

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 7, 2021, 11:05 AM
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON
THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW**

Brian Lehrer: It's the Brian Lehrer show on WNYC. Good morning, again, everyone. And now, as every week on Friday, it's time for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, or tweet a question at Brian Lehrer and good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. And, Brian, I have some breaking news for you today. Today, according to our Health Department the positivity level for COVID in this city is at 2.41 percent. This is the lowest COVID rate in New York City in six months.

Lehrer: That is really good news. It was that three percent positivity threshold that you were at for closing public schools that you had to deal with in the fall. So, it's been many months and that is good news indeed.

Mayor: And it's going in the right direction, and really this is something to celebrate about how New Yorkers have handled this because folks have been heroic and strong and done the distancing and worn the masks, and also gone out there and gotten vaccinated in extraordinary numbers, and we got more work to do, but this is a story of New Yorkers really pitching in and making a difference. So, something to be real happy about.

Lehrer: Well, that might change your answer to what was going to be my first question, because I noticed that since you were on last Friday, the Governor did it again. He one-upped to you on something that you initiated, and last Friday here, you are touting your plan to fully reopen the city on July 1st, because by then there would be about five million vaccinated New Yorkers, you said, and it would be safe enough to do so. First, the Governor wouldn't even promise to allow you to do that, but then he announced a full reopening for May 19th, six weeks earlier than your July 1st date. So, my question was, and I guess still is, since you hung your timing on when enough New Yorkers would be vaccinated, do you think of May 19th full reopening is safe?

Mayor: Well, look, Brian, what he's put forward is actually a variety of steps. It's not quite the same as what I said. What I said is a full, full reopening, and like essentially things back to normal with, you know, obviously some exceptions, but basically getting back to normal where we go to things as we always did. The plan the state has is a series of steps over the weeks ahead, we're still with a variety of restrictions in place. We're going to watch – we're going to watch carefully. Our health leadership is constantly looking at the data. We think everything needs to be based on the data and the science. So, today I feel good. I see things moving in the right direction. Let's keep watching carefully and we'll make adjustments if we need to. The most important point is for people to get vaccinated. And what we're seeing is folks continue to get

vaccinated. I want more and more folks to do it. This is the difference maker. Everyone now has perfect proof that vaccination was a difference maker, because we went from a situation where COVID was rampant to a situation where it's now on the run, decreasing all the time. The x-factor is the level of vaccination, even with the variance. So, a reminder to all your listeners, if you haven't yet gotten vaccinated, you can walk up at a variety of city sites, including the wonderful site in Times Square that we featured yesterday in our video, and the American Museum of Natural History. You can go to vaccinefinder.nyc.gov to find a site. If you want to make an appointment, you can call 8-7-7-VAX-4-NYC, if you prefer to go by phone. But it's time for everyone to contribute to this progress and consolidate it by going out there and getting vaccinated.

Lehrer: Question about another kind of safety – safety on the subways. I've been seeing the reports from our transit desk of several disturbing incidents just this week – an off-duty subway worker was slashed in the face on a J train with a box cutter and sent to intensive care. Another person barricaded himself in a conductor's cab on another J train disrupting subways for over an hour. A conductor confronted someone smoking on a 2 train in the Bronx and was knocked unconscious. The NYPD reports major crimes in the subway are down right now, but the NYPD also reports there've been at least 300 assaults so far this year compared to around 380 last year at this time. But considering there are more than 3 million, fewer riders every day, that would be a high and higher per rider number of assaults significantly. The MTA says it needs more police. You say there are enough. Do these recent incidents change your thinking at all?

Mayor: No. What's happening right now is clearly at the instruction of the Governor, the MTA leadership is fearmongering. I've never seen anything like it. Brian people constantly saying something isn't safe when it is. I've ridden the subways. So, many folks in my life ride the subways all the time. They're overwhelmingly safe. There have been some incidents that truly are troubling. You're right. The individual incidents are troubling, and we need to do a lot to make sure there's not even a single one, but we sent 600 more officers into the subways. We've sustained that. We have a huge amount of mental health outreach and homeless outreach now happening in the subways. What's really going to help the subways get safer is more and more people riding them, and that's what's happening. New Yorkers are choosing to get back to the subways, ridership is going up every single week. The recovery is going to bring safety with it. Because of a global pandemic, we went through unprecedented problems, but now we have a chance to do a really full recovery. The economy is incredibly strong. Jobs are coming back quickly. What leaders should be doing is saying, “Hey, we can do this and we're going to make the difference, and they should be rooting for New York City, not trying to undermine the recovery for political reasons, and it's absolutely for political reasons. So, let's be clear about that now that we've put a lot of cops in the subway, you're going to see them, but more importantly we need the people back and the people are deciding – they're voting with their feet.

Lehrer: Marie in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Marie.

Question: Hey, yes. Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mayor. Thank you very much for doing this every week, and thank you for the good news on the positivity rate. My question and my concern regarding an outdoor dining structure on my street in front of the laundromat, a use and in front of the street tree I mulch, I have been mulching for a few years. The bar/restaurant, in January, started its outdoor structure covering entirely not just its frontage, which is double at a corner, all the way across the laundromat, and they've just continued to you know, they're using

everything for their own end. No one can pick up or drop off in the laundromat. They've broken branches of our street tree. They have started – the leveled their own street tree pit with asphalt, and because of their construction, the end into the laundromat is blocking the flow of water into the storm drain, which is at the other end of the structure, creating a backdraft, and they have been trying to use the street tree as a storm drain because it's closest to that end. So, I need help—

Lehrer: Where is this?

Question: Kingsbridge on 231st Street.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Marie, thank you. Thank you for raising this. This is exactly one of the things I appreciate about this show, and I appreciate about you, Brian, but I especially appreciate about your callers, when they raise something that we need to fix and we need to address this is the voice of the people. So, Marie, thank you for caring so much for your community. Please give your information to WNYC, we'll have inspectors come out right away to address this. Look, I think outdoor dining has been amazing and it's going to be permanent and it's going to improve life in this city, and it's going to bring back our restaurant industry and hundreds of thousands of jobs and keep them, but it also has to be done in a smart way in terms of being good neighbors with everyone around. If folks can't get to their own laundromat, that doesn't make sense. Obviously, that's unacceptable. For years and years and years, I depended on the laundromat. I understand if you can't get to it, it really destroys your quality of life, and we need restaurants to be good neighbors. Our Nightlife Office often is able to go in and mediate situations like this and come up with positive resolutions. So, we'll get them involved. We'll get the Department of Transportation, which handles the sidewalks involved. I think we can find a resolution here quickly, and please let WNYC know how we can reach you today, Marie.

Lehrer: Pat on Staten Island, you're on WNYC, and Marie do hold on, we'll take your contact information off the air if you want to give it. Pat on Staten Island, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello.

Question: Hi, good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Mr. Mayor, I hope you're practicing the Dutch Reach, which we spoke about a couple of years ago. This is a Vision Zero topic. Obviously, Vision Zero has not been working because we're having more traffic fatalities. So, listen. this is the commonsense program that we need to get going. We need a blitz on obstructed windshields tool. Many people are driving with suction cup cell-phone mounts on their windshield, obstructing the view. They can't see pedestrians when they're turning. They have handicap tags on the rear-view mirror. They have air fresheners, they have masks, they have dice, they have stickers all over the windshield. I see more and more cars driving with front-tinted windows and tinted windshields than I have ever seen living in New York City for the past 36 years [inaudible] I haven't seen one ad from New York City DOT, and I met with the education and outreach department there. They have no idea what I'm talking about. How can you have a program called Vision Zero when you don't do anything about suction cup cellphone mounts on windshields—

Lehrer: All right, Pat, I'm going to leave it there, but your question is very clear. Obstructed windshields as a safety hazard. Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Yeah, and Pat, thank you for raising this and you have raised it before, and I think you've got a good point here. Look, I will disagree with you profoundly on Vision Zero. Vision Zero undoubtedly has worked. Vision Zero got, like so many other things, thrown off by a global pandemic that changed everyone's patterns, and we saw people using cars more, et cetera. We're going to reverse that. There's no question about that, but Vision Zero for God's sakes. The facts before the global pandemic, the facts were abundantly clear that we were pushing down the rate of fatalities and injuries consistently, and there's a lot more Vision Zero coming. In fact, next week, we're going to focus on the streets in New York City all week. We're going to talk about new Vision Zero actions, new ways of re-imagining the streets in New York City. There's a lot more coming to even deepen Vision Zero, including we got to have more speed cameras and we've got to have help in Albany passing the legislation. I said it should be in honor of a Detective Anastasios Tsakos – passing legislation to protect crash victims, to be tougher on reckless and dangerous driving. There's a chance to do that this year in Albany and help us deepen Vision Zero. But to your specific question, I think you have a valid point, Pat, and I'm going to ask the Transportation Commissioner Hank Gutman to talk to you directly about this and see what it will take for us to get more action, whether we need state or city laws or what it would take to be able to reduce some of these obstructions you're talking about. So, I do see your point. It's a very good moment for us to be acting on these issues and the Commissioner will follow up with you directly.

Lehrer: Pat, thank you for your call, and I was going to ask you, and I will ask you now a more general Vision Zero question anyway, which is based on the number of traffic deaths going up this year, 70 traffic deaths, including 43 pedestrian deaths, up from 26 last year at this time are the numbers I saw from the group Transportation Alternatives. And Staten Island, that caller was from Staten Island, the Staten Island Advance sites, a recent study by a car insurance industry group that named Staten Island as the number one most dangerous place for pedestrians in the United States. All boroughs but Queens ranked within the top 10, based on the proportion of drivers in each metro area who have received one or more citations for failure to yield to pedestrians. So, your reaction to all this?

Mayor: I would say we've got a lot of work to do. I mean, we, first of all, Staten Island obviously is the borough proportionately where people use their cars the most. That's a known fact. That means there's more vulnerability there. Second, we couldn't do all the enforcement we wanted to do because our police resources were stretched thin. Many police officers were out because of COVID, et cetera. I want us to get back to intensive police enforcement on speeding, on failure to yield. That was a crucial part of Vision Zero that was working, but we still got to go farther, and I think that changes now that we need deepening, Vision Zero, more speed cameras, tougher rules for drunk driving and reckless driving, ensuring that there's much more stringent penalties. There's still a culture. I talked about this painfully at the funeral for Detective Tsakos. There is still a culture in this city, in this country that if you go out and you drive impaired and you hurt someone, you kill someone, it's not treated like other crimes and it's somehow tolerated. People are driving drunk every single day in the city, and it's still socially too tolerated in so many ways. The legislation in Albany, the Crash Victims Rights and Safety Act is absolutely essential, and this has been strongly supported by Families for Safe Streets, it's been strongly supported by Transportation Alternatives. Within it is Sammy's Law, named after a

12-year-old in Park Slope who died because of a reckless driver. It is time to tighten these laws. So, Vision Zero works, but we've got to go even farther is the bottom line, especially on Staten Island.

Lehrer: Two weeks ago, on the show I asked you about the police killing of Kawaski Trawick who was in a mental health crisis alone in his own apartment. Commissioner Shea found no wrong doing, so no discipline for the officer who shot him dead, but the case was described in ProPublica, based on the officers at the scenes owned body cam footage, as containing a more experienced black officer trying to convince his newer white colleague not to use force before Trawick was tased and then shot and killed anyway, and ProPublica quoting a former NYPD detective who said they could have waited for help and just closed the door, since department policy is to isolate and contain people in crisis when they're alone. When I asked you two weeks ago if you support your Commissioner's determination of no wrongdoing, you said you weren't familiar enough yet with the details and you would find out more. Do you have a position now on whether that officer acted properly in killing Kawaski Trawick and should not have been disciplined as he was not?

Mayor: So, here's the bottom line. I have seen the video now. Gotten a lot more information. I'm glad you raised it. I'm glad that ProPublica raised it. I'm concerned, the – it's a complex situation when you watch it. There's clearly some real efforts to try to deescalate and address the situation. There is a weapon present in terms of the individual involved. It's a complex situation. There's no question about it, but I am definitely concerned by what I see. The Civilian Complaint Review Board is looking to bring action in this situation, I think that's appropriate, and there should be further investigation, further evaluation of what happened here. Because even though I think there are subtleties and problems here, it's not an open-end shut from what I can see, the goal in all these cases is to in any way, shape, or form, avoid the use of deadly force. And so, this deserves a fuller investigation. This deserves action by the civilian complaint review board.

Lehrer: I'm going to give the listeners a little more on this because the case doesn't get much publicity in the media. Here's part of what ProPublica reported from the body cam footage. Officer Herbert Davis, the more experienced officer told officer Brandan Thompson, “we ain't going to tase him”, as Trawick stood about seven feet from them. Thompson fired his taser anyway, which as can happen in rage Trawick who ran toward the officers, Officer Davis, again, tried to stop his partner this time from shooting his gun. Officer Davis briefly pushed Officer Thompson's gun down saying, “no, no, don't, don't, don't, don't.” He said don't five times, but Thompson fire three times anyway, pause for a moment, and then fire a final shot, and Trawick died almost instantly according to ProPublica citing the body cam footage, et cetera. So, considering that Commissioner Shea decided no discipline involved, you are concerned as you're expressing it right now, what does this say about keeping the final authority with the Police Commissioner to make these disciplinary determinations rather than with a Civilian Complaint Review Board?

Mayor: Again, first of all, if you look at all the footage, there's a lot going on and I can understand anyone who says there was numerous efforts to deescalate and there was unfortunately an individual with a weapon, and it was a dangerous situation. There's obviously – this is not, again, the opening and shut. So, I understand anyone evaluating that who says the officers did what they could do, but the, the bottom line to me is there's still – it's still not what we should ideally have. That's what we have to aspire to something better and I don't think he

should be dead in the end, and we need something better. And so, this is why we have the Civilian Complaint Review Board. This is why it is civilian, because they will bring a civilian perspective, and that's why we have oversight. Here's what we need to remember. There is now a discipline matrix. There is now an MOU, a Memorandum of Understanding, that Commissioner Shea signed along with the chair of the CCRB, Fred Davie, and it binds the NYPD to the due process led by the Civilian Complaint Review Board and to the outcomes that the matrix delineates. And I really say to all your listeners, if you will care about these issues, read the discipline matrix and this MOU, it's quite clear, and I've said, and the Commissioner said we are bound by it. We are sticking to it, period. So, if that leads to a new outcome, Brian, that will be the ultimate outcome here. And so, I just – I think that I understand why people say because State law, we did not write the State law, I would be entirely in favor of changing State law to make very clear that the matrix is binding. State law still puts in all police commissioners around the state, the final authority. But what Commissioner Shea has done is said, he defers to this MOU and to this process with the CCRB and the discipline matrix, and that was the right thing to do, and this case will now go through that approach.

Lehrer: Maria in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Maria.

Question: Good morning. Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for your successful contact tracer program. I worked for your COVID Tracer Initiative assigned to the DOE Situation Room, contacting phobic school staff and parents, my colleagues and I each talked more than 80 households daily. I hear about the financial impact on working mothers due to work absences caused by back-to-back quarantines because of their children's exposure to positive COVID cases, forcing moms to miss work and stay home with minors, you cannot be left alone. We hear about the students' mental and academic distress due to absence from the school environment, from their teachers and classmates. The solution, Mr. Mayor, I'm asking you to increase the current 20 percent COVID testing and scores to 80 percent to prevent daily exposures and the revolving quarantine, to identify more cases quickly, and prevent the spread from community to schools, and school to poor immigrant families and low wage jobs, and limited English proficiency who don't understand the messages sent from the schools regarding quarantines. Some households with multiple kids in the same schools have gone to four quarantines. I know you can't run again, but this is the worst time for you to be leaving us without seeing through the scope of the tracer program. We need your help. These families need your help, please.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Thank you. Yes, Maria. Thank you. First of all, thank you for passionately advocating for these families, and I really appreciate what you're saying, including folks who really are trying to understand what's happening and it's hard to get the information they need or, you know, a language barrier or creating a challenge. Thank you for being there for them and thank you for being part of our Situation Room and, and our test and trace effort. This effort is going to continue. First thing I need to say is the test and trace effort is going to continue until COVID is done, and then as converting into our new Public Health Corps, which is very important because we're going to take a grassroots approach to public health, going out to communities, educating them in multiple languages, going forward post-COVID. Maria, please give your information to WNYC so we can follow up with you on some of the specifics you're hearing, but I do want to tell all your listeners, Brian, today in New York City, we have 1,632 schools open, literally every

single school open. 1,632. We have a handful of classrooms quarantining, the total number of students right now in the school system quarantining is 955, out of the hundreds of thousands who are going to school today. So, what has changed profoundly? We got rid of the problematic two-case rule. Obviously, everyone together has been fighting back COVID. The testing programs have worked, tests and trace has worked, Situation Room has worked, vaccination drive has worked. Kids are in school now, and it's not being disrupted almost ever anymore because of COVID. So, that's the good news, but any place that we need to do additional testing, we automatically increase the testing of schools where we see a challenge, but the good news is we're seeing fewer and fewer challenges each day. The positivity level in schools as of yesterday, 0.27 percent. Almost no one, thank God, with COVID in our public schools right now.

Lehrer: I have a COVID in schools' question too. One that's been coming up recently from a number of news organizations. I see a report on Chalkbeat, the education site, that says with 60 percent of families still choosing fully remote learning after the recent opt-in period, some of those families will want the option for next school year if they don't trust the Department of Education's protocols or have vulnerable sick, or elderly relatives at home, et cetera. But they say you won't so far give them a clear answer about whether a fully remote option will be an option for students for next year. Can you give them an answer now?

Mayor: I'll give them a positive answer. Opening day of school in September is about four months away. And I just told you, we have the lowest COVID positivity of six months and it's plummeting downward. I think we're going to be an entirely different and better situation already in July. I said, July 1st for a reason, based on all the projections of our medical team, CDC, etcetera, we expect July to be substantially better than now and September to be an entirely different environment. So, the Chancellor and I've talked about this, we've talked about with the health care team, we are planning for every single child to be back in school. That is the plan, and we'll monitor, and we'll talk to parents, and we'll talk to health experts, and we've got a lot of time to make adjustments as we go along. But the plan is for every child to be back in school.

Lehrer: So, people will react to this however they are reacting, but are you stating today there will be no full-time remote option in September?

Mayor: No, I'm saying the plan is for every child to be back in school between –four months is a long time. So, I think – here's a question, the parents want to know if there's going to be a seat for their child in September, I guarantee you right now there's a seat for your child. We can accommodate every single child. We are moving full speed ahead with that plan. I think parents should want their kids back in school, honestly, because the entire situation is better now and it's going to be, I think, night and day between now and September, and we have a lot of catching up to do. So, we're planning for every child to be back. We will pay attention in the meantime to what happens with the health care situation, what our health care team says, we'll certainly be engaging parents, but it's plan A. Plan A is every single child back in school.

Lehrer: Last caller and it's a teacher. In fact, while we're on education, excuse me, John Carlo in Brooklyn. You're on w NYC with the Mayor. Hello, John Carlo.

Question: Good morning both, and yes, I am a teacher, and I am looking forward to a full return and full live instruction next year, but that will mean classrooms that are much more full with limited insulation, sometimes only one door. So briefly, right now students who do not have their

measles, mumps, and rubella vaccinations are removed from school. Will you pledge and with the DOE to know that the vaccines will soon be approved for age 12, will you pledge that students not COVID vaccinated will face the same restrictions as those who do not have the MMR?

Mayor: John Carlo, first and very importantly, thank you for the work you do because teachers have been heroic throughout this year. But no, honestly, I'm not going to pledge that at all. We have, right now we're seeing extraordinary success without yet being able to vaccinate younger kids. We are very, very hopeful, and Brian, I'm sure you're talking about this that very soon we'll be able to vaccinate even as early as next week, 12-year-olds to 15-year-olds with the Pfizer vaccine. We're going to act on that the second we get full sign off, and I think a lot of parents are going to come forward, and then we're hopeful we'll get to the point soon where we can go to even younger kids. But without the benefit of being able to vaccinate kids at that younger level, we're seeing the schools extraordinarily safe right now, and we're talking about what's going to be happening in September, fully four months from this day. So, I feel very good that we're going to be able to have a safe environment with a lot of people vaccinated, a lot more people vaccinated between now and then, but without a requirement. I think that's the right way to go, and we'll watch, and we'll pay attention to the science, and we might make adjustments. But at this moment, I think we can achieve it based on all the progress we're making.

Lehrer: John Carlo, thank you for your call. And with that, we are out of time except to say that a little birdie told me that tomorrow might be your birthday, is that true?

Mayor: The birdie is right, and it's a challenging birthday, but I'm moving forward with life, Brian. I'm enjoying this last day of this phase of life, and you know what? It's a beautiful sunny day, counting my blessings.

Lehrer: Well, may the eighth be with you. Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: Well done, well done. Thank you, Brian.

Lehrer: Thanks as always, talk to you next week.

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