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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everyone. Well, we're going to talk today about the most important way that we bring this city back, the most important part of a recovery for all of us, and that is vaccinations. And here's the bottom line, every single time we're running into the same challenge – we need supply, we need more vaccine so we can make a difference for the people of this city. Everything comes down to one simple issue – supply, supply, supply. Remember, in the beginning, for months and months, it was testing, testing, testing? Now, it is supply, supply, supply. We need more vaccine. And it's been really frustrating, because we are not getting the amount of vaccine we need and it would make all the difference in the world.

So, let's at least acknowledge happily that a number of people have gotten vaccinated. Here's the latest for New York City – as of today, 1,365,956 doses of vaccine have been given. That is, for comparison, more than the total population of Dallas, Texas, the ninth largest – ninth largest city in the United States of America, and a place that's got a lot more snow than we do right now. So, the fact is that the vaccine effort keeps growing all the time, but the supply is not growing the way we need it to. Now, right now, we have a particular challenge, we've got fewer than 30,000 first doses on hand right now. That means we're going to run out today, tomorrow. We're going to run out of what we have now. Once again, we're in this ridiculous situation where we have massive ability to give people vaccination, we could be doing hundreds of thousands of more each week, and we're running out of vaccine because we're not getting what we need. We need the federal government, we need the State government, we need the manufacturers to step up, produce more, make it easier for us to get it, give us our fair share, make the rules simpler. But, right now, we're running out again. And, on top of that, we've got the weather problem. All over the nation, there's huge storms that are now causing delays in shipments. So, I've been updated this morning on the fact that we unfortunately do expect vaccine to be delayed – shipments of vaccine that we were expecting by yesterday, today, to be delayed. That means we're going to have to hold back appointments that New Yorkers need, because the vaccine isn't arriving. Based on the information I've gotten now, as many as 30-35,000 appointments or more might not be scheduled, because we don't have vaccine. So, appointments we would have been putting up available to people right now, we have to hold them back because the vaccine hasn't arrived.

This is going to be so frustrating for so many New Yorkers who are just so anxious to get this vaccine. And, again, if you spend any time when someone has been vaccinated, particularly our seniors and our oldest seniors, the feeling of relief it gives them, the sense of peace of mind, the hope it gives them that this horrible chapter may soon be coming to an end for them, where they'll be safe – every single dose matters. But, once again, more delays, because we're not getting the vaccine we need.

Now, I'm glad that at the new administration in Washington is aiming high. From the very beginning, Joe Biden said, they're going to increase production, put strong goals out there, that's exactly the right thing to do. But we need to get half-a-million doses delivered to New York City every week so we can reach our goals. And we have a specific plan to fully vaccinate 5 million New Yorkers by June, that's what will really give us a recovery, but we're going to need a hell of a lot more support to make that happen. When you get 5 million people vaccinated, you can imagine what it means – this city will fully come to life. 5 million people vaccinated means we are really turning the corner on this disease and we can bring back our economy and our life strong. Can't do it without supply. And, once again, let me go over the things that would help us. First of all, we need our fair share of the vaccine. The federal allocation to New York City is indirect, because it still has to require approvals from the State of New York. That's slowing things down in many ways. We need direct allocation in New York City, meaning direct supply and no strings attached. Let New York City, let our Health Department, let Health + Hospitals do what they need to do, and know how to do, and vaccinate people much more quickly without the red tape, without the confusion. And there needs to be a recognition by both the federal government and the State government that we are typically vaccinating about – 20 percent of the people who we vaccinated are from the suburbs and surrounding states. And we don't begrudge them that, a lot of them are people who serve us here in New York City, but our allocation should be bigger to account for that. And I talked about it yesterday, the State sends us 45 percent of the vaccine they get when we're actually vaccinating more like 53 percent of the folks getting vaccinated in the state. We've got to get our fair share. That could mean tens of thousands of more doses each week. And we need it direct and without so many strings attached.

Second, the freedom to vaccinate. We've talked about this so many times. We need to be able to vaccinate wherever will work, much more of a grassroots focus. We've had these disagreements with the State where they say this center should be only for one type of worker, and another center for another – no, we need lots of grassroots locations where we can reach every-day people, particularly in the communities hardest hit. Maximum number of smaller locations, not just big mega sites, they play a role, but we need the freedom to have the smaller locations and a reliable supply of vaccine and not have the constant changing of rules that has held us back. Give us the local control that we can use to speed the vaccination effort.

Number three, once again, the pharmaceutical companies, where are they? I've been talking about this for weeks and weeks, I still haven't heard a great answer. The pharmaceutical company in America, except for the three that are now involved in vaccines, where are the rest of them? Why are they not stepping forward, offering their assembly lines? We need to see the full use of the Defense Production Act and all the other tools that allow the federal government to dictate the terms in wartime conditions, compulsory licensing laws, all of the tools that allow the federal government to say we're in an emergency here, we're not doing business as usual, every company needs to be a part of it. And the federal government has the ability to direct what is in the public interest. We need more of that. We do not need business as usual in the pharmaceutical sector, which we all know has made it share mistakes in the past. How about they actually step forward and do what's in the common good, put people over profits, volunteer to help in this war time effort. We need more pressure to make that happen. And if we do that, this is the way we get to that half-million vaccinations a week that would transform this city in a matter of a few months.

Okay. That's the overview on the number-one issue – supply, supply, supply. Now, let's talk about how we continue to try and make better the effort to allow people to get vaccinated, get those appointments. We want to constantly improve that effort. And, obviously, the online tools that we have, something we've been working on from the beginning. What's important is to constantly listen to the feedback we're getting from those we serve and improve our services. In the beginning, for example, we realized that just having appointments online was not going to be enough. That's why we had a phone option, especially for seniors as well. But we've constantly improved, and now the latest update today, if you go to [nyc.gov/four](http://nyc.gov/four) – excuse me, I said that wrong – [nyc.gov/vax4nyc](http://nyc.gov/vax4nyc) – [vax4nyc](http://vax4nyc) – what you'll find is a simpler approach to scheduling, now available in 10 languages. This was an important point raised by our colleagues in the media, that folks needed to have the whole application process in their language and the most prominent languages in the city. So, the whole application is in 10 languages. We've been using this approach now over the last few weeks. It's been running smoothly without glitches. The average time to an appointment is only three or four minutes. So, this is a streamlined approach. We're going to be bringing all the different providers who are now working with the city – and I can't speak for every private hospital, I can't speak for every pharmacy company, but I can speak for the entities that are choosing to partner with the City of New York as we open new sites – Northwell Health, Hospital for Special Surgery, Capsule Pharmacy – these are some of the health care providers who are opening sites with the City of New York. They're agreeing to be part of this website to make things move more smoothly, so there's a more unified approach. And we're asking all the vaccination providers to use our site so that more and more things get centralized and simplified. So, the other site that we have been using, which has been very productive, [nyc.gov/vaccinefinder](http://nyc.gov/vaccinefinder) shows locations, and then people can go from there to the sign-up process. That is a tool that people are using. We're constantly working to improve each tool, so they're simpler and people have a better experience. And we're listening to the customer feedback and making adjustments. Now, the problem we confront always is, it is something very frustrating when supply keeps changing and we can't create that steadiness, that momentum that people want to feel. So, again, the signup process will go so much better if we had ample supply, stating the obvious. But this is what we need, this is what we're going to fight for, and this is what will give us a recovery for all of us, when we truly have the supply we need.

Okay. As we talk about recovery, talk about bringing back all the pieces that make New York City so great – obviously, our restaurant industry. We love our restaurants. We care about them. They're part of our identity, and our culture, and hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers depend on them for employment as well. We've been doing a lot of things this last year to help the restaurant industry. We also want to make sure we are keeping everyone safe – the customers, the folks who work in restaurants. Number-one job as we find our way out of this pandemic, keep everyone safe. So, with indoor dining back at 25 percent capacity, we want to focus on the right way to go about indoor dining, the right way as someone who's going to enjoy indoor dining with your family, with your friends, how to do it safely, but also the right way to protect the people who work there, protect the folks who have kept fighting through, kept those restaurants going. We owe it to them to make sure we watch out for their health and safety too. Here to talk more about the rules for the road, if you will, for indoor dining, my senior advisor, Dr. Jay Varma.

**Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma:** Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. We know that the best defense against COVID is a vaccine in your arm. But while our supplies remain limited, we know that the next best defense is to be armed with information, information you can use to

reduce your risk getting COVID. And so, that's why we talk every day about the importance of masks, about maintaining physical distance, hand hygiene, and getting tested frequently. As public health officials, we know how important restaurants are to New York City. There are stories of joy, of culture, of income for so many of us. They're one of the features that make this city really so special. Now that the State has opened up indoor dining, we want to make sure New Yorkers are armed with information. If you choose to eat at a restaurant indoors, we encourage you to follow the tips that you see here are tips for safe indoor dining. And, as the Mayor has said, this is important not just for your own health and safety, but for the health and safety of all of the New Yorkers who work at our restaurants.

So, let's go through some of those tips. Before you go out, keep the size of your group small, consider limiting it to only people in your family or in a pod or a bubble, if you have one. Confirm that everyone in your group has no COVID-like symptoms and no one's been exposed, no one's a close contact of somebody with COVID. Encourage everyone in your group to get tested. You can go to our City website and find sites all over the city that are free, accessible, and fast to get tested, including rapid point of care tests you can get for that same day. When you're at the restaurant, make sure it's observing city and State rules for how to make sure dining is safe. Those include making sure it's not too crowded indoors. Remember, capacity is restricted to 25 percent. Make sure you see employees wearing their face mask consistently and correctly. Make sure the tables are spaced apart, they need to be at least six feet apart from each other. And make sure there are no self-serve buffets being used. Wear your face cover, except when you're actively eating or drinking. And you make sure to put it on when your server comes to your table. Wash your hands before you eat and after you use the bathroom – those are good rules not just for COVID, but for all times. And maintain distance as much as you can from other patrons, stay at your table as much as you can. And after you dine, keep it a record of where you went, when you went – where you went, who you went with. If you end up getting COVID, you want to have that information ready to give to your contact tracer. And then, make sure you're getting tested frequently. We recommend people get tested as often as once a month. And, as we mentioned, there are plenty of sites around the city where you can make that happen. Thanks.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much, Jay – appreciate all that clarity, and it's really important. Look, our health team, I want to thank them. They've really helped the people in New York City to know the best way to handle all the challenges of this crisis. Our health leadership, and I talk to them every single day, they've guided us well with the, kind of, news you can use, real guidance for your lives. And here are really great tips that Jay has provided on how to go about indoor dining the right way. So, thank you very, very much.

Okay. I want to go to another topic entirely, but it is very much a topic that's important to our future. When I talk about recovery for all of us, I'm talking about bringing this city back not just strong, not just bringing our economy to life, but making this a city that's fairer, a city that is someplace everyone knows their rights are respected in. We have to constantly do that work of reform. And when it comes to a crucial issue, the bond between police and community, the partnership we need to keep building between police and community, that is always based on trust and accountability and transparency. And one of the areas for years I've fought for, my police commissioners and fought for, is the end of the law in Albany called the 50-a law that stopped us from being able to be transparent about police disciplinary proceedings and outcomes. That law was finally changed last year, but then some of the police unions went to court and suspended the ability of the City government to release those police disciplinary records. Well,

good news, yesterday, the Second Circuit Court Appeals – the Second Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the new law passed in Albany that allows for the release of police disciplinary records. This is a very, very important ruling. This finally allows us, after years of trying to get this changed, to move forward. My goal is to start releasing data quickly. We still need further guidance from the court, but I'd like to see us as early as next week to begin to release data so long as it conforms with the specifics of the court's ruling. But this is a watershed moment. I guarantee you, as this data is released, it will have the effect of giving people more faith in the transparency of the process for police discipline, a sense that everyone's being treated with the same rules, and it fits really powerfully with the discipline matrix we've talked about in recent weeks, the new approach to police discipline that absolutely revolutionizes and clarifies how police discipline will work, going forward – and the memorandum of understanding between the Civilian Complaint Review Board and the NYPD that codifies that and locks that in as the approach we will take going forward. This court ruling really synergizes perfectly with the actions we've taken with the discipline matrix. And again, looking forward to releasing that data in a matter of days, hopefully, so long as the court will give us the final details on how we are allowed to do that.

Now another challenge and an immediate challenge, and we've seen what's happening all over the country with the winter storms. It's been unbelievable, how hard hit many parts of the country have been. We're going to get our effect from these winter storms too, although it looks like we're going to do a lot better than many other places, thank God. But here's the latest, starting tomorrow morning – and the latest we have from National Weather Service is between 5:00 AM and 8:00 AM tomorrow morning, we'll see some snow beginning. Looks like it'll go through the day Thursday, into Friday, ending somewhere between 10:00 AM and noon on Friday. So right now, over that pretty long period of time the total accumulation is not too bad. It's between six and seven inches. But I'm going to say what I've said many times and I've learned from painful experience, these things change. So, we're going to constantly update New Yorkers, six to seven inches over 24 hours or more. That's not so bad. However, that can change. It can become a lot more. It can become a lot quicker. The timing can change. So, we're going to constantly update you. What I can say is expect tomorrow to be difficult. So, I'm going to say what I always say when we're expecting snow, stay off the roads if you can, it's not going to be so easy driving out there tomorrow. It's going to hit potentially ahead of the morning rush hour. So, the ideal is if you don't need to drive tomorrow, don't drive. Good for you, take mass transit. It's better for you. Stay home if you can, but also better for clearing the roadway so Sanitation Department can do the job that they are so good at, and they have been outstanding in these last few storms we've had. I always say thank you to the men and women in the Sanitation Department. I'm asking you to say thank you to them as well. They got a big job to do tomorrow and Friday. Let's help them by staying off the roads.

Okay, let's go to our daily indicators now. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report, 255 patients, confirmed positivity, 66.42 percent. And hospitalization rate 4.62 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report, 3,321 cases. Number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average 7.04 percent. Okay, let me say a few words in Spanish, I'm going back to the main topic, vaccines – supply, supply, supply.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish:]

With that, we'll turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

**Moderator:** Hi all. We will now begin our Q and A. With us today is Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, OEM Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Sanitation Commissioner Edward Grayson, DoITT Commissioner Jessie Tisch, CEO of Health + Hospitals Dr. Mitchell Katz, and First Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Torian Easterling. With that, we'll go to Juan Manuel from NY1.

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

**Mayor:** Good Juan Manuel, how are you?

**Question:** Very good. Thank you. Talking about the disciplinary records for NYPD, how many records do you think there are, involving how many officers in the NYPD? How is going to be the process of releasing those documents, those records?

**Mayor:** We'll get you details. Look, it obviously is an extensive effort, going back over decades because we're talking about everyone who currently, is serving. That effort's been, you know, we were preparing to do this after the 50-A law was originally passed, and then the court action stopped us. So, the work to get ready to do the release has already begun. I'll get you the details, but I know a lot of it can start quickly and we want it to be done quickly. Go ahead.

**Question:** And related to education, Mr. Mayor yesterday, the State Education Department issued new guidance saying school districts cannot require students to consent to COVID testing in order to attend class in-person. That's been New York City's policy for weeks. Those without permission slips have been moved to remote learning. Does new State guidance apply to New York City? And will the City now allow those students to attend in-person?

**Mayor:** Thank you, Juan Manuel, really important question. Look, first of all, we set the gold standard for health and safety. We literally took the best approaches from around the world. They have worked. It's incredible how safe our New York City public schools are. It's incredible how low the rate of COVID is. You know, that's working, the famous New York phrase, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. You know, we have the right approach now. So, when that initial information came out for the State Department of Education, we were surprised and there's been a good dialogue since then. I'm confident that we'll be able to continue our current practice. It has been working. It's the right way to do things. So, I want to stick to the rules that we have now, and I feel good about the fact that we'll be able to do that.

**Moderator:** Next is Christina from Chalkbeat.

**Question:** Hi Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. I wanted to follow up on the testing and consent issue. You've said and the Education Department has said that the City is working to modify the State guidance. So, can you just expand on what that would actually look like? Is New York City looking for an exemption? Was this guidance put out too soon? Like what exactly is the City seeking from the State?

**Mayor:** Christina, we've been working closely on so many issues with the State Department of Education. It's been a very, very good working relationship. We were surprised by this, especially because we have a very successful approach here that's made such a good impact and has been recognized all over the country as a success. So we've been in dialogue with them since yesterday and saying, look, we have something that works. We need to keep doing it. I think that's being heard. And we're working out the right approach, but I believe what will happen is we'll be able to keep doing exactly what we're doing now with the consent forms. Because again, it's been working, it's been keeping kids safe. It's been keeping families safe, educators, staff – this is working. We want to stick with it. And I think we'll get to that point with the State Education Department.

**Question:** Parents have made decisions about whether or not to opt into in-person learning based on whether they would have to consent to testing for their children. Will there be another opt-in period for those parents who were wary of having their kids tested in school?

**Mayor:** Again, I'm starting off – I'm going to answer that in two ways. I believe we'll work things through with the State Department of Education so we will continue our current practice. Therefore, there would not be a new opt-in because we would be continuing our current practice. Down the line, if the health situation, the COVID situation intensely improves, particularly we're able to get the vaccine we need and vaccinate people at the level that we're capable of, I think there's a possibility of an opt-in later on in this school year. Because we might be able to do things very differently within our schools based on high levels of vaccination in the city as a whole. So, you know, stay tuned for that. We're not ready to say that yet, but that's still a possibility if we're able to do what we are hoping to do with vaccinations overall.

**Moderator:** Next is Ariama from Kings County Politics.

**Question:** Hello. Hi, good morning.

**Mayor:** How are you, Ariama?

**Question:** I'm good. My question, I just wanted to clarify, is the vaccine shipment going to be delayed because of the weather problems here or in Texas?

**Mayor:** A great question on this specific location. I mean, it's obviously a national problem what's happening with the weather. And it is you know, gumming up supply lines all over the country. So, it's the national weather situation. I don't know the exact states that are having the biggest impact. We can get that to you. What I do know is our vaccine shipments are being delayed, which is really frustrating because people are waiting right now to set up appointments. I do know that initially it looks like 30,000 or 35,000 appointments will have to be held back and not scheduled, while we see if we can get these shipments in. So, this is now a real challenge on top of everything else we're facing. We're watching it hour to hour. And we'll keep updating everyone as we get clarity on when those shipments will arrive. Go ahead, Ariama.

**Question:** Actually, that was my main question. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** Next we have Mike from the Daily News.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey Mike, how are you doing, man?

**Question:** I'm all right. So, on the issue of the State dictate on vaccinations – or on testing excuse me. You said you had productive conversations with the State on this. Can you give us a little more detail on that? I mean, it seems that what they're saying is contradicting what the City's doing. And the City intends to continue doing what it's doing. So, I mean, it seems like you guys are at loggerheads here. What are the productive conversations that are taking place now, given that reality?

**Mayor:** I mean, I understand the question I really do. But I want to suggest something maybe revelatory here. It doesn't have to be loggerheads, you know, we have a very positive, productive relationship with the State Department of Education. We work with them daily on a whole host of issues. They're doing a lot, we're doing a lot, sometimes something moves and people recognize there needs to be more dialogue. So, when we saw this come out, we said, hey, we want to make sure you're clear about what we're doing, why we think it's working. We think this is the right approach, considering the success we've had. I think they're hearing that, we're working together to resolve the issue. Again, I feel confident we'll get to a good place. Sometimes people just need to communicate and go over the details and can end up with a good workable solution. I think this'll be one of those cases. Go ahead.

**Question:** Thank you. And as far as 50-A goes, you said, you know, next week or days you expected to begin releasing these records. What exactly do you need to, or does the City need to know about releasing police records from either this decision or from its own lawyers? I mean, why can't you just release them now? What needs to be clarified, I guess is what I'm getting at here?

**Mayor:** Yeah. It's not on our side. It's about the court decision. I'll have the Law Department get you a little more of the nuance. But the bottom line is we only need a confirmation from the court about the specific conditions released, and then we're moving. Again, we've had a lot of this ready to go. That's why I said we'll be able to do this in a matter of days, once we get that approval. And it'll take time, there's a lot of different things that have to be released. But we want to get started immediately. This, something we believe in. I think it will be very good for the public's confidence in the process. We just need to make sure after a prolonged court process, that the court is confirming that our specific approach is the right one to do, and that we are good to go.

**Moderator:** Next is Ayana from PIX 11.

**Question:** Hi, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you doing?

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

**Question:** I am excellent, thank you. So, there is a City Council hearing taking a look at possibly creating one universal COVID-19 vaccination appointment system. What are your thoughts on

consolidating the process? Is that something that should happen? Is it just too difficult to do? Or is the system working the way it is?

**Mayor:** It's a great question, Ayana. I'd say this, in a perfect world where all the different organizations involved, we're all part of one, let's say one government or one approach, it would be great if everything was seamless and interconnected, meaning all the private hospitals, all the public hospitals, all the pharmacy companies, you know, all the health care providers, City MD, you name it. If everyone was under one umbrella, that would be great. That's just not how our health care system is organized. And when you think about the complexities, each company, each entity has their own systems for keeping records. People's individual personal medical records and appointment schedules and all, it is complicated. And I've pushed our team, Health Department, Health + Hospitals, everyone, simplify, simplify. But they have made a really fair point, that the long before COVID, we have a health system based on private and public entities that are all different. You can get them on the same page on some of the scheduling. You can get them to volunteer, to agree to some common approaches, but you can't just flick a switch and everyone's on the same exact system. So, I think given that limitation, we've been able to make some steady improvements. I want to keep doing better. But look, as I said earlier, we've got a really impressive number of people who have been vaccinated already. I'll quote the number again, 1,365,000 vaccinations have happened really in the course of weeks. A lot of people are finding online and on the phone, the ability to get the appointment. But we got to keep making it better. So, I think the answer is we'll get closer to a unified system. The announcement I made today about a number of entities agreeing to use this new approach is helpful. I don't think we'll get to nirvana of everyone being exactly on the same system. Go ahead, Ayana.

**Question:** Thank you. And I have a question from one of my colleagues. At a recent town hall, Schools Chancellor said that suicide rates among New York City students are on the rise. Do you have any information or numbers on that? And do you know what's being done to address that?

**Mayor:** Ayana, we are very about this. We've seen several suicides in recent weeks of public school kids. That is very, very painful. And I'm speaking now, not only as mayor, but as a parent. The fact that these kids have gone through this crisis, the trauma they've felt, many kids have lost, loved ones. Many kids are feeling really isolated in the absence of, you know, the regular rhythms of their life. And particularly the absence of school for some of them. This is why it's imperative we bring back school as quickly as possible. So, you know, middle school starts next week. We want to get on with the work of bringing back high school. As I said earlier, I am hopeful that the health care situation improves enough that we can do another opt-in period later on in this school year. And then most especially, September, we have to come back 100 percent, in-person, strong. In the meantime, we're trying to make sure, you know, every school under this administration, that every school has mental health services now available to them. That wasn't true in the past. Now, every single school has mental health services that they can plug kids into. We're trying to make sure that guidance counselors, social workers, principals, everyone's thinking about if there's a child with a mental health need that we're speeding those services and supports to them right now. But it's really – it's not easy when kids aren't in-person and that's what's causing so much of the problem here and it's painful, but we really are trying to help every child. But the best thing we can do is just get more and more kids back in the school as quickly as possible.

**Moderator:** Next is Matt from Patch.

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

**Mayor:** Good, Matt. How are you doing today?

**Question:** Not bad, not bad. Hey, I want to circle back to the COVID vaccination data that you released yesterday that goes by ZIP code. I think it's fair to say that it showed some pretty significant disparities in how the vaccine is being distributed, but it doesn't tell – it's still incomplete. What I'm talking about is it doesn't include demographic information such as race or age. Why doesn't it?

**Mayor:** So, let me start. And then I'll turn to Dr. Easterling who has been intimately involved in the efforts to create an equity framework and also put together data that really shows us what's going on. When we put out the broad data, a couple of weeks back for the city, we acknowledged that we're having a central problem of a lot of people are not indicating a race or ethnicity, and a lot of providers are not doing all they could do to ask race and ethnicity, and we are working hard to improve that. So, one part of the problem here is there's a lot of folks who have been vaccinated we don't have accurate data for, to begin with. The second is just constantly trying to get more and more refined data, make sure it's accurate, get it out publicly. We just wanted to make sure we constantly take new steps forward. So, showing the ZIP code data was something we wanted to do, and then we can keep refining it from there. So, Dr. Easterling, in terms of both getting more and more accurate information on race and ethnicity, juxtaposing it with ZIP code data, what can you tell us about the next steps?

**First Deputy Commissioner Torian Easterling, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** You're absolutely right. Mr. Mayor. I think, you know, we've been working really hard to make sure that we put out as much information, being transparent is part of our equity approach, which has been front and center from the very beginning. I'll just say, you know, one, we do have race, ethnicity data, which is aggregate citywide, and that does tell us an important story. And so, I think it's really important to know that yes, the data shows the gaps, but it also shows how we [inaudible] our COVID response. When we look at the neighborhood level, I think we also have to be mindful that there are limitations because when we drill down to the neighborhood level, numbers could be smaller. So due to those limitations, we also want to be mindful of how we're presenting very small numbers at the ZIP code level. And so that's really why we – how we're thinking about the data that we present.

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

**Question:** Okay. Shifting gears. I have a question from a colleague of mine. He recently wrote a story about sections of Carl Schurz Park, basically in your backyard around Gracie Mansion, they remained blocked by NYPD barricades. And neighbors have been annoyed by this. The protests are over. Are you aware of these complaints? And do you think that the barricades should be lifted?

**Mayor:** Well, I can tell you, I'm certainly aware that, you know, for my neighbors up by Gracie Mansion and any place where there's protests, there's always going to be complaints. There've been regular, constant protests. So, the notion that protests are over is just not accurate. There've been all sorts of protests on many different issues pretty much every week. Certainly, NYPD is

consistently, you know, removing barriers wherever they can. But if they've got a site that is a place where there's pretty constant protest, they've got to figure out what that balance is. And I think they're doing their best to do that. We'll constantly watch if things evolve differently, but I can tell you, because I live there, there've been protests pretty much every week, multiple times a week, different types, different issues. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next, we go to Nolan from the Post.

**Question:** Good morning, everybody.

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

**Question:** I'm all right, Mr. Mayor. I want to circle back to the issue of safety in the subways and the attacks over the weekend, reportedly by Rigoberto Lopez. He was arrested four times. The Police Department had said on the record, he'd been identified as someone with emotional stress issues at least twice before the attacks. Why was he – why wasn't he being assisted by City agencies? Where did things fall through?

**Mayor:** Well, I want to know more for sure, Nolan. I've talked about this over the last day or two, you know, the initial information that we have received suggests that the situation did not sound the kind of alarms that we have seen in some other cases where someone was clearly diagnosed with a mental health issue, not just indicated by, you know, an individual officer, but diagnosed with a mental health issue or had a history of a specific violent act. Those situations are supposed to set off, you know, specific alarms with specific follow-through actions. I'm waiting for the full results of the review of what happened in this case. But the last report I had was we did not have that kind of specificity in his situation. What happened here was horrible. And we've got to learn from every situation. And we got to constantly refine the ability of different agencies to work together. But we'll get more information. When we get the final review of everything we know about how he was handled, we'll talk about that publicly.

**Question:** But secondly, on the larger issue of subway safety, you repeatedly said that the subways are safer today than they were 20 years ago. I wonder what comfort should New Yorkers take in that when we've had two dozen slashings and attacks on the subway over a week. Why should people be satisfied with the level of safety on the subways now, and with your answers that have seemingly discounted concerns about this until the two people were murdered on the A train on Friday?

**Mayor:** The fundamental approach that I've taken for over seven years now is to focus on improving public safety. And what we saw for six years pre-pandemic was we were able to constantly drive down crime in the subways. This is not just about 20 years ago. This is over the first six years I've been here. We were able to drive down crime in the subways to the point where in a number of years, we got to about one index crime per million rides on the New York City subways. Anyone who experienced that knew that we had gone to a much better place than where we were even a few years earlier, certainly than we were back 10 and 20 years ago. That proves the ability of this city and the NYPD to keep people safe. And we're going to do it again. We've gone through a massive, massive disruption because of the pandemic, but we're now surging close to 600 officers into the subway system to make sure people see their presence, are

supported by them, that the situation is safe. That's going to bring us up to a very high level of presence by the NYPD in the subways.

Before these horrible incidents, what we actually saw was crime in the subways had gone down markedly even compared to a year ago, even compared to the same point 2020. First six weeks of 2020 versus first six weeks of 2021, 59 percent decrease in index crime. We know when we put more police out there through a precision policing strategy, it works. We've seen it happen time and time again, it works. It's also important to talk about the overall situation in this city. When you look at January, 2021 versus January, 2020, before the pandemic, the NYPD statistics that came out on Friday, make clear overall index crime, January, 2020 compared to January, 2021, is down 21 percent. That's a major, major reduction in crime. And the area we're most concerned about overall lately, gun violence – gun arrests are up 61 percent compared to a year ago. So, NYPD is out there aggressively, energetically addressing safety concerns, and we're going to do the same thing we've done at every point since CompStat was developed in 1994, we're going to identify a problem, address it, and show people it can be turned around. That will happen as well in the subways. Go ahead, Nolan.

**Question:** Oh –

**Mayor:** I'm sorry. I miscounted. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** For our last question. We'll go to Reuvain from Hamodia.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I'd like to ask you about the ZIP code data released yesterday. It shows certain areas, minority areas, other areas, including those that I cover, have lower vaccination rates than others. So, my question is, do we know why this is? Is it because there are fewer vaccination sites? Is it anti-vaxxer sentiment or it's just because some of these areas were hit quite hard and a lot of people have antibodies and don't feel an urgency to get a vaccine?

**Mayor:** I'm going to turn to Dr. Katz and Dr. Easterling. But with this point, I think you did a good job there covering some of the challenges. The vaccination centers are spread out all over the city. We're going to keep building more out. The number one problem has been lack of supply and not being able to have as many appointments and as consistent an approach to appointments as we would have if we had supply. I think that's been the single biggest factor. But why do you see differences among areas? I do think it largely correlates to where people are convinced that they want the vaccine versus where there's hesitancy or distrust. There is anti-vaxxer sentiment in some communities. There is a sense in some communities that they don't need the vaccine, there's overt distrust in some communities of the vaccine and the medical sector. So, it – that is really, to me, a huge part of what we're seeing here, but Dr. Katz, and then Dr. Easterling, why don't you speak to this?

**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals:** Well, thank you, Mr. Mayor. Part of why we know there's vaccine hesitancy in communities of color is among the health care workers and other people working in hospitals, there is no access issue. People can arrive, get their vaccine, and all on work time because it is part of their job. And yet we've seen tremendous disparities in terms of people feeling that they're not yet ready to get vaccinated. Important to note that very few people say, no, I won't be vaccinated. What they generally say is I don't want

to be the first. One woman cheerfully said, “I sent my husband, we’ll see what happens.” I think people want to, you know, see how this goes. There is, as you say, Mr. Mayor, a number of people in communities of color who were so hard hit, who were infected or who feel that they got through the infection and don’t feel that same sense of urgency because they feel like they survived it. So, I think all of these things play a role. I very much believe as supply broadens and as time goes on, and there are millions of New Yorkers vaccinated, the other people will come along with us. Thank you, sir.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Dr. Easterling.

**First Deputy Commissioner Easterling:** Yeah. Thank you for the question. And just to build on the points that the Mayor and Dr. Katz have already mentioned, you know, the access points that we have, we’ve looked intensely at the neighborhoods. And so, some of the neighborhoods that you’re pointing out, we were intentional in really identifying sites, and we’re continuing to work to identify additional sites in those areas. In addition, we’re working with the providers in those locations. We know that individuals want to go to their providers. They want to go to their pharmacies. And so that’s really important to really get to address a lot of the hesitancy, because you’re able to really talk to your own provider in your pharmacy, to pharmacists to answer those questions. But I do want to just address this hesitancy, and what our work is building confidence around the vaccine.

One, we have to really address trust. In that trust is what is the work that we do. You know, I joined another town hall yesterday in Queens with the borough president and a lot of the community leaders. The number one question that I received is, will this vaccine harm me? I had to continually respond to community residents and affirm that this vaccine is safe, and it is effective. But that is going to have to be the work that we have to do. Continue to show up, be present, but also to respond to these questions, even if it takes five, six, ten times, and that’s what we’re committed to doing. And that’s the second part, is the trustworthiness. And that’s what we’re doing by our town halls and our conversations that we do now on a nightly basis with so many different leaders across the city.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Very helpful, Doctor. Go ahead, Reuvain.

**Question:** Thank you. I’d like to ask now about snow removal. You know, we’re getting another storm. We still haven’t completely dug out from the other one. There’s lots of snow piles that are, you know, killing parking spaces and just sticking out into the street because what our city does is just, you know, push snow to the side and then people have to dig out and throw back it into the street. There are places like in Canada that actually have real snow removal where the trucks actually pick up the snow, put it in the dump trucks, and they put it in, and they have these snow dumps. What are the chances you might get that in New York and actually start having real snow removal instead of just the snow being pushed to the side of the street?

**Mayor:** Well, I like your question for its pure objectivity. In fact, we do that in New York City. I’ve seen it with my own eyes. I don’t know if Commissioner Grayson is on, I didn’t hear the – he is. So, I’ll start and then Commissioner Grayson, who’s, you know, spent a lifetime battling snow in this city, will speak to it. We do a whole lot of different things to remove snow in the city. And part of the challenge of late has been multiple storms and the need, of course, to pick up – trash pickup, the recycling, and keeping all those things moving. But yeah, we do take more

foundational efforts to get snow out of there whenever possible. Commissioner Grayson, take us away.

**Commissioner Edward Grayson, Department of Sanitation:** Good morning. Great question. We deployed the melters for a little over 10 days or so. So, we've been melting snow throughout the city in a true snow removal fashion. It is a very monumental task to think of going into every residential street and getting the snow out of every parking space. So, typically we plow to the right. Over many, many years, that's the standard practice. And we go through, as a community, the dig out process. But we do snow removal. We've literally been melting snow throughout the city for a very long time, since the first big event that started February. And we will continue to deploy melters whenever they're required. Hopefully, this next event, that the Mayor briefed everybody on, isn't one of those.

**Mayor:** Amen. Thank you very much everyone. As we conclude today, I want to go back to the fight against the coronavirus and what we need most. We need more vaccine. This is really the last great battle in the fight against the coronavirus. When we get five million New Yorkers vaccinated by June, it will be a whole different reality in this city. This is the last big fight, but we need reinforcements. We've been begging for reinforcements. We haven't gotten them yet. We need a steady supply of vaccine, and we need a greater supply of vaccine. When we get that, we get to transform life in this city.

I'm going to remind people again, each and every week lately we're giving 100,000, 200,000 fewer doses than we want to, than we are able to, if we only had the supply. New York City can be doing half a million vaccinations per week if we were just given the supply, we need by the manufacturers, the federal government, the State government. It is time to change things, switch things up, get us what we need so we can win this last great battle. Bring this city back fully. That's what all New Yorkers want, and that's what we're ready to do. Thank you, everybody.

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