

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good afternoon, everyone. We are holding a special press conference because we have really good news. And I'm pleased to say the good news is from Washington, D. C., something I haven't been able to say for quite a while, but I can say it now. New guidance from the CDC related to our schools and our classrooms is going to really help us to reach more kids, get them back into school where they can continue to learn and where we can help them deal with all the challenges they've dealt with this year and last year through the coronavirus. Look, we've talked over months now about bringing back this city about a recovery for all of us. A recovery for all of us hinges on bringing back our schools. There's nothing more important than bringing back the schools in New York City as fully as possible, getting as many kids in education now, and of course, looking ahead to September.

Now, right now, we're pleased to say where a lot of other school systems in the country, a lot of the cities, didn't even try to open their schools, New York City public schools came back and have stayed back. And they've done the work of reaching kids in the classroom where they can learn the best where loving caring professionals are there for them and attending to their academic needs and their mental health needs. We now have an opportunity to go farther. Now, the reason we were able to come back with our schools and keep them back is the gold standard of health and safety measures we put into place. And they have worked in an extraordinary fashion and we're going to keep them in place. But we have new developments that add to our success. The millions of New Yorkers who have now been vaccinated, over three million vaccinations so far, more coming every day, more supply coming, as we heard today, from the Biden administration.

So, that's a big piece of the equation working in our favor. But now we have the good news from the CDC, changing the standards while keeping everyone safe. So, the CDC has evaluated the evidence and has decided that the distance between children in our public-school classrooms can go from six feet to three feet. This obviously opens up a world of possibilities for bringing kids back. So, today I'm announcing there will be a new opt-in period for our public schools, a new opportunity for kids to start coming back to our public schools who are not attending in-person now. Now we're going to be doing this in different pieces as we did, when we opened schools originally. The first focus will be on kids in 3-K, pre-K, elementary school, and kids who are in elementary grades in special education D75 programs. The guidance from the CDC treats the younger grades differently than the older grades. So, we are confident that we'll be able, in the course of April, to bring back the younger students through an opt-in.

A lot of details to work out, and I'm going to emphasize this, and I know the Chancellor will as well, this is breaking news. This is a brand-new standard. We have a lot to work out. We are going to work with educators, work with principals and teachers work with the unions, work with health care experts to determine the best way to implement all this. But what we can say is, it is time for an opt-in period, and that will begin next week. The details will be announced on Monday. And what we can say is for parents of kids in the younger grades, we are confident that we'll be able to bring back a substantial number of students by the end of April. Now we have more questions we have to resolve in terms of middle and high school students. And we're going to work closely with the CDC and all of our stakeholders to resolve those issues. But we will also include middle and high school students in the opt-in period so we have a sense of how many parents, how many kids want to come back, and that will give us the information we need for when we're actually able to take the next step.

So again, next week, an opt-in period will begin. Our goal as always is to have as many kids in school as we can do appropriately, safely, smartly, and as many kids in five-day-a-week instruction as possible. A lot to work out, a lot of details to work through, but this is just good news because it opens the door to a lot more kids coming back. With that, someone who is just as excited, maybe even more, about this new breaking news from Washington, our Chancellor, Meisha Ross Porter.

Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And we are really excited to be turning the corner on this virus. It feels so good. You know, New York City since day one has been following the science and listening to the medical experts and we will continue to do that. We're going to continue to combine, with other measures, masks, proper hygiene, improved ventilation, comprehensive testing, and quick intervention by the situation room. Our schools are amongst the safest places to be. Our focus on health and safety will not change with the updated CDC guidance. We will continue to follow the science and keep a close eye on community transmission. And as a result of that and based on all that we've heard from so many of our families, we are excited to offer another opt-in window for all of our students next week. And we will be ready to offer in-person instruction under the three feet rule, beginning with our elementary school students, our pre-K and 3-K students, and our elementary District 75 students beginning in April. We'll have more information about the opt-in window in the coming days. Regardless, I know there will be many questions and we look forward to answering those questions about what this will mean for all of you.

For now, for our principals, I want you to know that this moment is going to give our students the best opportunity for success and the motivation for all of you, I know, will be when you see your students walking into your buildings. Being a principal for ten years, I understand that that changes a lot now. But we stand ready at the central office. You have the full support of the central office to troubleshoot any things that come up for you as we move towards this opening. For school staff, I want to continue to thank our school safety agents, our custodians, our kitchen staff, our nurses, our crossing guards who've been on the front lines through this whole thing, for our teachers, many of whom have been vaccinated or are well on their way to being vaccinated. We're still going to center health and safety in every single decision that we make, we will never skip that. I also understand that each school's community is different, and we will be flexible

and take into account the specific needs of each school. We're going to work very closely with our labor partners, every step of the way.

For parents, I am a DOE parent. I'm excited by this news. And for those of you who feel ready and comfortable to send your children back to school buildings, we will have more information to share on how to do that in the coming days. But I promise you that we will keep all of our children safe. And finally, for our amazing students who I've had the opportunity to spend so much time with this week, this could mean an incredible opportunity for you to finish out the school year in person with your peers and teachers. And that's what I've heard from you as I've gone around the city. We know there will be questions about timing and logistics. We're excited about this op-in window next week for all students. We want to hear from everyone about what you want to do. One thing this year has taught us is that any time in the classroom is valuable, the most important time is spent between teachers and students in classrooms, and nothing can replace that. And we have a third of the school year left. So, the DOE is going to do what we have always done during the pandemic, act in the best interest of our school communities, keeping health and safety at the frontline always, and centering our children as our priority in this moment.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chancellor. I love your energy as always. I can see your excitement on your face. Listen, everyone, I want to just add something. The Chancellor thanked our educators, our principals, our teachers, our guidance counselors, our crossing guards, our cafeteria workers, everyone, food service workers, school safety, everyone in the school building. This has been a really beautiful and heroic effort by educators and school staff to be there for our kids. And I know people will rise to the occasion again, because this is what they have devoted their lives to, supporting our kids and, boy, if there was ever a time our kids needed the help, it's now. And every single child can get back in the classroom, that's going to help them move forward and get past the pain of this pandemic and to a better future.

Now, let's just give a couple of quick other updates as we normally would do. First of all, number of vaccinations, just want to give you an update, since day one in New York City, 3,139,592 vaccinations from day one. And that pace is picking up and we're hearing good news about more vaccine coming. We can really make this number go higher and higher every day with additional supply. So, that is looking real good. Let me go over today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for COVID-19, today's report, 215 patients, confirmed positivity levels, 33.92 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.61 per 100,000. And number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report, 2,115 cases. Number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.6 percent. Want to say a few words in Spanish about the new CDC guidelines

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Good afternoon all, we'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today, Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, and Senior Advisor. Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Jen from the AP.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Hey, Jen, how you been?

Question: Okay. I wanted to ask, given that I think it's still quite a minority of parents who have opted in at the moment, to what extent do you think the limiting factor has been the six-foot distance, as opposed to people's own reservations about sending their kid. In other words, how much do you think this is going to bring people back?

Mayor: Jen, great question, and obviously on one level, it's the reason we need this opt-in period to find out where parents are at and kids are at now. I would say a couple of things – and I'd like to hear what the Chancellor thinks – I think there are more and more parents who want their kids back in school. They have seen real progress in the fight against COVID, again over three million vaccinations in New York City. We see real improvement in the health care numbers. And a lot of time has passed where kids have not been with educators and with their peers. And so, I think you're going to see a lot of parents who want to take advantage of this opportunity. But I think there's also going to be a substantial percentage who are just like, we're not ready and we're going to wait until the next school year. We don't know that number, but one thing I'd say for sure, I think a lot of parents have been clamoring for this opportunity. I think it will be a great relief to a lot of parents to know that there's a chance now to get their kids back in school. Chancellor.

Chancellor Porter: Yeah, I agree. I mean, every day I hear from parents about opening the opt-in window and getting their children back in school, but we also know that it has to be our parents' decisions that they make for their children. It's one that I'm making for my own child. And what I said in my remarks is we want to know parents who feel ready and are comfortable. And so, we want to open that window, so we see where our families are.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Jen.

Question: Thanks. The second question is about the policies for closing schools when cases arise. I know this gets asked about a lot, but in this context, I definitely have talked to some parents who kept their kids home because they felt, like, the yo-yo effect of classrooms closing down, schools closing down, in and out, it would just be too confusing. But do you have changes in mind to – that policy to try to keep the schools open more?

Mayor: Jen, we're evaluating that. We'll have more to say on that soon. We're obviously looking at now in light of this new CDC guidance as well, but I do think it's interesting to note that we're seeing overall improvement in this city. We're seeing, you know, a not perfect reality yet with health care and with the overall health situation, but we're definitely seeing improvement. And I think we're winning that race against the variants because so many people are getting vaccinated. So, my hope here, Jen, is that as more and more New Yorkers get vaccinated, our goal is five

million adult New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June, that we're going to see the spread reduced just because there's so many vaccinated people, there's nowhere for the disease to go. That's obviously going to have a big impact on how often a school needs to close. So, I am real hopeful that the numbers are going to start improving and that parents who have that concern are going to have less reason for that concern. I also would say to any parent, even though we're all – you know, we all struggle with everything with COVID, anytime your child's in school it's helping them. You know, even in an imperfect schedule, it's helping your child move forward. Kids need to be around their peers. They need to be around educators. They need to be around folks who can help them with guidance. I want to make it the most days possible for the most kids, but I know for sure that any amount of time in school helps. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Jillian from NY1.

Question: Hi Mayor. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes Jillian. How are you doing?

Question: I'm well, thanks. And it was nice to see the Chancellor this morning in my beautiful native borough of Staten Island for a school visit. My first question is regarding how many days a week students will be in class after another opt-in? Because as you know, some schools are more crowded than others. Some schools have had more children opt-in than others. So, while some schools have five days a week, others have two days a week, or three days a week. Are you anticipating that in some schools with more students opting-in, those students may be able to attend fewer days of the week, even with the reduced capacity guidelines for elementary schools?

Mayor: So, I'll turn to the Chancellor, but let me just say this, Jillian. Anyone who is on a schedule now, any kid we want to make sure their schedule is as good as it is now or better going forward. So, I certainly want to make sure parents know even as we're trying to give an opportunity for more kids to come in, we want to protect the schedules that kids already in, have. And a lot of kids are getting five day a week instruction now. And that's what we want. That's our goal, as many places as we can. We've got a lot of classrooms where a teacher has very few kids. There's clearly room for more. And you know, it's going to allow us to have more kids and be at five-day. But I will emphasize it will be different school by school. This is one of the real challenging things we have to work out in the coming weeks. Every school is different. We do not have a one size fits all. And we've got to work out what it's going to mean school by school. But the goal is the maximum number of kids back in school, starting with the elementary level again, 3K, pre-K, elementary, and District 75, for the elementary level, maximum number kids back in school, maximum number of kids five days a week wherever possible chances.
Chancellor?

Chancellor Porter: I agree with the Mayor. We want to keep to the current commitment that we've made to families. But we definitely understand that this is going to be a school by school, case by case basis. And we're going to work really closely with our schools to ensure that they can keep to the current commitment and welcome more students back in.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead Jillian.

Question: And then my second question, on grades six and up, I know the CDC guidance is different there. It requires a lower level of transmission in a community before reducing to three feet. What's your sort of sense of your timeline for middle schools? Is there, you know, does it have to do with community spread that gets you to a point where you can bring middle schools and high schools to the three-foot rule? Or you know, are there some other things that you're looking into, like barriers? I know all of this is sort of laid out in some of the CDC guidelines with plexiglass, things like that. What is sort of the game plan for students in six and higher?

Mayor: Yeah, Jillian, there's more work to do as the first answer, the honest answer. So again, we're going to invite parents starting next week to apply to opt-in for middle school and high school kids, but we're not going to be able to tell them how and when that will be activated. We want to find out how much interest there is for sure. We want to work with the CDC to understand the standards better. We want to work with all the stakeholders. But we acknowledge there's more work to do on those levels. But clearly if our overall health situation continues to improve, that's going to be one of the difference makers here. So, we'll start down that road and then we'll inform parents as we get more progress and more information of how it will shape up going forward.

Moderator: This is Mac from WCBS Radio.

Question: Hey Mayor. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah. How are you doing?

Question: Good. Thanks for taking my questions. So, you mentioned prioritizing certain age groups. Will there be any kind of priority within those age groups on special education students and others with learning disabilities?

Mayor: When, look, first of all, we definitely want to make sure that District 75, special ed kids in the elementary school level, have a full opportunity to opt-in here. Again, I think we're going to see a lot of parents want to come back, have their kids back, and we're going to see some who are not yet ready. But we definitely want to accommodate special ed kids. I think one of the things we've said from the beginning is perhaps the kids who have suffered the most for the lack of in-person instruction have been special education kids. We really want to be there for them. And we want to be there for their parents. Their parents had gone through a lot of challenges. I think this'll be a relief. But the good news is we – look, we have space in many cases, you know relatively few kids in the classroom. We have space, we have new standards here. I think it's going to open up a real opportunity for a lot of families. And then we'll judge by the actual numbers, you know, how to make it work and how to make the adjustments. Go ahead.

Question: And what does this mean as far as the fall? Is this kind of a, do you see this as a ramp up to what the fall could look like? Is it a blueprint in your mind?

Mayor: I think it's a great step towards the fall. I'll turn to the Chancellor, but I'll say, you know, we are really confident about the fall right now. Lot of work to do. Again, our goal was that every single child who wants to be back in-person in the fall is accommodated. But this is going to help us take those steps. Every time you actually are doing something, it's the best way, how to, figure out how to do the next thing. So, I think this does help speed our efforts towards the fall. Chancellor?

Chancellor Porter: Yes. I absolutely agree. I think this is, you know, I have been talking all over the city about the summer being our spring point to fall. But this is really going to be our spring point, springboard to fall. And so, you know, I think this is going to give families a lot of information about what we're ready to do. And I think it's going to raise the confidence level, levels of families across the city. And so definitely looking forward to what this opportunity offers us as we prepare for the fall.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Reema from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, Chancellor Porter. How are you guys doing today?

Mayor: We're having a good day Reema. How are you doing?

Question: Good. I'm doing well. It's Friday. So, Fridays are always good. I just wanted to follow up a little bit on Jillian's question. I've spoken to some principals who want to accept more students and are discouraged when they have to turn them away. But they're concerned about maintaining the schedules that they worked very hard to put together after so many previous changes. And so, you seem to address this? But I just wanted to follow up on, if principals do have to change schedules, will they be allowed to turn parents away if they don't have the room or staffing, or if they're in a position where they have, you know, they might have to change those schedules again? And within that, if they can turn students away, how will those kids be, how will they be prioritized in terms of who gets a spot and who may not immediately get those spots?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll start and I'll turn to the Chancellor. Reema, I don't think we start with the assumption of turning kids away. We start with the assumption that kids who now have a certain schedule should have it maintained. We don't want to take away, we want to be additive. Because I mean, you, I know you've been in schools, you've seen a lot of classrooms where, you know, it's a teacher with just a handful of kids, not even the capacity. You know, I obviously went to a lot of classrooms before we started school and since, where eight, nine, 10, 11 kids is the maximum. We've got a lot of classrooms where we're not even close to that. Clearly, you go to a three-foot rule, you can accommodate a lot more kids safely. So, I'm working from the assumption that we keep the current schedules for the kids who are already in school. We add in more kids giving them the maximum days we can. And then I think we can guarantee that there'll still be a substantial number of parents who are not yet ready. And I think we can hit the balance point with all those factors. Some schools, honestly, it's going to be easier than others. But we feel pretty good about hitting that balance point. Chancellor?

Chancellor Porter: Yeah. You know, in the Bronx, we started five days a week before we would ask, because we saw this space and opportunity to do it. Three feet gives us a whole new option and opens up new doors. And so, we want to start from the vantage point of how do we get more students in? How do we honor those current schedules? And we are absolutely going to work with principals, work with schools, because we know that every school has a different case and it's a different situation. And so, we're not pushing out an agenda. We're going to really work collaboratively with schools to figure out how to meet the needs of our families.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Reema.

Question: Yeah. So, my second question is the UFT right before your press conference, or I think maybe a couple of hours ago, they reached out to their members and Michael Mulgrew wrote that they've seen the new guidance and they want to talk to their independent medical experts first, before really signing on to any changes. And so, I'm wondering what sort of conversations have you had with the union? And I mean, right now it seems that they're technically not exactly on board? And so, I'm just wondering, like, what have your conversations been with them? And what's your understanding of where they stand on the change here?

Mayor: I won't speak for them. I'll just say that my team and I have had several conversations today already with the union leaders to begin the process of determining how to make this work together. We think we can work this out. We really do. Look, the CDC under President Biden – I will not comment on some of the challenges in the previous administration, but now we have the presidential leadership we have in yearning for. We have the national medical leadership that we can believe in. When the CDC says this is safe to do, I believe them, period. They are the health care experts for this nation. And we will then take that guidance and put it into action. Our health care team, which has done an exceptional job in this crisis, will work with the federal government. And we'll all work together with all the stakeholders in our school system to make it work. And I start with a very optimistic view here. The bottom line is kids need to be in school. Let's be clear as a bell about the goal. Kids need to be in school. If they're not in school, they are suffering. Our job is to help children. Our job is to help families. We have to move this whole city forward. And this is how we do it. And we can do it safely. We have proven that time and time again, we can do it safely. And I think this guidance shows us how. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Aundrea, from WCBS.

Question: Hi. Good afternoon. Following up on that question, in addition to the unions, how about the principals? What types of conversations have you all had with the principals prior to this announcement today? And how they can make this work?

Mayor: Well, I'll turn to the Chancellor and only say those conversations are about to begin in earnest. We wanted the parents of this city to know that an opt-in period is coming. This is such important news for thousands and thousands of New York City families. But there's a lot to work out with the principals. And obviously the Chancellor will lead the way in that discussion as a former principal herself. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Porter: Yeah. You know, we – our responsibility is to act on the guidance from the CDC and we've been – everyone's been hearing this coming for days. And so, our responsibility is to get information out and to act on it. And we will absolutely be meeting with principals and engaging with all of our union partners along the way to make this happen successfully.

Mayor: Go ahead, Aundrea.

Question: And the second question is about vaccinations. Where does that stand with school staff? Not just teachers, but you know, everybody who's in the school. So, where does that stand?

Mayor: I'll start. And between the Chancellor, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, if anyone knows more on the details, please share. The update I got earlier today, Aundrea, is now over 40,000 educators, which means members of UFT and CSA. Over 40,000 educators have been vaccinated, but that number is, we all think, low. Meaning, we think there are many other educators who are vaccinated, it just hasn't been reported in yet because they went to, you know, a vaccination site in their community where they live, as opposed to going through one of the union sites or other ways that we would hear about it. So, it's a really substantial number. I think it's going to grow a lot in the coming weeks. As for school staff, we've also been obviously focused on all school staff getting vaccinated. They're all essential workers and we want as many vaccinated as possible. So, Chancellor, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, does anyone have any numbers on non-educator school staff? Okay. Aundrea, we owe you that answer because we've got the educator side, but we'll get you the information on the other group as well.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Mike from the Daily News. We have three more, I made an error.

Mayor: Go ahead. Who is it? Is it Michael?

Moderator: Michael from the Daily News.

Question: Hey, everyone.

Mayor: How are you doing?

Question: Good, thanks. So, my first question is just, you know, why you waited until now to offer the new opt-in period, because it seems like now you have two logistical challenges with all the new families that may be coming in, and the new spacing guidelines from the CDC, which changes, you know, how many kids you can fit in a class. So, might it have been easier to kind of take those things one by one and offer the new opt-in period earlier?

Mayor: No, I don't think so, honestly. What we've been talking about – we obviously know a lot of parents want their kids back, we would love to have done it. We just did not believe with the physical realities and the standards that were held, that we could accommodate them properly. And so, you know, now we have a chance to do this on a much bigger scale and to do it the right way. I understand your question, obviously, and there were some individual instances where it

might make sense, but you're talking about the whole school system. It is something we had to do for everyone. I think this is the first chance we've been able to say, now we know – we know by definition we'll have an opportunity to accommodate a lot more kids and do it safely. Go ahead, Mike.

Question: Thanks. And my second question for the health officials and, you know, particularly Dr. Varma. You just offered this – the study of spread in New York City schools that found very low transmission, but, you know, you acknowledge that it's not really clear which of the measures, you know, has been most effective. So, I wanted to see what's your evaluation of the strength of this evidence for the three-foot recommendation? Are you planning to kind of monitor, you know, how that's playing out in New York City and whether it does, you know, change the, the spread in the schools?

Mayor: Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah – no, thank you very much for the question. I think we should always start by acknowledging the fact that, you know, this virus has continued to surprise us over time and we've needed to continue to learn. And one of the reasons we implemented such strict control measures at the beginning of the year was we didn't really know what is the best way to prevent transmission in schools. And we have looked at all of the data that CDC is relying on, including the three different publications that came out today [inaudible] MWR. And we are pleased to see that, in fact, the data is emerging that you can have in-classroom, in-person instruction where the distance requirement does not need to be as large as it has been in the past. And so, we are optimistic that we can make this change. Now, of course, the other advantage to our program is the fact that we do so much testing. We have a weekly testing program that provides incredible amounts of data, more than you could get from any school system in the country, to help us evaluate the effectiveness of those measures. And because we have that, and we have a highly effective situation room that's run by, you know, the DOE and the Department of Buildings Commissioner, and all of the health staff, I really do feel strongly that when we make this change, we're going to be able to evaluate it and we do anticipate that our safety measures will continue to be as effective as they have been.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi, do you want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. I'll just add briefly, Dr. Varma explained it very well. But the piece to add here is that what you have heard from us from the very beginning is that the rigor of our health and safety standards derives from the fact that they are – there are multiple layers to those safety standards. And that's the same thing that you see as the underpinning to the CDC guidelines that came out today, along with the fact that they sit atop of foundation of science, which has been the other constant in our approach. But with respect to those layers, you know, there's a lot of focus on the distancing aspect of it – three feet versus six feet – but that is in the context of masking, hand washing, testing ventilation, all of the other things that we have put in place to ensure health and safety in schools.

Mayor: Dave, we call that the gold standard – and it has been. It really is amazing how many different pieces were put together here and they will continue. Go ahead.

Moderator: Now, we actually have time for two more. First, we'll go to Mark Morales from CNN.

Question: Hey there, everybody. How are you doing today?

Mayor: Good, Mark. How have you been?

Question: Doing good. I wanted to switch gears a little bit, I wanted to ask you about that New Yorker article that came out last night. There was a section in that interview that mentioned Governor Cuomo having a dartboard with your picture on it. And I just wanted to see if you had any reaction to that?

Mayor: Well, I'll tell you the first thing I thought – you know, we know that Governor Cuomo, like Donald Trump has been obsessed with the size of his hands. So, I thought with those big, big hands, how could he possibly hold those tiny, tiny darts? It must have been very difficult. No, look, it's juvenile. I mean, it's just, like, frat house humor. It's not something you would like to see from someone who has, like, serious leadership responsibilities. But it is what it is, Mark. Go ahead.

Question: Yeah. And I just wanted to see if you had any other, like – you know, could you expand on any sort of personal experiences you have dealing with the Governor in light of everything that's been coming out, anything specific?

Mayor: Nothing – I'm not going to add anything specific I haven't said already, but I just think that we see this consistent pattern and what it really needs to be understood as, as something that has an impact on the lives of millions of New Yorkers. The decisions made around the nursing homes and the coverup of the truth, that affected people's lives. People's lives were lost. You know, families have lost a loved one, let alone what was done to people who were working in public service. And these women who have come forward, I admire them and we should respect them – you know, were put through hell and mistreated and are now speaking up. And then, what happened? A taxpayer funded effort by the Governor's Office to try and smear the women who were acting as whistleblowers. I mean, that's against the public interest. So, that's what I've seen playing out now, but it's all behavior we've seen different versions of before that's just gotten worse and worse.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. I'd like to ask a question to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi. There was a discussion a few months ago – we haven't heard about it much lately – of reinfection cases in the city. And I'm wondering if you have the numbers of how many cases – COVID cases in the city are reinfection cases and if any of those people that were reinfected actually had the presence of antibodies or a recent positive antibody test when they got reinfected?

Mayor: All right. Which doctor wants to go first?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, I can start on this. This is Dr. Chokshi. And thank you, Reuvain, for this important question. It is something that we have been continuing to monitor with respect to the evidence-based around reinfection from around the world, as well as more specifically here in New York City. What we can tell you from, you know, from both sets of data is that reinfection remains a rare occurrence, meaning that people who have had COVID-19 do have a good protection against subsequent infection, but that it can occur. You know, there are cases where it has occurred. In New York City, this is something that, you know, we continue to analyze, particularly in the context of the new variants. So, I don't have specific numbers for you at the moment, but it is something that our team continues to investigate.

Mayor: Dr. Varma, do you want to add?

Senior Advisor Varma: Nothing else for me.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Reuvain.

Question: I want to follow up – I know Dr. Chokshi said, we don't have an exact number. I'm wondering, generally, is it dozens? Is it hundreds? Or thousands? But also, I'm asking because I – actually someone just told me the other night that he had a COVID four months ago – the CDC says you can delay the vaccine up to three months after COVID – he had it four months ago, but he just got a positive antibody test this week. So, should I – he says, should I take the vaccine or not when my turn comes, if the turn comes, you know, very soon.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes. In those cases, you know, my answer is a very clear yes, you should get vaccinated provided that you have recovered from COVID-19, you're out of your isolation period, you know, you no longer have symptoms. We do encourage, particularly here in New York City, where we have had, you know, quite a number of people who have been previously infected with COVID-19, we want you to get vaccinated as well. I'll use my own example. You know, I had COVID-19 recently myself and I was vaccinated just a few days ago. And the reason for that is that we do believe that the vaccine confers additional immunity, particularly with respect to the duration of immunity beyond what you get from infection. So, these are all things where the science is still evolving. But the clear recommendation is that people who have had COVID-19 in the past, once you have recovered, we do recommend that you get vaccinated.

Mayor: And Dr. Chokshi, on the question of the amount of reinfection we've seen, to Reuvain's question, you know, put some kind of numerical value to it. From all of our conversations, I think it's been pretty strikingly low, but do you have any kind of numerical range?

Commissioner Chokshi: You're right, sir. It is to the lower end of the range that Reuvain set out – you know, in the dozens, to, perhaps, you know, slightly more than that over the entire duration for New York City. But this is something that we are actively investigating to get some more precision around.

Mayor: Thank you very much. All right, everyone, as we conclude today, just really emphasizing the good news that we know we're going to be able to bring more kids back into our classrooms. And I want you to think what this means for our kids and our families. So, many children who have wanted to be in school, couldn't. So many parents who wanted to get their kids back, it wasn't possible. The hope that this is going to bring to families, the chance to really benefit from being in school with teachers, with adults who are really looking out for them, helping them, with their friends again – it's amazing. This is really crucial to how we recover for everyone, because, step-by-step, we're bringing back the life of the city. And this is one of the pieces that really is the lifeblood of the city. Our public schools are one of the things that makes New York City great. And this is a really important moment in terms of bringing them back fully, giving kids a chance to rebound from everything they've been through over the last year and getting them in the presence of people who just love our children, care for them, want to teach them, want to help them forward. This is going to be good for all of us. So, a good day for New York City. Thank you, everyone.

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