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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. We're going to, in a couple minutes, to have an update on our vaccination effort, including a live vaccination, thus my informal clothing today. But I want to first start with the topic I want to talk about all the time, which is recovery – a recovery for all of us. That means a recovery that's lasting, a recovery that reaches every neighborhood of this city, brings back the life of the city, the vibrancy, the jobs. And good news today, Google, a company that has had a long, positive history in New York City, plans to invest \$250 million more in New York City during the year 2021. Now, Google is an important, large company. Obviously, they've been here for over 20 years, and Google considers New York its second home. The commitment that they are making will continue to expand their presence here. So, they're going to continue to develop their Hudson Square campus – 11,000 jobs already in New York City, that's going to go up to 14,000 in the short term. So, 3,000 more jobs coming, and I expect that number is going to grow even further. So, thank you to everyone at Google for continuing to believe in New York City. And we're seeing this across the whole technology community. The tech community is doubling down on New York City. We've seen a number of firms step forward, make new investments, because they know how much talent is here in New York City, and that the future is bright, and this is the place they have to be. So, good news today, and a good sign of things to come.

All right now, a recovery for all of us means reaching people in every neighborhood. It means addressing the issues that have come out during the coronavirus crisis, addressing the disparities that have been so sharp. We've seen it in every area and some of the sharpest clearest examples have come into the area of health care. So, let's talk about mental health. This is a need that we've been working on in this administration for the last seven years intensely. And if there's any place where disparity is clear, it's in the area of mental health. For the African-American community, Latino community, Asian-American community, there is a distinct need for more mental health services and more providers who come from the community. And we have to find new ways to reach people at all times, because the pandemic has also proven to us that we have to be creative and flexible in getting mental health services to people in any way that works for them. The leader in this field in New York City has been our First Lady. She has pushed everyone across the City government to innovate, to expand mental health services, to find new ways to make them accessible, and to make them available and appropriate for all the communities of the city. So, here with an important new announcement, our First Lady Chirlane McCray.

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Bill. And good morning, everyone. Today's announcement is about connection, an essential need we feel as human beings. Our drive to connect with others is embedded deeply in our biology and our evolutionary history. It's why we

love our families and communities and take so much satisfaction out of belonging to a neighborhood. And it's why when we need it, we prefer to seek help from the people around us, the people who know us best. The truth is many of us don't have that support anymore. Maybe we came from another country or state and left our family behind, or maybe we just don't know our neighbors that way. But we still yearn for that connection in times of happiness and celebration, but especially in times of crisis.

This past year, our communities of color have needed that kind of support more than ever. They have seen more death, felt more grief, they've lost homes and jobs, they have been subjected to hate, harassment, and violence, and they have gone through it all while already being underserved in so many ways. Communities Thrive is about bringing the support people need closer to where they live, to a familiar setting. We will help 30 community-based organizations team up with Health + Hospitals, taking advantage of the massive tele-mental health support system Health + Hospitals has created over the past year. Health + Hospitals has already hosted more than 1 million tele-health sessions with New Yorkers, including 200,000 tele-mental health visits. That number is both remarkable and painful to imagine. Community-based organizations will be able to refer their clients directly into the Health + Hospitals program. In turn, these organizations will work with our Health + Hospital providers to make sure they're fully understanding of the communities they serve and providing culturally responsive care.

This is teamwork at its best. It means people of color will get the care and support they need from professionals who really understand what they're going through. A few months ago, I visited one of the Korean community services locations in Queens, and this is an organization that I've met with before. I have spoken with the doctors, nurses, and staff, and I am always impressed with the extraordinary number of volunteers who show up day after day to help take care of their own. They speak the language. They know the family histories. They have real relationships with parents and children. These community organizations are key to providing the kind of safe spaces where most of the most important conversations about mental health can begin without stigma. Now, with Communities Thrive, this is exactly what will happen. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chirlane. And when you talk about the need to overcome stigma – and this is something that you have led the way on, starting a very different conversation years ago in this city that brought the questions of mental health out in the open, in a way that really helped people to think differently and help people come forward and get the help they needed and not feel bad about it. This has been a huge, huge change in the city – a lot more to do, but I'll tell you what's so amazing, I've had people come up to me, even the last week – I have been in different locations all around the city, talking to folks about the vaccination effort and bringing back culture and all, and when people talk to me about mental health, which they often do, they say our community has a problem with the stigma that we need to overcome. But what's amazing is, the phrase – the sentence is the same, but the faces change. It's people of all different backgrounds, but each says my community has a problem we have to find a way to overcome. But it's all of us – it's a New York City problem, it's an American problem, it's a human problem. So, this effort to really engage people all over the city through tele-mental health is going to make a huge difference. Every person who experiences mental health services and has a successful experience, tells the next person, helps de-stigmatize, helps demystify, helps get people what they need.

Now, here to tell us about the impact this is going to have on his district in Queens – and I want to thank Council Member Peter Koo, because he has been outspoken, fighting for the people of his district – Flushing, and other communities in his district – and speaking up for their needs, including making sure that the support we provide is culturally appropriate, is in multiple languages, and reaches people in a way that they can feel. He's been a leader, including in the effort to make sure that mental health services are available to Asian-American communities and all communities. My pleasure to welcome, Council Member Peter Koo.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Council Member. Thank you for your good work and your advocacy for your community. And really think what you said is important, we've got to ensure that people get the service they need in the language they need it in, in a way that works for them. That's how we move forward. We cannot have mental health be something only for those who are privileged, because, let's face it, the American health care system has been based on how much income you have. We've been trying to break that down in so many ways with Thrive, with guaranteed health care, but this is another way of doing it, reaching to communities that have had fewer advantages, making mental health services available for them in an easy, free, way. We are really excited about this. So, thank you, Council Member for your support.

Okay. Another part of a recovery for all of us – so, what is New York City all about? New York City – there's so many wonderful ways you can define the city, but one of the things that's going to come to mind always is arts and culture. The incredible cultural life of this city, admired all over the nation, all over the world. People come from thousands of miles away just to experience the culture in New York City and we are blessed to have it right here in our backyard, and it's part of who we are. and it's definitely going to be part of our comeback. So, this week, the announcement – I was really pleased to be with folks from the public theater at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, as we announce Shakespeare in the Park, coming back. And so much more culture is coming back and is coming back quickly, because this is part of what's going to give us the hope and the energy for our comeback.

So, last month, we announced something to make it easy for cultural organizations and venues to participate in this big recovery of our cultural and artistic community. The Open Culture Program gives space to artists, to performers outdoors, on the streets, in the parks, everywhere where we can gather people safely to experience amazing performances and feel the energy coming back to this city. Tomorrow, the first three performances as part of our Open Culture Program – I'm really excited that these performances are about to happen. It's happening now, it's coming together, and I'm really excited that it's happening all over the city. So, tomorrow, at the ID Studio Theater in Mott Haven, in the Bronx, an event of remembrance, featuring drumming, spoken word, hip hop, and poetry by Bronx artists. And then, also tomorrow, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, [inaudible] the theater group that is providing a performance to share expressions of the loss that people have experienced, but also the resiliency and the determination to move forward. And, finally, in East Harlem, a venerable organization, El Museo Del Barrio, a beloved organization, the nation's leading Latino and Latin American visual arts museum – a performance tomorrow by an all-women drumming group, Fogul Azul, and more additional performances as well. These are the kinds of events are going to excite people, energize people, help us move forward. We have 156 events approved already and more coming. And any

organization that wants to apply, you can go to nyc.gov/openculture, and you can apply to be a part of this amazing, amazing effort.

Okay. Well, every day we talk about vaccine and the vaccination effort, so that time has come. Now, first, let me give you the overview. The overview today is a very good one. Again, we have passed 3 million vaccinations from day-one and the number is climbing rapidly. Today, as of this moment, we have had 3,077,584 vaccinations. And we'll add one more right now on the way to getting 5 million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. I am really confident about that goal, so long as we keep getting the supply. And, obviously, we're pushing hard for more and more supply all the time, but this goal, we're on track, and it's going to be a fundamental change for the city when 5 million adult New Yorkers are fully vaccinated.

Now, today, we're focusing on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. I've been talking about it. Dr. Chokshi has been talking about it. Dr. Katz, Dr. Varma, everyone saying the same thing – the Johnson & Johnson vaccine – the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is safe and effective. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is easier for our health care community to use, because it requires less refrigeration. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine takes only one dose and you're done. And I remember when I was up in Co-Op City a week or two ago, talking to residents there who were looking forward to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, because they wanted to do one-and-done. They were happy it was only one dose. And a bunch of people said to me, they know the brand name Johnson & Johnson, they're familiar with it, actually made them comforted. They knew the baby powder and so many other things, and they were comfortable with it. So, I want to quote Dr. Chokshi before he steps forward, because he had, I think, the quote of the year when he said in an answer to folks wondering about different vaccines and how and when to get vaccinated. He said, the best vaccine is the one you can get now. The best vaccine is the one you can get in your arm as quickly as possible to protect yourself and your family and your community.

So, let's do that right now. Dr. Chokshi?

Mayor: It's good that we're giving you practice here, so you remember how to do this.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Yes, indeed. All right, sir, just a little prick –

[Mayor de Blasio receives Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine]

Mayor: Okay. Doctor, you have to tell me when you're going to give me the shot, though.

[Laughter]

I mean, this is going on a long time. Just give me a warning when you're about to give me the shot, okay?

Commissioner Chokshi: We're all done, sir.

Mayor: Very good. All right.

[Applause]

Mayor: Thank you. Thank you, team.

Commissioner Chokshi: And just a little bandage for you.

Mayor: I'm going to get live commentary now. First of all, you're very good at that. You should be Health Commissioner.

[Laughter]

So, I'm, like, amazed. I've gotten flu shots, obviously – this, really, I could barely feel it. I'm not joking here, that was great. Well done.

Commissioner Chokshi: I forgot some of the most important parts, sir – your vaccination card.

Mayor: Okay. There it is. I'm official joining the 3 million now.

Commissioner Chokshi: And a pen.

Mayor: I thank you. I'll put it right here above my other symbol. So, that was easy. So, I want to tell everyone, that's really easy. I can now attest personally. For anyone, if you've had a flu shot or anything like that, it's really, really the same. It's just done – you feel it for a second, then it's over. And we will report on the next 24 hours. Very normal people to have a little bit of a reaction for the first 24 hours, as with a flu shot and other vaccines. But a great feeling when you know you've been vaccinated and you can protect your loved ones and your family and your whole community. So, thank you doctor. Well done.

And everyone, again, I have total faith in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, that's why it's now in my arm. I totally believe that this is a safe, effective way to protect ourselves and we need it, because we need the supply, and we need the ability to get people done with a single shot. So, this is what makes a huge difference for all of us.

Okay. Let's go to our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Okay, today's report, again, below that threshold. Now, again, we have a long way to go. We've got to see a much longer trend line, but this is good, 194 patients. Confirmed positivity rate, again, this varies a lot by day, but encouraging – 33.01 percent. Hospitalization rate – today, 3.7 per 100,000 – getting better. And then, on new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 2,592 cases. And percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.42 percent.

Okay. I'm going to say a few words in Spanish, and the topic is the topic of the day, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

[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: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by First Lady McCray, by Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, Thrive NYC Executive Director Susan Herman, the Director of Citywide Events Ellyn Canfield, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today, it goes to Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, everyone. And Mayor, hope your arm doesn't hurt too much after that shot. My question is my first question rather is, yesterday Governor Cuomo announced that indoor fitness classes, yoga, dance, and boutique fitness could resume in New York City next week. Was your Health Department notified in advance of that announcement? And if your health officials could weigh in on how it is that on Tuesday, they told us that those classes could not safely resume, that now we're told on Wednesday that they can safely resume?

Mayor: Well, Andrew, you are identifying a mystery that we all should focus on. The State of New York continues to make decisions without consulting the City of New York or our health experts or any locality. And this is why we need local control. It's just troubling to me that our health care team has said very clearly, this is not what they would have done. And the State just doesn't care. I put out a statement and said, we're going to do best to implement this rule safely because the State has the legal right to do it. But it's not what we would have done. And on top of it, I want to ask a question. Is this being done because of what the data and science is telling us, or is this being done for political reasons? Because it sure as hell looks like a lot of these decisions are being made by the Governor because of his political needs. So, that's my statement. As to the specific, were they consulted, what do they think of it? Let me turn to Dr. Chokshi and then Dr. Varma.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We were not consulted on this specific decision and as the Mayor has said this is an area where we've expressed concerns about the risk of spread of COVID-19, particularly because it's an activity that combines being indoors, being in groups, and not being able to easily and consistently wear masks that don't get wet. And for all of those reasons you know, we had expressed concerns about it. Now, as the Mayor has said as well, we will take all appropriate health and safety safeguards to reduce the risk when indoor fitness classes are allowed to resume on Monday.

Mayor: Yeah, and Dr. Varma if you'd speak to this too. Again, with the – you look at the national picture, the international picture. There's a reason we have not thought this made sense. Could you speak to that?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. Yeah. Just to reiterate to people, this is an important area where people need to be careful. We have seen data from outbreaks here in the United States, as well as internationally. Some of these very large outbreaks because of fitness class, of course can, can involve a large number of people in the same place together. And so, this is an area where people need to be extremely careful because we have very clear evidence of events around the country and around the world. So, we'd really advise people if they are going to participate in this activity since the State is now allowing it, to make sure they follow all the precautions that we've talked about, similar to indoor dining. Make sure you're getting tested regularly. Make sure you're adhering to all the precautions when you're there. Make sure everybody in the class and the facility itself is keeping with the precautions, particularly regarding distancing and making sure everybody adheres to masks. And then of

course, getting tested frequently because that's going to be important. And then finally, maybe keep a record of all the places you've been, because if you do test positive your contact tracers are going to want to know about it so they can notify the facility.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Doctor. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: But to be clear Mayor, and to the medical professionals, isn't what the State is saying is that these sites can open next week, but they don't have to? And do you not have the authority as Mayor or as Health Commissioner, if you have true medical and scientific concerns about this, to prevent them from opening?

Mayor: Look I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. Andrew, again the State of New York usurped local control, local power, took away the normal democratic process at the beginning of this crisis. It has not been restored. It's clear as a bell. Talk to if you want, we'll have our legal team talk to you about exactly why it is the way it is. But it's not right. This is a decision that should have either been made carefully in consultation with the health leadership in New York City, or should have been one where the State deferred to New York City where we are 43 percent of the state's population, we are eight and a half million people, give me a break. We would be a huge state unto ourselves. This is not something the State should have done without us. But legally they do have the right, whether I agree with it or not. Go ahead, Doctor.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes sir. What I would add is as the city's doctor is for people who are thinking about whether or not to participate in higher risk activities, please consider that carefully. We remain in a period where we shouldn't be throwing caution to the wind. You know, we still do have a risk of COVID-19 spread. And so, everyone can make the individual decisions. We've talked about the smart decisions that one can make to protect oneself from risk and participating in high-risk activities is part of that. And I would say that's particularly to be emphasized for anyone who is at risk of severe outcomes, if you're older or if you have an underlying health condition.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah. Good morning everyone. And congratulations, Mr. Mayor on getting vaccinated.

Mayor: And Shant, I want to give you extra credit for being an intrepid reporter. You were there at 6:30 in the morning yesterday. I was impressed.

Question: Yeah, thank you. I wouldn't have missed, very different vibe this year, of course. So, yeah, as far as the vaccination goes, Governor Cuomo got vaccinated yesterday in Harlem. You're getting vaccinated today. Did your decision to get the shot today, have anything to do with the Governor's decision yesterday?

Mayor: No, Shant. As soon as the new guidance came out for public facing public officials, I decided it was the right time. Obviously, I qualified and I really wanted to promote the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. And do it in a very visible way to make sure people know it's safe. I think it's

important for people to see I have total confidence in it, our Health Commissioner has total confidence in it. He got it too. And we want to spread that word. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah. And I also wanted to ask about the mental health initiative you and the First Lady just announced. I mean, if I understood Councilman Koo correctly, it was sort of tying that into the challenge of dealing with hate crimes. Just any thoughts in that vein? How much do you see the undertaking you launched today potentially addressing hate crimes? And just what the City's role is bringing mental health plans to the rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans?

Mayor: Thank you. It's a great question, Shant. I'll start and I'll turn to the First Lady. I think when people are dealing with stress, when they're dealing with fear and it's very legitimate fear, whether it's the pandemic or this horrible rise in hate against Asian American communities, that just exacerbates so many other challenges. And people need an outlet, they need somewhere to turn and it needs to be in a way that works for them. And I want the First Lady to talk about the importance of culturally appropriate mental health, because people are suffering right now. I've talked to so many people in Asian communities who are suffering right now and they're fearful. And that means they need more help and more ability to turn somewhere, but it's got to work for them. First Lady?

First Lady McCray: Yes. You said that very well. Unfortunately, the pandemic has increased the amount of isolation that so many people are in. And our communities of color don't necessarily have access to many of the support services that other communities do. They may not even have access to broadband. Now imagine what you would do without your phone or your computer and not be able to connect to a wider variety of services and people who could help you when you're going through a tough time? You know, the violence and the Asian American violence and the violence in other communities brings on tremendous stress, tremendous. I can't overemphasize it, in addition to everything else that is going on, food insecurity, fear of being evicted. There there's so many stresses. This is another way that people can connect to those who can provide ongoing care. And the wonderful thing about this is that it's going to be provided right in their community. They don't have to go somewhere else and deal with a lot of different people. You can go to someplace familiar, community-based organization, where perhaps they're already receiving services. And get connected to ongoing care. And somebody who understands their culture, speaks their language, knows the traditions. And that is – it's very helpful to have that to be able to cope and to move forward.

Mayor: Amen. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Jenna DeAngelis from WCBS.

Question: Hi, congratulations on getting your vaccine. I'm joining my colleagues and congratulating you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Jenna. How are you doing today?

Question: I'm good. I'm good. Thank you for asking. So, at a news conference, a police union said the City never asked them for input on NYPD reform. Has the City reached out to the unions for input? And if not, do you think the City should?

Mayor: That's just not accurate. There were over a hundred different types of meetings, public hearings, stakeholder sessions, as part of the reform effort over months and months. In fact, I've talked to the three leaders who joined the effort, Jennifer Jones-Austin, Wes Moore, Arva Rice about the fact that it was important. They thought it was important to include unions. And Arva talked to me about specific conversations she had with union members and union leaders about their concerns. So no, there was an open door for that dialogue. And I really want to credit everyone who was involved. They went far beyond any normal concept that we've seen before of input and really reached deeply into communities to get the best ideas, hear deep concerns that needed to be addressed. And they came out with an extraordinary set of reforms. Go ahead, Jenna.

Question: Thank you. And my second question, there are charges that Andrew Cuomo created a toxic work environment for young women in the Governor's office. What was it like when you worked for him at HUD? And when Karen Hinton was your press secretary, did you ever discuss what working with Andrew Cuomo was like?

Mayor: Long time ago, obviously at HUD. So, I don't think it's applicable – I think it's a very different situation than what we've seen reported. Now Karen and I talked many times about it, but I want to respect those private conversations. But I think we both – I won't speak for her, but I think we both came away very distressed with things we saw happening over the years. But I'll tell you what I'm seeing now, it's a worse version, a much worse version of what I used to see. And to see that after Lindsey Boylan came out with her experience, telling her truth, that the Cuomo team mounted an attack campaign against her. And I want to remind everyone, a systematic, taxpayer funded attack campaign against a woman who came forward to talk about the sexual harassment that she experienced by a public official. So, this is really cynical when a public official uses our money and his staff to attack someone who's a whistleblower. That's exactly what happened. So, that's even worse than anything – far worse than anything I saw in the past.

Moderator: The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio, congrats.

Mayor: Thank you. How are you doing today, Katie?

Question: I'm doing great. I'm doing great. My question for you is in regards to this increase in hate crimes or violent attacks against Asian Americans here in the city. And there was a story in the New York Times that said, very few of these incidents get charged as hate crimes. And that's actually been very frustrating for people in the community because they feel for, you know, for multiple reasons that these attacks are not being taken as seriously. I know Commissioner Shea this morning spoke a little bit about how these are also under reported. But can you talk a little bit about what you would like to see the police do or what the City can do collectively in, you know, perhaps if some of these are hate crimes but they're not getting charged as them, what the City can do and what you would like to see the NYPD do, if they can do more?

Mayor: Yes. I think we all can do more. And I think it is a reality we have to overcome that some people experience something horrible and don't know where to turn. Or aren't sure if they should report it. And my message to all New Yorkers and particularly to Asian American New

Yorkers at this point, is please report what you see. We need it. We need to know what's happening. We need to know if you've been treated wrongly. If you've been a victim of discrimination, if you have been a victim of a hate crime, if you've been a victim of violence based on who you are, we need to know about immediately. We need to know everything we can to find those who did it and bring them to justice. Because I'm a believer that we of course need the bigger efforts, the education, the outreach, but we also need consequences. So, I want to remind anyone who feels that they have witnessed or experienced any act of hate, go to nyc.gov/stopasianhate, really important to get those reports. There's also a lot of information in there about how to support the Asian American community. I think if we get more and more reporting, it will help us to stop – and to stop this and find the very few people who are doing it. I also think even if something is not a criminal case, a perpetrator being confronted by the City, whether it's NYPD or another agency, and being told that what they've done was very hurtful to another person and could if ever repeated, lead to criminal charges, that's another important piece of the puzzle. That's why we need these reports. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thanks. And I guess just to follow up on that, but I guess the concern and the upset coming from within the community is that so few of these are being actually tried as hate crimes. And that's what they don't understand. And that's what they are trying to, perhaps if it's an education issue – I don't know if you've spoken with Commissioner Shea about this? And I mean, what you said about, if it's something that's not a criminal case, how would the NYPD confront someone if it's not criminal? Would they have a conversation with them to say, Hey, that's actually not cool? How would that work?

Mayor: Well, that's exactly what happens. Whether again, it's NYPD or it could be other agencies as well, but NYPD is a great example. One of the things officers are trained to do is to give warnings. If someone has done something wrong, but not rising to a criminal level, it's perfectly appropriate for an NYPD officer to talk to them to say that was not appropriate. And if you did that on a higher level, that would be a crime. And I think that has an educating impact on people. I think it has a sobering impact that we need. That's why we need every report – by the way, if something might be a crime, if it's not 100 percent clear, the NYPD is going to investigate. I assure you if an NYPD officer calls you or shows up at your door to ask about something that you did, that makes people think twice. And we need that. We also in the reform report that we have put together in these last weeks, based on hearing communities, we put in there a new policy to widen the definition of what would qualify as hate crimes. And to widen the tracking, improve the tracking of hate crimes. This is a problem, and let's be blunt and honest. It's a problem that emerged, particularly in the last four years in this city and in this country. We all know that the forces of hatred were unleashed by Donald Trump. That is not a news flash. We know more and more hate speech has occurred, more and more people who are hateful have felt emboldened. We've got to deal with that aggressively. And part of it is to report everything, track, everything, and anything that might be criminal, prosecute. And anything that's not criminal, still follow up on aggressively, so people feel the presence of law enforcement in the city watching them to make sure this does not happen again.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

Mayor: Henry?

Question: I'm sorry, here I am.

Mayor: There you go. How are you doing?

Question: I'm doing well. How are you?

Mayor: Good, man.

Question: I guess my first question has to do with these PACs that are affecting the mayor's race. Shaun Donovan, there's a story in the Times today about his PAC, or his father's, raising more than a million dollars. And Ray McGuire, raised \$3 million in a month. Some people contributed \$500,000 or more. Is this – what's your reaction to this in terms of how it affects City politics and the race for mayor particularly?

Mayor: Well, I'll say the simplest thing, Henry. We passed a referendum a few years ago, I'm very proud of it, to make our campaign finance system, I think the best in the entire nation, because now people can run for even mayor of the nation's largest city and never turn to a high donor ever. That's what we passed, that literally you could fund your entire campaign with grassroots donations and matching funds. I'm saddened to see any candidate work outside that system and focus on big money. That doesn't help us move forward. And I don't think the voters want to see that. I think they want people to participate fully in our very progressive campaign finance system that protects the voters' interests, because it's not about who has the most money, it's about the voices of everyday people. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay. My second question has to do with my inability to question or interview people in the situation room who are evaluating the safety of the schools. I've been trying to do this now for probably three months. I don't like advertising the story that I'm interested in pursuing, but it's reached the point where the press offices at the Health Department, the Department of Education, they all tell me I can't do this, and I'm not aware of any national security interests or any other public safety interest that would preclude me from discussing these issues of public import with people whose tax money is paying for their salary. Can you explain to me why they are somehow sacrosanct and unreachable and unaccountable to the news media?

Mayor: I'm not going to explain that to you. I'm going to say we'll set up an interview for you with our Buildings Commissioner, Melanie La Rocca, who has done a brilliant job running the situation room. I think it makes total sense. We are very proud of the work that's been done there. It has helped us keep the nation's largest school system up and running and safe. The situation room is one of the biggest innovations that was part of this gold standard of health and safety elements that made New York City public schools the envy of the nation. We created the situation room. That was a brand-new idea. It's been working. Commissioner La Rocca has done an amazing job. We'll make sure you can interview her and some of the other people who participate.

Moderator: Next is Emma from the New York Times.

Mayor: Emma?

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. Sorry about that. I wanted to ask, first of all, about the vaccine. How do you feel emotionally right now? Have you been worried about getting the virus? How do you sort of, do you feel a sense of relief?

Mayor: I definitely feel a sense of relief. Also, I have been not so worried, but someone very close to me who may be on this panel has been constantly telling me that it's really important to not delay because this is something that – you know, I'm out there with people all the time. And I wanted to really wait for a while because I thought it was important. But now that we've had three million vaccinations and the new standards came out for public officials, I think it really made sense. Yeah, of course, I feel relief. Even though I felt confident in all the health and safety measures that Dr. Chokshi taught me to use, and I've been using them, got my double mask right here, Doctor –

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you.

Mayor: I do feel immense relief and the fact that it's only one shot, I think this is really a great feeling and not having a wonder, you know, when's the next one and what's going to happen in the meantime. I feel a lot of relief now. Go ahead, Emma.

Question: Thanks. And then I was on our New York Times website today and, you know, it says very clearly, no large city is faring worse right now than New York City. And I'm sort of worried that people are letting their guard down. I'm curious, are you worried that people are letting their guard down and would you do an indoor fitness class right now?

Mayor: Oh, no. I would not do an indoor fitness class, and we do not agree with the State's decision. I am worried about people letting their guard down, but I think in general, New Yorkers are hanging pretty tough and sticking with the standards. I've been watching, our health teams have been watching them. We were worried about keeping vigilant. We don't want overconfidence, but I think in general, New Yorkers went through hell and have not forgotten it and are being careful and cautious. To your statistical point, Emma, look, we are one of the most densely populated places in America. We carry the burden of history in terms of there being way too much poverty, way too many people who didn't get the health care they deserved for decades. There's reason why – there's reasons why this place is a tougher environment than a lot of other parts of the country. But I have to look at the progress that this city has made and say, that needs to be put in context too. We're obviously driving back this disease in a very, very difficult environment. I give our health team a lot of credit. I give every-day New Yorkers, a lot of credit. You can see the numbers moving and you can see the triumph of what's been done with our public schools and how safe they are. So yes, that number is on the website and I respect the methodology, but I think there's a bigger story to tell.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Sophia Chang from Gothamist.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor, and congratulations on the vaccine.

Mayor: Thank you, Sophia. How are you doing?

Question: I'm good. I wanted to ask you about this possible revision of the CDC guidance for classrooms and distancing. If they revise it down to three feet as sufficient, is that going to affect

how you and the Department of Education will approach reopening plans or plans right now for schools?

Mayor: Absolutely. Sophia, I would say we're working – I just had a long meeting yesterday with Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter and her senior team. We are planning for September on the assumption that we will invite back all children. I think the six months between now and September is going to be a sea change time. I think you're going to see an extraordinarily different reality by September, starting with the fact that we're going to get five million adult New Yorkers vaccinated by June. So, we're preparing for every child to come back whose family is ready to have them back. I also know maybe some families will not be yet and we'll have a plan for them as well. But as to the here and now, Sophia, we're starting the planning now to be ready for the possibility that the CDC will change the standard. If there is a change from six feet to three feet, for example, that will absolutely be the reason for an opt-in because we would want to give more kids a chance to get back into school quickly. So, we're getting ready for that possibility now. Go ahead, Sophia.

Question: So, if the CDC changes its policy, you would open opt-in this semester for families? And also do you have data, numbers of how many teachers have been vaccinated thus far? Because it sounds like the UFT numbers are a little bit different from what we hear from the City-run vaccination sites.

Mayor: On the first point we are preparing, we're not announcing anything yet because we still need more information. We're preparing for the possibility of a new opt-in for this current school year, but we need more information. We need to be really clear that we can do it in a healthy and safe way, but we have to start the preparation now. It's the middle of March and, you know, there's three-and-a-half months left in the school year. That's a lot, but there's also lead time that would be involved in something like this. Tell me, I'm sorry, the second part of the question, Sophia was about teachers, teacher vaccinations?

Question: Yes.

Mayor: Okay. So, the last information I got was now at least a week or two old, was over 30,000 members of UFT and CSA pedagogues. But that number we all agree is low, including the unions would agree is low because there's a number of educators who have gotten vaccinated on their own, but not necessarily reported back. There's no obligatory system if you're an educator for reporting back that you've been vaccinated. We want to keep working on that because we need the information to be helpful to us. But I think it's safe to say a very high percentage already have gotten vaccinated, more getting vaccinated all the time. But as you saw our extraordinary safety record, the health and safety record that has been achieved and our public schools happen before there even were vaccinations available to educators. So, that situation is only going to get better as more and more educators and school staff get vaccinated. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Allan Villafana from Telemundo.

Question: Good morning, Mayor. How are you? How are you feeling about the injection? The shot?

Mayor: I am feeling very good, Allan. Everything's feeling good. Dr. Chokshi is very, very effective at giving the shot. I barely felt it at all honestly.

Question: Oh, good, good, good, good. Mayor, first of all, what are you going to do with your vaccination card? Are you going to use it for traveling or, I mean that piece of paper that the doctor gives you? Yes. Thank you.

[Laughter]

Mayor: Yes. I assume – it says, I'm going to read it to you. It says it's from the CDC and it says, "Please keep this record." And I think it is important for people to keep the record handy for a lot of reasons. Obviously, one of the things we're all working on is how to have an effective system for people being able to show that they've been vaccinated because I think that's going to be very helpful to our reopening efforts. So, we're working on that now, but the most important thing is for everyone to get out and get vaccinated. And this is why I'm talking about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine today, because this is the game changer. First of all, it's going to change our supply intensely. We've needed so much more supply. This is going to allow us to get a lot more supply. And second, one dose and you're done. It's literally going to take half as much effort for us to reach people now. And this is what puts us on that pathway to five million adults vaccinated by June. Go ahead, Allan.

Question: We have found that there's people in the Latino community, that for a certain reason they don't want to have – they don't want to be vaccinated especially among 65 and over. Is there something you want to tell them?

Mayor: Well, I want to get the doctors to tell them what they want them to hear. I'll start, but then I'm going to ask each of our doctors to offer their own statement. But Allan, this is why I'd say, to all New Yorkers and to all seniors and to all members of the Latino community, let's help each other, let's move forward together. I know that people care deeply to protect their families. Well, the number one thing you do when you get vaccinated, you are protecting everyone in your home and you're also able to see your children, your grandchildren, whoever it is in your life you love, you're able to see them again. It makes all the sense in the world. Now the doctors will tell you why it's safe. I know it's safe because it's in my arm. I made that choice. I was comfortable doing it based on all the research that I had done, but I want you to hear from the doctors. So, I'll go to Doctor – let's get Dr. Katz in first because he hasn't had a chance yet. Dr. Katz then Dr. Varma, and we'll close with Dr. Chokshi.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. And these are conversations I have every week in my primary care clinic at Gouverneur. Almost all of the patients I take care of are people of color, African Americans, monolingual Spanish speakers, Asians. And it's not at all unusual for a patient to say to me, no, I don't want to get the vaccine. And I think what's important is then to not immediately jump to explaining the science but to openly talk to them about where they are. A question that I often ask my patients who said they don't want to be vaccinated is tell me what would make you more or less likely to get vaccinated. Right. And I ask it in that way because I want to be neutral. I want to go where they are, to start where they are, and really probe, well, what has caused them to feel that way. And then if you ask it in a completely open way, people will tell you what the issue is for them. And I listened to that issue. And then I tell them that I feel that they would be safer. And as you

say, Mr. Mayor, their family would be safer if they're vaccinated. And I find that if, as a doctor, I'm giving them that recommendation, many of them then say that they'll take it. Some of them say I'm still not ready. And I'm like, that's okay. You'll tell me when you're ready. So, I think being very open, supporting people where they are is key to getting everyone vaccinated. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, no, I think Dr. Katz has really elegantly expressed how important it is for each of us, whether we're physicians, whether they're family members, whether they're work colleagues to be an ambassador and to be sensitive to people's concerns. People are concerned because this is unusual, that is entirely appropriate. Their concerned because information changes a lot. You know, we're constantly getting updated. We're – that's always a challenge for us, so that's a challenge for them. So, I think Dr. Katz has really explained how important it is to really understand people's concerns. But the two messages that I find most powerful, maybe not necessarily at the one-on-one level, but sort of across the community are really for people to focus on, this is the single best way to prevent severe illness and death. And we know that all of the vaccines that are authorized are equally as protective at preventing severe illness and deaths. So that's a message about protection, how you protect yourself. And the second is vaccines are the surest way back, path to the world we all want to be in, where we get to hug our loved ones, spend time with our friends, go to activities that we really love. So, a message really about community and how we can get back to normal. So, I think at the big population level, those are important, but Dr. Katz has really highlighted how important it is for us to also understand people's very real and appropriate fears and do our best to understand them and try to address them.

Mayor: Thank you. And Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes sir, I'll just try to pull it together by saying we have a simple message, the COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and they save lives.

[Commissioner Chokshi speaks in Spanish]

That's why we have chosen to get vaccinated for ourselves, for our loved ones and for our city.

Mayor: Well said, in multiple languages, Dr. Chokshi. And look, as we conclude today, I think anyone, any New Yorker who has concerns, has questions they need answered, we want to answer your questions. We want to hear you. And we want to respond to you. Our Health Department, Health + Hospitals, everyone's out there. No question is wrong. We want to hear all the questions, but we also want folks who need that information, need that reassurance to get it so we can move forward. Johnson & Johnson vaccine, this alone changes the situation. It helps us move forward. I'll give you reports every day on how I'm doing, but I can tell you I took the shot because I have total confidence in it. And I believe that if people get all the facts, they're going to want to get vaccinated, they're specifically going to want the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, and that's what's going to move us forward. Thank you, everybody.

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