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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON MSNBC'S MORNING JOE**

**Mika Brzezinski:** The pharmaceutical and biotech company, Moderna, has found that its COVID-19 vaccine appears to protect against the new, more infectious variants of the virus found in the U. K. and South Africa. The company said it will still test whether adding a booster dose, in addition to its two-dose regimen, could protect even more against the new strains. And now another new, more contagious strain of the virus, first detected in Brazil in December, has been confirmed in Minnesota. As for the race to vaccinate the country, production appears to be slowing in the process. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said yesterday that the city has the capacity to administer half-a-million doses a week but has not been able to because it is waiting for the vaccine production to ramp up. And Mayor Bill de Blasio joins us now. This is frustrating. What are you hearing about when you're going to get more?

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, we're not, Mika. I mean, it's amazing to be able to tell you that we could be doing a half-million vaccinations a week and there's just no real supply coming to the city, and it's true all over the country. I mean, so far, we've done 650,000 vaccinations. That's the equivalent of the entire population of Portland, Oregon. That's the good news. But the bad news is we could be doing so much more. I want to open up Yankee Stadium and Citi Field and do 24-hour sites all over the city, but we're not getting a clear message from the manufacturers. And I'm just hoping, and I believe in President Biden, I believe he wants to move this process. But I'll tell you it's going to take him using the Defense Production Act, demanding that a lot of pharmaceutical companies get into this together, breaking down those silos, and doing something very different if we're going to be able to do this.

And one other thing, Mika, it's really important, I've got 100,000 second doses that right now are sitting on the shelf. They can't be used for weeks. And what I would ask of the president is order governments all over the country, just take those second doses and start using them right now because even a first dose gives folks about 50 percent protection. Think about senior citizens. I was with a 97-year-old woman in Queens last week. And for her, she was scared to death of the coronavirus. And that first shot to her literally meant she was going to live. She was going to get to be with her family. Emotionally and medically, we got to get people that first shot, no matter what.

**Brzezinski:** Well, what about teachers and first responders? How are you doing accommodating the need there? Because kids need to be in school so badly.

**Mayor:** Yeah. And Mika, look, thank God we were able to reopen our schools in person for a lot of our kids. And they've been very safe, actually the safest places in New York City because we do testing, we do constant cleaning, face masks. But I want to see our educators and school staff vaccinate as quickly as possible. But, again, we just don't have the vaccine. I mean I'm hundreds

of thousands of doses short for this week we're in now. And I think about for a moment, we're the greatest country in the world, I feel that we all feel that, but I am certain there is more capacity to produce vaccine out there, but it's not happening unless the federal government takes it over aggressively. And for some reason, President Trump wouldn't do that. I never understood why, but I know Joe Biden has the decisive feeling about this to actually go out and do something.

**Willie Geist:** Mayor de Blasio, it's Willie Geist. Good to see you this morning. We just talked to Governor Murphy across the river in New Jersey a few minutes ago about where he sees the breakdown in the process. He needs more doses, just like you do. As you talk to people along the supply chain, where is the problem in your view? It's been interesting to hear different points of view on this this morning. Is it just that they're not making enough or that it's not getting to where it needs to go?

**Mayor:** I'll say three quick things. They're not making enough. And again, I think it means bringing other pharmaceutical companies into this. Even if it isn't their own brand or patent, we got to break down those silos. This is war. Every company that could be helping to produce vaccines should under federal orders. I think second, some of the vaccine has gone to places that absolutely need it, but just don't have the ability to distribute as quickly, and you know, dish the ball to whoever's got the hot hand, to use the basketball analogy, right? If someplace can do it really fast, get the vaccines there first, backfill for the other places. And then the third is the second doses. If you're sitting on top of, as I am, 100,000 second doses I'm not allowed to use, even though no one can possibly use them for weeks, that doesn't make sense. Let's cut through that, get those into play right away.

**Geist:** Mr. Mayor, you mentioned a minute ago, and you're right, that our schools in New York City are among the safest places to be. That was a refreshing fact given we weren't sure what it was going to look like when you did reopen some of the schools. So then why aren't the middle and high schools open? And what do you say to the president of the teacher's union, Michael Mulgrew, who told the Wall Street Journal a few days ago, 'I'm not sending my teachers back in until they can get vaccinated first.' And he even cast doubt on next school year, the fall, whether or not schools could open then.

**Mayor:** Oh, we're coming back in September full strength. I don't have a doubt in my mind. With the kind of goals that President Biden has set for vaccination, with our ability to vaccinate half-a-million people a week, I mean, you know, a city of eight-and-a-half million people, do the math, and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which is only one dose, no question in my mind we're coming back strong in September in-person. And in the meantime, Willie, I want to get middle school open soon and then high school beyond. But we got to see what happens with this variant. We got to get more people vaccinated. We got to have more testing capacity. I'm certain we'll do it over time in this school year, but a few challenges we got to overcome first.

**Geist:** But Mr. Mayor, what's the distinction between elementary school and middle and high schools? Why is it safe for those young students to be there and not the older ones?

**Mayor:** I think it will be safe for the older ones, Willie, but we needed more testing capacity to get, first, the elementary schools done and special-ed and all of them. Now we're going to work our way to middle school. But right now, with this variant out there, I want to make sure we have

all the tools in place to do it. And the number one thing is if I could just keep vaccinating, this would be moot, we could move on to middle school much more quickly.

**Brzezinski:** All right, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Thank you. Come back soon. Keep us posted. We appreciate it.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

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