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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. Well, we have some really good news this morning. Last night, the State Legislature made history and acted to right a wrong and legalize marijuana the right way and I really want to emphasize this. I want to thank the State Legislature. I want to thank the leadership for being so conscientious, now over several years, really studying the issue carefully, focusing on the right way to do things with a particular eye to addressing the mistakes of the past. And really profound thanks to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, to Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, to the Chair of the Senate Finance Committee Liz Krueger, to the Majority Leader of the Assembly Crystal Peoples-Stokes. Senator Krueger, Assembly Members People-Stokes were the co-sponsors legislation. I talked to them multiple times. They put an immense amount of effort into this with a focus on equity. The issues that we raised now almost three years ago, the City of New York put out a report delineating the kinds of things that would be necessary to do legalization the right way, and that included making sure that the economic opportunities that would come would focus on the communities that were most harmed by the previous drug laws, that there would be actually an economic benefit to folks who had suffered the most. This legislation goes a long way to achieving that. Also, a focus on ensuring that the mistakes of the past, the convictions that held back so many people for very small offenses, that those would be expunged and a focus on investment in communities that have suffered and ensuring that this is part of their economic rebirth. A lot of good in this legislation and a lot more to be done, by definition, and that's something we will be working closely with the state on in this year or next year, the years ahead to get it right. Still want to make sure that the voices of localities are heard and respected in this process, but this is a hugely important moment for the State of New York. So, a huge congratulation to the Legislature for a major, major step to reform.

And continuing the good news trend this morning. I want to talk to you about the latest vaccination update. And I've said that when we talk about a recovery for all of us, the number one element of the recovery is to ensure the maximum number of vaccinations as quickly as possible. So today, good news, we have passed the four million vaccination mark. Over four million vaccinations have been given in New York City since this effort began. The exact number, 4,058,854 doses have been given. And I've always tried to give you some context of how that compares to the total population of major American cities, when we started doing this toward the end of January, we talked about surpassing the total population of Boston. Then we talked about other cities along the way, Phoenix, Houston, Chicago, some of the biggest cities in the country. Well, here's the comparison now. We have now surpassed four million vaccinations, that's more vaccinations than the total population of Los Angeles, California, to give you a sheer sense of the extent here, because we're New Yorkers, sometimes we hear big numbers, and it kind of goes right by us because we're so used to doing everything big around here. Think about

that though, as many doses given as the total population of L.A., and we're going to be going farther, going forward, we'll start comparing to state populations since we've run out of other cities to compare. Now, the good news is we continue to expand our capacity, more and more sites coming online, more and more grassroots sites, more staff, everything's clicking, we need the supply. So, I'm going to keep hammering away on this point. We need the supply. We need the flexibility so we can reach our goal and we will reach our goal, five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers by June. So, this is the way forward.

So, recovery for all of us, the foundation is vaccination. The foundation is bringing back the city strong and healthy, but a recovery for all of us, it goes far beyond just the question of bringing back our economy. It goes to bringing back the city strong in every way, and in fact, doing things differently, addressing the mistakes of the past, rejecting a status quo that didn't work, doing something that really is befitting of the greatest city in the world. And one of the areas that we continue to work on is improving the relationship between police and community, deepening reforms for NYPD, this is work that will continue to go on. We just had an extraordinary process that created a huge reform plan with a lot of big steps forward, but we said, I said, I know members of the Council said, we've all said the work always continues. So, today the work will continue because it's so important to recognize there's always more to be done. In the reform package we addressed a host of issues. We addressed, for example, a better process for assessing officers who might have problematic behavior and ensuring that they are addressed, and if necessary that they do not patrol our streets. We address things like ensuring that if someone has – an officer committed a serious act of misconduct, and it's been proven through due process, calling upon the State to cancel pensions in that case. We talked about how to use the entirety of an officer's career in looking at promotions, looking at things that went well, things that didn't go so well, factoring in all those in a very systematic way as we make promotion decisions. We've changed the preference we give to New York City residents as part of the reform package that we did with the Council.

So, now in New York City residents will be further favored in the recruitment process to become police officers. And we're addressing so many of the root cause issues looking at what has historically been called the poverty to prison pipeline and how we can undo that and address the root causes, all of these things we're working on right now as part of that original reform plan, but we want to do more. And in the conversations with community members, with elected officials, particularly City Council Members, a lot of other ideas came up that we want to keep addressing. And I particularly want to give thanks to Council Member, Adrienne Adams of Queens, who is the Chair of the Council Public Safety Committee. We had a number of very detailed conversations as part of the reform process. And we talked about the fact that although there's been real progress in ensuring diversity in the leadership of the NYPD, there's more work to be done. And we talked about the ways that we could make sure that happens systematically, not just on the basis of individual promotions, but on a whole systematic level throughout the NYPD. And we talked in particular about other approaches that have worked in this country, and one of them, we borrow from professional football, from the NFL, the Rooney Rule, the idea of ensuring that for every major position that there is a guarantee that people of color will be interviewed and given maximum opportunity. That approach in professional sports has proven to be effective. There's always more to do, but it's really helped. We want to bring that approach here to the NYPD and it's something that, you know, it could be done in a lot of different ways

going forward beyond the NYPD, but we're going to start with the NYPD because it's so important to show the communities of this city that everyone is represented in the leadership ranks of the NYPD.

So, I want you to hear from some of the Council Members who've been involved in this reform process, and I want you to know that the work we all did together has led to the decision to issue an executive order that will address the hiring process at the NYPD and ensure that diverse applicants, candidates, get opportunity. So, this will be a major reform and a systemic reform, and it came out of these conversations with the City Council and particularly with the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, my pleasure to introduce Chair Adrienne Adams.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you much, Council Member. And thank you, I really appreciate our conversations and I appreciated the way it helped bring out new approaches, new ideas. Thank you for your leadership. And as we said many times when you and I talked, police reform is something that continues and we're going to be doing a lot more in the course of the months ahead. So, thank you so much. And now, I'm going to turn to your predecessor who was Public Safety Chair earlier in our administration, and with whom I spoke many times as well, and someone who is passionate about neighborhood policing, about ensuring that there's a deep bond between police and community. She's been a leader in the reform efforts from the very beginning of this administration. My pleasure to introduce Council Member Vanessa Gibson.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you very, very much Council Member. And thank you for your passionate expression of the fact that there's just tremendous talent waiting to be tapped. And that's exactly what we will do through this action. Thank you very much. And one more member of the Council I want you to hear from who has, for years, long before he was an elected official, was an activist, fighting for the community's voice to be heard. And he has played a key role also in efforts at police reform, always remembering his roots, which I appreciate very, very much. We are joined by Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Council Member. Thank you also for telling the story of what you experienced years ago when you were leading those students in protest. And the notion that anyone would be told they don't have rights because of who they are, where they come from is anathema to everything we believe in, in New York City. So, I think it was a powerful vignette to remind us it is so important to the communities of this city to see members of their own communities represented in leadership. And one of the things we heard throughout the reform process, the very, very intensive series of public hearings and meetings, stakeholder meetings – almost 100 different gatherings during the reform process was the consistent request that we see more and more diversity in the NYPD and more and more diversity in the NYPD leadership. So, thank you for being a part of that. And this is what we're going to do today with this executive

order – ensure systemically that we take a major step towards diversity in promotions for senior leaders of the NYPD. And let's sign the executive order.

[Mayor de Blasio signs executive order]

And this will take effect immediately. I want to emphasize that this is we affecting all promotion actions by the NYPD, starting immediately.

All right, with that, we're going to go to what we talk about every single day, our indicators and our fight against the coronavirus. So, first, number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 237 patients. Confirmed positivity level, 61.48 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.83 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,461 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report, on a seven-day rolling average, 5.93 percent. Now, I want to say a few words in Spanish, and I'm going to go back to the police reform we just discussed.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

**Moderator:** We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Ted Long, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Andrea Grimes from WCBS.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for taking my call. My first question is regarding the Asian hate crimes, a number of the suspects have proven to be homeless men, and it seems like these attacks are getting increasingly more violent. The NYPD was taken out of the homeless outreach business, who is in charge of monitoring the homeless population, helping them, and getting help for them, and specifically the people who are more violent?

**Mayor:** Andrea, look – thank you for the question. We, in every way as a city, have to work together to stop these attacks. We are seeing them, different people, different places, they're all unacceptable. And again, the crucial need is for in every case, whether someone regards it as a small act or a major act, to report it. Go to [nyc.gov/StopAsianHate](https://nyc.gov/StopAsianHate), report anything you see so the NYPD can act. Andrea, to your question, I want to first affirm, the lead agency for everything regarding homeless individuals is Department of Homeless Services. But Department of Homeless Services works closely with the Health Department, with Health + Hospitals, certainly with NYPD as well – NYPD still, of course, has a role to play – but the lead agency is Department of Homeless Services. We are going to have all the agencies work together to address these issues, and that means everything from deploying street outreach workers, or mental health professionals, or, in other cases, of course, how we move NYPD officers around, precision policing. Not only officers you see in uniform, but also undercover officers, decoy officers, this is a tactic the NYPD is using now to try and find these perpetrators. This is crucial to equation finding – it's a very few people, but we need to find each and every one of them and stop this. Go ahead, Andrea.

**Question:** Thank you. And my second question is regarding taxes, the combination of new federal taxes proposed by the President and the proposed \$7 billion in New York State taxes would make New York the highest tax state in the nation. How worried are you that this will force people out of the city? Affect the city tax base? And should New York lawmakers seek a lower tax increase given what the feds are doing?

**Mayor:** Well, Andrea, first of all, I am not worried and I'm going to tell you why – since the 1960's, the amount that the wealthy pay in taxes has just steadily gone down, and that was amplified by the huge giveaway to the wealthy corporations that Donald Trump engineered in 2018. So, let's be really clear, the wealthy are not even close to paying their fair share in taxes, and we need them to, there are so much to be done in this city, in this nation, going forward. And a lot of folks who are wealthy got wealthy because of laws that favored them, or the tax laws, or other laws that help them gain all their wealth. So, no, we have a lot to fix here. President Biden is absolutely trying to move us in the right direction, I commend him. But, Andrea, there's a long distance between him proposing something and what actually happens in the end, the same, of course, in Albany. Whether the exact proposals show up like this or some other form, we don't know yet. But the wealthy have to pay their fair share in taxes. And especially if that's done on a national level, I think that does help to create evenness among the different states. In the end, what we've seen for years and years is changes in the tax rate do not dictate behavior. This is really well documented. Wealthy folks are going to be wealthy either way, and there are so many reasons that so many of them want to be here in New York City. In fact, more and people in New York City have become wealthy in recent years, because there's so much economic opportunity here, and just the life of the city that so many of them want to be a part of. So, I think we're going to be strong regardless of what happens with the tax decisions. But if it's a matter of fairness and justice, the wealthy should pay their fair share.

**Moderator:** The next is Sydney Pereira from Gothamist.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I want to ask about vaccine equity among Black and Latino New Yorkers. The gaps, the racial gaps in vaccinations have improved slightly for Latino and Black residents in the city, but still not by that much. It's like three or four percent. And I'm wondering, in Philadelphia there was an implementation of walk-in appointments at the FEMA vaccine sites. And early results show that that improved the diversity of who was getting vaccinated. I know there's some walk-in options for older New Yorkers at City sites, but do you think more vaccines sites should move towards walk-in options to address racial equity issues with the vaccination rollout? And if so, which ones? And obviously there are State sites. So, I'm wondering if you've talked to the State you know, the Governor and State health officials about this issue to speed up closing these racial gaps?

**Mayor:** Thank you for the question Sydney. It's something we talk about all the time, we care about deeply. There is definitely progress. There's progress because we put the overwhelming majority of the vaccination sites in the communities that were hit hardest by COVID and where people of color and immigrant New Yorkers could best access vaccination and with community-based organizations, with houses of worship. That's made a huge difference. We're going to keep deepening that strategy as we get more and more supply. So, that really, to me is the number one thing. We're also seeing hesitancy start to reduce. We all know Sydney, there was a big

difference in hesitancy levels between white New Yorkers and New Yorkers of color. We are seeing that now, start that gap to close. We're seeing less and less hesitancy in communities of color, especially as people experience the vaccine, members of their family, neighbors, et cetera, have a good experience. So, I'm very hopeful on the overall.

We are experimenting now, a pilot program with the walk-up vaccinations focusing on the oldest New Yorkers. But I think your point is well taken. If we see this approach starting to work, it's something we'd be open to doing more in a targeted manner. But we're – we have to pilot it first. Because there are always concerns about making sure it works effectively, that it doesn't end up with long lines. You don't want that for a lot of reasons. So yes, we're going to pilot it and see if it could be helpful. And yes, we are going to see if it might contribute to achieving more equity as well. Go ahead, Sydney.

**Question:** Great. Thank you. My second question is about shootings in New York City. And I really want to ask about this from a public health perspective. Shooting incidents and shooting victims have so far risen again in 2021 after you know, the very high rise we saw last year. And I know you've invested – made recent announcements about Cure Violence initiatives to start this summer. I'm wondering what the federal stimulus or, you know, any other just change in the budget situation or how – if there is there any way to help those violence interrupters start their work sooner to get ahead of the rise in shootings often seen in the warmer months? And I know there are multiple Council members on the call or there was, I don't know if they've dropped off or not, maybe they've dropped off. But just having talked about police reform at the top, I'm wondering if there are still Council members on the call, what non-police solutions would they want the, you know, the Mayor to implement, to address shootings in their districts?

**Mayor:** I think the Council members have left. Yeah, they have. So, let me just speak to the point, Sydney. We want to maximize the work of the Cure Violence movement and the Crisis Management System. Since I came into office before the recent actions we took, starting with State of the City, we had already tripled the funding for Cure Violence. It was a really nascent reality when I took office. We've made it an important part of the strategy and really dedicated, serious resources. And we will continue to. To actually build out the work, it is painstaking work. What folks in Cure Violence and Crisis Management do is outstanding work, but it takes very careful design and training. And it's not something you can just flick a switch. It does take lead time. So, that's where our focus now, is really having those operations be as strong as possible for June. And a lot of cooperation with the Cure Violence and Crisis Management leadership to get that done.

But I agree with your – I think your question is raising the point, are we looking at any and all community-based solutions to violence and everything that we can do particularly ahead of the summer? The answer is yes. And I think unlike last summer where we had – so we did have that perfect storm. We had so much that was not working in our society. Jobs gone, businesses closed, schools closed, houses of worship closed, everything now is obviously coming back. It's going in a much better direction now. We're experiencing with each month more and more recovery, more and more activity, sort of things re-solidifying. I think that's going to make all the difference. But we are going to invest heavily in young people this summer. This is something that the Council has really focused on as well. We're bringing back Summer Youth Employment

at the full strength where it was before. We're, you know, we're going to be looking for every opportunity to maximize the other kinds of investments that also help us achieve safety.

**Moderator:** The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Katie. How are you doing?

**Question:** Oh, you know, not bad. I wanted to ask if you have any information or any specifics again on this May 3rd reopening? I've heard from multiple City employees who say, what you're saying on TV is not what they're seeing. The infrastructure improvements, the HVAC improvements, do you have a cost estimate? I know that we have that when schools were kind of retrofitted to allow for schools. But do you know how much the City has spent so far on these infrastructure improvements to allow for cleaning and particularly air flow in – once employees return?

**Mayor:** Katie, it's a great question. I will make sure that our team gets you – I don't have it at my fingertips, but gets you the latest. Now it's to be fair, we've learned so much about how to do this. And I think our office settings are places where we – it's a very straightforward approach. You know, how many people you want in one place, everyone keeping on their mask, making sure the ventilation is good, making sure there's regular cleaning. We have a pretty good game plan. And we're still talking another five weeks or so until folks start to come back. But we'll get you a sense of the costs involved and how it's progressing. But I feel very confident we can do this safely. Go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** And following up on that, I know you said you've learned so much from the schools reopening, so will there be like we've seen in schools, a situation room? Is there a policy on closures if someone at an office, if there's more than one positive case? Will there be weekly testing? Just more information on that?

**Mayor:** Yeah, and we will be saying a lot more as it gets closer. I think the central point – it's a great question, is we of course want a clear mechanism and a well coordinated mechanism for ensuring if there's anything that needs to be addressed, that is done promptly. Situation room was created for a very different reality with 1,600 schools and, you know, very, very challenging logistics. Again, our City office buildings, that's a much more finite universe. So, we'll talk about how we're going to handle those individual situations. But I think it's a very good point you're raising and we will go through it in one of the press conferences, laying out the details of how we're approaching it as it gets closer.

**Moderator:** The next is James Ford from PIX 11.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call.

**Mayor:** Good morning, James. How you've been?

**Question:** Not bad, thank you. Not bad. And I appreciate you taking my call. This may be something of a follow-up to the previous question. Look, Pfizer is now saying that it has 100 percent efficacy for vaccines for children, age 12 to 15. And there are trials going on for children six months to 12 years old. With this new information, how might that impact the full reopening of schools? Maybe even without the three feet social distancing or with it, but if you could say what preparations you all are making noting that there is this new information and more expected to come out regarding vaccination for children?

**Mayor:** I think this news from Pfizer falls under the category of it's all good. I mean, this is really great to hear. It just gives us more tools and more ability to keep moving forward. I'm going to turn to Dr. Varma, who's been very deeply involved in all of our efforts around schools from the beginning. But let me say it this way. You know, I think what this means is we're just going to see more and more people vaccinated as we go forward, particularly looking to September. There's still a lot to be done, you know getting through the whole approval process and then vaccination starting to happen is its own reality. But every time we hear that vaccinations work with another age group or that new vaccines are coming, anything that gives us more capacity helps us move forward. But we already know James, our schools are the safest places to be in New York City right now. And that was true before there was widespread vaccination. So, it only will get better with more and more vaccination. And we are already planning for September to bring all our kids back, for everyone who's ready to come back. But this'll, you know, as this progresses, it just makes it better. Dr. Varma?

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Great. Thank you very much for the question. And just to echo what the Mayor has said about the results. You know, these are ultimately verified when they're presented to the FDA. This is just extraordinary news. I mean, to be quite frank, I literally almost dropped my phone when I saw how impressive the data was that Pfizer released. It's amazing and incredibly important news. And it's important for a couple of reasons. One, you know, the long-term quest is us for it to get to a level where a large enough percentage of the population is protected so that we can go back to living the way we normally can. And so, anytime we can expand the group of people that's eligible, that's just absolutely great news for all of us. Number two, as you know, it's going to have a really big and important impact on our schools. It may be challenging of course, for this current school year. Again, remember that you know, first of all, the vaccine data has to be presented to the FDA. They have to authorize it. Then people have to be willing to accept it. And then of course there is that timeline, it takes about three weeks between your first and second dose, and then at least another two weeks for you to, for you to take effect. So, we are looking, I think probably more at the summer for us to really accrue the benefits, kind of as a whole society and then of course, as it relates to our schools. But absolutely this is really tremendous news, and it may have a really important impact on what happens with school protocols in the fall. I think we're just going to have to wait and see you know, as we get all the final data and as we pull it all together, what that exactly means.

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

**Question:** Congratulations for passing the four million threshold for dosages. But can you put this in terms of people? I mean, how many New Yorkers are fully vaccinated? How much further do you have to go? And also knowing what you do about supply, how soon might we



realistically see every New Yorker who is eligible and wants to get vaccinated, actually get the vaccine?

**Mayor:** Okay. So, James, first of all, we are going to start talking more and more about how we are moving toward our goal of five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers by June. To date, of course one of the challenges has been the difference between the folks who take the two-dose approach and those who take the one dose with Johnson & Johnson. But we're going to increasingly capture that information and provide it so you can track our progress. The overall reality is we're confident, absolutely confident about hitting that five million mark in June. Now where is the natural end point potentially? And I'll get Dr. Varma to weigh in here too. I think we have seen that, first of all, supply wise, we unquestionably, we proved it last week. We can do half a million doses a week. We can probably do substantially more than that. So long as we have supply, we'll just keep expanding. We're hearing good things about the April supply levels. We're hearing that there could be really extraordinary supply in May. So, that says to me, going into May, going into June, it's going to be easier and easier for people to get a shot. Where do we get to a point where there's more shots than people want them? I don't know yet. I think my hope is that hesitancy keeps decreasing and as supply increases, more and more people get the shot more and more people know people who got the shot, it went well. They think, hey, maybe it's time for me to do it. You know, hesitancy goes down, down, down. There's always another person to give a shot to. My sense is that we'll continue certainly through the summer. But let's hear Dr. Varma's assessment.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, I actually, I concur exactly with the Mayor. I mean, I think what we know from vaccine programs that go back many decades here in the United States and the experience overseas is that you know, getting good acceptance of a vaccine is not an immediate process. We, you know, obviously we've all been through this incredibly traumatic time that none of us have ever experienced our life. So, we are seeing really good uptake right now. It gets everybody to understand, this is a way to protect yourself. This is the way for us to all get back out of this. But we also know that people have appropriate questions. They are skeptical for any of the number of reasons. And we know this with all vaccines that it does take time to get to that point. So, I think as the Mayor has noted, five million I think it's a very good, acceptable target for us to think about a time when enough of the population is protected, that our health system is safe. That the number of people who are at risk of dying has declined dramatically. And we will start to see lower levels of disease. So, I think that's a really good sort of intermediate end point. And then the longer-term end point is to work on hesitancy over time. And it's going to take all of us to do that. You know, we have to be vaccine ambassadors ourselves because there's going to be friends and family members that have questions and we need to show them, well, we got vaccinated, this is why. What are your concerns? And us, try to address them on an individual basis and continue to do that at a population level.

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

**Moderator:** The next is Odalys Molina from Telemundo.

**Question:** Oh, hello. I'm sorry.

**Mayor:** Odalys, can you hear us?

**Question:** Yes. Hi Mayor. How are you doing? I'm surprised.

**Mayor:** How are you doing?

**Question:** Thank you so much for – I'm doing great Mayor. I'm doing great. I have a question for you, and this is regarding, this is regarding the vaccine. About the vaccination, how will the program or protocol will work for those 16 years and older to get vaccinated starting in April? Could you go over that?

**Mayor:** Yes, absolutely. I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Long. So, you're right. Next week, in fact folks 16 and up will qualify. And you know, I think that even though it's going to be a new group of people, it doesn't change the basics of the process. So, Dr. Varma, Dr. Long, you want to speak to that?

**Executive Director Ted Long, Test and Trace Corps.:** Sure. I appreciate the question. It's really important for everybody to know and feel comfortable with how to make appointments. So, the same way that today, if you are eligible, you can go to our website or to call our number, VAX4NYC. Those opportunities will be made available the same way for people 16 and above when they're eligible for the vaccine next week. One thing I'll note is that the Pfizer vaccine is the one that is available for people 16 and above. So, when you call or go on our website, it's clearly demarcated, which sites have that vaccine in case you're 16 or 17 years old, so you can know what site you should be going to.

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

**Question:** There are talks about the fourth wave due to the increase of the new numbers of COVID cases in the nation, plus a different variant reported. What is the plan for New York City looking ahead? Can you talk a little bit about that or share more information?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Odalys, look I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Varma. We take the situation very seriously. And again, what we decided long ago is the only way to make decisions is by being led by the data and the science. We are watching these numbers every day, every hour to discern what kind of moves we need to make. Overall look, thank God we have seen the situation in the hospitals improve markedly. We've seen fewer deaths, but we're still really concerned about number of cases. We're still really concerned about the impact of the variants. So, we adjust constantly. Where I would keep saying there is a concern, is some of the decisions that the State is making. I think some of them are premature. Certainly, the fitness classes were an example of that. I'm concerned about the decision that they made about indoor athletics for colleges. Again, we think athletics should be focused on outdoor activities for the foreseeable future while we see how the variants play out. So, I think there's some decisions that are taking us a little too quickly into areas that, it is just premature. That would be my concern. But I think if we stay careful and cautious, we can navigate this because the pace of vaccination is so intense. That's the good news. And we think it's going to jump up a lot in April as more supply comes. Dr. Varma, do you want to add?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, thank you very much. I, you know, to echo what the Mayor has said, you know, we are still in you know, coming down off this second wave of ours. And unfortunately, we are not seeing the declines that we really want to see. So, we remain very concerned. I think our health care system has proven to be incredibly resilient. But what our real concern is people getting sick and people dying. And we need to do everything we possibly can to prevent that. Vaccines are the most powerful tool to achieve that. But they take time. It takes time to receive the vaccines. It takes time for your body's immune system to be fully protected. So, in that interim period, we have to double down on all of the measures that we've been taking for this past year. The reason it's called pandemic fatigue is because it is hard. It's hard for all of us emotionally, physically to stay in this. But we need people to keep wearing masks, getting tested, maintaining distance, washing their hands, and staying away from others. If they happen to have symptoms. There is a very real possibility that you know, we can be completely out of this you know, within another six to eight weeks of very aggressive vaccination. But we do run a risk of having a resurgence if we relax some of those measures of safety that we know work so well.

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

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

**Question:** Good Morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey, how are you doing?

**Question:** I'm good. Thanks. How about yourself?

**Mayor:** Good. So, your executive order today reminded me that when you made Dermot Shea police commissioner, you came under some criticism for missing a potential opportunity to make a person of color the city's top cop. I mean, I think Council Member Rodriguez, who was on the call just now, gave an impromptu press conference to that effect. So, just looking back at the year that's passed since then and your executive order today, do you have any regrets about making Dermot Shea the top cop instead of a person of color?

**Mayor:** No. Shant, look, we're talking about something much bigger than just who is the commissioner. We're talking about putting together a leadership team and continually evolving. So, look, I think what we've seen has been an incredibly tough period. I give Commissioner Shea a lot of credit for helping this city through this period and also building up a leadership team. The folks who are in leadership now Chief Harrison, Chief Holmes, but so many others who represent this whole city and he's been doing that systematically right down to the precinct level. And I think it's something that should be looked at, to recognize how much he has focused on diversifying leadership within. So, no, I think this has been the right approach. Just keep continually building and I think it needs to be systemic, which is why we have the executive order. Go ahead, Shant.

**Question:** Yeah. So, thanks for that. I also wanted to go back to some of your comments yesterday, encouraging New Yorkers to intervene if they see a hate crime unfolding. And if you could bear with me when I – because I have a kind of analogy in mind basically trying to get at what example are police officers themselves setting here. And it's a slightly different scenario, but when it comes to mask enforcement, my understanding is that's something police officers have basically stopped doing. There'll be times anecdotally one is on the subway, you'll see someone not wearing a mask. Police officers will see the same thing and they tend not to say anything about that. So, given that that's the case in that seemingly relatively low-risk scenario, what kind of example are police officers themselves setting for New Yorkers who you're asking to intervene in being potentially very dangerous scenarios?

**Mayor:** I respect the question, but I don't see the analogy. What we are doing with masks, overwhelmingly, there've been times when, of course there has been enforcement necessary, but overwhelmingly what the approach is, is a positive approach, it is an educational approach, it is reminding people, it's giving people free masks. A lot of that's been done by civilians. Some of that has been done by police officers. That continues. We're going to continue to focus on the subways and making sure that as people come back, there's mask distribution. But I think when you see – I mean, I really was reacting, Shant, to that horrendous video that we all saw yesterday. I don't understand if someone – you know, here's an older woman being kicked on the ground. Someone needs to do something, again, whether it is screaming out, whether it's calling 9-1-1, whether it's, you know, trying to get the assailant to move away, whatever it is, it's a choice people have to make. And I always want people to be smart and careful, but that was just horrifying to watch, you know, someone's standing right there and turning away rather than trying some form of intervention. I think everyone can find some way to contribute in these situations. And again, I hope we see this trend end once and for all. But I do think every New Yorker can stand up to hatred in a lot of different ways. And I want to remind people that there are right ways to do it, and you get a lot more information, again, go to [nyc.gov/StopAsianHate](https://nyc.gov/StopAsianHate) for the information on how to do that the right way and to report anything you see, because we need those reports to find the perpetrators of these acts.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Abu from Bangla Patrika.

**Question:** Hello, Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** Hey, Abu. How you been?

**Question:** Good. Thank you so much for, you know, asking. Mayor, I have a question which is about the first, about the vaccine that the people who are taking the vaccine, took the vaccine, but they are still infected. And, you know, people have questioned whether which one is good, which one is bad. Is there any definition of the Johnson, Moderna and you know, the other [inaudible] any kind of difference?

**Mayor:** I'll turn to Dr. Varma with this statement, Abu. I don't think there is such thing as a perfect scenario here. The notion of the vaccines is to greatly reduce the risk of being infected as particularly the risk of the worst outcomes. That's where the vaccines have been outstanding and consistent, but they are not perfect. And I think that needs to be understood and from what I've

seen, they all perform the most important function, which is guarding against serious medical issues and particularly protecting people against death. So, Dr. Varma, take it from there.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah. So, as the Mayor has discussed, there are basically two main ways that we consider a vaccine to be effective. Number one, does it protect you from getting severely ill, being hospitalized, and dying? And the second measure is, does it protect you from transmitting infection to other people? On the first question, we know the answer and we know it for all three vaccines. They are extremely effective at protecting you from being hospitalized or dying. And we know this from the studies that have been done, and we know this from the real-world experience here in the United States and in many other countries overseas. So, our recommendation remains the same. The best vaccine is the one that you can get right now. So, whatever vaccine option you're given, take it. It's not about a brand, it's about the outcome. The second question is one that public health people are still continuing to study, but we're seeing really good news. So, the second question is, does it protect you from not potentially infecting other people? And we've seen a study that came out from the CDC this week that is really tremendous news. It looks at the first two vaccines, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and shows that they are incredibly effective at stopping people from getting the infection, even without symptoms, and transmitting it to other people. So, I think we're going to probably eventually see very similar data for J & J and can be quite confident again that the best vaccine to get is the one that's available to you right now.

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

**Question:** The marijuana, you have a statement that you talked about in the morning? Do you have any statistics [inaudible] negative impact on the society and the public health on marijuana?

**Mayor:** Well, I'll see if Dr. Varma or Dr. Long want to comment, but I'll say this. I think the important point here was to recognize we've had widespread marijuana usage for decades. It has been only counterproductive to have it be illegal while also being simultaneously widespread. This is a case to me of use the legalization process to address the injustices, the mistakes in the criminal justice system, the mistakes in our law, that disparate negative impact, try to create some positive in terms of economic empowerment for communities that have suffered, and revenue that can be used for good purposes, rather than just an underground economy, but also address legitimate health and safety issues out in the open. It is an opportunity to do that. So, I just think it's a much more sensible approach. Look, as a parent, you know, I certainly took seriously that there are health and safety issues here, and I think we need to, but I actually think we'll have more ability to do that with this being something out in the open with rules and laws, including age levels at which people are allowed to buy marijuana that are going allow for a better approach, a better conversation. Dr. Varma or Dr. Long, do you want to add?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Sure, I can start. And I would just echo exactly what you've just said, which is that, you know, we know that any type of product has a risk of potential being abused, but we also know that any type of product can be managed if you put in the right resources. And those resources don't involve criminal justice they involve, you know, informed, supportive care to help people with their problems. So, I know myself again as a parent, I think that my – you

know, I tell my children, you know, there are things that adults should do, and there are things that kids should do. And my recommendation is that they stay away from kind of mind altering substances when they're younger and they wait until they're older. And for adults, I think we are still learning, you know, are there long-term complications or not? But what we do know is that a lot of adults do use these products safely. They lead highly functional lives. They lead to no severe health outcomes, and we need to have a society that doesn't criminalize that type of action and does provide support for people who do end up having problems with it.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Dr. Long do you want to add?

**Executive Director Long:** Just add on to that, yeah. I mean, as a primary care doctor myself, one of the biggest concerns always with drugs is that they can potentially be misused. Having the right regulations in place to insert the safe and appropriate use of things like marijuana will only help to save lives. So, I appreciate the question. Thank you.

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

**Moderator:** Last question for today is from Yehudit Borough Park 24 News.

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

**Mayor:** I am doing very well, Yehudit. I hope you are having A Zissen Pesach.

**Question:** Oh, I am. Thank you so much for the beautiful wishes and everyone in our house started to say that because of you. Thank you. So, speaking of a *Zissen Pesach*, I don't want to sound so much like a Jewish mother, which I am, but I know your support [inaudible] marijuana, but opponents of the marijuana bill's passage say that it could lead to the distribution and marketing of the drugs to minors and revenue from the drug being used for criminal purposes, such as guns, gangs, and cartels, and the distribution of the drug to states where it's not legal. Other concerns are that the legalization of marijuana would increase traffic deaths, experimentation with harder drugs, addiction to marijuana, and that children and other New Yorkers would have to live under a perpetual haze of secondhand smoke. So, I'm just wondering, I just – before I asked the question, I want to say to Dr. Varma, I think that we all know as parents that, you know, you can tell children, you know, don't do what we do, but we all know that whatever we do for good or for bad children are going to imitate. So, I really firmly believe that. So, I was wondering, Mayor de Blasio, do you fear any negative consequences at all from the legalization of marijuana in New York?

**Mayor:** It's a great question, Yehudit. And I, and it's – you always ask very earnest questions and I appreciate it. And I'm a parent, you're a parent, Dr. Varma is a parent. We're all working through these issues all the time. I think – I used the analogy the other day to another really problematic part of our history when I said don't ask, don't tell. I think that kind of approach is always the one that fails. So, I think the notion of, okay, for years and years, we had laws officially saying it was illegal and yet marijuana use was widespread. All the criminal activity you were discussing was actually happening in part because it was illegal. We looked carefully – when I put out the study, I believe it was December 2018, all the years are all mushing together

now. But when we put out that study, one of the things that I said to my team was, spend the time talking to all the jurisdictions that had legalized, particularly where they had bigger cities. Talk to their police departments, talk to their health departments. We got our public safety team, our health team involved. We all processed what we saw and what we saw was there was not an increase in criminal activity. We're talking about places in California, Seattle, Denver, you know, major cities. But, thank God, at least some of the worst things that came with the previous laws were being addressed in the sense of getting rid of the negative impact on people's lives from harsh sentences, expunging those sentences, offering some economic opportunity to communities that didn't have enough, again, some revenue that was going to the public sector for health and safety, rather than just flowing illicitly. So, I do understand the concern truly, but I think, Yehudit, it is like every other challenge in society, bring it out in the open and address it and educate people and take the steps to help people be their best selves and be safe. That's a hell of a lot better than, you know, having it be a shadow economy and think that that's going to work for us. So, that would be my analysis. Go ahead, Yehudit.

**Question** Okay. Well, I have a follow-up question to that, but I think I'm just going to move on to something else. So, it's such great news about increased vaccination and eligibility and vaccinating four million New Yorkers and Drs. Chokshi, Katz, and Easterling have addressed, in press conferences and conference calls, many of the misinformation that I still hear such as that the vaccine affects fertility, it was rushed or somehow dangerous. And, of course, we all on this call value news as a way to spread truthful information and fight misinformation. I was wondering if you would consider launching more vaccine information to fight hesitancy on mediums that people who are hesitant are perhaps more likely to believe such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and other forms of social media, and maybe also have a greater variety of religious leaders to publicly take the vaccine.

**Mayor:** I think those are great ideas. We have had some religious leaders take the vaccine, but I agree with you. We need to do more. In fact, one of the things, your timing is impeccable, Yehudit, because one of the things you're going to see starting this week and the next few weeks is more and more of the vaccine centers being in a diverse group of houses of worship and in their community facilities. So, synagogues, mosques, temples, all sorts of different places, but I think you're right about having more religious leaders join us and expressing their confidence in the vaccine. I think the more places that we have the vaccine distributed the better, and I agree with you more and more emphasis on social media, and we're going to be making a lot of emphasis on community and ethnic media as well.

I think this is a more is more kind of equation, Yehudit, that we need to just keep patiently explaining, answering questions, showing how much faith there is, including from trusted people in each community. But I'll tell you the good news is we are seeing the tide turning. I mean, all of the public polling is showing it, but also our experience on the ground. More and more people coming forward and there's less and less hesitancy. And I'll finally say this, when I talk to people, I go to the vaccine centers and I talk to people and many people, and I say, did you feel some hesitancy, were you worried? A lot of people start by saying at first, I was, I wanted to see how it went for a while, I wanted to see, you know, if some other people that I knew got it. But that momentum now is shifting, more and more people getting vaccinated more and more people feeling comfortable. So, that is definitely the good news.

And I'll come – finish with this. I want to just reflect on the action we took the day, the reform through the executive order. Again, this work of bringing police and community together, this is work that we will be doing for years and years, it is something we always need to keep perfecting. There's lots more reform to be done, but the good news is we are doing it. We are doing it as a city together. And when I think about today's executive order, I think about an NYPD that just gets better and better in the future, more and more diverse. And I'm thinking particularly about the precinct commanders, because they play such a crucial role. We now are involving communities in the selection of their precinct commanders. That's been a reform that has been very, very powerfully received. Folks see that as the beginning of a bigger change, these decisions being made more together.

Now with this executive order, it's going to help us ensure that those who lead precincts, who play such a crucial role in keeping communities safe, more and more will reflect those communities. And that's going to give people more faith. Folks deserve to see the opportunity for members of their own community to have a chance to lead. And the more that happens, the more respect and faith people have, the more they feel respected. So, look to me over these last seven years, I've seen so much change and I know, and I give credit to the NYPD, it's an organization capable of tremendous change and improvement, and it keeps doing that work. And today is another big step on that road. And I look forward to the day and I believe it is coming where every young person in New York City can see themselves reflected in the NYPD, that they can feel that the NYPD is there to protect them and they can feel a connection that sometimes they haven't in the past, that there's a mutual respect, the sense that officer is there for them, but they also can feel a connection to that officer. That may sound a little utopian, but I believe it is where we can go. And that changes everything on the ground. And that's what we aspire to. Thank you, everybody.

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