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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. After several delays in widespread skepticism among educators and parents, in-person learning is set to begin this week for some City students. And as we mentioned at the top of the broadcast, this comes as several neighborhoods throughout the city are seeing upticks in coronavirus cases. Joining me now to talk about all of that from the Blue Room Inside City Hall is Mayor de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. How are you doing?

Louis: I'm just fine. Thanks. I wanted to start by asking you about City data, showing that in eight ZIP codes around the city, some of them clustered, some of them a little bit dispersed, there are really high or substantially higher rates of coronavirus infection. According to the City's own data over a 14 day kind of rolling average. So this is not a snapshot, but a trend. I'm wondering what the response is going to be? And then I guess we can start talking about what it will mean for the schools?

Mayor: Well, the Department of Health has been leading the way, obviously with our Test and Trace Corps as well. And a lot of other City agencies were out in communities, obviously today is Yom Kippur. So we're not out in force today. But on the other days of this weekend and, very strongly coming into this new week, there'll be a lot of presence out in communities. A lot of close work with community organizations. And the goal here is to get everyone wearing masks, to get everyone socially distanced, to make sure that we're working with community institutions, that they have put proper precautions in place and reverse this trend quickly. And we're gaining more and more cooperation from the community. I was on a conference call on Saturday evening, late evening, with leaders in one part of the Brooklyn community who were very devoted to working with the City and getting it right and looking for direction and offering to help and get the right messages out. You're seeing more and more of that. So I think that's all going to have a big impact. It'll take some days obviously, but there's going to be a very intensive effort.

Louis: From your different sources, including those community organizations, the Test and Trace Corps, the Health Department, generally, what are they telling you collectively about the source of these outbreaks?

Mayor: Well, I think what we know so far is it's not about an individual source per se, but it is more about getting everyone to do the things, you know, they have that sense of those core things that really make an impact. The basics, the wearing a mask, social distancing, staying home if your sick, washing your hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, they call that a core four.

Like that idea, making sure it's really being practiced carefully. And we do know that makes a huge difference and it can make a quick difference. And so we're definitely hearing more and more of that message being amplified by community leaders and community institutions. And I think that's going to make a big difference here.

Louis: Okay. So now the reason we focused on three percent was back in July, you said school reopenings would be conditioned on keeping the rate under three percent. So now we have eight ZIP codes where it's over that amount, including two that are over five percent, one that's well over six percent. What does that mean for the public and private schools in those areas?

Mayor: Well, that's an important point and I want to separate the types of schools here. But let's start with the beginning. What we said is three percent on a seven day rolling average. That was the standard the City set proactively, voluntarily because we wanted to work out of an abundance of caution and put health and safety first. Thankfully the City as a whole is nowhere near that at his point. We have seen an uptick. Today's positive level is 1.93 percent for the city. That's obviously higher than we've seen recently. But still the question is what happens citywide over a sustained level? We're not anywhere near that yet, at three percent level citywide. In terms of certain communities. So, for example, eight ZIP codes, you mentioned, I believe there's 146 ZIP codes in the city, just to give you a perspective, that those eight are a narrow geographical area. And we know a lot of kids in those communities do not go to our public schools. So our public schools, we're going to watch them individually. We are constantly – I'm checking in all the time with our situation room. We're not seeing any unusual activity at this point in the schools that have been up and running. We're not seeing it among the schools where staff is in waiting for kids to come in tomorrow. We're not seeing anything unusual, according to ZIP code at all. But for the nonpublic schools, inspections have been happening the last few days. Clear guidance went out from the Health Commissioner at the end of the last week, that they will be expected to follow the same standards, laid out by State rules. And a lot of the same standards the public schools are following. And if they're following those standards effectively, of course they'll remain open. We've had so far four yeshivas that had to close. There'll be regular inspections looking for problems. When God forbid, that one needs to be closed, it will be. So we're going to make sure that is a very constant process.

Louis: I mean, the one thing we've learned over these last eight or nine months is that the infection doesn't respect any boundaries, right? So it's not going to know to stay on this side of the street where there's a yeshiva and not cross the street to where there's a public school, right? I mean, how do we make this into a public health response that's commensurate with the deviousness of the problem, the infectiousness of the coronavirus?

Mayor: Yeah, it is devious for sure. And we're going to be focused on health and safety all time. But we, again, what has gotten us to the very good situation we've been in for these months? The focus on data throughout. So again, the data is telling us this is a narrow reality, very real, take it seriously, immediately contain it. And we've obviously made clear the steps we're going to take now. And if we have to take more stringent steps in the next few days, we will. But to be clear, there is not as much interconnection, for example with the public schools. You're right, that people may live in some proximity to each other, but that's not the same thing here. If one group of people participates in public school, another group of people participate in private or religious

school, there is some real separation. But again, we're going to have data school by school. That's the important thing to recognize. We will be able to know in every school what's happening. How many people are sick, if someone tests positive. Again so far, we're not seeing this indicated in our public schools, even in those ZIP codes.

Louis: Okay. Will any of that change when we have the broader reopening starting tomorrow?

Mayor: Look, we're going to monitor closely. I mean, tomorrow, you're going to have K-to-five kids coming back, K-to-eight kids coming back. Later in the week, Thursday, middle school and high school kids coming back. It's a big moment for the city. As many as half a million kids could be in school in the course of this week. But again, the vast majority of them live in ZIP codes that are not affected. In the ones that are affected there tends to be a pretty clear delineation of who goes to public school and who doesn't. But we're going to watch constantly. And most importantly, look, if we have the support of community leaders, which I really want to emphasize, we are getting a lot of support from community leaders, telling members of the community wear masks practice social distancing. We are going to have a lot of City agency support out there in the streets, giving out the masks. Where people need enforcement there will be enforcement, there'll be constant inspections. And again, more rigorous measures if we need. I think these pieces are going to help us to contain this and reverse it. But we'll be monitoring constantly for any bigger actions that we have to take.

Louis: So what then becomes of the three percent rule, guideline or suggestion? It was something, you know, as you've mentioned, that it was out of an abundance of caution. But if it's breached in area after area, after area and the response, which is good is to sort of, you know, put some attention on it – It's not a, I guess it's not the absolute boundary that it was first introduced as?

Mayor: Oh, I would disagree because it was introduced as a standard for the city as a whole. And again, three percent on a seven day rolling average. And we are not at that point nor near that point on a citywide basis. Again, you mentioned eight ZIP codes, I'm telling you out of 146 ZIP codes. So I think the fact here is if we see something happening on a bigger level, of course, we'll act out of an abundance of caution. We are not seeing that at this point. And we think the measures that are being taken, working with the community are going to reverse this trend. And hopefully very quickly. We saw that in Sunset Park. We saw that in Soundview when we applied more testing and there'll be a lot of testing out in the community starting tomorrow. There has been, but we're really beefing up testing locations all over the community in these effective ZIP codes. More and more mask distribution, more and more messages from community leaders. This kind of thing does work. We saw in Sunset. At first, Sunset looked very troubling. It was – my memory serves, well over four percent, got knocked down in a matter of days, back to an acceptable level. The more people we tested, the better the results became. We got a better cross section of the population. So we're going to do that again, very rigorously.

Louis: Just to – and then on the subject of schools, the principal's union voted unanimously, or their executive committee did, for a vote of no confidence in you and the Chancellor and called on the State Education Department to oversee, or step in and oversee the reopening process. I thought you were working with these guys side by side on all of these plans.

Mayor: Well, we have been. And so, I'm not going to comment on their decision because it doesn't make sense to me. The fact is that we have been working with that union. I've been talking to the president of that union daily, lately. We have been acting on a number of their concerns. I mean, he's not going to be able to tell you, we didn't agree to a bunch of the things they asked for that they needed. So, I'm quite confused why they took this action, but, at the same time, they made clear everyone will be showing up tomorrow and schools moving forward. And hopefully after, you know, people have gotten this point out, we can now get to the work of educating our kids.

Louis: Do you maybe want to issue a personal vote of no confidence in him?

Mayor: I don't think it's constructive. I try and work with everyone, I really do. And I thought over weeks and weeks and weeks, we've had a lot of very constructive conversations with the heads of both unions. And you've seen them here in the Blue Room with me talking about how we've been working together. So, let's put aside, you know, any noise or whatever else and just get to the point. We're here to serve kids. I don't know a single educator who believes that we can serve kids well with all remote alone, and certainly not kids with a lot of challenges and greater disadvantages. We need kids in school. We can do it. We can do it well. We can do it safely and starting tomorrow, huge step forward for our school system. So, whatever else is in the background, in the foreground is going to be a lot of educators actually doing the work and serving our kids.

Louis: Okay. Standby, Mr. Mayor, we've got more to talk about. We'll take a quick break now, then we'll be back with Mayor de Blasio, stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio from the Blue Room. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about the reports that Donald Trump has not paid his taxes or that he's paid a minuscule amount. The New York Times expose that's on their front page today focused mostly on federal taxes. I guess that's the kind of information they got. But do you have a sense of whether or not Donald Trump has paid his City taxes?

Mayor: Well, I think we can guarantee based on the information from New York Times, that he hasn't paid his City taxes the way he should have. Look, this is going to give us a lot of information to work with, and our City Finance Department will get to work right away to determine if, in fact, the President of the United States cheated New York City on his taxes. But I think it's a foregone conclusion at this point, given everything we've seen from this guy. I mean, this is appalling. And I think a lot of his supporters are going to look at this and be very angry that it's the least patriotic thing you could do to use your wealth and power to evade the taxes you owe the people of this country. And I think it's going to come back to bite him, but yeah, we're going to pursue this with all we got because he needs to pay his fair share.

Louis: Yeah. I was trying to wrap my mind around the notion that I paid more for my iPhone than he appears to have paid the taxes –

Mayor: Well, Errol, you've paid a lot more in taxes – you've paid a lot more in taxes, I've paid a lot more taxes to New York City than Donald Trump –

Louis: Don't even, don't even – please, don't even start. I don't – you don't want to see me weeping here on camera, Mr. Mayor. Governor Cuomo, I wanted to ask you about, is extending a residential rent moratorium until January 1st, through the end of the year, basically. A commercial rent moratorium, supposed to end on October 20th, you signed a bill today that prohibits, temporarily at least, the enforcement of personal liability provisions in some commercial leases and rental contracts. I guess my question is, the problem – we understand the source of the problem, coronavirus, lockdown, mass unemployment, shortage of money. We certainly understand it from the point of view of residential tenants, but aren't we now moving a big financial problem onto landlords, many of whom are mom-and-pops like yourself.

Mayor: Look, just quick framing of this that we have to remember. There's so many people who just can't pay for anything, even if they wanted to. They just don't have any income anymore. So, today we made sure that people are not going to lose everything they have personally because a landlord comes along and tries to take all their personal assets. You know, think about how many small business owners put their whole life into building up a restaurant, a bar, you know, a retail shop. And imagine they not only lose the business, but they lose all their savings in the process. That's ridiculous. We can't let that happen. That's what we acted on today, in addition to extending paid sick days and other things, just to help people through the crisis. So, you're right, there are a lot of hard work and landlords who are in a tough situation too, but we can't – it's sort of the classic saying, two wrongs don't make a right. We can't say, okay, well, let's have people be evicted, let's have people be impoverished, and have all their life savings taken away, and at least the landlord will be okay. No, I don't look at it that way. Landlords by-and-large are in a better situation financially. They can weather it a little bit better. Let's not let the little guy be put out on the street. Let's have things – I've talked about it before, I think there should be a State law that provides for payment plans that are extended enough that people can actually get back on their feet. There should be a vaccine by spring. The economy will come back. Give people a chance to make it up over time, but don't put them out on the street. And landlords, I think will have something to work with there.

Louis: Isn't the problem with a moratorium that it's not means tested in any sense? I mean, there was, you know, there's an extreme case that pops up in the news from time to time, about some couple that was renting out in the Hamptons and they said, hey, you know what, moratorium, we're not going anywhere. And they've just been kind of living it up, when the implication, at least in the story, is that they probably could pay their rent, or they could just vacate the place since that's not where they live. What about that though? What about people who could pay the rent, but thanks to all of this concern that's led to these legislated or executive order moratoriums, they can say, hey, I'll just put the money in my pocket.

Mayor: It's a very fair question. I think it's as simple as this. If you can pay the rent, you should pay the rent. And if these approaches need to be tightened up to make clear that there are some people – by the way, most people still have their jobs. And there's a lot of people who are working from home who are still making good money in professional jobs, for example. Anyone

who can pay the rent should pay the rent. I'm concerned about the million or so people who lost their job and have no income at all, who simply can't pay the rent. I'm concerned about the small business owner, whose income collapsed because their business had to close. I think there's a whole lot of people who literally can't pay the rent. They should get the opportunity to go on a payment plan. They should get the leniency and not be put out on the street. Anyone who can pay the rent, of course they should pay the rent.

Louis: We saw Corey Johnson announced that he's not going to run for mayor after all. There are a whole bunch of other people though, who do want your job after you're done at the end of 2021. What advice would you give to the various people who are sort of on the fence trying to figure out if this is the right thing for them to do?

Mayor: I would tell them they should get their sleep now, if they want this job because you're not going to get a lot with this job. It's – look, it's a very, very tough moment in the city's history. So, I would say to anyone considering it, you know, be ready to go through some very choppy waters. This city is going to come back and it's going to come back real strong. I believe that. And I talked about it this last week, a vision that we put forward around building the city economy more and more around public health and the extraordinary ability of this city, really unsurpassed in the world, to bring together all sorts of different efforts and energies to improve public health, to make sure that our not pandemics in the future to show how we can create a health care system for everyone. This could be really, to me, the springboard for a whole new New York City economy. So, I'm hopeful about the future, but I will say to any prospective candidate that the next few years are going to be very tough as we come back. And certainly the budget situation is going to be very, very tough. And if you really want this job, you better be ready to make some very hard choices given what we're going to be facing.

Louis: Okay. On that note, we'll say good night for now. We'll wish you the best of luck with the reopening of the schools and we'll reconvene and figure out how it all went next Monday. Thanks so much for joining us, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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