

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Okay. Let's start with the good news, because what a difference a few days makes. When we got together last, the election results were up in the air, long count expected, lots of questions, but this morning there are answers and they are very good answers for New York City. We are so happy that I can now say the words – congratulations, President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. This is a great day for this country and for the city, because not only do we have leaders who are going to move us forward. And, Joe Biden, I'm absolutely convinced, is a leader who's going to get so much done to put this country back on its feet and heal this nation. That's who he is. That's kind of person that he is. And Kamala Harris is going to do so much by his side and has fundamentally change this nation already by showing that leadership is for everyone, everyone's talents will be honored and respected. This is an amazing turning point, but what it means for us here in New York City in particular is that we will have three things that we need desperately. We will now have clear national leadership in fighting the coronavirus with a clear message, a clear vision, a clear strategy that we can believe in – that's one. Two, a vaccine we can trust. That's going to be crucial. A vaccine that when it is finally announced and distributed people will believe it is the real thing and be ready to take it. And three, of course, that stimulus that will put us back on our feet, a stimulus big enough and focused enough to help New York City and New York State get moving. We're going to get all three of those things, I'm convinced, because of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. So, that's extraordinary good news. And that's going to be a game-changer. And the people in this city are feeling it. They're feeling a sense of a weight lifted, a sense of hope and possibility, and putting behind us what has been such a painful and divisive time for our nation, for our city. I don't know about you, but I feel a sense of calm, a sense of peace that I haven't felt in a long time because we finally have a clear result to this election.

So, that's the good news. And that's going to do so much to help us, but, unfortunately, we're also dealing with an immense challenge this morning, because we see the presence of the coronavirus in the city and is trying to reassert itself. And we have to do everything in our power – while we're waiting for that help from the federal government to finally come, we need to do everything in our power to stop the coronavirus from reasserting in New York City. We have to stop a second wave from happening here. It is getting dangerously close. I've been telling you for weeks that we had the ability to stop a second wave. And, for weeks, actually our numbers were higher than we wanted, but they had leveled off. Now, unfortunately, we're seeing a real growth in the positivity rate in this city and that is dangerous. So, we have one last chance to stop a second wave. It's as simple as this – this is my message to all New Yorkers today – we can stop a second wave if we act immediately, but we have one last chance and everyone has to be a part of it. Just like you fought back the coronavirus after March and April, brought the city back, made it

one of the safest places in the country. We have to do that again and we have to act urgently. Citywide positivity now – the positivity level above two percent and it's been increasing. That is a problem. We have gone well past the threshold for the number of cases we set. The case numbers continue to increase – that as a problem. We're seeing household transmission, we're seeing community spread, we're seeing things we have not seen in a long time and we have to stop them. So, we're going to be talking to you about what we're doing everywhere in the city, but there are still parts of the city that are particularly of concern. There are still some areas of the city that need special attention, special effort. And we're going to talk about that in terms of the neighborhoods and the ZIP codes. We're coming back now with the ZIP code information that's going to allow us to focus on where we need to do the most work, the most testing, the most outreach, the most mask distribution. And it's important for us to understand, it's a problem everywhere, but it's a particular problem in certain neighborhoods.

So, to give us that information clearly, so every single New Yorker can participate, our Department of Health is now going to resume putting up data by ZIP code. You'll be able to see the positivity levels by ZIP code, the trends that are happening, the test results, transmission rates, the things that really will tell you exactly what is going on. You can go to nyc.gov/health/coronavirus. The whole idea here is to take this information and turn it into power, take this information and fight back with it, use it to tell us what we need to do. And our Health Commissioner is going to address this, but one more thing – and I'm going to highlight – he's going to make this point. I need everyone to listen loud and clear. He is New York City's doctor – listen to the point he's going to make that one of the most crucial things that'll happen in the next two months, of course, is the holidays, and the holidays we associate with travel and the holidays we associate with big indoor gatherings, big meals together – that, unfortunately, this year can't be the case, because if you look at the numbers that we're going to go over now, you're going to see loud and clear we're in a dangerous situation and we have to change our habits. We cannot take the risk of going back to larger shutdowns of our city, our economy, more and more restrictions. We cannot take that risk. We have to change what we do in light of this situation. So, here to give you an update and give you the guidance you need to help us stop the second wave, the City's doctor, our Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. From the beginning, science and data have been the lifeblood of our response. The numbers help us decide how we intensify outreach and where we direct our resources. We also know that an informed and watchful city is one of our best defenses against COVID-19, which is why we're pleased to announce we've updated our website to offer even more timely information to New Yorkers. The new page on our website includes a new summary of the latest data, seven-day average of percent positivity by ZIP code, more refined age breakdowns, and testing turnaround times. The site will be live today and we invite all New Yorkers to see what is happening in their communities. Something that will be apparent to anyone reviewing the data is that numbers are rising steadily in neighborhoods across the city. These numbers must serve as a warning to us, as the Mayor has said. The virus starts local, but, as we're seeing around the country and around the world, it doesn't stay local unless each of us takes the action that we need to, to protect ourselves as well as others.

Now, the timing of this increase should give us pause, because it comes at a moment that I want to acknowledge is precious to so many of us. It's precious and yet laden with risk this year – the holidays. I understand that after all we've been through, there is a need to find comfort through celebrating with family and community. But I want to be clear, the holidays this year cannot look like years past. Many of the things that make the holidays so special also carry the most risk. We know the virus spreads through social gatherings, even small get-togethers. And the cooler weather means drier air, conditions that we know for most respiratory viruses, like the coronavirus – more contagious. That's why today we're posting our holiday guidance about safe celebrations that will protect the health of those who are most dear to you. As the Mayor said, please, if you don't absolutely have to, don't travel. This will help protect not just your loved ones, but also other New Yorkers. Don't host a party and avoid gathering in groups.

Mistletoe maybe off limits this year, but holiday cheer is not. You can enjoy virtual gatherings, seasonal traditions, whether it's a football game or admiring holiday decorations from a distance or eating some of your favorite holiday foods. Finally, the core four and testing remain the cornerstones of keeping our city safe, during the holidays, but also every day. Mask up, maintain distance, wash your hands, stay home if you're ill and get tested. Six feet and a mask are what helps separate us from a second wave of hospitalizations and avoidable suffering. And as you'll see on our updated website, about two-thirds of all test results are returned within 48 hours, helping us interrupt the spread of COVID-19. If you have symptoms, test positive, or are in quarantine, you should wear a mask while you're in your own home. This helps prevent spread to family members as well as roommates. Otherwise mask up anytime you are outside your home indoors or out. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi. Six feet and a mask – that says so much, that simple phrase, and that makes all the difference. Now, look, we've got a lot of work to do. We got to do it everywhere, but let's also remember, we see particular places where they have challenges. For weeks, it was parts of Brooklyn and Queens. Those areas, thank God, have gotten a lot better – still work to do, but they've gotten a lot better. But, as we talked about in the end of last week, now we're having some challenges in Staten Island. So, we're going to focus a lot of resources there to protect the people's Staten Island and to stop this second wave. We are going to see a Day of Action tomorrow in Staten Island. And this Day of Action means a lot outreach, a lot of mask distribution, a lot of testing. There'll be an outreach effort at the ferry terminal and other locations around the island. And, of course, it's Get Tested Tuesdays. So, we're going to encourage the maximum number of Staten Islanders to get tested. Here to talk to you about this effort, the head of our Test and Trace Corps, Dr. Ted Long.

Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps: Thank you, sir. The purpose of our Day of Action is to test as many people as possible. Testing is our line of sight into the fight against the coronavirus and every single New Yorker, every single Staten Islander that comes out and gets tested on Tuesday, you've strengthened our ability to win that fight. Now, what we're going to be doing in Staten Island on Tuesday is we're going to have 75 volunteers and staff roving around the island. There'll be at the ferry, there'll be at Staten Island Mall, there'll be at Brick Town Center at Charleston, and there'll be at Forest Plaza. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to get tested. Again, come to any of our sites for a fast, easy, and, of course, free test. You will help us to win this fight. We'll see you on Tuesday.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Long. So, everybody, look, the basics make such an impact. So again, Get Tested Tuesday. This is – now that we're giving you this warning that a second wave is out there. We've got to beat it back. I want to emphasize to anyone who has never been tested, get tested this week. If you haven't been tested in a long time, get tested this week. This is the time we need to know better what's happening neighborhood by neighborhood so we can stop the second wave. So, if you want to know what you can do, go out there and get tested.

All right, now, again, want to remind people with the holidays coming, the best solution is not to travel. If you can possibly avoid travel, you should. And I know it's painful. We miss loved ones that we haven't seen in a long time. I'm feeling it. I know what it feels like. I wish I could go see my loved ones. This is going to be the first holiday season for my family that I can remember my entire life where I won't see some of the people who I'm closest to in this world, but that's to keep everyone safe. And so, if you don't need to travel, you can avoid travel, that comes first as the best option. But if you travel, New York State has now issued new guidelines. And if you travel, you will have to quarantine for 14 days. And we mean it. We're going to be very strict about that, unless you follow State guidelines and you get tested before your trip, then a few days after you return. So, there is an opportunity to avoid the 14-day quarantine if you test before traveling back to New York City and after returning to New York City. But if you don't follow those specific guidelines, you have to quarantine for 14 days. We have to take it seriously. We have to enforce it. We will enforce it, because this is how we use every tool in our power to stop a second wave from hitting us here.

Okay. Now, let's talk about the daily indicators and it will be quite clear the challenge we face. So, three indicators – the one that, thankfully, maintains at a certain level that we are handling well is, number-one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. That threshold is 200 patients. Today's report, 71, with a confirmed positivity level of 29.58 percent. So, look, right now, that number remains at a fairly low level, but note that that positivity level for COVID continues to rise. And, obviously, with the number of cases growing, we are very concerned that there will be more and more people going to the hospital. It's a level we can manage right now, though I'm thinking about the human reality. Anyone who goes into the hospital is dealing with a serious problem. We can't see that continue to rise. But, right now, thank God, still at a lower level. But here's where the news gets much worse – number-two, the new reported cases on a seven-day average – that threshold of 550 cases. For a long time, that seemed like a threshold we would never surpass. We then did surpass it in the last week or so, but now much higher – 779 cases. That right there shows you the magnitude of the problem. Some of that's explained by more and more testing, and more testing is good, but some of that is explained by the fact that the positivity levels are going up and is a problem. And that's what you'll see in number three, percentage of people testing city-wide positive for COVID-19 – threshold five percent. Today's report, 2.36 percent – very worrisome. Seven-day rolling average, 2.21 percent – highest we've seen in a long time. We can fight these back. There's still time to fight them back, but those are numbers that should have us all alarmed and ready to act with everything we got.

Okay. We'll do a few words now in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Dr. Dave Chokshi, the City's Health Commissioner, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Executive Director of the Test and Trace Corps Dr. Ted Long. With that, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. With regard to these higher numbers, has your Test and Trace Corps learned anything about how these cases are spreading? It seems like all of these months into test trace, we don't get much in terms of specifics. Are they small family gatherings where people are inviting a couple of friends over indoors, and that's where the spread is taking place? Do you have any evidence of any outdoor spread anywhere in New York City?

Mayor: Andrew, first I'll start and then let the doctors weigh in. I understand your question entirely. We're all, you know – we all would in a sense prefer to know a very specific source of the problem, but that's not what we're seeing here. It's not like there's a specific building, a specific gathering. You know, what we've seen overall is that where really good precautions are taken, we don't have a problem. Our school system continues to be a great example of that. I think what we're seeing is something much more generalized. Test and Trace has been out there working intensely, and what we're seeing unfortunately, is broader community spread and clearly some of it related to what's happening around the country and travel, but something broader than that as well. That's why the way to fight is for everyone to double down on the things that do work. Dr. Chokshi, you want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, sir. Yes, the only thing that I would add is that we do have information, you know, not just from the tracing efforts from Test and Trace here in New York City. But we now also have a robust evidence base, you know, with respect to the science about how the coronavirus has spread across the entire world. What we know from that evidence base, from the science is that is that it happens any time that that people gather, but particularly when they gather without masks and indoors, and so that's true of social gatherings, as I mentioned. It's true, anytime people are congregating for other reasons, whether related to a work or more socially and it's true you know, particularly during the cooler months because the air is drier and because people are more likely to gather indoors. So even when we don't have those specifics we do know the specific things that people can do to avoid the spread.

Mayor: Yeah, and Andrew, that combination – gathering indoors without masks plus cold weather, which makes people want to be more indoors, obviously – that combination is a real problem. That's why we're going to keep emphasizing wearing the masks all the time and avoiding large gatherings, particularly indoors. That is such a crucial point. Dr. Long you want to add?

Director Long: Yeah, so I appreciate that question. What you're going for here too is have we seen the same type of super-spreading events as the Mayor said, localized to a pinpoint location

that have plagued other cities, other countries. Because New Yorkers have taken the precautions that they have we had one of the best control rates in the country, and we've not seen anywhere close to the same degree of that type of spreading event in New York City. To be concrete for you, about 10 percent of our cases that we're seeing here, we track back to travel. Five to ten percent, we tracked back to specific gatherings or events. We have detailed information on every single case that we get, the we're able to talk to, to able to interview, and we act on the information to know where we need to deploy our resources, where we need to do messaging, where we need to do specific testing outreach in terms of different workplaces. So we act on that every day, and I appreciate your question.

Mayor: Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: So my next question has to do with the city's plans for upcoming holiday events. Are you prepared Mayor to take more aggressive actions, such as not allowing the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree or making sure that any Thanksgiving-related gatherings do not take place? What new steps will you announce?

Mayor: We're going to look at all that Andrew. I think again, the first concern needs to be making sure we do not have large indoor gatherings and that we get people wearing masks all the time. There really are not many major outdoor events at this point. But we'll look again to see what's out there and if any additional precautions are needed. But again, the key problem here is indoors and not wearing masks. Let's really emphasize that if people avoid indoor gatherings and wear a mask, that's going to be crucial to turning this around. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah, thanks for taking my call, Mr. Mayor. Yeah, I mean, following up on Andrew's questions, I'm wondering if you can maybe outline some possible scenarios in the weeks ahead. I mean, I, in previous weeks, when you talked about a second wave, you warned of more severe restrictions coming back. Certainly in the red and orange zones, there was a crackdown on parts of the reopening. Can you say what you have in mind in terms of scaling back the reopening, if the second wave does come and is there a timeline here? Is it like we'll know in a week, a month, anything like that?

Mayor: Shant, very good, common sense questions, and I appreciate any question that's the kind of thing an everyday New Yorker would ask, and the first thing I want to say is let's be careful about trying to predict exact timelines because in a sense that takes away the role of the people, meaning it is not something that happens to us and we have no impact on. That's the whole story of the difference between March and April, when this horrible virus appeared in this city out of nowhere, versus the way people were able to fight it back through their own actions, their own behavior, and we need them to do that again. So the more that people wear masks, practice, social distancing, all those basics, the more we're able to fight back that second wave. So I can't give you a timeline. It will actually depend on how people respond to your reporting and everything else we put out there – if they take decisive action, that can make a huge difference.

But it is important, I think, to lay out the danger in terms of new restrictions, because I think it will make it very visual, very real to people what we're up against. God forbid this continued and we had a full-blown second wave, it means a lot more restrictions. It means – unfortunately it could mean even having to shut down parts of our economy again, which would be horrible for this city. Horrible for the livelihoods of people. It could mean having to shut down schools. There are obvious, real dangers here, and we don't want to see that happen. So that's why I'm telling people there's one last chance to stop that, and we need everyone to participate. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah. Thanks for that, and I guess switching gears to the incoming Biden administration. Could you say whether you've reached out to that administration yet, and just any thoughts on what your strategy will be for getting, you know, the funding that you've been calling for for months and months from Washington?

Mayor: Yeah, I'm reaching out later today to folks in the incoming administration, start those conversations. Look, I'm tremendously hopeful about the kind of stimulus that a Biden administration would do, but even the fact that there will be a Biden administration is now really creating energy in Washington for stimulus even quicker, and if it's a good one, if it's a fair one that really focuses on what people need, but also what cities and states need to get back on their feet, that could be a blessing for sure, but we'll be talking with the Biden team, emphasizing those three things I talked about at beginning: we need clear national leadership to fight back the coronavirus, a single clear message about where we need to go as a country and what people need to do, we need a pathway to a vaccine we can believe in, and that people will want to take, which is crucial, and of course that stimulus. That's what I'll be focused on.

Moderator: Next is Jillian from WBAI.

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

Mayor: Good, Jillian? How've you been?

Question: I'm well enough that I can start breathing again as of Saturday.

Mayor: Excellent. Good. Welcome back.

Question: Yeah. So about the special Flushing waterfront district, I'm sure you're aware that there's an Article 78 lawsuit already pending. No EIS was conducted or even required for the plan influx of almost 2,000 new units, which many opponents considered DCB doing an end run for the developer, basically. There are estimates that a thousand new sewer line connections will be needed and only three percent of apartments fall into affordable housing categories. The AMI requirement for these new apartments is it's 80 percent of the city-wide AMI, but the Flushing AMI is less than half that. DCP's own data reports 66 percent of current residents are already rent burdened, struggling, small businesses called the project slap in the face, especially given the pandemic and because of the large retail component, others call it a massive giveaway to a developer, which you have repeatedly said was a thing of the past—

Mayor: Okay, Jillian, come on, get me to a question.

Question: —this particular development is a good idea?

Mayor: Jillian, look, I need to look at the latest on that. Honestly, we've been focused on a lot of other things. I appreciate the concerns you're raising because we obviously want to have maximum affordable housing, protections for small businesses. These are all things I fundamentally believe in. Let me look at the latest on that and I can give you a more coherent answer because I just haven't looked at that in a while. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks, and that's understandable. I promise this a quicker question. Of the 13 proposed towers, only two don't violate FAA height restrictions imposed because of the proximity to LaGuardia Airport. The project is slated to be built in coastal flood and hurricane evacuation high-risk zones, and my understanding is whatever the PR narrative may be, the developer has not committed to cleaning up Flushing Creek, despite the expected pollution caused by the new sewers and generated by all the new residents. So how does the city plan to deal with these concerns, which I'm sure you don't know right now, but I'm asking anyway?

Mayor: No, I am taking my notes on all of it. I appreciate all the questions. They're very fair questions. We're going to come back with answers on it. All of it. I obviously want to really particularly focus on those height restrictions. That's a very real issue and we have to have a clear approach there. So give me a day or two and we will have an answer for you. I appreciate the question.

Moderator: Next is Jeff from the New York Times.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I'm wondering – we reported today that city health officials felt that some of the infections were coming from clusters linked to workplaces, such as construction sites and offices, and I'm wondering if you agree with that and what does that mean about the city's effort to restart the economy, get people back to work. Is there enough focus being placed on the clusters that are being found at offices and construction sites and things of that nature?

Mayor: Yeah, again appreciate the question, Jeff. I think what the approach the city is taking is really could be described as abundance of caution, looking at some areas where we want to make sure there's focused testing and follow up. Again, as you heard from Dr. Long, unlike a lot of places, our problem has not been specific sites really driving a lot of our challenge, but we want to be real careful, and that's what I think describes the essence of the city strategy. Dr. Chokshi, you want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir, just to add briefly to that. That's exactly right. We have to look at all places where there is a greater risk. But again, the actions are the same, whether you're in a workplace, whether you're at a social gathering – there are things that we know that can reduce the risk particularly wearing your mask and keeping your distance. We'll keep looking at this data, you know, not just on a week to week basis, but on a day-to-day basis and any place that we do see a concentration of cases, whether it's because it's happening at a zip code or

because it's happening in a particular setting, that informs how we think about fighting the coronavirus going forward.

Mayor: Go ahead, Jeff.

Question: I guess just a follow-up, Mr. Mayor is, you know, if we don't know where the infections are coming from and we're having trouble analyzing them, isn't it a little too late? I mean, should you, at this point already be imposing some restrictions on non-essential businesses because the rates have continually been rising for the last few weeks.

Mayor: Jeff, a very fair question, and it's something we've talked about a lot internally in last few days. I think it's fair to say after a lot of discussion, first of all, a discussion also with the State of New York that has to make a lot of the ultimate decisions here, but look, the way I've asked it to the health team is, you know, where are we this minute in terms of our ability to move forward as a city? What kind of trajectory on, what can we do about it? Well, where we are, right this minute is more cases than we want for sure. But at the same time, Jeff, the city is clearly functioning across the board. We have gotten a lot more activity back, a lot more jobs back. We're hovering now about around 4 million jobs in New York City. So we've had a real major comeback in terms of employment, much more to be done. Obviously school is open, a lot of things are happening that people need, and if we stayed right where we were now we could sustain ourselves.

So then the question is where are we going? We fear, of course, that we're seeing this kind of increase. But the question I always ask the health team is can it be turned around with the right effort by the people and the government obviously leading the way? And the answer is yes, but we have a brief window. We have to make that turn around quickly. So I think the simple answer is no, it's not yet time for those broader restrictions. I pray it will never be that time, but if we don't act very quickly, then those restrictions could become a reality.

Moderator: Next we have Erin from Politico.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, I'm just wondering, you've specifically said in the past that indoor dining should close when we're over two percent on the seven-day average, which we now are. I know it's not your final decision, but is that going to happen? And you're going to try to make that happen.

Mayor: What I said is that two percentage should be re-evaluated and I think it should be re-evaluated now. Again, the goal is to stop this trend in terms of higher infection rates and push it back down. But certainly we're at a point where I think it makes sense to take another look given what's happening. Go ahead Erin.

Question: Okay, and then, so I believe it was Dr. Long said earlier that five percent of cases are being tracked to a specific gathering or event. So I know you only have that information for a minority of cases, but can we get some examples of what are these gatherings and events that cases are being tracked to?

Mayor: Yeah, and I'll start as the layman here and say that, remember until very recently, thank God we had a very low number of daily cases. So what we've seen over the months is sometimes that's just a family gathering, even, you know, 10 people get together, 15 people get together and that can actually spread the disease among family, and we have to understand that this is the cumulative effect, when you have a city of eight million people, a lot of very small gatherings can be the problem. We are always watching to see if any of the bigger ones, particularly the indoor ones have sparked more of a problem, but let me have Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Long speak to that.

Commissioner Chokshi: The way the Mayor described it is right. You know, one of the things that we can say is that when we do the contact tracing that Dr. Long will speak about in more detail we can understand the patterns of transmission. So I can give you a concrete example. Let's say there is a small social gathering, one of the things that we are discouraging actively right now. But let's say there was that small social gathering where someone was infected with the virus, but didn't know it. They develop symptoms a couple of days later and they got tested. And then at that point, understood that they were infected with the virus. That original gathering, those people who were there would have gone into other locations and because of that exposure, you know, had spread the virus to some others. This is something that we have seen happen in a way that actually leads to an increase in cases in a geographic area, just link back to that sequence of gatherings over time. So that's why it's important to follow this guidance and particularly to focus on gatherings indoors and mask use.

Mayor: Dr. Long, you want to add?

Executive Director Long: Yes, all the important points have been covered. I'll just emphasize that when we do contact tracing, we don't just look for a single close contact. We look for the setting or the type of place where you were where you were likely to receive the infection. That's why we look at things like workplaces, and we have granular detail on the type of workplaces. Anytime there's more than two case – two or more cases in a specific type of setting or workplace, we document that. We look at that and we intervene based on that. With your question about gatherings and events. The Mayor's example is actually right on. We do detect even small gatherings, we're able to clarify with our contact tracing interviews, what happened, who was there. And then we could reach out to other people, maybe other cases that we link it together. And then maybe additional contacts beyond that. So, our contact tracing scheme really enables us to look at the likely source of infection and take concrete action, ranging from bringing testing to different types of settings, to understanding what we need to change in our messaging. Like the fact that with the indoor transmission we're seeing now, it is more important than ever to wear a mask indoors. And we know that clearly from our data here. So that's the key message we see from all of our data in totality.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Nolan from the New York Post.

Question: Good morning, everyone. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes. How are you doing Nolan?

Question: I'm well, Mr. Mayor. You said at the top or reemphasized at the top the importance of everyone wearing a mask and everyone keeping six feet apart, as ways to stop or slow sort of the rate of infection across the city. On Saturday we saw a lot of celebrations. The celebrations included a lot of people in masks, but very few people keeping six feet apart. Are you guys worried that all the celebration Saturday and Sunday could fuel this increase in cases?

Mayor: We're always looking at that and any other situation like it, Nolan. I would say overwhelming – I had this conversation with the doctors this morning. The huge difference between outdoors with a mask versus indoors without a mask. This is really what we're seeing decisively. Those outdoor gatherings, always something to keep an eye on, but if people have a mask on and they're outdoors, we haven't seen too much ill come of that. Increasingly the concern is more and more people indoors, fewer and fewer people indoors wearing – or not fewer and fewer, but not enough let's say, wearing a mask, that's overwhelmingly where our concern is.

Question: And the appearances of a double standard. This concern has been raised a lot over the summertime. I was raised again by lawmakers in Southern Brooklyn where the enforcement actions continued against businesses. Whereas there didn't seem to be much in the way of social distancing enforcement for the outdoor gatherings after the election. What do you say to them?

Mayor: Again, we are seeing a profound difference when people are indoors. We're seeing a profound difference when people don't wear a mask. I think everyone needs to be careful all the time. And particularly Nolan, if these numbers we are reporting today, continue to grow, then people are going to have to get used to the more and more restrictions. And going back to some of the ways we had to live in the spring. But I want to emphasize the biggest concern right now, whether it's in a store or a business or a home is when people are indoors. And the biggest concern particularly is when people don't have a mask on. We did not know in the beginning, back in March, April, the scientific community didn't know what incredibly crucial role masks would play. Now we do. So that's where we're going to win or lose this game. If we are really focused on people, keeping those masks on and particularly being careful indoors.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First is Fred from WNYC.

Question: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I know you addressed this partially, but in terms of what sort of triggers we might say – we can't lay out a timeline but you said two percent will trigger reconsideration. We've blown well past the 550 rolling average. So, are we setting new trigger levels? Or are we doing away completely with trigger thresholds at a city level and focusing them more exclusively on the kind of micro cluster neighborhood level? Can you talk about that schedule?

Mayor: Yeah, Fred. Thank you for the question. I actually answered this last week. I think it was on Thursday, but I'm happy to do it again. The three indicators really tell us so much. We have one where, unfortunately, in the last couple of weeks, we've gone by it now, gone by it a lot. That's the cases. We have another one, hospitalizations that actually have remained again,

reasonably low, but still worrisome. You know, well below the 200, positivity rate low, well below where it was in the spring among those patients. But still worrisome. And then we have the citywide positivity rate, which really has moved in the wrong direction the last few days. I said last week, three percent is obviously a key, key indicator. That's what we've put forward as the indicator to watch in terms of our school system. So what I would say, will unfortunately indicate if we're in a full-blown second wave would be if those case numbers remain high, if the positivity level goes above three percent on a sustained basis. And if the number of hospitalizations goes up around or beyond that 200 patient-a-day threshold. That would clearly define to me that we are in the second wave. Go ahead.

Question: Can we just flesh out a little more some of the enforcement efforts? For instance, you said you're going to get really serious about holiday enforcements. It's my understanding from people contact tracers, I've spoken – the travel, they're so overwhelmed with local cases making calls, they've more or less ceased doing the monitoring of the incoming travelers, which they had been doing. And also, on the restaurant enforcement, which is a different group, perhaps because of restaurant inspectors or, you know, come from a different place. But now that there are more and more of these out outdoor, semi-indoor, outdoor sidewalk places, I wonder if you could talk to how we are in terms of personnel and enforcing this? So, two different categories.

Mayor: Yeah. Fred, very important. So, on restaurants, obviously Health Department leads the way. That's going to be a continued focus. But I think your first point is a particularly one, the travel and quarantine. You're right, the Sheriff's Office played a really big role in the travel enforcement. They've had to do some other very important work in the last few weeks, but we're going to be shifting more of their energy back onto the travel enforcement, for sure. And quarantine enforcement is going to greatly intensify. This is something we've been talking to the State about as well, with the holiday travel. Again, we're praying people will really, really limit it this year or just not travel at all. But we're going to have to have much more vigorous enforcement in terms of travel and quarantine and clear consequences for folks who break quarantine. So that's something that between Sheriff's Office, Test and Trace, Health Department, we're going to be putting a lot of resources into that. And I think the message right now is people need to understand the quarantine has to be taken seriously. The State has given people a way to avoid it if they follow very specific rules. But otherwise we're going to hold people to the quarantine standard. And there'll be real penalties if they do not live up to that standard.

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to Yoav from The City.

Question: Hi everyone. You mentioned there's going to be a day of action on Staten Island tomorrow because of the increased positivity rates. I'm seeing about eight ZIP codes there that are above three percent. If you look at the Bronx, there are seven ZIP codes that are above three percent. What are you guys doing for the Bronx, as far as new actions?

Mayor: Yes, very, very fair. Let's give it quickly an overview. And then my colleagues can speak to some of the specifics. Yoav, a couple of things. One, we had Brooklyn and Queens really, really high numbers, much higher than what you're seeing on the chart today, by ZIP code, when we originally raised the concern, we saw even higher numbers than that. Really good

news story, that with a lot of work, a lot of community participation, a lot of help by community leaders, organizations, a lot of testing, that number has gone down in the vast majority of Brooklyn Queens neighborhoods that were affected. We are seeing still a few problems in Brooklyn and Queens. But nowhere near what we were seeing before. That's good. We're not seeing in a problem in Manhattan. That's good. We are seeing a bigger problem now in Staten Island. It has been growing. We're going to put a lot of resources into addressing that.

And then the Bronx, we see some ZIP codes, but I want to emphasize we differentiate a ZIP code, Yoav that went up to above three percent one day, but then goes down the next day. That's different than if you see a clear pattern over multiple days. So one of the things we're going to be very careful about is are we seeing a pattern? Are we seeing uneven results? Are we seeing enough testing data to be persuasive that we have a clear trend line? It's going to be clear on the Department of Health data when there's a sufficient amount of testing versus when there isn't. And I believe Dr. Choksi you said the numbers 260 tests per hundred thousand residents in a ZIP code is the way we are weighing that. So Dr. Choksi, with that preface why don't you start then Dr. Long on the ways we're going to go out to those neighborhoods in Staten Island first and foremost, and now parts of the Bronx as well to really try and turn the tide?

Commissioner Choksi: Thank you, sir. And you've covered a lot of the high points, but what I would say is that this is part and parcel of us using our data to drive action. Ultimately, you know, the data is our window into what's happening. But based on the data, we have to both motivate our fellow New Yorkers to take action, as well as provide resources at a local level to help people do the right thing with respect to interrupting the spread of the virus. So when we look at it, one very important point that the Mayor said is that we have to look at it with respect to patterns. Understanding sustained increases over time, which are more worrisome than fluctuations in data. And that is something that we have seen in Staten Island over the last few days, which has helped motivate the day of action. Beyond that, we also look at not just percent positivity, but numbers of cases and understanding how the case rates are changing over time as well. We combine that with data on hospitalizations to have the whole panoply of indicators that helps us figure out where we need to go and how intensive our response needs to be.

Mayor: Go ahead Dr. Long. You want to add?

Executive Director Long: Yes. I very much appreciate that question. One of the big points we want to drive home is the same thing that Dr. Choksi just said. We're guided by the data in terms of defining our actions. In Staten Island we're going out, getting people to get tested. Tomorrow we have ten sites that are new in Staten Island, including a large new rapid testing site opening at the ferry on Thursday. Looking back at what we've done so far in places like Sunset Parks, like Soundview when we brought in that level of testing, we were able to drive down the virus by two thirds. Same thing happened in the clusters in Brooklyn and Queens. We brought in 32 new sites into the clusters. 18 of those in the red zones alone. Queens has seen substantial improvement. So has Brooklyn. So, we ahead of now are already doing this in the Bronx. And you can see with the data that we're going to be putting out later today, exactly how we're guided in terms of what we do. In the Bronx we've 25 new testing sites, including a large, massive one at Edward L. Grant. And we're opening up more massive testing sites in the Bronx too guided by

the data that you're going to see. And that's one of the mainstays of how we're going to drive down the virus is by bringing testing to people.

Mayor: Go ahead Yoav.

Question: Thanks for that. On the school's issue and correct me if I'm wrong on this, but I think there's about 45 public schools in, I think they're in red zones that the Governor said on Friday could be opened. And you said you were going to take a look at it. What's the plan for those schools? Are you going to try to reopen them?

Mayor: Yeah, there's a first of all, just updating you on the numbers. It was 45 before the State changed the red zone maps. So, the red zone map has now greatly decreased. That's a really good thing. As you saw the State's most recent action late last week, a number of red zone areas of Brooklyn were taken out of red, went into yellow. A bunch of red – excuse me, a bunch of yellow zone areas in Brooklyn and Queens went out of yellow zone, went to green, all good. So now in the much smaller red zone area of Brooklyn, which is just a handful of ZIP codes, there are 22 schools, 22 public schools in the remaining red zone areas. Again, we're going to stand back, continue to hope that the progress in the red zones takes those areas out of the red zone altogether, at which point we'll reopen those schools. In the areas that have gone from red to yellow, those schools will open on Thursday. Wednesday is a holiday, obviously for Veterans Day, those schools will open on Thursday, the ones that are now in yellow zones in Brooklyn that had previously been in red zones. So that's about again, 20 plus schools that will be opening on Thursday.

Okay, everyone. Look, as we conclude today, I want to go back to something that Dr. Choksi said a really, really simple thought. I love nothing more than when a few words can remind us what we need to do, how we have to keep everyone safe, six feet and a mask. Five simple words, right? Six feet and a mask. That's what's going to make the difference here. So we're up against a real challenge. Every one of us is, we're showing you the numbers neighbor by neighbor – we're showing neighborhood by neighborhood. We're showing you City numbers. We're showing you the data. We're showing you the science, and we're telling you, there is a danger of a second wave hitting New York City. And we have to act immediately, immediately to turn this around. Everyone can be a part of it, every single New Yorker can be a part of it. And if you are fearful right now, if you're worried, I don't blame you at all. But I do remind you, you did this before. You overcame something horrendous, horrible, overwhelming before in March and April. Remember what we went through, but you overcame that. You did that. Because you put on those masks, you practiced the distancing, you made the changes and you fought back the disease. We did it before. We need to do it again right now. Thanks, everyone.

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