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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN'S THE SITUATION ROOM

Wolf Blitzer: We're following breaking news as the surge of new coronavirus cases, deaths, and hospitalizations sweep across the United States. Right now, we're joined by the Mayor of New York City Bill de Blasio. Mayor de Blasio, thank you so much for joining us. Big picture – New York City has seen a steady rise in cases. This fall, Dr. Fauci is warning we haven't yet seen the full brunt of Thanksgiving, could get worse after Christmas, New Years. How bad should New Yorkers – how bad should New Yorkers prepare for things to get in the coming few weeks?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Look, Wolf, I think we've got one more big battle ahead. I think we've got to get through December and January, and I think things are going to get a lot better after that, because we'll be past the holidays, because of the vaccine – the impact of the vaccine will be felt more and more with every passing week. Right now, we've seen a surge of cases. But you know what? New Yorkers are fighting back. We have a lot of folks wearing masks, a lot of folks getting tested, they're really answering the call. And, on top of that, today, you know, a great victory for this city and for the parents and kids of this city, getting our schools up and running again for our youngest kids. I was out in the Bronx today at an elementary school and seeing the kids and parents come back – they're ready to make it work and to do it in a way that keeps everyone safe. There's a lot of spirit in this city to fight through this last push and get to a better time ahead once the vaccine has really had a chance to do its work.

Blitzer: I want to talk about the kids going back to school – almost 200,000 went back to school today out of 1.1 million in your school district. But let's talk a little bit about what Governor Cuomo said, he said New York State will have to suspend indoor dining in five days if hospitalizations don't stabilize. Will that really be enough to get the current surge under control? I ask the question, Mayor, because California, as you know, is now enacting much broader stay-at-home orders.

Mayor: Wolf, look, it's an important step and we all hope it doesn't have to happen. You know, we're talking about 100,000 or more people whose livelihoods depend on the dining industry. And, of course, we're still going to have takeout delivery. We still have outdoor dining. We've made that permanent and safe. But indoor dining matters to a lot of people, so no one is looking forward to this, but I think it is likely given the surge in cases. It will help us to fight back this upswing. Look, every option has to be on the table. Again, I think this is the last big battle in New York City against the coronavirus. And if we have to use restrictions, we will. But the most important thing is that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, because, literally, next week, the first shipments of vaccine are arriving and that's going to change the whole reality in our favor.

Blitzer: I want to get to that in a moment also, but getting back to the schools that reopened up for the kids up to fifth grade today for classroom learning – why are you so optimistic, Mayor, that schools won't necessarily have to close down again as we face what you yourself acknowledged will be a really bad surge in December and January?

Mayor: Wolf, we've proven that our schools are safe over months. The biggest school system in the country, the place that had been the epicenter of the coronavirus crisis – we layered every conceivable health and safety measure one on top of each other. We found it worked – very, very few kids or staff members tested positive over these last few months. In fact, our health leaders say there's no place safer to be in New York City than in one of our public schools. So, we said, look, we've got to bring them back, strengthen them further. Weekly testing now, Wolf – the obligation is every school must test its students and staff every single week. We're making that happen and we're convinced we can make them safe. And, I'll tell you, parents are voting with their feet. This morning in the South Bronx, there was no hesitation. They wanted their kids in school. I asked one fourth grader, her name is Martha. I said, why do you want to be back in school? She said, because I learned better in school. I mean, that just said it all –

Blitzer: It goes without saying.

Mayor: Kids want to be back. Parents want to be back. And we know can keep them safe.

Blitzer: Kids clearly should be in a classroom – they definitely do learn better that way. As far as the vaccine, Mayor, while I have you, the Pfizer vaccine could get emergency use authorization by the end of this week. How many of New York City's health care workers and nursing home residents do you expect to be covered in the initial shipments of the vaccine? How many of them will get both doses that they need?

Mayor: Look, Wolf, we're working with the federal government and the State government to really fine tune, but you're exactly in the ballpark there. We're going to focus on the highest-risk health care providers, frontline health care workers, and our nursing home residents, and staff. That's where the priority has to begin to begin with. And, of course, in a vaccine that requires two doses with time in between, that's a logistical challenge we're going to have to meet. But, certainly, when you're talking about, you know, hundreds of thousands of doses coming in, in each shipment, we've got the potential here in a matter of weeks to reach the highest vulnerability of health care workers and all of our nursing home residents and staff. That's something we literally are going to be able to do in the course of December, going into January, cover all of that and keep going with more health care workers, first responders, and into, you know, a very important group of people, folks over 65, folks with preexisting health conditions who are the most vulnerable. Now, here's the key, Wolf, as we do more and more of that, the pool of folks who might be vulnerable to the virus shrinks. You're also talking about a city where probably at least 3 million people have been exposed to the virus already and are unlikely to get it again in the short term and unlikely to feel any negative effect from it. With every passing week, the possibility of the virus expanding outward is ending as you go into January, as you go into February. That's why I'm saying, I think it's the last big battle against the coronavirus in New York City, because we're going to limit where this virus can go and turn this city around.

Blitzer: Let's hope, indeed. Mayor de Blasio, good luck to you. Good luck to everyone in New York. Thanks for joining us.

Mayor: Thank you, Wolf.

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