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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. You know, sometimes we say a moment is historic – maybe we use that word a little too much, but this actually is a historic moment. Over these next few days, as the vaccine arrives in New York City, we start the final phase of the battle against the coronavirus. We've all been through so much. People have fought so hard to get to this day, but it's here and we need to recognize the fact that the vaccine is coming, changes everything. It will allow us to end this pandemic. It will allow us to get on the road to recovery. And I am convinced that is a road that New Yorkers will travel quickly. We're going to recover quickly and get back on our feet and move forward. But it all begins with the vaccine and making sure that we are able to mobilize every resource of the City of New York to get the vaccine to people who need it most and to get that done quickly, effectively, efficiently. That's what we must do. And we must focus all our energies not only on ensuring this happens well and quickly, but that it happens equitably, it happens fairly, it happens according to the priorities that have been set for who needs this vaccine the most.

Look, this coronavirus crisis, it's been many things. One of the things that has been – it's shined a very clear sharp light on the unfairness, the inequality, the disparities that pervade our society. We saw what happened to Black communities, Latino communities, Asian communities in this crisis. We saw how people did not experience the coronavirus equally. It was all about the decades and decades before of health care inequality and economic inequality that brought out such painful disparities. We know the pain that families went through was magnified for so many families in this crisis because of these fundamental inequalities, and we need to confront them and overcome them. So, how we distribute this vaccine is part of righting those wrongs and that means prioritizing the 27 neighborhoods of this city that bore the brunt of this crisis – Black communities, Latino communities, Asian communities that went through the very worst and

making sure that the folks in those communities who are most vulnerable get the vaccine early in the distribution.

Look, to get this done we're going to have to do things differently. And that's why months ago we created our Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity. This was a different approach than the City government has ever taken before. We said, let's empower those leaders in all our city agencies, leaders of color, leaders from the very communities most effected, people who literally live in the communities that bore the brunt and feel the lives of their neighbors and are there to make sure that we do things differently, that we address the disparities head on right now – not someday, right now. Taskforce in the truest sense of the word, a group of leaders, holding the entire government accountable from within in every single agency. And I want to thank all the members of the task force for their extraordinary and urgent efforts. I want to thank the Executive Director Sideya Sherman, for her outstanding leadership. She's here with us today. Thank you, Sideya, and everyone has been a part of this, because this is about government changing from within to serve every community in need. So, the task force will make sure that we have a fair and equitable distribution and the task force will work to build trust in communities. We know there is a trust gap. We know a lot of people are uncertain about the vaccine. We have to win people over and show them why it works, why it's real, why they can believe in it.

We're going to focus on the places where the need is greatest, not just in terms of the neighborhoods, but also in terms of public housing. We know that folks who live in NYCHA really bore the brunt of this crisis. We're going to make sure that the vaccine distribution focuses on them as well. So, this is going to be a Herculean effort and we're going to talk about the ways that we make this happen today. In terms of ensuring equity, we're going to turn to the leadership, the First Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Health, who also holds the title of Chief Equity Officer for the Department of Health. And he has put his whole career into ensuring health equity. And he's now going to help lead the way to make sure this vaccine distribution is equitable for all. My pleasure to bring forward Dr. Torian Easterling.

First Deputy Commissioner Torian Easterling, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. As we know, we've have been dealing with parallel pandemics – COVID-19, racial injustice, and social and economic instability. For decades, racist policies and unjust practices have left communities of color and low-income neighborhoods with limited resources and opportunities. Racism shaped so much of our lives from where we live to the medical care we receive, which makes equity crucial to this response. I'd like to say upfront, in order to reach communities, we must listen to communities, and that is what we're doing. Our vaccine planning is developing every day with feedback from community partners, in collaboration with Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian communities that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and should be prioritized. We are partnering with

more than 200 community organizations to earn the trust of the community, something that history has stripped of too many government entities.

Let me just say that I saw firsthand during the peak of the pandemic. People were dealing with sickness and death. People reached out to me directly, questions that they had about why and what are we dealing with? What is happening and why do we have people dying in our neighborhoods? We know people will have questions about this vaccine. I'm receiving these questions right now. Is it safe for me, for my family? When will I receive it? This is why relationships are so important. These relationships that we have are not starting from scratch. The bonds between us, the groups, the communities we serve have been active for over many years and they've even led vaccination drives not only with the flu vaccine, but with so many other resources. To give a sense of how these vaccinations events take place, we partner at local houses of worship, community centers, or other popular, easy to reach locations with onsite tables for vaccination, and other resources, such as food distribution and COVID-19 testing. We know that many New Yorkers have been impacted by the history of racism and harmed in medicine, research, and government. So, we don't expect them to come to us. Instead, we'll meet New Yorkers where they live. To provide easy access to the vaccine and to deliver preventative care, we will model the City's successful partnership with NYCHA to expand COVID-19 testing. This plan will include H + H clinics at NYCHA locations and other NYCHA sites to support vaccine distribution.

Further, we're going to need everyone. We're going to need every individual and organization to help be the ambassadors to bust myths and to share facts. So, we will be hosting virtual community conversations to share information on vaccine planning and to provide opportunities for community members to raise questions and concerns. We're going to implement a [inaudible] model for community partners to host webinars about COVID-19 vaccine and engage trusted messengers to deliver important information about the vaccine. We are already partnering with faith-based partners in the faith sector advisory and we will continue to do so.

Last June, as the Mayor had mentioned, when the coronavirus was devastating Black and Brown communities, City Hall created a task force on racial inclusion and equity, co-chaired by the First Lady and Deputy Mayor Thompson. To support vaccine efforts, the task force led by senior City leadership of color will continue to work hand-in-hand with communities to ensure residents that would need to be prioritized will receive the vaccine. We will promote transparency and address mistrust, the concerns around vaccine safety, and misinformation we know they exist. We will also monitor vaccine uptake and be prepared to act quickly. If areas are not getting vaccinated as much as the rest of the city, we will respond. We've recognized that there is no reopening without gaining your trust and helping New Yorkers make an informed decision about accepting the vaccine. And for that to happen, there must be healing in our communities. It has to be a partnership with a shared goal of recognizing and repairing a legacy that has compromised the

health of too many New Yorkers. We will hold ourselves accountable for racial oppression within our systems. We will engage our people in organizations in New York to make New York safe. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Easterling. And thank you for your leadership and thank you to all the members of the task force who are going to make sure this is an equitable process. Now, everyone, we have so much to do in the coming days as the vaccine arrives in New York City. And again, one thing we do in New York City, we do things big. We're going to do a big, fast distribution of this vaccine. When it comes in, we're going to get it right out to the people who need it and keep going and going and going. As much vaccine as we get, we're going to get to the people as quickly as possible. To do that, we need a command center. And so, our Vaccine Command Center opens on Monday. The Vaccine Command Center is going to be the go-to location to make sure that the vaccine distribution is fast and effective and fair. The Vaccine Command Center is going to be the place where we see the whole picture, everything happening in the city, in every one of our health care providers and all the places where we're working with communities – one place that has the picture of the whole city, the air traffic control for the vaccination effort. This is unprecedented, because it's not just about logistics. It's about making sure we win public trust. It's about ensuring equity. It's about making sure there's a lot of information and transparency out there to get people involved, let them know what's happening, gain trust through transparency. That's what we have seen has worked throughout the coronavirus crisis. So, the Vaccine Command Center is going to be the indispensable piece of this equation. Now, we'll be putting out regular updates on the vaccinations, what's happening around the city, and the work that is being done through the Vaccine Command Center with all City agencies. It's not just Department of Health, it's not just Health + Hospitals. We're going to be working with Social Services, with NYCHA, with Department of Education, you name it. Every part of the City government is going to be a part of this. Obviously, our hospitals, community organizations, nonprofits, everyone's going to be in this together. But it will need an extraordinary kind of coordination and a forceful effort to make sure all the pieces come together.

Leading this effort and ensuring that this command center comes alive and becomes the difference-maker in the vaccination effort will be our Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services. And also, she is serving as co-chair for our Task Force for Racial Inclusion and Equity. My pleasure to introduce to you Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog.

Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, Health and Human Services: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. As the Mayor said, starting Monday, December 14th, the Vaccine Command Center will begin operations housed right across the street from City Hall at 253 Broadway. It will have a twofold focus, building trust through community outreach and engagement ahead of widespread vaccine distribution in the community and real-time reporting, troubleshooting, and communication as a

vaccine is distributed. This multi-agency command center will react in real time as an air traffic control to the vaccine, with agencies from NYCHA, the Office of Emergency Management, to Community Affairs, all in the room together, working in real-time to problem solve any issues as they arise. An example of this could be, vaccines are not showing up to a certain community site. The command center would work directly with the provider on tracking down additional vaccines or directing patients to another location. Another example could be the command center, working with a partner on the ground to identify certain communities where trust in the vaccine might be low. We would shift resources and work directly with trusted community voices to not only educate, but build the infrastructure to give the vaccines.

An additional critical part of the command center will be transparency and reporting. We'll be reporting out the number of people getting vaccinated, breakdowns on borough, demographic age, and many more indicators, ensuring New Yorkers have up-to-date information and data, but also making sure we have an equitable distribution. While the command center will be focusing on all neighborhoods across the five boroughs, it will be paying particular attention to the 27 hardest hit neighborhoods. This means reaching out at the grassroots level to ensure New Yorkers know where the vaccine is being distributed and administered. Deputy Mayors and agencies across the administration are contributing staff to focus on maximizing our ability to provide information to all New Yorkers and our City workforce, and to maximize trust in our vaccine mobilization. The command center will play a key part in our fight back against COVID-19, ensuring New Yorkers have faith and trust in the vaccine while creating a stronger, more equitable and healthier New York City. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Deputy Mayor. And I want everyone to know that Melanie Hartzog has been really one of the heroes of the City's fight against the coronavirus. Her previous role as our budget director, there was plenty to do in that role, but she also became one of the leading forces in pulling together the initiative to build up testing in this city and to ensure that we had what we needed. That crucial element of the equation that we were deprived of by the federal government to begin with has become, over time, one of the strong suits of New York City, having now a huge amount of testing available, and Melanie's one of the people who made that happen. So, thank you for that great effort and thank you for the leadership you're providing now as we opened the command center on Monday.

All right, with that, let me turn to our indicators today. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Unfortunately, this is the first day that we've seen this number go above the threshold – 205 patients admitted. Now, that's obviously very worrisome. The threshold is 200. We've been holding the line up to now, but this is a sign that the hospitalization issues becoming a bigger challenge and one that we're going to have to confront, all of us are going to have to be part of addressing. The hospitalization rate per 100,000 people, 2.48 today. We want to get that under two. So, again, that number has also gone

up – that's worrisome. New cases – well, this one is one where we've been blunt that we've been way past the threshold for quite a while. Now, again, we're including probable and confirmed cases. Today's number on the seven-day average, 2,559 – a number that's way too high and that we have a lot of work to do to bring back down. And, finally, percentage of New York City residents testing positive on a seven-day rolling average – today's report, 5.35 percent. Again, we want to be under five percent. So, unfortunately, across the board, we see that these indicators have all unfortunately surpassed their thresholds. This is an indicator – this is a sign, I should say, of how deep this crisis is right now, how much work we have to do to fight back the coronavirus as we, thank God, implement the vaccination in the program that will change everything. This is a crucial moment – and I'm going to say it every chance I get – everyone has to be part of this. Everyone needs to wear your mask, practice social distancing. If you have travel plans, canceled them now. Stay home for the holidays. Stay close to the very few loved ones who are close by. This is what we need to do to get through this last push until the vaccine is more widely distributed and we turn the tide.

I'll do a few words in Spanish –

[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: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, First Deputy Commissioner Torian Easterling, Executive Director of the Task Force Sideya Sherman, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Dr. Mitchell Katz, CEO of Health + Hospitals. With that, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Can you walk us through a little more of the timeline of the next few days in terms of the vaccine? When exactly we expect some of these frontline health care workers to get their vaccines?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll turn to Dr. Easterling and our other doctors to say, we're going to be reporting as we have a final information, Andrew. We will keep you updated. I know everyone in this city is anxious to know more and our colleagues in the media, we want to keep you updated, but we

need to lock down final facts in each case. What we can say, and it's in a matter of days, we'll be in a position to start giving the initial vaccines. Dr. Easterling?

Deputy Commissioner Easterling: Absolutely correct, Mr. Mayor. Where we are right now, we have moved along in the phase – an independent committee has just looked at the data, I think, which is very promising, because we want to make sure that we are sharing information about the data. And, I think, as we're moving forward, the next step is getting the approval on our emergency use authorization, which we hope to be next week – this weekend, excuse me – and then, next week, really hoping that the vaccines are available. And so, the focus is really going to be vaccinating long-term care facilities, folks in nursing homes, as well as individuals who are working in high-risk settings. And so, I think the important part is that things are moving along, which is very promising.

Mayor: Amen. Dr. Varma, Dr. Katz, do you want to add anything?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Nothing for me.

Mayor: Dr. Katz?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, Health + Hospitals: Just to say that the health care system is ready to start vaccinating the people at the highest risk of COVID who are working as heroes throughout our system. And we will be working closely with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to get them vaccine as soon as possible. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: [Inaudible] question is, our anticipation is that Governor Cuomo will soon announce that because the indicators have not stabilized on hospitalizations, he's going to order indoor dining in New York City closed. What is your message to New York City restaurant owners who haven't gotten a stimulus? Who haven't gotten any aid, and many of them may well go out of business over this next period of time where they're closed? What do you say to them?

Mayor: I feel tremendous empathy for restaurant owners. A lot of them are mom and pop businesses that put their lifetime into them. We want them to survive. We need them to survive. We need the – you know, as a result of indoor dining alone, we think almost a hundred thousand restaurant workers got their job back. Every single worker we care about. But, Andrew, at the same time, these numbers don't lie. Look at what we had today – for the first time, unfortunately, all three of our indicators are past their thresholds. That's a second wave. We have to fight it back to save lives and we have to fight it back to start our recovery. If the Governor announces restrictions, I support him a hundred percent because we have to protect against the worst. The worst is the vaccine just grows – excuse me, the virus just grows and grows, that more and more people get infected, our hospitals start to get stressed and then get to the point where they can't provide the service that people need. That puts lives in danger. I guarantee you, if that keeps happening, then it's going to be a lot longer time before we're able to recover economically. That puts those restaurants in much greater danger for the long-term. So, I feel for them, but sometimes it's smart to say, look, if you take an action, now you can stop much worse things from happening later, and thank God also for the restaurants, outdoor dining is now permanent, which is an option we did not have in the past, and obviously take-out and delivery, which New Yorkers have embraced and they're really working to support their local restaurants. So, I feel for them, but I also need – know in my heart we have got to stop the spread of this virus quickly to be able to turn this situation around.

Moderator: Next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Mayor: Katie?

Question: Hi, good morning. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah. How are you doing?

Question: Good. Thanks. So, I have a question and it's I guess it's similar to what Andrew asked, but for the average essential worker listening at home, or, you know, waiting to hear details on how this will roll out. Can you give them anything? I mean, is it that they have to call the city? Does the city call them? Is there a master list of who is prioritized? just a little bit more detail on how it works when the vaccine arrives?

Mayor: The important thing, it's an important question, Katie. Thank you. The important thing to recognize is the initial categories and it's been true federal, state, local government. We all agree. The focus on the most vulnerable health care workers, the focus on folks who work in nursing homes, the focus on folks who live in nursing homes. That's certainly going to be where the first weeks of this vaccine priority are. Over time, there will be more and more distribution to other folks who work in health care settings, first responders, essential workers, folks who are over 65 and-or have preexisting conditions. This will play out week by week. So, I understand people are anxious for more information, but I can say essential workers will get instructions as it gets to be that time. We want to reach essential workers with this vaccine, but we got to do the highest priority folks first, but you're going to be hearing effectively daily updates on the status of the vaccine and who's next and how it's going work. People – I would never ask New Yorkers

to be patient, we're not a patient people, but people should be confident the updates will keep coming, including very granular information about where people in each category can turn to get those vaccinations, but we don't have all that yet today. We do know where we're starting with those first categories. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks, and if the doctors on the call want to just talk a little bit about the outreach being done looking, you know, to educate people in the city who might have real or even not real concerns about the vaccine and everything that comes from it. You know, I think its reported, you've all seen a lot of people sharing this information and then unfortunately can spread pretty quickly. So, do you want to talk a little bit about that outreach all across the city on how to reach different communities who have doubt?

Mayor: Yeah, absolutely. Let me start with Dr. Varma, who has been down this road many times in his career and he and I have talked about it a lot. So, Dr. Varma, then Dr. Easterling, and Dr. Katz, anything they want to add, but to the question of how we, Dr. Varma, how we educate people about the vaccine and give people information that will instill trust. Could you speak to that from your experience?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, thank you very much. We have a long experience working, you know, everywhere around the world, everywhere around the city in how to build trust in vaccinations. But first and most important thing is to obviously meet people where they are what are their, what is their language? What are their cultural experiences? What is their history? And combine that with what we know about the data, but the information that we have ourselves about the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines, there is a very large concern that we have that, you know, people are going to be very hesitant and refuse because of misinformation spreading, and we're absolutely sensitive to understanding why people might want to believe that information. There was a long history of the medical system not serving the needs correctly of people, particularly from Black and Brown communities. So, we have a lot of experience and understanding how we can take the data on what we know about safety right now, which is that these vaccines are both safe and effective and discuss them in a way that is culturally sensitive and also sensitive to the history of people's experiences. Through that approach. We have greatly increased influenza vaccinations this season and have some of the highest vaccine acceptance rates around the country for the routine vaccinations.

Mayor: As I said, I'm going to turn to Dr. Easterling and Dr. Katz. I also want to see after that, if Sideya Sherman wants to jump in on this question. So, Dr. Easterling.

Deputy Commissioner Easterling: I would just add that it's so important that communities and the public knows that we're going to be standing shoulder to shoulder with communities, and this is something that we're already doing currently and will continue to do as we are sharing information about the vaccine. We're hosting you know, summits with faith based organizations, our flu and faith summit with over 200 houses of worship across the city, several denominations talking about the vaccine, and this is a way that we can make sure that we're addressing this information in this trust, and we're already hearing about the key concern as I shared earlier. One of the key concerns is "is the vaccine safe for me" and we're addressing those questions, but we can also lean on the opportunity of working with organizations, activating them, making sure that

they have the resources that they can do the outreach themselves, and we're also partnering with them in the communities that they're working in.

Mayor: And I want to note with appreciation that throughout these last months, Dr. Easterling has been in direct contact with community leaders, faith leaders, elected officials across all the communities in New York City and really been one of the bridges to the community leaders who needed that health information to be able to spread you know, honest, reliable facts out to communities, and thank you for that, doctor, that's been tremendously helpful. Dr. Katz, you want to add?

President Katz: Yes. Mr. Mayor, you can count on Health + Hospitals, which is the largest hospital system in our country and a very trusted provider of services to low-income people, to the Black and Brown communities, to immigrants. We take care of over a million people a year. We have 400,000 patients for whom we are the primary provider on an ongoing basis, and we will be vaccinating those people as the vaccine rolls out to New York City. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you. Sideya Sherman, do you want to add?

Executive Director Sideya Sherman, Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Wait, we can't hear you well enough. Hold on. Can you try again?

Executive Director Sherman: You hear me?

Mayor: Yeah.

Executive Director Sherman: You can hear me.

Mayor: Yeah.

Executive Director Sherman: Great. So, just to reiterate the points that were raised by the doctors we are really relying on community leaders, local stakeholders, to be the credible messengers on the ground. This is ongoing. This communication has existed since the start of the pandemic and it's continued, and it will be key to the strategy and ensuring that people feel safe and comfortable and know that the vaccine is accessible to them, and so that's a key piece of how the work would move forward, and obviously the leaders across the task force, many of whom come from the communities that were most impacted will be at the forefront of that.

Mayor: Excellent. Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Michael from the Daily News.

Question: Morning guys.

Mayor: Hey, Michael, how are you doing?

Question: I'm good. Thanks for asking. Couple of questions. First, on – you know, you spoke about misinformation as far as the vaccine, and I realize this might be a bit lower on your priority list, but is there been any effort to track the spread of misinformation? Is there the sense that this is you know, kind of an intentional spread of misinformation or just something that organically happens to kind of years of distrust?

Mayor: Yeah, I would say, honest answer, we're not right now focused on a tracking effort. We know there's years and decades and centuries of mistrust that we're addressing. We also know there's an anti-vaxxer movement out there, but I think the best way to confront all that is with the facts. So, again, I want turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Easterling, just to talk about why the vaccine is reliable and how much vetting has been done, because this is what people need to hear. Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, I've been following the information from FDA and discussing extensively with my colleagues both here in the United States and around the world. Everything we know about the vaccine that is about to be authorized by the FDA is that it is both safe and effective, not just in helping people you know, who are of young age but across an entirely broad spectrum. Now I say all that also saying that we, it doesn't mean that we, we stopped looking for, for events. We know from the experience in the UK that a small, very small number of people with a history of very severe allergies can get an allergic reaction. So, we always need to be watching and always need to be careful, but I can say confidently that I, myself, my wife, who's a pediatrician, my kids who are all 16 and above. We'll all get the vaccine when it becomes our turn in line to get there, and, and I think that the quality of the data presentations that you saw in the past week not just from FDA and the companies, but then independent analysts and advice has really been exceptional, extraordinary, and so I think all eyes are watching and that's boosting all of our confidence in what we know right now.

Mayor: Thank you so much. Dr. Easterling.

Deputy Commissioner Easterling: Yes, and I think to address misinformation we're certainly going to be leaning on our trusted messengers, and as the Mayor mentioned, I'm meeting with community leaders every day on a weekly basis, talking to them about how we're responding to the pandemic, and now I'm talking to them about the vaccine. I am letting them know very clearly that I am taking the vaccine, and I know that the vaccine is safe, given everything that Dr. Varma has just mentioned, and my family is also planning to take the vaccine when our place in line comes. So, I think that's going to really help address the misinformation, really making sure that individuals like myself, other providers, trusted messengers are out in the community, really talking to residents.

Mayor: And I want to note Michael, one more point [inaudible] I turned to the Deputy Mayor. I mean, part of why we are having a command center in place is of course, again, the massive logistical effort now, controlling the operational dynamics and making sure they're effective, but it's also to have a single point of contact where the information comes out, the confirmation that people what's happening, the consistent transparency and the troubleshooting. If we see places, for example, in this city where the concern or the distrust is causing people not to take the

vaccine, we will have a targeted effort to reach deeper into the community, to restore that trust and give people the evidence and faith they need to engage. So, Deputy Mayor, could you speak a little bit about.

Deputy Mayor Hartzog: Sure, I will just add that in addition to all the work that Torian talked about in engaging CBOs, just want to remind everyone that there was a lot of concern at the height of the pandemic and trust – issues of trust, and we launched the Test and Trace Corps, and at that time, I think there was a general concern of one, if we could actually build out that level of infrastructure, but two, engage communities, meet them where they're at with their concerns around testing, where to go, is it safe to get tested? When we had a scarcity, how do we actually target who gets the testing? And now we're at a point where I think we've got a tremendous amount of infrastructure, trust. We've hired from communities as part of the Test and Trace Corps, and I think we will be leveraging all of that apparatus as we move forward with the command center in partnership with the Department of Health to actually build on that trust that we have as we move into this next phase of vaccinations.

Mayor: Go ahead, Michael.

Question: Okay. The next question has to do with this story we did a couple of weeks back on Ricardo Morales and you know, this is going back a bit, but you said you had no involvement in his firing. But you know, there's an email unearthed in court papers that you sent to Emma Wolf back in March of 2016, where you referred to a “Ricardo Morales issue.” So I was wondering if you could talk about what exactly were you referring to at the time?

Mayor: Yeah, Michael, look, that is something we've covered many times. The bottom line is he was fired because of nonperformance of his duties. I can't go into the tick-tock years ago, obviously, but he was fired because of the non-performance of his duties. That's the bottom line. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Kala from PIX 11.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to go over the list of vaccination sites earlier. I believe you mentioned schools as a possible site. Is that still the case and how will that work? Like what would that look like?

Mayor: Kala, we're going to look at a whole range of options and, you know, I want to say that it is early in the process. I think it's important to recognize that the priorities we've talked about so far would be to focus on the most vulnerable frontline health care workers, nursing home residents, and workers, other health care workers, first responders, folks who are most vulnerable to the disease. Again, folks over 65 with preexisting conditions, we've got a lot of priorities we have to get through. We're certainly going to be looking down the line at schools and many other sites and ways to distribute the vaccine. But I want to caution that that is farther out. We got to first do the highest priority groups and the command center will be focusing on those priorities and building them out, and as I said, we're going to be giving you very, very regular updates on how each piece is going to go, but the schools are certainly farther down the line, given the other priorities. Go ahead, Kala.

Question: I had talked to some people yesterday who had mentioned that they would not get vaccinated because of their distrust in the government and the nation's history with vaccines, and particularly African-Americans. I know you've talked a bit about setting an example and going into certain neighborhoods and going to them, but how, if someone has such a strong opinion, especially of distrust, how do you break that to get through them?

Mayor: Kala, it's such an important question. Thank you, I think there's several ways. I'm going to turn to Dr. Easterling. After I say a few things, I, we, first of all, the distrust is real institutional racism, structural racism, the horrible complicity, often some members of the medical community in racist acts. I mean, there's a reason why people have this distrust that said we are here today, fighting this pandemic with leaders, from communities of color, playing key roles, people who are trying with every fiber in their being to change that history and create a new reality, and I do think folks who are distrustful will see the leaders, both of the citywide health effort, but also community leaders who they trust, who they know, who are confirming to them how important this is, and then I think as with everything else in human life, leading by example, as all of us are getting the vaccine, it will encourage people. As people talk to friends, neighbors, you know, folks in their family about the vaccine and had a good experience, it will encourage people, but it's going to take a lot of work to overcome that mistrust, and we intend to do that persistent work. Dr. Easterling.

Deputy Commissioner Easterling: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I would say just plainly we know that there are many reasons why individuals in the Black and Brown community, my own community, are distrustful of government distrust for the medical system. As the Mayor had mentioned, we know that there is a history of medical experimentation and racist practices in this country. We need to make sure that we have our leaders stepping out, such as myself. I know that the process that has been put in place has given me the reassurance that this vaccine is safe, that I'm going to take this vaccine, and I will be out talking with community leaders, community members, letting them know why I know that this vaccine is safe and that the process has really allowed us to understand the information. But we're also going to be activating messages. It's not just going to be me. It's going to be this entire city. We are activating our houses of worship. We're activating our community based organizations on a daily basis and this is the work that we have to do. This has to be a collective approach really to address the mistrust and really reassure New Yorkers why this vaccine is safe. Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Nolan from the New York Post.

Question: Hi, good morning everyone.

Mayor: Hey, Nolan. How you doing?

Question: I'm all right. How are you doing, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Good, thanks.

Question: To follow up on Michael's question about the Ricardo Morales, he had a series of laudatory job performances, and yet you can continue to say he was sacked for not doing his job well, can you square that circle for me?

Mayor: I can only tell you what I know for a fact, he wasn't doing his job well, and when someone's not doing their job, there has to be consequences. Go ahead.

Question: Yeah, so when you asked Eric Phillips what you should say about the matter, he said that you should say – according to the emails and the court papers – that you should say something anodyne, you know, and instead you decided to say he was sacked for poor performance, which is job reviews don't back up. So again, why do you keep saying that?

Mayor: I just don't agree with your rendition of history. He wasn't doing his job. I don't know what you're referring to. I know what I received from all the folks who were working with them directly, that job wasn't getting done, period. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Rich from WCBS Radio.

Question: Mr. Mayor, given the fact that there could be some – I mean, by the way, good morning. I'm sorry. I'm starting running into the question here –

Mayor: Rich, you never have to be sorry. You have fabulous manners. Good morning, how are you?

Question: Right. I'm okay. So I'm just wondering in regard to curing the doubts about the vaccine, you know your son Dante was a pretty effective spokesperson for you during the campaign. Is there any thought that the First Lady and Dante might be involved in this effort?

Mayor: Well, I won't speak for my adult son who will make his own decisions. We certainly, you know, Dante is a really thoughtful young man and if he wants to get involved, I would welcome it. I am certain Chirlane will be involved. She believes fundamentally it's important to go out and educate communities and lead by example. So again, when it's her turn, when it's my turn for the vaccine, we're going to do that very publicly to show people we have faith in it. Go ahead, Rich.

Question: And those numbers that you mentioned today, I mean how would you characterize, you know, where the numbers have been going? I mean, are you surprised, is this coming from any particular place? Is it citywide? I know they've rolling average as citywide, but do you see spikes that are driving these numbers upwards in particular neighborhoods?

Mayor: Look Rich, I think first of all, we have a national problem right now. Obviously there's a huge uptick all over the country. This is now clearly a second wave in New York City that has reached every part of the city. True, there are some communities that the numbers are even higher, and I want to keep reminding people that is in some cases directly related to the use of masks or unwillingness to use masks, we really need everyone using masks. We need everyone going out and getting tested, but that said, overwhelmingly, we've got a citywide problem. So I've been talking regularly to the Governor. I spoke to him this morning. Our teams are talking all the time about what would be the appropriate measures to protect our hospitals, what are the appropriate measures to stop the spread, which restrictions will be needed? We are at a point where we got to realize that we've got to do everything in our power to turn this back and hold the line for the vaccine to do its work because every single additional New Yorker who gets the vaccine is one step in the right direction. So we could just stop this spread long enough to let the vaccine really come into play in a big way, that's when we turn the corner. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Yes. good morning all, good morning, Mr. Mayor. So I want to follow actually on [inaudible], you know being that you and the doctors on the panel today are saying that you will

all publicly get the vaccine. Have you thought about recruiting let's say sports figures or people in the performance world, you know, notable people to do that as part of aim?

Mayor: I think that's a great point. Juliet, look, the first thing to say is this vaccine will be distributed equitably. So it doesn't matter how famous you are, how powerful you are, how rich you are, this is going to be given out in the order it's supposed to be given out. And again, that starts with frontline health care workers and nursing home residents and workers, not celebrities, not rich people, but that being said as notable New Yorkers get their moment in line, when their priority comes up, I think it's a great point. There are so many famous New Yorkers, iconic New Yorkers who are so devoted to the city and want to help us come back strong, I think a lot of them will be very willing to come forward and give people faith in this vaccine through their own example. So yes, that is an approach we're going to use for sure. But we're going to do it in a way that respects when each person is actually supposed to get the vaccine. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay, and thank you. And also I guess I wanted to get a little more specific on how you will be informing people? Are you going to have, let's say meetings in NYCHA developments or giving out flyers or email blast? What – how directly are you contacting people about either, you know, convincing them this is safe or when it's their time for the vaccine?

Mayor: Let me turn to Sideya Sherman who has done extraordinary work at NYCHA and knows it so well and also the great work she's doing as the Executive Director of the task force, because this has been one of her areas of focus, how we reach deep into communities and get the word out, especially from trusted messengers. Sideya?

Executive Director Sherman: Sure, can everyone hear me?

Mayor: Yes.

Executive Director Sherman: Yes. Okay, great. So yeah, to the Mayor's point, we've – most of this communication has already started, we've been an ongoing communication with community-based organizations, tenant leaders throughout the pandemic, and that those conversations are starting to switch towards informing and educating people about the vaccine. And so we will use all the communication channels that we have at our disposal from robo calls to emails, to flyers, but we also have regular forums with tenant leaders for instance that are happening with

Department of Health. And so those will continue as people get closer to their place in line. There will also obviously be direct communication to New Yorkers from the Health Department, from practitioners, and so we'll be working across agencies to make sure that we have consistent communication, consistent flyers and messaging. But we also will ensure that in the communities where we know we need an extra push that we're working with folks on the ground to help carry for us that message and to help amplify the information. And we also will be relying on, again, our tenant leaders, community leaders, to really be the trusted messengers, and also to give us the information we need to constantly adapt our distribution strategy, as well as our messaging.

Mayor: Yeah and two more points, Juliet, one, you know, we've been working deeply with faith communities, our Center for Community and Faith Partnerships doing extraordinary work. I'm a firm believer that we can reach the grassroots much better working with our faith partners, so there'll be a big piece of this. And then the Command Center. I want to note that one of the things that Deputy Mayor Hartzog and her team will be looking for all the time is where are those places where we need to reinforce, where we need to send in more folks to do outreach, we need to get more community leaders involved. If we're seeing a trust gap in a certain neighborhood, the Command Center is going to determine how to focus on that and get those vaccination levels up to make sure that everyone gets their fair share. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to Abu from Bangla Patrika –

Mayor: I don't know if your microphone is on. Abu?

Moderator: Abu.

Mayor: Okay.

Question: How are you?

Mayor: Hey Abu, how you doing?

Question: Good, how are you?

Mayor: Good, good.

Question: My question is when the vaccination is going to start, what could be changed a scenario, like that school will be – the students who are going to the school, the school is open for everyone and the you don't have to wear the mask. I mean, what are the rules when someone get the vaccination?

Mayor: So I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Easterling, look again, we're going to do this in phases, and we're going to be very public, very informative about who's up when and where it's going to happen and one thing or another, but in terms of how someone actually gets the vaccination, that when you get to the hospital or doctor's office, what happens next? Dr. Easterling, can you give us a little bit of that play-by-play?

Deputy Commissioner Easterling: Sure, I think an important part to remember that we're going to be prioritizing certain groups right now, as the Mayor had just mentioned. Right now we're focusing on long-term care facilities and individuals who are working in high risk settings, and I think the important part to remember is that we're not out of the woods yet. Once the vaccine is administered to some of the groups, and obviously we're going to continue to expand and reach out to more communities, but we will still need to continue to wear a mask, keep six feet apart, and make sure that we are monitoring our own health because we're – we know that, you know, that the vaccine is going to protect individuals, but we just do not know how much it's going to really prevent the spread. And so I think it's going to be really important to make sure that folks understand that as we are rolling out our vaccine plan to continue to follow our core four and get tested as well.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Katz, Dr. Varma, again, give a little more of the flavor of how vaccination actually works person by person in a medical facility? Dr. Katz?

President Katz: Well, yes, for us, sir, there'll be two parts once there's vaccine available, we will be providing it to those people at highest risk in the hospital. So people who are intubating patients, which is where you insert a breathing tube, ICU nurses, respiratory therapists, and people who are at the highest risk of infection and we'll work our way down until we've

vaccinated all of the people with patient facing functions. Beyond that, sir, we look forward and working with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to vaccinating all our patients starting in the same priority groups, as you've already stated. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Varma, I want you to make it very granular and real just what a vaccination is like, how it is like for the individual patient to go in and vaccinate. Just paint the picture for us.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, no, absolutely. So I think when we get to the stage where vaccines are going to be more widely available, this is going to look for people somewhat similar to their regular experience getting a vaccine, whether it's themselves or the kids and maybe a little bit different because we're going to be expanding our efforts. So what you're going to be doing, is you're going to be either going to your regular medical provider, or you're going to be going to one of the special clinics that we're going to have set up for you to get vaccinated. You're going to have to fill out some basic information to describe your medical history. We need to make sure you don't have any reasons why we would be concerned about your risk. You'll then get some information, what's called the vaccine information sheet which describes what vaccine you're getting. It's going to describe any known side effects of the vaccine, what you should do if you develop any side effects, basically all of the information that you could ever want that'll be available to you in all of the languages that are common here in New York City. And then you will see your provider, and your provider will usually be a nurse or somebody who's authorized to provide vaccines, they'll go through the regular procedural, you'll roll down – roll up your sleeves, they'll use a little bit of of an alcohol rub or cleaning solution, and then you'll have your vaccine.

What people need to know that's important is that right now the vaccine needs to be given in two doses. So that will be the first time you get the vaccine and then after 21 days, three weeks or later, you'll be called back and you'll get reminders and you'll need to remind yourself to come back to get your second dose. We know there was some protection after the first dose, but the full protection really comes up to the second. And then it is possible for you to have some side effects like achiness in your arm, a low grade fever, to feel kind of tired, particularly after that second injection, but what we know right now is that is a sign that the vaccine is working. So it's important for you to be in touch with your doctor if you have any concerns, but those are also good signs that your body is responding the way it should.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead, Abu.

Question: Second question is about [inaudible], you know, there is a lot of people didn't have jobs and they are not paying the rent and the recent executive order I think has expired as well. So if those people are evicted from the house or apartment, or do we –I mean, what is the next plan, or do you have any other option you are thinking about? The people who are unable to pay the rent or the people who are not - also the homeowner?

Mayor: Yes, Abu, such an important question. Listen, first of all, I think the greatest opportunity to address this issue comes through the stimulus process in Washington. There should be direct relief to renters who cannot afford to rent, that also would allow direct relief for people that own the buildings and, you know, need to pay mortgages. This is the kind of thing the federal government should be doing right now to help people survive this crisis and get back on their feet and foster recovery. The State and the City have worked together to avoid people being evicted who can't pay the rent. I always say, Abu, if someone can pay the rent, they should keep paying the rent. I want to make sure that the protections in place are reaching those who need them, who have had their income taken away, but there's obviously a lot of people who still have their income and should be paying their rent. But for the hundreds of thousands of folks who have been disrupted, their lives disrupted, their livelihoods disrupted by this crisis, the eviction moratoriums are crucial. The court system is obviously not acting on many evictions right now, which is a good thing. We need to keep those moratoriums in place and a grace period after the crisis abates.

Further, we need something else and I've been calling for this for months, I really hope the legislature will take this up and get it done, we need a new law that will allow for a payment plan structure, something that can be universally recognized so that if a tenant cannot afford the rent because they've been affected by the crisis, that they are allowed to stay in their apartment, when they finally have income, again, start paying rent again and start catching up on past rent over time in an acceptable plan, giving tenants the security they can stay in their apartment, giving landlords and security that eventually there'll be made whole. We need a structure like that to protect everyone. The thing we cannot have is anyone losing their apartment in the middle of a crisis through no fault of their own. We just can't let that happen. So we're going to keep working with the State to keep those protections in place.

Okay everyone, as we conclude, very simple, big moment for New York City, vaccine about to arrive, our Command Center up and running on Monday to distribute the vaccine, we are ready with a plan to ensure that that distribution will be equitable, will be fair, will be focused on the folks who need it most. Look, here is a moment that will turn the tide for New York City, but it's also a beginning of something bigger, it's the beginning of the recovery and rebirth of New York City. And as we create that recovery and rebirth, it also is a chance to disrupt a status quo that was in too many ways broken. All that distrust we've talked about has come from too many bad experiences, too much pain, too much discrimination, unfairness. We are not going to return to

that status quo. So as we fight back the coronavirus and we show that that can be done in an equitable and fair manner with the voices of community truly heard and respected, that also provides a template for the New York City ahead. That has to be a better and fairer place for all and everyone will be a part of that work together. Thank you, everybody.

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