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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. We are returning to what has been our top story all day, the coronavirus vaccine rollout has officially begun in New York with an ICU nurse in Queens getting the first Pfizer dose. This milestone could not come soon enough of course. Cases are on the rise all across the state and here in the city. And officials are warning that additional restrictions could take effect, even a quote, full shutdown. Now Mayor de Blasio was at NYU Langone on the East Side of Manhattan earlier today, hailing the vaccine's arrival here in the city. He joins me now to talk about that and much more from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. What a great day. How are you doing?

Louis: I'm doing fine. And it is indeed a good day. You went to NYU Langone to watch the vaccine get administered. In these first few weeks, at what pace are vaccinations going to occur? And when might we see even a small impact on the rate of spread of COVID?

Mayor: A crucial question. So, I just want to frame this by saying, look, this is such an important day for New York City because it is the beginning of the end of the Coronavirus era. But it's not just the fact that these vials with vaccine have arrived. It's also a shot of hope for the whole city. People really needed to believe that we could put this behind us. And now we have the most tangible evidence since March that we can overcome this challenge. So extraordinarily important day in terms of the people's hearts and souls and emotions and the level of hope we're going to need to get through this. But look, the goal here is a very fast distribution. The Department of Health and all City agencies have been put on alert to move this very quickly through our command center over at 253 Broadway, that's going to be making sure that every shipment is acted on quickly and all of the pieces we need to come together are happening at the community level. I think what you'll see during the month of December, of course, the focus will remain on frontline health care workers. And we'll be getting into of course, nursing homes, staff and residents going into January, continuing to finish out those categories. First responders who are in greatest need, health care workers in great need. I think as you get through January, we're then going to be able to start to focus down to the neighborhood level more. I don't have an exact date for you yet. We'll have to see what level of doses come in and how quickly we can move everything. But I think it's right to think of now into the beginning of January is the most sensitive of folks getting it first. Then starting to broaden out and getting into the general population over time. And one of the things we're focused on through our command center is the focus on equity, the 27 neighborhoods, African-American, Latino, and Asian hardest hit by COVID, where we're going to put the greatest effort in terms of reaching everyday people, older folks, folks with pre-existing conditions as we get into January and then February.

Louis: Okay, so now you both, you and Governor Cuomo have warned of a possible full shutdown in the coming weeks, similar to what happened in the spring. Remind us a little bit about what that would mean, especially now that we know more about this virus? I mean, back in the spring, you know, restaurants went to zero percent seating. Is that what looms on the horizon if we can't get this spread under control?

Mayor: Well, right now, I agree entirely with what the Governor has said. The trajectory we are on is very troubling in terms of the number of people who get sick, the number of people we would lose, God forbid. And obviously the impact on hospitals, their ability to treat people. We've got to start planning on bigger actions now. I think the natural time to do that is immediately after Christmas. But look, it means only essential activity would continue. What was defined as essential in the spring, obviously grocery stores you know, supermarkets, pharmacies, takeout and delivery, that did continue in the spring. A variety of essential businesses. That's what we would need to focus on. Folks in other types of business wouldn't be going into their workplace. But look, what we've learned since the spring is the things that can be kept safe. And we've learned a lot about how to keep people safe. Our hospitals are much more effective than they were in the spring. It's striking how much better they're doing. They're a lot safer for their employees, but they also are handling their patients better. Our schools have been an incredible success story in terms of safety. So we know some things will be different and a different approach than the spring, but the basic concept of essential work would continue, less essential work would be on pause. That's what I think we should be anticipating.

Louis: What would happen with the schools as a matter of fact? I mean, there was some reporting about nearly 500 – I mean, I think the number was 489 classrooms got closed about a week ago. And 30 buildings were closed for at least a day. And, you know, dozens more. Something, you know, that parents need to know is what they can expect going forward?

Mayor: They can expect incredibly rigorous safety standards, including the weekly testing. And all kids who come to the buildings have to have that test consent form or a medical exemption. The fact that our situation room is working so intensely – yeah, they do close a building for test and trace, if there's the right criteria met. And then if a longer closure is needed, it happens. Now, this is against, of course now we have 878 school buildings that opened last week. So, you would expect some of them to be closed at any given point in time, but the vast majority have been open and serving kids. Which is exactly what families need. Schools have proven to be safe. They're bluntly amongst the safest places to be in New York City. So, my anticipation is schools would keep going so long as they continue to be so obviously safer than the rest of the surrounding community. And, certainly, our health care leadership feels that. I spoke to Dr. Fauci at length about this a few days ago. He feels that strongly. So, a lot of work to keep doing, but, so far, the track record of our schools really speaks for itself.

Louis: Okay. As if you didn't have enough on your plate, the city's going to get its first major snow storm this week. Are the Department of Sanitation and the restaurants ready to navigate the outdoor dining situation? Meaning if there's a foot of snow to plow who's in charge of that? Is that the plows? Is that the restaurants? What's going to happen to the structures?

Mayor: So first of all, knock on wood, right now we're not hearing a full foot of snow. Reports have gotten a little bit better now. We all know let's get closer before we get to a final determination. We do expect a storm, sounds like a mix of snow and rain. Sounds like less than a

foot of snow, in fact, but we'll know a lot more soon. But let's take the situation where you really do have a foot of snow. In that case, what we're saying to the outdoor restaurants is bring in everything you can bring in to protect all your equipment, also to make it easier for the snowplows. But we know some of these restaurant structures are built in a way that's really hard to take apart and that's okay. We'll work around them to the best of our ability. Look, the outdoor restaurants have helped save the restaurant industry, helped save about 100,000 jobs. We really want to respect that. Sanitation Department, Transportation Department, they will work with the restaurant community to be as flexible as we can. But we're really telling the restaurants when you got something you can bring in, in snow conditions, blizzard conditions, you want to bring it in, it's in your own interest.

Louis: And then I guess finally, there are lots of families wondering what happens if you do have a lot of snow, is there such a thing as a snow day? Or does everybody just stay remote?

Mayor: It's so, it's a different reality now. In fact, you're right, a snow day turns into just a remote education day. So, if we had the kind of snow that would cause us to not feel comfortable with kids coming to school, buildings not feel comfortable with school bus service, we'd announce that obviously in time. And then kids would go all remote and just, that would be another day at home, learning from home.

Louis: All right. Let's take a short break. Standby, Mr. Mayor, we'll be back with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall and once again I'm joined by Mayor de Blasio, and Mr. Mayor, I want to get off of a COVID and snowstorms for a minute and talk for a couple of minutes about the body-worn cameras that were one of the big reforms to the NYPD that a court appointed monitor really sort of helped take the lead in. We just got a report saying that the body worn cameras, while powerful, don't necessarily reduce the use of force that, you know, the report of the monitor says that the behavior of police officers don't seem to have changed, that the number of arrests with force, the number of summonses, the domestic incident reports, citizen crime complaints, all seem to be more or less the same, which suggests a real gap between the intention of reform and the reality of the results?

Mayor: Okay, a couple of things, Errol. First of all, respectfully, the monitor certainly plays an important role, but this administration brought body-worn cameras to this city in very, very fast time. Look, I want to be clear, this is something I believe in, I implemented because I believed it would lead to more accountability and that cops had done the right thing would have evidence of it and if a cop, God forbid did the wrong thing, there'll be evidence as well. I don't think it's a right to say that we have the full understanding of the impact of body-worn cameras, right? I don't know the specific report that you're referring to. I haven't seen that one, but the point here is this is still a pretty new innovation. It's proven to be incredibly helpful in getting a clear picture of what happens in many, many instances, I've seen a lot of this footage myself. It has really helped us to understand what happened in ways we never would have before. Sometimes it has in fact shown, unfortunately, an officer did something wrong and it was further proof that was important to have. But a lot of times, again, it's also proven when officers really went out of their way to do everything right, even at great risk to themselves. So I don't understand any concept

that a body-worn camera is not value added. Of course, it's value added. I do think it's one of many factors that affects behavior, training I think is probably the single most important one, and we've put an immense amount of energy and resources into training over the last years. That was a big missing link in the NYPD, we've really worked to fix that, including implicit bias training, de-escalation training. So we'll keep looking at it, but I, I'm pretty convinced that body-worn cameras are part of the solution.

Louis: You're talking about this as simply an internal tool for, you know, you and the NYPD to look at patrol operations and either make adjustments or not and the public never sees any of this.

Mayor: The public clearly does see a lot of this footage and their rules –

Louis: We see only what you allow us to see, and it, you know, when there've been incidents where it's been edited and freeze frames and all kinds of other distortions of whatever is on the camera.

Mayor: You know, obviously recently there's been a lot of clarification of how and when the footage will be released, I think that's good. That clarification was needed. But I want to emphasize where you started, the question was what's the impact of it. The impact of it, I think it helps to the NYPD do its job better. I think it does create accountability. It makes people think about their work differently in a better way. Certainly again, we have seen already that is part of proving when people have done things right and wrong. I think it's only value-add if we've got to keep working on how to use it or how to disclose the material, we can do that. But the question of is it something that's helped us to create a more accountable in my NYPD? I feel strongly it has.

Louis: Wouldn't you – I mean, if there's no number behind that, if the – you have exactly the same number of citizen complaints as you had before you rolled out the program, does –why are you so confident that things are better?

Mayor: I can't for a moment buy into the notion that if a certain statistic over a limited period of time, and it really has been limited period of time since all the folks on patrol were wearing them, that that's the end of the discussion. I just don't accept that. There's a lot of factors that go into why there might be complaints or anything else. We've been doing a lot to give people the knowledge of how to file a complaint. That's the kind of thing that might increase the number of complaints. CCRB is much stronger than it was under my predecessors, I'd like to note and much more of a strong presence in our city. So, there's a lot of reasons you might see different things. But the question to me is, first of all, it's not static, Errol. This is a new thing in policing in New York City. We're going to learn how to use it better and better, but just think about you or me or anyone else, if you put a camera on, and you have it on when you're doing your interactions with other people, it does affect the way you think about stuff and it does give people a formal record. That's all to the good.

Louis: Well - hey okay. I mean, I don't want to keep going back and forth about it, but the – yes, there's a formal record, but there's no nothing you can tell and nothing I can tell my audience about how, when, and whether they would ever see any of that footage short of a gigantic lawsuit

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Mayor: Again, I said to you before –

Louis: Or like 120,000 to 130,000 new videos every week.

Mayor: Well, the problem right there with the size of this force, obviously in this city, is it's an untenable amount of information, but in the cases where it's been particularly pertinent, there is a protocol, we improve the transparency protocol, so information would come out. But again, I just want to really respectfully, I know how much you care about policing and how much you know about it, I want to just put a factor on the table here. How do we judge improvements in policing? Well, I would say in the seven years I've been doing this work, we want to look at things like gun discharges, we want to look at things like have we improved the outcomes where there's a difficult scenario where there's something where we want to and inhibit police from escalating. We want them to use the de-escalation approaches. You look at a lot of different examples. I think this is a very different police force by those measures. I think there's a lot of evidence in terms of how few gun discharges occur, how much de-escalation training has permeated the force, I think the body worn cameras are helping as well. And it's a point of evolution. We have a long way to go to continue to change the culture. But I think this is a piece of it. If we have to improve the transparency, we should, but we obviously can't keep track of all of that material all the time in the public domain, but we can do a lot to make sure it does affect the improvement that policing.

Louis: And I guess finally, you know, it's entirely possible that the numbers need to go in the other direction in the sense that shootings are way, way up, and of course that's a precursor to, you know, bodies ending up in hospitals and in the morgue and there's a real concern out there that the problem has simply gotten away from the NYPD.

Mayor: Well, it has not. I would just disagree with that as well. We went through an absolute perfect storm. I will say this until I'm blue in the face, because I believe it profoundly, you know, the previous six years I saw such clear patterns of why we were able to drive down crime. What was going right with the relationship between police and community, through neighborhood policing. All of these things were moving so consistently, massive disruption by a global pandemic that took every part of life of New York City apart, turn it on his head, created massive conflict, emotion, frustration, all over the city. We are not going to see anything like that again, I guarantee you that. Next year is going to be a very different year. We right now are celebrating, today is the day we get a vaccine in New York City, we know over the course of months how much impact that's going to make. Next year will be a very different year. We're going to be able to turn this around, I'm quite convinced, and we're not going to see a year like 2020 again. And the NYPD has the tools because they've proven for 25 years of reducing violence that they had the tools, those tools didn't suddenly disappear because of the coronavirus.

Louis: Okay, well from your lips to God's ear, Mr. Mayor, we'll be watching that and much more. Thanks so much for spending some time with us. We'll see you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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