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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning everyone, and let me tell you, I started my morning on a very inspirational note. I was out in Brooklyn with the folks who are doing amazing work reaching homebound New Yorkers who need to be vaccinated. The nurses, the health care heroes, the FDNY leading the way organizing the effort, TLC drivers, want to thank all the taxi drivers who are a part of this heroic effort. It's amazing to see so many people committed to reaching homebound New Yorkers, folks who cannot get out of their homes, who are vulnerable, and what I said to these heroes this morning was you are reaching the most vulnerable New Yorkers. You're reaching the folks who are most scared, and their families are scared for them because they can't leave their home, but they deal with the threat of the coronavirus. They needed to know that somehow help would come and now help is arriving to really save lives. So, I just expressed my gratitude. These great folks are going literally home by home, apartment by apartment, making sure folks are vaccinated, spending time with them, making sure they're okay. I heard some of the stories from the nurses, just the sheer gratitude that seniors and other homebound folks felt that someone remembered them, someone cared about them, and went out of their way to show up. And this has been already an extraordinary effort, thousands, over 3,200 homebound New Yorkers have been vaccinated. We've made contact with thousands and thousands more to set up appointments, and throughout the month of April, we'll be out there going to people's homes, getting them vaccinated, helping make sure that everyone needs service in their home, gets it. And for other seniors and other folks getting them to vaccination centers or even bringing vaccination to the lobby of their buildings in some of the major senior buildings. We've got a variety of approaches, but they're all for the same goal, to reach everyone who needs a vaccination, everyone is ready for vaccination, particularly those who are most vulnerable. So, again, thank you FDNY, thank you to all the nurses, thank you to the TLC drivers. You're doing something amazing.

Now, let me give you another amazing point on the overall vaccination numbers to date. We are damn close to the four million mark for vaccinations to date. As of this morning, 3,958,318 vaccinations have been given in New York City, and the number keeps growing constantly. We also are ready because we have the capacity. We have the vaccinators ready. We still need a hell of a lot more supply, I'll keep saying, but we're ready for the new rules that the State has determined. So, starting today, New Yorkers 30-years-old and up will be able to make appointments to be vaccinated on April 6th next week, that will expand to all New Yorkers 16-years-old and up. So, we will be ready. We believe in the freedom to vaccinate, but we need the supply. That is always going to be the message. We're hopeful in April the supply numbers are going to really go up and that's going to be fantastic. Again, well on our way to the goal of five million adult New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June.

Now, more and more good people and more and more companies, more and more nonprofits, so many organizations coming forward to help in the vaccination effort. And today I want to talk about a company that's really stepping forward to help make vaccination happening for their fellow New Yorkers. But I want to start by saying they're also investing in New York City. I really appreciate that. I mentioned this earlier this month that Google has made a decision – on top of a lot of previous investment in New York City – has made a decision to invest another \$250 million expanding their footprint in New York City. We're really happy about that. We're really appreciative. That means more and more jobs from New Yorkers. That's going to help create a recovery for all of us. This kind of commitment to New York City is powerful, especially because we know the tech community has been crucial to what makes New York City great. And the tech community has done a great job of spreading out all over the five boroughs and hiring a New Yorkers from all walks of life, and I think the tech community is going to be a big part of our recovery, but also the tech community is committed to the vaccination effort, and Google is doing something very important, a new partnership between Google and the Hudson Guild to reach some of New Yorkers in greatest need, and this is residents of public housing. A new vaccination site will be set up on the West Side of Manhattan for residents of NYCHA buildings, for residents of Fulton Houses and Chelsea Elliot Houses specifically. They will get the priority. The site will be open next week, and that's wonderful onto itself that Google is making a priority of helping public housing residents, some of the folks who have been most vulnerable to the coronavirus, I want to express my appreciation for that. Also, Google's committing a million dollars to help the city to advertise a new vaccination sites that we keep bringing out, that we are doing more and more at the grassroots. This is going to be crucial, more and more grassroots vaccination sites means more and more New Yorkers feel comfortable getting vaccinated, easier places for people to get to, Google's going to help us get the word out. I want you to hear from the Chief Health Officer from Google, and I want to express again my gratitude on behalf of all New Yorkers, this is going to help us immensely. My pleasure to welcome, Dr. Karen DeSalvo.

[...]

Thank you so much, Dr. Desalvo, and I want to thank you, you're right that we have to meet people where they are, and that means getting them the information they need answering the questions. A lot of people have fair, legitimate questions, and they need people to listen and to answer, but also making vaccine available right where they live. That's been a difference maker. So, thank you. Really appreciate your commitment. Thank you to Google. Thank you to Hudson Guild. And doctor, I think you'd agree, on our path to five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers, it's one person at a time, and every person we reach helps us reach the next. So, can't thank you enough.

[...]

Thank you. So, everyone that obviously nothing more important to our recovery process than the vaccination effort, but we think about a recovery for all of us in so many ways. We think about what it means to bring back the vibrancy of this city. We think about what it means to give people an environment where they're ready to move forward, bring back jobs, build businesses, go back to their lives in so many ways. And, you know, spring is a perfect time to think about that kind of recovery, that kind of renewal, and spring also reminds us of spring cleaning. So, it's time for spring cleaning here in New York City. We love our city. We want it to be even more

beautiful, and we have a couple of important initiatives to announce today from our Sanitation Department and this will start right away, starting on Wednesday, tomorrow, restoring significant funding for litter basket collection. This has been an issue we've heard about from community members all over the city. Everyone understood we went through a tough, tough time during the pandemic and resources were tight. Now, we're focusing on some of the things that community members have talked to us about the most. So, we'll have over a 100 additional sanitation trucks out doing this work, including restoring Sunday pickups and a great initiative to work with community members and community organizations that want to do their own cleanup efforts, the Community Cleanup Van will be coming to you all over this city. If you have a cleanup idea and you need help getting it to happen, we're going to be able to do that with the Community Cleanup Van, getting resources to New Yorkers who want to do community cleanup efforts.

Here to tell you about these great initiatives – and I'm so appreciative for his leadership. We saw his extraordinary leadership during snowstorms, and now we're going to see it again as we make New York City cleaner and cleaner as part of our recovery. My pleasure to introduce Sanitation Commissioner Ed Grayson.

**Commissioner Edward Grayson, Department of Sanitation:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We are very excited about answering the call to duty that the Mayor just announced, that we will be back out in-force with additional resources on basket collections and a new program called the Precision Cleaning Initiative. These are targeted, borough-based teams that will go out to address those quality-of-life concerns, illegal dumping, and other eyesore conditions that we've seen as we've progressed through the pandemic. This new resource, this new team will help us be even more nimble as we answer the call for a recovery for everyone. We're very excited about spring cleaning, sir.

In addition to that, we mentioned the van – this van will be out there. It is a great asset to help deliver tools. We partner with so many local community groups to do cleanups. In fact, from March of 2020 to March 2021, we have doubled the amount of community cleanups. That partnership that we have with these local organizations who want to do their part are – is very important. It's very critical for the cleanliness of New York City, and we can't thank them enough. That said, with this new asset, we'll be able to do even more of that. And we strongly encourage any community group to go to [nyc.gov/sanitation](https://nyc.gov/sanitation) and click the link that says get involved. No better message – get involved. The cleanliness of New York City is something that we all want. The cleanliness in New York City is something that we all contribute to. And our partnership with the public has never been more important. With the increased basket service that the Mayor announced, with the Precision Cleaning Initiative, and with this community van that's sponsored by our partners with the Sanitation Foundation, these are important resources that can help us clean New York City and lead us into a healthier spring. Thank you, sir.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Commissioner. Thank you, again, to all the men and women of the Sanitation Department, you guys are doing a great job, as always. Thank you for your leadership. Now, I mentioned, we heard a lot of voices calling for increase in basket collection, calling for more and more efforts to clean up neighborhoods. And the elected officials who have really made this a priority have been pushing us hard and getting us support too, to do this work, and I want to thank them for that. First, I want you to hear, from the Bronx, from Assembly Member Latoya Joyner. Assembly Member, are you there?

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you, Assembly Member. And, Assembly Member, thank you – obviously, you care passionately for your community and really appreciate everyone in your community who has been fighting back during this pandemic. And a special thank you to you, because I know you're working hard in these crucial days, leading up to the State budget. You're working hard on behalf of New York City to protect the resources New York City needs to come back from the COVID crisis. So, thank you very, very much for that.

Now, I want us also to hear from member of the City Council. City Council members have really made a focus of restoring Sanitation services as quickly as possible as we finally got some more support from the stimulus and recognizing how crucial it is in terms of quality of life, in terms of recovery to have clean communities. Here to speak about this – and he's been pushing hard for the litter baskets collection to be resumed, and he's been a strong voice for the neighborhoods, not only of his community in Brooklyn, but all over the city – Council Member Justin Brannan.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you, Council Member. Thank you for pushing hard for this to come back and we're really happy it's here. And thank you for shouting out the really wonderful work of the Sanitation Department. Everyone, Sanitation is going to play a crucial role in our recovery. And then, we're going to go beyond that. In early April, we'll be talking about something new that's been made possible by the stimulus funding – the City Cleanup Corps. That's going to be an exciting new piece of the equation, allowing us to go farther to clean up neighborhoods and beautify them, and announcements are coming very soon on that front.

So, look, up to now we've been talking about a lot of good news, a lot of things that really are about our rebirth as a city and our ability to recover. But I want to now talk about something painful, because we continue to see these horrible, disgusting attacks on Asian-American New Yorkers, and it's got to end and we're going to use every tool we have. And we need everyone to be a part of this, because, yesterday, I don't know if you've seen the video – but absolutely disgusting and outrageous video of an Asian woman being attacked, pushed to the ground, kicked viciously by someone full of hate. That was bad enough, but then to see a security guard standing nearby and not intervening – absolutely unacceptable. Look, I don't care who you are. I don't care what you do, you've got to help your fellow New Yorker. And if you see someone being attacked, do whatever you can – make noise, call out what's happening, go and try and help immediately call for help, call 9-1-1. I mean, this is something where we all have to be part of the solution. We can't just stand back and watch a heinous act happening. And I think for so many Asian-American New Yorkers who are feeling isolated right now, or feeling fearful, they need to know that they have solidarity of all New Yorkers and support. So, please, everyone, right now, if you have any information about this crime on West 43rd Street yesterday, call 800-577-TIPS – T-I-P-S – that is the Police Department hotline. Our Hate Crimes Task Force is working on this issue immediately. And, of course, anyone who wants to help in the effort to protect Asian-American New Yorkers, support them, learn about what you can do, report anything you've seen, you can go to [nyc.gov/StopAsianHate](https://nyc.gov/StopAsianHate). We all have to be a part of this. We all have to be a part of this to end this horrible trend once and for all. We know where it started – we know very painfully it started in Washington D.C., but it has to end here in New York City.

Okay, let's go to today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 186 patients. That's a good number. Again, we'll keep watching that closely, but that's a good number today. Confirmed positivity, 54.64 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.94 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on seven-day average – today's report, 3,591 cases. Number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19 – today's report, on a seven-day rolling average, 6.15 percent.

Let me do a few words in Spanish, and I want to go back to the topic of spring cleanup. This is a topic that's going to make us all happy.

[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 Commissioner Grayson, Commissioner Chokshi, Dr. Jay Varma, and Dr. Ted Long. With that, we'll go to Juan Manuel from NY1.

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

**Mayor:** Good, Juan Manuel. How have you been?

**Question:** Very good. Thank you. Mayoral Candidate Andrew Yang is asking you to save most of the federal stimulus funds – about 70 percent of those funds for the next administration. What are your thoughts, your reaction to that?

**Mayor:** I'd say a couple of things, Juan Manuel. First of all, the way the stimulus funding is structured, it is doled out some this year, some a year from now. So, it's structured to be released over time. The other thing I'd say is, the nature of stimulus – I'm someone who believes we've learned the lesson of history. When in distress, use stimulus to bring things back, to recover, to stimulate the economy and move us forward. So, we need to use the resources we have now to really get New York City back on its feet. That recovery has to happen very strongly in 2021, to set up a better 2022 and 2023. So, we'll be careful, as always. We'll be fiscally responsible, as always. But the nature of a stimulus is to stimulate a recovery. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

**Question:** And following-up with the mayoral campaign, I don't know if you have any thoughts about how the Democratic campaign for mayor is going, whether you're closer to an endorsement, whether there is any candidate that you think is hitting the right notes and the right themes this year?

**Mayor:** There's still a long time to go. I mean, it's basically three months away, the election. Again, this is a different kind of election – very, very large field, a lot of talented people, obviously, but, also, I think in the election that sort of developed more slowly than many, because we're also focused on dealing with the COVID crisis and the recovery. You know, over the next month or two, I think we'll all know a lot more, and I'll continue to watch closely and, you know, keep in mind if I want to get involved in some way, but no decision yet.

**Moderator:** Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

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

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

**Question:** I'm okay. Thank you. You know, I wanted to ask about variants and re-infection rates. Are Health Department officials measuring that at all? Or what role the variants are playing in reinfection rates?

**Mayor:** It's a very good question, Juliet. And, boy, this is a question that goes back to early on in this crisis. I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma. We still know that there's a lot we don't know about COVID – remember, that COVID is still a very, very new disease in the human experience. And this question of reinfection has been one for months and months we've all been talking through. I think what we can say is that we don't see a lot of evidence of reinfection from the beginning of this crisis. And we also can say that we're always concerned about variants, but that's still, to this hour, the number-one fact about variants that the vaccines do work in addressing the variants. And the number-one thing we can do is get the most people vaccinated. So, those are some basic truths, but I would also say the science keeps developing, literally, you know, week-by-week, day-by-day, and we'll keep adjusting as we get more information and talking about it as we get more information. With that, let me turn to Dr. Chokshi first.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. And you covered the high points exactly right. What we know both from our experience, as well as the science that is evolved around the world is that reinfection is possible, but it appears to be relatively rare, at least based on our understanding thus far. There are some of the variants, particularly the B-1351 and P-1 variant, those are the ones first identified in South Africa and Brazil, respectively, that do appear to be able to evade our immune response more so than some of the other variants of the virus. And so, that's something that we are following closely and there appears to be evidence that people who get those variants are more at risk of reinfection, even if they've had COVID-19 in the past. With all of that said, you know, based on our own observation here in New York City, including the variant that was first identified here in the city, we're not seeing a greater likelihood of reinfection from that particular variant or the likelihood of reinfection growing over time. So, this is something that we're continuing to follow very closely, and we'll keep everyone updated if our understanding changes.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Dr. Varma?

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Great. Yeah, thank you very much for this important question. I think Dr. Chokshi and the Mayor covered a lot of the important issues. I think there's two that I just want to go into just briefly, a little bit more detail about. One is what Dr. Chokshi said about the analyses that we're doing. Just to reassure you, this is an analysis that the team at the Health Department and we as the, sort of, health care leadership review weekly. We look and compare percentage of cases that either had a prior antibody test before, or had a prior PCR test before, because we really do want to understand better about these areas and whether or not they are more likely to cause reinfection and people [inaudible] before. And as Dr. Chokshi has said, we

don't see that signal in our analyses to-date, but it's something we need to continue to analyze, because there have been reports from other parts of the world that new variants do cause that problem. And then, the second point that I would raise is that we're starting to learn a lot more from laboratory studies also to really emphasize why vaccination is so important. It does appear that when you look at the data from the – at least from what we know now from the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines, is that it really does increase both the quantity and quality of your immune response. That is, you have more protection, you know, for any given virus and it also covers a broader range of viruses. So, it's really just another reason why we really want people to get immunity through vaccination and not through infection.

**Mayor:** Great. Thank you. Go ahead, Juliet.

**Question:** Okay, great. Thank you. My other question involves just people who are trying to access the online portal to get the appointment. I'm just hearing from people that it's still very difficult. Is there any way to work that out or get out the kinks or streamline it? You know, you have to sort of re-do or re-put in your information every time you want to make the appointment. Is there any way that that can be sort of logged in, so that it doesn't have to be repeated again?

**Mayor:** It's a really good question. It's something I have raised – great minds think alike, Juliet. I've raised this too. I, again, do appreciate that everyone in our team has been trying to work this through with the huge disadvantage of trying to bring a lot of different health care providers together into one system, and that's been part of the challenge here. If it was all just one agency, this would be a whole different discussion, but it's made complex by the fact that we're using so many different providers in so many different places.

I want to remind everyone – I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, who can speak a little more to this – but I want to remind everyone, you can go to [vax4nyc.nyc.gov](https://vax4nyc.nyc.gov), and that's how you can book a reservation for an appointment, or you can call 877-VAX-4NYC, and again, it's not perfect by any stretch, but we've had almost four million vaccinations. So, something is working for a lot of people, thank God. But Dr. Chokshi, we obviously are continuing to try and update and improve and Juliet's point is well-taken, make it easier for people and less repetitive. What can you tell us about those efforts?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thanks Juliet for this important question. Our goal is indeed for today to be a better experience than yesterday and for tomorrow to be even better than today, and I'm very grateful to our information technology colleagues who have really made strides over the last several weeks to make it a more seamless experience, not just the ease of being able to book an appointment, but language access, you know, ensuring that that it is available to New Yorkers who speak a different language other than English, and also to people who may be less internet proficient, and so that call center number that the mayor mentioned, 877-VAX-4NYC, is another really important part of it. We continue to bring on more providers onto the central scheduling platform that our, IT colleagues have been able to build, and that that really does help eliminate some of the redundancy that you're alluding to, and we'll continue to seek ways to capture information from people who are trying to book an appointment so that they're able to get matched up with an appointment when one becomes available. So, stay tuned for some other enhancements related to that in the coming days and weeks.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** Next is Arthur from FOX 5.

**Question:** Hi, good morning, Mayor. I hope everybody is well. My first question has to do with the attacks – you mentioned the one on the 65-year-old woman. There was also a subway attack at around the time of your press briefing yesterday that caught a lot of attention, also with bystanders who did not intervene. Given that it's been about a month and a half since you first started targeting this issue and started to Stop Asian Hate campaign in the city, do you feel what we're doing in the city is working, if we're seeing these attacks it and it seemed to be accelerating and also do – there's some organizations, including the Asian American Federation, which you've had on and Hollaback!, that are doing bystander training. Should the City look for ways to expand that so more New Yorkers are trained on how to react in a situation like that.

**Mayor:** Yeah. Thank you, Arthur. Yes, I want to thank the Asian American Federation and Hollaback!, and that type of training is crucial. We do want to support it. We do want to make sure as many people as possible get that. So, we'll be working with them to see how we can help them reach more people.

Look, I'm very frustrated by these attacks. It's horrible. It's disgusting to see people, you know, put in a such a horrible situation to fear that's been created, it's so unfair to Asian New Yorkers. I know a huge effort is being expended to educate, to get people involved in the solution, to find the perpetrators, to bring them to justice, which is always part of the process of ending this kind of trend, and, you know, it's painful to talk about, but it's true. We saw a period of time where we saw attacks on Muslim New Yorkers, on Sikh New Yorkers, on Jewish New Yorkers. We have seen this before on members of the LGBT community. We've seen this before, and we know some of the things that work. Solidarity works, folks getting involved to help each other, being in solidarity of different communities, standing up for them, being active and not passive if you see something. But also helping the NYPD to find the individuals involved. As we know, it's very, very few individuals who do these heinous crimes. We've got to find them.

So, we're not where we need to be, Arthur, but I do believe the lot of the right tools are there and New Yorkers care, and they're going to help us finally end this horrible reality we've been living with. Go ahead, Arthur.

**Question:** Thank you for that. My other question is regarding COVID. The City went from the worst numbers in the country, and through the hard work of everyone, including your office went to the one of the best infection rates in the country, and now again, we're falling back to being one of the worst, and while we're asking people to redouble their efforts, the weather's getting warmer. People don't like wearing masks. We're seeing a lot of people without masks, both in the subway system, a higher percentage of them, and on the street. Is the City prepared to do what it needs to do to encourage better behavior, whether it's real consequences for people not wearing masks, because sometimes just asking apparently is not enough?

**Mayor:** Look, I think it's a fair question, Arthur. But I would like to recognize the same realities that brought New York City back from being the epicenter. They still exist. Meaning the vast majority of New Yorkers are observing the guidance that they've been given by the health care leadership. Folks – I understand there's a lot of fatigue having been through this crisis, but I still want to note how many people are following the rules are trying to protect each other and are



getting vaccinated, and this is the number one piece. You know, today at the point where we're almost at four million vaccinations, we will get to the five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers by June. That's the number one factor here, continuing to expand vaccination, getting more supply, getting people who were previously hesitant in, and we definitely see a reduction in the hesitancy Arthur, and that's crucial more and more people willing to get vaccinated. So, I think we can redouble a number of our efforts to educate people, to distribute masks. There's a lot we can do before we think about adding additional consequences. I think it's about the positive tools, getting people vaccinated, educating people, getting the masks out there, and we're going to continue to do that.

**Moderator:** Next is Jeff from the New York Times.

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

**Mayor:** Good, Jeff, how've you been?

**Question:** I'm good. I'm hanging in there. I wanted to ask what do you expect to, or what would your advice be to New Yorkers who witnessed an attack, like we saw, that brutal attack on the Asian woman yesterday. What should New Yorkers do in that specific situation? Should they have intervened or, you know, what's your advice to New Yorkers?

**Mayor:** Look, each situation is different, Jeff, and I obviously would say people should approach a situation like that carefully because we want everyone to be protected. But I think the most important thing is to be present, you know, literally shout out what's happening, try and, in any way, disrupt, even just verbally disrupt, what the perpetrator is doing. Come to the aid of the person who is suffering the attack immediately. Call 9-1-1 immediately. Look, we know if attention is drawn to a situation, a lot of times the perpetrator will stop or will run off. Even just that act of drawing attention and not just letting it go on is powerful. That would be my advice. Go ahead, Jeff.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask about the cleanup situation in the City. You know, I live in Upper Manhattan. I noticed it has been unfortunately noticeably, dirtier, find myself picking up, you know, picking up trash as I walk around. I'm wondering specifically, is, is there a sense of exactly what happened here? Was it just the reduction in Sanitation pickups that caused the problem? Because, you know, it seems like a pretty big issue, at least in my neighborhood, in terms of the trash. Was there something specific you can target that maybe caused the trash to grow up to the levels that we're seeing now?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Jeff first of all, thank you for picking up trash. I know Ed Grayson thanks you too. You're a good citizen. Look, I think it's two things. Clearly, if there are fewer resources for litter basket pickups, that's going to affect things, but we also went through a perfect storm that we still haven't really taken stock of, and I don't blame us because we've all been living through it and trying to deal with it. But we went through a moment, unlike anything any of us have experienced in our lives where all of the underpinnings of society were being stressed simultaneously people lost their jobs, kids weren't in school, houses of worship were shut down. I think folks kind of disconnected from a lot of their normal behavior, a lot of the normal guardrails that we live with and we got to bring it back and we are bringing it back.

You can see very, very noticeably, a lot of the energy now in the city, a lot, that's coming back, obviously hundreds of thousands of jobs have come back. Kids are going back to school in September, all kids will be welcomed back to school. It's a rebuilding process, and I think as we do that, you will see a lot of the good norms returned, but also we'll have resources, which we didn't have during the worst of the pandemic. You know, the pandemic was cruel because it creates so much pain and suffering. It also took away the resources we needed to address so much of the suffering. Now, the Sanitation Department is going to come in strong with the litter basket pickups and helping the community cleanups, and then right behind that, we'll be talking soon about the City Cleanup Corps, and I think you're going to see a real difference in the next few months in the look and feel of this.

**Moderator:** Next is Henry from Bloomberg.

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

**Mayor:** I am doing well, Henry. How've you been?

**Question:** I am good. Baseball season is just days away.

**Mayor:** Days away. It's palpable. It's in the air, Henry.

**Question:** The Red Sox first loss of the season just days away.

**Mayor:** Ouch, Henry. That's awfully personal, Henry. Let's just be a – what's the word I'm looking for – a good loser, a good winner, not a sore winner, whatever it is.

**Question:** All right. Well, my first question is really, you know, these numbers are very stubborn on infection rates, positivity. I've asked this question a million times and others have too, but has the City's priorities shifted toward really caring about hospitalization and death rather than looking at the numbers of cases and the positivity rate? Are those indicators really kind of falling by the wayside, as vaccinations increase? What is the reality here?

**Mayor:** It's a great question. You know, you have raised it and I think I felt like we spoke to this over time, but it's good to come back to it. I think there was a, and I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi, and I also will get Dr. Long in this because of the experience that we're seeing in Health + Hospitals, which is really, really important to your question.

Henry, simply put, job one has been to save lives, from the very beginning. We knew in the beginning what we didn't know, right? COVID was so new, the approaches in the hospitals just weren't ready and the immense stress on the hospital system, and, and we were trying with everything we could to just keep the hospital system able to tend to people and save lives. But when we got a year later to the point where the hospitals, the medical world had really learned a lot more about how to address COVID, we saw a very different reality. We saw people go into the hospital and come out alive much more often, thank God, and we did see the number of deaths go down and we saw very, very different reality, and that's the most important thing, is saving lives. We take seriously the case numbers, for sure. We want to drive them down, and the best tool to drive him down is vaccination, and then the next best thing is all the following all the guidance that that health team has given. That still is overwhelmingly what New Yorkers are

doing. So, I think we take both seriously, but undoubtedly, we start with, you know, saving lives and avoiding the kinds of hospitalizations that mean someone's going through a really, really tough time. So, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Long, just let's do lightning round, but give your quick responses.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, I mean, this is obviously – it's a very hard and difficult topic to discuss, but let me just say a few really quick points. One is, you know, Henry, as you know, none of these indicators is absolutely perfect and that's why we have always emphasized the importance of looking at all of them together, and as you note, this is –we are at a very high plateau that we want to get down from, and there are ways to get down from that, and one is to make sure that people continue to do all of those personal measures that are important. Number two, they get vaccinated when it's their turn, and number three, they continue to get tested and to observe you know, the precautions, if they do take risks or, you know, enter into the situation where they're traveling or something to continue to emphasize those precautions, particularly in those higher risk scenarios.

I think the second point is that, you know, one of the most effective ways that we can prevent death is through vaccination. I think what has really been consistent throughout all of the different vaccines has been the remarkable impact that they have on hospitalizations and deaths. So, we absolutely to continue to prevent infection through all the methods that we know, but we also know that the vaccines are going to be very effective at that more severe outcome.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I'll just add briefly you know, as the Mayor said, our job at the end of the day is to save lives and prevent suffering, and that's why we do look at hospitalizations and deaths so closely and carefully and deploy all of the strategies that Dr. Varma mentioned to try to prevent those numbers from rising, and you know, we see the numbers every morning. We think about them not just as epidemiologists or, you know, from the mathematical perspective, but the very human suffering that is behind each of the 2,600 people who are hospitalized across New York City as of today. But that leads to the other part of your question, which is we do look at cases and test positivity because those are also related to avoidable suffering that we are trying to prevent. Cases and test positivity in particular, are often the leading indicator, meaning we have a beat on what's happening sooner when we see the trajectory of those numbers. So, we look at all of them together but they inform, at the end of the day, the strategy that we have to try to avoid those outcomes that we take so seriously.

**Mayor:** Thank you, and Dr. Long, you can speak for what's happening in the hospitals directly.

**Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test & Trace Corps:** Yeah, thank you, sir. So, Henry going back to the last March and April, I was on the front lines of our hospitals where we quadrupled the size of our ICU's. We cannot go back to that. So, what we've done here, with respect to the second wave in the city, is we've sought to delay and diminish the number of cases that we're seeing here in the second wave, if you will, and that's resulted in us being able to save lives, but also importantly, to Dr. Chokshi's point, keeping our hospitals going so they can continue to provide the excellent care that we know that they can. Through our second wave, we actually have had in New York City, one third fewer per capita that's of New Yorkers think compared to the rest of the country, and that's because again, New Yorkers came together, wore

their masks. 96 percent of the time we're reaching every single new case from a contact-tracing perspective.

Now we're doing more testing than almost any other country in the world. Those things came together to delay the onset of our second wave, diminish its peak, and that resulted in saving lives, and in particular, by keeping our hospitals going. You walk into the door of any of our hospitals now at Health + Hospitals, it looks different than it did last March and April. And it will continue to look different because of what New Yorkers do and are willing to sacrifice every day. Now, on a note of cases, I just want to make the point that it's not an issue of whether cases are more important than hospitalizations and deaths, but rather it's Dr. Chokshi's point, they serve a different purpose. Where we see cases going up, that enables us to strategically deploy our resources. We see cases going up, testing going down in the community. I, and Test and Trace, have 40 mobile units, all of which have rapid testing capabilities. 20, soon to be 40 mobile units, with vaccines. We can deploy our resources where we need to, and that also helps us to break chains of transmission and save lives. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Ted. Go ahead, Henry.

**Question:** Okay, thanks. Here's a question that is kind of weird. It's – Mr. Yang took a shot at you yesterday, not a vaccine shot, but kind of, he threw some shade on your administration. And in the course of enunciating one of a bunch of policies in which he seems to be sort of either uninformed or off, just not factually correct. For example, he wants you to declare a subway fare holiday which would mean taking money out of the City treasury to pay people, literally, to take the subway, which as we all know, is a State-run facility. He's also asked you, or demanded really, that you not spend all of the federal relief money in one year when we know that it's going to be dispersed at least over two years. He's also called the City's reserves, a rainy day fund [inaudible] that the State law prohibits the City from establishing a rainy day fund, and he's called on you to tax Columbia and NYU, they can pay property taxes, and we know that that would require a State action to do that. And so, my question to you is, you know, obviously, you know, the whole history of the City is that incumbent mayors don't get involved in the politicking for the person who's going to succeed him or her. But he also has called for spending a billion dollars out of the City treasury on 500,000 people who would receive basically \$167 a month. So, in giving all of these policies that really either run a [inaudible] of what you've done or are really impossible under State law, do you feel an obligation as the incumbent, as the mayor, as somebody who has spent the last seven plus years dealing with these issues to somehow set the record straight and inform the front runner, or at least the population of New York City, that these ideas would take a heck of a lot of work to implement if not being impossible?

**Mayor:** I appreciate the question. I certainly would just say to everyone, we for years worked very hard to shed light on the fact that the State runs the MTA. I just want to pull out that one piece. I think it's really important. Early on in my administration, I would go to town hall meetings and there was obviously – people would raise concerns about the subway, and I would ask them, you know, who runs the subways and there'll be a lot of confusion. You know, Henry, the MTA was set up purposefully decades ago in part to create that confusion purposefully, to keep accountability from residing in any elected official. Well, obviously over the years, the State became the one place where decisions were made about the MTA controlling the leadership, controlling the budget. And I think we did a good thing in these last years by clarifying that, really creating accountability.

So, that's the kind of thing, you know, I'll keep doing everything I can to educate New Yorkers about the truth. And certainly, you're right, the truth is the stimulus funds will be dispersed over two years. And a lot of the other elements of stimulus take a substantial amount of time to come in. The truth is the decisions about taxation typically reside in Albany. And that is a complicated process to address. The truth is the State runs the MTA and we want to make sure the State keeps its commitments to the MTA, and that there's an understanding that since the State controls it, they have to actually invest in it, not take away money from it as they have sometimes in the past. So, yeah, I will keep doing everything I can to help New Yorkers know about these important elements. And, you know, I think people, as we go through this year, are going to get more and more informed as they make their decisions. And that's a good thing. So, I'll certainly play my role whenever I feel it's appropriate.

**Moderator:** Go ahead. Next is Nolan from the Post.

**Question:** Hey, good morning everybody.

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

**Question:** I'm alright, excited that the designated hitter will not be returning to the National League.

**Mayor:** Oh, Nolan, Nolan, wait a minute. That's too controversial. Come on, be a modernist, Nolan.

**Question:** No, baseball should be played the way God intended it.

[Laughter]

You have repeatedly promised to release data about how many kids are getting in-person education in city schools. You declared that the Post reporting on the subject isn't accurate, even though it was based on documents we obtained from the DOE. So, when are you going to put these reports out?

**Mayor:** As we get information. Again, we'll – you're talking about a couple of different things. What I talked about the other day was the attendance levels, where that report was not accurate. But on the question that you've raised previously also about the different types of education happening in schools, as we get information, we'll put it out. I'm very comfortable with that. Go ahead, Nolan.

**Question:** All right. So, there's still no deadline there for putting out that information. Why won't you set one? And then on a separate and unrelated topic, which gets back to sort of the high plateau of the coronavirus levels, you have said, and the health experts here have said, that one of the reasons that the levels are elevated is because we've been relaxing those restrictions. Typically, which restrictions do you guys feel have been the most responsible, the lifting of which restrictions you do you feel are the most responsible for keeping the case level elevated?

**Mayor:** Nolan, I'd say it simply, I don't – I think it is less about just relaxing restrictions and more we're all concerned that people are fatigued and that, obviously, there's going to be a temptation to not follow the rules as closely as possible, or in some cases to be overconfident once one is vaccinated. That's why we keep saying, we want people to at least through June stick to all the simple rules, the mask wearing, the social distancing, et cetera. On the restrictions concerns, I've been vocal as has our health care leadership. We think the decision on the fitness classes was a mistake. Been very clear we should not go farther on indoor dining. 50 percent is enough for the foreseeable future. And we'll watch a number of the other decisions about gatherings and gathering places. We're going to watch those very closely. So, I think in all of these cases we want to watch what the data is telling us. We want to see what Test and Trace is seeing, and if we think something needs to be further adjusted, we'll say it. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more first to Steve from WCBS radio.

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

**Mayor:** Good, Steve, how you been?

**Question:** I'm all right. I'm Team Universal DH, just for the record.

**Mayor:** Well, I am increasingly with you. I didn't use to be, Steve, but now I am.

**Question:** I know, I think it's an evolution and Nolan will get there someday.

**Mayor:** Yeah.

**Question:** I wanted to bring some breaking news by you that we just saw, speaking of cleaning up the streets. The federal DOT has just cleared the way for congestion pricing or at least the environmental assessment for the MTA to do to get congestion pricing off the ground, which means it looks like it could be some amount of months away at this point. I wanted to get your general reaction to that news. And if you remain as committed to congestion pricing now, as you did before the pandemic.

**Mayor:** Absolutely. We need congestion pricing. We need to make sure we have the resources to bring back the subways and buses strong. We need, obviously, to continue to address congestion itself. And this is really good news. I want to thank President Biden. I want to thank Secretary Pete Buttigieg. I spoke to Secretary Buttigieg a month or so ago and told him this was the number one priority to get support from US DOT to move this forward. I really want to thank him for following up on that aggressively. This is something that's going to have so much to do with the future of New York City, because the future is mass transit. So, having a reliable revenue source for mass transit, this is going to make a huge difference for everyday New Yorkers. Just think of this as the way that we're going to know our subways are going to be running on time, are going to be safe. This is what we need. So, this is a big step forward. Go ahead, Steve.

**Question:** Thanks. And following up on the same topic, one part of the release from the DOT that stood out to me was that they are looking for input on this from the suburbs, from New Jersey and Connecticut. I know there've been a few voices in New Jersey – Congressman Josh

Gottheimer comes to mind – talking about how this is basically a tax on commuters. And they don't want to see this congestion charge be on the backs of people coming in through the Lincoln Tunnel, the Holland Tunnel. How much of a say do you think those in the suburbs should have on this New York City congestion tax?

**Mayor:** Look, we have to listen to everyone. And a lot of times when you get that input, it helps you do things better. But let's face it, New York City is the economic engine for the State of New York. New York City is the economic engine for the metropolitan area. New York City is one of the economic engines for the United States of America. If you just look at the metropolitan area the, the GDP of the New York City metropolitan area rivals some of the biggest countries in the world. So, all of that comes back to the subways and the buses that are the lifeblood and when they're working well, everything else works and it takes real resources to make sure that that will happen. So, I think of this one in the investment category, Steve. This is everyone helping to ensure that this city works for everyone, not just in the five boroughs, but the entire metropolitan area. And congestion pricing, you know, we've seen it work in other places in the world, I'm convinced this is the way forward, so we'll listen to everyone, but I don't have a doubt in my mind this is the way forward. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Last, we'll go to Gersh from Streetsblog.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate again, playing the cleanup role here. Your discussion of the designated hitter rule is appalling to me and I share Nolan's concerns about that. And I hope [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** Wait a minute, Gersh, you're a traditionalist?

**Question:** Yes, am. Yes, I am. I do not believe that designated hitter role should play a role in modern baseball.

**Mayor:** Gersh. I will – we'll get to the topic at hand, but I'm saying if you want an automatic out every nine hitters, that's your choice. If that's what you want, God bless you.

**Question:** Part of the game, part of the game.

[Laughter]

Anyway. So, Mr. Mayor, you know, I hate to keep going back to the mayor's race, but Andrew Yang said inexplicably yesterday that the City should rethink the Flushing Busway, which was a particularly weird comment because he has previously praised your 14th Street Busway. So, I'm gathering, you're not going to rethink the Flushing busway, but we don't have a list of the new busways that you're going to do in 2021. So, why not make news right now and tell us which long suffering bus riders will get better commutes this year? You know, Fordham Road, for example, I know there's some initial groundwork over there, but that is long overdue for some sort of busway treatment. So, why don't we just make some news? What do you got for us?

**Mayor:** You know, Gersh, I appreciate your energetic approach prompting me to make sudden news, but I am not going to be able to achieve that today. I am – we are definitely looking at a lot more we're going to do with buses in the year 2021. Despite the challenges of pandemic, we got

a lot done in 2020 expanding bus routes, expanding busways. This is also a really important part of our future. So, more to come on that route. And yes, I remain committed to the busway in Flushing, because remember this is about thousands and thousands of people, how they get around, how they get to their jobs, how they pick up their kids from school. You know, this is crucial. Mass transit is our future and the busways have proven to be incredibly effective. So, we know that anytime you make a change, there will be concerns, often legitimate concerns. But we got to think about what is going to help the vast majority of the people and the vast majority of people take subways and buses. This is why busways have proven to be such a popular and powerful idea. Go ahead, Gersh.

**Question:** Okay. Well, you did make some news there because you, obviously, were standing by the busway. So, that's good. So, I've got to go to a different topic though, not the designated hitter rule though, I'm still stunned by that. So, Manhattan Borough Pres— this is going back to Open Streets. I spoke to Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer yesterday, and she had put out a report about a week ago called the Future of Open Streets, which strongly argues that the City needs to do more than what you did last week, which was basically announcing new application process, but that you actually need to redesign many of these Open Streets so they don't need volunteers, that maybe the barriers are retractable for example, or they're simply remapped as park land so they can be rebuilt into linear parks. She's got one on Pleasant Avenue that she says is the best in the city. Obviously, the people on 34th Avenue in Queens, beg to differ. Their Open Streets is [inaudible] all day long. So, what do you think about the idea of actually – because we've talked about this, Mr. Mayor, of actually taking a few of these Open Streets and making real demonstration projects in the form of, you know, extensively parks that work for people all the time, rather than just moving gates all day long?

**Mayor:** Well, Gersh, I would say, look, one, although I understand what you're saying, I would say Open Streets have been extraordinary. I don't think it's something we should minimize. Yeah, there's logistics that have to go with it, but you know, it's an idea that's really worked. And in the current form, it's offered a lot of opportunity for people to be outdoors and have a very positive experience. But it also offers us some flexibility. I think we're going to be looking more and more at the future of the city in terms of having as much open space as possible. Sometimes it's going to be done in a temporary way. Sometimes it will be done in a permanent way. We should look at all of it. But what we do know is a lot of changes are happening in the streetscape and that's for the good. Open Streets have worked. Open Restaurants have worked. More and more, we're going to be using our space differently. This is a beginning, but I think there's lots of potential going forward. So, we're looking at a lot of options and I will not make news before it's time, but we continue to look at a lot of different options.

And with that, everybody, look, you know, we started out talking about making this city cleaner and greener. All of these pieces actually are connecting nicely. What we're doing with Open Streets, what we're going to be doing with congestion pricing. All of this is about a greener city, for sure, a healthier city, but also, we want a cleaner city. So, I'm going to say what I have said before, always remember the unsung heroes out there. When you see someone from the Sanitation Department, thank them for the amazing work they do for us every day. They often don't get the credit they deserve, but we rely on them, thank them. And also, you're going to see a lot more in our cleanliness efforts, community cleanups, litter basket collections, City Cleanup, Corps coming. This is going to be a big part of bringing the city back and a big part of A Recovery for All of Us. Thank you, everyone.



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