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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Happy New Year. Welcome back. This is a great day, because it's a day that has the number 2021 in it. And I'm so excited that it is a new year. It is a better year already. Really great things are going to happen in New York City this year. So, everyone, look, this is a year we're going to have to do great things to recover, to come back strong. That's what new Yorkers do. This is a year where we have to do transformative work, work that is going to change the face of health care and public health, that's going to be crucial to what we need to do for fairness and equality and social justice. This is going to be a banner year, an extraordinary year, and it all begins with the biggest vaccination campaign in the history of New York City. I want people to be clear about this, we put down this goal of 1 million doses by the end of January. Why do we put down on this goal? Because we are convinced we need it and we can do it. And this is what is crucial to understand here, this is a moment where we're going to ask everyone to join together in the spirit of extraordinary efforts of the past. And we have this new poster that epitomizes this energy, hearkening back to the days of World War II. We're going to ask all New Yorkers to be part of this effort, every city agency, every hospital, every part of our society has to pull together to make these million vaccinations happen by the end of January, and then much, much more beyond. To get this done, we need help. We need flexibility from the State of New York. We need support from the federal government. We need the federal government to simplify the rules and to join us in making things move quicker. We need the manufacturers of the vaccine to keep delivering on schedule. There is so much that can be done if everyone acts in partnership. And I think that's what everyone's impulse is, that's the good news. This is part of a bigger reality with a vaccine that's truly historical – world historic how quickly this vaccine came together, how much the global scientific community worked together. But now, to actually implement the vaccine, we need federal government, State government, manufacturers, City government, everyone on the same page, and that's what we will create in the month of January. We need to move quickly. We need to move urgently.

Now, look, I want us to immediately get to work expanding the number of people, the kind of people who can get the vaccine. I want in the month of January, in the next few weeks, I want us start to vaccinate educators and school staff. I want to see us vaccinate first responders of all kinds – cops, firefighters, across the spectrum. We're focused right now on our health care heroes. We're focused on nursing homes, but during the month of January, we need to expand those categories. We need to reach many more people quickly, urgently, and it can be done. That cooperation at all levels of government can make it happen. There's going to be concern that this is such a crucial and important moment, can it be done? I know I'm going to get those questions today. Let me remind everyone of what we just did together in 2020. When this disease hit, we

didn't have the testing capacity, and this city was thrown back on our heels, we all worked together, our hospitals held. We all worked together, we got the PPE we needed. And we couldn't find it elsewhere in the country, elsewhere in the world, we created our own. We all held together, we created the biggest Test and Trace Corps. in the United States of America. We all held together, we opened our schools when almost no other major city in America even dared to. We have a track record in New York City during this crisis that we take on big goals and we make it happen. So, you're going to see an intensive speed-up in the month of January, and, then, of course, beyond. But we're going to need everyone pulling together to achieve that outcome.

Now, we want to make sure that New York City gets our fair share of doses. And as we expand, as we give more and more doses, we need to make sure that the federal government keeps allotting for us the amount that we can actually use. Some places can use more and more quickly, other places can't – it all depends on the infrastructure they have, all depends on the approach. As we continue to speed up this process, we need the doses to be reserved for us. We need them to be delivered. That's something we're going to keep pushing for throughout. But what we do know, and this is progress, that, as of today, more categories of individuals have been approved by the State of New York for vaccination. That's good news and I thank the State for that. We want to keep expanding those categories. The more people that we can reach quickly, the better. The more options we have to spread out the effort and make sure that vaccinations happen where they're most possible, the better off we will be. Remember, every single additional person who gets vaccinated – one more step towards defeating the coronavirus.

We're going to be doing a variety of things to expand sites where we will have, through our Department of Health, pop-up sites that will be focused on health care workers. We're going to have sites created by Health + Hospitals, our public health system. We're going to have vaccine hubs created and three of them will be open on Sunday. This is the shape of things to come. You're going to see a lot more like this, using public school buildings as hubs for a larger community. So, in Brooklyn at the Bushwick Educational Campus; Queens, at Hillcrest High School; the Bronx, at South Bronx Educational Campus. This starts Sunday. This is a model to start getting us to the grassroots where we can make so much impact. We want to make sure that whatever it takes logistically and whatever it takes in terms of community outreach, we're going to be able to get to this goal and then build from there. To tell you about how this is proceeding and how it will build in the weeks ahead, our Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, sir. The new year does feel like a new door is opening. And as a city, we'll be opening our doors in the days ahead for even more facilities to get eligible New Yorkers vaccinated. And, this week, in another ray of hope, the first New York City health care workers will get their second dose of the COVID vaccine. But, as the Mayor said, we must do more together. Overall, our plan is to double the current capacity of about 125 sites where New Yorkers are being vaccinated today, to at least 250 sites by the end of the month. We anticipate getting to at least 160 access points by the end of this weekend. For instance, today, the Health Department is booking appointments for COVID-19 vaccine clinics at two locations in Manhattan for the next two weeks. On Wednesday, five Health + Hospital sites will start vaccinations for newly eligible health care workers, namely East New York and Cumberland in Brooklyn, Gouverneur in Manhattan, and Belvis, in Morrisania, in the Bronx.

The City is also connecting with small community providers in priority neighborhoods to connect them locally to available appointments at 16 community health centers and 15 Urgent Care sites. These are all in addition to the hospital sites that have already begun vaccine operations. At these new sites, we'll be ready to welcome newly eligible individuals, such as unaffiliated health care providers who don't have employer-based access to vaccines. These include not just nurses and doctors, but also phlebotomists, dentists, physical therapists, coroners, funeral workers, and staff at specialty clinics like dialysis centers. If you are one of those unaffiliated providers, you can find out how to get vaccinated by visiting nyc.gov/covidvaccine. Working through this weekend, we've also moved up the timeline for our city vaccine hubs, which will launch this coming weekend with three sites that have the capacity for thousands of vaccinations, ramping up over the following week. Health Department staff, other city staff, and the Medical Reserve Corps. will operate the site and we are ready to roll up our sleeves so that New Yorkers can roll up theirs for the shot.

Now, last week, you heard us set a bold goal for the end of January. This requires many factors to line up for it to be possible, including more flexible eligibility guidance, a consistent supply of the vaccine, and a quickened pace from private providers. We must do more together. As we continue to vaccinate health care workers and nursing home residents, New York City would also like to begin vaccinating our seniors, namely those over 75. The sooner we can get them protected, the sooner we will save lives. We also need the federal government to pick up the pace of vaccination through its programs, like the nursing home program operated by CVS and Walgreens. Just as I've asked of our hospitals, we need them working seven days a week and on holidays, which I should point out they did not do this past weekend. We all need these bold goals and to pull out all the stops in order to reach them.

I know it won't be easy for us or anyone else. I know that this is going to be an intense month as we scale up capacity to meet both eligibility and supply, even as we continue fighting back the second wave. We also want to make sure that New Yorkers can get their questions answered about who is eligible and other natural questions, like what kind of screening is required and how to book an appointment. You can do that by visiting our website nyc.gov/covidvaccine. And, of course, we'll be back here as well to share what we know with you, the media, so that New Yorkers get the latest on where to go and what to do to get vaccinated. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Dr. Chokshi. Everyone, let me make a couple of points really clear – what Dr. Chokshi is saying. First of all, to everyone, to all our partners, this is got to be a seven day a week, 24 seven reality, going forward. We understand that in the first few weeks there was tremendous caution and care about making sure people understood how to use the vaccine, the refrigeration issues, there was a lot of care to make sure things were done right and safely to make sure that we saw good responses from the folks who were vaccinated. All that happened. That's done. Now, from this point on, seven days a week, 24-seven has to be the attitude and the approach. We're going to do that in the public sector. We need our private sector partners to do the same. Second, essential workers, across the board – I mentioned first responders of all kinds, I mentioned schools, teachers, staff – all essential workers, all the people who have been the heroes throughout this process, we need to reach them and reach as many of them as possible in the month of January. We need that flexibility in the rules to allow us to do that. We're ready to keep expanding outward. With that flexibility, we can reach so many of those folks who did so much for us and who need this protection now so they can keep serving

us and protect themselves and their families. So, that's the shape of things to come and that's what we want to see happen over these next days in New York City.

All right, let me shift gears for just a moment – a couple of other pending events here. We have a few special elections coming up, and this is because some of our public servants are going on to new roles. District 11, the Bronx, Council Member Andy Cohen has now become a judge. And I want to congratulate him. Had a great conversation with him the other day. I know this is something he aspired to, and I know he'll be a great judge, and I thank him for all the work he did as Council Member. Yesterday, I also spoke to Ritchie Torres – now, Congressman Ritchie Torres. He was just sworn in yesterday. His council district, District 15, in the Bronx, also will have a special election. I congratulate Congressman Torres. He was in our conversation, intensely focused on making sure New York City got his fair share of federal aid, going forward. And I thank him for that focus and look forward to working with him as well. So, in District 11 and District 15 in the Bronx, special election on March 23rd – March 23rd. And new leaders come coming into the City Council to serve the those communities. So, I'm going to sign the executive orders to establish those special elections. And to all the folks out there in those two districts who want to serve your communities, get out there and get petitioning because we have special elections called for March 23rd.

[Mayor de Blasio signs executive order]

Okay. Now, let me go over to today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for COVID-19. Today's report, 234 patients. Obviously, we've gone by the 200-patient threshold. That's a real concern. Now, the overall situation in the hospitals, I went into great detail yesterday with our health care leadership on this. Hospitals still doing very well in New York City, still holding the line, have built out capacity, working closely with the State of New York. This has been a strong area, even though these numbers are too high and we want to drive them back down. So, hospitals holding, but numbers still worrisome. The hospitalization rate per 100,000 also worrisome – 4.07. We want that below two. So, that's an area we've got a lot of work to do. January, absolutely crucial month, coming off the holidays. We hope to see in the course of the month of January, downward pressure on these numbers as the effects of the holidays and the gatherings decrease. We also, obviously, hope to see downward pressure as more and more people get vaccinated. But these numbers are still too high, obviously. And the same for number two, daily number of cases – seven-day average 3,976 – that's confirmed and probable together. That's a very, very high number. We want to get under 550, ultimately. And then on the percent – number three, percentage of people testing positive city-wide, seven-day rolling average, huge number today, nine percent even. We obviously want to get back below five percent. We're going to push hard to get this number back down in the days and weeks ahead. Nothing will be more important than the vaccination effort to help us get there.

Okay, a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I'll turned to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Health + Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Emma from the New York Times.

Question: Hi. Good morning, Mayor. Happy New Year.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Emma. How are you feeling?

Question: I'm good. I'm good. So, to start out, it seems like you're sort of acknowledging today that the rollout of the vaccine hasn't been going as smoothly, as quickly as you would like. What specifically do you need from the State? What do you want them to greenlight in terms of the next population to get the vaccine?

Mayor: Yeah, this is crucial. Emma, thank you for the question. Look, we've been constantly working with the State, my team talking to the Governor's team. I've been talking to the Governor. Everyone wants to move urgently. No question about it, a lot of cooperation. Here's what we need to do. We've got the category one A, we're working on now, obviously highlighted by health care workers, folks in nursing homes, and folks who staff nursing homes. That's crucial and we're going intensely at that. But we need to get into one B right away. We need to focus on essential workers across the board. Like I said, a whole range of first responders. Obviously EMTs, paramedics have been crucial already. We got to go farther. Police, Fire, first responders across the board, Correction officers. We've got to get into teachers, school staff, the whole range of folks who are there at the frontline, all those essential workers who have been serving us, including folks in grocery stores, other essentially workers who have been a crucial part of this. We need to start moving into as many of those categories as possible in the next few weeks. And having that flexibility is going to allow us to speed up our effort. The more places we can go, the more options, the more we can make the logistics match up. Again. I want to go 24/7 with this, seven days a week obviously. Having more and more options allows us to do it. A lot of these folks rightfully are clamoring, give us a chance to get vaccinated. This is a way to do it. And as Dr Chokshi said, we want to start reaching out to those over 75, who are so vulnerable at the community level. So, if we can get not just one A, but one B immediately it gives us the flexibility to use the supply we have very efficiently, very effectively, very quickly. Go ahead Emma.

Question: And you talk about wanting to move it to 24/7 but why hasn't it been? This is something you knew is coming. You all have been preparing for weeks or months for the vaccination effort. Were people off for the holidays? Why has the first three weeks been so slow?

Mayor: Yeah, Emma, as I said, I think the reality that we have to be keenly aware of is first of all, our health care professionals are dealing with an entirely different vaccine. A vaccine they have never had before. The refrigeration requirements alone have caused a huge number of logistical challenges to get it right and learn how to work with the vaccine properly. The fact that there was a real public concern, a trust issue that had to be addressed, put a real premium on making sure the first few weeks were steady and careful and smart and effective. So, when I look at the first few weeks and I see what was, thank God, a very smooth rollout. Meaning the issues were addressed, the refrigeration was handled properly. The vaccine was handled properly. Those who got the vaccine had a good experience. Almost no instance of a negative reaction.

That has allowed trust to build. That's allowed people to see and feel comfortable in the vaccine. Getting it right in the first few weeks was the trendsetter. And that's the thing that was going to give confidence. Now it's time to sprint. All that's been done, logistical groundwork has been laid in the last few weeks while that was being done. From this week on, I expect these numbers to increase intensely. So, this week, for example, previous to this week, about 100,000 vaccinations. In this week, I expect more than 100,000 vaccinations, just in this week. By the time you get to the end of the month, I expect us to be a clip of about 400,000 vaccinations a week. So, the groundwork is laid. Now it's time to put this into action on a 24/7 basis. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Happy New Year.

Mayor: Happy New Year Juliet. Are you ready for 2021?

Question: I am. I'm ready. I'm back in the saddle.

Mayor: Alright.

Question: Thank you. So, my question is, first of all, do you have the supply for a million vaccines this year – of this month? And also, there's been a proposal by Council member Mark Levine to open sites 24 hours. Is that on the table?

Mayor: Absolutely. I want to see 24 hours sites. I want to see, obviously from this point on seven days a week. Again, I understand that the first weeks had to be very careful because our health care professionals were dealing with something they had never dealt with before and they had to get it right. But from this point on, look, that's all behind us now. It's now time to sprint. Seven days a week, wherever possible, 24 hours a day. Everybody, everyone who could be a part of this needs to be a part of this. So, I am confident now that we have all that we need logistically. As you heard from Dr. Chokshi 160 sites by the end of this week, going up to 250 sites minimum by the end of January. That's a tremendous amount of projection capacity. And as for supply, we do not yet have the supply we need to get to a million. That's a crucial point, Juliet. We need the federal government to keep allocating supply to New York City. We need the manufacturers to keep producing it and delivering it. We have enough to get through this week and going into next week. We do not have enough to get through the whole month yet. And we need those deliveries. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay. And switching gears, I know this is so important, vaccine is a priority. But what about an economic recovery plan for New York City? You know, there's so many empty storefronts, obviously restaurants are struggling, people are not working. Do you think you also need to roll out some idea of an economic recovery plan for New Yorkers so that they feel that there's a plan in place or at least a starting point? You know, as we start in the new year and as the vaccinations are getting rolled out?

Mayor: Absolutely Juliet, it's a crucial point. Look, first of all, nothing will help our recovery more than an extraordinary vaccination effort. You know, as I said over these last months was job one was fighting back the coronavirus. So, the economy could reopen, so we could recover.

Overwhelmingly New York City has done very, very well. The summer was extraordinary, in the fall now into the winter, thank God we're still doing better than a lot of other parts of the country. And that's because of what New Yorkers have done, which has been heroic. But this vaccination drive is the key to our recovery. So that's job one. But what I'm going to do in the State of the City address is provide that vision of where we go from here on economic recovery as well. And we talked about a bit in September, the focus we're going to put on health care going forward as a huge growth area of our economy. But also, an area where New York City is going to provide particular leadership in the world because everything we've learned from this crisis. So yes, economic recovery plan, absolutely crucial. That'll be coming out this month, but it will be undergirded, the foundation of course, of anything that's really going to reach deep into our communities has to be this fast, effective vaccination effort.

Moderator: Next is Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

Mayor: I am a very happy person Marcia. It's 2021. How are you?

Question: I'm good. Good and happy New Year. I hope we have a good year coming up. So my first question has to do with the vaccine. And I'm wondering why you're not having the vaccines being given out at CVS, Walgreens, and other drug stores that are easily accessible to people in the community?

Mayor: Well, I think that is the shape of things to come Marcia. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. Because one of the things he referred to is the role that those outlets play in the federal program. And we love that, but we want to see a lot more of that. We haven't seen enough yet. That needs to be on a 24/7 basis. But over time, the vision is to go deeper and deeper to the grassroots, have more and more partners participating, especially as we're trying to reach in the community level, seniors and folks with pre-existing conditions. So, Dr. Chokshi, if you could reiterate the concern about the federal program and then go into the role, you see those pharmacies playing going forward?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you very much for the question. And that's exactly right. We expect pharmacies to be a pillar of our vaccination efforts. With respect to the federal program that the Mayor referred to, the federal government has contracted with CVS and Walgreens to roll out vaccination in nursing homes. We want the pace of that vaccination to accelerate rapidly. Because we know how lifesaving it is for as many people in nursing homes to get vaccinated as quickly as possible. Having CVS and Walgreens vaccinate in the communities across New York City, not just through that nursing home program, does also require some federal coordination. And we have been very aggressive in petitioning for New York City to be the very first place where that will be activated. Which I expect will happen as soon as, as next week. Beyond CVS and Walgreens and some of the other larger chain pharmacies like Rite Aid and others, those are all part of our plan for the next two to three weeks with respect to ramping up as many access points as possible. And I will make note that another very important piece of it is those independent pharmacies that exist in communities, particularly in the priority neighborhoods which will be very important to extend the reach of access to vaccination.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi. I want to amplify that point. Independent pharmacies, mom and pop pharmacies in communities that in many ways, depend on them even more than communities that have a lot more health care options available. A lot of places, the only place to turn is that independent pharmacy. And they've been there for their neighborhoods year after year, generation after generation in some cases. So, I want to thank all the independent pharmacists, all the folks that work in the independent pharmacies. We've needed you long, long time for things like flu shots and everyday help. But now we're going to need you to play a crucial role in the fight against COVID going forward. Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: So, my second question, Mr. Mayor, sort of switching, switching gears. Many schools decided to keep doing this learning remotely until after Martin Luther King weekend, giving families time to quarantine after the holiday break, if needed before returning to in-person learning. I'm wondering what went into the decision here to send New York City public school students back into the classroom today, instead of waiting two more weeks?

Mayor: We're confident based on the standards we put in place. So, let me just refresh everyone's memory. The holidays, of course, we've all had other better things to think about. But the testing initiative we put in place in December when schools came back – about 100,000 students, teachers, staff got tested across the entire school system. 100,000, the positivity level was 0.68 percent. Much, much lower than anything we're seeing anywhere else in New York City. So, the safest place to be in New York City of course, is our public schools. We see that and we know it's working and so we want – absolutely know our kids need to be in school. They need the benefits of in-person education. And a lot of families really wanted that for their kids. So, January 4th was the day we planned to come back and we're confident that this is the right way to go. And that testing starts again today. And it will be every school, every week to make sure everyone's safe. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Rich Lamb from WCBS Radio.

Question: Happy New Year, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Rich. How do you feel?

Question: Well, I've been off for a couple of weeks. So, I feel good.

Mayor: You feel good. All right.

Question: So, I'm just wondering how much resistance are you getting to the vaccine? You know, have you done any kind of a survey to find out who's willing? I mean, I've run into people from plumbers to a dentist who says, you know, they really wonder about it. And they're – and you know, they're concerned. So, I'm wondering whether any kind of a survey has been done or whether there's any experience in the field to see that people are saying no?

Mayor: It's just such an important question, Rich. Thank you. Look, first of all, there's a lot of independent public opinion research that's been done. I think we're seeing here in New York all over the country is there was a lot of concern and mistrust a month or two ago. But that situation is starting to change rapidly as people are actually seeing folks get the vaccine, seeing that there's not a negative impact and that it is giving safety and protection. They're seeing what they needed

to see. They needed to know it was safe. They needed to know it was effective. Obviously really important for people to know it's being given for free. It's quick, it's easy. So, folks have been seeing that with their own eyes, more and more people getting vaccinated. The word is spreading, word of mouth. People are hearing from family, friends, neighbors, that's going to magnify and magnify. So, we're quite confident. Now with that said, Rich, do I think there's going to be ten percent or 20 percent of the population for the next few months, that's going to be hesitant and not necessarily willing to be in the early wave? Yeah, of course. But that doesn't change the basic trajectory of what we're doing because we have so many people who are ready, willing, and able that we're going to have plenty of people to give the vaccine to. And the more we give the vaccine to, the more people who have a positive experience, the more people who will want it. Again, we need that flexibility to be able to have as many different people included as possible. But I don't think the quote unquote hesitancy issue is going to stop us from achieving our goals. Go ahead, Rich.

Question: So, just wondering, in regard to the possibility of you taking the vaccine as an example, or you and your family. Are you still going to whatever it is, wait your turn was the original phrase? Or do you think you ought to move it up and do it publicly?

Mayor: I think it is really important for public officials to show that we wait our turn like everyone else. Again, what we're seeing more and more is more and more acceptance, more and more desire for the vaccine. So, some of the hesitancy issues are starting to reduce. That's good news. But what I think is important is people see there'll be fairness and equality in the way that the vaccine is provided. So, there are folks who deserve it and need it more than me. Our first responders, our health care heroes, our seniors in nursing homes and the folks who work with them, all of our essential workers. And folks who are older and have pre-existing conditions. My view is the best thing to do is defer to those who need it most. And when my time comes, then I'm certainly going to be very public about it. But there's a lot of people already starting with the President-elect who have shown folks in this whole city, this whole country that it's safe. I think that message is being sent, you know, loud and clear.

Moderator: Next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

Question: Good morning Mr. Mayor, and Happy New Year.

Mayor: Feliz Año Nuevo, Juan Manuel.

Question: Muchas gracias. Feliz Año Nuevo. I want to start with just a clarification because you talked about how by the end of the January, you want a million vaccinations, and I'm guessing that means half a million New Yorkers vaccinated by the end of the month. But my question is now that we have the silver bullet, given the importance of vaccination, are you planning on including number of vaccines and the city's possession, but at any given time and the number of doses distributed in your daily indicators?

Mayor: Yeah, I want everyone to understand exactly how this is progressing, Juan Manuel, and I want folks to understand the speed with which the increase is going to happen. That you're going to see again about 160 sites by the end of this week, going up to 250 sites, you're going to see this week, at least 100,000 or so doses given, going up to the end of the week, as you may end of the month, closer to 400,000 per week. So, we want to show that trajectory. What the concern is

now, which is a very honest and real concern, you know, use every dose we have. I want to see that happen immediately, but I want to tell people what we're going to be talking about in a few weeks is not that in a few weeks we're going to be talking about where's our supply, where's the next supply coming from? We need the federal government to keep up with us. We need the manufacturers to keep up with us. That's the concern later in January, will they be able to meet our demand? So we definitely want to show those numbers and show everyone how it progresses in the course of the month. Go ahead.

Question: And yeah, just again, the half a million – million vaccinations or people, if you can clarify that and will lower priority New Yorkers have earlier access to the vaccine if higher priority New Yorkers refuse to get vaccinated? Is there a system in place for that? Because a lot of New Yorkers are already asking after three weeks of the vaccine being here in New York City, when is my turn coming?

Mayor: Yeah, and again, three weeks is a very brief period of time when our health care professionals are dealing with a brand new vaccine and making sure that they know how to use it properly, they know how to store it properly, that they understand that it can be used safely and they're doing it through real experience. That was a very, very important period of time to get everything right for now what will be an intensive push. But to your point, look, one, yes, we'll be giving second doses to our health care heroes and all the folks who are appropriate in that first category will continue to get second doses as we can do that, first doses for everyone else. We're going to be moving both those efforts simultaneously, and that makes all the sense in the world. The first dose gives you about 50 percent protection. The second dose, almost a hundred percent protection. The first dose immediately is a benefit, but we want that whenever we can, as quickly as possible close the loop, get that second dose to many people as possible. But in terms of categories of people, this is why we want the flexibility to have category 1A and 1B both authorized so we can move simultaneously. Wherever is the most effective, efficient place to go. If you think about a seven day a week, 24-7 effort might be that for example, on an overnight shift with our first responders is a great time to get people done who are right now in category 1B, and we're not allowed legally to give the vaccine to. I want to give them the vaccine right away. If I have that authorization, we can be doing that on overnight shifts as a way to be very, very efficient. So there's lots more we can do if we have both those categories approved. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah. Good morning, everyone and Happy New Year—

Mayor: Happy New Year.

Question: Thank you, sir. So far, so good. Wanted to ask about the idea of getting to the point of 24-7 vaccinations. I know the city was planning to ask municipal workers to volunteer at the sites at schools and elsewhere. Can you give an update on how that's going? Also, you know, at least one councilman has called for the Medical Reserve Corps to be activated to get to the point of 24-7 vaccination. What would you say to that?

Mayor: I think that's great. I will have Dr. Chokshi talk about the public employees volunteering to be a part of it. But look, this is a “whatever it takes” situation, and again, Shant, I harken back

to the other “whatever it takes” situations we've been through in less than a year, we had to save our hospitals and make sure they held during the early part of the crisis. That was whatever the hell it took. We were going to do it. We did. We had to get the PPE and when we didn't get it from the marketplace, we had to build our own. We did. We had to make sure we had a test and trace quarter could reach every corner of the city. We did. We had to open our public schools when a lot of other places didn't dare. We did. We're going to do this too. So, I want every hand on deck, and that means city employees. That means Medical Reserve, anybody and everyone who can help us get this done. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, sir, and that's exactly right. It's all hands on deck. We've already issued that call for city employees, and we've gotten a very robust response with respect to people who are interested. We're categorizing that and matching them up with our plan for those vaccine hubs that that I've described. Those vaccine hubs will also involve the Medical Reserve Corps which is a group of about 13,000 New York City personnel, nurses, doctors, other health care professionals, who will be a big part of the workforce for the city vaccine hubs as well. But as the Mayor said, that's just the start. If we need more manpower, there's nothing more important than this vaccination effort, and we'll seek whatever additional manpower we need to get it done.

Just one final note with respect to making sure that vaccination is happening across the entire day, several of the hospitals that I've already visited are doing a very late night and early morning vaccination. They found that that's actually the best way to maximize throughput for people who are either coming in to their night shift or leaving their night shift, and several of the hospitals have started overnight vaccination as well. I encourage as many hospitals as possible to ramp that up this week, if you haven't already.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah, so another question about the vaccination hubs, three high schools starting this weekend, it sounds like there could be more schools utilized down the road. Obviously in-person learning isn't happening at high schools, but what can you say about safety for students and educators? If there's a scenario in which vaccinations are being given out simultaneously to the return of in-person learning, if that happens?

Mayor: Yeah, it's a good question, Shant. First of all, let's say, remember on weekends, of course, we don't have any overlap with our public schools so we can do that freely. You're right. middle school and high school right now. We were working on that plan. But job one is to get this vaccination effort going and to fight back this immediate wave we're having with the coronavirus, our hope and prayer is in the course of January, you're going to start to see the case numbers come down because of the effect of the holidays starting to reduce. But if we are not open in middle and high schools, they become a very, very effective option for us. There's a lot of other good community locations we can use. So, we're going to be mindful, always. We've got to keep our schools safe that are open. That's been a strong suit. That gold standard of health and safety measures has worked. The testing has worked. We're going to be very, very careful to keep the schools safe at all costs. We have a lot of other sites we can work with for sure. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to James from PIX 11.

Question: Happy New Year, Mayor.

Mayor: James – there you go. Happy New Year, James. How you doing?

Question: Ah, great. Thank you, sir. I appreciate that you're taking my call. First, look, I'm a journalist. I'm not a mathematician. This is a follow-up on the NY1 call, though. You are still saying a million inoculations by the end of the month. The numbers that you've given though, they to my mind, don't add up to one million. Are we saying it's half a million people with two doses, or are you convinced that one million people will get both doses before February 1st?

Mayor: One million doses, one million doses. But remember, depending on when people get their first dose, there's a waiting period you have to go through before the time you can get your second dose. So it's not a choice of, is it one million people or as a half a million people it'll be something in between in terms of people number, but in terms of doses, it will be one million doses. That's the plan, and again, we need help from the federal government, simplifying the rules and ensuring our supply. We need the manufacturers to deliver. We need the state to give us flexibility. We can do it. We have the capacity. If we're going to be at 250 sites, I mean, you're, you may not think you're a mathematician, but I know you can do the math with me. If you're at 250 sites that is 4,000 – 4,000 vaccinations per site. Now we're not at 250 yet, but just put this in your mind or what gets you to a million? 4,000 vaccinations is something that can be done very quickly at an individual site. So we're going to have the physical build-out. We have an incredible infrastructure in this city, but we need the rules to be flexible and we need the supply to be guaranteed. Go ahead, James.

Question: And then a second question. This is for my colleague Narmeen Choudhury. The Pier 76 Tow Garage. Can you talk more about what the status is regarding towing of vehicles in Manhattan going forward? Is that just not going to be happening for some time?

Mayor: No, there will be towing, but not to that location after January. So, we came to an agreement with the State of New York. We will be out of that tow pound in Hudson River Park. We'll be out of it during the month of January. We're going to go to an alternative, city-owned site. We came to a good agreement with the state. There will be no fine from the state toward the city, which is a very good thing. We'll have a new site set up at least temporarily, ultimately permanently and towing will continue, and those whose cars unfortunately, are towed will end up going to that new site to get their cars back.

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to David from the Queens Daily Eagle.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, Happy New Year.

Mayor: Happy New Year. How are you doing David?

Question: Good, thank you. So two questions. The Umbrella Hotel in Kew Gardens has been the scene of at least three shootings in recent months, including the first murder of 2021. City agencies issued a few violations in the fall. But local leaders are calling on you to take more aggressive action, shut the hotel down. What are you doing, and will you suspend or close the hotel?

Mayor: David, I appreciate the question. I do want that hotel closed. I've instructed my team. I saw the very, very painful report a few days ago. I instructed my team to move to close that hotel immediately. We're checking obviously all of our legal powers here to make sure that what we do is legal and appropriate, but I want it closed. I think it's been a blight on the community and it should not be that going forward. So we're going to use all the power of the city government to get that closed and stop having the community suffer from what's happened at that hotel. Go ahead, David.

Question: And when will vaccines reach homeless shelters in supported housing sites? And what will that roll out look like for staff and residents?

Mayor: Again, we want to make sure that we're reaching folks in any kind of a group setting like that. Very important to keep people safe. Dr. Chokshi will go over the, the, where that falls in the scheme of things, but I want to keep emphasizing, this is another reason why we want the flexibility of having a, both categories, 1A and 1B, approved so that we can move expeditiously wherever the need is greatest and have the most options to be able to keep getting people vaccinated. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thanks, David, for the question from the health perspective, this is certainly a concern of mine as well, with respect to making sure that people who are experiencing homeless as well as the staff who care for them are part of our vaccination plan. The current recommendation is that both staff and residents would be a part of phase 1B. So that's the phase directly after the current one that involves health care workers and nursing, home staff and residents, and we would support as the Mayor has said, moving as expeditiously as possible to opening up a phase 1B so that those people and others who are in that group can get vaccinated.

Mayor: Well, everyone, as we conclude today, look, I don't know about you, but I am feeling a ton of energy because of this new year. It is 2021. I hoped and prayed and dreamed we would get to this year. We are here. We now have a lot of momentum. We in New York City are going to do amazing things in 2021, and we're going to defeat the coronavirus, starting with the biggest vaccination effort in the history of New York City, and that goes into full gear right now. So this is a chance for us to protect people. It's a chance for us to start our recovery. It's a chance for us to show the world just how good New York City is, and we're going to remind people once again, why this is a very, very special place and that's going to be why our recovery happens as well, because the magic of New York City, once people are reminded, they will, once again, gravitate here, support us, invest in us. We will build, we will rebuild. It all starts now. So 2021 is going to be an amazing year let's show what New York City can do. Thank you, everyone.

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