

# Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Makes an Announcement on COVID Mandates

March 4, 2022

**Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi:** Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Thank you all for being here with us today. It's an important day. I want to thank the Mayor for centering public health in our administration. Thank you.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** I want to thank Chancellor David Banks and Camille Varlek, and all of our dedicated educators for helping to keep our schools safe. I also want to thank Andrew Rigie for his work throughout the entire pandemic advocating for our beloved venues. And a huge and special very special thanks to Dr. Celia Quinn, my Deputy Commissioner for Disease Control, and one of the public health heroes who has kept this city afloat for the past two years. You may not have heard Celia's name before, but she has probably saved your life.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** I want to first begin by recognizing the unspeakable trauma. We've all experienced these last two years. We've lost friends, neighbors, loved ones. Nearly 40,000, each of whom has a name, a family, a story. Many of us have held a loved one's hand as they suffered because of COVID-19 or survived about with the virus ourselves. And many more of us have experienced severe loneliness and isolation, the effects of which will be felt and experienced for years to come. But none of us would be standing here today were it not for the safe and overwhelmingly effective COVID-19 vaccines. Over 77 percent of New Yorkers of all ages are fully vaccinated, including 87 percent of all adults and hundreds of thousands of children. And millions have kept their immunity up to date by getting boosted. Each and every one of you has my heartfelt thanks.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Vaccines have saved so many lives and prevented an immense amount of suffering and pain. New York City's nation leading vaccination policies, while sometimes controversial, were demonstrably effective. Since the beginning of our vaccination campaign in December 2020, an estimated 48,000 deaths have been prevented. That's 48,000 New Yorkers who will celebrate their birthday this

year. Over 300,000 hospitalizations have been averted – 300,000. And more than 1.9 million cases prevented as a result of New Yorkers doing right by their city and getting vaccinated. These estimates are from an updated analysis done by epidemiologists at Yale University, supported by the Health Department and the Commonwealth Fund. If any of you miss those numbers, I'll direct you to the billboard just behind you to see them.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** I also want to be very clear, while this COVID-19 wave is ebbing, we can't yet say that the pandemic is ending. We still have more work to do to ensure that even more New Yorkers are vaccinated, particularly our kids, and that all are staying up to date with booster doses when it's their time. While my tenure as your Health Commissioner is coming to an end soon, my teammates at the Health Department will continue working under my esteemed successor, Dr. Ashwin Vasani to ensure that we keep New Yorkers safe and healthy.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** This is why today we're releasing a new COVID Alert system to give New Yorkers a roadmap for how to mitigate their own risk today and in the future in the event that we see another surge or an increase in transmission. There are four color coded levels: low, medium, high, and very high, which align with what we see in terms of community spread and impact on our health care system. At each level, there's clear guidance for what precautions New Yorkers should take and what actions you can expect from your city government. According to our data, we are currently at a low alert level, thankfully. The highest level, very high or red alert, needs no explanation for those of us who survived the devastating spring 2020 first wave in New York City. Those memories are seared in our brain in perpetuity. It is a level of infection and hospitalization that we hope to never see again, but one that we must be prepared for. COVID Alert will keep New Yorkers informed about what the risk of COVID transmission looks like in our city, and how you can best protect yourself and your neighbors. It will also hold us accountable by laying out proactive actions that we will take at each level.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** As we look to the months ahead, "living with COVID", cannot mean ignoring when too many continue to die of COVID. With the vaccines and now with effective free treatments, that the city delivers to your doorstep within hours of your diagnosis, so much of the suffering that we have borne witness to is now unnecessary and preventable. We must do everything we can to reduce that suffering. Even as we take on the many parallel pandemics worsened by COVID – from mental health, to chronic diseases, to structural racism. Before I hand it over to our Mayor, allow me to extend my thanks to every New Yorker for the chance to serve as your Health

Commissioner these last couple of years. I believe there are jobs, there are careers, there are missions, and then there are callings. For me, getting to serve as New York City's doctor was undoubtedly a calling, and it's been the honor of a lifetime. Thank you so much. Thank you. With that, I'm going to turn it over to our amazing Mayor, Eric Adams. Thank you, sir.

**Mayor Eric Adams:** Thank you. You got me tearing up. You know, we cannot say enough about Dr. Chokshi and his team. Many of you benefited from his answer to the call of service. I want to thank him, his team, and I want to thank the former Mayor. Bill took a lot of incoming – a lot of criticism. He made some tough calls to put in place mandates. And New Yorkers are not used to being told what to do. You know how we are. You tell us to go right, we want to go left just because you told us to. But Bill had a tough time – to shut down this city. Watching trucks with morgues and bodies inside. Schools being closed. No matter what decision Bill made, he had an opposing view – protest marches, people who criticize him. But the numbers don't lie. You know, when you look at the prevention – some of you are sitting here today, because he was there to make those tough calls with his team. 48,000 deaths we prevented. 48,000. 303,000 hospitalizations and 1.9 million cases. That's why you know, I told my team, sometimes we have to look at the signs, because the numbers mean nothing too far too many. But these are Bettys and Davids and [inaudible] and Chens and Hassems. These are real people that we prevented from dying, going to the hospital, and prevented them from getting COVID.

**Mayor Adams:** If you were on the other end of a phone call of someone you love and they couldn't breathe and we're afraid – if you stood up all night hearing people say, I'm afraid to go to sleep because I don't think I'm going to wake up – this team saved lives. They saved lives. I'm just so proud of the service. I'm so proud of what you did. You didn't look to put your names in lights. You just did your job and you did it well. So, you know, we were really proud to have this transformation of power. The doctor did not have to stay. He could have – why stay in the heat of this fire. He stayed. And he partnered with Dr. Vasani and said, we're going to do this together. That's what makes New York and America great. It's the proper, peaceful transformation of power, and the information that we had is the information we could use as we do in the future. So I want to thank this team and New Yorkers all owe them a debt of gratitude.

**Mayor Adams:** As we continue to look forward to the extraordinary work that they accomplished and saving the lives of people during a very challenging period. When you think about two years ago, we were the epicenter of the COVID virus. And two

months ago, we became the epicenter again under Omicron. Two years of pain, of heartbreak, of uncertainty, of business loss, of schools closing, of just conflict inside our households. It was a tough time, but I said from the time I was elected, we are not going to allow this COVID to define us. We're going to define ourselves, because that's who we are as New Yorkers. The crisis did not control us. We leaned into our resiliency, our strength, and we pulled together. We were united in stating that we were going to defeat COVID like we defeated any other challenge that we're facing. That's why we're right here, Andrew, right in Times Square, to tell people from Canada, from Arkansas, from New Zealand, from anywhere else, come here, but don't come in and just walk, spend some money and restaurant.

**Mayor Adams:** This community stepped up, the city stepped up, New Yorkers he stepped up. They heard the call and they responded. We did the masking, we did the social distancing, we did the check of vaccinations and booster shots. We did everything we were supposed to do. And when we reflect on this moment in time, people are going to look at the historical changes we did to save the lives of people. We have to say thank you to the doctors and nurses and the bodega workers and the restaurants, the dishwashers, the cooks – everyday people that did an extraordinary job. Those first responders, those who were police officers, firefighters, everyone coming together – is showing why we are a professional operation with courage and service. That is why we're here today to make this moment possible. I will tell you time and time again, we're going to follow the numbers and we're going to follow the science. That's how we got here and that's why we're ensuring the safety of New Yorkers.

**Mayor Adams:** We are far from out of the woods. COVID is still here, but we are beating it back. We are showing them that we're going to beat it back, and New York is back. Our current positivity rate over a seven day average is only 1.8 percent. That is impressive to look at. In the numbers, as we stated, over 6.4 million New Yorkers are fully vaccinated and over 17 million doses have been administered. Since the rollout of our historic vaccination program and estimated 48,000 people, as we stated, deaths have been prevented. That is extremely impressive. Everyday New Yorkers are going home to their families because of that. So the Key to New York City has been a success with business compliance at 94 percent. Businesses have responded to it, they heard it, and they carried demand to the front line to make sure we can get the numbers we have. So I want to thank every business – tough time, we went through a tough period. But we dug in deep and we knew that we can defeat COVID in a real way and we're going to continue to do that. I'm glad to say that the rates are low enough that the mandatory program is no longer needed. No longer needed. Beginning Monday, March

7, we will be suspending the requirements under Key to NYC. So, folks can come in and enjoy the restaurants, enjoy the businesses, and be a part of this great city without having to show proof of vaccination. That means our restaurants, our businesses, and our concert venue will no longer need to require patrons to provide this proof.

**Mayor Adams:** Now, restaurants, they still can use their discretion if they desire. It's up to them. But the overall restriction is being removed. This is about giving people the flexibility that is needed to continue to allow not only safety, but we have to get our economy back on track. It's time to open our city and get the economy back operating. Just like our economy, we're making some changes in our schools to make it easier for students and staff. Our schools have been some of the safest places, I said this over and over again. When the calls were made to close down the schools, we said no. Schools are the safest places and we're keeping our schools safe and open and we were able to do that. As of this week, the schools' positivity rate is 0.18 percent. So I'm announcing today that we are lifting the indoor mask requirements for DOE schools between K-12 starting Monday, March 7. That is a great initiative and I know there are some who say that they still want their children to wear their masks – you can. We are not going to get in the way of your discretion. We want New Yorkers to be smart, flexible, and to be able to feel comfortable without any bullying or without any teasing. If you feel comfortable wearing your mask, feel free to do so. I, from time to time, wear mine until we get to a point where we can wean off and get the comfortability that we want.

**Mayor Adams:** Masks will now be an option in indoor settings and will be available for students and staff and anyone who wants to wear one because we want to give people that comfort level. The great part of this – you know, I know you missed it, and I missed it. We want to see the faces of our children. We want to see their smiles. We want to see how happy they are. We want to see when they're feeling sad, so that we can be there to comfort them and a mask prevented us from doing so for almost two years. I'm happy to see those smiles again. We will continue to keep our schools safe with our Stay Safe and Stay Open plan including doubling down on surveillance as we have done. 85,000 students and staff are testing weekly as part of this program. Camille, thank you, you came in and just did an amazing job. All of these names that are behind the scenes that keep things going – you know, when we had to double down on testing, Camille came in, and organizers, we were just blown away every day on the morning calls. How impressive she was with orchestrating this activity. We have distributed, through Camille, the team of public safety, Deputy Mayor Banks, and others who have

volunteered, almost 20 million rapid tests and conducted over 1 million PCR surveillance tests. That's just extremely impressive in such a small period of time.

**Mayor Adams:** We will make the proper public health decisions to keep our city safe. We will pivot if we see a reason to change any policies. We're going to be unafraid to make those adjustments and changes. COVID changes, it shifts, it modifies. We must be open to do the same and be unafraid to do so in the process. And if we see a rise in cases or hospitalizations, we're gonna come back. Every morning we talk about this and we make decisions based on what's in front of us, the data, and the science. That's why Dr. Chokshi mentioned in his remarks, we are launching an update alert system on COVID to keep people focused on what we're doing, the way we do with any other type of crisis. So it's imperative that we know that this battle is still on, and we're going to continue to do what's right for families and New Yorkers. For those who have not done so already – vaccination, booster shots. We cannot say it enough. It prevents hospitalizations. It prevents deaths. We must encourage people to get vaccinated and booster shots and you should encourage your family members to do so as well as we return back to work. We're bringing tourism back. We're bringing our economy back. It's good to be back. This is clearly an Arnold Schwarzenegger moment, we'll be back.

[Applause]

**Mayor Adams:** Hold on, we got to turn – the doctor is going to run the show. I did not – I got to talk about my pinkie you know.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** All right, next up, I have the privilege of introducing a son of New York City who's now serving this state, Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin.

[Applause]

[...]

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thank you so much, Lieutenant Governor. I have to take a moment just to say how grateful I am that under your and Governor Hochul's leadership, the collaboration with the Mayor, between our health departments in COVID response, and so much more, it has benefited the people of New York City, so I'm very grateful. Next I'm going to introduce a man who needs no introduction, especially in Times

Square, Mr. Andrew Rigie, the Executive Director of the New York City Hospitality Alliance. Andrew.

[...]

**Commissioner Chokshi:** And with that, Mr. Mayor, I believe we're gonna open it up to Q&A. So I'll turn it over to you.

**Mayor Adams:** Sounds like a plan.

**Question:** For students... [inaudible] do you think that's something that needs to be done next year? Are you planning to do that? And if not, why not – to mandate that kids get vaccines to return to school in the fall?

**Mayor Adams:** Those – that's part of what's on the discussion block and we'll discuss that with our medical professionals. When it's time to roll that out, we rolled it out.

**Question:** I wonder what's gonna happen with Broadway shows. I know with your lifting of Key to the City, people won't have to show proof of vaccination to go to a show, but what will Broadway do? Will they require masks? Will they require vaccinations so that people feel safe when they're at the theater?

**Mayor Adams:** Yeah, what we're doing, we're lifting the overall mandates that are issued by the city, but we're allowing each industry to make the determination, the entertainment industry make that determination about their patrons that are coming in. Do they want to check for vaccines? Do they want to have mass requirements? We're recommending if you're in a large setting to wear a mask. But, you know, Broadway will make a determination and we'll respect that. But we're lifting our mandate set in place.

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor Adams:** As of now, under existing rules, he cannot.

**Question:** I wonder what you might say to critics who think that masking requirements should be lifted for those students younger than five seeing as transmission rates have been low among that age group.

**Mayor Adams:** Yeah, you know, I was surprised when we sat down because that came up in our morning meetings – that's why it's so important to follow the science and listen to the doctors, because when you look at those under five, they were more likely to be hospitalized. You know, I say – people wanted to say, let's lift it across the board, but that's not what the science was showing us. So I know some people are concerned. I would rather people complain against me, than losing my babies in our city. We got to follow the science. The science states that that age group cannot be vaccinated. They have, among children, some of the highest hospitalization rates, so we have to save our children.

**Question:** Can you explain how is it fair that an unvaccinated tourist from Indiana or Oklahoma or wherever, starting Monday, can go to whatever restaurant they want, whereas an unvaccinated firefighter or EMS worker who lost their job doesn't get their job back? How is that fair?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, there was clear, you know – this went to court, this was the rule. How we determined fair and unfairness is in the court of law. The court of law said it's fair, and so we're going to follow the laws. It's fair. That's what the court of law said. That's the country we live in, where the court of law said this was fair and that's what we're doing.

**Question:** Just as you're rolling back Key to NYC, you could reinstate the people who lost their jobs.

**Mayor Adams:** Here is the problem by doing so, which we wrestled with, we don't know if another variant is coming. So when we tell New Yorkers, this must be put in place to save lives, New Yorkers trusted us. The overwhelming number of New Yorkers, city employees did the right thing – overwhelming number. It sends the wrong message to those New Yorkers who stated, even if I was reluctant, I'm going to follow the rules. That is what we are doing. We can't send the wrong message that when we say something, we're going to change and vacillate. That is what was stated people understood, particularly those who took the job with that understanding, we are people who took the



job with the understanding and refused to comply. And so the information was clear. People have to comply with the rule.

**Question:** Good morning, everybody. In terms of the other requirements are city schools like spacing and cafeterias and things like that? Will those restrictions also be lifted?

**Mayor Adams:** Great question. You want to jump in, Dr. Chokshi?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thank you, Nolan. You know, an important question. The short answer is most of them will remain as they are. We will continue to evaluate them one by one, as you know, the transmission rate evolves. But what we want to do is particularly because we are lifting one of the layers, the universal mask requirement, we want to keep much of the rest of it consistent as that happens.

**Question:** [Inaudible] before determining the policies that will be in effect. There aren't hard numbers on that. So are there numerical thresholds? And if so, what are those numerical thresholds for each? And then on the lifting of the vaccine mandate, that color code – it says that orange, it might come back. Why not order the return of the vaccine passports if community spread returns considering how easily this disease spreads inside?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** I'll start on that one, and of course, the Mayor will add as needed. Yes, there are specific thresholds and indicators that align with the CDC community levels that were released just a few days ago. We used those thresholds, the framework that the CDC has put out, and we match it up with New York City data. That allows us both to align with, you know, the federal government scheme, but also make sure that it is responsive to what is happening in New York City. We'll have additional information on the alert levels that will be released later today. Then with respect to this specific question about the vaccine pass, the Key to NYC, if we do see a higher level of cases and or hospitalization, we will, as the Mayor has already said, reconsider whether Key to NYC or other vaccine requirements are warranted. But that's not something that will be automatically done, in part because it depends on the nature of a new variant, exactly what the velocity of increase is, and what's happening in our hospitals. These are things that as you've heard, we take the indicators into account in concert and holistically rather than with very specific actions following indicators.

**Question:** I was just wondering, with lifting these restrictions, do you plan to stop signing the emergency orders that gave your administration some of this like extra power over procurement and other stuff?

**Mayor Adams:** We are in conversation with the Comptroller's office. Brad, the amazing relationship we have with the Comptroller, who's doing his job to audit us and make these determinations, and our job of making sure we move the city forward. So the Comptroller's Office's Counsel is speaking to our Counsel and we'll be able to make a formal announcement on that in the days to come.

**Mayor Adams:** We're going to – we will do you right after here, okay?

**Question:** Mayor, what do you say to New Yorkers who say this will actually make them feel less likely to go to restaurants because they're worried that people at the table next to them may not be vaccinated, that they like having Key to NYC in place?

**Mayor Adams:** You know, there's no decision you can make in New York that you're going to get 100 percent of New Yorkers. 8.8 million people. 30 million opinions. We are going to open. People are going to get back in restaurants. They're going to go back to their normal lives. It's going to take time for some, but the overwhelming number of New Yorkers, like that guy behind me, New York, New York. We are alright folks. I know people want a – while to stay here. We are alright. We're doing the right things. People will be back in restaurants. They are coming back out. They enjoyed this city. And so those few that are going to take a while, I understand it, you know. But the overwhelming number of New Yorkers are ready. And we are all right. And I am so happy today that these numbers show that we are alright.

**Mayor Adams:** Inside Edition. I used to love that show as a child.

**Question:** First of all, we do feel as it was mentioned earlier, like first responders, you know, we've been here since the beginning, so we thank you. We lost a coworker and so it means a lot. I do have another question though, which came up. I'm sure you saw the New York Post today. The Batman comes out today. And the author writes, The Batman made me feel miserable, miserable about living in crime ridden New York City. So you want to open up New York City to the world. There are concerns about this crime wave. So how do you address that to out of towners who might be reluctant to come back to New York City?

**Mayor Adams:** Our Bruce Wayne the Batman wears a blue uniform with a shield on his side and a bulletproof vest. That's the Batman I depend on – the men and women that protect this city. Just as we defeated COVID, we will defeat crime. This is New York, we are winners.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, any plan to lift the private sector workplace vaccine mandate? And if not, why not?

**Mayor Adams:** Not at this moment. It's part of our continuation of releasing as the better and better we get with these numbers. Not at this moment.

**Question:** Hi, Mayor, we received the first numbers of your subway safety plan, 22 homeless individuals [inaudible].

**Mayor Adams:** We got all the off top on top off top we go to on top.

**Question:** Question about COVID related emergency orders. Will your administration instruct city agencies to stop using COVID as an excuse to not fulfill FOILS?

**Mayor Adams:** They should never give you an excuse at all. They need to follow the rules and if someone is using that as an excuse, that's not acceptable. Is it time consuming? Is it taken a lot of time to do so because we're inundated with those FOILS and the manpower that's needed? So I don't think that they're using an excuse. There's only 24 hours in a day. We have limited staffing, and instead of responding to FOILs, if you're in H&H, you should be responding to the issues of health care. We want to respond and be transparent, but we do have to – we're inundated with the number of FOIL requests. I don't know if it's because I came into office, but we got a lot. And so they got to do it in a timely fashion, but we're not going to delay. We're going to do it as expeditiously as possible.

**Mayor Adams:** We got to do some off-topics because I got a bounce in a minute. Like that brother?

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, what's the legal guidance you're giving restaurant owners who want to keep the mandate? Will they legally be allowed to refuse service starting on

Monday to someone who doesn't show a VAX card when it's no longer the city wide requirement?

**Mayor Adams:** Great question. We sat down with our attorneys because we thought that through also and if it covers all legal muster, they're allowed to do so.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask about the the modified anti-gun unit, where that stands at the moment, where the training is, and have any units been deployed yet?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes. The anti-gun unit will be deployed. The police commissioner can give you the direct time, you know, that's her agency. But let's keep in mind, while we are deploying a well trained new unit that is not going to be heavy handed, we have a great team that's out there that's taken thousands of guns off the street. I am satisfied with those police officers. But the police commissioner is going to deploy that unit when it's properly trained, properly manned because the worst thing that could happen is that you have the wrong person in that unit executing our precision policing policy. We're going to get it right and we're not going to do it based on the timetables of others. We're going to do it based on the timetable that we got it right.

**Question:** Do you have any reaction to the latest crime statistics that came out? It seems like almost every major category is up. So anything that you have to say about that?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, we got to get it right. Two months in, we're executing our plan and we're gonna defeat crime. I'm clear on that.

**Question:** Hi, Mayor. So I was wondering about this meeting you had with gay leaders? Did you agree to do anything to address their concerns about the hires in your administration?

**Mayor Adams:** We had a great meeting of anyone that was in the meeting that was there. They can tell you the outcome of it. I shared with them my history. Many of them stood up and stated, Eric, we know your history. We know that you were there for us as a cop when the gay officers actually needed you. You were there. You were there as a captain when runaway gay youth were being harassed in the 6th Precinct on Christopher Street, you were there. You were there when we wanted marriage equality.

You were there for gender equality. You were there when you put money into Stonewall House in Brooklyn. You were there when we needed money in the Brooklyn Pride Center. They said my history. Just about everyone I spoke to talked about my history. The least discussed topic were the hires. They stated, how do we move forward with a Mayor that has always been our friend and that is an ally. And they believe in me, I believe in them. And we're going to do some good things in our follow up meetings.

**Question:** Mayor, quick question. As per lifting the restrictions about parades and festivals this summer, are they coming back to New York? For example, the Puerto Rican parade.

**Mayor Adams:** We have become so boring as a city. I want all my parades back. Every one of them. It is time for us to enjoy our city again. All of these noes, noes, noes. We've become a city of noes. I want to become a city of excitement. We're going to look to reinstate every parade, every festival, every block party – people need to get outdoors and enjoy our city again. So if you received a no, that we're not doing a parade, I need to find out why.

**Question:** I got a question for Lieutenant Governor Benjamin. Can you tell us why you, in putting in expenses, travel expenses, bill to the Senate expense account when you were State Senator as well as to the State? Can you get into the weeds on that?

[...]

**Mayor Adams:** Okay. When you see him at the press conference, you got to say, oh-uh. I'm glad it was him.

**Question:** The President, you know, [inaudible] sanctions the Russian oligarchs. Can you tell us how can the city help with that? Do you have plans to help with that and identifying properties the oligarchs own and helping the federal government with, you know, for research purposes.

**Mayor Adams:** I'm not sure of the White House's plans, but I'm in alignment with the White House that this was a horrific attack on a country. We're going to reach out to the White House and ask how could we help send a strong message to Putin that this is unacceptable. What happens on the global scale plays out in New York. So we want to

help the White House any way we can and we will communicate with the White House to find out how we could help within legal boundaries.

**Question:** To follow up on the question...

**Mayor Adams:** You got a lot of questions today, you know that?

**Question:** I think it's a habit of mine and it's not going anywhere. Two questions related to crime, first of all, do you have an estimation for when the anti-gun squads will be ready to hit the streets? And secondly, how many of the homeless outreach teams of the 30 that were promised are now working?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, one, the first question, let's peel them back – the first question – they're going to hit the streets when they're ready, when they are prepared, when they are trained, and the PC (Police Commissioner) is comfortable that we have the right team that's going out there. The worst thing that could happen is for us to try to be expeditious to some timeline that others have created and not do the job the way I expected to do. I've been very clear public safety and justice – and this team that's going to go at guns must meet my expectation of the training that I expect. When I'm comfortable based on a presentation from the Police Commissioner, I will get the thumbs up, because I have to protect the city, both in public safety and justice. So when that's ready, that's when we do so. The first question.

**Question:** The subways, Mr. Mayor. 30 teams promised how many are currently...?

**Mayor Adams:** We're getting exact numbers for you. But I'm really excited about what's happening on the subway and I'm getting a briefing today from the team. We're moving into a real execution. You're going to see a visible change in the subway. These encampments and all the things that we have visited and witnessed before, you're going to see the change that New York is expected to look for.

**Question:** I want to go back on-topic for a second. I know that right now mask mandates are going to be in place on public transportation, but the CDC has said that it would evaluate that on March 18, which is just another week and a half away. I wonder if you have a feeling about whether you think it's a good idea to lift the mask mandate on public transportation, or because it's such close quarters, maybe you should keep it.

**Mayor Adams:** New York is unique than any other state and we need to always modify our responses based on the density. I think we should continue to wear the mask on the subway system. I know I will continue to do so. I use the subway a lot. The CDC will hand down their recommendations, but I'm not at the place now when I think we need to stop wearing masks on the subways.

**Question:** Mayor, at Rikers Island, are you planning to hire more corrections officers? Do you have money in the budget right now to hire more? Or are you planning to keep the level exactly where it is?

**Mayor Adams:** We're going to go based on the recommendation of my amazing DOC (Department of Correction) Commissioner that continues to impress me every day. If he determines that we need more, we're going to get more. We're going to make sure we have what we need to turn around the Department of Correction.

**Question:** I have another on-topic question. Given the fact that the detection of a variant or a new coronavirus lags the spread – you know, we're building this local color coded system based on local spread, but doesn't it make more sense to monitor globally like what's happening around the world? For instance, by the time – we didn't realize that Omicron was here when it was already here. So doesn't it make sense to do something more preemptive?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, I think it makes sense for me to follow this amazing team and their recommendation is to do a color system here locally and they got us here. So try and believe in what you use to get to the successful place. This is a celebratory moment. Why aren't we celebrating this? You know, why? Why? You know, we've been waiting for this day for so long. And we're here. We're here. So I'm a yeasayer. I'm not a naysayer. We are winning. We are winning. So let's celebrate the wins. Go out this weekend, go dine, go enjoy your family, go for a walk, stop and see me at City Hall. We are winning folks. Let's celebrate the wonderful career of this doctor, his team, these members here. Let's celebrate New York and let's celebrate you. You are now able to cover this close together. I remember those days, two years ago, when you wouldn't even come to a press conference sometimes. We are winning New York. We are winning because of one reason, we're made up of the best stuff on earth. We're New Yorkers. Thank you.

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