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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. As we continue the fight against the coronavirus, we take a moment today to reflect today is World AIDS Day. We reflect on the decades – the decades-long fight of the AIDS pandemic. We reflect and we mourn those we lost. So many New Yorkers lost someone dear to them to HIV and AIDS. We reflect on the fight, the amazing struggle, the activism, the grassroots voices that stood up and said government has to do more. And we reflect upon the extraordinary efforts of our health care leadership, all those trailblazers and innovators who found new approaches to keep people alive and keep them safe. And we've come a long way, and it's a reminder of our ability to fight back even against extraordinarily difficult odds. And no place felt that more in the AIDS crisis than this city, but let's also appreciate how far we have come back and that we can now talk about ending the epidemic once and for all.

So, today, it is a reminder of the crucial role our public health leadership plays in protecting us, hearing those voices of the people and finding solutions and approaches that will really help to guide people, to educate them, to give them the tools to protect themselves. And we have throughout the coronavirus crisis turned to our public health leadership for guidance, for strategies, even though for all of us, including the most learned medical professionals, we're all dealing in many ways with the great unknown when it comes to the coronavirus. Nonetheless, our health care leadership has helped us find solutions and a way forward.

So, today, we're going to talk about the moment we're in now, and it's a challenging moment. We are fighting with everything we've got against this second wave bearing down on us. But we have the tools to fight back in so many ways. And we particularly have to remember what we learned in the spring about who is most vulnerable and the special precautions that need to be taken when it comes to our seniors and folks with pre-existing conditions. So, we today are going to make very clear that new measures need to be taken to protect those who are most vulnerable. And our health commissioner will be issuing a public health notice to make clear the standards that we have to hold as the second wave bears down on us. Here to tell you about it, New York City's doctor, our Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. And what you described is indeed what we're seeing, a marked increase in cases as well as hospitalizations due to COVID-19. This escalation unfortunately follows a tragically familiar pattern, cases grow, hospitalizations follow, and, sadly, too many result in critical illness or even death. Hospitals have reported more than 1,100 COVID patients. That's twice as many as were hospitalized less than three weeks ago and the highest number since early June. Every one of those hospitalizations represents a person, fighting to recover, a livelihood interrupted, and a household distraught. I know this because I've seen it with my own eyes. I remember the concern that I felt for my own primary care patients earlier this year, particularly those who are more susceptible to severe illness. I think about my young Dominican patient with type one diabetes and my older Bangladeshi patient with emphysema. And I know that some people face a much greater risk for severe illness from COVID-19. This includes people who are older or have underlying health conditions like cancer, heart disease, weakened immunity, obesity, sickle cell disease, diabetes, and others. These factors greatly increase the risk of poor outcomes and even death. That's why today I'm issuing a Commissioner's Notice that warns at-risk New Yorkers about the growth in COVID and that urges appropriate precautions. That means stopping nonessential activities, staying in as much as possible and avoiding social activities outside of your household. We'll be working with partner agencies, with community-based organizations, doctors, and others to distribute this notice.

But there's one thing that I want to say to all New Yorkers – a risk factor does not alone determine risk. Whether or not you are a senior or have one of these conditions, COVID-19 can infect you. It can cause serious illness and sometimes long-term symptoms and could spread from you to others who are at even greater risk. To invoke the

great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. And with that same historic lens today, does make me take stock of another mystery virus, which a generation ago was fast-spreading and about which our understanding changed by the day – HIV/AIDS. At that time too, there were people who stepped up and changed the world. And so, on World AIDS Day, I'd like to recognize what those heroes achieved in our ongoing fight against HIV. We are close to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We must learn from that experience as we continue to hone our response to COVID-19. Foremost is the notion that it takes a whole community to beat back a pandemic. That's why the Commissioner's notice that I'm issuing today is just one step. We need you to carry the message forward to help protect at-risk New Yorkers.

I do want to conclude, Mr. Mayor with one final appeal to New Yorkers. While I am discouraging nonessential activities, medical care is essential, both for COVID – that includes testing for COVID – as well as for other conditions. Whether for diabetes or depression, it's important to keep seeking routine care and to go to clinics and hospitals when you need to. It is safe. That includes getting the safe, effective, lifesaving vaccine that we already have – the flu shot. It's still may be the most important one you ever get. Let's all roll up our sleeves for this next phase in our pandemic response. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much, Commissioner. Everyone, look, what you're hearing Dr. Chokshi say is we need you. We need you, if you're older, you have preexisting conditions to take additional precautions. We need you. We need you to go out and get that flu shot. If you haven't done it already. And we need you on another absolutely crucial mission for this city, because we need to keep people alive. And that is not only an issue when it comes to fighting the corona virus, it also is so crucial when it comes to anyone who ends up in a hospital and a moment literally of life and death and needs a blood transfusion. We need to make sure that that blood supply is there for all New Yorkers, any New Yorkers who need it in their hour of need. And people constantly ask me how they can help. I can't tell you how many times I've heard just every-day New Yorkers saying, I want to help, I want to do more, I want to help us over this crisis. Here's something everyone can do – you can get blood. And it makes such a difference. We have seen a market decrease in the blood supply, because, of course, there haven't been corporate blood drives and blood drives at colleges and all the things that used to – government offices – the things that used to make such a difference. But we have to come up with another way now, and it's going to come down to every one of you who can help, helping out. The current blood supplies down to just a few days – just a few days. This is really a very, very urgent situation. So, we need you. We need you to lend a hand, or, more accurately, to lend an arm and give blood. Everyone, the New York Blood Center is leading the way, as always, with a new campaign, Give Blood NYC, helping us to understand how important it is and how easy it is. And the goal here is to get 25,000 New Yorkers to give blood this month – 25,000 people this month so we can get that supply back up. And the good news is, not only is it the right thing to do, not only will you help save a life, and you're going to feel great inside that you did something so good, not only will you get a cookie and a juice box – one of the great fringe benefits of giving blood – but now you have an opportunity to also win some great prizes. The Blood Center is working with us and a lot of other great people to make this something that is life-saving, but also a lot of fun. And I'm talking about real good prizes, notwithstanding the travails of the New York Jets season – you could get coach club tickets – coaches club tickets to the home opener for the Jets next year. You can get a VIP tour of the Empire State Building and – Dr. Chokshi, do not listen to this prize – free Krispy Kreme donuts for a year. That is not approved by the Health Department, but the rest of us would really like that. So, anyone who wants to be a part of this great contest, you can go to nybc.org and sign up. And here to tell you about what it really means – and to talk about the extraordinary work of the folks at the Blood Center, who we depend on. They don't get the credit they deserve, but we depend on them every day. The President CEO of the New York Blood Center, Dr. Christopher Hillyer.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you, Dr. Hillyer. Again, thank you to you and all your colleagues. And really want to make sure people understand, there's a lot of folks looking out for us every day who we don't get to know so well, but we really need to thank the folks who work at the Blood Center who do so much for us. We're going to hear from another special guest. And she is an educator who serves our kids and if she was just here to tell you about her life of helping others and helping uplift our children, that would be powerful enough. But she's here to tell you about what it means to be someone who got one of those blood transfusions, what it means to be someone who really needs that help. And so, you can feel the impact of what you're going to do, what it means humanly to be there for your fellow New Yorker. So, my pleasure to introduce a great educator, someone we're so happy to have with us, Shatera Weaver. Welcome, Shatera.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Shatera. And thank you for telling your story, because it really is powerful and reminds people this is such a beautiful and important thing you can do for your fellow New Yorker. So, I want to thank Shatera. Thank Dr. Hillyer, everyone who's doing this good work. Thank you to all the folks who are donating the prizes, the companies and the folks who are really stepping up to make it something so appealing for New Yorkers to get involved. But really, we need you. So, we're going to start today, saying we need 25,000 people for the month of December. We're going to keep giving you updates to remind you how we're doing and how much we need. But everyone, you're going to feel so good after you give blood. Maybe not as much as spinach to Popeye – to use that great analogy – but you're going to feel good, because you're going to feel in your heart that you did something so good for your fellow New Yorker.

And imagine, just that that few minutes of your life could save someone else's life. So, please, everyone, we need you now.

All right, let me go to our daily indicators. And again, this is another day where we have some results that are lower than recent days, meaning the number of tests that we are relying on is lower because we saw a reduction around the Thanksgiving weekend and the number of people being tested. So, we're going to give you the numbers, but with a bit of an asterisk that they're based on a lower sample size than usual. Okay. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold 200 patients – today's report 132. Confirmed positivity rate, that continues to go up. We're watching that very carefully, 58 percent now. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, 550 cases is the threshold – of course, far beyond that now, 1,685 cases. And number three, percentage of the people testing city-wide positive for COVID-19, threshold five percent – today's report, 5.72 percent. So, that's a daily report. And, again, based on a lower sample size, but obviously something we're very concerned about. The more important number, even though also affected by a lower test numbers recently, lower amount of tests recently, but still on number that we are really concerned about, 4.14 percent.

Let me say a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

**Moderator:** We will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, by Dr. Christopher Hillyer from the New York Blood Center, by Dr. Mitch Katz, and by Senior Advisor, Dr. Jay Varma.

**Mayor:** And by Shatera –

**Moderator:** And by Shatera –

[Laughter]

**Moderator:** First question today goes to Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, everybody. How are you doing?

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

**Question:** Good, thanks. I'm just curious – I know you kind of added that asterisk to the daily indicators today. Do you know why there are – just for an explanation for those watching – why is it a smaller sample size? Is it a different methodology for taking this information? Or, what has changed, I guess, over the last few days that there's a different, smaller sample size.

**Mayor:** Sure, it's the holidays. It's from Thanksgiving Day through the weekend, just fewer people getting tested, because of, you know, being involved with family activities or whatever else it may be. So, we expect those

numbers – they are starting to go back up again, but we had several days where the numbers were noticeably lower. The number of people being tested were noticeably meaningfully lower than previously we had seen. Go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** Great. And my second one is just about with the hospitalizations increasing, I know the City has been prepared, I guess, for what could be a second wave at some point, but if – I don't know if someone, Dr. Katz or Dr. Chokshi wants to speak a little bit about the City's preparation, especially now that there's larger advisories to the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions – just some of the preps being done.

**Mayor:** Yeah. That's a very, very important question. We're putting a lot of focus on that. Obviously, we've been working closely with the State and the plan the Governor put out yesterday is something we were involved in over the last week working on with the State, but the City, the public hospitals, H+H have been preparing now for many weeks for this possibility. I know the hospitals in Greater New York Hospital Association have as well. So. Dr. Katz, why don't you talk about some of the ways that you have been preparing for these additional cases and what you are doing, obviously, based on the lessons we learned from the spring.

**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. So. as you say, we've been working on this for the last several weeks, so that if is a major increase in cases we are prepared to handle that. Right now. people should know that Health + Hospitals, our ICU is only about two-thirds full. So. we have a third capacity, same on the regular medical surgical wards, and we're not overwhelmed at any of our 11 hospitals. I've talked with my colleagues at health through the Greater New York Association, and all of the hospitals are right now prepared to take more patients if we need to.

In terms of preparation, what we've done is first, thank you, Mr. Mayor, you made sure months ago that we had three months of supplies for all of our personal protective equipment, what people call PPE. We have more than enough ventilators. We purchased a group over the summer, so equipment is a non-issue for us at this moment. We are well-prepared. We have prepared a number of spaces to be able to take care of people who have COVID by adding HEPA filters, into their rooms, creating negative pressure rooms, which suck the air out, and thereby suck the virus out and protect the health care workers from infection. We've added cameras and audio monitors to a variety of rooms so that patients can request things from their nurses and doctors, without anyone having to enter the room. If there are things we can answer questions or provide without putting anyone at risk, we want to do so. We've learned a lot about how to take care of this disease, providing people who are short of breath steroids makes a huge difference in shortens hospitalization, which is undoubtedly one of the reasons why we are not overwhelmed despite the growth of cases that we've seen. We've learned that patients do not all need to be intubated when they become short of breath. Many people can be cared for better by giving them a high flow of oxygen and they advise saving intubation only for those patients who absolutely need it. So, it's a combination of preparing our facilities and being able to better care for patients so that we do not become overwhelmed. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Mitch.

**Moderator:** Go ahead. The next is Bob Hennelly from the Chief Leader.

**Question:** Yes. Mr. Mayor, I just wanted to ask you why should members of Congress from districts and states poorer than New York vote for a billion-dollar bailout for New York City, New York State, and the MTA when this state has been back to Wall Street billions of dollars in rebates of a tax it's had on its books since 1905, but stop collecting in the 1990s. I think that some have been [inaudible] estimates it's worth \$19 billion a year – in that in the last decade alone, we've sent back \$138 billion to the Goldman Sachs crowd?

**Mayor:** Okay, Bob, I'm going to flip that. I'm going to answer it, but I just want to, I think I would order it a little bit differently. The first point is New York City and New York State send so much more money to the federal government than we ever get back, and that's been happening for decades and decades. For God's sake Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan used to do an annual report on how ridiculous the disparity was going back to the 70s and 80s. It continues to be an unacceptable disparity. We send so much out. We get so little back. So for the federal government, for the Congress to approve a stimulus, to help the whole country back on its feet, to help the whole country recover humanly and economically is the right thing to do. New York City is one of the leaders of the national economy, helping us back on our feet helps the entire country, and I say that again, helping us back on our

feet helps the entire country. That is why the Congress should pass a stimulus. It's the right thing to do. It will spur on the economy. It will help people to survive these tough times.

Also, we deserve our fair share. We've never gotten it for half a century or more. We should get our fair share of resources, it's long overdue. But you also point out something really important, Bob – are we taxing the wealthy enough? No, the answer is simple, no. The wealthy are doing better and better during this pandemic. It's a shocking truth. You look at the stock market. You look at how the rich have literally gotten richer while everyone else is suffering. It was unacceptable, the status quo before the pandemic, it's worse now. There need to be higher taxes on the wealthy. The Stock Transfer Tax totally should be reconsidered and handled differently going forward because clearly Wall Street can afford to contribute more to New York City and New York State. So your question is very, very fair. I just think the ramifications are much broader than that one tax. I think Washington needs to help us because it's the right thing to do on many other levels as well. Go ahead, Bob.

**Question:** So since the earliest days of the state's public health crisis, Governor Cuomo has urged that public hospital systems like H+H and private hospitals operate as an integrated unit. Why shouldn't that be the model going forward? Since we know that the pre-existing fractured system resulted in so many poor people falling through the cracks in terms of the care they were getting?

**Mayor:** Well, Bob, again, you ask a good and big question. I'm going to turn to Mitch because he's obviously on the front line of this. Look, I think that the core of your point is right, that we need to see as much of a team effort among our hospitals and that those hospitals that happen to have more resources, should be in the work of helping patients with the greatest needs. We did see, to be fair, some amazing teamwork during this crisis. When H+H needed help, Hospital for Special Surgery stepped up, Memorial Sloan Kettering stepped up. I want to thank them for really being there and working in that team effort, and it wasn't because of an order. It was something that they wanted to do to help each other out. But I think you're right, going forward. There's more ways to think of the whole hospital system as a team effort. So Dr. Katz you want to speak to that?

**President Katz:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I think it's a wonderful point that we are stronger when we work together. When we level set across all of the hospital systems and that's very much the plan going forward. We're also going to be working actively with the fire department to allow patients to be transferred across borough lines, if necessary, when a part of the challenge we had in the first wave was that Central Queens was so disproportionately hit that it was difficult to transfer patients beyond any hospital in Queens because all of the hospitals in Queens were full. So, we're looking at much more as the City as a whole resource, as all of the systems as a whole resource, and I think that will make us stronger. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Go ahead.

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

**Question:** Yeah. Good morning, everyone. [Inaudible] ask about the Commissioner's notice, first of all, when you, when it said that it applies to older New Yorkers, can you put like a more specific number on the age you might be talking about? And also, can you put the notice in context, is this, you know, going to – what happens after this? Should this be interpreted maybe as leading up to broader stay at home orders like we saw in the spring?

**Mayor:** I'll have the Commissioner reiterate who he is focused on, who is in greatest need right now, and most vulnerable. I think, Shant, to the bigger question, we all have to work really hard right now in every way, the most – the smallest ways like wearing a mask and practice social distancing, and the bigger ways in terms of people not hosting bigger events and really making sure to keep people safe and protecting our elders, protecting people with pre-existing conditions. We have to do all those things. We have to do them intensely. If we are not successful in driving down these numbers soon, of course, there's the real possibility of much greater restrictions. So we have to do this work individually, if we want to avoid those restrictions. Dr. Chokshi you want to go over again, who you're focused on?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, sir. Thank you, and thanks for the question, Shant. Specifically, in terms of age, what we know from the science is that for adults the older one is the greater your risk is so people in their sixties are at higher risk than people in their fifties. Same for folks in their seventies, eighties, et cetera. The commissioner's

notice specifically refers to people above the age of 65, because we do see a significant increment in risk for seniors who are older than 65. But remember it also includes people who have other conditions that put them at risk to have the severe outcomes that we're really trying to prevent that lead to hospitalizations and more catastrophic outcomes as well.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Shant.

**Question:** Yeah. Thanks for that. I also wanted to ask about testing for students. I understand that Pre-K and kindergarten students don't have to submit COVID testing consent forms. Could you and maybe Dr. Chokshi explain the rationale for that and say if there are any other measures being taken to assure the safety of Pre-K and kindergarten kids specifically?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Dr. Chokshi can talk about the reality we've seen with kids that young because of obviously is different. Go ahead.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** So the rationale for thinking about testing differently among younger kids is that we know the risk of transmission is lower among younger kids. This isn't to say that, you know, there aren't situations where they may need to get tested. It's still possible for a younger child to get infected with COVID-19, and if they develop symptoms you know, they should certainly get tested as well, but in terms of what we're doing with the more routine testing in schools, that's the rationale for the difference.

**Mayor:** Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next is Marcia from WCBS.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor and Dr. Chokshi. I have more questions about your directive for seniors to stay inside. I wonder are you going to provide any special services, helping seniors get food, helping seniors get to their medical appointments, anything that they might need so that they can find staying inside the safer alternative.

**Mayor:** I'll start and turn to Dr. Chokshi. Marcia, look, food right now, absolutely – we've had that from the very beginning, any senior who cannot get food themselves or have someone bring it to them and needs it delivered, we will do that for them for free. All they have to do is call 3-1-1 – that has been from the very beginning of this crisis. I've said we will not let any New Yorker go hungry, will not let any senior go hungry. Even if it means delivery right to their door, we'll make it happen.

In terms of medical appointments. I've spent enough time around Dr. Chokshi to know he's going to say one of the only exceptions to what he's saying is to make sure that people get the health care they need, and that is something sacred to make sure folks stay in touch with our medical professionals, and we will do anything we can of course, to support seniors and folks with pre-existing conditions, who need that help connecting with health care. Go ahead, doctor.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** That's exactly right. Mr. Mayor, let me just take a step back to emphasize that the Commissioner's notice is specifically about avoiding non-essential activities. That means that essential activities, whether it's you know, someone going to the grocery store occasionally or as the Mayor said, you know, someone going to their medical appointments, which are very important those can and should continue. But it's nonessential activities that we really want to see curbed and curtailed as we see cases and now hospitalizations, you know, starting to increase. With all of that said, yes, we need to do everything that we can as a city, but also as neighbors, as family members to support people who are more at risk. So that includes, you know, the food delivery programs that the city has set up earlier, and that continue throughout the pandemic.

There are ways to ensure that you have support, whether it's for transportation or getting a medications delivered to you, or are prescribed in a more convenient way. You can call 3-1-1 for assistance with those services as well, and then the final thing that I'll just say is that another essential activity is getting care for COVID-19. So if you are feeling symptoms you should get tested as quickly as possible, and certainly if you're feeling even worse you should seek care with your doctor or at an emergency room.

**Mayor:** And one other obvious point, which has really changed a lot, Marcia, in the course of this crisis is the use of telehealth and Dr. Katz, I'd love you to jump in here. I know that it's something obviously helping the hospitals he was before, but we've seen in the crisis many new ways of using a telemedicine much more willingness of your patients to engage it. This is also a crucial way you can help seniors and folks with pre-existing conditions without them having to leave their homes. So, Dr. Katz, you want to speak about that?

**President Katz:** You're absolutely right, Mr. Mayor. I see many of my primary care patients these days who televisits, especially if they're older or have co-morbidities, and we've learned a lot about sending people blood pressure cuffs, sending them oxygen saturation meters, sending them home with glucose testing kits so that people can actually do [inaudible] parts of the exam, and I know that it's not just Health + Hospitals that's seen this explosion, that providers all over New York City and all of the hospital systems are prepared to see people in televisits with just the telephone. So people, if you're worried that, oh my goodness, I don't know how to use a laptop. I couldn't possibly that's okay. The phone works quite well in most cases. But for people who have the ability to use a laptop we can also do televisits. Thank you.

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

**Question:** So, Mr. Mayor, a few weeks ago, you predicted that December 1st would be the day that – the demarcation of when there might be more orange zones or red zones or yellow zones, actually in New York City. I know you've seen the numbers continue to rise, the numbers are rising today. Do you have any prognostication about whether once the Thanksgiving numbers come in the next seven days or so whether you'll see more mini clusters zones and restrictions in New York City.

**Mayor:** Look, this is something I've been talking to the Governor about. Our teams are talking constantly. The State obviously is focused on, you know, a micro-cluster approach. That's had a lot of impact clearly, and it's been effective in many cases. So I think what we're going to see is the state looking at the different areas in a targeted way. You look at the ZIP code data for the city that we put out. We see very different realities and very different parts of the city, but I certainly think there will be some more restrictions coming. If we continue to see these numbers, I don't have any doubt about that. I can't tell you exactly how and when, but I, you know, expect more to come, and again, if I know, I don't even have to say if – I know New Yorkers want to avoid more stringent restrictions, we all have to do everything we can do right now to do the hard work, to avoid those restrictions. That includes getting out there, getting tested, wearing a mask, all those things that Dr. Chokshi has been telling us to do. People have to be really devoted to that now or else we are certainly going to see more restrictions going forward.

**Moderator:** The next is Reuvain from Hamodia.

**Question:** Good morning. It was the Mayor. I would like to follow-up with a question about special-ed students. You said yesterday on CNN that the middle and high school would not be opening until the new year. There are – I know District 75 will be opening soon, but there are a special-ed classes in these schools, but not a District 75. Are they students going to have to wait until the new year or will the special-ed classes be opening earlier?

**Mayor:** It's a very important question. I appreciate it. I can tell you this much with District 75, we made the decision to do the opening across all grade levels. So, I want that to be really clear because everyone agrees all of our stakeholders, the State, the city, everyone agrees that kids with special needs, the in-person support is absolutely crucial. So, District 75 schools will be open across all grade levels. Your point is a very good one and we are looking right now at how quickly we can reach special needs kids at the middle school and high school level. I don't have an answer for you on that today, but we'll come back with that soon. I also want to emphasize our goal is to open up middle school first, as quickly as we can. But I think realistically, as I've said, that's not in the next few weeks, but I do think that's in January, and then after that to go to high school as well, but we need the testing capacity since we're much – at a much higher level of testing under our new plan, we need to make sure we can do that first properly for District 75, Pre-K, 3-K and K-to-5, and then we can build out to middle school next and then eventually to high school as well. Go ahead, Reuvain.

**Question:** I have a question for the doctors, I've asked in the past about antibodies when they might be recognized as a people being immune and perhaps giving allowances to these people, just as if they had a vaccine. Generally, the answers I received or that, you know, we don't have complete information, we're eight months into this

pandemic, I'm wondering, is there some point at which we might have some more information and people with antibodies might be treated like people with the vaccine eventually will be treated?

**Mayor:** Dr. Chokshi, do you want to start?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Sure. Thanks for that question, Reuvain. I would reiterate, you know, what we've said about this in the past. The science has not changed with respect to being able to say that someone who has had a positive antibody test should act any differently than someone who has not had a positive antibody test. The way that we think about antibody tests is they are tests of exposure and not necessarily tests of immunity. So most importantly, continuing to do the things that you would otherwise do, wearing your mask, making sure that you're distancing, washing your hands frequently, et cetera, those things all continue to apply. I do hope there will come a point where we understand more about immunity to COVID-19, where we can say things with more certainty about who is and is not protected. But with a vaccine on the horizon, I think that is the most likely destination, the most likely point at which we will be able to say that with more certainty.

**Mayor:** Dr. Varma, you want to jump in on this?

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** I guess the only other point I would make is there was a question about the timeline and I just want to make the point, we are all impatient and would love to have valid information right now, but eight months when it comes to understanding a new disease is actually a relatively short period. So we would love to have definitive information, but it is almost certainly going to take more time.

**Mayor:** Dr. Varma, I think you would actually do a service to everyone because we're all still trying to recognize reality. We never heard of this disease a year ago, basically. What is the typical timeline just to give people some perspective?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah. You know, what we're seeing right now is science moving at an incredibly fast pace and even though we're all impatient, this would normally take years to answer this type of question, and even then there would be still some uncertainty. And that's because of the simple fact, when we want to say how long are you protected? You can't speed up time. And the studies that you do in laboratories really don't give you a sense of how the body is going to maintain its immunity over time. We're still learning things, for example, about measles which is a virus that we've had a vaccine for since the 1960s.

**Mayor:** Very, very important point. Thank you, doctor. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is David Cruz from Gothamist.

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

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

**Question:** Good, thanks for taking my questions. So, on the first question is the Archdiocese of New York filed a lawsuit against the city, claiming that the city is violating State law by not offering Catholic schools the same free COVID-19 testing provided to public schools. So why did the city file the appeal if there's a state law on the books that would grant Catholic schools the same access?

**Mayor:** We believe the law is clear that it is not the city's obligation to provide the actual testing service. Our lawyers have looked at this carefully. Law Department has handled this from the beginning. Look, I've spoken to a Cardinal Dolan about this, it's something I fully understand the fact that folks in other school systems are urgently trying to protect their kids. I appreciate that. I know they are dealing with all the challenges we are. They have limited resources, but our obligation right now is to continue the process of having New York City public schools be open and healthy and safe. We're - we've got a huge number of kids to serve. We need all the resources that we have right now. What we're describing now, this weekly testing is going to take a huge amount of resources. It's the right thing to do. It's taking our gold standard we started with in terms of health and safety in our schools and adding even more and it's what's going to sustain us, but it takes an immense amount of resources. So, the law is clear that our



obligation is to ensure that the facilities we run we're providing the testing to. For the types of schools, they have an obligation, but we'll help them. The Department of Health has been there for them the whole way through. We'll help them get the free test from the state. We'll help them learn the best ways to implement it. We'll give them a helping hand to every time we can. Go ahead, David.

**Question:** And then your office hasn't released a racial demographic data of students who've opted for hybrid learning. So when can we expect to see that data?

**Mayor:** If that data is collected in that fashion, I don't know the history, honestly, of Department of Education providing demographic data, but if they have it, we'll make sure it gets released soon. But again, I want to be careful because I'm not sure how that is handled in generally – excuse me, in general. But look, the bottom line here is remembering that our school system is about 80 percent kids of color and obviously in comparison to private schools and religious schools, New York City public schools overwhelmingly provide support for more kids who are working class and lower income. More immigrant kids, obviously a huge number of kids who tragically are in temporary housing. When we put the open opportunity out there for parents from the original surveys and the summer on through to the different opportunities to engage blended learning, it has been an absolutely available choice to all parents. And I want to emphasize this, I care deeply, my whole public life has been focused on the issue of fighting disparities, but I also want to really respect each parent's choice because I'm a parent too, I understand our public school parents, we many times have said the parents, this is what you feel is right. Whatever you want to do is what we will support. And we've made that open opportunity available from the beginning and obviously with the most recent opt-in period. And I think everyone who cares about disparity also has to respect the individual choices of parents who know what's best for themselves and their kids. Go ahead.

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

**Question:** Hello?

**Mayor:** Hey Abu can you –

**Question:** Hi, how are you?

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

**Question:** Good how are you?

**Mayor:** Good.

**Question:** Okay. My question is the –

**Mayor:** Wait, we need a lot more volume. Can we get our volume up there?

**Moderator:** Abu, can you speak a little bit closer to the microphone please?

**Mayor:** Abu, can you hear us? I think we're going to have to come back unless –

**Moderator:** We may have lost Abu for now, we'll have to come back.

**Mayor:** We'll have to come back in a moment. Okay.

**Moderator:** The next we will do Arthur from FOX5.

**Mayor:** Good morning, everybody. Mr. Mayor. I was wondering since you've been collaborating with the Governor on approach here, what can you tell New Yorkers about the original plan of 10 days above three percent or five percent everyday? I forget what it was, but needing those 10 days before some more severe restrictions, is that still

currently the plan, or could there be a scenario where the numbers go up so quickly that that plan is set aside and those those restrictions have to go into place more urgently?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Arthur, I mean, obviously it's important you ask the State directly. We've had a number of conversations with them over the last few days. Everyone's focused on health and safety and also obviously focused on people's livelihoods. We're really aware of how much pain folks have gone through this year and how, you know, many, many families are struggling, working class families, low income families that need employment and small business owners, so we're trying to balance all these factors. As I said, the State obviously has focused on a micro-targeting approach. I think that's where they're going to be continuing to focus. As to the numbers again, that 10 consecutive day number is something they've used up to now. I'm not sure that's how they're going to continue to do it but we're going to continue to talk to them to figure out the best way to balance all these pieces. Go ahead, Arthur.

**Question:** Another question is on street safety, there was a car after midnight on Monday in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn that went through a red light and slammed into a car. I don't know if you saw the video, the woman in the backseat of the Uber that he T-boned, the car was hit so hard that she ended up outside the vehicle being ejected from it. The driver, as is often the case, was not cited for anything and allowed to go home. Police say that they're investigating it. Given the fact that she's in critical condition in the hospital that he was seen on video camera speeding, going through a light and hitting that car, do you think in a year where we're seeing 15 percent more traffic related fatalities that this – there's a better message to send to drivers who drive recklessly in our streets and leave other New Yorkers in critical condition, if not worse?

**Mayor:** Look, first, I want to be clear. I want to make sure I get the exact facts of what happened, but the broader point you're making is something I feel very strongly about. There's not clear enough, strong enough consequences in the law for drivers who hurt their fellow New Yorkers, or even killed their fellow New Yorkers. The law is still – I'm talking to all law, City, State, federal, everywhere, it's still too deferential to the automobile and the automobile driver. And especially if someone's under the influence and they harm someone, there needs to be real penalties for that. So I don't know the specifics and I'll find out right away, and if that something wasn't handled right here, we're obviously making sure that that's addressed immediately. But I think the bigger point is, I think we need stronger laws, harsher penalties, honestly, and it's something I've worked on with the NYPD. I want to see them NYPD constantly improve its enforcement and follow through that. Been a lot of good work by NYPD to make Vision Zero come alive. It never would have worked without NYPD but there's still more that we can do to tighten up enforcement, I'm quite clear about that. Go ahead. Do you have Abu back?

**Moderator:** We're going to go back to Abu.

**Question:** Hi, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Abu.

**Question:** Okay. Sorry that it was interrupted. So my question is you know, the South Asian community their involvement - the COVID is increasing [inaudible]. Hello?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Abu, you're skipping in and out, but keep talking. Let's see if we can hear you.

**Question:** Hello, can you hear me?

**Mayor:** Yeah keep talking.

**Question:** Okay. Yeah so they're - every Friday at the mosque has a lot of congregations, the Muslim community they're coming in the mosque, they are praying. So do you have any kind of guidelines for them, because of the [inaudible] increasing the disease and when people are coming to the mosque and, you know, some people there are expressing their concern. Do you have a suggestion for them?

**Mayor:** Yeah, no, it's a very important question and thank you. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but just say everyone needs to be mindful about the precautions we have to take, especially indoors, especially in colder weather where more people are indoors and it all begins with the use of masks, especially this is such a crucial piece of the equation, but I want you to reflect on what Dr. Chokshi said today, that if someone is older or has those pre-existing conditions, being really, really careful not to do anything they don't have to do. And if they can worship at home or worship separately, there are so many virtues in that. So, Dr. Chokshi you want to speak that?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thanks, Mr. Mayor, I think you covered the major points. I'll just add a couple of first, you know, I want to acknowledge that COVID-19 has affected South Asian communities in New York City significantly, particularly in parts of Queens, which is where where I live in Jackson Heights and where we know there are significant numbers of neighborhoods with many, many people of South Asian descent. Part of this is related to the topic of this morning, which is that COVID-19 has more severe effects on people who have chronic conditions, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, these are things that we know occur more frequently among South Asians as well, and that's why it is so important to follow the precautions that we've been talking about. I'll just reiterate the ones that are the most important, wearing your mask at all times, particularly indoors. If you do choose to to worship in a mosque or a temple, it's important to keep your mask on when you're doing that. It's also very important to six feet of distance and practice good hand hygiene. And then most importantly you know, for people to stay home if they're not feeling well, because that is how we know this virus spreads among people.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Abu.

**Question:** And second question is the president said the vaccine for distribution by December, but as he mentioned that New York will not get the vaccine because of his kind of [inaudible]. Do you think it's going to be impact on the New York State and city people, because of the president's decision?

**Mayor:** Abu, that's a really important question and I'll let Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma speak to the conversations they've had with their health care colleagues on the federal level. I would remind you that President Trump even before he lost the election, constantly threatened New York City and other cities, you know, he said he would send in a federal troops and officers, that didn't happen. There would be these massive ICE raids, that didn't happen. He would cut off our funding, that didn't happen. Sometimes the court stopped them. Sometimes it was just words and campaign bluster that went nowhere. I do not believe that the responsible elements of the federal government are going to not send the vaccine to the biggest city in America and the place that was the original epicenter of the crisis. I just don't believe it. I think people are bluntly starting to transition right now to the new administration and doing what is the right thing to serve people and not listening to the evermore desperate voice of President Trump. So I think that's reality, but let me have the doctors speak to it because they are closer to the situation. Go ahead. Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, sir. I agree with your statement. You know, stated simply, I believe that New York City, as well as New York State, will get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time that others around the country will get it and that's once the FDA has has determined that it passes muster, that it's authorized, that we do have a safe and effective vaccine. Our conversations with our federal counterparts, both at the CDC, as well as the federal Department of Health have all been very productive. They occur very frequently, certainly on a weekly basis, sometimes even on a daily basis. And similarly, we're in close contact with our State counterparts as well. And so everyone at all levels of government are working closely together to ensure that once we do have a safe and effective vaccine, which we hope will be within weeks, that that is delivered to New York city as soon as possible.

**Mayor:** Dr. Varma, you want to add?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** I only just to echo exactly what Dr. Chokshi said and that we also are professionally colleagues of many people who were on the COVID task force to the president-elect team, and can reassure you that these are all the highly seasoned to expert professionals who are fully committed to making sure that New York City not only gets the vaccine, but distributes it as quickly as possible.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Everyone, as we conclude, look I'm going to just end where I started, very, very poignant day, World AIDs Day, but also a day that reminds us of the power of people to fight back and reminds us

that the voices that people matter so much here. We learned in this crisis, again, how important it is to go to the grassroots, engage the people, educate people, get them to be part of the solution and the fight back against the disease, today being the coronavirus, and the people in New York City have responded so powerfully. But we also have learned how important it is to invest in the ways we support people, and that means our public health system, whether it's Department of Health, whether it's Health + Hospitals, or Test and Trace Corp, including the Take Care Initiative that we talked about yesterday, all of these investments have helped us to survive and now fight back against the coronavirus, and I really want to emphasize that we keep learning this lesson over and over, that the investments that we make in public health are both morally right thing to do, but end up saving lives and stopping so much needless loss of life and destruction to our lives and our city, our economy.

So, we're going to keep making those investments and we intend going forward to show this country and this world, what it looks like to have a city that is focused intensely on public health and to be that public health capital of the world, the place that not only experienced this pandemic at the epicenter in this country, but also took the lessons, built upon them, and now can teach others how to fight back and to avoid these kinds of challenges in the future. That's going to be so much of the mission of New York City in the future. So, we've got a challenge right now with a second wave bearing down on us, but we will defeat it. We will have that vaccine soon. And then we get to the work of this city recovery and this city becoming an example to everyone else of how to persevere and prepare for the future. Thank you, everyone.

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