

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everyone. Well in our battle against the coronavirus, we have an important milestone we marked today, and this is another example of what New York City can do to fight back against COVID, the strength of New Yorkers, the ability of New Yorkers to get things done. As of today, we have surpassed two million vaccinations since the beginning of our effort, the exact number 2,024,601 doses have been administered since we began, and the very beginning we had very little supply, but we knew the vaccine would be the difference maker. It was a shot of hope and now it's two million shots of hope that have been given and so much more to come. Look, I said weeks ago, we could hit five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. This is further proof we're on target, we can get it done, so long as we get that supply. Well, I've said from the beginning, we need the manufacturers, we need the federal government, we need the State government to help us get it done. Get us the supply, free us up, free us to vaccinate, cut the red tape, give us local control, this is the way forward.

Now, back in January, I think it was January 26th, I said, look, we need the federal government to use the Defense Production Act, we need to get all the pharmaceutical companies in America into this effort. Three companies only is not the way to defeat this virus, three companies only is not how we overcome COVID this year and into the future, nor how America leads the world and serve the rest of the world in fighting this virus. And talk about further proof that we're all interconnected, if this virus is raging at one part of the world, we know it will eventually reach us. So, actually getting everyone vaccinated everywhere is in America's interest, in New York City's interest. That's where I said, let's get all the companies who can participate involved, and at that point specifically, I said, look at Merck, giant pharmaceutical, they tried to make their own vaccine, couldn't, they were moving on to other things. At that point, weeks ago, I said, hey, let's get them to participate in creating the vaccine. Well today the White House is announcing that that is in fact what is happening, that Merck will cooperate and partner with Johnson & Johnson to greatly expand their production capacity so we can get more vaccines. We can get what we need, supply, supply, supply. This is an example of getting it right and as a result of this partnership, now, the projection is a 100 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine available nationwide by June. What a difference that would make, what a difference that will make here, but let's not stop there. I'm going to appeal again to the pharmaceutical industry, to the federal government, go farther, use the defense production act even more, bring more companies into this, we'll be at this all year into next year in this country, globally, let's defeat COVID as quickly as possible. We need every company to be a part of this effort.

Okay, now, the sheer numbers are crucial. Everything runs through the question of supply. Our ability to recover depends on supply, a recovery for all of us, a fair, equitable recovery depends on supply. Fighting disparity requires supply. We need to build momentum up in the communities that have suffered the most and then hit hardest by COVID. We've got to get supply of vaccine to these communities so more and more people get vaccinated, then tell their family, their friends, their neighbors, their coworkers, and that builds trust, and then more and more people come forward. That's what we need, and so the supply will allow us to do all these things. But even without the supply we fully need, we're focused on equity every day, and we're focused on getting the supply where it's needed most. Today we make a major announcement. A part of this city, a really wonderful part of this city, built by working people for working people, Co-Op City in the Bronx, some place that I feel is an example of the goodness in New York City, a place for every kind of person, a place where people work together, literally a co-op. That cooperative spirit is strong in Co-Op City and Co-Op City has not had its own vaccination site until now. Today we announce that a new site will be open on Thursday in Co-Op City and let's face it, the Bronx has been very hard hit by the COVID crisis. Hospitals in the Bronx were amongst the hardest hit in the entire city. Communities felt deep, deep losses from the coronavirus in the Bronx. The Bronx is too often overlooked. We can't let that happen. So, we're going to bring the vaccine to the people of the Bronx, to the people Co-Op City. This is going to be a key part of reaching that five-million-person goal by June.

I want to thank my colleagues in government who pushed hard for this to happen, and I want you to hear from a couple of them now, and first a man who's really made his voice heard during this crisis on this call for equity, and specifically reached out to me and said, Co-Op City needs our help and we're doing it because we'd heard his call for help and justice. Great pleasure to introduce Congress Member Jamaal Bowman.

[...]

Thank you so much, Congress Member, thank you for being such a strong voice for equity, not only in terms of the coronavirus but on so many other fronts as well, we're going to keep working with you because I keep saying a recovery for all of us means doing things differently, not repeating the status quo that existed before COVID, but doing something very different, and you've been such a powerful voice for that. And I look forward to seeing you in a few days up in Co-Op City as we celebrate this step forward, and I want to bring in another voice who's been fighting for equity for the Bronx, and to make sure that we're there for the people of the Bronx who have been so hard hit, and not only is he fighting for that in the Bronx, he also fights in Albany to protect the Bronx and New York City, and he's been right there with us in our efforts to make sure that the State provides us our fair share. And I'm going to keep talking about this, New York City is still not getting our fair share of the vaccine, we need it, and the Bronx in particular needs it. So, it's my great pleasure to introduce State Senator Jamaal Bailey.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you very much, Senator. And, you know, you said an important point there at the end – when people see the vaccine site in their community, some place they know, some place they trust, it encourages people to come forward and encourages people to feel more

comfortable, and they know they'll get answers from people they know in their own community. That's what we've got to do more and more of. My goal is to get this vaccination effort to the grassroots more and more all the time. That's how we're going to reach the incredible numbers that we're shooting for to make sure we can bring back the city strong. So, thank you, Senator. Also, special thanks to a new Council Member from the community, from Co-Op City and the surrounding area, Kevin – surrounding area, Kevin Riley, thank you. You've been working hard already to make sure the vaccine reaches the people of your district. So, thank you.

And, everyone, look, the good news is we see steady progress on the vaccine supply. We need a lot more, I want to see a lot more progress, but we definitely keep seeing improvement each week. That's really good news. The good news is we obviously see some progress in terms of the case numbers and the positivity. But we keep cautioning, we've got to know a lot more about the variance. The variants are the X-factor here. I don't want people to think of the variants as something bigger than they are. I don't want people to give them mythological powers, but I do want us to be sober and clear about the variants. We need to know more. We need to constantly tell you what we learn. So, New York City continues to deepen our efforts to test and evaluate the variants. We are doing that more than any other city in the nation. We're going to intensify our capacity for doing that testing. In fact, we plan to quadruple our capacity in the month of March, because we need more and better data and the public needs more and better data. And we've said from the beginning, the coronavirus, unlike the vast majority of crises we deal with, this is literally ever-changing. I can't remember a single week where it was the same as the week before – everything changes all the time when you're battling the coronavirus, that's a particular challenge. But the answer is more research, more facts, more data, more science, more transparency, and that's what helps people to understand, and to feel comfortable, and to believe that we can move forward together.

So, now, we're going to hear from Dr. Varma. There'll be a more detailed technical briefing. So, for our colleagues in the media, if you have a lot of detailed questions, you'll certainly have that opportunity after this press availability to talk in greater detail with Dr. Varma. But I want the public as a whole to hear what he has to say, because he has an incredible ability to make things plain and clear for all of us, and it's something I value greatly, and he's done a great service to this city. So, to tell us about the latest on the variants, and sort of to frame the larger discussion about the variants, Dr. Jay Varma.

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. There's been a lot of discussion in the media about the danger of variants and people are worried very naturally whether or not they should be doing something different. It's a very reasonable thing to worry about. There may be a day when we have to do something different because of this. But, right now, so far, the answer is clear, there's nothing different that we need people to do in New York. The single most important message is that don't change what you're doing right now, keep wearing a well-fitting mask, even consider wearing two masks, maintain distance, wash your hands, get tested, and when your turn comes ready, get vaccinated. This is the same message being delivered in the U.K., South Africa, and Brazil, the places where you've heard about variants being widespread. You know, when the news about new variants in New York City was reported last year, my college-aged daughter asked me is the vaccine still going to work, you know, when it's my turn to get vaccinated? I have a friend from college who's now a medical

school professor who texted me and said, is it true that these variants are all over New York City and our vaccines don't work anymore? So, I want to be really clear – everything we know about the virus and our vaccines right now says getting vaccinated is the single best way to prevent getting severe illness and dying from this virus. And it's the single best path all of us have together to get back to doing the things we love.

Now, here in New York City, we're testing for these variants more than any other city in the country. And we're not just tracking the spread of the variants that we know about. We're also testing so that we can find new ones that might emerge in the future. Specifically, we have the capacity to sequence over 2,000 specimens a week at our pandemic response laboratory and our City Health Department laboratory. And we have the capacity that's being quadrupled of that just in those City laboratories alone. In addition to that, we have all of the tremendous academic partners who are now ramping up their testing as well. And we're really the only city or state in the country that's continuously reporting estimates about how common these are. And you'll hear more about that during the technical briefing afterwards.

So, I really just want to emphasize to everybody that, you know, we're studying these actively. We're all hoping and wishing together that we don't want to find anything too alarming, but we assure you that we're going to tell you what we know, what we don't know, what we're working to do to find out, and whether anything should change in what you're doing, even if it's difficult. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Dr. Varma. And, everyone, look, we're going to constantly report what we learn. We believe that is the single best thing we can do. Dr. Varma is going to constantly give updates – Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz – you're going to hear exactly what's going on. But what we can tell you right now, all those basics work, and getting vaccinated works, and getting tested works. And so, we remind everyone, I'm going to say it again – it's Get Tested Tuesday. It's a great reminder, every Tuesday, if you haven't been tested in the last month, get tested. It is one of the ways we protect New Yorkers. Why? Because it gives us a lot of information. But for you, it tells you, if you test positive that you can turn to our test and trace – Test and Trace Corps. The Test and Trace Corps. is there for you, can help you safely separate, if you need, from your household, can get you the support you need, the guidance you need, connect you with medical support, whatever it is. We've got to keep testing, because that is a key part of how we know the next steps to take person-by-person and as a city. So, please, everyone, just make it a point – if you haven't been tested once a month, it's free, it's easy, let's keep doing that.

Okay. Now, when we talk about the way forward, it's always, first and foremost, vaccines and a central question always with vaccine is supply, supply, supply. But we do see improvement, as we see improvement on the supply front, it's a reminder, we've got to reach all the folks we really need to be reaching and for very strategic reasons. Look, there are so many people who support us, take care of us, make things happen for all of us. They need to be protected. Not all of them have been made eligible. So, I'm calling upon the State of New York to update the eligibility once again. There are folks who need to be included – our Sanitation workers, who have been heroes, just did amazing jobs during the snowstorms. We depend on them. We need them to be healthy. We need to protect them. They should be included. Also, looking at the folks who go

out there and protect our health and wellbeing all the time – City inspectors from variety of departments, go out and protect us, make sure things work, make sure things are safe – they need to be protected. The folks that literally protect our lives – by the way, not so long from now, it's going to be warm weather again, we're going to need our lifeguards back. We need to start training them now. They need to be protected. All of these types of New Yorkers, all these categories should be on the State list of those eligible for vaccination.

Further, we need to do more to make the city safe to turn the page from 2020. That means getting our court system back. Our court system is still not functioning, that is holding back the entire justice system. What should we do? Vaccinate. Vaccinate everyone who works in the courtrooms. Vaccinate the court officers. Vaccinate the district attorney's staff. Vaccinate everyone who serves on a jury. If you're willing to serve on a jury, thank you, God bless you, but you should know you'll be safe. The best way to do that, if you're coming into work on a jury, you get vaccinated and you know you're going to be safe. This will allow us all to be safe, because our justice system can come back strong. But the State of New York is not keeping up with the need to update this category, to update these eligibility categories. So, calling on the State, do the right thing, give these folks the ability to vaccinate and to be vaccinated. Give us the freedom to vaccinate. Give us the freedom to vaccinate sanitation workers. Give us the freedom to vaccinate the folks who work in our court system and those who serve on juries. Give us that freedom and we can move this city forward.

All right, everybody, let's go over today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 211 patients. And I'm going to just stop there and note, despite the qualifiers we're talking about today, and our focus constantly on the data and the science, well here's data – this number is actually getting close to that 200 threshold that we say is the key indicator we're looking for. Actually, this number is finally getting back down there, that's a good sign. But on the other fronts with hospital admissions, 65 percent confirmed positive, that's still high. Hospitalization rate, 4.3 per 100,000, that's still high. So, we're watching all that carefully. New reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,558 cases. And percent of people positive tested citywide for COVID-19 – today's report, seven-day rolling average, 6.09 percent. Also good to see that number, but a long way to go for sure.

Okay. A few words in Spanish, again, on the topic of vaccines –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

**Moderator:** We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Senior Adviser Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, and Dr. Ted Long. First question today goes to Sophia from Gothamist.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I am wondering if you think Governor Cuomo should resign?



**Mayor:** Sophia, look, these are very serious allegations against the Governor, both in terms of the nursing home scandal and in terms of sexual harassment. Obviously, a third woman has come forward. If these allegations are true, he cannot govern. He would not be able to govern, it's as simple as that. You have to have a trust from the people, and if you can't maintain that trust, you can't govern. Go ahead, Sophia.

**Question:** Thank you. And pivoting to what the program for homebound seniors will look like, now that the Johnson & Johnson vaccines are arriving – how quickly do you think the City will be ready to stand up at program? What's the scope of the outreach? Are you targeting specific neighborhoods?

**Mayor:** Yeah. So, I'll start and turn to our medical colleagues. Sophia, look, this is one of the very best uses for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, because it's single-shot, which is so important. It means, you know, one and done, and that particularly is important for protecting homebound seniors. They cannot get to vaccination appointments. It has to come to them. So, getting it done in one dose is particularly important. Also, it's just an easier vaccine to use requires less refrigeration. So, we're going to devote a lot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to the homebound senior initiative. We're getting to the point we'll be able to start that very quickly. It's very labor intensive. So, I want to caution, it will take time, because it's, literally, you know, have someone trained, going to each and every home and apartment, but we'll be able to that out this month. And let me turn to – I know that I have Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, Dr. Long, who wants to start on this?

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Sir, I'm happy to start on it and I'll pick up where you left off, which is that we've been planning for this, of course, with respect to being able to use the Johnson & Johnson vaccine for our homebound seniors. And I'm so heartened that some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers will get this added layer of protection. It is something that is logistically complicated, but we're committed to doing it in the coming days. We expect to get the initial part of our Johnson & Johnson supply later this week, it could be as soon as Wednesday or Thursday. And very soon after that, we will be ready to start deploying the vaccine to actually reach our homebound seniors. That overall process will take a matter of weeks, but we aim to start as soon as possible once we have the vaccine in hand and we work through the protocols to deliver it safely.

**Mayor:** Dr. Katz or Dr. Long, anything to add?

**Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps.:** This is Dr. Long. The only thing I would quickly add is, again, this is an incredibly important population. I literally have been, as a primary care doctor, counting the days until we received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, to be life-saving for this population of New Yorkers. We've been planning this for weeks, we will execute it as quickly as possible. And, as Dr. Chokshi said, we're heartened that we have this ability to keep our New Yorkers safe.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Shant from the Daily News.

**Question:** Yeah. Good morning, everyone. I also had an Albany-related question. The State Assembly canceled a session yesterday as the capital is just consumed by the Cuomo scandals. There's just a month to go before the State Legislature is supposed to approve a fiscal plan. [Inaudible] with all the chaos in Albany, are you concerned about the State budget being passed or any other thoughts about getting that done?

**Mayor:** I have a lot of faith in the Legislature, Shant. I gave my testimony about a month ago. A lot of legislators agreed that we have to stop the Governor's proposed cuts to Health + Hospitals, which is almost a billion – a half-billion, excuse me, in cuts. That we have to stop the Governor's proposal to take \$800 million away from New York City public schools. We have to stop the Governor's proposal to take away the rights of local communities to have a say in land-use decisions and give that power to wealthy developers. You know, we, I think, clearly have a number of items we're concerned about, plus the things that we need to get done to empower working New Yorkers and create equity, like local hiring legislation, to make sure that every-day working people in communities where development is happening actually benefit from the jobs from that development, and the ability to get more and more of our government contracts to minority- and women-owned businesses. That's a lot on the table, but I have a lot of faith that the Legislature agrees on these issues, agrees with the City of New York, wants to work with us, wants to get things done. So, I have a lot of faith in Carl Heastie, a lot of faith in the Andrea Stewart-Cousins. I think they will keep things running even while the Governor deals with these scandals. Go ahead.

**Question:** Yeah. So, thanks for that. In a different vein on buses and subways, it seems like there's talk of new service cuts. Some MTA officials, saying those are needed due to low revenue. Others are saying, got to keep things going full steam as much as possible to avoid crowding. Just wanted to ask, what do you think?

**Mayor:** I spoke to Senator Schumer a few days ago, and it's quite clear, to his great credit – and there's nothing like having the majority leader of the U.S. Senate come from your state – he is working overtime to ensure that the stimulus helps us on so many levels, including directly for the MTA and, obviously, a huge amount of money the State would get through the state and local aid. There should not be cutbacks to MTA service when we're trying to recover. This is a year of recovery. 2021 is going to be a historic comeback year for New York City, but that requires the MTA to be strong. From everything I can see in the proposed stimulus. The money is there to keep MTA service at the levels it is at now. And there should not be any cutbacks in that service, especially at this crucial recovery moment. So, I understand anyone who says the MTA has big challenges, but cutting back service would be a huge mistake. And by the way, let's move forward with congestion pricing. One of the ways to help benefit the MTA and the bottom line of the MTA, and make sure we have the mass transit we need is to move congestion pricing aggressively. I spoke to the new Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg last week. He heard me loud and clear, New York City's ready to go. I think he's going to do a lot to help us. He's a former mayor. He understands how to get things done at the local level. Let's speed up the process to bring congestion pricing into play so we can have additional revenue to protect mass transit for all New Yorkers. Go ahead.

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

**Question:** Hi, good morning Mayor. So, there's been some debate over whether the workers who are doing emergency food distribution delivery should be included in the vaccine. And it sounds like there might be some movement, but mutual aid group volunteers still aren't included. Can you talk about whether you would support adding them to the other essential workers you mentioned?

**Mayor:** Oh, Emma 100 percent. People who are feeding their fellow New Yorkers, keeping people alive must be protected. First of all, I say, thank you to all of the folks who are providing food to people, really going out there, putting themselves on the line to do it. It's not easy work, does involve risk. We need to be there for them. So, I'm calling upon the State to fully authorize the vaccination for everyone who's providing food to their fellow New Yorkers. Go ahead, Emma.

**Question:** And then I wanted to ask about Governor Cuomo. He's sort of been in hiding for the last few days, and he's not in public talking about the pandemic response. Does that sort of hurt your ability to reach the public? Does it hurt your ability to work together on the pandemic response? Should he go back to holding in-person events?

**Mayor:** I think all leaders have to answer tough questions from the media, regardless of whether it's convenient. The fact is the work we have to do right now is what matters. Fighting COVID, bringing the City back, bringing the State back. That's the work we all need to be focused on. Now, I would say at the same time, a way to move everything forward is to restore local control. It should not be all in the hands of one person and we're getting a real object lesson for that right now, Emma. If you put too much power in one person's hands, bad things happen. We need local control back all over the state. We have extraordinary health leadership in cities and counties all over the state who need to be re-empowered to protect their people. We need the freedom to vaccinate. We should not have to go hat in hand to Albany for every little change in the vaccination rules. When we know those folks providing food need to be vaccinated. Our Sanitation workers need to be vaccinated. The folks who would serve on juries and help us restore the justice system need to be vaccinated. But the State of New York will not allow me to vaccinate those folks. That's broken. Give us back local control. That's how we move forward.

**Moderator:** The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, everyone on the call. I'm actually up in Albany right now. And what I wanted to ask is sort of as a follow up to what Emma was just asking. You're saying, we need the State to give us control on vaccinations. Do you not have this handled at the staff level? Or can you not have Commissioner Chokshi call Commissioner Zucker to make that happen? You actually need Governor Cuomo himself to pick up the phone? As a practical matter is his crisis right now, imperiling something as simple as permission from the State Health Department?



**Mayor:** Andrew, look, in a normal government where there would be respect for the health professionals and they would have the freedom to do their work, we'd be having a different discussion. I think it's well documented that the health leadership in Albany is very tightly controlled by the Governor. And so, we've asked for the freedom to vaccinate many times. You remember, I had to fight to get senior citizens the freedom to be vaccinated. I had to fight for our first responders to be vaccinated. To me, what should happen at this point is the health care leaders at the State level should have more ability to make these decisions with us. But the best way to get things done is to give localities the right to make their own decisions. We've been doing this for a year. We've been doing this for a year. We know plenty – I don't know anyone in this nation at this point who knows more than Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, Dr. Long. They've been at the frontline of the crisis from the beginning. Give us the ability to make our own decisions. And local control, just restoring normal governance would do that. Go ahead, Andrew.

**Question:** My colleague Marc Santia, is in Connecticut and he's hearing from their largest hospitals and vaccination centers that people are passing on Johnson & Johnson appointments and holding out for Moderna or Pfizer based on their perception that the J & J vaccine is a second class vaccine. It's not as effective. It's not as good. So, I'm wondering if you and your health officials could respond to that? If you're hearing from that concern – if you're hearing that concern in New York as well? And would you yourself get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to perhaps show folks that there's a no drop in efficacy there?

**Mayor:** Yeah. I want to say that very clearly. Thank you for the question, Andrew. I plan on getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. I want to show people it's the right choice. And I, for one look forward to only getting one shot rather than two. Not because I can't handle shots, but because of the schedule and everything else. When you get it done once and you're done, it is so much better for everyone's lives. We have people who aren't showing up for their second shot. That's a problem if it takes two shots to be effective. But when you get one shot and it's done and you're protected, your life is protected. You're not going to end up in the hospital. That's the name of the game. So, I'll be choosing the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. I want you to hear from Dr. Varma and Dr. Katz. And I want – Dr. Varma, can give you, you know, the big picture. I want Dr. Katz to talk as someone who is serving patients right now and governing over the biggest public health system in America, why people should have faith in Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Dr. Varma?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Great. No, thank you. This is a really important question, Andrew. And it's one that we've been worried about really from the beginning. Because you know, the results from the Pfizer and Moderna studies were really incredible. And it's going to be hard to always replicate those in everything that you see. But I really want to emphasize the most critical point. You know, one of the issues that we get with these variants emerging is the virus does evolve. And when you do these studies, you know, they measure kind of two different end points. So, one is people who get mild illness. And one is people who get severe illness and have to be hospitalized and die. Now, what really has worried us about COVID and it was what shut down the world and cost so much of us distress, isn't the mild illness. You know, we get coughs and colds and things all the time. What really has devastated our societies and killed so many people is, are these severe outcomes. So, what is it that we know about these vaccines? They stop those

severe outcomes. They are powerful at doing it. It doesn't matter whether you get Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, or Moderna, the results are absolutely clear. Once you get vaccinated and you wait a few weeks for your body to build up that system, there are basically close to zero hospitalizations and absolutely zero deaths. So, what we need to do about this virus is stop it from making people seriously ill, stop it from overrunning our health system, stop it from killing people. And all three vaccines do that equally.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Dr. Katz?

**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals:** Yes. I intend to start recommending my patients get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine as soon as it's available in our facilities. I like the idea that they will get one vaccine and they will be protected. We have had issues with people who have planned for a second vaccine and then something comes up and they're not able to do it this way. I know that I've gotten that vaccine into their body and they will be protected. And as Dr. Varma says, they will be protected against the thing we worry about, which is that people will die of this illness. And just knowing every time we give someone that Johnson & Johnson shot, that I will not have to worry about them dying or will not have to worry about them coming back for that second shot, will give me tremendous peace of mind as a doctor. Thank you, sir.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Narmeen from PIX 11.

**Question:** Hi, good morning everyone. I wanted to ask following up a bit more on Andrew Siff's question there. I'm glad he asked it in regards to J & J because it's something that we are also hearing from community groups in particular in the Bronx and in Queens. Some misinformation out there is that J & J is being saved for their communities because one, it can be spread out, but also the efficacy levels being low, gives them more mistrust over the vaccine. Can you again, emphasize the education that's going out in those particular communities explaining the differences in the vaccines?

**Mayor:** Yeah. And I'll turn now, I want to keep turning to this great lineup we have. So, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Long in a moment. Narmeen, thank you. It's such an important question. The bottom line is we need everybody vaccinated. Whatever allows us to get people vaccinated the quickest is what's right for you as a New Yorker, it's what's for your family, for your community. There've been so many concerns that there are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people trying to get a vaccine. And then we say, here's a new vaccine. Here's a way to reach more people. And then some voices out there saying, Oh, well, that vaccine is different. We should keep waiting. That makes no sense. Why would you wait when you can get protected right now? And with one single dose, be protected against the worst effects of this disease, it makes no sense to delay. So, I think it's our job to keep educating people. I think there's going to be many, many New Yorkers who say, I'm going to do the smart thing. I'm going to get the first vaccine available. Whatever is the first one available, is the right one for me. And we're going to keep spreading the word that this is the way to get protected immediately. And our job is to reach as many people – remember, how do you stop the coronavirus's grip on our lives? By getting

more and more people vaccinated. Every additional person being vaccinated is another step to defeat the coronavirus. So, we've got to fight this misinformation for the good of all of us. Dr. Chokshi?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thank you, sir. And yes, let's go back to the facts. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is safe, it's effective, it's lifesaving. That's why the FDA and the CDC have authorized it. And it gives us one more tool. So, we now have three vaccines that are safe, effective, and lifesaving. Across all of the scientific studies that were done, across those three vaccines, over a hundred thousand people who were in those studies, not a single person who received a vaccine died from COVID-19. And that's why we're really emphasizing the protective effect of all of the vaccines, including Johnson & Johnson. Our message is simple: the best vaccine to get is the one that you can get now because the sooner you get it, the sooner you'll have protection against this terrible illness. And with respect to getting the message out, I do want to enlist all of you as partners in combating that misinformation that you've described. The City will pull out all of the stops as we have with respect to knocking on doors to spread the message, we've sent out hundreds of thousands of print mailers. We're making phone calls, we're having conversations in communities to engage the people that folks in neighborhoods already trust. And all of this is so important because we have to make our public health messages more contagious than the virus itself.

**Mayor:** Well said, Doctor. Dr. Long, you want to add?

**Executive Director Long:** Yeah, I would add, I believe in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. As a primary care doctor in the Bronx, I will be telling my patients moving forward that I recommend that they received the Johnson & Johnson vaccines. They have chaotic lives, and I know how hard it's been for them to come in and get tested once a month. And being able to get the vaccine only once and know that they're protected and that will help to protect our families goes an incredibly long way. In terms of other things that we're going to be doing, our outreach teams – today's Get Tested Tuesday. You could think of this as Get Tested and Get Vaccinated Tuesdays. We're going to be getting the word out as we talk about the importance of testing, given where we are currently emerging from our second wave, equally more important to get vaccinated as well. So, our teams are going to be spreading education of the facts out there. And finally, we're going to continue to work with our community-based organization, or CBO partners. We've been in lock-step at every step of the way on the testing side. That's how we've been able to be at more than 400 testing locations. They are the trusted messengers that my patients in the Bronx listen to and that New Yorkers listen to. We're going to be sharing the truth out there, which is that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine prevents what matters, deaths and hospitalizations. And again, I believe in it.

**Mayor:** Thank you. And I want to just requote Dr. Chokshi, Narmeen. I think that said it all. The best vaccine you can get is the one you can get now. I think that says it perfectly. Go ahead, Narmeen.

**Question:** I think that might appear on a graphic for you tomorrow.

**Mayor:** There you go.

**Question:** So, a question for you in regard to our vaccination hubs, you've been doing a lot of these pop-up, the more grassroots hubs. I'm curious to know if you have any idea, as far as how quickly they're filling up. Are they filling up as quickly as you'd like, are there ones that are not just, you know, if you can categorize them kind of one to ten, if you will?

**Mayor:** If ten is, they fill up really, really quickly, I would give it an 11. I mean, it's unbelievable. Every place I go, I was out at Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn, Sheepshead Bay Nostrand Houses in Southern Brooklyn, I was at First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem. Every place says the second they put the appointments up, they fill up, period. And we're finding that all over the city, huge amounts of demand. And Narmeen, importantly, demand levels are going up steadily in communities of color because trust is growing as more and more people get the vaccine. I told the story yesterday, it was a story I love, of two women at First Corinthian who were hesitant. And talk about word of mouth advertising. The person who convinced them to go get vaccinated is their 83-year-old mother who had got vaccinated herself and said it was okay. And that she wanted the family back together again, and that people had to get vaccinated so they could see each other again, that's going to be repeated over and over and over again. So, I think we're going to see just steady increase in demand, but yes, talk about if you build it, they will come. The second we put up appointments, they get snapped up everywhere. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Steve Burns from WCBS 880.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Steve, how you been?

**Question:** I'm good. I appreciate you calling on me even though I'm not Rich Lamb.

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** You know what? No, one's perfect, right?

**Question:** Yeah, no one's perfect. I promise I won't ask too many questions about the City seal here.

**Mayor:** Okay. You can – but you're filling big shoes, but we welcome you.

**Question:** I appreciate that. First of all, I wanted to go back to some of the previous questions around your communications with the Governor's office. If that's gotten any more challenging since the scandals that have broken out. I mean, I wanted to give one example. I reached out to the Governor's office yesterday, following what you had said about the Javits and Aqueduct shots that were being given out to non-city residents. And the response I got from the Governor's office was, “the Mayor's argument doesn't make sense, we won't let the Mayor's petty politics distract from our goal.” Do you see it getting at all more challenging to interact with the Governor's office and make plans with the Governor's office when you have so much extraneous other things happening in his realm right now?

**Mayor:** Steve, we've had challenges with the Governor's office for seven years. It's nothing new. But there are still plenty of people on the staff level who talk to each other, keep it professional, keep things moving. Certainly, in all the State agencies, departments, City departments, people are talking to each other all the time. You know, this too shall pass and we're all going to keep moving. On something like that topic though, that response is the petty part. Look, we're saying we have factual data driven evidence of a problem here. We've got these big mega sites, Javits and Aqueduct. They are serving a lot of people who don't come from New York City. I want those people vaccinated too, but the answer is, give us more vaccine. If New York City is expected to cover our people, plus folks from the suburbs, plus folks including from New Jersey and Connecticut, we will serve anybody and everyone, but give us our fair share of vaccine. Don't give us too little vaccine and then expect us to handle people from the city and outside the city. So, we just want to be honest, we're trying to fight the inequities here. We're trying to reach five million New Yorkers vaccinated by June. We're not getting our fair share of vaccine from the State, and it's important to put those facts forward. But we'll keep working with anybody and everybody in Albany and also with the Legislature to make sure things get done. We'll do that no matter what. Go ahead, Steve.

**Question:** All right, appreciate that. Secondly, you touched on it a bit yesterday in terms of reaching the anniversary of when things really started to get hairy here. And a year ago today you were in, what we all know is an alarmingly crowded conference room, with the Governor talking about the first reported case. And obviously there are some lines that stick out here. "This is something we can handle together, go about your business, we can do very fine tuned work with any more positive cases that we see." I mean, just hearing what was said at that press conference a year ago today, obviously so much we didn't know then that we know now, but what goes through your mind as you think back to that day?

**Mayor:** What goes through my mind – I appreciate you raising it, Steve. It's really important for us to understand what happened here. It was January 24th, I think last year, that I called upon the federal government to immediately get us the testing we needed and to authorize us to do our own local testing for the coronavirus. That request was ignored by the Trump administration. The greatest sin in this whole process was that the federal government under Donald Trump ignored the crisis, diminished the crisis, and didn't do the thing that any other president would have done, which is declare a state of emergency, get the testing out to the local levels, really focus on where the danger was. And, of course, you know, the president was very quick to cancel flights from China, but not flights from Europe. And our problem was flights from Europe. So, what we now know, when you go back to March 2nd, we had gotten our first case the day before, we had no idea because we didn't have testing that the disease had already spread thoroughly in the month of February. We – I certainly was trying to keep people in this city safe and also protect people's livelihoods with what we thought was a containable situation. But we didn't have what we needed to, to address an international pandemic. And that's a never again. I hope, truly hope, that this lesson is learned once and for all. Our federal government's going to have to do a lot more to protect us in the future. And when we talk about New York City's role in the future. I've talked about us being the public health capital of the world. We learned the toughest lessons. We came up with some of the best solutions. We have the talent to help make sure that this nation never goes through another pandemic like this. And people don't suffer like



this before, but that effort to prepare for the future has to start very soon. That's what I learned from this. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, everybody. Regarding Johnson & Johnson, do you know how much vaccine you're getting and how or where it would be distributed? I know you mentioned the senior program, but are you exclusively going to put J&J vaccine to that or where else it go?

**Mayor:** I'll start, and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. Juliet, we're going to do more than one thing with that vaccine and hopefully, again, the numbers are going to add up quickly, especially with this new plan for Johnson & Johnson to work with Merck. The home-bound seniors are a special priority for us. These are folks who really deserve the help, need the help. Again, these are our grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles. These are people who are alone and need to be protected, but it's also very labor intensive. So, it will take a lot of time to fully reach folks. In the meantime, we have massive demand at these centers we've set up all over the neighborhoods. So, we'll balance the use with both. But my understanding is it's a fairly limited supply to begin, but later in the month we think we start to see real numbers. Dr. Chokshi could you give us your specific understanding at this moment?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, sir. I'll be happy to and thank you for the question. We are very excited about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine arriving to New York City. But as the Mayor said it's a relatively small supply to start. It will be about 70,000 doses that are available for us, over the first two-week period. That's the first two weeks in March. And it will remain quite limited, we understand, through the middle of March before picking up significantly, we hope by the end of the month. And I'll just add one more note to what the Mayor has said with respect to our priorities. You know, our focus remains on both people who are most vulnerable to the disease. And we're excited about using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to get to some of the people who have been harder to reach, including homebound seniors, but also keeping a laser focus on other older adults across New York City who may have, you know, problems with mobility, who may find it difficult to get to some of our other vaccination sites, and particularly keeping equity at the center of where we are bringing vaccine as well as our vaccination sites.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Juliet.

**Question:** Okay. Thank you. Actually, baseball is starting next month. Yay.

**Mayor:** Yay –

[Laughter]

**Question:** How are you going to handle, you know, the vaccination sites at Citi Field and Yankee Stadium when baseball resumes, because fans are going to be able to come back and, you know, the season will be underway?

**Mayor:** Yeah. First of all, at this moment, I agree with you, but I want to remind you, everything is determined by the data and the science. And I know Major League Baseball feels the same way. So, I assume they will be back pretty much on schedule, but we have to get there and there's still X-factors out there. But let's say they are back. And let's say they have fans, obviously, it's still going to be a limit on the number of fans. And, of course, the way baseball schedules work, some days the teams are in town, some days they're on the road. So, we're going to work with the Yankees, with the Mets to figure out what works. And if it means that sometimes the centers are closed, we'll work with that. If it means there's different hours, we'll work with that. The goal will be to have those vaccination centers up as intensely as possible, longest hours possible, most days possible, but we'll work with them. And what we certainly know is we've got a huge amount of additional capacity right now. But we know – remember on a Friday, Juliet, we got to 76,000 vaccinations in one day, 76,000 in one day. That is further proof we can be at a half-million a day or more even. So, if you say one of those stadiums is not available on a certain date, we can move that capacity to plenty of other locations. Those appointments will be snapped up. It will not change our overall ability to reach people. We can get to five million New Yorkers vaccinated by June, regardless of the baseball schedule. But I'm very, very happy baseball's back because it's one of the things I think is going to give us a lot of heart and a lot of energy and keep people going, keep morale high as we fight our way back and we recover in this city.

**Moderator:** Last question today goes to Debralee from the Manhattan Times and Bronx Free Press.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, everyone. Can you hear me?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Debralee, how have you been?

**Question:** I'm well, thank you. And good morning to all, Mr. Mayor, the allegations raised against Governor Cuomo have renewed the conversation around harassment, specifically in the political workplace. And so, in response to the charges, as you know, the Governor has described, by way of explanation and/or apology, an environment in which its chief executive, he may have constructed [inaudible] to a culture of overly personal humor or exchanges that made others uncomfortable. And then upon review, he says these were unintentional and inadvertent despite abundant examples of unacceptable behavior similar to this by others in leadership, anti-harassment legislation, and mandated training for years. Excuse me. So, specifically, can you speak to how recently you received sexual harassment training and then in light of this recent episode, do you feel the need to revisit any instances in which you feel you might've led or contributed to any uncomfortable workplace environment?

**Mayor:** Thank you for the question, Debralee. You know, the Governor's statement I've been very clear about. I was very troubled by it. Sexual harassment is not a laughing matter. It's serious. That was a non-apology and it belittled what had happened and I found it unacceptable. We'll get you the date when I went through training last. I've been going through the training cycle with other folks in City Hall. And the answer to your last question. No, I do not feel there's been any situation that was inappropriate. I look, let me be personal about this. I was raised by a single mom. My mom, Maria, raised me – unfortunately I've talked about my dad's life, he was

not in the picture, he was not able to help. I was brought up with a reverence and a respect for women. Very, very strong women in our family. Everyone knows the partnership I have with my wife, Chirlane. The notion of a man taking advantage of his power and his office to intimidate a woman in his employment or to try and somehow insinuate she should have sex with him, that's disgusting to me and it's unacceptable. It's not something – not only would I never, ever allow it, tolerate it, conceive of it being possible in my life or in my staff, I can't think of any decent human being who would do a thing like that. So, I'm very clear about my values and I'm very clear about the respect that has to be shown to women in the workplace. Go ahead, Debralee.

**Question:** And then switching gears. I want to speak to some of the concerns expressed by TLC-licensed drivers, the independent drivers in accessing some of the mass vaccination sites and even just some of the regular sites. You know, they've spoken to the need to have drive-by or drive-in vaccination opportunities. Do you see that as something, particularly with the J&J vaccine coming onto the market, as something that the City can move to?

**Mayor:** Well, I wouldn't say drive-by, I would say drive-in. I mean, there's still a process around getting vaccinated, including, you know, getting screened and confirmed and then the waiting period after to make sure people are okay. And that still needs to be done in the right settings. Citi Field's a great example, and we do have preference for TLC drivers at Citi Field where there's ample parking and the capacity to do as much as 35,000 vaccinations a week so long as we get supply. So, we will certainly keep working with the community of drivers to identify the best locations for them. I do want to prioritize them. They perform a crucial service to our city, but I'd say right now that's a great example of a – excuse me – a go-to location. Obviously, Yankee Stadium, another great example. And we're going to keep adding more. As we get vaccine, we'll be adding more and more locations, including locations that have more and more parking, which I think will be great for our drivers.

Okay. Everyone, first of all, just a fact update. I said – when I was trying to say half-a-million doses a week, and I have been told I accidentally said, 'in the day.' That would be really cool, but, no, I meant a week. I've been saying that throughout, my apology. But what we have confirmed, by the 76,000 vaccinations we did on Friday – again, do the math, 76 times seven. We can do 500 million vaccinations in a week. Going forward, I think we can do even more than that. So, that's exciting. But look, it all comes down to supply. And today's news, this is from the Associated Press. I love this headline. This is where I was talking about in the end of January, but I love the way they say it. "Merck to Help Produce Rival J&J's COVID Vaccine." This was the whole point. What kind of – where is their rivalry anymore in the middle of a global pandemic? It shouldn't be business as usual. It shouldn't be who's making the most profit or who holds a patent so they can dominate the market. No, this is that time for the federal government to use the Defense Production Act fully, and for all the pharmaceutical companies of America to voluntarily come forward. For God's sakes, people's lives are being lost. This is a global pandemic. It will not be fully defeated in the next few months. Around the world, we'll be fighting this fight this year into next year. But if we don't defeat the coronavirus everywhere, it's a threat to people anywhere.

So, this is a great step forward. This proves it can be done, but we need to go much farther. You actually have to act like it's war time, because guess what it is, it's a different kind of enemy. It's

actually an enemy that is killing more Americans than many of our biggest wars put together. So, today's a good step forward. I'm glad Merck is participating. I'm glad we're proving it can be done, but now let's go a lot farther and get the entire pharmaceutical industry to contribute to defeating the coronavirus once and for all. And if we get that, we get that supply that's what's going to fuel the speediest recovery possible and a recovery for all of us. Thank you, everyone.

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