

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 28, 2021, 10:00 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. I like to talk about good things that happen in New York City all the time, and there were a lot of good things this weekend. But there was also something really, really bad, another shooting in Times Square, which is absolutely unacceptable, and we will not tolerate. Now we've seen patterns in Times Square that we are going to address very, very aggressively. That is the entire notion of precision policing. You're going to hear from Chief Rodney Harrison on the specific actions that the NYPD will take working with other City agencies immediately in Times Square. The victim of the shooting, innocent bystander. Thank God, from the last information we've gotten, he'll be okay. But it's just an unacceptable state of affairs. This is a place that is so precious and so important to our city. It has to be safe. We're going to be adding additional officers and additional measures to make it safer, to make it better. And we're announcing today the Times Square Safety Action plan to make sure that anyone who goes to Times Square knows they're safe, and they're going to see plenty of police presence in Times Square. Here to tell you about it, our Chief of Department, Chief Rodney Harrison.

Chief of Department Rodney Harrison, NYPD: Yeah, Mr. Mayor, good morning. And thank you so much for support, especially during the Pride weekend. But yesterday around 5:20 PM at the corner of 45th and Broadway there was a dispute between one individual and several other individuals. This individual who was a male Black, looks like he's in his 20s, pulled out a firearm shooting several times at the individuals he was having a heated argument with. What we've seen at this time under the investigation from Midtown South, it looks like one of the bullets that was fired at the individuals where the arguments were going on, it looks like the bullet ricocheted and hit our unintended target. So, the investigation is ongoing with Midtown South. And one thing that you will see going forward over in that area of Midtown South by the bow tie is dozens of more police officers.

You know, after this shooting and the shooting that we had a couple of weeks ago, it's important that we put a lot more of a police presence over there, trying to engage some of the issues we're seeing with these soliciting or aggressive panhandling of CDs. We're not sure what the motive was from yesterday. We're not sure if it's from CDs or street dancing, but the investigation is still ongoing, and we'll get down to the bottom of it. It's also very important that we work with our Consumers Affairs as well as DOT, our Times Square Alliance. We're also going to try a different strategy and see if we can get some undercover officers to find a way to engage these individuals that are soliciting these CDs to see if we could do a better job of enforcement in that area. So, Mr. Mayor, that's what we're going to look to do now. And we'll continue to come up with innovative ideas to address some of the issues that we're seeing in that part of the city.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Chief. The bottom line is we are going to flood the zone in Times Square with additional officers to make sure this situation is resolved once and for all. We are going into the Summer of New York City. We have more and more activity out there, more and more jobs coming back, more and more tourists coming back. They have to be safe and they have to feel safe. So, we're going to ensure that Times Square is very, very clearly well-patrolled, visibly patrolled. In addition to measures you may not see, as the Chief just indicated, to make sure the situation is safe for everyone. This is what precision policing is about. This is what CompStat is about. When you find the problem or pattern you address it, you shift resources. We'll shift as many officers as necessary to address the situation. And we'll also deal very aggressively with any illegal vending, any other problems that are happening in the area. That is the thing we have to do urgently at this point to keep Times Square safe and move our city forward.

Okay, now I said Summer of New York City. Well, we're feeling the Summer of New York City right now. We're feeling it more than we might want, actually. The heat is coming on strong today, and I want everyone to know, heat advisory is in effect at noon today and take this seriously. You're going to hear from our Emergency Management Commissioner, John Scrivani, in a moment, but I want to say the number one thing when we give you these warnings is we're trying to get you ready to make adjustments in your day and not go about business as usual. This is serious, serious heat. It'll be a problem starting noon today through 8:00 PM tomorrow. Cooling centers will be open across the city and anyone who needs a cooling center call 3-1-1, and you can get information about the one near you. You can also sign up for NotifyNYC and get regular updates. It is so important to stay informed whenever we're dealing with a weather problem or any other challenge that we need to make adjustments around, to keep ourselves safe, our family safe. Parents keep an eye on your kids, make sure they stay hydrated. Don't leave any child out too long in this heat. Let's be careful out there. I want you to hear from our Emergency Management Commissioner now, Commissioner John Scrivani.

Commissioner John Scrivani, Emergency Management: Thank you, sir. Good morning. I want to echo your messages and let New Yorkers know it's important to plan ahead and stay safe during this extreme heat. The City has various resources and programs available to help New Yorkers beat the heat in the summer months. We currently have over 200 cooling centers available throughout the five boroughs. And just as a reminder, the beaches, pools, and the parks with water features are now open. Cooling centers will be there, as the Mayor said, they're going to be open – they're open now through Wednesday for New Yorkers to go out, to beat the heat. And again, as the Mayor mentioned, you can call 3-1-1, or you can visit nyc.gov/beattheheat. I do want to echo a couple of the Mayor's points about safety, you know, stay indoors and use air conditioning if you have it and it's available. If not, you can go to one of our cooling centers. If you have to go out, please avoid strenuous activities, especially during the sun's peak hours from 11:00 AM to 4:00PM. And if you must do those strenuous activities please stay hydrated and try to do it at times where it is a little bit cooler out. Don't forget to check on your neighbors. It's very important that New Yorkers help each other to beat the heat. People that are vulnerable, if you have neighbors that you know that can't get out or need some support, please get out there and help them. Our reminder is never leave children or pets that require special – or people that require special care in parked cars. It can get very hot, especially in the middle of the day with that extreme heat. People can have adverse effects very quickly. And if you do have anyone

experiencing those adverse effects, please call 9-1-1 immediately to get them help. On the NYCEM side, we are working with our partners, the utilities, the other City agencies, and the non-government NGOs to help New Yorkers with any resources they may need. Thank you, sir. Appreciate the opportunity today.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Commissioner Scrivani. Thank you to your whole team at Emergency Management. We depend on you guys a lot, all of you. The men and women of Emergency Management do really important work and they don't get enough thank-yous. So, I want to offer one now because you're always looking out for the people in New York City, helping us stay ahead of the problems and addressing them when they come. So, thank you for that.

Everyone, let's take this seriously, but I – another thing I want to say to Commissioner Scrivani – and I hope he will take seriously. You know, he and I were at the Bushwick Pool on Saturday, having a great time with kids, families there at the pool, celebrating the reopening of our outdoor pools. I wore a very tasteful Hawaiian shirt. Commissioners Scrivani did not get the memo. He really needed to up his game there. So, Commissioner, we'll be watching for something a little more colorful next time.

Now I want to turn to a Council member who has really advocated for cooling centers to be available, particularly for seniors. He has really made this a central issue over the years and helped us to determine better ways to serve senior citizens and all New Yorkers, particularly in his community in Southeast Queens. And I know he's out there getting the message out today. My pleasure to introduce Council Member Daneek Miller.

[...]

Thank you. Council Member, thank you very, very much for being out there for your community and getting the word out. This is how we protect people. A lot of folks, at the frontline in their communities, making sure people are safe. Thank you very much. And I want to now go to another part of Queens, hear from another elected official. He's a member of the Assembly, also has focused on getting the message out and getting the message out in multiple languages to people all over his community, stay safe, stay cool, making sure people realize the challenge of this heat wave. My pleasure to turn to Assembly Member Ron Kim.

[...]

Thank you, Assembly Member. Thank you for the good work you do for your community, also the work you do as the Chair of the Aging Committee in the Assembly, serving seniors all over the city, all over the state. It makes a big difference. Thank you for being with us and let's spread the word today and tomorrow and keep people safe.

All right let me take you to a new topic. Speaking of rising summer temperatures, Summer Rising sign-ups are getting higher and higher and higher. You see what I did there? See that? Rising summer temperatures, Summer Rising. That's a segue right there, people. Summer Rising, our absolutely unprecedented effort to reach young people in this city. This is a response, of

course, to the pandemic and the aftermath of the pandemic, but it's something we also intend to do for the future. Right now, over 200,000 New York City kids have signed up for Summer Rising. This is going to be by far the biggest summer effort for our kids in the history of New York City. And I really believe it is the shape of things to come. More and more parents are turning to Summer Rising as a safe place for their kids to be. It's free. It's going to be fun. It's going to be educational. It's going to help kids make up for lost time in school, but also have a lot of fun this summer, connecting with their friends again. I want all parents to know applications for Summer Rising are still open. You can go to schools.nyc.gov/summer. For most kids, Summer Rising will start on July 6th. So, you still have some time to sign up. If you're a parent out there and you don't have a good option for your kid, you want something that's going to really be positive, engaging for them this summer, turn to Summer Rising. Sign up now.

Okay, let me give you a vaccination update because we keep talking about everything we're looking forward to the summer, the Summer of New York City. The reason we're having the Summer of New York City, the reason we're having this comeback is vaccination. So, the number of doses administered from day one, 9,236,421. Numbers keep growing. Incentives keep rolling out. People want those incentives. People are really paying attention and signing up. This week, the vaccine contest, we're going to have ten new winners of \$2,500 each and 15 new winners of the staycation packages. Enjoy your city from a beautiful hotel and experience New York City as it comes back. Also, the vaccine referral bonus program for local organizations, that's going strong. A lot of organizations signing up. Great way for them to reach the community, get people vaccinated, but also bring resources back to the community. So, we're going to keep doing all these things and more as we build out the vaccination effort.

Meanwhile, a big piece of our comeback will be our new recovery budget. The City of New York, as of Wednesday, we're going to be having – passing a new budget from New York City for next year. The recovery budget is what we need now. It is a radical investment in working people. It is a really different approach because we finally got the support we needed from other levels of government so we could invest in working people. We're going to give you more details. There's ongoing conversations right now with the City Council. They're going very well. We fully expect resolution as early as today and a vote by the Council either tomorrow or Wednesday but let me just tell you the goals that we've all been working on. We've – number one, of course, finish the fight against COVID once and for all, and make us the public health capital of the world going forward. Focus for sure on continued strong fiscal management, focus on bringing our economy and jobs back, it's happening, but we're going to do a lot in this budget to continue that and build that. A major focus on bringing our schools back strong, both in terms of the academic needs of our kids, closing the COVID achievement gap, but also addressing their emotional needs in ways that go far beyond anything we've done before, and obviously a focus of public safety, new investments in community-based solutions to violence, focusing in every way on making sure the city will be safe this summer and beyond. You're going to see these things in the recovery budget, and it's a budget based on the concept – I know the City Council feels the same way – we believe in a recovery for all of us. We believe in our recovery budget for all of us. We believe in reaching every part of the city and not just repeating the status quo of the past but moving forward. So, we'll be having details for the public and the media as early as later on today, or certainly by tomorrow morning, and a vote in the Council by Wednesday, and that will be a major, major moment for the comeback of the city.

Okay, let's go to indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 58 patients. Confirmed positivity of 15.52, hospitalization rate per 100,000 is 0.29. That's a great number. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 179 cases. Number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report, seven-day rolling average, 0.57 percent.

I want to say a few words in Spanish about the heat advisory and how we all have to stay safe in this heat.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn 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. As a reminder, we're joined today by Chief of Department Rodney Harrison, by New York City Emergency Management Commissioner John Scrivani, by Dr. Chokshi and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Katie Honan from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

Mayor: Hello, DJ Katie Honan how are you? Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't supposed to use that identity.

Question: It's okay. It's okay. I'm asking – I have a question about this Times Square safety plan. I know you said that you will add more police officers, you will flood the area with police officers. I cannot think of a place in New York City that already – that more police officers than Times Square. Maybe like NYPD graduation. There are already so many police officers in Times Square, and so many different departments within the Police Department. So, can you explain, is this maybe, do you want to take a different approach? How was this different than what we already have? Just explain a little about this strategy if it's already happening when we already have so many officers in Times Square.

Mayor: You're right there's a lot of officers, but I think given these incidents, we want to beef it up more. So, you're going to see more officers who are visible. As Chief Harrison said, some officers that won't be as visible doing undercover work, and you're going to see a different approach to vendor enforcement, where we see any illegal activities by vendors, both with civilian authorities and police. We're going to pull all those pieces together. The bottom line is we've got to fix this situation. We will, and I think an even stronger police presence is part of that. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: I don't know if maybe Chief Harrison wants to explain a little bit more about that different strategy, because again, I mean, it's not new that people sell CDs and other things in Times Square. What will be different now, especially if we already have a lot of police officers in Times Square and this continues to happen.

Mayor: Go ahead, Chief.

Chief Harrison: So good morning, and you know, thank you for your question. One of the things that we're going to push a little further is engagement. Making sure we're not just having the [inaudible] out there, but we're going to make sure we engage the individuals that are part of this aggressive solicitation, aggressive panhandling. That's going to be a new thing going forward, going through the warmer months, as well as making sure we work with DOT, like I stated, making sure we're working with Consumer Affairs, making sure we work with the Times Square Alliance. That's an important partnership in order for us to maybe clean up that area of Times Square going forward. But thank you very much.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: The next is Kiran Dhillon from WCBS.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah. Kiran, how are you doing?

Question: Good, how are you?

Mayor: Good, good.

Question: Listen, I want to follow on the previous question. Back in April, you know, you told our Marcia Kramer that you would create a new unit led by Terence Monahan that was going to bring in 80 uniformed cops and supervisors to make people safer, deal with the homeless problems, street peddlers, drug use in Midtown and specifically in Times Square. So, I'm not really sure how this is much different than that. It sounds like, you know, we get these announcements that you're going to be doing something every time there's crime in the area, but we're not really seeing the fruit of that labor. So, I want to know how is this, what you announced today, different than what we heard about in April with Terence Monahan, and specifically, I'm not sure if you mentioned it, but if you could tell us specifically how many officers, new officers we can expect in Times Square?

Mayor: I'll turn to Chief Harrison to give you a sense of the current approach and how it will be modified. But I want to emphasize the work that the NYPD does, constantly adjusting all over the city, and under Chief Harrison's leadership, there's been a group of officers focused on some of the quality-of-life issues. That's been a new approach has proven to be very effective. Terry Monahan, as a senior advisor to me, has been really helpful, working with the business community, coordinating with that work and the NYPD. But obviously the leadership of the NYPD, including the new unit that's been put together, have been the folks doing the day-to-day work, and it's had a really positive impact in many communities. But I think the bottom line is we see something just as – again, we always are taught by CompStat and precision policing when you see something develop, you make further adjustments, we think the adjustments we need to make now: more overt policing, more undercovers, more work on the vendor issue, and

so we're going to expand it further, especially given the Times Square is getting busier and busier. It's night and day compared to April, and it's important to double down there our efforts. Chief.

Chief Harrison: So yesterday was a very big day in New York City. We had several Pride events, so we had to make sure we covered different parts of Lower Manhattan yesterday. We had a lot of cops over in the Times Square area. Actually, there was a police officer right around the corner that heard the shots being fired at the time. So, I want to – I don't want it to come across like we don't have the appropriate presence there. But I think it's a point that you understand is that the different strategy going forward is now we're going to be engaging these individuals that are selling or panhandling these CDs, making sure that they're doing it right, making sure they're not harassing or making the tourists in that area feel threatened or feel as though they're going to be faced with some type of injury if they don't buy their products. So, a lot of work is going to be done. But once again [inaudible] like I stated before, there's to be a team effort to make sure that everybody's plugged in to do a better job going into the future in Times Square.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Kiran.

Question: Thank you. Yeah so, just to follow up, so this new Times Square Safety Action plan was created as a result of yesterday's shooting, and it's in addition to the 80 uniformed officers that Terence Monahan has already mentioned will be throughout Midtown South or throughout Midtown. So, I guess my question –

Mayor: Go ahead, Kiran.

Question: My question to you then is, just to follow up, if we've already seen after the shooting in May and in April, you announced the safety plan that business leaders are going to be doing there with Terence Monahan. How can New Yorkers, or tourist, or anyone really feel safe when you announce these plans but then we're still seeing unintended targets, innocent bystanders get shot in the middle of the day in Times Square?

Mayor: Kiran, this is how we change any situation we've seen. This is just the history again that we've seen over decades. When there's a problem, when there's a pattern, you move additional NYPD resources in you, change tactics, change strategy until you get to a positive resolution. There's no question in my mind, this is going to work. We're going to have plenty of officers. I agree very strongly with Chief Harrison that we need to ensure that the vendors who are out there are acting legally at all times, and there's going to be very aggressive, focused efforts to make very clear to them that's the only way to be in that area and anyone that doesn't want to abide by that won't be allowed to be there. So, this is additional focus, additional resources. That's how we solve a host of problems, and that's how we're going to solve this one.

Moderator: The next is Jeff Mays from the New York Times.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask about the lawsuit that was filed by two lawmakers Zellnor Myrie and Diana Richardson. They say they were pepper-sprayed by

police during a protest. Even though they obeyed their orders, they were pepper sprayed directly in the face, and then handcuffed. I'm wondering what do you think about what was done to them? And the point of the lawsuit they said is that, you know, even as lawmakers, they were treated in this way. Their concern is how police treat the general public. So, I'm wondering if you and the Chief of Department can address that?

Mayor: Yeah. Jeff, we are talking about events from a year ago. I was nearby when it happened. I was very distressed to hear that they had that experience. We don't want that to happen to anyone. There's been extensive investigation by DOI and the Law Department, a host of changes and recommendations that they put forward that are being implemented. But I'm not going to comment any further, obviously with a lawsuit on the table. I just I think we've spoken very, very consistently to what we learned from all of the challenges of that time and the things we're doing differently now. Chief, anything you want to add?

Chief Harrison: Listen, Jeff, if you don't mind, 99 percent of our interactions I want to say ended up positive. You're going to have the percentage of, fortunately that don't go the direction that that we like, it's important that we learn from these mistakes and become a better police department to protect the city. So, regarding the lawsuit, I don't have much to say about that. But we evaluate mistakes that are made, and we become a better police department from those mistakes.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Jeff.

Question: Thank you. I'm wondering if you can talk specifically about what's been learned from that event? Because just yesterday in Washington Square Park, there were, you know, some interactions with people there with police and some of the same complaints. So, you know, if you're still having these sorts of interactions going down with police, what has really changed since those two lawmakers had their incidents with the police?

Mayor: Jeff, a lot has changed. That doesn't mean every interaction is going to be perfect, obviously. And Chief Harrison and I have talked about this. I think there were a couple of things in Washington Square Park that should have been different, should have been better, but overwhelmingly what we've seen since those recommendations came out, since they were adopted by the NYPD, a much lighter touch, much greater use of community affairs, much less use of the specialized units. I think that's been productive. There's been lots and lots of protests around the city that have gone off smoothly, peacefully, once in a while we find things we've got to keep working on, but I got to say, overwhelmingly, the changes that were suggested at the end of last year have been implemented and implemented effectively.

Moderator: The next is Julia Marsh from The Post.

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

Mayor: Good, Julia, how are you doing today?

Question: Great. Just quickly, when does this flooding the zone with the additional police officers? When does that start?

Mayor: Chief, you can give the good news.

Chief Harrison: Yesterday.

Mayor: Literally, yesterday. Go ahead, Julia.

Question: After the incident, I assume, right?

Mayor: Correct.

Chief Harrison: Yes ma'am.

Question: Okay, and then, actually, Mr. Mayor, I think the last time I was on this call was you with you is right after the first shooting where the four-year-old was wounded in Times Square, and I asked you if you thought it would have a negative impact on bringing workers back to Midtown and tourists, and you said no at the time. So, now that we're having a second incident, that was very close to the first, tell me about your concerns that this will have on a tourism and reviving Midtown?

Mayor: Julia, we cannot let it have a negative effect. That's the bottom line, it's mission critical to get this right. So, we're going to make very clear to everyone, they're going to see plenty of police presence, and they're going to see these issues address very aggressively. The recovery we're seeing now is very, very strong and it's going to keep happening and we're going to do a lot to make sure it happens including in the area of public safety. But anytime we see a problem, we got to show people an aggressive response and that word will spread, and then we can keep moving forward.

Moderator: Next, we have Eve Kessler from Streetsblog.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor –

Mayor: Good morning –

Question: The MTA got clearance to – good morning – the MTA got clearance to do an environmental assessment for congestion prices three months ago. And there's been no public movement since then. Are they moving aggressively enough? And do you want to see this implemented finally the beginning of 2022?

Mayor: Eve, thanks for the question. One, they must move aggressively. We have to get congestion pricing in as quickly as possible. It's crucial to the comeback of the MTA and the comeback of the city. It's a really good question whether the MTA is doing everything they should do as quickly as they can. I want to get a clearer answer, I'll ask my MTA board members to immediately look into this. But in answer to your bigger question, yeah, this is really

important for the city, and I call upon the MTA and the State to get going on this. We got to get this done. Go ahead, Eve.

Question: Okay. This, my second question is Secretary Pete is in town. Do you have any message or agenda for him?

Mayor: I spoke with him some weeks ago about, in fact, congestion pricing and how important it was to move this forward. I know he's also visiting the Gateway Tunnel site with Senator Schumer. I let him know how important that was to New York City as well. I'm very encouraged that he's here to look at Gateway, we need that, and the federal government did step up and took initial actions we needed related to congestion pricing. So, I really appreciate Secretary Buttigieg's efforts.

Moderator: Last question for today Abu from Bangla Patrika.

Mayor: Yes. Hi, how are you?

Question: Good morning, Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good. Good.

Question: Okay. My question is, as you know, that Delta Indian variant –

Mayor: Wait, Abu, get closer to the phone. We're having a little trouble hearing you.

Question: Okay. As you know, the Delta variant or [inaudible] called Indian variant? How the city is monitoring the – because it's a very dangerous variant – how the city is monitoring and how many cases have been detected as of now?

Mayor: I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi in that order, but first say we are monitoring very carefully the Delta variant, we take it seriously. Thank God, as you've seen from the indicators, as you've seen from the vaccination numbers, we continue to move in the right direction and the answer to the Delta variant is more and more and more vaccination. But we're certainly keeping a close eye on it. So, let me turn first to Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great, thank you, Abu, for your question. I first – I want to emphasize that it is incredibly important for people to be aware that, you know, the battle against COVID isn't completely over, as we see from around the world, the virus can continue to mutate, but the great news is that the vaccines continue to be highly protective. So, even though this strain of the virus appears to be both more infectious and more dangerous, it appears to also be very responsive to the vaccine. So, for anybody out there who is not yet getting – not getting vaccinated, we would, again, strongly encourage you to do it because it is going to be the best protection. Now, for your specific question, the Health Department, and Dr. Chokshi can go into this in more detail, has a very extensive surveillance system to keep track of new variants of the virus, and there is a report that's put up on the website every week to answer your question. Over the last four weeks, the Delta variant has represented about 10 percent of all the cases in the city,

and that percentage is increasing, and we expect that to be the case, because again, as you get a very high number of people vaccinated, and COVID rates continue to go down, the cases that occur are going to be more likely those new strains, not the older strains. So, it's – while it's something that we need to monitor carefully, we need to always emphasize the fact that even though the percentage of Delta cases is going up, the total number of people getting COVID continues to go down and the vaccines continue to be very effective.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Choksi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thank you, Abu for your question. Dr. Varma described it well. In our last week of the variant testing that we do, the Delta variant represents about 23 percent of all cases, and that is increasing over time, which is something that we have to keep an eye on, but the overall number of cases continues to remain low and has decreased very significantly in recent weeks. My primary concern with respect to the Delta variant is people who are unvaccinated and, in some ways, based on what we're seeing with the Delta variant around, the world and in New York City, now may be the most dangerous time to remain unvaccinated because of the threat that this variant poses. So, for my fellow New Yorkers who have been waiting to figure out whether or not to get vaccinated, if you've been on the fence, my message is very simple, your wait is over and now is the best time to get vaccinated.

Mayor: Thank you very much, doctor, go ahead, Abu.

Question: Second question is, as you know, the city is opening everything now and travel is going on, big crowd is going on, and there is a lot of people, a significant amount, of curable, they don't want to take the vaccine, how city will handle them? And what is the plan that the city could, you know, achieve the herd immediately. Do you have any specific time that this is the time we can achieve the herd immunity?

Mayor: It's a great question. I know both doctors have strong views on this, and I think the way to think about this is less about “herd immunity” more about functional immunity or community immunity in some way. Let me give you the numbers. First of all, Abu, before I turn to the doctors as of today, 4.2 million New York City residents, fully vaccinated. So, we are right about the halfway mark in terms of our total population, fully vaccinated halfway, and remember, we still don't have kids under 12 eligible for vaccination that will be coming soon, but that's really going to help us increase the numbers as well. In terms of New Yorkers who've had at least one dose, 4.6 million, and overwhelmingly folks who get one dose come back for that second dose. So, you know, we're going to keep driving these numbers up. We're going to be reaching more and more young people particularly as we get close to school reopening. In terms of what that nets us as we gain more and more vaccination, how it creates any kind of larger community reality, first Dr. Varma, then Dr. Chokshi.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yes, Abu, this is a really challenging topic, but I'll try to make it as simple as I can, which is that because this new strain of the virus is more infectious and markedly more infectious than the original or sort of the classic strain of COVID, it really does raise the threshold for the number of people that need to be vaccinated until we can say that, you

know, COVID is, is no longer a problem at all in New York City. So, you know, you've heard numbers that have been said before, that 70 percent of people need to get vaccinated or 80 percent for true population immunity, but the reality is we don't know the exact number and that number probably is rising because the virus is more infectious. So, all of the things that the Mayor has been talking about, the incentives to get vaccinated, the messaging campaigns, and additionally, as he just noted, the expanding eligibility are really going to be crucial because the only way that we can really put sort of COVID completely in the rear-view mirror is for us to get those very high vaccination levels, and the virus is teaching us as, Dr. Chokshi has said, this is a very bad time to be unvaccinated and that we really do need to do everything we can to spread the word.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Look, each dose of the vaccine is another brick in our wall, and that's how we have to think about how we are building up community immunity, and that's why we're doing all the things that the mayor and Dr. Varma have emphasized because these last miles of the vaccination campaign in some ways are our most important to reach every single New Yorker who can benefit from the protection that vaccination affords. This means we've done canvassing, we've knocked on thousands of doors to have those one-on-one conversations. We've worked with community-based clinicians because we know how trusted they are by their patients. We are focused on youth vaccination getting to the places with our mobile vaccination options, where we know that young people are and where they're congregating with their families. And finally, last week, the Mayor announced that we are expanding our in-home vaccination program. That means any new Yorker who's currently eligible for vaccination can sign up for it. So, we're going to leave no stone unturned with respect to reaching every single New Yorker that we possibly can.

Mayor: Thank you so much, doctors. As we conclude today, it's a simple message, summer in New York City's here. It's going to be fantastic. It's going to be a huge part of our comeback, but the best way to enjoy this summer, the best way to bring New York City back is go out and get vaccinated. We've made it easier than ever, more incentives than ever. This is the time to go get vaccinated, everyone. Thank you very much.

###