

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well look, we focus every day, we have these gatherings to update you, we talk about health and safety and that's what it's all about. That's how we protect the people of this city, protect you, protect your family, your community. And that's how we bring New York City back strong. So think about how much has been achieved fighting back the coronavirus. Still a disease that is so dangerous, a disease that we still don't know, everything we need to know about, the medical and scientific community don't know everything they need to know. But nonetheless, this city, all of you have fought back this disease in such an admirable fashion, and we're going to keep fighting it back further.

But now we have a new challenge, a new challenge upon us this time of year, every year at this time. But this one is different. It is a powerful disease. It's one we should never take lightly, but it's one that we do know how to fight even more because we have a vaccine. And of course, I'm talking about the flu. And we're wearing these buttons today, all of us, because we've gotten our flu shot, we're going to talk about how important it is that you get your flu shot too, and your whole family. So look, a lot is happening. The economy is starting to come back, more and more people moving around, schools coming back. And of course, flu season, beginning in earnest. So it's really important that we take it seriously and we get ahead of it. Now, the flu we're used to it, you know, the coronavirus is still very new in our lives. The flu has been around a long time. Even though we're used to the flu, we should not underestimate it. It can be deadly. It is for too many people. It has to be taken seriously. And again, we have a tool in the vaccine that makes all the difference. So yesterday we started a major citywide effort, multi-language ad campaign to let New Yorkers know it's time to get the flu shot. To let them know how important it is to do, especially this year, while we're also fighting the battle against the coronavirus. And we want people to know that it's easy and it's available and it's free and it can make all the difference. So I want to show you a video that's now playing that lets New Yorkers know just how important this is.

[Flu vaccination ad campaign video plays:]

So that says it all. And look, it's a reminder of all of us. When you get the flu shot, you're not just protecting yourself, you're protecting your family and your whole community. We got to realize this is something we do not just for ourselves, but for everybody else. Here to tell you more about this huge outreach effort, it's going to reach every corner of the city, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you Mr. Mayor. Now sometimes the advice from doctors I know can be complicated but today my advice is so simple, it can be summarized on this button right here, get your flu shot. This year's flu vaccine could be the most important one that you ever get. Now the flu can be deadly even in normal years. And we know 2020 is anything, but a normal year. COVID is still circulating and flu presents many of the same symptoms as the coronavirus. We don't want the health care system to expend time and resources on preventable illnesses even as they continue to handle COVID cases. Just as we wear our masks to protect one another, the flu shot not only protects you, it also helps to protect others as well. Most of all, we want to protect New Yorkers who are especially vulnerable to the flu, such as babies and our senior citizens.

So here's what we recommend. New Yorkers older than ages six months should get a seasonal flu vaccine. As the Mayor said, it is especially important for adults, age 50 and older, pregnant people, children age six months to five years, and people with chronic diseases. As a doctor, as well as a father, I wouldn't ask New Yorkers to do anything I wouldn't do myself. I get my flu vaccine every year. And I'll be sure to get my baby daughter immunized as well. While this year's vaccine may be the most important one in our lifetimes, the City is working to make it the easiest one you ever get. New Yorkers can find out where to get vaccinated at nyc.gov/flu. You can also call 3-1-1 or text flu to 8-7-7-8-7-7. And today I'm happy to join the Mayor to announce this media campaign to encourage vaccination, which will appear everywhere from bus shelters to neighborhood businesses like laundromats and bodegas. The campaign will tell New Yorkers what I'm saying today. This year's flu vaccine could be the most important one you'll ever get. You may be hearing me say that a lot in the coming months. My goal is to match the moment's historic importance and help vaccinate more New Yorkers against the flu than have ever been vaccinated before. You can help. Join us in encouraging flu vaccination by using the hashtag #FightFluNYC. Thank you.

Mayor: Well, thank you so much, Commissioner. And look everyone, again I have people all the time saying to me, what can I do to help New York City? What can I do to help us come back? Here's another example of something everyone can do. Just go get that flu shot. It only takes a few minutes. It's easy. It's quick. Make sure the people in your life know how important it is. This is something we can do to protect all of us and to move us forward. Now, look again, it comes back to what everyday people do that matters. And we've seen that with the coronavirus. It's been outstanding, how people have all played their own part in this battle to fight back this disease. And we know that a crucial, crucial element of this effort has been our Test and Trace Corps because Test and Trace Corps connects with everyday people to help them do the things they need to do to fight the disease. And I know people have been grateful for that support, for that direction, that understanding that the Test and Trace Corps brings them of how to deal with the challenge.

Now we've been testing constantly to see what the results are of Test and Trace Corps. We've been studying, researching to understand how this strategy is working. And what we're seeing is really, really encouraging. Having the biggest strongest Test and Trace Corps in the country out there in communities all the time, following up on cases all the time. It's making a world of difference. So our latest estimate is that the presence of Test and Trace and the extraordinary outreach to communities has prevented up to 15,000 potential coronavirus cases. That's an extraordinary number. People who were protected themselves, from this disease and also were not therefore going to end up spreading it to others. So that's striking. And another striking fact is that Test and Trace Corps is every day learning more and more how to connect with people and support them and get people to be a part of the solution. So currently about 80 percent, 80 percent of all positive COVID cases who are identified to the Test

and Trace Corps have completed the intake with the Test and Trace Corps. That means they're working together with Test and Trace to do the right thing and to prevent the spread of this disease.

So this is really exciting. It surpasses the original benchmark goals that were set. And it proves that New Yorkers want to work with this effort to keep everyone safe. Now there's another key piece. And I was in Soundview in the Bronx a few days ago, as part of this hyper-local effort outreach to communities that need to do more testing, getting more and more people involved. It's an exciting and powerful effort. And again, everything happens at the grassroots. The two-week hyper-local outreach effort in Soundview, in the Bronx, striking. When that effort began, the testing levels of positive for coronavirus were about 2.4 percent in that neighborhood. By the end of the two-week period testing more and more people, the rate went down to 0.82 percent. So it just continues to prove the more people get tested, you get more information, but also you help prevent the spread of the disease. So that is something we're going to be doing wherever we see a need. We want to make sure that people are tested. And then if someone tests positive that we get every single one of them involved with Test and Trace to take the next steps the right way.

So we're going to extend that hyper-local effort now to Southeast Queens, to communities again, that have lower testing levels than we want to have. We're going to be out there in Ozone Park, South Ozone Park and Richmond Hill. Getting the message out, making sure people get tested. Strong grassroots effort. There'll be rapid point of care testing, the rapid test where you get the immediate results, that will be available at the Ozone, excuse me, the Ozone Park Library. Rapid testing available at the Ozone Park Library starting this Friday. Of course, fast, easy, free. Now the hyper-local effort continues in Borough Park in Brooklyn. The testing center now open at Fort Hamilton Parkway and 41st Street. An area I know very well in my old City Council district. So that effort continues to deepen in the community. Getting people tested, continuing to make sure people are wearing masks, distributing free masks, and continuing to remind people avoid large gatherings, particularly indoors. Obviously this is a time where it's particularly important. More and more economic activity, more and more people going back to work, schools reopening and the high holidays coming. Very important to remind people to avoid those large gatherings. So that work is going on right now in Borough Park. Now to give you a little more about the hyper-local strategy, why it's so important and why it's working, the Executive Director of the Test and Trace Corps, Dr. Ted Long.

Executive Director Ted Long, Test and Trace Corps: Thank you sir. To keep the virus suppressed Test and Trace must engage every community in New York City. Our hyper-local response is our directed and focused approach to engaging communities at higher risk. Drawing from our success in Sunset Park, where we were able to drive down the percent of people testing positive by two thirds, now in Soundview we've achieved the same thing. The percent of residents testing positive for coronavirus in Soundview today is two thirds lower than it was in mid-August before we got started. And we've done that through knocking on 12,000 doors, making 50,000 phone calls, doing 2,600 tests and working with community-based organizations, such as the Mexican Coalition for the Empowerment of Youth and Families, and SCO Family of Services. We've even at that site had in-person contact tracing to do it immediately upon any positive result. And we've engaged 100 percent of people with a positive result in Soundview to-date with our teams speaking seven languages.

Moving forward, our next type of hyper-local response will be in Southeast Queens and Ozone Park. Starting this Friday, you can come to our new site at Ozone Park. You can get tested and have your result back within 15 minutes. If it's positive, our team of in-person contact tracers will get contacts from you right there. We'll call them that day and bring them in for testing. And then before you leave, we'll pair you with a resource navigator to ask how we can help to keep you and your family safe. We look forward to working with the community in Southeast Queens and Ozone Park, and we look forward to having the same success that we've had in Sunset Park and that we've now had in Soundview. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Dr. Long. So look, thank you to you, the Test and Trace team, everyone at Health + Hospitals, everyone at the Department of Health, working together to make this work right down to the grassroots. And an important update on Test and Trace. We have a new hotline, so it's easier than ever, if you have a concern to reach out and talk to an actual human being about the questions you have. That hotline for the Test and Trace Corps is 2-1-2-COVID-19, couldn't be easier to remember. 2-1-2-COVID-19. And it's one place you can call, you can get information about testing sites, where you can get free testing near you. You can get advice from medical staff directly, information about how to quarantine properly, how to safely separate. If you need other types of help, like mental health counseling, because so many people going through so much, you can get help through that number too. So 2-1-2-COVID-19, the place to call if you have concerns as we fight this virus.

Now let me talk about another health care topic, and this one – we've talked about before a couple of months ago. It's time to talk about it again. We continue to have a challenge with something crucial. We don't usually talk about it, but it really, really matters, particularly for folks who end up hospitalized and whose lives are in danger. It's our blood supply. In a typical year when there's no pandemic, there are all sorts of blood drives and communities, community groups, government offices, corporate offices. So much of that of course is not happening. So there is a real need right now for more blood and plasma to make sure we can protect people's lives. The New York Blood Center, doing a great job as always, but they need your help. So urging all New Yorkers again, people say to me, how can I help? Here's a way to help, if you haven't given blood in a while, please do. So you can go to the New York Blood Center website NYBC.org, or you can call 8-0-0-9-3-3-2-5-6-6. And 8-0-0-9-3-3-2-5-6-6, make an appointment, donate blood. They have sites all over the city. It is a great way to help this city and help your fellow New Yorker.

Okay, let's talk about our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold is 200 patients – today's report, 66 with 4.4 percent confirmed positive for COVID. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold 550 cases – today's report, 259. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, threshold five percent – today's report, 1.05 percent.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, Chancellor Carranza, Tests and Trace Executive Director Dr. Ted Long, Dr. Mitch Katz, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Rich Lamb from WCBS 880.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Rich. How have you been?

Question: I've been all right. So, with the deadline in 16 days, given whatever progress you may have made with unions and negotiations, how would you rate the chances for averting those 22,000 layoffs that could happen on October 1st?

Mayor: Rich, that's a fair question. I try and stay out of the ratings game. I think – I'm very worried about the challenges we're facing right now, but I do want to thank our union partners, there's been very serious discussions, constant discussions. I know everyone's working hard both to move our colleagues in Albany to act on long-term borrowing. I know our labor leaders have spent a lot of time and energy talking to Legislators about how important it is to do long-term borrowing. And I thank them for that. But also, they're talking to us about ways to find additional savings so we can avert layoffs. So, we are not out of the woods at all. We've got a lot of work to do, but at least incessant is going on with labor to see if we can find a better path.

Go ahead, Rich.

Question: Okay. And in regard to the flu, of course, there have been reports that it's been crushed in the southern hemisphere, basically by the precautions that have been taken as a result of COVID-19. I wonder whether the doctors think that that could be a factor here, and I guess it's a take-no-chances situation that they're – they're saying they're urging the flu shots, right?

Mayor: Rich, you have your facts right. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but I'll only say this. We are heartened by the news from the southern hemisphere that actually seems like the same precautions that work against the coronavirus work against the flu. But you said it right, Rich, it's a take no chances, abundance of caution, strong vaccination effort, because, you know, we need to stay ahead of this. Go ahead, doctor.

Commissioner Chokshi: That's exactly right. Mr. Mayor. The only thing that I would add to it is that this abundance-of-caution approach is particularly important for our most vulnerable New Yorkers – our children, our senior citizens, people with chronic diseases. And so, although we are seeing reasons for optimism with respect to influenza in the southern hemisphere, we just can't leave it up to chance, and we have something that works in a safe and effective vaccine.

Moderator: The next is Gloria from NY1.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayer. I wanted to ask you a question about the hotel situation on the Upper West Side. It's my understanding that the Hotel Association contract is expiring on October 12th. And Randy Mastro has said he wanted the residents out of [inaudible] by the end of the month. Are you going to be able to meet that commitment?

Mayor: Gloria, I appreciate the question, but I'm going to start by saying we're in a litigation situation here so I'm going to be very broad in my comments. Again, our Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson, our Social Services Commissioner Steve Banks are handling this jointly. They're looking at the whole picture, our whole homeless services system, because we do want to get, of course, back to that original policy of not being in hotels, being in shelters, where people can get a lot more support. But they're going to look at the whole picture and then decide the next steps. So, I'm not going to speak to exact days, but they'll be coming back soon with that vision.

Question: Okay. And I wanted to revisit this letter from the business leaders that was issued last week and the discussion that has come as a result from it and the calls for them to – for you to specifically come up with a plan. You have said September is supposed to be this moment of rebirth for the city when we, you know, open up schools, get back to work. Are you working on a specific plan that addresses [inaudible]?

Mayor: Again, look, we've been working for months now on a vision of how to bring this city back strong, how to bring it back effectively and in a more equitable fashion. I mean, I think you've heard me say that many times. A lot of people have been working on it intensely over the last few months. Our first focus – I think I've been clear and consistent about this – the first focus was to fight back the disease, then get us sequentially through phases one, two, three, four, and to hold them. And we did that on time in each case and we're able to hold it. Then, take the bigger step to the immediate restart of the economy and the restart of schools. So, that sequence has been moving very exactly. The next big step, obviously, this coming Monday. In the days after that, we're going to be talking about the bigger approach and the bigger vision a lot more. But there's no question, this is what we all have been doing – is trying to set the foundation so we can have that strong comeback for the city.

Moderator: The next is Bob Hennelly from the Chief Leader.

Question: Yes, Mr. Mayor. I figured it out. We have the technology.

Mayor: Welcome, Bob. Welcome to our gathering, Bob.

Question: Yeah. [Inaudible] for these six months, because I hadn't figured out how to join in. I guess I wanted to follow up on my dear colleague, Rich Lamb's question, regarding the layoffs. So, that October 1 contemplated the 30-day advisement happening in September 1. So, I just want to make sure for our readers that the Chief Leader that I am correct that you would still have to – those notices had been printed up and they'd be mailed out, at which point there would be a 30-day window. So, at any point where you have to pull that trigger – and I assume that could still come any day, is that correct?

Mayor: Yeah. Unfortunately, Bob, it is. And the 30-day window, as I understand the civil service law, the unions have to be notified 30 days out. Then, there's a period of time in which the individual workers have to be notified. Again, this is nothing any of us ever wants to do. I don't want to see us go down this road. It would only be a last resort. But you're right, from the moment that we say there's no other choice, it's a 30-day period from there. Go ahead.

Question: Of course, then as a consequence, you would be then budding into the holidays. And as [inaudible] said – that would be just yesterday when we spoke with them – that could really be problematic. That would turn you into like a major Grinch.

Mayor: It's – look, Bob, I don't want to see anyone suffer. We have been fighting to bring this city back. And I think people know for a long time about my relationship with labor unions and working people, I don't want to see anyone suffer. In fact, I think we need a big strong public workforce to keep moving forward as the city, but I have a budget I have to balance and I've gotten no help from Washington – that is a fact, the stimulus that was supposed to come, never came. I've been asking Albany for months for something very fair and simple – long-term borrowing, which the City has received in past crises. Hasn't happened. We're running out options. Now, I do believe labor's working real hard, Bob, to help us in Albany and to come up with alternatives. So, I'm going to hold out hope that that's how we can solve this.

Moderator: The next is Emma Fitzsimmons from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Good morning. I wanted to ask about the business letter as well. Your press secretary posted on Twitter, that it was almost as though a letter drafted by hedge funders in the Hamptons wasn't as sharp as read of the city in response to some of the backlash. Do you think the letter was out of touch?

Mayor: Well, Emma, look, I think the fact is that work people are going through so much. And, you know, right now, we've spent six months trying to help just every-day New Yorkers back on their feet, making sure that no one went hungry in New York City, making sure everyone got access to the health care they needed, including people who needed it for free. And that's why we now have in all five boroughs, guaranteed health care in this city. Getting schools back so families, particularly families who have suffered the most, can get support for their kids, get them back on track with their education. This is what we've been doing and it's been working. So, I would think that any leaders – civic, business, labor government – would want to celebrate the fact that this city continues to fight back. In fact, we're the envy of the nation when it comes to the health care situation here, we're one of the safest places in the country right now. People are looking at the fact that our school system is coming back and they're amazed. I would think that all leaders would want to celebrate New York City's strength. And then, of course, we'll talk about the things we need to keep working on and making better, but that's the tone I think would be most constructive.

Question: Okay. And it seems like there's almost a fundamental disagreement about whether workers should be returning to offices in Midtown. These companies, especially, you know, people who own big office buildings, they want people to return. Do you want to wait and see how schools go first? It sounds like that's what you're saying.

Mayor: Well, I'm saying something that is about sequencing, Emma. The – we – again, we went through phases one, two, three, four on time, that set up the reality now, and we knew after Labor Day there'd be a lot more activity. You can see it all around the city. And, of course, schools coming back – huge piece of the equation. It takes, you know, a couple of weeks to see the first round of impact, a couple more weeks to see secondary impacts. I think it's fair to say, we're going to know later in October, exactly what the impact has been of all of this new activity. I am hopeful, because New Yorkers have really been disciplined, but I think it's important to sort of watch each step and see what happens. That being, said I commend business leaders who are starting to bring back their workforce. I was at the opening of One Vanderbilt yesterday, the ribbon cutting, and one of the companies involved in that effort, SL Green, has brought back their entire workforce. I think that's great. And we're going to start a plan as to when and how we bring back the City workforce that is working remotely now. It's time to start moving more and more, but it should be sequenced do we see the impact of each action and make sure the data and the science confirmed that it's time to take the next step.

Moderator: The next is Julia Marsh from the Post.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor. Actually, just following up on what you were speaking about, about SL Green, bringing back their workforce. And Mr. Green told us that he'd like to see you lead by example and bring back your workforce. You said you're working on a plan. Can you give us a sense for what the timeline is for that? And do you encourage all other private employers to bring their workforce back?

Mayor: Yeah, I think everyone should start the process now of determining how to do that. So, for us, again, Julia, I think you'd agree, I'm not like most employers – 380,000 or so employees. When we move, it has a very, very big impact. So, we have to be smart about our sequencing. But for a lot of, sort of, smaller and mid-level employers, of course, start to bring people back as soon as you feel ready. We want to make sure that this city comes back to life unquestionably, but for the big strokes, like opening schools or going through those big phases, or, certainly, the return of the larger City workforce, those we're going to sequence carefully to make sure they conform to what the data and science is telling us about how we keep the coronavirus at bay in this city. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. Thank you. And then on the Industry City, there's obviously a Council hearing today with public input. I'm wondering if you would say whether or not the City can afford, especially now with our dire economic situation created by COVID, let an Industry City expansion fall by the wayside that would provide 20,000 jobs and a hundred million dollars in revenue because of concerns over a potential rise in housing costs. I know you've said that the – it's up to the City Council, but why not take a position on this as you lead the City's recovery?

Mayor: Julia, look, this is a different situation than a lot of the ones we've talked about previously. A lot of times we talk about a rezoning effort that is sponsored by the City or proposed by the City. This is a private application and there's been real community concerns raised. And there's also been really important concerns raised about the need for jobs and revenue, as you said. I want to respect the City Council's process. There's still time for this to play out, but I think the important thing is to let the City Council do its deliberations for now. And then if at some point I think it's important to weigh in, I will. But right now, I want to let them do their appropriate deliberations.

Moderator: The next is Kala from PIX.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I am wondering, after the announcement of 2,000 teachers being added this week, the principals union had announced that that was a fraction of the 10,000 that they requested. So, how many more teachers do you plan on hiring? And if they're not hired by the start of school, then what happens?

Mayor: Kala, first of all I respect the union a lot. I've spent a lot of time in recent weeks talking to Mark Cannizzaro about his concerns. I also know that – I've never met a manager that didn't want a bigger budget and more personnel. So, it's not surprising to me that they've put in a big request. What we've said is we got to make sure to balance the real challenges we're facing – everyone knows we're facing all sorts of challenges, budgetary, and otherwise – with the fact that we need to make sure there's the appropriate number of educators in each school. So, we have had a rigorous process over the last few months to get that right. We announced yesterday 2,000 new educators going into the schools immediately and we're going to then compare notes with the principals and the superintendents, see if that allows us to fill the gaps that exist. If there's still some gaps, we'll take another step. But I think this 2,000 will solve the problem by and large. Go ahead.

Question: And can you clarify, what's the timeframe for Test and Trace to reach out to teachers who need to quarantine based off a positive test at their school? There are several teachers who were saying that they were never contacted by Test and Trace I guess in a timely manner to feel safe at school.

Mayor: Well, I'll turn to Dr. Long, but I'll say this, the whole concept is to move very, very quickly. That's why we have the situation room that we announced yesterday. And, obviously, if any educator says they weren't contacted right away, please, we need to know that. If that's something – if there's ever an instance where there wasn't right communication, we need to know that right away. So, I'm going to ask you sort of civically to please inform our team here if you hear anything like that so we can find those individuals and find out what happened, but overwhelmingly what you're going to see, because of the presence of the situation room, is very, very rapid connection between any school staff member and Test and Trace, same day, immediately getting to work. Dr. Long, do you want to add?

Executive Director Long: Yes. Sir, you covered all of the high points. The two things I would highlight is one, 98 percent of all of the teachers that have gotten tested at our prioritized sites have had a test result back within 48 hours. And as soon as we get the test result in the situation room, it's instantaneous, we reach out right away. There's no delay.

Mayor: Go ahead, Kala.

Moderator: That was Kala's second question.

Mayor: Oh, that was, I'm sorry. My apology.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Katie Honan from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask, so yesterday you were asked if you were certain schools will open in person on Monday and you said yes. But the UFT and the union leaders said that they don't believe that some schools are ready for in-person education on Monday. So, I wanted to get your take, especially given the uncertainty for parents who might not know – I mean, we're getting down to the wire, we're six days out, and there's a lot of confusion. So, what is going on there?

Mayor: I honestly, Katie, do not believe there's a lot of confusion. I understand the unions will advocate and they will raise concerns, but a friendly reminder, everyone, the Department of Education, City Hall, we are the people providing the services to our parents and our kids. And we've made very clear what all the preparations have been. We've been talking about it for weeks and weeks. School is opening on Monday the 21st. There's one building I know of, and we've talked about it openly, that is going to need alternative sites. That's the MLK building in Manhattan. Everything else is moving forward. There was a group of 17 buildings on State-owned properties that didn't get the inspections in the timely manner they should have. Those will all be inspected, and we'll have answers today on all of them. The problems that have been raised about individual classrooms, for example, those are being resolved, but if there's some classrooms in the building, they simply will be held offline if needed. So, I think it's pretty straightforward at this point. Go ahead.

Question: So, my second question is I guess about the bureaucratic technicality or whatever of teachers receiving health accommodations. I know when firefighters and police officers, they usually go to sort of agency-sanctioned doctors to get these accommodations if they're out on any kind of LODI, line of duty injury, or something like that. But with teachers it seems that it's just any of their private doctors. So, is the DOE going through each accommodation request – I'm not accusing teachers from fraud, of course, or faking it, but there is this process already in place for other City employees, and I'm just curious if it's the same, that is in place for teachers seeking health accommodations because in some schools, many teachers have sought this. So, what is the process?

Mayor: I'll let the Chancellor speak to it. Of course, there's a verification process. The Chancellor can start. And, Chancellor, if you think any of the health team here should add, that's your call. You start –

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So there – you're right. There absolutely is a process where teachers could apply, or any employee could apply for an accommodation based on medical – underlying medical conditions. We've consulted very closely with the Department of Health. So, there is a process of evaluating those requests. Teachers have been informed if they do qualify for an accommodation or not. And it follows very strictly and very closely with the process that other agencies and entities have put in place. I'm not sure if Dr. Chokshi would like to add anything to that.

Commissioner Chokshi: Nothing to add.

Mayor: Okay. Thank you.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Erin from Politico.

Question: Hi, there, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to follow up on some of your comments about encouraging employers to bring back their workforce. I kind of just want to clarify the technicalities of that because if I understand correctly, please, correct me if I'm wrong, it's still capped at 50

percent of the workforce, right? So, are they even allowed to bring back their entire workforce? And if they're not, is there some kind of timeline for, you know, those regulations [inaudible] –

Mayor: Yeah. I'm speaking to the broad strategic direction here. Of course, employers are going to follow all State and City guidance. My point is that I think as we've gone through these other phases, I mean, just think about the pure momentum and logic of this, the goal is to keep coming back, but always to do it safely. That's what governed phases one, two, three, four. That's what governed the decision to come back with our school system. And then we'll continue from there, keep building up, but it has to be done safely. So, of course, following all rules. And as I said with the City workforce, which is a big workforce, we're going to do that carefully and in a timely manner based on the data and science. But what I'm simply saying is I think employers should start at least making those plans now getting ready to bring back – those who can, within the rules, bring back more, I think it's a good thing to do, but everyone will figure out the right timeline for themselves, obviously. Go ahead.

Question: All right. And then I want to go back to something you said yesterday with regards to people who test positive that, you know, for the vast majority, it's a very temporary reality. But there've been a lot of studies showing that in many patients, in fact, some indicating a majority of patients, there are long-term health effects from the coronavirus. And I'm wondering, is the City doing anything, A, to quantify kind of, the, you know, long-term health burden that might come from a disease, you know, that's been so widespread in the city would be to, you know, provide services to these people, make sure they can get the care they need when they're still dealing with symptoms?

Mayor: It's a very good question, Erin, and I appreciate it. And I'll just say something up front and then turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma, Dr. Katz, anyone who wants to jump in. Look, we know coronavirus, it's been devastating to this city. What happened particularly in the beginning in March and April, the lives we lost and the horrifying experience that a lot of people went through. We also know the vast majority of people, thank God, went through much, much less. And today we see something different. Today we see a very low rate of infection in the city. We see very few hospitalizations, which would be one of the ways, of course, of measuring severity. It's why it's important that we tell you every day, the number of hospitalizations, but also the percentage that test positive for COVID. And you can see how very low that's been.

There still are people suffering from it. You're absolutely right. We don't ever want to miss the fact that for some people it's a horrible experience, but clearly the facts keep telling us, thank God, that for most people it is not. But your question's a really good one. And I have heard from a lot of individuals, their concern and their feeling that they are experiencing long-term impact. So, it's something we have to start dealing with for the future of the city. So, again, we'll start with Dr. Choksi and then if any of the other doctors want to join in, please do.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, Sir. Well, you made the key point, which is that our overall goal is to prevent as much suffering as possible. The best way to do that is to prevent as many people from getting infected with COVID-19 as possible. We do know, to your very good question, that people, some people who have been infected with the virus do show signs of persistent symptoms, things like fatigue or shortness of breath, joint pain, you know, these are things that can be can be very significant, you know, for the people who are experiencing them. It's an area where we're still watching the science unfold to understand precisely why that's occurring. And so, we are in regular touch with our clinical colleagues to make sure that we're understanding what they're seeing and starting to track it as much as possible. The final note that I'll say – and Dr. Long may have more to say about this – is that we know that many of the health care systems across the city are setting up dedicated services and clinics for people who are experiencing persistent symptoms from COVID-19 including at our public health care system, Health + Hospitals.

Mayor: Let me invite any other doctors who would like to jump in. Okay. Thank you and look, everyone, as we conclude today, I think the important thing to think about here is what has allowed us to come back and what's going to allow us to deal with the challenges that we face ahead. It's been an incredible spirit of solidarity in this city. And it's interesting, one of the most diverse places on Earth, a place where you could say, how on Earth could people get on the same page and work together, and yet that is what makes New York City so exceptional. It does not stop us from getting together that we happen to come from every corner of the world or that we speak hundreds of languages. People actually do get together on the same page. And we've seen a sense of solidarity, people looking out for each other, looking out for their neighbors, the whole city coming together. And certainly, from the City government, we have that same sense of City agencies all working shoulder to shoulder in common cause, and it doesn't really matter which specific uniform of which agency they're wearing. There's been a spirit of we're all in the same fight together. This is a city built on the labor of working people. Its greatness comes from everyday people, neighborhood people, grassroots people. That has always been our strength, a lot of them unsung heroes, but that strength, that resiliency is going to bring us back. And there is a palpable sense – you go out in the neighborhoods in this city, like I was in a Soundview in the Bronx a few days ago, people actually do feel like they're in this together and they're fighting for each other and that is what's going to bring us back strong. So, thank you, everybody.

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