information. We know this has been a year filled with disruption. We know some families left the city and are now coming back. We know some change the kind of schools they were going to. I think we're going to see a continued movement in our enrollment throughout the school. I think we get to September when people will be coming back in person, that's going to be a much more stable situation. But I'll talk to our colleagues at DOE and get you the latest numbers that we have.

**Question:** Secondly, just a quick clarifying question. You mentioned there might be a need for another pause, does that include schools and sort of somewhat unrelatedly to the enrollment question, you know, typically in a school year of schools lose enrollment if they have to give back some of their budgets and it appears that that is happening, sort of in – through the typical process this school year. The principals' union has raised some concerns about that and has sort of made the argument that schools should be held harmless, and you've obviously said that this school year and next school year are very high stakes school year. So I'm wondering whether you've considered reevaluating that policy and sort of how – and why you think school should be forced to relinquish money?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I don't think – it's a fair concern, but I want to also say I'm not sure the union is presenting the whole reality. Alex, we have been really flexible with schools. We've had lots of issues where schools needed different staffing. We've helped them to get that staffing, we've helped them to have budget flexibility. We certainly want to be respectful of what schools have been through. So it's not – it's not business as usual. It is a different approach this year, and it's much more an effort to hear what each school needs and adjust to it. So that's the approach that we're taking. I spoke about this on the question of pause. I spoke about this on NY1 last night. Look, our schools are the safest places in New York City right now. Our health care leaders have said it, and I want to get Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi into this point. Right now we're seeing

extraordinary success in keeping our schools safe. I want to keep them open. If we do have a pause that will be a decision the State makes, as I said, that could be as soon as right after Christmas, but the schools with all the layer upon layer of health and safety measures with this gold standard of health protections that we've put in place, schools can effectively keep serving kids and kids need it. And I think this is important to hear health care voices talk about why schools are safe, but also why kids need to be in school. Dr. Varma and then Dr. Chokshi?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Great. Thank you, Mayor. I think one of the things that we really committed ourselves to before the school year started was trying to take the best of all interventions that we know about around the world and combine them into a package. And then what we have seen with our data that we get from testing in schools, as well as the reporting of cases occurring in students and any staff outside of school, is that the schools are not increasing the rate of transmission. People's risk of getting infected, if you are a member of the school community, is either similar to, or in some situations, much less than it is for anybody else in the community. And that means basically what the schools aren't going to protect you from getting infected in the community necessarily, but we can reduce any transmission that might occur in those, through all those safety measures. And the other thing that I think that's critically important that the Mayor just mentioned is that health of course is more than just freedom from COVID. Right now we're in this pandemic, that is our highest priority, but there are tremendous health and social benefits that come from being in school, and I think the American Academy of Pediatrics statement on this issue that's been published before is probably really one of the most strongest and comprehensive statements from people who know, physicians who know about the importance of in-person schooling. So I do feel strongly that we can keep the school environment safe even while we have this pandemic region around us.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, doctor – thank you – and go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I'll just add briefly, you know, Dr. Varma covered it very nicely. It boils down to safety and health and we've put in those rigorous protocols that Dr. Varma went over from the safety perspective. To add just one more layer on the health perspective, the reason that we as doctors, you know, as health professionals feel so strongly about this is that it is a worthy mission from the perspective of the health of children who are being served in schools. Everything that happens in schools from, of course the learning and the education itself, to some of the services that are provided both for mental health, as well as social services, schools should be thought of as instruments of promoting health in our communities. And so that's why we have taken those pain staking steps to make them as safe as possible because they promote health.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more questions for today. The next is Jillian Jonas from WBAI.

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

**Mayor:** I'm doing well, Jillian, how are you?

**Question:** I'm fine. Thank you. I'm following up on a question from last month about the Special Flushing Waterfront District, which the Council approved last week. There are still these outstanding issues and I've seen nothing addressing them, the first thing that the plan building is in a coastal flooding hurricane evacuation high-risk zone. And the second is that 11 of those 13 towers exceed the FFA limits, with the potential to obstruct flight patterns and paths around LaGuardia. When I asked last time, you said you wanted "to really particularly focus on those height restrictions". So have you reviewed them? What is the administration and DCP doing? Is that included in any kind of negotiations with the developers?

**Mayor:** Thank you for the question, Jillian. My understanding is that those issues, that the FAA issue, was satisfied in the different planning and negotiations that went on last few weeks. Obviously in terms of any kind of building in coastal areas, and you're pointing out an important point, ever since Sandy, we are very, very sensitive about what it takes to build in a coastal area, in a flood plain, there are new rules obviously been put in place on how to do that safely. So my understanding is those issues were addressed. I can't give you the chapter and verse, but I will make sure today that we get you the details on that. They're are important questions and I do remember you asking them, I want to make sure we give you a detailed answer. Go ahead.

**Question:** Thanks, and that's a great segue to my next question, which is about to Gowanus rezoning, which is planned in a coastal flood plain and a highly toxic public place site, which has, you know, cold tar plumes and carcinogens. My understanding is that they can't be cleaned up in time for the timeframe for the rezoning. So are you comfortable bringing in tens of thousands of people into these kinds of circumstances?

**Mayor:** Look, obviously, Jillian, I know the question is asked sincerely, but I would never be comfortable with anything that makes people unsafe, but I don't think the way you're framing it is the entire reality. The cleanup efforts around the Gowanus Canal have been going on now for most of a decade. I was a City Council member when this all began and the EPA's involvement has been consistent throughout. So we're never going to let people be in this situation that's unsafe. The Gowanus rezoning is scheduled to come up soon, but those environmental factors have been worked on deeply for a long time. We'll get – again, we can get a detailed update on the sequencing and where to clean up stands, but of course we don't want anything to happen is not safe. We need to make sure the safety issues are addressed when it comes to any location that's coastal or in a flood plain. Again, that doesn't mean we don't develop there anymore. It means we develop their differently and those changes were a part of what we've done with land use with Buildings Department ever since Sandy. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Last question for today goes to Matt Troutman from Patch.

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

**Mayor:** I'm doing well. How you?

**Question:** Doing well. Okay, well, we have a major snowstorm coming and schools have more or less been back in session for just about a week or more. What are the logistics of a potential, you know, closure of in-person learning coming up and what's the likelihood?

**Mayor:** Okay. Right now, as I've learned with the National Weather Service and predicting the weather, and I have a lot of respect for the National Weather Service, but we have been surprised many times with storms changing at the last moment or being more or less unexpected. So it's still early to make a final prediction. I'll bring in our Commissioner for Emergency Management, Dan Criswell in a second, but I'd say what I'm hearing is from Dan and others, not until later tomorrow, Wednesday, do we see the storm having much effect? So school day tomorrow, as of now, looks good. That goes to the open question about Thursday morning. Again, we're about to potentially experience something we've never experienced before in the history of New York City, which is if we did have a snow day, meaning kids couldn't physically go to school, we still have remote learning in place. Someone said to me the other day they felt kind of forlorn about the fact that it ends the snow day as we knew it as kids, when we look forward to a day off, yes, it's true that that's now going to be a thing of the past, that even when kids are home because of snow, they'll still be learning. And I'm kind of sad for the kids on the one hand, on the other hand we got a lot of learning that needs to be done, a lot of catching up. So it's the right thing to do. But right now I'd say Wednesday looks solid that we can have school as normal. Thursday, still we need to know more as we get closer and we'll certainly alert parents and families as quickly as we have a final determination. Commissioner Criswell, you want to jump in.

**Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Emergency Management:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Yes. Right now, you know, we are watching the weather closely and I am on the phone with the National Weather Service multiple times a day, and the Mayor is right. Wednesday looks good right now up until later in the afternoon, we are going to start to see some snow come in around the four o'clock, maybe evening rush hour. It'll be light. In the majority of this storm is going to happen in the evening hours and the overnight hours where we will see up to eight to 12 inches of snow with some heavy winds. And it will start to dissipate and move out by the morning rush hour, but we might see some lingering snow through the morning. So again, we're watching this closely, we're communicating with all of our city agencies so they can make the most effective decisions that they can.

**Mayor:** Thank you, commissioner. Go ahead, Matt.

**Question:** Thank you for that. Okay, switching gears kind of drastically here. I have a question coming about a Parks Department decision. They're planning to evict some community composting sites and East River Park and under the Queensboro Bridge in Long Island City. Now in the case of the site under the Queensboro Bridge, Parks Department says they plan to use the space for parking vehicles. Now, local advocates and officials want to know, are you going to intervene to help them find a solution to keep the sites where they are?

**Mayor:** I'll certainly get involved to make sure that the sites can, either there or someplace else appropriate, continue to do their work. They do really important work and I respect their work. I don't know the details about the specific site and what parks needs, but I'll get involved to make sure that we find a resolution that protects the ability of folks doing composting, but also serves what the Parks Department needs in general. I have been down this road with these kinds of conflicts many times, and I find there's almost always an acceptable solution if we just get everyone talking to each other, so that's, that's what we'll make sure we do.

All right, everybody, as we conclude today, look, let's just take a second to appreciate, we're talking about the vaccine today, it's pretty miraculous what has happened here. Here's a disease,

the coronavirus that basically a year ago we had not even heard of, had not been part of the human experience, became the dominant reality on the whole earth and caused such pain, such loss, and then scientists and health care leaders and governments all over the world really put everything they had into achieving a vaccine. And as some of our health care leaders said in the last few days, this normally would have taken years, in this case it took months and multiple companies came up with a safe, effective, vaccines based on what we've seen so far. And now we're going to be positioned to use them. In the very same year the coronavirus struck this country, the vaccine is available in this country. That's never been done like that before. And we need to really appreciate this moment, even though it's been a very painful, tough year. We got to celebrate here as this year, end something extraordinary that happened in our time to fight back and to help people.

So, we now need to do what we can do to take that extraordinary achievement put into action. So, I'm going to ask every New Yorker, work with us. If you need information, we're going to provide a lot, but also, you know, do whatever research you feel is right to get the answers you need, but let's get those answers out there. Let's get people comfortable. Let's get people engaged. Every single person that takes this vaccine, even for the first dose, it's helping to protect you against the coronavirus. If you're being protected, your family's being protected, your community is being protected, here's an opportunity to turn the corner. So, we're going to do everything we can to get the information out there to every community, in every language, in every way, and distribute this vaccine with extraordinary speed and effectiveness through our Command Center and make sure that distribution is equitable. Every one of us plays a part. Every one of you plays a part to make this work for all of New York City and I know we can do that together. Thanks, everybody.

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