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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON NY1

Rocco Vertuccio: And we are speaking by phone this afternoon with the latest on this lead paint crisis impacting the City's public housing authority. Mr. Mayor thanks so much for being with us by phone this afternoon. I want to start off, 800 children that is a new number of children who have tested for elevated levels of lead in their body and that is much larger than what was previously announced from your office. Can you first of all tell us when did you learn of this number and why the big discrepancy here?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: So Rocco let me put this in perspective for - first of all most importantly - I'm a parent and I think this as a parent. I care deeply about the children of our City I want to make sure they are all healthy. What New Yorkers need to know is for years our Department of Health has been following up in each and every case where there is an elevated lead level in any child, by the way the vast majority of cases in the City are not in public housing, they're people who live in other types of housing, private housing. And what we've done in this city for the last decade is reduce the amount of elevated lead levels in kids by about 90 percent in just about a decade.

What used to be tens of thousands of cases a year is now a few thousand cases a year and we've got more to do but we have the best public health department in the entire country and they've aggressively followed up in each for years and they publish the data for years. What hasn't been done is to separate the NYCHA cases which are clearly an absolute minority of the cases or a small percentage of the cases, they have not been published separately. We're going to do that from this point on. But much more importantly we're announcing now a very aggressive effort to go out to every single family, anytime we have a report whether it's public or private housing of a child with an elevated lead level.

Even at the most conservative standard, so we're using a very, very stringent standard here, any indication – meaningful indication - of lead exposure, we're going to send inspectors out to inspect that home, again whether public or private, and to make sure there is remediation. We're also going to track each child through our Department of Health and Health and Hospitals to make sure they're getting the care they need –

Vertuccio: And that's all children under the age of 18?

Mayor: Well first of all the first concern is kids under six because that's when most brain development occurs, zero to five, that's the really the sensitive time and those cases we want to make the priority. But if there's kids who are older we'll follow up on them as well. We want to make sure kids get the care they need. We're going to track each individual case. The most important difference now, and again most of these cases being in private housing, is we're sending out inspectors from this point on and as starting this month –

Vertuccio: So that is – that's starting now, that's starting now?

Mayor: That is starting now and anybody who needs help if they want to report that their child, they're concerned about their child, or they think they may need inspection they can call 3-1-1. If they want to access screenings they can call 3-1-1 and get those through Health and Hospitals. We want this to be available to anyone who needs it. Now you should know that our Department of Health already whenever there's a report by doctor that shows five micrograms or more lead present in a child's system, that automatically is flagged to the Department of Health and that immediately leads to tracking and follow up. That's what's been happening for years. Doctors have been providing those reports to the Department of Health. The Department of Health has been following up –

Vertuccio: Sir, I do – I do want to go back to the 800 number there. So those – when you found out – when those cases were found out, the parents received a letter in the mail but their apartments were not tested, correct?

Mayor: Well some – in some cases they were, in some cases they weren't to the best of my understanding, but I want to be very clear, and this is scientific fact, lead has – lead exposure – lead poisoning comes from numerous sources and here's the challenge – it can be something in the home, it can something out of the home, it can be paint, it can be something else. We know that there could be any number of causes but we don't know in each case what it came from. There's a very rigorous process it takes to try and figure that out. And in each case it's not always successful. Those hundreds are over multiple years, they all were reported to the Department of Health, the Department of Health followed up with those families and with their doctors. But here's the thing Rocco, when you get an initial report, and again the highest most stringent level is five micrograms, it's actually a very low level of exposure but what the federal government said is when you see that level, act quickly to try and make sure nothing worse happens. A child at that level, if they are caught early we can make sure that the problem is isolated and that the child does not suffer from long term consequences. That's why that early detection is crucial. And that was happening in each case with the Department of Health. That's going to intensify now with these home visits by inspectors, again in public and private housing.

Vertuccio: You can understand sir, why so many people might say that your administration has been misleading about this, had something to hide, to not tell the whole truth – in fact the City Comptroller Scott Stringer plans an investigation of your office, the Health Department, and others, what do you say to them sir?

Mayor: Rocco, this information has been provided publically in composite what's happening around the city. As I said, the city has seen a 90 percent reduction in lead paint poisoning, or lead poisoning I should say overall in the last decade. We are actually one of the national leaders on this. We've seen the numbers go down in NYCHA and in private housing but we take every

case seriously. So the information has been out there. It was not [inaudible] for NYCHA, we will do that publically from this point on but remember under Local Law 1, which unfortunately was not followed in the previous administration and I've said very publically, I wish we had caught that mistake, I wish everyone in NYCHA had understood that mistake was made in the previous administration and that we had addressed immediately but now every apartment where there's any indication of lead in NYCHA, is inspected, remediation is done. I want to emphasize that residents in NYCHA have to give access to the people coming to do the remediation. If they don't we will take access—

Vertuccio: And sir, can you say with certainty now, that of all the kids who have been exposed to lead, have elevated levels of lead in their body, they have all been identified now. Or could there be more in the next few days?

Mayor: Anybody, this is my understanding from our Department of Health that any child that has been seen by a doctor and a doctor identified a level of five micro organic grams or more that was reported to the Department of Health and the follow up has continued from the Department of Health. And if those numbers go higher, if that exposure gets higher, there's a more intensive intervention. That's every child who has been identified by a doctor as having an elevated level. If there's any child out there who has not seen a doctor, and a parent fears that there may be a problem with lead, that screening will be provided for free at Health + Hospitals, all they need to do is call 3-1-1 and they can get the information and set up that appointment and get it for free. Everything is going to be for free Rocco, the screening in the home, of the home itself, public and private housing, that will be done for free. If a child needs to come into a Health + Hospitals facility and get a blood test to check on lead levels, that will be done for free. But it's very important, if there's any parent who has not seen a doctor and fears there's been exposure we want them to get their child to a doctor right away.

Vertuccio: Sir, should people in your administration lose their jobs over this? Ritchie Torres, a councilman calling for the resignation of Herminia Palacio, the Deputy Mayor.

Mayor: That's an absolute mistake – Dr. Palacio has been doing all the right things to try and address this issue. Remember for years and years this wasn't even identified as a challenge that again Local Law 1 which is one of the best laws in the country that governs lead paint in this city was not being followed properly in the public Housing Authority going back to 2011. It's now, the problem has been identified, the inspections are being done, the remediation is being done, the Health Department is doing very aggressive follow up on the kids. We got to solve the problem but again Rocco, what's so important, if people think this is primarily a public housing problem, that's not accurate. It's actually primarily a challenge outside of public housing. We want to make sure that any child who has been exposed gets treatment right away. Any home that needs remediation gets it. We need to focus on solving this.

Vertuccio: Mayor de Blasio we appreciate your time this afternoon. Enjoy the Fourth of July, we appreciate it.

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