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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, good morning, everyone. And here's my message to all New Yorkers today – thank you, thank you, thank you. Amazing – folks really heeded the call yesterday, stayed off the streets, helped our friends at the Sanitation Department to do their job. And, I want to tell you, the Sanitation Department did an amazing job. To all the men and women of the Sanitation Department, thank you to you as well – extraordinary job, made a huge, huge difference. Now, we've got more to do, this ball game ain't over. But I really, really appreciate the effort that was put in both by every-day New Yorkers, helping each other out, staying off the streets, and, of course, by Sanitation Department.

So, here's what we know so far, and there's still some snow coming, a small amount, but, right now, the measure in Central Park for this storm is 17.2 inches of snow. Again, a little bit more in the course of the day today. It will certainly end up being one of the bigger snowstorms we've had recently, but, thank God, the vast majority is over now. Everyone, I went around the city yesterday and wanted to see firsthand what was going on, wanted to check on how people were doing, see how Sanitation was doing. I saw really great stuff. I was out in Staten Island, along Hylan Boulevard and other parts of Staten Island. I was out in Brooklyn, Fort Greene neighborhood, The Hub in the South Bronx. Obviously, I was around Manhattan and out in Queens at the garage in Maspeth – the Sanitation garage. And I an opportunity there to thank some of the extraordinary folks at Sanitation for the job they did. And I stayed in touch with people around the city in the course of the day and heard the same thing, that they had seen multiple passes by the Sanitation plows. And even though there's more work to do for sure, folks felt that the effort was really good and they could see that we'd be back and running quickly.

So, that's what I saw with my own eyes, and it was an example of the dedication of the men and women of the Sanitation Department. Now, let me give you a few other updates, because obviously we had the local state of emergency in place until 6:00 AM this morning. That's now been lifted. But, obviously, we want to keep saying to folks, if you don't need to be driving on the roads, please don't. If you can stay home, it's still best while the cleanup is continuing. The good news is more and more mass transit coming back to normal schedules above ground. Subway service has resumed and life has coming back a little more to normal quickly. There are still issues, of course, some delays – most flights at LaGuardia and Kennedy still suspended. There's no bus service at Port Authority. But we are also, of course, mindful that while the cleanup is happening, we want to make sure people have one less thing to worry about, so reiterating that alternate side parking is canceled through Saturday. Update on the Staten Island Ferry, operating now on a 30-minute schedule – every 30 minutes. And on the other ferry, SeaStreak Ferry suspended today, but New York City Ferry has resumed service as of this

morning. So, you know, a lot of good things, especially thanks to all of you who really heard what needed to be done and you did it. Thank you to all New Yorkers.

And now, want to say with great appreciation to our Sanitation Commissioner Ed Gayson, thank you for what you and your team did over these last couple of days. And Commissioner, why don't you give us all an update?

**Commissioner Edward Grayson, Department of Sanitation:** Thank you, mayor. Yes. I'm very proud of the work of the department. The men and women of Sanitation did a great job. All of our frontline field personnel who responded to the storm and the mechanics who keep the trucks rolling for us. So, they did a great job and I really couldn't be prouder.

We were out there all through the night and we'll be out there all day today. The fights still on, there's still plenty of work to be done, and we're coming into all those – readdressing all those residential streets. That's where we're focused on today. We did a great job. We have a lot of the main access roads – you know, you're seeing blacktop today. And we're going to do our best to get blacktop roads into the residential sectors of the city and continue to make progress. There's a lot of work still to be done. Also, today from 8 AM onward, we did employ our first shift of the emergency snow labor program. And for people who want to get more information about that, you can go to [nyc.gov/snow](http://nyc.gov/snow). And, today, they will be focusing on trying to get some of the shoveling done at the pedestrian crosswalks and do some of the catch basins in the hydrants.

A little note to everybody about shoveling today. Remember, at some point we will see the cessation of all snowfall, there's just a little bit still lingering around. But as you get out there, definitely take some time while you're shoveling. Definitely take breaks, because it's a heavy snowfall. But also, be mindful, and we encourage all property owners and people managing properties – remember the people who have mobility concerns. Let's make a nice wide path for people to be able to walk through, definitely try to treat the sidewalk. But I also need to stress, I need you to pay attention to where you're putting that snow, okay, because we have a lot of the curb lines that also do – some of the bike lanes that we have. So, if you could try to not pile that snow that you're shoveling from your – from the walkway into the bike lane, that would help us out, because that's another thing we're going to be focusing on today with the snow removal program, we try to get it to the bike lanes and continue focusing on the pedestrian streets.

Cannot stress it enough – this was a major snowfall event, a lot of snow citywide. We, the Department, are very aware that we have a lot of work yet to be done. And some of the folks that are watching out today and just looking out as you observed the town, you're going to say, wow, I could really use a plow. Yes, you can. We are coming. We're on all snow. We have not taken our foot off the gas and we'll be continuing to do that all through today and into the overnight shift.

Onto refuse and recycling collection, we are definitely delayed. We did not pick up the garbage yesterday and we are not on pace to be picking up your Tuesday frequency service today. We do everything we can to get back on schedule, but, again, we are focused on the snow removal today, continuing on with our plowing. The laborers are doing the manual shoveling and definitely trying to get salt everywhere. And tomorrow, we'll be on snow yet again. So, we have service delays, but we'll keep the messaging out there and try to let you know when we're going to get back on schedule. And I just want to say, again, the Mayor put it out there – ASP is

suspended the whole week. So, if you don't have to be on the roads today, please don't. It'll help us make even further to the progress. And again, to the men and women of the Department of Sanitation, they did a great job. But to all the residents who listened to and to everybody who stayed off the road yesterday, thank you for doing your part as well. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much, Commissioner. Commissioner, job well done. I know you got a lot more to do, but job well done.

All right. Let's talk about some other updates related to the storm. So, of course, in-person learning is not happening today. Remote learning is happening for all kids, but back tomorrow. Our schools will be back in person tomorrow, strong. Everything's looking great for that for tomorrow. Other updates, Open Restaurants will resume today at 3:00 PM. So, for all the folks who own restaurants, all the folks who work in restaurants, all the people that love to patronize our restaurants, they will be back 3:00 PM today. Open Streets initiative resumes tomorrow. Now, I want to remind everyone, people who love our restaurants, please get out there help them out. Restaurant Week To Go is still going on. Amazing deals, amazing opportunity to try new restaurants and help out the people who take good care of us and feed us all over New York City. And everything we do to help our small businesses – and we're going to be talking about this a lot in the coming weeks – is part of creating a recovery for all of us, and we're going to be having constant updates and recovery effort [recoveryforall.nyc.gov](http://recoveryforall.nyc.gov). But crucial to the recovery in New York City this year is to bring back small businesses strong, and we're going to be talking a lot about the direct support we're going to provide to small businesses, the ways we're going to cut red tape, make their lives easier. But, in the meantime, let's go out there and spend some money when you can. If you can, go out and take advantage of Restaurant Week To Go.

Okay. Now, let me go to the number-one issue of the day – vaccine. So, obviously, everything we're going to do to recover as a city depends on the vaccine effort. We need supply badly. We'll keep talking about that, but let me give you an update on today and tomorrow how we're handling vaccination. So, overall, we said, today, we would not be having vaccination at most of our sites, because of concerns about the weather. And thankfully the storm ended up being a little less than expected, but, you know, when you make decisions like this, you have to be very, very careful about health and safety. We made a cautious choice. So, most sites are not open today. They'll be back strong tomorrow and we'll be able to catch up on appointments quickly. I wish we had so much supply that we would have to say, wow, we have so much to do. But unfortunately, in this case, because supply is limited, we'll be able to up on those appointments very quickly and then, once again, we will not have supply.

Health + Hospitals, sites are open for vaccination today. They have been in touch with the folks who were scheduled. Obviously, hospitals and clinics are staying open all the time, no matter what. So, they're able to continue vaccination today, which is great. The latest number of vaccinations for the City of New York since we started the vaccination effort, 823,670. So, a great number, but a number that could be so much bigger if we had sufficient supply. I'm going to keep sounding the alarm here and keep saying we need a truly national effort. All of the companies in America that could be helping with the direction of federal government, truly national effort to radically increase the amount of vaccine supply in this country. It can be done. It was not done previously when we had a better chance last year, it can be done this year, and that's what I'm going to fight for. And if we can get that kind of true national mobilization, it will make a world of difference. We can be doing half-a-million in vaccinations per week – per week

in the month of February, if we had the supply. Now, that being said, I really want to thank everyone out there. Who's running these vaccine sites, working at these vaccine sites, really doing an outstanding job to keep this process moving, even with the supply problem.

So, this week, we have an update on our Department of Health vaccination hubs. And this is so important because what the Department of Health has done – just like Health + Hospitals – where are these hubs? They're in our communities. They're at the grassroots. They're where the people are and they're where the people are who have the greatest need, including a lot of folks who have felt the disparities of this crisis the most. We believe in a grassroots approach to vaccination, decentralized down to the neighborhoods, down to the grassroots. What are we seeing? We're seeing amazing results. I was out at Hillcrest High School in Queens, a few weeks back, saw a great operation there. Those Department of Health hubs now at the grassroots have provided over 100,000 doses to New Yorkers. And that effort will grow intensely once we have the supply to go with it. That is how we get vaccine to the people that need it, we build trust, we fight disparity – is getting the vaccine to the grassroots. Congratulations to the Department of Health for really impressive numbers so far.

Okay. Everyone, before we go to today's indicators want to give you an update – important update. We have a special election today. We've had a lot of special elections lately, some more coming up. Special election today in Council District 24 in Queens for City Council, and this is the enablers of Briarwood, Cunningham Park, Flushing, Fresh Meadows, Jamaica, Kew Gardens, Hollis, and more – pieces of all those neighborhoods are part of a District 24. Polls are open, they will be open till 9:00 PM tonight. If you need help finding your polling place, go to [voting.nyc](http://voting.nyc). And the Sanitation Department – thank you again to Sanitation, they made a special effort to plow the streets in the areas of the poll sites to make it a little bit easier. Sanitation is clearing the path for democracy and we thank you, Commissioner, and all the men and women of Sanitation for helping out folks in that district in Queens.

Okay. Indicators today – number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 206 patients. This is a good report today. Now, again, I'm going to pause here for a moment and say, the daily reports are crucial, the big trends are more crucial. This is a good number. I'm happy to see this number, going in the right direction. I'm extremely concerned about the variants that we're seeing, the UK variant, Brazilian variants, South African variant. These are big open questions of what's coming next at us, but still very happy today. We see a better number – 206 patients, almost down to our threshold. Still a high level of confirmed positivity among those patients, 63.89 percent. In terms of hospitalization rate, 5.09 percent – I'm sorry, 5.09 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, that number today, 4,585. And number three, the percent of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's number 8.2 percent.

A few words in Spanish – and this is about the snowstorm.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to amplify that point – City workers, public servants have been working so hard the last few days to make life better for people and help people through the snow storm. Everyone should be proud of our public servants who really did a great job these last few days,

looking out for all of us. With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media, and please let me know the name and outlet of each journalists.

**Moderator:** Hi all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Sanitation Commissioner Ed Grayson, Emergency Management Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Health + Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Bob from the Chief Leader.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call. Andy Slavitt, Senior Advisor to the White House, who's heading the COVID response, advised health care providers to tap into whatever reserve they've held back for the second dose to be used now. You mentioned last week that the CDC had helped out last week when they widened the window for the time between the first and second shot to six weeks. It's been reported that Governor Cuomo released 18,000 doses the City hand on-hand that fits this category. Now, with the alignment of the CDC and the Biden White House's latest advisory. When will you see by more macro shifts so this becomes the standard?

**Mayor:** Thank you, Bob. Really important question. And I have been talking to folks in the Biden Administration about this, and, obviously, speaking out publicly – we need to free up the second doses. It just does not make sense that they're being held back. More manufacturing is coming. I have absolute faith that the Biden Administration is going to speed the manufacturing process. I think we could go so much farther if there was a full national mobilization of the pharmaceutical industry and the biotech industry to produce a vaccine on a much faster, greater level. But, unquestionably, more is coming. Johnson & Johnson is coming. There's going to be a better situation just weeks ahead. So, it makes total sense to free up the second doses now. That additional guidance from the federal government is tremendously helpful. We need the State obviously to join us in freeing up those second doses and fully authorize the use of those second doses so we can put them into play immediately. Go ahead, Bob.

**Question:** Okay. So, also, in Washington, Senate Republicans are offering a much smaller COVID relief package in their initial conversation with President Biden that he's contemplating. We do see just now something crossed where Comptroller DiNapoli warned that there has been a ten percent drop off in sales tax revenue, much deeper than the six percent of the Great Recession. What is this? What is the risk here of going too small in terms of the granular impact that you would see?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Bob, crucial question. Thank you. If there's not a true stimulus package, not a strong large stimulus package, there will not be a recovery. Let's just be clear about this. If they nickel and dime the next stimulus, there will not be a strong recovery. Unfortunately, we learned that lesson after 2008. The stimulus that was put together then was insufficient. The recovery took a whole long time, people suffered. We got one shot to do it right. And Joe Biden's fighting for a really substantial stimulus. It must include State and local aid. There's no way the economy recovers, there's no way we can serve people without the State and local aid. So, it really depends on whether the Republicans in the Senate want to see an economic recovery of this country and want to see people get back on their feet. If they want that, they must include State and local aid. If they don't care about working people, then they should keep doing what they're doing. Go ahead.

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

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

**Mayor:** Good, Marcia. How you been?

**Question:** I'm wondering if you could tell me what instructions you're giving people at DOT about looking at the structures for outdoor dining to find out if any of them have been damaged by the storm and what you're going to do about it?

**Mayor:** Yeah, thank you for the question, Marcia. I'll start and then see if either Commissioner Criswell or Commissioner Grayson want to add. That's something absolutely that not just DOT but everyone's very mindful of. We want to make sure those outdoor dining structures are okay. If any damage occurred, obviously, we want to make sure that they are safe before anyone goes back and uses them. So far, Marcia, and I've been talking to lots of folks from lots of agencies and getting reports from all over the city, I have not heard any major problem with that, but obviously, you know, people are still digging out. Commissioner Criswell, or Commissioner Grayson, any insight you can offer? Commissioner? Commissioner? If you don't have it, we'll get back, but tell me if you've got something.

**Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Office of Emergency Management:** No, Mr. Mayor, I think what you said is right. This is Commissioner Criswell. We didn't have any reports of any damage to any of the outside structures, but people should exercise extreme caution today as they're going out and cleaning up around there to provide for their safety.

**Mayor:** Yeah. And Commissioner Grayson, I think you guys did drills to prepare to handle outdoor dining? I think you should talk about that because I think that's part of the approach here.

**Commissioner Grayson:** Absolutely Mr. Mayor. We did our drills in the preseason. We got some great experience on the first event in December with regard to navigating around them as we plowed. And even anecdotally throughout this event, we did not see widespread damage to any of the structures. And we think they held up pretty well. And we've seen a lot of the restaurant owners even now in the daytime coming out and making their own cursory looks to make sure that they're ready for when they can reopen.

**Mayor:** I liked the fact that you use – I'm a baseball fan. So, I liked that you call it the preseason for Sanitation before the snow comes. Go ahead, Marcia.

**Question:** I'm just wondering when, if you're sending out DOT inspectors just to make sure or Buildings inspectors, what they're going to be looking for and what help they can give a restaurateurs if they have any damage?

**Mayor:** Sure. We're absolutely going to have folks out checking on what's going on. And again, not just from one agency, from a of number agencies. And obviously we encourage if the restaurant owners are having a problem, they've been very vocal and we've worked with them a lot and we want to hear if there's a problem out there. But the most important thing is to make sure the structures are safe. So, if any restaurant owner has a concern that there may have been

damage and they need an inspection to check, they can call 3-1-1 and we'll get that to them right away.

**Moderator:** Next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Oh, Hey, could you actually skip me and go to someone else? I'm sorry. Can I use my one pass?

**Mayor:** You can use your pass for sure. We'll come back to you.

**Moderator:** Next, we're going to go to Ariama from Kings County Politics.

**Mayor:** Ariama?

**Question:** Hi. Hello.

**Mayor:** How are you doing?

**Question:** Good morning [inaudible].

**Mayor:** Can we try again? We couldn't hear you that well.

**Question:** Hello.

**Mayor:** There you go.

**Question:** Good morning. Hi. Ariama, Kings County Politics. How are you doing?

**Mayor:** Good. How are you doing today?

**Question:** Good. So really quickly I'll ask if you [inaudible].

**Mayor:** Now we're not hearing you well. We're not hearing you. We'll come back to you as well, because we're just not getting a clear connection. If you got another phone you could call in from try that. But let's, let's go ahead with someone else in the meantime.

**Moderator:** We'll come back to you. For now, we're going to go to Henry from Bloomberg.

**Question:** Hello Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

**Mayor:** Good Henry. How are you?

**Question:** I'm doing pretty well, thanks. I guess my first question would have to do with making sure that people of low income and immigrants are getting the message. What specifically is the City doing? How many languages are being used to get this message out? And how is it being, how was the message being disseminated? How are you going to combat this data that's showing inequities and disparities?

**Mayor:** You did not say the word vaccinations, I'm going to assume everything you said was about vaccination, correct?

**Question:** Correct. But I did notice the same thing going on with testing earlier in the year, but yes, it's about vaccinations.

**Mayor:** Yes. I will start and turn to both Commissioner Chokshi and Dr. Katz because both of them have really put intense effort into addressing disparities and making sure the services were available. So, what I'd say to begin, Henry first and foremost is where you choose as locations determine so much. If you just do, you know, big mega sites in, you know, areas away from grassroots communities, you're not going to get everyday New Yorkers. You're not going to get as many people of color. You're not going to get as many immigrants. If you really want to reach the people, go to the people. Which is why 60 percent of our vaccination sites are in the very same neighborhoods that bore the brunt of the COVID crisis. Those 33 neighborhoods we talked about on Sunday. So, location, location, location. Put the vaccination sites where people need them the most. Second, get out there with the community. This is what the vaccine command center is doing. Working with community leaders, clergy, grassroots organizations, neighborhood-based clinics to get the word out, to demystify, answer questions, lay concerns. And then yes, multiple languages, including the application form itself, now will be in ten languages, the application for appointments. Lots of outreach. We're going to do paid media in different languages. It takes all of that and then it does take some time. And I still contend that the number one factor here Henry is supply because if we had ample supply, those locations would be doing a lot more at this moment. And then more and more people would have people in their lives who got vaccinated. And that word of mouth would be the single most powerful element. I want Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz to talk a little more humanly, personally, about their experiences with what has worked with dispelling myths and helping people have confidence in addressing disparities. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you, sir. And thank you Henry for this very important question. You know, as the Mayor said we are very focused on access. But access in multiple meanings of that word. You know, I go back to one of the vaccine principles that the Mayor laid out, which is about meeting patients where they are. That means the specific locations of vaccination sites, but it also means ensuring access within the sites themselves. So, for example, we have a language access coordinator at each of our community vaccine hubs. We have all of our Vaccine For All materials translated in the 13 most common languages. And we also have additional access to over 180 languages through the language line, which is accessible both through our call center, as well as onsite at our vaccination sites. But to give you a little bit more of the individual perspective on it, I would just share, you know, my experience taking care of patients myself. So much boils down to the relationship that people already have with a trusted clinician, with a trusted faith leader. And so a linchpin of our approach is meeting patients where they are with respect to getting out into communities, into churches, into community organizations and having the humility to partner with them as we roll out this historic vaccination campaign.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Dr. Katz.



**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals:** Yeah, I can build on what Dr. Chokshi has said because Health + Hospitals very proudly has taken care of New York City's immigrant populations, the Black and Brown communities, low-income people, uninsured people, the very people who we most wish to vaccinate, who have been so hurt by this pandemic. And so, what we are doing is we're not just waiting for people to make that appointment. We are actively calling people who are over the age of 65, especially if they also have comorbid problems. We're calling them in their language, by their clinician teams and asking them to come in and be vaccinated. And we're setting aside appointments for our own patients so that we know we're addressing the disparities that have been so troubling in this pandemic. Thank you.

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

**Question:** Okay. Far be it for me to make anybody uncomfortable here, but –

**Mayor:** Go ahead Henry, make us uncomfortable.

**Question:** All right. I'm interested in why Commissioner Grayson is still the acting commissioner?

**Mayor:** Henry, I'm going to stop you, I'm going to stop you right there. He was named the full commissioner weeks ago, my friend.

**Question:** Oh, okay. Thank you for that. That's my question. Go on to the next person.

**Mayor:** No one's uncomfortable. He's doing a great job. Okay, go ahead.

**Moderator:** We believe in second chances. So, we're going back to Katie Honan.

**Question:** Thank you so much. I got to use my Henry Goldman pass. My first question is something the Governor was asked about yesterday, but do you think that restaurant workers should receive priority in getting the vaccine? Maybe be added to 1b or at least especially as we're going to be opening up indoor dining?

**Mayor:** Yeah, absolutely. Look, the restaurant workers now are going to be in enclosed places with people eating and drinking. And every doctor on this line or any place else will say, that's an area of concern. We have to protect the people working in our restaurants. So now that the State has made this decision, it follows that we have to protect those workers and they should be added to the 1b category. Go ahead.

**Question:** Thank you. I guess that's – are you asking the State on this and I don't know how you would – because I understand it's their qualifications. So, I don't know what the Mayor can do in this instance to advocate for that?

**Mayor:** I just did. I just did advocate for it. And I think when I say these things publicly, it's duly noted in Albany. So, look again, these are folks who serve us, who we depend on, who in the course of one of their shifts will be in contact with multiple people. We need to protect them. So the State made a decision. Now follow through on the decision and add those folks to the 1b category.

**Moderator:** Another second chance for Ariama. We're coming back to you.

**Question:** Hello.

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

**Question:** Can you hear me now?

**Mayor:** Yep.

**Question:** Hi, good morning. Sorry about that. So my question was actually, I think she stole my question, but I had a backup. My backup question was, is there any kind of task force that kind of planning [inaudible] because I know the focus on the storm is on the streets and with snowplows and everything. NYCHA residents who lost heat, is there any kind of task force on the horizon for them and getting their power and stuff back on?

**Mayor:** Thank you. It's an important question. This is not – it's not a separate task force. It's the responsibility of NYCHA. And I will tell you that over the last few years, there's been profound changes at NYCHA in terms of heat and hot water, making sure that people get what they need. We're talking about very old buildings, sadly, that for decades did not get the maintenance they deserved. But NYCHA has done a lot to improve the situation as you may remember, from past winters. They have many more mobile generators they can employ. They're doing a lot more work between the heat seasons to improve the systems. We put a lot of really substantial amount of capital funding into improving the heating systems. So that's their job. And whenever we get a report of an outage, their job is to get those residents the heat and hot water they need as quickly as possible. We can get you an update on the current numbers. Did you have a follow-up?

**Question:** Okay. My follow up would be because I know your administration also put a lot of money into repairing a lot of the roofs for NYCHA residents. Will there be inspectors send out starting tomorrow to also look at those issues as well with the snow piling up on the roofs?

**Mayor:** It's a good question. For the best of my knowledge, that's what the maintenance teams at each development do normally. We'll get you an update on that too. But to me, that's a standard maintenance that needs to be done to make sure things are okay. And we want those roofs cleared, obviously in any way that might affect what residents are experiencing. So, we'll get you a specific update on that.

**Moderator:** Next is Nolan from the Post.

**Question:** Good morning everybody. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good morning, Nolan. How's things in Crown Heights today?

**Question:** Snowed in.

**Mayor:** All right. Well, have some hot chocolate and carry on.

**Question:** Much like the rest of the city. I've got a couple of questions for you, but I'd like to start with – just to follow up on a story we published a couple of months ago when we exposed how the New York City Police Department was using its administrative powers to obtain records, not only in the course of conducting internal investigations, but also with regards to reporters and other members of the public. You promised that there would be a review and that you would be briefed on it. Have you been and what is the status of that investigation?

**Mayor:** I will get that today. I need – it was a while back, so I need to get the latest briefing on that, but we'll definitely get you an update today. Go ahead.

**Question:** And just to follow up, are there – what is best practice, what is the procedure for rebooking people? Like when you have a limited number of slots and when those slots are –

**Mayor:** What – wait, what topic are we on?

**Question:** Yep. So, back to vaccinations.

**Mayor:** Okay, go ahead, go ahead.

**Question:** [Inaudible] with the delays in shipments, there have been two or three weeks in a row where the City has had to reschedule a significant number of shots. Is there a procedure that's been laid out for how this should be done so people know what to expect? Is it, you get moved into the next week, on the same day, at the same time at the same facility, is it you're guaranteed the same spot, is it more random? Is there some sort of policy that's been developed around how rescheduling works at both Health + Hospitals and the Department of Health?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Very, very good question. And again, you know, yes – and I'll turn to Dr. Katz and Dr. Chokshi to talk about it. It is a very fair question and a very frustrating topic because when we have this level of capacity, when we could be doing half a million vaccinations a week and we're constantly having to hold back, and we can't run the engine the way it should be run, it's very frustrating. Again, to the earlier question we need, the second doses freed up, that would give us more supply right now. We need a national mobilization to increase supply from all the pharmaceutical companies. But in the meantime, we're trying to make this as even and smart as possible. But without better guarantees on supply, there's unfortunately going to be these stop and start moments. Dr. Katz, then Dr. Chokshi talk about how you make those adjustments when you have to.

**President Katz:** Thank you, sir. Fortunately, when people sign up for a vaccine, they put in their phone number or their email, or their text number. And so, we contact people individually because even if we were to reschedule them, we'd have to tell them when. There'd be no way they would know when they get rescheduled. So, what we typically do is we put people into the next available appointment, despite [inaudible] chose, because we find many people have chosen a specific geographic site because it's convenient to them. We put them into the next available appointment at that site, and then we reach out to them. And if they would like to choose a different site or that particular appointment is not good, we'll try to find them a different appointment. But our commitment is that we don't make new appointments for people until we've taken care of all of the people who have to be rescheduled. So, the people who get

rescheduled, we know that it's upsetting, but our commitment to you is that we're going to get you a slot before we allow other people who haven't already made an appointment to book a slot. Thank you, sir.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Dr. Chokshi?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thank you, sir. Yes, it's the same protocol for Health Department sites as well with respect to rescheduling. There's a default path in terms of when that appointment is rescheduled to. We get in touch with people individually in order to communicate that. In some cases, people are unable to make that rescheduled date or time, and then we have options for them to take another slot if that's the case.

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

**Moderator:** We have time for two more. First is [inaudible] from WNYC.

**Question:** Hi, Mayor. I have three questions, one on data, one on the vaccinations, and one on the variants. I don't know which one [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** We got to question rules. So, turn it – give me one followed by a second. Go ahead.

**Question:** Sure. Sure. Okay. So, first is about vaccines. So, it looks like about 4,000 doses were administered yesterday. I was wondering if any doses were lost due to people skipping their appointments, given that the doses were sort of handled in batches –

**Mayor:** I'm going to check – hold on, hold on, that's one. Dr. Katz, I'm going to check with you on this. My understanding is yesterday since we had broadly postponed the appointments, that the one place that ended up still doing some vaccinations was H + H. And obviously you have all the refrigeration capacity there. So, I'm assuming you did not have a problem with any lost doses, but please clarify Dr. Katz.

**President Katz:** That's correct, sir. We had no problem. We don't open the vial unless we know that we have the right number of people to use all of the vaccine. The vaccine is way too precious to us to risk losing any of it.

**Mayor:** Okay. Go ahead with your next question.

**Question:** You brought up the variants earlier. Public Health England released last night that the UK variant has picked up one of the mutations seen in the South African variant, one that might allow it to bypass the immune system. I was wondering if you could give us an update on how the City is tracking these variants, how many samples are being genetically sequenced per day?

**Mayor:** Two things. Thank you, very important question. First, I'm going to ask Dr. Varma to speak about what we're seeing internationally, and then Dr. Chokshi to talk about the City's specific efforts to do the genomic sequencing and to analyze the samples we're getting. But I want to emphasize, to this very important question, we should all be deeply concerned about these variants. We, you know, everyone wants to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and again, we see some indicators of some improvement lately in terms of the overall situation, but these

variants are tremendously dangerous, and a lot of things we don't know yet about them that could be particularly perilous. We don't know enough to say with assurance how they will respond to vaccine, how infectious, how deadly. There's so many open questions. This is why we need a national mobilization to create as much vaccine as possible to get as many people vaccinated as possible. Now that's – the best bet we have to protect people against the variants is to vaccinate as many people as possible. Even though we don't have all the answers, it's the one thing we know would truly help and it still needs to be achieved quickly or else you're going to have a huge number of unvaccinated people potentially endangered by these variants. I just want to put down that foundational point. Dr. Varma please help us with what we're seeing with the development of these variants around the world, then we'll go to Dr. Chokshi.

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Yeah, thank you for the question. We are closely monitoring the situation as it evolves throughout the world. And what we know is that, again, there are – some of these variants are particularly worrisome because not only are they more infectious but they may be a little more likely to reinfect people who were previously infected. So that is concerning and that's what's being reported out of the UK right now. This situation in the UK is there's variants that have that additional mutation are actually fairly small proportion of all of the infections. So, while it's a worrisome sign, it doesn't represent an acute threat to their public health situation right now. I think a few points and just really worth emphasizing based on what the Mayor has said, first of all, we know that the single best way to protect against these variants is to reduce the number of people infected.

So, repeating all of the things that we know are so important – we must reduce the number of infections through mask wearing, hand-washing, maintaining our distance, getting tested. Second, as the Mayor has noted, we desperately need to increase our vaccine supply and get more vaccines into people. Even though there was some concern that vaccines may be a little less effective with some of the variants, they are still effective. Your chances of being infected with the regular strain, or called the wild-type strain, are still the highest and [inaudible] is incredibly effective across the board, particularly in preventing hospitalization and death. So, absolutely important to keep pushing on the vaccinations. And I think, Dr. Chokshi, if you what talk a little bit about how we're monitoring for this in the city.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, thank you very much, Dr. Varma. First, I want to just echo what you and the Mayor have said about the degree of concern that we have for the variants. We are monitoring the situation very closely and carefully, learning from our public health colleagues around the world to understand, you know, what the implications are. But even as we clarify that understanding all of the actions that Dr. Varma laid out particularly around ramping up vaccination are things that we can do right now to mitigate the effects of those variants. With respect to the numbers that you asked about, we are doing hundreds of sequencing analyses each week for New York City residents. So, since January 1st it's been about 1,500 that have been done in New York City residents that occurs over a combination of New York City's own public health laboratory, the New York State public health laboratory, as well as some academic laboratories that are doing sequencing as well. And we have access to the results across those sites. We are significantly ramping up that capacity over the coming week, so that we have an additional lens into how the very answer evolving in New York City. And the final thing that I will say is that thus far we have identified 13 cases of the B117 variant – that's also known as the UK variant – and thus far we have not identified cases of the other variants. Although given that

sequencing capacity, we'll be looking very closely and following that over the coming days and weeks.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much.

**Moderator:** Last, we'll go to Narmeen from PIX11.

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

**Mayor:** Good. How you been, Narmeen?

**Question:** I'm doing okay. A little tired today from all the snow coverage but hanging in there. So, I wanted to ask you, I mean, going back a few months, you know, when we were looking and identifying the micro cluster zones in Brooklyn and Queens, and now looking back at our map again, I kind of noticed these old familiar neighborhoods popping back up again. I want to ask you how frustrating that might be for you to see. I know the focus is again on vaccinations, but what does it tell you about behavior in some communities bringing numbers back up?

**Mayor:** Well, it's a great question, Narmeen, but I think there's more than one thing going on here. I mean, the biggest, most important point here, which I'm seeing more and more now is the lost opportunity last year to have established an approach to the vaccine that could have had us in a very situation – very different situation now. I mean, let's just think about this for a moment. In 2020, there was a chance to fully mobilize the industrial might of America, all the pharmaceutical companies, all the biotech companies to get them all ready to produce whatever vaccine proved effective. And you remember the day that we got the information that Pfizer had a good vaccine, the day we got the information Moderna had been approved. There was no federal effort by the previous administration to then link those achievements to other companies to maximize production. Even though we have plenty of examples from wartime of that very same approach being used. That was the lost opportunity.

Now the new administration in Washington is going to have to play catch up because of what didn't happen in the past. If we had had the kind of supply of vaccine we needed, we'd be having an entirely different discussion because right now, hundreds of thousands more New Yorkers would have been vaccinated. But to your underlying question, look, I do see the problem. And it is frustrating that even though our doctors have given people such clear instruction and try to support people in so many ways, and we've had mask distribution and so many other things, there, of course, have been, people have been resisting it. But Narmeen, that's not the majority. The vast majority of New Yorkers have been wearing masks, have been practicing social distancing, and have been doing all those efforts to keep things working right. Look at our schools, you know, the safest places in New York City. Everyone in our school communities has worked so hard to keep them safe. Most New Yorkers are doing the right thing. But the difference maker here would be having the supply of vaccine we need. Go ahead, Narmeen.

**Question:** Yeah. Last question – thank you for that – is in relation to the variants. Just a point of clarification, I know Dr. Chokshi just identified that we had 13 cases of the UK variant, but does this mean that we don't believe that the other variants are around, or do we think that they are somewhere in New York City, just have not been caught by our sequencing efforts yet?

**Mayor:** Dr. Chokshi, start. And if Dr. Varma, if you want to add, feel free. Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes. Thank you. And thanks for this very important question, Narmeen. We should assume that there are other variants in New York City. We don't know for sure which of the other variants may already be among – within New York City. But given the degree of spread that we've seen including in the rest of the United States I do think that we have to assume that there is, you know, some degree of spread in New York City as well, but I would go back to the point that Dr. Varma has made, which is that that piece of information, although it's very important for us to do the sequencing, to understand this in detail, the actions that we can take, the core public health guidance, the need to ramp up vaccinations and ensure that our most vulnerable New Yorkers are getting vaccinated, all of those things remain just as urgent as they have always been.

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

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, just to emphasize that even if we haven't detected those specific strains, the number of infections in the United States creates an opportunity for either these strains that we've documented already or new strands to emerge. So, emphasizing what Dr. Chokshi said we're really in a race against the virus to get people vaccinated as fast as possible. And while we – while those of us waiting to get vaccinated, wait in line, do all the things that are necessary to prevent infection, because that is the best way, we can outrun the virus.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Dr. Varma. Everyone, as we conclude today, look, it's interesting, two very different things we're talking about today. A snowstorm came out of nowhere. One of the bigger storms we've seen in a long time, and of course the fight against the coronavirus, the biggest challenge of our time, the biggest crisis this city has ever faced. But what we see in both of these situations, one's just of the moment, the other one we've been dealing with for years, New Yorkers stepping up, doing the right thing, helping each other out, really listening to what needs to be done, and then doing it. So, again, a thank you, thank you to everyone in this city, for the way you handled yesterday, you stayed off the roads, you helped out our Sanitation Department, you looked out for your neighbors. Thank you. That same spirit is what's going to take us through this crisis, overcome the coronavirus and bring us back to a full recovery in New York City. So, I'll say what I've said more than once, I believe in the future in New York City, because I believe in New Yorkers, and you keep showing the world time and time again what you're made of and why we're going to come back strong. Thank you, everyone.

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