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

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, we have a lot of important things to talk about today, but most important thing is to talk about what happened overnight in this city, and I'm just feeling very, very sad right now. My heart is heavy. I was out at New York-Presbyterian Hospital Queens, and we lost a very good young man, 14-year veteran of the NYPD, someone who went out there every day and served us. Anastasios Tsakos, epitome of a family man, he has a six-year-old daughter, a three-year-old son, and it was heartbreaking. Commissioner Shea, and I spend time with Anastasios' wife, Irene, who was just going through hell and spoke from the heart about the pain she was feeling, and just to think two children who, you know, will not be seeing their daddy again. It was just horrible. And this happened because two different people were driving recklessly, under the influence it appears, with suspended licenses. Two different situations came together in this tragedy, our officer lost, another life lost as well, a civilian, because of reckless driving, and it is a reminder that there has to be a relentless, continued effort to ensure more consequences for people drive under the influence, for people drive recklessly, for people who drive with suspended licenses, these are dangerous, dangerous things. And we've lost someone today and we've lost so many others and it has to end. But I just want to express my condolences to his family here and in Greece, and his NYPD family as well, and let's just have a moment of silence for Officer Tsakos.

[Mayor de Blasio leads moment of silence]

Thank you.

We always have to remember the people who do so much for us, who protect us, who are there for us no matter what. We saw that throughout the pandemic. Amazing, amazing efforts by our first responders, our health care heroes, so many people who are selfless and put their lives on the line and were just there for us every step along the way, and that's why it was so important to be there for them and help them get vaccinated. That's why we fought for the freedom to vaccinate, making sure that our first responders, our health care heroes, so many people who serve us got vaccinated, and we now continue that effort to reach everyone, whether they're a public servant or an everyday New Yorker, just continuing to deepen the vaccination effort every single day, because that's what will beat back COVID, and you're going to see again today in the indicators continued evidence of the power of vaccination.

So, as of today, in this city, from the very beginning, 6,249,262 vaccinations from day one, more vaccinations than there are people in the entire state of Maryland. This is a really impressive number. We have to keep it going and that's why with all the City-run sites, Department of

Health sites, Health + Hospital sites, we've made them walk-in sites. Now it's really easy to get vaccinated, more than it's been almost the entire time. So, everyone, if you haven't done it yet, now is the time, and it's going to help the city move forward. Anyone looking for where they can get vaccinated, go to nyc.gov/vaccinefinder, or call 8-7-7-VAX-4NYC. The important thing is to do it today. Go get vaccinated today if you have not. Literally just walk up to one of our sites, get vaccinated today. If you can't do it today, at least make an appointment for a day ahead, so you know it's going to happen. This will make such a difference for yourself, for your family, for this whole city.

Okay, now, we focus on vaccine a lot, fighting COVID, and then we focus on recovery. So, let's talk about a Recovery for All of Us, and yesterday we announced a recovery budget, and that recovery budget was something I'm proud of because it's going to reach every part of this city in so many ways. It's a Recovery for All of Us, which means every single neighborhood, every New Yorker, it means righting the wrongs of the past and making sure there's more equity and fairness. And also, it means dealing with some of the issues that we've never dealt with enough. And what we know in this city and this country is it's always been a challenge to get people to think about mental health and talk about mental health, bring the issues out in the open and address them. But something has changed in the last year. The trauma caused by the reality of COVID has caused people to be more open about mental health than I think has ever happened in history, and this is exactly the time to reach people, and that begins with our children and in our schools because our kids have been through so much. And our kids really respond when you give them a chance to talk about their feelings. Our kids don't have the hang ups a lot of adults have, and if you give them an opportunity to just express what they're feeling, you can do a world of good helping them to then take a step forward from there. So, we have a video that gives you just flavor of the amazing work being done in our schools to help children understand and address their feelings. Let's look at this video together.

[...]

Kids are just so amazing, their ability to learn and then take what they learn and make it come alive, and those beautiful children there are learning, you know, to cope with the challenges they're facing and let's face it the – again, the trauma kids have been through in this last year is beyond anything that we've ever known before. So that's why we're going to do things we'd never done before, and one of the most powerful elements will be universal mental health screenings. This is an idea that's been thought about in the past, but finally is going to happen, and it makes such a difference to have the ability to know what each child is going through, and then to have real professionals who can help kids who have particular needs, to have mental health services in every school. And our First Lady has been talking about this for a long time, how do we get to that point where there's mental health services in every school? She's been helping to build that foundation over years, and it was one of the reasons that we finally got to universal mental health screenings because of what she has been proposing for a long time now, and I want you to hear from her because this is something that's going to make a huge difference and it's going to be available for every child and every family. So, let's hear from our First Lady Chirlane McCray.

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Bill. Good morning, everyone. This is a wonderful day for students, parents, and families all across the city, and I think it's important for everyone to remember that our children feel everything that we're feeling. Last December we sat right here and made an announcement that was a long time in the making, bringing academic and social-emotional behavioral screenings to our public schools, and our plan was to start in this communities that were hardest hit by COVID 19. But we talked about the benefit it could have for every child and how with federal support, we wanted to make these screenings a reality citywide. Today, I am thrilled that we are bringing these screenings to every New York City public school this fall. So, why is this important for families? Well, think of the peace of mind that comes from a regular checkup from a pediatrician, it's a preventive measure. It has a focus on maintaining wellness. These screenings are preventive measures as well. Children will receive individual attention to their emotional wellbeing. They will have an opportunity to talk about how they're feeling, how they're getting along with friends and classmates, how things are going at home, really, anything big or small that they're experiencing. Those are conversations that are - that they should be able to have in the best of times, but after the year we've had, these conversations mean more than ever before.

As I've said before this fall, every child will walk into a classroom with more than a backpack. They will have so much to share, and transitions are experienced differently by every child. Some will be grieving., some will be excited to see classmates again, yet others may feel shy and uncomfortable. Some may feel just fine, but there'll be lonely and want someone to talk to. These screenings will help teachers and school staff assess their wellbeing. They will offer children more personal attention and an appropriate support and by reaching out and educating the whole child, academically, and with social-emotional learning, our school communities are ready to help our children excel in every way. Our children are our future, and with these advances, New York City, our city, will be healthier and stronger in every way. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chirlane. And this makes such a big difference for kids, and it makes such a big difference for parents because we all feel what our kids are going through and we want them to get the help they need, get the support they need, and it's just so important to have this discussion, bring it out in the open so we can all move forward together. I want you to hear from a parent who's been active in her child's school, has been a parent leader, and has seen firsthand the power of making sure that kids get the support and what it means for a parent. My pleasure introduced from the Bronx, Grisel Cardona.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, Grisel. That was wonderful. And what a powerful statement there, come together as a community to heal. Thank you. Thank you, Grisel. And, Grisel, I admire you've been through a lot, but you showed a lot of strength, and you were there for your kids, and thank you. And that's the message, everyone – that we can reach each other, we can help each other. And so, today, I'm announcing absolutely universal mental health screens. Every child can be reached, but, on top of that, now we'll have more ability to help the kids who need extra help, because we're also announcing that we'll be adding over 500 social workers and psychologists to our schools as part of their permanent staff to help address the challenges that kids are going through. We need to have mental health infrastructure in every school and we're doing it as part

of the budget we announced yesterday. On top of that, mental health supports this summer in our extraordinary Summer Rising approach. This is something you've never seen before in New York City, a universal approach as well – any child who needs to have a great summer option, we'll have Summer Rising available to them. All of these approaches, plus additional outreach to parents – and you're going to hear about all of this from our Chancellor. You're going to hear about the Parent University, a brand-new approach to bring parents into this discussion and support them as they address the mental health needs of their children. All of this is going to happen in the coming months in a way we've never seen before as our response to this crisis. As part of our recovery for all of us, we're doing things that only were imagined the past. Now, they're actually going to happen in New York City. And I know our Chancellor, who is so energized about so many things understands how much this is going to mean for the parents and the kids that she serves. My pleasure to introduce Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter.

Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter: Good morning, everyone. And thank you, Mr. Mayor; thank you, First Lady, for your commitment to the mental health needs of all of New York City's public-school children. And I want to thank Grisel, because what you all don't know – and that is what's so important about this moment – we never know what anyone's dealing [inaudible] and I've watched this young lady be such a leader and a hero for parents across the Bronx. And so, I'm so glad that our school system was able to be a support for her and her family when she needed it while she's been such a support to so many people.

The partnership that we have with our schools, and our children, and our families is critical. And it's part of the vision forward for New York City. It is hard to put into words how significant this moment and this historic investment is. As a principal, I've saw every day how hard families work to provide the absolute best for their children. I saw how hard educators worked to comfort their students and take care for their families. As a principal, myself, I made it a priority to have a full-time social worker on my staff. Linda Salazar was a dream to our school community and she was not a mandated counselor. She provided additional social-emotional supports, and her services, and her relationships with mental health organizations outside of the school are the reasons so many young people graduated who was struggling in ways that we couldn't see.

Today though, that support arrives for more schools across New York City. Today's announcement means we will add over 600 new social workers, school psychologists, and family support workers into our schools. This means – and this is something that was really important for us at LGJ and what we had in Ms. Salazar. It meant when we saw something, we had somebody to go to. This means educators will have someone they can work with to help provide the help young people need in schools. Starting this summer, we will have staff on-hand at every Summer Rising site to support the mental health of our young people. And as teachers and students come back together this fall, many, for the first time in 18 months, every school will have access to mental health supports in September. We will make sure every educator has both the training and resources necessary to help identify social-emotional issues at their school that students may be grappling with. We will also be providing trauma-informed care trainings to every early childhood staff member who works with students and parents.

Finally, today's announcement represents a major investment and our steadfast partnership with parents, our most important partner. We know that when our parents work together with

educators, truly incredible work is done in this city. And we saw that as we partnered with parents throughout this pandemic to teach our children. These trainings will provide parents with the same social-emotional practices used in schools, which can be used at home and in the community. As our city looks to build back and recover from this crisis, we must not lose sight of what that which is unseen – the mental health of our neighbors. As educators, we know that children succeed when they are at peace. Our vision today is that every child and their families have the support necessary to find peace and to heal. And so, we look forward to transforming all of our schools into healing-centered spaces. Thank you so much, and I'll pass it back to you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Chancellor. Look, this is a big investment we're making and it's something we've been talking with the City Council about a lot, shifting our focus and priorities more and more to the mental health needs of our kids to address the trauma they've been through. And as we built the executive budget that we announced yesterday, we heard loud and clear from the City Council that providing additional support to our children was absolutely crucial and one of the ways that we could most help bring about a recovery in our city. The focus on the mental health needs of kids, the focus on Summer Youth Employment – all of that loud and clear from the Council, was part of how we built the executive budget and we're going to keep building upon that in the weeks ahead, working with the Council on the way to the final June budget.

I want you to hear from the Speaker of the City Council, who has really focused on these issues with his colleagues and has been outspoken himself about the importance of addressing mental health issues openly, and smartly, and consistently. And that has been really, really helpful to the city, to have his strong voice. My pleasure introduce Speaker Corey Johnson.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Speaker. And I really appreciate that you shouted out your guidance counselor, who was there for you years ago. And, you know, I've heard so many stories over the years of an educator, a social worker, a guidance counselor, someone who was that one person a young person was able to connect with that helped them through a tough time, or helped them see their own potential, or find peace in their lives. And to know that we're going to be able to do that for a lot more kids at a time when they need it so much. I really love that you told that story, because it brought out exactly what just one person can mean in the life of a young person. And I'm glad that happened for you. Thank you so much.

Everyone – okay, we're going to now turn to our indicators. And, again, as I've said when we were talking about vaccinations earlier – look, we keep seeing progress. Progress is never guaranteed, everyone. We know that. We've been through so much together in the last year-plus. But we also know that every time New York City has come roaring back in its fight against COVID it's because everyone got involved. Remember, we went through the hell of last spring and then we came back so strong in the summer, because people did so much to help themselves and everyone around them be safe. Well, the version of that right now is going out there and getting vaccinated, because we can see as the vaccinations continue to grow COVID continues to recede. The numbers related to COVID, the indicators get better and better all the time – direct

causal relationship to the level of vaccination in this town. So, everyone, if you haven't done it yet, this is a good day to get vaccinated.

And here are the indicators. Number one, daily number of people at New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, very good, 140 patients. Well below the threshold. Confirmed positivity level 42.45 percent. Hospitalization rate today continues to go down. We want to get below two per 100,000 – we're at 2.24. So, we're getting really close to getting below that threshold as well. And then, new reported cases on a seven-day average, also seen a lot of progress there – today's report 1,603. So, you see that steady downward trend. We want to keep that going. And, most importantly, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 on a seven-day rolling average, 3.50 percent. Again, look at that line, straight downward. Let's keep it going, everyone.

Okay, a few words in Spanish – and this is about the support we're going to provide our young people with their mental health needs in our schools.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Good morning, we will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we are joined by the First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray, Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter, Deputy Chancellor for School, Climate, and Wellness LaShawn Robinson, Senior Advisor and Director of Thrive NYC Susan Herman, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and President and CEO of Health + Hospitals Dr. Mitchell Katz. We will begin with Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, all on the call. How are you?

Mayor: Okay, Juliet. How are you doing a day?

Question: I'm okay, thank you. You know, I did want to ask you about the letter that the city's unions wrote to you about safety on the subway. You know, in light of wanting to get people back to work, what do you think of their concerns and what more do you think needs to be done to address safety on the subway and also their perception of safety on the subway?

Mayor: I really appreciate the question, Juliet, because it is two different things often – you know, what's the – what do the numbers tell us and what is the perception? You know, I think when working people say they feel that they need more help, I always take that seriously. So, the people who work in our subways who keep New York City moving, we depend on them, we want to keep them safe. That's why we surged additional police officers into the subway and we've seen a real impact from that. But when it comes to the perception issue, I think it's really important to recognize that clearly having that kind of police presence does have an impact. What we've seen is continually increased ridership. So, that's the people voting with their feet, Juliet – the people of this city, more and more are getting back on the subways. Overall crime in

the subways has been down compared to historic levels. We know that the additional presence in the NYPD is making a big difference, and we'll keep making adjustments. And, you know, the Chief of Transit Kathy O'Reilly, really was clear the other day about PD's ability to continue to drive down crime. But we've got to help encourage people back to the subways, because it is part of making the subway safer for everyone, for folks to come back. And I think that's going to happen more and more in the weeks ahead as the city recovers. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: All right, so how do you do that? You have City workers that are coming back in – do you have, let's say, a public service campaign? Do you add, I don't know, vaccination sites in the system? How do you get people back there and feeling safe, that they're okay to get on the subway and not get hassled by, you know, somebody who's troubled or mentally disturbed or somebody who's going to hold them up?

Mayor: Well, again, I think it's really been important that the subways have been cleaner, and that's an initiative the City and State worked on together – that clearly has had an impact. The additional police officers had an impact. We're continuing to do a lot of outreach work to help folks with emotional needs in the subways, and that will deepen. But I think it's a combination of all of those efforts to address issues specifically and the fact that folks are coming back to so many things, to jobs, to school, to cultural activities. So, that's happening naturally. But I think we have to sound a clear message that the subways are safe and will work for the people of this city. We all did that together on the question of cleanliness. Now, we need to do it together on the question of safety, because the facts speak for themselves – the NYPD has done a great job, making the subways safer over time. We need folks to have that confidence. We're going to keep showing them that they can have that confidence.

Moderator: Next we have Andrew Siff from NBC New York.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. My first question has to do with the CDC guidance that we're getting today from President Biden this afternoon. By most accounts, the crux of the guidance will be that vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks outdoors. So, first of all, Mayor, will you stop wearing a mask outdoors immediately? And from your health team, how concerned are you that the message might lead to many people to not mask up at all? And how do you account for this?

Mayor: Really appreciate the question, Andrew. First of all, look, I think President Biden has done an extraordinary job increasing the amount of vaccine, getting people in this whole country to understand how we come together to fight COVID, it's been so refreshing. Obviously, the numbers speak for themselves – how many people have been vaccinated on his watch? And also, just that we are hearing guidance that we can believe in from him. You know, obviously Dr. Fauci is allowed to say what he actually thinks now, the CDC has been professionalized again, there's so many good things happening. This guidance, we do anticipate exactly what you said. We can certainly work with that, because we've said all along the difference between outdoor and indoor is really so much of this ball game. And so, outdoor is a much, much better situation. But what I'd say, Andrew, is, I think it will be the choice of each New Yorker what they're more comfortable with outdoors. So, the federal government is saying you don't have to, I think a lot of people will still choose to, or, at least, a lot of the time will choose to. I expect a lot

of time, I will for sure, but it will depend on the circumstance. And so, I think it's a new approach we can definitely work with. What we do want to focus on intensely is keeping people in the habit of wearing the masks indoors, at least for the next couple of months. We've talked about June as an important turning point moment. I think people should anticipate keeping those masks on indoors, certainly during May and June. And then we'll reassess from there. I'll just turn to Dr. Varma to see if he has anything he wants to add to my overview there?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: No, thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. I think you hit all the important points. I would just say, you know, first of all, we do – we need to wait and see exactly what the guidance is. You know, and so we're eagerly anticipating it. We do concur of course, that vaccinated people are at very low risk of transmitting infection to other people. And then when you add in the fact that transmission outdoors is far less likely than indoors, that certainly adds up to a logical recommendation. I think one of the challenges that we face here in New York of course is that our environment is very different than most parts of the United States, where people driving cars, and they're not walking on a crowded busy street around other people. So, we also have to factor in things like norms, you know, politeness, getting people habituated with the fact that they still need a mask if they're going to be entering an indoor setting as well, too. So, we look forward to reviewing the guidance in detail and seeing how best to apply it in New York.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Second question is on behalf of my colleague, Melissa Russo, who's reporting on the census today. And we've now of course heard that New York came up 89 people short and that's going to cost a congressional seat. One of the mayoral candidates, Shaun Donovan, has laid the blame at your feet suggesting that while you were distracted running for president, that could have been time better spent drumming up support for the census. Do you acknowledge that perhaps you could have done more on that front? And if not, what should have been done to get those 89 people?

Mayor: Yeah, Andrew that's preposterous, honestly. I think someone should get a calendar over to Shaun Donovan. The census took place in 2020 long after I was doing anything on the national level. And our focus was on building a huge census apparatus that was so strong and so grassroots focused that actually we managed to achieve the same level of census response in 2020 during a global pandemic, as was achieved four years earlier. So, under incredibly tough conditions with the president of the United States trying to discourage immigrants from filling out the census and everything else, we built a massive grassroots apparatus, organizing apparatus to go out there and achieve what a lot of people thought was impossible. So, I'm very proud of the New York City effort. I put a lot of focus into it, a lot of energy, went out there myself into communities, spoke about it all the time. I feel great about that. I don't feel so good about the State. I think the State could have done more. I don't think the State moved the resources it should have at the time it should have, to build the same kind of approach that New York City did. It would not have taken much more on the State level to reach enough people because remember, this was not just about New York City, Andrew. This was about the State of New York and I think that's where the messed up – missed opportunity was to count more of our people and get us a better outcome.

Moderator: Next we have Nolan from the New York Post.

Question: Hey, good morning everybody.

Mayor: Hey Nolan. How are you doing?

Question: All right, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Oh, you know, tough morning, but we're moving forward.

Question: Yeah. I understand that. And obviously everybody's thoughts are with the family of the officer. Onto the issues of crime and of shootings in the city, sort of the follow-up on Juliet's question. There have been pushes as you know, for more police officers in the subway. You've promised to deploy an extra 200 officers this summer. We've had our worst week for shooting so far this year. Are there any plans to accelerate the NYPD's effort to combat the shootings?

Mayor: Everything we've laid out in the last few weeks, absolutely to me is acceleration. We're building up a host of new approaches that are starting now that will be in full gear ahead of the summer. The number of gun arrests – I mean, you look last night alone at the gun arrests that the NYPD publicized just in the last 24 hours, extraordinary work is being done by our officers getting guns off the streets. What is truly going to supercharge this is next month when we get the court system back. And then the whole process begins in earnest to take folks who have been arrested on gun charges, prosecute them. And if they're found guilty, they're going to be out of circulation. That's going to change everything. So, a lot is happening now and it's going to build up even more so in the month of May. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: Yeah. Errol Lewis put the question to you last night. And you didn't really answer, so I figured I'd put it to you again. The shooting strategy for this year is basically the same as the shooting strategy for last year. Shootings last year were up 100 plus percent. Shootings so far this month are clocking in at 150 percent above the same point in time last year. For the week, they were up by 250 percent. So, at what point do you acknowledge that the current strategy isn't working?

Mayor: Nolan, again I keep saying you guys, when you ask that question, put it in the context of a global pandemic, a perfect storm that caused all elements of our society to grind to a halt. It's just not realistic to say, you know, that happened and it didn't have an impact. That had a profoundly negative impact and a huge number of police officers were out sick. There are so many aberrant realities. This year we have so much coming back to the other way. More and more activity. The subways are coming back to life. Businesses are coming back, jobs are coming back. Schools are coming back. On top of that NYPD, 35,000 officers, not losing a huge number of officers to COVID as they were all the time with people out sick. There's so many different factors now that are going to have more and more of an impact with every passing week. It takes time, but we know the strategies, CompStat, precision policing, neighborhood policing, these strategies have worked for years and years and years. And they're going to work

again now that we're getting the life of the city back. I don't have any doubt about it. I think they're proven approaches.

Moderator: Next we have James Ford from PIX 11.

Mayor: James?

Question: Thanks for taking my call.

Mayor: Hey.

Question: Do you hear me okay?

Mayor: Yeah. How are you doing today?

Question: Okay, I'm doing okay. And like everyone on the call my condolences to this officer's family and to the members of the NYPD. Another – this is a sort of a follow-up to Andrew's question and maybe a bit to Dr. Varma's comments. Can you elaborate? We're still waiting for the official CDC guidance, but we all have a sense of what's going to be said. Can you maybe elaborate on what the city is likely to recommend to people in outdoor spaces that may be heavily attended? I mean, this is, we are unique in New York, right? So, anywhere from outdoor observation decks to protests or people attending outdoor concerts or waiting in line for the bus, or to get into the grocery store. What – will there be any kind of changes to recommendations for masking and for that matter, social distancing going forward, where there's a lot of people outdoors together?

Mayor: Yeah. It's a great question, James. Look again, first, we'll wait to see the federal guidance in specific. But I want to really amplify your point. I think you're raising a really important point. We are different. We are one of the most densely populated places in the whole country. People here learned through the pain we went through, to be smart, to be cautious. We want to keep that instinct alive. So, I think if the guidance is you don't have to wear a mask, we're certainly going to remind people it's still great to wear a mask whenever you can, including outdoors. It's going to be, if I understand this guidance, you know, the idea is that it's more of a choice. But I'd say in the context exactly what you said, if you're in a crowded place, if there's a lot of activity, that's a great time to keep wearing a mask. So, we are going to also watch as always the data and the science. Because this is the guidance we're getting today, and we hope things get better and better and better. And I'm really hopeful they will. If at any point something changes, we got to address what we see from the data and science and make adjustments. But my advice to folks is if you're in a crowded situation, indoors or outdoors, it's always smart. Why not abundance of caution? Wearing a mask is always a good idea. Go ahead, James.

Question: And the health care – yep. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, there you go.

Question: You hear me, okay.

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: Okay. I was also curious if any of the health care professionals had anything to add to that?

Mayor: Let's ask the health care professionals. We'll start with Dr. Varma and then see if Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz have anything to add.

Senior Advisor Varma: Sure. I think the only other thing that I would try to really emphasize here is that we're still in the middle of a very severe epidemic. You know, we are incredibly excited about declines that we're seeing. You know, we're seeing about 20 percent declines week over week in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. But we still have far too many people suffering from this infection. So, we need to continue a lot of the efforts that we're doing until we get to a much lower rate of disease. And that is important when you factor in the guidance. Because, you know, vaccines are incredibly effective, but if you're surrounded by people that are coughing on you, they can overcome that effectiveness. Now of course that is much less likely to occur in an outdoor setting compared to an indoor setting, but that's one of the other factors that we're considering here. I think as our disease rates go down and once they get to a much lower level, that's when we as health professionals are going to feel a lot more comfortable changing our guidance for both outdoor settings and then ultimately for indoor settings. Again, all dependent on the rate of disease in the population.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz, anything to add?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Yes, sir. I'll just add two points briefly. The first is to say as you and Dr. Varma have, let's make sure that we see what the actual CDC guidance is. You know, we expect that it will involve not just masking requirements in the context of people who are fully vaccinated, but there's a component of ensuring that that people are distancing as well. So, it's really about the interaction between those three things, mask use, someone who's fully vaccinated, and then the distance that they maintain outside. Which leads to the second point, which is to build on something that the Mayor has said. Even if it's not required to wear a mask outdoors, it will still be reasonable and rational for someone to do it, even when they're fully vaccinated. So, we should use common sense and keep up masks in situations where there are more people and less ability to maintain distance. The rule of thumb that I say is anytime you're close enough to be breathing in someone else's air you know, that's a situation where you should strongly consider keeping your mask on.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Katz, anything to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: I would say out of sort of a personal feeling since, you know, not all of these things have to be worked out. When I was by the beautiful Hudson River over the weekend, sitting with a friend of mine who was vaccinated, I felt very comfortable taking off my mask. There was no one near us. We had distance. When I walked to work on the crowded Broadway, I wear my mask. People are walking very close to me there. I feel like there is, as Dr. Chokshi said, the possibility of someone coughing on me or

someone breathing on me. And even though I feel very good about the vaccine, we know it's not 100 percent. And I think most New Yorkers are very sensible and will make decisions like that.

Mayor: That is – you made it very real life there. Thank you. Dr. Katz. That was news you can use. Okay, next.

Moderator: Next we have Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

Question: Morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Michael, how are you doing?

Question: I'm all right. I wanted to ask you about this report Stringer's office put out today. I'm not sure if you've seen it yet, about the City's payments to global medical supply group for ventilators. And I mean, based on what I've read so far it appears the City basically got scammed out of several million dollars and is still trying to call back close to \$2 million. And, you know, reading what is in this report, it seemed pretty obvious that this is – and I understand, you know, we were in a huge crisis at the time, but it seems like there are a lot of red flags here. And Stringer is talking about going back to the old procurement rules. And I'm wondering, you know, is the City going to be able to get back this money? Looking back, are there things the City should have done to – where the City could have better avoided this sort of predicament?

Mayor: So, Michael first of all, have not seen the report. Second of all, I'm sure that real efforts are going to be made, intense efforts are going to be made to get the money back. And we'll get you an update on that. But to the bigger questions having lived through every minute of the crisis from a command perspective, we had a team of folks scouring the world, trying to find us equipment and supplies. It was literally, hour to hour, minute to minute thing, trying to get enough ventilators to save lives. And it was not business as usual. With all due respect to the Comptroller, you know, that's doesn't reflect what it was really like to be in the middle of a kind of war time dynamic, a crisis dynamic, trying with everything we had to find ventilators to save lives, where they were almost nowhere to be found. And we had to take calculated risks. I think the folks who did this work were smart. They were careful. But their number one job was to save lives. And overwhelmingly they achieved, I think some miraculous outcomes. I mean there were points when it looked like there was just no way in the world we would get the ventilators we needed. Our team managed to find a way and to actually find a way to produce ventilators in New York City, which was extraordinary. There were times we were this close to running out of PPE. They did extraordinary, unbelievable things to find supplies all over the world. And on top of that, built PPE supplies right here in New York City, which we hadn't done before. No, I think in the real-world conditions, the most important thing was that the supplies and equipment were there in time and the lives were saved. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: The other thing I wanted to ask you about were the stories on Governor Cuomo today. I'm not sure if you're aware, but he took questions directly from reporters yesterday. And I'm going to read you a quote from him and I'd like to just see what you have to say about it. He was asked about Tish's probe, Tish James's probe. And he said, the report can't say anything different because I didn't do anything wrong. And I know you're aware of prior comments he

made. And I'm just curious, based on the quote I just read to you and the prior comments, what do you make of that?

Mayor: I'm trying to remember the lyrics from the song. Is it living a life of illusion? Or living a life of delusion? I can't remember exactly what it was, but that's what we're seeing here. I mean, this – you know, it's clear with the fact that there was a coverup of the nursing home scandal is documented. His top aide said it in front of a group of legislators. We have numerous women who have come forward and talking about – to talk about sexual assault and harassment. I mean, these things are documented. So, I don't understand how he's saying that. I think the investigation will proceed and I absolutely assume the investigation will prove that, in fact, something very wrong happened.

Moderator: Next, we have Jessica Gould from WNYC.

Question: Hi, everyone. Thanks for taking my call. Mr. Mayor, as you know, the Times reported a significant portion of Americans are skipping a second dose, and we wanted to know if that's true for New York City. And maybe relatedly, sources have told our health desk that the City sites are now offering second shots to people who got their first shots at non-City providers. So, we were wondering if that's an effort to address the issue with second shots.

Mayor: Let me give you the facts as I have them, Jessica, and then turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz for what they're seeing through their operations. I do want to say the intrepid Bill Neidhardt, always concerned to do fact checking, handed me a note. It is, 'Living a life of Illusion' by Joe Walsh. Obviously collaborated with the Eagles in his heyday. Thank you, Bill, for always getting the facts right. Okay. Here's what we have, Jessica. Right now, fully vaccinated from New York City, about 2.3 million. And then folks who have received that one dose at least is 3.4 million which is a 52 percent of adult New Yorkers. Now, the last I checked in the last few days, we were seeing pretty steady results with a second dose appointments. And we definitely want to keep it that way. And there are situations where sometimes people get a second dose somewhere different than where they got the first dose and we can work with that under the right circumstances, certainly. But, you know, our goal here is to keep reminding people to get that second dose however works best. We're going to accommodate them and keep this progress moving because we still can get to the goals we need. And clearly, it's helping us drive back COVID markedly. But in terms of what we're seeing, especially in recent days, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, what can you tell us about folks getting second doses?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir, I'm happy to start on that. You know, the article that was mentioned reported a national average of about eight percent of people who are missing their second doses. For New York City based on our data, we are doing significantly better than that, it appears that less than five percent of people are missing their second doses within the 42-day window that's recommended for the follow-up with the second dose. So, we are doing significantly better. However, we're not resting on our laurels with respect to making sure that every single person who is due for a second dose is reached out to. We use multiple channels, text messages, phone calls, and that's on top of the system that we have in place to ensure that people leave their first dose of the vaccine with an appointment for that second dose. So, those are the systems that we have in place. We'll continue to track those numbers. And I just want to

add from the, you know, from the clinical perspective, how important it is to get that second dose of vaccination, because that is what gets us to the full immunity that vaccination affords, and that's a critical part of making sure that we turn the corner on the pandemic.

Mayor: Thank you. And Dr. Katz, what are you seeing in your operation?

President Katz: As Dr. Chokshi said, New Yorkers are very good at getting stuff done, right. That's part of the nature of a New Yorker, right. We get stuff done and our numbers are much better than the national numbers. And I'd also point out we don't believe that if someone gets that second shot beyond the 42-day period, we don't think there's harm in that, but we, of course, want them protected as soon as possible. But sometimes people have a legitimate reason. They may not be able to get it within that window. And we keep up in terms of calling them, texting them, writing to them to get them in for that second shot. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you, Mitch. I like your quote, "we get stuff done." I think that is a perfect summary of what's good about New York City. Go ahead, Jessica.

Question: Okay. I had a second question on education, but I did want to clarify from that first question. Just if you can get a second shot at a City site, if you haven't gotten one there, your first one there, including walk-ins. And if that has to count as my second question –

Mayor: We'll it's an important clarification. Hold your education question for a second. Dr. Chokshi, obviously we're going to accommodate anyone who needs a second shot. Can you talk about sort of the right way to go about it? If someone is seeking a second shot, they got their first shot, even in another state, or they got it another center, but they want to get their second shot at a City location, clarify the right way to go about that.

Commissioner Chokshi: Well, you said it exactly right, Sir. You know, we want people to keep their second dose appointments, if they've already made them, go back to the same place where they got their first shot optimally. But if for whatever reason people need to get their second dose and they don't have an appointment, they got it elsewhere, you know, we will accommodate them at City sites either as walk-ins or there is an option, you know, through the website to request that type of appointment.

Mayor: And Dr. Chokshi one more, just because again, the news you can use is so important to people in clarifying this – if someone walks into one of your locations or one of Mitch's Health + Hospital locations and says, 'I got a first shot before, I got Moderna, I got Pfizer,' do they to show any proof of it, is it just verbal is sufficient? What do they need to be able to make the match with the right second dose?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thanks. This is an important question, sir. We need one of two things. Either there has to be a vaccination record in our system that we can access, or the person has to have their CDC vaccination card on hand. And the reason this is so important is that we do want to make sure that a sufficient number of days has passed between the first dose and the second dose. And so, we have to ascertain exactly what the date of the first dose was through one of

those means. But as long as that has happened, then people will be accommodated for the second dose.

Mayor: Dr. Katz, is your approach the same at H + H?

President Katz: Yes, sir. We will do our best to accommodate people, but we do – as Dr. Chokshi said, it's important for safety to document where the first vaccine was and to make sure you're giving the correct second shot.

Mayor: Excellent. Jessica, thank you for asking for the clarification, because it was important for us to get that out to folks. Go ahead. What's your education question?

Question: Great. That was extremely helpful. So, I think this is predominantly for Chancellor Porter, local parents and also some State lawmakers are calling for schools to require and then provide more Asian-American history in schools. And I know that a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum is a top priority for the Chancellor, but the City schools also have a lot of autonomy over their curriculum. So, I was wondering if there are currently any requirements to teach any elements of Asian-American culture history specifically across the school system and what they are?

Chancellor Porter: So –

Mayor: No, go ahead.

Chancellor Porter: I was just going to say, first of all, we welcome the conversation about increasing the visibility of Asian-Americans in our curriculum and across our school system. And yes, there's a level of autonomy. However, we're working to ensure that as a part of our comeback, that we're building curriculum as a part of that process and that we are making sure that many – that our diverse New York City is represented in the curriculum that our students experience every day. But we welcome the conversation and look forward to engaging families and communities and teachers across New York City in the conversation and looking really closely at our curriculum.

Mayor: And just to clarify, Chancellor, I mean, I think there was some reporting that didn't capture the fullness of what is already in the curriculum, because I think if I understand correctly, Asian-American studies is embedded in the curriculum in a variety of ways. Can you speak to some of those specifics?

Chancellor Porter: Absolutely. So, Asian-American history is included in Passport to Social Studies, Civics for All, and Hidden Voices. And we've developed resources along the way this year to support discussions in our classrooms on anti-Asian bias, racism, and hate crimes. And in fact, when you and I were in the Bronx a couple of weeks ago, we walked into a classroom where we saw just that happening. And so, we understand the importance of representation in the curriculum and particularly representation across New York City, particularly in this moment for Asian-American families.

Mayor: Thank you very much.

Moderator: We have time for two more questions today. The next question goes to Steve Burns from WCBS 880.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Good morning, Steve. How are you doing today?

Question: All right. I wanted to follow up on Michael's question regarding the comptroller's report. I understand you haven't seen it yet, so you may not be able to go into too much detail, but one of the recommendations was for your office to go back to normal procurement rules. Given that we're no longer in that crisis war-time dynamic that you described, why are usual procurement rules still suspended?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll get you an update, Steve. First of all, to say our procurement rules have a lot of value to them, but they are inherently – they create a lot of slowness. There's no question about it, a lot of checks and counter checks. And in a crisis atmosphere, you've got to figure out how to move things quickly. And there are still elements of this equation that we still have to act quickly on. We're still in a very dynamic situation. The COVID crisis is not over. But that said there still are checks and balances that are maintained at all times. So, let's get you the exact way the rules are being applied now, but I want to caution the first thing we have to do is defeat this crisis. We're going to do it in a smart way. We're always going to be careful with the public's money, but we've got to defeat COVID and we cannot let bureaucratic standards stand in the way of that. I really want to emphasize that. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: I appreciate that. On an entirely different topic, about six weeks away now from early voting starting in the primary and we're working up a story on ranked-choice voting implementation, given that you're one of the few people in the city not running for office next year –

Mayor: [Laughter]

Question: [Inaudible] you'd be more candid and talk about your confidence in the new ranked-choice voting system, the education, the outreach. Obviously, there is a lawsuit from some members of the Black, Latino, Asian Caucus on the Council saying it's unfair to voters and the outreach just hasn't been there enough for there to be enough understanding on this new concept. So, what is your confidence level that this will – there will be enough outreach for this to be a fair implementation in time for June?

Mayor: Yeah, I'm worried, Steve. I'm worried because I think the level of focus on the election is so much lower than any mayoral election I can remember, for the obvious reason that we're still fighting the COVID pandemic. And I think the amount of dislocation that's happening in people's lives and just how much people are struggling to move forward means here we are less than two months before a mayoral election, it doesn't even feel even slightly like it's felt in the past two months before Election Day. And I worry that with that kind of artificially low level of

focus and interest that's exactly when the new election system is being introduced. No one could have anticipated that obviously. At the time that the referendum was passed on ranked-choice voting there was no COVID in our lives. But it's going to take a lot of work to catch up. I certainly want to see more from the Board of Elections, and we're going to try and figure out how to very quickly take additional actions to educate people. And I would urge, you know, every civic group, every community group, elected officials, everyone to do everything you can to educate people on how the system works or else we could see a lot of people disenfranchised. If folks don't realize the power of putting a second choice and a third choice and a fourth choice, if they don't do that, they're going to lose their votes in large numbers. So, there's definitely work to be done here. Go ahead.

Moderator: Our last question for today goes to Jeff Mays from the New York Times.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. My first question is about the hotel special permit. I'm wondering, the Office of Management and Budget has calculated that such a permit could cost the city \$7 billion by 2035. I'm wondering why do you support the idea of a hotel special permit given the cost that's been laid out by OMB?

Mayor: Yeah, Jeff, I do not believe that's the definitive analysis from OMB. I believe that was one analysis done at one point, but that's not the final word by any stretch and it certainly doesn't take into account everything that's happened in recent – the last year or so. Right now, the hotel industry, we're going to do everything we can to bring them back strong. We obviously have announced a huge new tourism promotion effort. We're doing everything we can to bring back our economy, but I think we can safely say, it's going to take several years for the hotel industry to regain the kind of strength that it had pre-pandemic. There's no lack of hotel rooms in New York City right now. I think what's going to happen in the future is you will continue to see hotels develop, but what we're working to do is to make sure there's community input. Hotels have an impact on surrounding areas particularly if they're more residential areas. We want to make sure that there are clear. So, I think this is going to have a good impact for communities, but a very limited impact on the hotel industry anytime soon. And then when the hotels are full up again and tourism is booming again, I think the market will adjust and you'll see new hotel development. Go ahead, Jeff.

Question: Thank you. Mr. Mayor, yesterday, you said the police budget is roughly flat under the budget you proposed. I'm wondering, what do you say now to activists and others who have been calling for further cuts to the police budget, to use that money for other social services and other things that they think will reduce the need for policing?

Mayor: I think we thank God right now because of the actions of Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, and Chuck Schumer and Carl Heastie and Andrea Stewart-Cousins. We have for the first time in a long time the resources we need to invest in our schools, to invest in mental health, in Summer Youth Employment, so many things that are going to be crucial to our recovery. So, what I announced yesterday, you know, a \$98 billion-plus Recovery Budget, really speaks to a lot of the concerns that community members have had about shifting resources towards young people, towards education. It allows us to fully fund the affordable housing plan for 300,000 apartments. That's going to serve 700,000 or more folks, ultimately. There's so much that we're now able to

do, but when it comes to the police side of the equation, I think where we are now, which is essentially where we were back in June, 35,000 officers, renewing our focus on neighborhood policing, a whole host of reforms, and tremendously focused work to bond police and community back together again, I mean, that's the ultimate way to fight crime. That's what this budget does. So, I think we're in the right place on the police budget. I think we're finally positioned to make huge, vast, additional investments in terms of youth services, social services, education, all the things that communities have asked us to put more into, we're doing that right now.

And I'll finish on that note because it really does wrap together so much of what we're doing today. Yesterday, we announced our Recovery Budget. Today, the focus on mental health at a moment in history where people are thinking about and talking about mental health like never before. We're going to do something revolutionary in New York City, mental health screening for every single child in our schools. And by the way, that is not just about dealing with the trauma of COVID and this moment in history. As our First Lady will tell you, if we reach young people early and we identify a challenge or a problem, it can be addressed, it can be treated. The biggest problem with mental health is when a challenge goes unrecognized for years or even decades, think about what it's going to mean for families all over the city, that if a young person has a need, it's actually going to get addressed right now, that's going to make all the difference. And that's the kind of thing worth investing in. Thank you, everyone.

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