

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 23, 2020, 9:00 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON 1010 WINS

Lee Harris: What's happening is that we were going to dispense with our regular headline format so we can talk to Mayor de Blasio, who joins us on the live line. Good morning, Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Lee.

Harris: Well, we got figures from you last night, almost 11,000 confirmed cases and 99 deaths in the city. Have these figures been updated yet?

Mayor: No, that's what we have now. But you know, Lee, and I hate to say it, we know where it's going. There'll be, you know, even more in the next few hours as we update.

Harris: Now, one figure we really haven't been seeing is hospitalizations. Do you have a sense of that number, especially regarding the City-operated hospitals?

Mayor: Yeah. What we know right now is what we've projected – about 20 percent of all cases require hospitalization. Not exactly, but a pretty strong standard, pretty consistent standard. About 20 percent of cases require hospitalization, at least for some period of time. Our public hospitals are feeling more and more of the brunt but they're holding. But what we desperately need, and this is what I spoke to the president and vice president about last night, we desperately need more supplies, more equipment starting with ventilators. Our supply of ventilators in our public hospitals is really being stressed. We can get through this week, but we cannot get through more than this week unless we get a resupply quickly.

Harris: Is there any particular hospital in the system that's especially stressed?

Mayor: Definitely Elmhurst Hospital in Queens has had an extraordinary amount of activity and that's in part because there's 2.3 million people in Queens and fewer hospitals proportionately than some other parts of the country – excuse me, the city. And also, it's a surrounding community with very deep health care needs. So, we think there's a reason for that, but it's been very tough for Elmhurst Hospital. I want to say that the folks who work there, all the medical personnel, all the staff that work there, they've been extraordinary, keeping up with a really tough situation.

Harris: You did talk to the President and the Vice President last night. Did you ask them for help, particularly in the form of ventilators and medical equipment? How confident are you that you're going to get what you asked for?

Mayor: Look, we're in the middle of an emergency, a crisis here in New York City where the epicenter and the whole nation now is in crisis. So, I'm going to always proceed with hope and hoping that we can all work together. I went in a lot of detail for President Trump and Vice President Pence about the exact needs we have for ventilators, the fact that we're going to need a lot more medical personnel going forward, the fact that we must have this stimulus bill support private hospitals and public hospitals that, you know, New York City and all sorts of localities are not going to be able provide services to people unless we get federal direct aid.

I do want to say it was a detailed conversation and I think they heard the points I was making, we had a back and forth. But terms of seeing actual results for the people in New York City, I have to say until I see it, I can't believe in anything until it's actually here. So I'm going to hold out hope, but we need to see these supplies arrive now. We literally have only days to get some of these things in place.

Harris: Mayor, the president has been complimenting you on your work here. So, that's a little out of the ordinary. Now the Governor asked you to develop a policy to stop people from congregating in parks and other public places. We heard that was going to come out this morning. Has that been formalized yet?

Mayor: We'll have that to the Governor later on today. But the broad outline Commissioner Shea and I spoke about yesterday – we're going to use the NYPD and other enforcement agencies to get out in the parks and all around to grocery stores, pharmacies, wherever we see people congregating. We're going to remind people they have to spread out. We're not going to allow any place, outdoor or indoor, to have crowds, and, if we can, get people to hear these new instructions, which they'll take some days, Lee, for people to get used to it, we understand that. But generally speaking, we're seeing extraordinary adherence from New Yorkers to this new reality, overwhelmingly. But we'll be out there in force and if we see places where it's not working, I'm not going to hesitate if I have to close some things or take a tougher approach. But I think what Commissioner Shea wants to do at first is educate people, warn people, remind people, remind people to keep moving, and I think that's going to have a very big impact.

Harris: Now, in New Jersey, Governor Murphy has talked about actually arresting people. Do you foresee the need for that at some point?

Mayor: I've talked to Commissioner Shea about all the tools that could be used, including summons, and if you ever got to that point, you could use arrest, but that's not what we anticipate. We believe – I believe, he believes that the vast majority of people – I mean, look, Lee, people have been inundated with news and information about the extent of this crisis. I think the vast majority of New Yorkers get it and after a little bit of adjustment, they'll do the right thing. Yeah, we reserve arrest always as a possibility, but it's not likely. It's not where we want to go in the short term. I think, you give us a few days to get people really clear about how this has to work and I believe you're going to see millions and millions of New Yorkers who do it because they understand it's about everyone's health and safety and their own family's health and safety.

Harris: Now, distance learning is beginning today for city school students, any sense yet of how that's working?

Mayor: We're going to talk about learning by doing, Lee. This has never been attempted on this scale, anything close to this scale by a school system in America. I mean, this is a huge endeavor. And I want to thank all our educators who have thrown themselves into it, to have to learn in a matter of days how to do things they've never done before. So, you know, we'll get a good sense at the end of the day of how it went, how many kids we reached, but it's going to grow over the coming weeks. We're going to figure out how to do it. I don't have a doubt in my mind. And we're going to reach hundreds of thousands of kids. It will not be as good as kids being in a school building, not even close, but it will help. And we're particularly going to focus on our high school seniors to make sure if they can graduate on time, we want to really help them do that.

Harris: You've let some inmates out of jail, you're talking about letting out some more. Do you have a sense of how big a number this could turn out to be?

Mayor: I don't have an overall sense. I mean we've got over 5,000 inmates right now in our entire jail system out of 8.6 million people. That's kind of amazing to begin with. That's half the number of inmates we had six years ago, but I think we're talking about initially hundreds – there's another group of about 200 inmates we're reviewing today with the NYPD and what we're looking at, Lee, is folks who either have serious health issues or they're older or they have the kind of offenses that we think do not indicate someone who will reoffend or another category, people who are very close to the end of their sentence anyway. Those are the categories we're looking at and we're going to announce day by day the number of people we think is appropriate and there's going to be some people it obviously will not be appropriate to release, and we're going to try and strike that balance.

Harris: Alright, Mayor de Blasio, we know you have things to do and people to see. So, we'll let you go. Thank you for joining us this morning.

Mayor: Thank you, Lee. And to all New Yorkers just – we're going to learn how to do this together. Let's support each other.

###