

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Holds a COVID-19 Briefing

April 1, 2022

Mayor Eric Adams: Good to be here, and as we deal with the many issues about COVID. COVID is a formidable opponent, and we are going to continue to pivot and shift as we move along. And even before we get started, if you have not noticed, we reappointed my good friend, Dr. Katz.

Dr. Mitch Katz, President and Chief Executive Officer of NYC Health + Hospitals: Thank you, sir.

Mayor Adams: I spoke with Dr. Katz so much over the campaign, and even before that, his innovative, thoughtful approach to medicine. We embrace this same belief of how much preventive medicine is important and how food plays a major role in that. We did the meatless Mondays in the hospitals and other initiatives, and I'm really excited that he decided to stay with us and be a major anchor in our health and hospitals. And so, New York is in good hands with Dr. Katz.

Mayor Adams: New York is the epicenter of the pandemic, not once, but twice. And each time we were able to recover and move forward because of our people, not only because of vaccination, boosters shots, medicines, amazing first responders, and healthcare leaders, but I think sometimes we underestimate the role that everyday New Yorkers play. They stood up, they understood the dangers we were facing, and they responded accordingly. And we just showed the entire country, if not the globe, how resilient we are, and we're going to continue to come back.

Mayor Adams: I just want to say, thank you, personally to New Yorkers for what they have done and will continue to do, as we fight back COVID and how aggressive it is, as it comes in many variants, different sizes, and different approaches. And if we are stringent and not willing to pivot and shift as needed, we're not going to continue the success that we have.

Mayor Adams: And we need the federal government, they must play a role. We need \$15 billion that we're trying to get to come to assist in this emergency funding that's going to play a vital role in continuing to push back on COVID. And so far, the obstructionists in Washington, DC don't really see how important this is for our entire country, because New York is really the welcome mat for the entire country. People come here, they stop here at Kennedy Airport and branch out to different parts of the country. So, we need this funding. We need to be able to continue to provide the needed services around vaccination, around testing, around tracking the virus so that we can move in the right direction and continue to have our city up and recover it.

Mayor Adams: Right now I know the president is debating. I will be in Washington tomorrow. We have a series of meetings and I had a conversation with our congressional delegation. I take my hat off to them. They have recovered and assisted us over and over again. And I want to thank all of them, the delegation leader, Hakeem Jeffries, and the senior member of Congressman Nadler, who we have communicated with a number of times. Every time we reached out to Congressman Nadler as a senior member to hold a delegation meeting, he has responded and he did so this week. Without this funding, we're going to lose resources, testing, treatment, and vaccines. We need Washington to step up, both the Congress and the Senate. Senator Schumer has been a real champion for New Yorkers, and I want to also thank him as well.

Mayor Adams: Many risks we have to overcome with COVID, but we remain committed to assisting and responding as needed. Here in New York City, we are not going to sit around and wait to act. We're going to be aggressive in our response. And as I say over and over again, GSD, get stuff done.

Mayor Adams: Ted and your crew, you guys have been amazing and we're going to continue to do so. We're going to be distributing 6.3 million free at-home tests for the Test & Trace Corps. We have an amazing team of men and women who are working around the clock to get this done. They will be provided to over 2,500 community organizations, libraries, cultural institutions, houses of worship, and elected officials. So we can use those relationships we have developed over the last few months and make sure this information gets on the ground to families. We have already distributed 11 million at-home tests for New Yorkers, with 7 million tests going to New York City schools.

Mayor Adams: Dan, you and your team coordinated so well to make sure they were in their hands. And I believe this was the cornerstone to the success of keeping our schools open with our morning updates and meetings. But I want to encourage everyone to get vaccinated, boosted. And something that probably many of you are going to ask about, but we want to encourage people, if you're in a setting where you're not comfortable, like some of you are doing right here in this room, to wear your mask. If you don't know the vaccination status of people who are in the room, wear your mask. We're seeing a slight uptick and we want to be prepared, not panic. That's the theme that we are doing here. New York is, we want to be prepared, not panic, as we continue to cycle out of COVID and deal with the new variants as they come.

Mayor Adams: I've also said all along, we will continue to follow the science. And so before I hand over to Dr. Vasan, I want you to comment on today's court ruling regarding the issues of two to four-years-olds. And the ruling that was handed down by the judge, I think, is imperative that due to the rise in cases that we're seeing as slight as they are, our plans were to take a week to assess the numbers before removing masks for two to four-years-old. But of course, we're going to comply within the ruling from the judge. Our legal team is going to put in place an appeal and ask for a stay. We truly believe this is within our powers to execute what's best for the City of New York. And the legal team is going to take the necessary steps to ensure that we're able to do that, to keep New Yorkers safe, and to be successful in the recovery that we have witnessed.

Mayor Adams: So I want to turn it over to Dr. Vasan and give you an update on where we are and some of the initiatives we're doing around COVID. And then we'll answer any questions after everyone speaks. Let me have my mask before they write about me.

Dr. Ashwin Vasan, Health Commissioner, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Appreciate all of you joining us this afternoon. We know that over the past two years, we've asked a lot of you. We've asked a lot of New Yorkers' patience, patience with changing guidelines and evolving science for an entirely novel disease, patience with the changing landscape of this pandemic due to variants, patience with navigating the safest ways to get back to our lives and normal routines.

Commissioner Vasan: This afternoon, we're asking for a bit more patience and a bit of grace. Cases are definitively rising and it's gotten our attention. They will continue to rise over the next few weeks, and it's likely that over these weeks, we will move into a different level of overall risk across the city. Masking along with getting vaccinated, getting boosted if you're eligible, testing regularly, and getting treated are the best tools we have to take on this virus, whatever it throws at us. And you should integrate those tools into your lives, your daily lives, as we adapt to the next phase of this pandemic. As the mayor said, it's time for preparation, not panic.

Commissioner Vasan: You'll notice today that I, myself, am wearing a mask. I'm doing that because it's what I'm recommending New Yorkers do in public, indoor settings, especially if you're not certain about the vaccination status of those around you, but also calibrating for your own individual sense of risk and comfort. For most of us, that masking remains a recommendation. But with respect to mandates, 10 days ago, we announced that masks might become optional for children under the age of five in New York City childcare settings. We said then that if we saw concerning changes in our data, we may quote, "be having this conversation again."

Commissioner Vasan: And the mayor made this point well. We are making decisions safely, in stages, and guided by the data on what we know is happening now, and from prior waves, that's why we're recommending to wait a little bit longer before making masks optional for this age group. We're looking for the earliest opportunity to do this safely, and we can assure you that day is coming for your children. But for now, we want to keep an eye on this latest uptick to ensure that our youngest New Yorkers remain safe, as we see an increase in cases due to the more infectious BA.2 subvariant. As we know in the past, cases and hospitalizations have risen in this vulnerable age group, in line with wider community spread, usually lagging by a couple of weeks. This is why we're making this decision now.

Commissioner Vasan: So we want to use every tool, we have to slow that growth. We've gotten as far as we have, thanks to masks and thanks to a number of other tools, which include vaccines, testing, treatment, and yes, patience and resilience. We need to employ all of these tools together and extend each other a bit of forbearance grace as we do so. This is also why limiting federal funding at this time is extremely ill advised. It will hinder our capacity to respond to this surge and to prevent the worst outcomes through testing, treatment, and vaccination. As an example, the federal government has already begun reducing allocations of monoclonal antibodies, an effective COVID

treatment that has kept New Yorkers out of the hospital and prevented severe illness and death.

Commissioner Vasan: As we have seen throughout the pandemic, the impact of these funding cuts will not be born equally. Without reimbursement for testing and vaccination of uninsured New Yorkers, the inequitable impacts will continue or even worsen. And if someone is turned away from these critical services because they're uninsured, what are the chances they'll seek services again, or get necessary care to prevent needless suffering? The city and our partners at H + H will continue to serve New Yorkers, regardless of insurance status. But if we see a new variant that intensifies transmission, how will that impact be felt, if we don't protect those who are uninsured?

Commissioner Vasan: Time and again, the virus has thrown everything it can at us and has shown us that none of us are safe until all of us are safe. So we don't know what this summer, fall, or winter might bring. We need a robust supply of vaccines, boosters, testing, and treatments to weather whatever comes our way. And so, it's time to restore those federal funds now. This is something for which we can have no patience. Right now, we need resources to protect the lives, not only of New Yorkers, but of all Americans. So, thank you. And I'd like to introduce my colleague, Dr. Ted Long to talk about how New York and our hospital system is stepping up.

Dr. Ted Long, Senior Vice President for Ambulatory Care, NYC Health +

Hospitals: Thank you, Dr. Vasan. Today we have the tools to keep our city safe. Today, I'm excited to announce that we are going to be distributing more than 6 million home tests to New Yorkers to prepare for the BA.2 variant. What we want is to give every New Yorker access to these home tests before you get sick. So if you get up in the morning and you aren't feeling well, you can take a test before you go to work, or before you see loved ones, to know if you have COVID before you leave your home. To help spread these home tests across New York City, we're going to be distributing them through more than 700 community-based organizations and houses of worship.

Dr. Long: Through more than 700 community based organizations and houses of worship, more than 150 libraries and cultural institutions, through our 1,600 DOE schools, through local elected offices, our Department of Homeless Services, and our brick and mortar testing sites. To find a site near you where we have home tests, you can call 311, or you can go to nyc.gov/covidtest. Importantly, if you use one of these home tests and you have a positive result, in New York City you can call 212-COVID19,

press nine and in a matter of minutes, you'll be on the phone with a doctor to tell you if you're eligible for one of our lifesaving treatments.

Dr. Long: If you are eligible for one of these lifesaving treatments, we'll send it to you in your home so you won't have to leave that same day. For every 20 New Yorkers that we treat with these new medications, we prevent one New Yorker from getting so sick that they have to go to the hospital and be admitted. We are prepared for the BA.2 variant. These home tests, along with continued federal support for testing, vaccination and our lifesaving treatments, will keep New York City safe and open through this variant and any future variants. Thank you.

Question: Why the decision to continue, if the virus, throughout the course of the pandemic, it seems like the youngest kids have been affected the least by it, why the decision to continue with the mask requirement for the youngest kids? Why appeal the Staten Island ruling?

Mayor Adams: Why did the-

Question: Yeah, if the virus seems to effect youngest kids the least, why continue with the masking policy broadly? And why appeal the Staten Island ruling.

Mayor Adams: Because my child's doctors told me that's the best thing to do.

Question: There are New Yorkers who are probably going to be confused because they've heard the Kyrie rule has gone away, the mask mandate for kids, kindergarten through 12th grade, has gone away without a notable uptick in the schools. And they're going to say, "Why are you coming down hard on the toddlers? Why pin the next pivot on COVID on the two to four-year-olds?"

Mayor Adams: There's one thing that New Yorkers are not, among my administration, is confused. I'm clear. I give very clear directions so that people can understand exactly what's happening. Now, if others want to add to the confusion, that's another thing. But no one can say that this administration is not very clear on what we're doing. What I'm asking New Yorkers to do, ignore the noise and listen to their mayor and he's going to give you clear instructions on what we can do.

Question: And just as a quick follow up, how quickly do you think you might be able to get a stay in place, given that parents were going into Monday thinking they might not have to mask their young ones? They're not knowing what to do for Monday morning. I don't know if you have legal guidance about how quickly you might be able to get a stay.

Mayor Adams: Well, let's be clear, the overwhelming number of our school students, we're talking about just a specific group, two through four. And our attorneys are going to take the necessary actions. As soon as we know, we're going to make sure that the public is aware of it. We don't control the court systems. We're going to respect whatever, whichever, whatever comes out of the court system, because we believe in following the laws. But as soon as we know we will share it.

Question: Mayor, why just the two to four-year-olds? What about the other older children? Or are you considering other measures right now?

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry?

Question: Why just the two to four year olds? Why not older children as well?

Mayor Adams: Because this is the advice of my medical professional and this team that's up here now. That is their advice, and I'm following their advice.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I wonder, since you've talked about the fact that you're doing this because an uptick in disease, I wonder if you could give us some sense of what that uptick is, what you're seeing and why you've decided that this is the time to pivot in this group.

Mayor Adams: Doctor?

Commissioner Vasan: Sure. Thanks for the question. We're seeing cases rise across the city. You may recall we published the COVID color coded risk alert system a couple of weeks ago, which really looks at a combination of factors, but case thresholds, case transmission being one, hospitalization rate being another, bed occupancy, space in our healthcare system being a third data point. We're seeing cases rise across the city and if they continue on this trajectory, we expect to move into a higher risk category in a matter of weeks, which is why we're making this decision. Look, it would be, we're

making the tough decision now. We could do the easy thing, which is to say, 10 days ago we said, "Lift the masks," and just, let's go ahead with that. We're coming back to you knowing the challenges of this, because we're following the data each day and saying, "Well, let's look at the trajectory," and we think that that's going to increase overall risk in the city.

Question: And if I could just follow up, Doctor. If you decided that the trajectory is that there's going to be an increased number of cases in New York City in the next few weeks, why are you limiting it to just this group of toddlers? Why not go to the entire K through 12 school system, because you want to protect those people as well and also protect teachers?

Commissioner Vasan: We're making the strong recommendation that all New Yorkers of every age choose to wear a mask in indoor settings, according to their level of risk, according to their level of comfort. That's our strong recommendation. It's why I'm wearing a mask. It's why many of you are wearing a mask. We have a licensed vaccine product for ages five and up, and we do see some level of protection and immunity on the basis of that. We have no licensed vaccine product for anyone under five, and they remain our most vulnerable population, amongst our most vulnerable populations. And yes, you're right, cases are lower for this population than the general population. But we should have an extremely low tolerance for cases, for hospitalizations and for bad outcomes in our babies.

Question: Basically what you're saying is that because they can't get vaccinated, you want to protect them?

Commissioner Vasan: I want to have an abundance of caution for this population, much as I would for other vulnerable groups in the city.

Question: What's the concentration like of the BA.2 subvariant? And what does that concentration and any change or uptick tell you about the trajectory in the next few weeks?

Commissioner Vasan: I think you're hinting at something very important, BA.2 makes up the majority of cases here in New York, as it does across the country, as the CDC recognized earlier this week. BA.2 is the main driver for this increase in cases, across the world, that we've seen, and New York City and the United States is no exception.

Question: The majority meaning, what's the number?

Commissioner Vasan: I can get you the exact figure. I believe as of last week it was 78 percent.

Question: Of new cases?

Commissioner Vasan: Of sequenced cases.

Question: That was going to be my follow up. It was originally around [inaudible] two weeks ago at your press briefing at the health department, we're now at 78 percent. Are you concerned about seeing that trajectory or is this in line with what we understand about how COVID spreads? And then as a follow up, what are we expecting at the hospital system? Are we expecting an increase in hospitalizations due to the BA.2 variant?

Commissioner Vasan: Thanks for the question. We know that this subvariant is more transmissible, we think somewhere between like 50 percent more transmissible than the previous Omicron variant, and that is explaining the uptick in overall cases. We're not making decisions based on the percentage of BA.2. We're looking at the overall cases and of course hospitalizations and bed occupancy, which are lagging indicators, which usually start to rise a week to two weeks after case rise. But I'll let Dr. Katz speak to the H + H system.

Dr. Katz: Yes, Amanda. So far we have no rise. As of this morning in the 10 health and hospitals, we only had three patients with COVID in the ICU and 19 overall in the 10 hospitals. But as Dr. Vasan has said, historically hospitalizations have lagged cases.

Question: Just a quick follow up, can you clarify a little bit about what people can expect when they call the hotline? I've been hearing a lot of confusion from people around my age, wondering do they qualify for the medication or not? So just getting some clarity around what to expect [inaudible] preventing serious hospitalization.

Dr. Katz: Sure. Well, the best part is if you call 1-212-COVID19, you'll get to speak to a real doctor. And unlike other kinds of advice, this has to be specific to not only your age, but other comorbidities. In general, we recommend medications, either monoclonal

antibodies or the antiviral for people who are either older or people who are younger but have some other underlying health problem, because supplies are still relatively limited and those other groups do well. The groups that continue to struggle with the disease are primarily older adults and younger adults who have some other condition.

Question: Sure. Just wondering if you can explain about what you've been seeing in terms of symptoms with the BA.2 variant compared to some of the earlier variants, milder symptoms, more severe?

Dr. Katz: Yeah, I think in general, the Omicron variant and subvariants have been in general milder on balance. That doesn't mean that's true for vulnerable people, people with preexisting conditions, children. One of the outcomes we're very concerned about in young children is multi-system inflammatory syndrome. And that's a really devastating illness that kids are predisposed to when they get COVID, and we should have an extremely low tolerance for it. It usually has associated with hospitalizations, sometimes ICU admissions. And so these are the sorts of things we're tracking.

Question: Thank you. As it relates to the mask rule staying in place for the two to four-year-olds, is there a new date by which you're planning to reassess that by? Or is it just indefinite at this point that that stays in place?

Dr. Katz: We're reassessing the data every single day. We start our day assessing the data with the mayor and we are ready to make policy adjustments based on that data. We're here today making this decision before we get into a higher risk category so that we can do our part. And I'm asking all New Yorkers to do their part to help try to bend that curve and lower their risk.

Question: And if I could, to the mayor, keeping the mask mandate in place as Dr. Vasan explains it, for two to four-year-olds, is because that population is so vulnerable in that they cannot get vaccinated currently. I'm wondering with that logic, how does it make sense to allow unvaccinated people to say, eat and drink indoors without any mask rule for them?

Mayor Adams: I listen to the advice of my doctors, and this is what the doctors told me to do and that's what I'm following.

[Crosstalk]

Question: Hi Mayor. I'm curious, would you consider reinstating masks for children in kindergarten through 12th grade if we do move into that medium level or cases continue to rise?

Mayor Adams: What we are going to do is do what COVID is doing, pivot and shift. We do our morning briefings, we do an analysis, after the analysis we make a determination of what is needed to keep the city safe. And I'm not going to leave any stone unturned and keeping the city safe from COVID or any other threat. And so based on analysis that this team has shown throughout these last few months, we are going to look at that analysis and make determination. COVID is a formidable opponent that does not live within the boundaries of rules. This is a new place where all of us have been, and I'm going to listen to them as we make the determination.

[Crosstalk]

Question: I have a more practical question about how this will work for parents sending their kids to school on Monday. You say you want to extend the mask mandate for children under five. There's obviously this court ruling. I understand there will be an appeal. Do you expect to have that all wrapped up in court before Monday or what's the rule on the ground for Monday morning?

Mayor Adams: Well I remember at the height of COVID, there were different decisions that were made and the information got out right away. Our attorneys are going to attempt to do a stay, an appeal. We believe we have enough evidence to win. And as soon as the judicial system make the determination and rule on it, we're going to move forward based on that.

Mayor Adams: We will follow the rules. We believe we have been doing that. We believe because of the mandate, we were able to get through this where we are. So as soon as we are known, we'll make sure Marcia knows so she can let everyone else know.

Question: What's going to happen on Monday?

Mayor Adams: Well, we are hoping that we win the stay. And until then, we are in the hands of our judicial system that I think is the best on the globe. But I also want to point out something Dr. Vasani said. That we're a far cry from two and a half years ago because of the tools that we have. And so when you look at hospitalization, when you look at deaths, getting COVID is not automatically a hospitalization or death sentence. And so that's why we're encouraging people to get vaccinated and take booster shots. We have these tools. These tools have allowed us to be ready and we could be prepared without panicking. And I think we need to continue to do that.

Question: Hi there, Mayor Adams. Thank you. On the topic of safety, I was just wondering if you could give us any update on the shooting in Brooklyn last night that sadly killed a 12-year-old boy. And I understand also that what you've rebranded and relaunched as the anti-gun unit became operative on March 14th. I'm just wondering if relaunching this controversial unit is the way to fix the issue of gun violence in New York City.

Mayor Adams: Well, I know we have access to a video that we believe is going to be helpful. And there's some other evidence that is part of the investigation. I don't want to harm that investigation at this time. We were on the ground last night at the location, and it's horrific to have a young lady shot several times. Our hearts go out to the family. To have a young boy shot, and when you look at the video it's horrific how it happened. And we're piecing together the pieces. And we are going to find the individuals that are involved.

Mayor Adams: But this is what I talked about over and over again. The over proliferation of handguns, the right laws in place to ensure we don't have a revolving door system and to put in place the right tools. I'm a bit dismayed that all we talk about are protecting people who commit crimes. I say this over and over again. When are we going to start talking about the people who are doing the right thing? Sitting down, eating in the car should not be a death sentence.

Mayor Adams: There are too many guns and a small number of dangerous people who have made up their minds that they're going to inflict violence on our city. And we're going to go after them. We keep making the arrests. We made the arrests of the McDonald's assault. We made the arrests of the hammer assault. We made the arrests of the young lady who was killed in Burger King. We're going to do our job and we're going to be proactive. And one of the ways of being proactive is my anti-gun unit. And

people continually say this, and I find it surprising, people keep saying that you're controversial anti-gun unit.

Mayor Adams: Controversial to who? Everywhere I go in this city, New Yorkers are thanking me for putting in place a unit that is targeting those who are carrying illegal guns. And so I think what you need to stop listening to the loudest and start listening to the majority. This is not Eric's plan. The polls are showing that New Yorkers are in support of what I'm doing to deal with gun violence in the city.

Mayor Adams: So it's not controversial. It's controversial to those who are the most sophisticated on Twitter and social media and who yells the loudest. But everyday New Yorkers are saying, "Eric, we are with you." They give me that thumbs up every day. "We want you to go after these illegal guns and not have people that are heavy handed." And that's what I'm doing. And I'm proud of doing it.

Question: Mr. Mayor, back to COVID in schools. The vaccination in the city for children is 58 percent. The vaccination rate for children in the city is give or take 58 percent. During your first COVID briefing at Borough Hall just before you became mayor, you said you would analyze if the city should request making the COVID vaccine mandatory for city school students. Are you going to go ahead with that decision? Will the vaccine be mandatory to come back to school in the fall?

Mayor Adams: When I made that notification, or make a notification at public briefing when I'm there, I'll let you know.

Question: Do you have a timeline for making that decision?

Mayor Adams: No.

Question: I just would like you to speak to the parents of toddlers who on Monday have to decide whether they should send their kids to their programs with masks or without masks. What are you telling them to do?

Mayor Adams: That we will make the notification after we apply for the stay and apply for the appeal. And based on that, we are not in control of our judicial system. Based on what the judge tells us, we're going to follow what the judge states.

Question: Are you recommending to the parents that they keep the mask on?

Mayor Adams: At this point from the judge's ruling, I will continue to say to parents that you should keep your mask on your children. But right now they have the decision to do so or not. If the stay is successful, then it goes back to what we had in place.

Question: Yeah. Just to, because I'm a little confused, so I'm hoping to just get a better understanding. So kids under the age of five are recommended to wear a mask, but because of the order you can't mandate it?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: Kids over the age of five, K-12, that's recommended as well [inaudible] for masks?

Mayor Adams: Right. Very clear. Very clear. All New Yorkers. [Inaudible] Every New Yorker over or under any age, we're stating if you're in a setting that you feel uncomfortable with unknown vaccine status, booster status, you should make a decision. I wear my mask when I feel uncomfortable, and we recommend others to do so. And so I cannot get any clearer than that. At this point, with the slight uptick we're receiving, we're telling everyone to take special precaution.

Mayor Adams: We had a large number of people here at City Hall, who caught COVID. They're home. They're not hospitalized. They are boosted and vaccinated. They have flu-like symptoms. And that brings a great level of comfort that knowing, the mere fact you see, that COVID diagnosis, that you automatically don't believe you're not going to be able to breathe. You're going to feel as though you're losing your breath, that you're going to be hospitalized on a ventilator.

Mayor Adams: I just really think modern science did an amazing job and we should be really proud of how we responded as New Yorkers to push back on this virus. And because we have the tools of vaccines, pills, booster shots, we are not where we were two and a half years ago.

Question: Oh, Dr. Vasan mentioned the color-coded system. And you said we might move into a higher category in the next few weeks based on the trajectory of things.

Can you remind New Yorkers what that might mean if some other recommendations, or even mandates, might come back if we move into that higher category?

Commissioner Vasan: We're making these recommendations now for New Yorkers to not only wear masks in indoor settings, but to go get vaccinated and boosted, to get frequently tested and treated now, before we move into that level of risk, in the hope that we can actually do something about bending that curve and making sure that we don't stay in that level of risk for an excessive amount of time. And so New Yorkers should know that the tools are available to them to make choices, to keep themselves safe, households safe and their community safe.

Question: Dr. Vasan, could you talk about with the uptick, are we seeing a lot of cases in people who are boosted or who already had Omicron getting it again?

Commissioner Vasan: Like other waves, as you might expect, the people who are out and about the most and what we would say social mixing, contacting others the most, engaging in the economy and nightlife, are at most risk. Because you're contacting people with whom you may not know their vaccination status. As with every other wave, we're seeing that age group lead the way. But what we've seen in every other wave is that both older at-risk New Yorkers and younger children always lag a couple of weeks behind that initial upsurge in those younger, more mobile working adults.

Question: Quick follow up to what Michelle just asked, sorry. Has anyone who got Omicron in late December or early January, has anyone also gotten BA.2?

Commissioner Vasan: I don't think we know the answer to that definitively. Any infection confers some level of protection. It is not the same as vaccine-derived protection, immunity. But certainly if you were infected recently with Omicron, you are at lower risk than someone who wasn't infected recently with Omicron, relative, taking into account the same vaccination status.

Question: Two questions on that point. The city's booster rate is give or take 44 percent. What's being done to get that up, because the boosters do confer an additional level of protection? And secondly, just from my own experience having COVID about a month ago, I tried to call the hotline. The wait was, I was on hold for a significant period of time. Eventually I got an operator who said they were too overwhelmed to take

reports. So what's being done to actually staff the system so it can respond to another surge with virus if this continues?

Commissioner Vasan: Yeah. Right now, we have adequate supply to get New Yorkers boosted when they need it. And we're making this very clear statement today. If your time is up for getting a booster, go get boosted today.

Commissioner Vasan: But this is also why the federal funding is so critical to come through. Because if we want to sustain that supply of vaccines for the coming weeks and months, we need that money in our coffers. Right now, New Yorkers can go get boosted at a host of city sites, at their healthcare provider. We're really encouraging New Yorkers to also integrate these conversations back into their normal health-seeking behavior. Go to your doctor. Talk about the vaccine. Talk about the booster. And go get vaccinated.

Commissioner Vasan: So you have to remember that that time we had explosive growth that we had never had before of so many infections. And we did learn from that. I've recently sent people to the line and people have reported that the wait is in minutes. And we have now our backup staffing so that if there is a need to rapidly increase and deal with more calls we can do so.

Question: Should the city bring back the incentive, the incentive to get people boosted? Should that be something that gets brought back, the \$100 or whatever it is?

Commissioner Vasan: I mean, I think we've seen incentives have a limited and strong but narrow effect. Time-limited effect. I think now we're encouraging New Yorkers to make that choice. Go get boosted as soon as you're eligible. The FDA just announced a second booster for people over 50. If you're four months after your last booster and you're over 50, go get that second booster. This is our recommendation. We are moving into a phase of this pandemic where we're integrating these tools into our daily lives. This is not an emergency response. This is integration of these many, many tools we have into our daily lives so we can go on and recover and heal.

Dr. Long: The hotline. So 212-COVID-19 is a phone tree. There's no weight for dialing that and seeing what the options are, based on what option you select. If you select option nine, it's our virtual express care platform. You could think of it as a virtual version of the emergency department. There are sometimes during the day where the

emergency department is busier, sometimes where it's less busy. I recently called myself for a family member; I was on the phone with a doctor in a matter of minutes. I've heard others say they had to wait a half hour to get through to a doctor on the phone, through that platform by pressing nine. That can happen, depending on what time of day you call; the same as if you go to the emergency room at a time when other people have gone.

Dr. Long: But I just wanted to make the point that one of the press offices to one of our resource navigators where somebody will call you back so there's no wait; press nine to talk to a doctor. But the hotline itself is just a phone tree to can to where you need to go. If there's one of the particular [inaudible] office that you're having a wait time for, for example, talking to a doctor, we always welcome the feedback. Again, our experience has been that the wait time has been pretty good, but we always welcome more feedback.

Question: Can you talk about the difference in the staffing level between Omicron version one and Omicron version two, as you get ready for version two?

Dr. Long: So the virtual express care platform that we have, we've continued to staff up. But it's not specific to COVID. It's a virtual version of the emergency department that you can call if you have a pain in your leg, or if you have a variety of other issues. So we staff that up, not based on people calling it through the 212-COVID-19 hotline, but as we would with any emergency department. If more people are calling, we get our emergency doctors to join the hotline. I actually was on a call about it this morning. We'll continue to do that moving forward.

Dr. Long: We're proud of this. We're not familiar with many other places that have the ability to press nine and in a matter of even 30 minutes, getting through to talk to a doctor directly.

Mayor Adams: And of course you said that, Ted, because we need to manage the expectations of people, and be honest and realistic. I called my bank the other day and I was on for 45 minutes on hold. We have a system that is not in other states and other cities where you can call from the comfort of your home and if it takes you a half an hour, put it on speaker and do something around the house. This is a large influx of calls, and we want to get in contact with people.

Mayor Adams: It's commended, what you have done and what the doctor has done, and we are managing the inflow of calls. And it's commendable. I thank them for doing that. But is it going to be instant all the time? No, it's not. Are there days we're going to get heavy flows? Yes, it is. So let's manage the expectation of New Yorkers that no one is sitting around listening to the phone ring and not picking up. There's a volume of calls that's coming in. We're going to handle those volumes. And we check; we do our own little spot checks to see the product that we are putting out.

Question: Perfect. Thank you. Mr. Mayor, shifting gears a little bit. Yes. The Deputy Mayor Banks, when he was testifying before the council earlier in the week, mentioned that there might be potential mistakes in your blueprint to end gun violence. Have you spoken to him about what those mistakes are? And are there any plans to amend any portion of the plan as a result?

Mayor Adams: No. And that is, that is not what happened. Let's have a level of accuracy. We should re-roll the tape. I believe Charles Barron, Councilman Barron, was asking a question who stated he did not like any part of the blueprint, including of what we're doing for foster care children, crisis management teams and all the other of things we're doing. He said he didn't like any part of the blueprint. And Deputy Mayor Banks stated if there's a mistake that you saw, let us know. He has yet to do that.

Question: That's actually not the portion of his testimony I'm referring to. I'm referring to questioning from Councilman Bob Holden; and in response to a question from him. Deputy Mayor Banks said basically city government isn't right a hundred percent of the time. And then he pivoted to the blueprint to have gun violence and said, "There might even be potential mistakes in this blueprint that we might need to adapt." I'm wondering, have you spoken to him about those?

Mayor Adams: Yes I have. And I'm glad you laid out exactly what he said, because I agree. City government is not perfect. Eric is perfectly imperfect. And he also stated that there may be mistakes. That's a document that was created by human beings. Human beings make errors. We don't know of them. He said he's not aware of them. If Bob Holden knows of some, we want to hear it. Because our government, our administration, we are receptive to continually learn. So we don't know any mistakes. Deputy Mayor Banks sat down with me. He said, "I don't know of any mistakes." If you know of what Bob Holden felt is a mistake, we're welcome to hear it; Charles Barron, we're welcome to hear it. One thing is clear to us: a 12-year-old child was shot

yesterday and killed. So if there are better ideas that people have outside of what we have put forward, we're open to hear it because we want to stop the violence.

Question: There's no current plans to amend any portion of the plan?

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry?

Question: There's no plan in motion to tweak any aspect of the plan as a result of what Deputy Mayor Banks said?

Mayor Adams: No, no, no. And Deputy Mayor Banks did not see any portion that needed to be amended. He was part of the crafting of it. And he has clearly stated, this is a home run. We touched on proactive and intervention. And so I'm excited about it, and he's excited about it also.

Question: If I could just ask an off-topic question, because I have to try to make the bud with it? You know that Albany has been negotiating on bail reform, and it looks like there's going to be a deal of sorts that I guess it would do repeat offenders and some gun crimes. I'm sure you're aware of it. But it does not include the concept of dangerousness, which is a particular difficulty thing for the legislation to do. Are you happy with the fact that there's going to be some bail reform changes? Are you unhappy that you're not going to get the dangerousness part again?

Mayor Adams: Well, I think we have to be real clear, which happens often when we put out these proposals. People should read the full scope of our ask. We stated that there are many rivers that feed the sea of violence. The dangerousness component was one of them. That has taken, I believe, all of the oxygen out of the room. I stated that we need to stop allowing the repeat offenders who are caught with guns, able to come right back out and have another gun; violent offenders caught with guns. We talked about so many elements of discovery. That's a crucial part of what we pushed for.

Mayor Adams: So dangerousness was one piece of the proposal that I submitted. And I know Albany; I was in Albany. I know that when you go up there, you negotiate; you try to find a middle ground. And I don't know what the final product is going to be, but I do know they're talking about earning income tax credit; they're talking about having childcare money; they're talking about looking at discovery. So all of those items that I

brought up to Albany, they're talking about it. I can't control them. I don't know what the final product is.

Question: Can you give us the bottom line. When you started talking about it, they said, "No way, Jose." Now they're going to do something, so doesn't that make you feel good?

Mayor Adams: Well, actually once I wake up and take my smoothie and exercise and meditate, I always feel good.

Question: Yeah, so the PBA today had filed a lawsuit, saying that they want their police officers to get the same kind of exemption that Kyrie and other professionals, performers are able to gather. I was wondering if you would support that for police officers who were fired because they didn't get vaccinated to be reinstated? And if you're willing to offer that kind of carve out to the cops?

Mayor Adams: The courts would decide the outcome of their lawsuits. That's outside my scope. We made the right decisions based on our medical team. And again, when you look at the numbers of the countless number of officers, firefighters, teachers, they responded; New York has responded. And so I'll let the judge make the determination, but right now we are straight ahead based on the advice of my doctors.

Question: You mentioned earlier that there's people at City Hall have recently tested positive for COVID.

[Crosstalk]

Question: I'm wondering how many people have tested positive?

Mayor Adams: We're not going to tell the medical outcome of our staffers here.

Question: Mr. Mayor, so much about the budget is sequencing and the order which things get rolled out and announced, the order which the deals are made. Was it a mistake for the governor to announce the big football subsidy before getting bail done, before getting local control schools done?

Mayor Adams: I don't focus on Buffalo. I focus on Buffalo Avenue in Brooklyn. So the governor knows what she's doing. Let her handle what her job; I have to handle. My job is complicated enough, and so it's up to her to decide how she want to roll out her items. Okay? All right.

Question: What happened to you pinky?

Mayor Adams: I need a doctor.

[Crosstalk]

Mayor Adams: I shook someone's hand. I heard an electric shock, and it damaged my tendon. I have to wear this for eight weeks, according to the amazing doctors at Wyckoff Hospital.

Question: Is this the second or the third time?

Mayor Adams: No, this is the first time. I waited, what was it? Three weeks before I said, "Let me go in and check it." I thought it would heal on its own. But all they said, I can't do surgery. I don't need surgery. I just have to have it straight for eight weeks. And it's amazing how much we depend on our pinky.

Question: Mayor. Mayor, who did it? Was it A-Rod?

[Laughter]

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