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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, I hope everyone had a great Christmas, great holidays, really hope everyone got a chance to do something that you love to do with family and friends, even if it had to be on Zoom, and connected with the people you care about, had a chance to reflect on this long, difficult year. But the good news is just a few days left in 2020. 2021 is almost here. Now, for everyone, we talked a lot about travel and it's still going to be an issue up through next weekend. Want to continue to say if you don't need to travel don't, but if you did travel please make sure that you pay attention to these very important guidelines to keep everyone safe. So, if you traveled and you're tested while you were someplace else, and you're going to test again when you're here and test out, so you don't need a quarantine, that's great. If you follow those rules carefully, you'll be safe. But if you did not go through that plan, it's really important to follow the quarantine rules for your safety, for your family's safety. And we make it simple through our Take Care initiative, providing you all the support you need. So, everyone please pay attention carefully to that guidance, follow it. And it's so important to get tested. If you – whatever you're doing, whether you traveled or you didn't get to travel, get tested.

This is going to be a theme even as we're talking about the vaccine finally being here, testing matters immensely. We got to stay focused on it. And we had a really impressive achievement on the 21st of December. Over 100,000 New Yorkers got tested on December 21st. We are continuing to expand testing in this city. This has been one of the great examples of New York City ingenuity, New York City drive. I want to thank everyone who's been a part of our Test and Trace team and all the folks at City Hall and all our agencies, who got together to make sure we could have the maximum amount of testing. We're going to keep building that number up. But over 100,000 New Yorkers were out there on December 21st. Let's keep going farther when it comes to testing. Now, we're looking ahead to 2021, and the vaccine is going to be the crucial, positive game-changing reality of 2021. We are all excited that the vaccine is here. The results so far have been really great. We're going to continue to expand vaccine distribution. This is going to be the difference maker in 2021. Now, it's also going to be the thing that allows us to move forward as a city, let's be clear, providing that vaccine, distributing it as quickly and widely as possible. It is going to be the foundation for our recovery for this city coming back strong.

So, this is going to be, without question, the largest vaccination effort in the history of New York City. It's off to a strong start and it's going to build up more and more each week. We want to

make sure that everyone understands the vaccine is safe, the vaccine is effective, the vaccine is free. And more and more people are realizing what a smart thing it is to get vaccinated. And we're going to be spreading that word. We've seen all over the world people showing up to get vaccinated. The results have been great. Last week in New York City on one day alone, on the 23rd, we had over 12,000 New Yorkers get vaccinated. And that's just a beginning. You're going to see so much more in the days ahead, as the vaccination effort really builds out. So, over 12,000 people got vaccinated on the 23rd – total, to date, 67,000-plus New Yorkers have been vaccinated and results, again, have been great. Now, there's going to be more and more people vaccinated, more categories are being approved by the State of New York so we can keep expanding the vaccination effort to more health care workers, more high risk people. We want to see that continue to build out every single day. And we're working with the State as they continue to refine those rules so we can go farther and farther. So, we talked about testing, we talked about the vaccine, and what the vaccine is going to mean to us, how crucial it's going to be.

But I want to remind you of another crucial health care reality we need to stay focused on. And we've talked about it several times in the month of December, and that is the importance of giving blood. This has been a tough year in so many ways and obviously blood drives have not been happening as usual, but New Yorkers really stepped up. We've, several times, made a public call for New Yorkers to come forward to help your fellow New Yorker, save lives. And almost 13,000 New Yorkers have done that in the month of December. We have another 2,000 scheduled for this week. We want to keep encouraging folks to come forward and give blood. It makes such a difference. Literally can save lives. And because so many of you did come forward. Here's the good news – the city's blood supply, the amount we have on hand, got down as low as three days' supply. It is now 6.5 days. That is much better, much healthier, much safer. We are seeing the highest number of donations lately that we've seen since the beginning of the pandemic. So, New Yorkers, thank you. Thank you for showing up. Thank you for helping your fellow New Yorkers. We need you to keep doing that for the last few days of December and into January so we can protect people. The sites all over the city, open throughout this week, even some open on New Year's Day. You want to do a great new year's resolution, make a resolution to give blood and go out there and help someone in need. And you can sign up at [NYBC.org/givebloodnyc](https://nybc.org/givebloodnyc). There are still prizes being given for people who sign up to give blood, and tickets to the Jets season opener are still up for grabs and the Jets are looking a little better lately so that's going to be a hot ticket. A lucky winner will be drawn in the sweepstakes on January 4th. So, get out there, give blood the next few days, and you might win those tickets to the Jets home openers, and you will definitely help save the life of a fellow New Yorker.

Okay, now I said, all the things we're doing are going to help us recover as a city, come back strong, the vaccination effort, leading the way that's going to be the game changer, New York City's going to recover, and we're going to recover because of the amazing spirit, the ingenuity, the drive, the entrepreneurship, that is just part of the DNA of this place. And that's particularly true when it comes to our local small businesses, our mom-and-pop stores, the businesses people built with their own hands, family businesses that make such a difference. We want to keep helping our local businesses in every way possible. So, our Open Storefronts program has been a key, new innovation to give people the opportunity to sell their wares out on the street, where a lot of people feel, of course, more comfortable shopping at this moment. I'm going to sign an

executive order today, extending the Open Storefronts program through September 30th, 2021. And we're going to add stores and restaurants that sell pre-packaged foods. We want to allow restaurants and other food stores to get out there and make their products available for takeout right out there on the sidewalk. And we think that's going to help them as they continue to fight to survive in this tough environment. So, here to give you an update on why this is important, how it's going to work, our Small Business Services Commissioner Jonnel Doris.

Commissioner Jonnel Doris, Small Business Services: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I'm excited to join you once again to announce the extension of this program. Our small businesses have been doing everything they can throughout this year to stay afloat, to survive. And we've been there right there with them all along. It's reinforced, this pandemic, a direct connection to public health and our economy. We had to reimagine the way that we look at our public spaces, how we engage our small businesses, our community, customers to make our city come back stronger than ever. So, the extension of the Open Storefronts program will help our small businesses survive this pandemic. It allows, as the Mayor mentioned, the pre-packaged food for outdoors, helping restaurants – the 10,000-plus restaurants we have in our program, to participate in the Open Storefronts program and the new feature of the Open Storefronts program, allowing the use of sidewalk for restaurants to take outdoor operations and also allow them to do takeout from that particular location. This is fantastic news for our small businesses, particularly small business advocates, our BIDs, our chambers of commerce, and so many that we've been working with throughout the year as they brought this to our attention. Look, what we've done so far for these businesses, we have done educational training, seminars, reaching out to the 27,000 restaurants we have, also 220,000 small businesses we contact every single week, our interagency webinars that we do, and the like, and so, look, we will continue to do those. We'll make sure that small businesses know what's here for them, the resources they have, particularly this particular program which again is vital to our survival of our small businesses.

But we all have to play our part. And every time I have an opportunity, every time I get a chance, I want to remind New Yorkers to Shop Your City. This campaign is so important. We want you to engage your local businesses. We want you to go out and speak to them and talk to them about what it means to have their support. We need that right now, more than ever. And so, we want to remind everyone to Shop Your City, and to go and do your part. But also, we know we can't do it alone. We did have a federal stimulus, the PPP program, that came through – \$284 million for small businesses. And we're going to help our small businesses connect to that funding. But we need more from our federal government. We did not get any funding for state and local governments, which mean we could have done so much more and do some creative things, but we need them to also pass the Restaurant Act to help us as we do creative things now. We need them to do more, and, also, complete forgiveness, particularly for those businesses in New York City, 87 percent of them who received \$150,000 in those programs or less. So, look, the extension of this Open Storefronts program is a breath of fresh air for our small business community, but also it will bring a revitalization that we're looking – the resurgence of our city to come back stronger and better than ever. So, if you're interested as a small business out there to join this program, you can go to nyc.gov/openstorefronts. And, as always, if you need to contact SBS, you can by calling 888-SBS-4NYC. We've already received over 50,000 calls, helping small businesses during this critical time and we will be there for them, going forward. Mr. Mayor, thank you so much. And, everyone, please remember the shop your city.

Mayor: Well said. Thank you, Commissioner. It's 888-SBS-4NYC. And, everyone, small business owners out there, if you need help accessing those new PPP programs and the federal government or any help, Small Business Services is here for you. They can tailor-make solutions. They can find you help of all sorts of different kinds. Thank you, Commissioner, to you and your team. I know this has been a labor of love for you. And, everyone, thank you – anyone who went shopping locally at the holiday season and focused on small businesses and neighborhood businesses, thank you. Thank you. It made a big difference. And please, just keep doing that throughout the year. So, now, with the Open Storefronts initiative extended, and it's going to be available to the food stores and the restaurants, it's going to be even easier to shop and get the things you need in your neighborhood in a healthy way. I want to encourage everyone to do that. And, with that, we are going to sign right now – I'm going to sign this executive order to extend the Open Storefronts program.

[Mayor de Blasio signs Executive Order]

All right, now, I want to focus us on this concept of what we can do to keep money in our own communities here in the neighborhoods of New York City. I want to focus us on what it means to help each other in this really difficult moment. And we're here in the Kwanzaa season, and it's a time that really helps us think about principles that are so powerful for guiding our lives, particularly in a crisis. I've got to tell you, the Kwanzaa principles, they make so much sense anytime, but, particularly in the tough times we're going through, they really shine through. So, today is a fourth day of Kwanzaa. Today's principle is *Ujamaa*, or cooperative economics. It's a powerful concept. And I want to turn to Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, who is someone who has been leading so many of the initiatives of this administration to help keep money in our communities, to help make sure that people have opportunity who didn't have it before. He's been leading the way on our M/WBE programs for minority and women-owned businesses to get more and more opportunity through government contracts. He has been leading the way on our efforts to help support a worker-owned, employee-owned businesses. It all comes back to this central concept of cooperative economics and creating a maximum self-sufficiency here in our own city. And I want you to hear from the deputy mayor, he's really put his lifetime of his work into this. I want him to talk to you today about this principle, what it means, and how we put it into action. Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, welcome.

Deputy Mayor Phillip J. Thompson, Strategic Policy Initiatives: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. *Ujamaa*, as the Mayor said, means cooperative economics. And economics is not about how a few individuals get rich while most people get left behind. The meaning of economics, which *Ujamaa* speaks to, is how do we support one another in material terms with things like food, housing, and shelter? During Kwanzaa, we always begin with honoring our ancestors. For those of us who are African-American, we can use ancestors as an example of *Ujamaa*. If you look around the country, you'll see Black churches everywhere. And if you look at the cornerstones, the dates when they were founded, many of them were founded just a few years after slavery. And you might ask, how did a people with very little money who just emerged out of slavery manage to build so many churches all across this country? And the answer is cooperative economics. They pooled their money week by week and built these churches. When Booker T. Washington, a former slave, wanted to build Tuskegee University, one of the first

Black colleges, he hired an architect named Robert Taylor, a Black architect, and grandfather of Obama advisor, Valerie Jarrett. Except, when Robert Taylor got to Tuskegee, he found they didn't have any money to build anything. So, what did they do? They organized a brick-making cooperative amongst the students. The students sold bricks across Alabama, and they made the bricks that built Tuskegee. That's literally how Tuskegee got built.

Our administration is taking a cooperative economics approach to M/WBEs. When we spend City revenue to contract with M/WBEs, we are practicing a form of collective economics. Why? Because we are recycling money you pay on taxes to M/WBEs that almost always hire people from neighborhoods within the city. The Mayor has asked us – you just heard him, and Jonnel, as well, buy local, shop local. Why? Because that way your dollars go to help people in your very own community. This too is a form of cooperative economics. Our Department of Housing, Preservation and Development is now promoting community land trust and non-profit ownership and M/WBE ownership of housing. Why? Because that way housing and land become a community asset that we can cooperate together to sustain and prevent displacement. A few weeks ago, we announced a new program – the Mayor did – to help employees buy businesses when their owners want to sell. In the first week after the announcement, we had over 60 owners contact us saying they were interested in this program, because they would like to keep their businesses with their employees after they retire. This too is a form of collective economics.

Looking forward, we will continue to look for new ways to build on the principle of *Ujamaa*, whether in manufacturing locally many of the things we buy from afar, or in using our collective savings, whether they're in banks, pension funds, or insurance companies, to strengthen our communities. We believe the solidarity helps build prosperity, not greed. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Wonderful. Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, I always am spellbound when you give us a sense of the history and the bigger picture. And I know now why you have been such a beloved professor in your work at MIT before you came to us, because it immediately bring everyone into a deeper understanding. So, really appreciate you giving us that insight and wrapping the pieces together. And, again, everyone, the principles of Kwanzaa are ringing through so clearly right now as we face this crisis and overcome this crisis. And thank you for putting it all into perspective, Deputy Mayor.

Deputy Mayor Thompson: Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. So, let me do one more topic here and it plays right off of that. And it's about the fact that in this really painful difficult year 2020 people created. People created things that they didn't think of before that they didn't even know they could do before. We saw incredible strength. We saw incredible cooperation. We saw incredible ingenuity all over the city – our health care heroes, of course; the way small businesses helped each other out; so many people came forward in a spirit of charity and supported their fellow New Yorkers. That's what we've seen throughout 2020. That's what gives me so much faith in 2021, and the years beyond, the way New Yorkers handled 2020 really tells you everything you need to know about our people and our city. We also innovated right here at City Hall. We talked about the Open Storefronts program – obviously, Open Restaurants, Open Streets, whole new ways of doing

things and there's got to be a lot more like that, going forward, because we found in crisis solutions that, ideally, we would've figured out when there wasn't a crisis, but the crisis gave us that transformative moment to do something different and better, and we need to build upon it. We also found new ways to deepen our commitment, to protecting our people. And in this crisis, we know so many people were trying to figure out a way to keep things going, find a way to keep their employment going, find a way to get around that they felt was safe. More and more people of course turned to cycling as an option, and one of the things that we focused on this year was creating protected bike lanes to really ensure that New Yorkers could cycle about the city in the safest way possible. I'm happy to tell you, we have a record number of new protected bike lanes this year. This year, in all five boroughs, we built 28 miles of protected bike lanes. That is just in the year 2020. And now, with that achievement, combining with what was done previously, 133 miles of protected bike lanes that we've built in the last seven years of this administration.

So, this city continues to evolve and change. There's so much that we can do to make it a better city going forward. And we're going to be talking a lot about this in the coming weeks, the future of New York City. Again, we're not going back to a status quo, we are going forward to something better, something more sustainable, something more inclusive, something that will really help this city to grow together. That's what we'll be focused on as we enter into 2021 and this city rebuilds and recovers.

With that, let me turn to our indicators for the day. And I want to say up front, indicators are a little unusual because we, obviously, had different patterns of testing because of the holidays. So, the numbers – got a caution from Department of Health, we should take these numbers with a grain of salt, because they don't necessarily reflect the same trends as when we see more regular testing. But let me go over the numbers. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 182 patients. Again, we want to be under 200, so I'm glad it's under 200. I want to drive that number down a lot. And here's another reason why – hospitalization rate per 100,000 people, 3.93 percent. Very much too high, we want to get that under two – I should say three [inaudible] 3.93 people per 100,000. We want to get that under two. Number two, daily number of cases for COVID-19 on the seven-day average – today's number, 3,390 – very high number. We want to get under 550 – obviously, a long way to go to bring that back. And number three, current testing indicator and seven-day rolling average, again, affected by the unusual testing patterns last few days, but 7.45 percent is the number. The goal is to get back under five percent and go lower again.

Let me say a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that let's turn to our colleagues in the media. And 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 Small Business Commissioner Jonnel Doris, Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Ayana from PIX 11.

Question: Good morning, Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Ayana. How are you doing today?

Question: I'm doing really, really well. Would love to hear some details on the plan and timing to get the COVID-19 vaccine to the members of the NYPD.

Mayor: Ayana, let me start and I'll turn to Commissioner Dave Chokshi. We want to continue to build out the vaccination effort rapidly. Now, this is something we do based on the State guidelines and we're in constant communication with the State about it. I think the more we can build out those priorities so that we can get to more and more people, the better. Right now, of course, the first focus has been on frontline health care workers and on folks in nursing homes and who work in nursing homes, and that's the right priority. But I want to see us get to our first responders as quickly as possible. So, we're waiting for that State guidance to be clarified. And, as soon as it is, we'll get that effort underway. Dr. Chokshi, do you want to add?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Sir, you covered all of the high points. We do have State guidance with respect to health care workers and nursing home staff and residents for this week, as well as next week. And as soon as there is additional State guidance elaborated, we'll be ready to continue vaccinating other people as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead, Ayana.

Question: And so, once you get that State go-ahead to vaccinate NYPD officers, do you feel that there's enough of the stock of the vaccine to get them all vaccinated?

Mayor: So, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, with simply this point, that what we're finding, of course, is the more authorization we get the more we can move our efforts quickly, because the more opportunities – it's organizationally a lot easier to reach people if you always have other people you can turn to who might want the vaccine. Now, that doesn't mean everyone wants it, Ayana. To be fair, this is a voluntary effort, and some people are still not choosing at this moment to take the vaccine. I think you're going to see more and more people want it as time goes by and they see the effectiveness and the safety of the vaccine. But, unquestionably, if we're given the authorization, we can move very quickly. Dr. Chokshi, go ahead.

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, that's exactly right. I'll just add that we have gotten resupplies of the vaccine early this week, meaning yesterday, and we'll continue to get some additional deliveries today and tomorrow as well. And that will help us vaccinate as many people as possible in the groups that have already been prioritized. And then, we'll await further numbers from the federal government with respect to what our allotment will be for January. And I'm hopeful that for both the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccine, there will be sufficient supply for us to keep expanding as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead.

Moderator: As a note, we're joined by Acting DOT Commissioner Margaret Forgione. Next, we'll go to Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today? Happy New Year.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Henry. It's almost here, our dreams are about to be realized.

Question: [Inaudible] a year for you, that's for sure.

Mayor: A better year for all of us, brother.

Question: Okay, man. So, my question has to do with the pace of vaccination in the city. I was looking at some numbers, Israel has a population of 8.8 million, they started vaccinating on December 20th and they vaccinated 495,000 people so far. Yesterday, they vaccinated 115,000 people in a population of 8.8 million, covering some 300 – I'm sorry, you know, obviously a larger area than our 302 square miles. So, my question is, why is – understanding that we've gone through holidays here, but still we're living through an emergency, why is the pace of vaccination so much lower in this city than it is there?

Mayor: First of all, I commend them. I don't know the details of what's happening in Israel, but I commend them. That sounds fantastic. I think we need to look at a variety of factors. First of all, the way the federal government mandates the process is very cautious, if you will, and that does add steps into the process that takes time. We need the State guidance in terms of the categories of people and the more that expands, the faster we can go. The fact is there has been real care getting used to this vaccine and figuring out the best way to implement it and I think that's been important in the first days to make sure everyone was comfortable and it was working right. But I want to see this vaccine campaign takeoff. I really do. And I think we're going to see that more in the coming days. I also think – I don't know about other countries and what level of hesitancy they have or don't have – I think we're going to see some initial hesitancy in some quarters, but I think the more people see folks in their life take the vaccine successfully and see it's safe, see it's effective, know it's for free, you're going to see more and more take up. So those are some of the factors we're dealing with, but I feel very confident this number is going to grow rapidly, especially as we get the authorization to go farther. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay, I just – I do want to say they do have very similar priorities that as we do in terms of who gets it first, but they appear to be going at a much more rapid pace than we are –

Mayor: Just one second, I'll just say staying on your first question then I'll turn to Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi if they want to add anything. Look, throughout the crisis we have learned from other parts of the world, most notably when we put together the plan to reopen our schools, we borrowed health and safety measures from all over the world, we created that gold standard combining all sorts of measures into one. I want us to do the same obviously with vaccination. I want us to look around the world and see what's working, what approaches we can borrow and implement here. So this is just begun. It's going to take off, but Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, you want to add anything?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Nothing else from me.

Mayor: Okay, Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Just to say, sir, that there's nobody more motivated than I am and that I know my colleagues are to have our vaccination rollout occur as quickly as is possible within the regulations and the supply constraints that the Mayor described. And the reason for that is simple, we know that every single vaccine that gets administered means we are one step closer to ending the pandemic, to preventing the suffering, you know, that we've all seen over the last few months. So, we're highly motivated to make sure that this occurs as expediently as possible. We do have to make sure that it occurs fairly and equitably with respect to the priority groups that have been rolled out, and also safely, you know, we want to make sure everything that's happened with respect to the degree of rigor around the safety and the efficacy of the vaccine actually translates into the real world as well. But as the Mayor said, you know, everything that we're doing to prepare for our vaccination campaign will mean that we're ready to expand our circle of vaccination as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: All right. Thank you. My second question goes back to an issue that was discussed during your last briefing, which is the priority for different neighborhoods, disadvantaged neighborhoods, neighborhoods historically disenfranchised in terms of their health care and making them a priority in terms of getting the vaccine. And the fact that there are neighborhoods in the city which have much higher incidents of COVID, for example, Borough Park, 14 percent, Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach – I'm going by the zip code data – 14 percent. Richmond Hill, an immigrant neighborhood, which I don't know has been identified, 13 percent. Bedford-Stuyvesant, five percent. So my question is, has your focus on these historically discriminated against neighborhoods have kind of made it difficult for you as a leader, as a governor, to connect with the people you're governing who may see this as, you know, a slight, obviously, you know, some of these Jewish neighborhoods are, you know, they're saying, hey, you took away our our right to congregate for religiously, now you're not giving us the vaccine when – where our neighborhoods are overrun by a virus.

Mayor: Henry, I appreciate the question because – oh, go ahead. Go ahead.

Question: What is your answer to those people who feel that you are not – that you're favoring one part of the population over them?

Mayor: Okay, I appreciate the question because it's a chance to dispel any misunderstanding. No, we're trying to reach everyone. And I think that's been clear throughout the – when we talked about – let's go back before the vaccine, we had a challenge in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, that happens to be a Latino and Asian community. We had a challenge in Soundview in the Bronx that is more of a Latino community. We had a challenge in Southeast Queens, particularly in African-American community. We then had a challenge in Borough Park, a Jewish community. We went around wherever the challenge was and we addressed it with more testing, more outreach, more support. We had challenges in Brooklyn and Queens more broadly. We did a lot of on the groundwork and worked very closely with community leaders and I've said that

community leaders were fantastic as partners helping us turn the tide and we did in Brooklyn and Queens. So, I think this is clearly about going wherever the need is and working with everybody.

The vaccine distribution, what we said about that I think has been pretty clear. I actually think most people get it quite clearly. The priorities are the ones starting with the federal standards and the State specific guidance that we focus on people across the board in greatest need, the frontline health care workers, the folks in nursing homes, and we build out from there across all communities. We've had to be really clear about the fact that the vaccine will not be distributed based on wealth or privilege, that is going to go where the problem has been greatest just as much any place else and we're going to make it a priority to make sure there is that fairness. And that's why we focus on the 27 neighborhoods that have borne the brunt of COVID. That's just a matter of fairness. It's not to exclude anyone, we're going to be rapidly providing vaccine in all neighborhoods. It's to make sure the places that bore the brunt absolutely get their fair share and get the priority they deserve. So I don't get the sense, certainly with working with a lot of community members and leaders, that people are missing that concept. We want everyone to get vaccinated. We just want to make sure the neighborhoods that bore the brunt get their fair share and that's why we prioritize them. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor and everyone on the call. My question to you about the vaccination paces, what do you say to an 85 or a 90-year-old person who's at home, who's been told they've been prioritized, but they're feeling very anxious because they don't have specific guidance about what to do next. I know Dr. Chokshi said maybe a week or two ago that they can reach out to their doctor because eventually that might be the point of service, but do you have any specific advice to the huge elderly population about what they should be doing right now about getting a vaccine?

Mayor: Thank you, Andrew. Very, very important question and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. I just want everyone to understand that what is so important is to make sure that we first vaccinate the folks who are in greatest risk. Obviously, that's folks in nursing homes, we know that from painful experience and the folks who work there, and all of those frontline health care workers who we're all depending on who every day potentially exposed to COVID. So that's why we start there, but clearly in a matter of weeks, we'll be in a position to start reaching older New Yorkers who certainly are vulnerable and we want them to get that vaccine as quickly as possible. We're going to keep telling them it's safe and it's effective and it's free, and when that time comes, we're going to be constantly making clear how you get it. But I think you're right to say, we better start laying that groundwork now. So, Dr. Chokshi, you can start laying that groundwork now for older New Yorkers who are not yet in the priority categories waiting for that to happen in January and February, help them understand what they should be doing now to get information and get prepared.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, well, first let me just acknowledge I certainly understand the concern just from the human perspective. You know, as a doctor who has cared for many, many of our seniors here in New York, I understand the anxiety, the anticipation, about, you know,

getting a vaccination now that we do have safe and effective vaccines available and we want to get them to our seniors as quickly as is possible. I would just add a couple of other points here. First is that as the Mayor has mentioned, we are rolling out a vaccination in our nursing homes already. New York City was at the very front of the line with respect to activating the National Pharmacy Program to begin vaccinating both residents and staff in our long-term care facility, including nursing homes. That started last week ahead of most other places around the rest of the country and that's something that brings me just a profound sense of hope that we will be able to start averting the suffering, you know, that we've seen in many of those places as quickly as possible.

To the question about what people who are older New Yorkers and are at home right now should be doing during this time. I encourage you to to make sure that everyone is up to speed about the facts around the vaccine. Get your questions answered so that when the vaccine does become available more broadly, you'll know where to go, you'll have, you know, a list of things that you may want to discuss with your doctor already checked off and you're prepared to get the vaccine as soon as it's available. The final thing that I will convey, again, you know, out of a concern from seeing our cases and hospitalizations are continuing to be at worrisome levels is that we all have to do our part to protect older New Yorkers until that time comes, when all of them can get the protection from the vaccine. So doing all of the things that we've emphasized with our public health guidance is important, not just for ourselves, but to be able to protect our seniors in the coming weeks and months.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Can have to do with the seven-day positivity, the numbers are above seven percent now pretty consistently and we haven't even factored in the post-Christmas gathering surge. How concerned are you that that number will above nine percent [inaudible] and essentially schools will not be able to reopen in-person?

Mayor: I think I heard you, you were breaking up a little bit there, but I think I got the question, Andrew. Look, obviously everyone's watching and we should be watching for any effect from the holidays that will play out well into January. But when it comes to the school's issue, I want to go back to something I said back on December 8th, which is, you know, the State has the standards, the State sets those rules, the State has the numbers that they go by. We'll be working with them. We'll be making sure to monitor what's happening every step of the way. But, right now, I remain confident with all the work that's being done, our schools are extraordinarily safe. I've got now data for you based on just in the few weeks since we reopened in December. So, basically, December 7th to December 23rd, almost a 100,000 tests taken at New York City schools, positivity rate students, staff, everyone combined based on 100,000 tests, 0.68 percent. So, look at the amazing success that we've had in our schools keeping them safe. Clearly New York City public schools one of the safest places to be in all New York City. So, I'm confident that we can and should keep them open. But again, the State will make that ultimate decision based on State data and State standards.

Moderator: Go ahead, next is Sydney from Gothamist.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. I have a question on the vaccine priority groups and distribution as well. Just with the expected groups to be people who are at high risk of COVID or older people, I'm wondering, do we know what health conditions put someone at risk to be considered in a priority group? And the CDC recently set their advisory guidelines as an older person, meaning 75 and older, how does that play out at the city level and is the city waiting on guidance from the State to answer those questions specifically?

Mayor: We turn to Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thank you for these important questions. Let me start with the first one, which is what are the underlying health conditions that put someone at a greater risk from COVID-19 and particularly from severe outcomes related to COVID-19. We do now have a fair amount of scientific evidence that has shown that people who do have a chronic health conditions, these are things like cancer, chronic kidney disease, diabetes, emphysema, heart conditions, sickle cell disease, those are, you know, a sampling of the conditions that that we worry about with respect to someone being at risk of severe outcomes and I do think that will be a similar list that the CDC takes into account when they determine prioritization for, you know, for people along with age, as well as risk of exposure, particularly for people who are frontline essential workers.

And then the second part of your question is, you know, as you mentioned the CDC did issue some recommendations with respect to what's called phase 1-E. So, the second part of phase one in terms of prioritization and that included older adults above the age of 75, these are recommendations that the federal government makes then states have to – if you – their own prioritization guidance for. The State has not come out with formal guidance for phase 1-E yet, so we're still awaiting that as we think about what the next group will be beyond health care workers and nursing home staff and residents.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Sydney.

Question: Okay. And then my other question is for you, Mr. Mayor, as well as the Acting Commissioner Forgione. Given the city is on track to see one of the deadliest years with traffic fatalities and as the vaccine rolls out, we're going to see more people commuting again and moving about the city. I'm just wondering, given your bike lane announcement today around the numbers of how many bike lanes were put into place this year, what do you and the active Acting Commissioner plan to do in the coming year to make more progress on those – on Vision Zero goals, and would that include increasing the bike lane goals or more concrete efforts to make sure bike lanes are actually protected as intended in the first place?

Mayor: Thank you, Sydney, I'll start and I'll turn to the acting commissioner. Look, Vision Zero. Let me say at the beginning, it has been a very tough year. It's been a very tough year on so many levels, and it has been a tough year for lives we've lost, including the lives we've lost on our streets. We know there's been way too much speeding. We know we have to crack down on that in 2021. We also know that the more life starts to get back to something like normal. The better ability we'll have to do that, but it's also, to me, a call to arms that vision zero needs to keep expanding rapidly on every front, whether it's protected bike lanes or, or any type of bike lane,

whether it's enforcement, whether it's the speed cameras, and obviously we're going to fight in Albany to get that expansion of the timing of the speed cameras. That's absolutely crucial. That's one of the things that's going to save lives the most. So, we have a very aggressive vision, zero agenda for 2021. Specifics will be forthcoming obviously. But I can tell you it's going to be a high priority. Commissioner, go ahead.

Acting Commissioner Margaret Forgione, Department of Transportation: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. As the Mayor said, this was a very bad year for Vision Zero, mainly due to increased speeding that we saw on our roadways with a reduced traffic. So next year as the Mayor has previously mentioned, we'll be working with the state legislature to look at having our cameras on 24/7. In addition, we'll be working to continue all of our lifesaving projects that we have seen do result in fewer injuries and fewer fatalities. We will continue with our protected bike lane work. We hope to do a little bit more than what we've done this year, and this was our best year ever as the Mayor said. So, all of these things combined we look to next year to having much better Vision Zero numbers than we had this year.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah. Good morning, everyone. Thanks for taking the call. I hear you, Mr. Mayor, talking about some of the positive developments related to the vaccinations, because I wanted to ask about another aspect of the outbreak. Don't enjoy bringing this up, but I do see on the city's COVID-19 data page, that the number of New Yorkers who have died from the virus surpassed 25,000 recently, the latest number appears to be 25,008. Any thoughts you can share on this?

Mayor: It's incredibly painful, Shant. Look, every one of these people we've lost are part of our lives. Part of our family's part of our communities and all lost to a disease that about a year ago, we had never even heard of, and, you know, it's shocking, still, it's shocking. We can never get numb to just how horrible this has been, and I think the one thing it makes me feel in particular is resolved to protect every single New Yorker right now with this vaccine and to make sure people know it is safe and is effective and it's going to be available widely, and we need people to get it, to protect themselves and their families. I think that's – that's the thing we can do right now to honor those we've lost. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah. Thank you for that. Switching gears to Albany, the state legislature passed strengthened protections from evictions, any comments on that? And is there anything else you want to see from Albany related to helping out New Yorkers financially with rent otherwise at this point?

Mayor: Yeah. I mean, look, I really want to thank the legislature for the action they took. It's very, very important. You know, folks who have no income, haven't had income for months and months, no fault of their own. If people can't pay the rent, if they just don't have the money, we cannot allow them to be put out on the street. We need to keep a roof over their heads. So, I'm very, very appreciative that the legislature acted. We still need a real stimulus from Washington, and what we, I think need additionally from Albany is further action to help protect people. I've

talked before about the payment plan idea to really give a long-term relief and stability to renters. So, they have the knowledge, they can stay in their apartment long-term if they can't afford to rent, now they can pay it in the future when they can. I would far prefer our true stimulus that, you know, put money directly in the hands of renters and landlords to make up anything that's happened. That wasn't any of their faults. But in the meantime if we at least get some kind of payment plan law to make sense of the years ahead, I think that would help, and it's just always state the common sense for those who are blessed enough to have income pay the rent. It's so important for those who don't, you should not be penalized. You should be allowed to stay in your home until life gets back to something more normal and people should have the ability to stay long-term and have a payment plan to make sense for them. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Steve from WCBS radio.

Question: Mr. Mayor, hope you had a nice holiday. Just wanted to check – I'm about to head out to the FDNY's first vaccine at their headquarters in Downtown Brooklyn, and you know, the story a few weeks back was that the union did a survey there and found 55 percent of members did not want the vaccine. I know it's a kind of a thorny issue to say whether it becomes mandatory or not, but what kind of becomes the outreach and the education to make sure you get more than 45 percent of the FDNY vaccinated?

Mayor: Steve, look, I think we should really recognize, even in the last weeks we see in people's experience with the vaccine, very favorable outcomes. We see the word of mouth impact as people talk to the people in their lives about the experience they have, the vaccine that more and more folks are reassured. It's so clear that it is safe and effective, and the public opinion research is showing more and more people around the country are now saying they do want the vaccine. So I think you're going to see a change literally week by week, but our job is to make it available to all these heroes, all these folks who were there through the thick of this, and it's their choice. We do not have at this moment a plan to do anything but voluntary. We'll see how things play out, but that's the plan right now, but I do think you're going to see people get more and more comfortable with it with every passing week. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: And also, just to follow up on these questions about the pace of vaccine distribution I know you said about 67,000 had been done up to this point. The Governor yesterday said that the city will have about 369,000 doses through this week. So obviously we start to see what those numbers, some concerns about popping up in some places. So just strictly from a logistical point of view, how do you avoid having some of those bottlenecks and having, you know, vaccines, hundreds of thousands of doses sitting on the shelves just simply because you can't get them out fast enough.

Mayor: Yeah. Steve, we've got real work to do here, but I do not see that scenario taking place, honestly. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, I'd say it's this simple: again, I mentioned there are some specific federal rules that I think need to be examined to see how they can help us speed up the process. But the other question is just us having the ability to reach more and more constituencies, more and more people, and that's based on the state authorization, that's a conversation that's happening literally every day, every hour with the state to determine how quickly that expansion could happen. But I feel very confident. I've had this conversation in great

detail with our healthcare team that as we get authorized to do more and more populations of people will be able to move very quickly. I do not see a time when we have a lot of supply hanging around. I think it's going to move very quickly from when we get it to when it is implemented. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, that's exactly right. Mr. Mayor. The pieces that we've already talked about, number one the supply of vaccine and then number two, making sure that the categories of eligibility are broadened out and done so rapidly. Those are the major things that we're looking at with respect to ensuring that this happens as quickly as possible with his which was one of our primary goals is as we've discussed. But one other element to this that I do want to mention particularly here in the early weeks, is that it's important to realize that the different access points for vaccination are all coming online in a phased way. So, we started in our first week with hospitals and making sure that the hospital workers are getting immunized that allows those hospitals to deliver the care that we need, but also to start to vaccinate beyond their staff, which we'll start to see in the coming weeks.

Similarly, last week, community health centers known as federally qualified health centers started vaccinating their own staff. That means that whole set of clinics will come online as a set of access points more broadly for New Yorkers, and this week, now that we have the state go-ahead, a staff in urgent care centers will also be vaccinated. So then urgent care centers will also be able to vaccinate others. So, in these early weeks, it does take, you know, a bit of time for all of those access points to start coming online. But we're seeing that expand, and that will mean come January, we'll have a much broader set of bases that will be able to administer the vaccine.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more first all go to Jillian from WBAI.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, happy new year.

Mayor: Happy new year to you, Jillian. How are you doing?

Question: I'm okay. I'm well, it was a nice quiet holiday because I'm an atheist. So, there wasn't really anything to do. Which was better. I'm sorry.

Mayor: No, I was going to say whatever works for you. God bless.

Question: Well, not God, but okay. Anyway, I wanted to ask you, because in September I did ask you about the developments around the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens and Arch towers and the 1991 shadow study, and the zoning guidelines that the think it's an administration they're putting into place so that the Botanic Gardens would be protected, and you gave a very extensive answer on affordable housing and community benefits, and then you came out and said you're against the large tower, the 960 Franklin – I believe the 960 Franklin Avenue tower, and so I wanted to know what went into changing your mind?

Mayor: Well, first of all, I appreciate your question, Jillian. I always want to give credit where credit is due and because you asked the question you know, it gave me the opportunity to turn to my team and say, Hey, I want to get briefed on this because there've been a lot of other things going on with COVID and all. I hadn't been focused on that development when I heard the details of it. It was just abundantly clear. It made no sense. It was wildly out of scale, and the claims that were being made on affordable housing were not believable to my team, and when I went over the details with them, I said, this just doesn't make sense, not just alone because of the impact on Botanical Garden, which is a real issue too, but it just didn't make sense for the neighborhood, and, you know, I say if a developer wants to win public support, they better come in with real community benefits and be responsive to community concerns, and this project just wasn't doing that. So, I thought it was important to come out in opposition to it upfront. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks. I appreciate that. So as a follow up the day after you made your decision public, the court decided against a different, smaller building. It's also on Franklin Avenue and that's been in litigation for a while, and so [inaudible] movement to protect the people and its allies one on, on its merit. There was an article that said the city was going to appeal. So, I want to know is that still in the plans?

Mayor: I'll always tell you when I feel I'm up to date on something when I'm not on this one, I don't feel up to date, so I will get a briefing on it and I'll make sure my team gives you an update. Just want to make sure I'm always getting the latest information before I answer you. So, we'll get that to you. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor and happy new year.

Mayor: Happy new year.

Question: Thank you. Thank you. I just wanted to ask as in the coming weeks, as some people get the second dose of the vaccine, will any allowances be made for people who have had the vaccine, maybe though let's say stop wearing a mask or things like that?

Mayor: I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi we've talked about this. Look, I think the important thing here is to think about this over the first six months of the new year. This is an initial estimate. Obviously, it will change as we get more information, but I think it's fair to say over these next six months we intend to see as, you know, wide swath of New York City vaccinated as humanly possible. We can reach all New Yorkers over that timeframe. We want to see people get comfortable with the vaccine and want to participate. But I think to say, you know, that six months' window is what makes sense, and during that six months to realize that there was more and more people getting vaccinated, there's still going to be a lot of people are not yet vaccinated. The threat of the disease is very real. Obviously, we are concerned about what we saw come out of Great Britain in terms of a mutation of the disease. So we want to stay on guard. That is my preface to say, we want people to keep wearing their masks. We want them to keep practicing social distancing, and we want them to keep limiting travel, keeping

gatherings very small. All of these rules make sense for the next six months, just to keep protecting each other until we are fully clear of this disease in terms of, you know, the impact it's having now. Dr. Varma, then Dr. Chokshi.

Senior Advisor Varma: Great, thank you for the question, and I agree completely with what the Mayor just said. I mean, the way I like to think about it is that we have different layers of defense. You know, up until this moment, we've been using individual measures, wearing a mask, keeping your distance, washing your hands, and we've been using community restrictions and we've been using our Test and Trace score, which has this incredible milestone of a hundred thousand people tested on a single day. Now we have an additional line of defense, which is the vaccine. But it's the things we don't know are exactly what level of vaccination and what level of mask wearing, what level our restrictions is going to bring us to the level that we need, where people can go about their regular lives, and there's going to be very few or no deaths from this infection.

So for the exact moment, right now, our recommendation is very strong, and this is the consensus everywhere that even if you've been vaccinated, you need to continue wearing a and continuing to maintain your distance. All of that may change in the future, as we learn more, both at the scientific level about how much and how long people maintain their protection, and as we learn more at this population level about what happens to our case rates and when we can start relaxing some of these defenses until we can get back to a period when we all feel like life is more normal.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Nothing to add, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Okay, great. Go ahead, Reuvain.

Question: Yeah. I just wanted to follow up on what Henry asked. Those 27 neighborhoods, so just to be clear, will they in any way to get priority as far as getting the vaccine, or is it only regarding like outreach and education?

Mayor: No, it's making sure the vaccine gets to where it's needed most look Ravenna. I don't think you'll be shocked if I said historically when there's something like this that could have such a profound impact on people too often things went to people who had the most privilege, the most money did not go according to need. We're focused on – the most dire need has been in the communities hardest hit by COVID. So, we're going to make sure that communities get their fair share and are prioritized to make sure we can keep the maximum number of people safe, and we know where some of the greatest danger has been. The goal is to get every single person vaccinated, and we're going to be working with community groups, working with elected officials, working with community institutions to maximize that in every neighborhood. But we very much want to remember where the pain has been greatest, where the danger has been greatest to make sure that is reflected in how we prioritize.

Alright, everyone, look, as we conclude today, first I want to just say on a programming note, I'll be back in two days on Thursday for the last press conference of the year, and that will be a joyous moment because it means at that point, it will only be hours until 2020 is over. But look, I hope you're feeling what I'm feeling. We're going to turn the page on this godforsaken year. We're going to move forward. There's so much possibility ahead for this extraordinary city, for the people who have been heroic this year, fighting back COVID. Next year is going to be the year of recovery and rebirth and renaissance it's coming. So, I'll see you again one more time this year, and we'll start the countdown then as we get ready to say goodbye to 2020. Thanks, everyone.

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