

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Let me start by telling you a story and it's a story of heroism, our health care heroes, our health care leaders, the folks on the ground and the folks who organize the massive effort to protect the people of this city, to save this city, to fight off one of the most difficult foes we've ever seen in our history, the coronavirus. Our health care heroes saw us through those horrible months of March and April, dealing with an absolutely unprecedented challenge. Our hospitals held, our public hospitals at Health + Hospitals did amazing work, all our hospitals around New York City, we honor the heroism, the folks who had everything thrown at them, but they held the line. They saved lives. And then as we move forward, there was challenge after challenge. We didn't have enough PPE in this city, we couldn't get PPE from anywhere in the world. Our federal government wasn't there for us, but we kept finding supplies anywhere we could. There were a lot of heroic efforts by New Yorkers in the government and beyond who made things happen and we partnered with the private sector, with the universities, with anyone who offered help to create PPE here in New York City, ventilators as well, whatever it took, we created a whole pandemic response lab in this city. All of these efforts came from the heroic desire of New Yorkers to protect and save New Yorkers and time and time again, they saved the day and I honor them for that. Then it came time to create what we knew would be key to fighting back, a Test and Trace Corp. We created the biggest, strongest Test and Trace Corp. in this nation. Our health care leaders, our health care workers did that, people contributed to make that work. Then it came time to open the nation's largest public school system, and once again, our health care leaders, our health care heroes, our health care workers were their working with educators and staff, together doing what many said was impossible. Not only opening the schools, making them the safest places in New York City.

This is a clear record of achievement and I want to speak up for our health care heroes, I want to speak up for our health care leadership and let everyone know how exceptionally they have performed. And I think it's about trusting the people who have actually done the work, trusting the people who have accomplished so much time and time again, trusting people who have devoted their whole lives to protecting and saving the lives of others. That's what we're doing here in the city and it has worked time and time again, and it will work again going forward as we mount the largest vaccination effort in the history of New York City. Trust is crucial and I want to express to everyone, I want express clearly my trust in our health care leaders and our health care workers, all the health care heroes, and I want to say very clearly, there are health care heroes in cities and counties all over New York State doing the exact same thing. They should be trusted – they need to be trusted too. They should be respected too. Look, all the people that frontline have done the work deserve our trust and respect, and we need to listen to them. We need to listen to them to know what will work. So, to all those City health officials all over the State of New York, all those county health officials, thank you for what you do. Let's all work together to vaccinate people and move forward.

Look, this is a moment for cooperation. This is a moment for trust. This is a moment for partnership. What we need is the freedom to vaccinate. We need to listen to our health care leaders and our health care workers who are saying, give us the flexibility to vaccinate more and more people, let us have the ability to do our jobs the right way, give them the freedom to vaccinate, and they will vaccinate thousands, and tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, then millions. What they don't need is to be shamed. What they don't need is more bureaucracy. What they don't need is the threat of fines. If the State of New York says, well, you get a million-dollar fine if you move too quickly and you get a \$100,000 fine if you move too slowly, that doesn't get anyone anywhere. That just paralyzes people. Why don't we stop talking about fines and start talking about the freedom to vaccinate, letting the professionals do their jobs. So, we are going to move with every conceivable speed, capacity, creativity, flexibility to do what we can do, but we need help from the State government. We need help from the federal government and I'll speak to the federal piece as well, because there really are crucial things that we need from the federal government to make this work. But the bottom line is our health care leaders, our health care workers are doing the job every single hour of every day. And by the way, there's a lot of people that want the vaccine. There's also people who don't want the vaccine yet, and we need to be aware of that in our plans. And that's okay if they don't want it yet, we'll get them later. But right now, now we want to reach everyone who is ready, willing, and able to get vaccinated.

Here to tell you about the efforts of our public health care system, again, our public hospitals and clinics have been heroic. Our health care heroes throughout have sustained us. The investments we made years ago, we put hundreds of millions of dollars into Health + Hospitals to make it strong well before we ever heard of the coronavirus, those investments were worthy because our health care heroes were there for us. Pleasure to introduce the CEO of Health + Hospitals, Dr. Mitch Katz.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Mayor, and you know, our staff was so honored when you came, it will be three weeks tomorrow that you came to Elmhurst Hospital and we started vaccinating those health care heroes and we started, as the State has asked, with the people at the highest risk, those two people you remember, sir, were one worked in the ICU, one worked in the emergency department were people have breathing tubes, which put people at high risk. Both of them you'll remember we're over 60 –

Mayor: Yes.

President Katz: Right. So, we started very narrowly. But in these last three weeks, I'm happy to tell you, we have vaccinated everyone in all 11 hospitals who have patient care responsibilities, so they are protected. They can go and take care of their patients and know that they are not themselves going to fall ill to this illness. Now starting yesterday, the State gave us approval to vaccinate everybody in the hospitals. So, by the end of this week, sir, we are going to vaccinate everybody in the hospitals. All staff who want to be vaccinated, we are going to do it. I was pleased to follow in the footsteps of those two great heroes and get my own vaccine when we opened it up to outpatient doctors and when I see my patients this Wednesday, because it's been 10 days, I will know that I'm not going to transmit the virus to them and I can take care of them

without the same worry that I'm going to bring home that virus to my family or elderly parents.

But there's so much more, sir, that we really want to do. We're going to be starting this week to take care of vaccinating the affiliated – excuse me – the unaffiliated physicians, that those are the physicians who worked so hard in the community. They are often taking care of patients from low socioeconomic areas. The dentist, the physical therapist, the home health care aides, the optometrists, we want to vaccinate all of those people so that they too can do their patient care work without worrying about getting infected themselves or worrying that they are going to transmit this virus to someone else. But I have to say, sir, what will make me most happy is when I can vaccinate my own patients. I have several patients who are over the age of 75 with diabetes and heart disease. I want to be able to vaccinate them. We have the ability to do it at our health centers and our hospitals. We simply need the approval from the State so that we can get going on these other groups. The health care heroes deserve to be first. They were at the greatest risk. They gave up – sadly – many of them gave up their lives in order to be able to care of the patients, but we next want to go to the highest risk people, which we know are elderly persons. I want to be able to do those patients in my patient panel who I'm the primary care doctor for. I want to do all of the patients of Health + Hospitals. I know the other hospitals want to be able to offer it to their patients. I think two of my 98-year-old father, you know, World War II vet, my 93-year-old mother, I want them vaccinated. We are waiting our turn, of course, but I want that turn to come and I feel with your leadership, sir, we are ready. We are ready to do those people at greatest risk and we look forward to working with you in the coming weeks to see them vaccinated. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Katz, and what a beautiful story of Mitch Katz's is 98-year-old dad, World War II hero – thank God, still with us. And, Mitch, I have really admired your devotion to your mom and dad, it's something I love about you and appreciate about you. But, everyone, listen, his 98-year-old dad is not allowed to get the vaccine right now, that just doesn't make sense. Let's all work together. Let's create the flexibility. Again, give the city the freedom to vaccinate, give our health care heroes the freedom to vaccinate. So, if someone's 98, let's get them a vaccine. If someone's in one of Mitch Katz's hospitals and they're over 75, they should automatically have the right to be vaccinated. We can do more than one thing at once. We can focus on vaccinating all the health care heroes who want the vaccine, all the folks in nursing homes and who work at nursing homes who want the vaccine, while simultaneously expanding the categories, reaching folks over 75, reaching educators, reaching police officers, reaching all of the folks who we need to get the vaccine as quickly as possible. Look, it just is common sense, because we want to get the folks who want the vaccine, but there's a lot of people who are not yet ready. That's okay. Again, that's okay. But when we look at these numbers, we've got to keep in our minds the fact that there's still a substantial number of New Yorkers who are going to take a pass in the first round. That's another reason we need more flexibility, because if you've got a group of people you're authorized to give a vaccine to but a lot of them are not ready to do it and say no, you need to move on to the next group as quickly as possible. You can't be bogged down. That's why we need that greater freedom.

Okay. Now, the federal government – crucial, obviously, in this equation. And what we need the federal government to do is to clear the way, make things simpler, make them clearer, solve some of the problems that are bogging down this effort. I've said very clearly, Operation Warp Speed actually achieved something very, very important and crucial in working with the global

scientific community to get these vaccines to all of us in record time. But we need that attitude of warp speed to now be about how quickly we vaccinate everyone. Other nations around the world are showing us great examples. We need federal leadership. I sent this letter to Vice President Mike Pence, and this is online so everyone can see it, and I said, look, we've got a challenge, because, right now, in New York City, we don't know when we're getting future shipments. We can't plan. We need to get a million doses done in the month of January. We don't know where those doses are coming from yet. We need the federal government to fully use the Defense Production Act to maximize production, to give us the most possible clarity about the schedule so we can plan accordingly. But beyond that, we need the government to do much more to make sure that nursing home residents and staff are vaccinated. They've created an initiative with pharmacies. That's great, but it's not moving quick enough. We need the federal government to step in. I sent a letter to Vice President Pence as the leader of Operation Ward Speed, but also the Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, and the Director of the CDC Robert Redfield. We need all of them to help move these goals forward. So, the pharmacy effort has to be a lot stronger. On top of that, right now, there are real supports and real incentives for health care providers to provide testing, but not for them to provide vaccines. We need to clarify that, give them the same incentives, give them every reason to want to get vaccines to people in the priority areas. Finally, something the FDA can do – the FDA – I want to tell you, we've been working closely with the FDA and with Stephen Hahn who runs the FDA, has been a great partner. I want to thank him. But we need them to do something our health care leadership has been raising to me for days now. We need the FDA to give approval and to health care providers to pre-fill syringes so vaccination can go much more quickly. We can create a positive vaccination assembly line where a lot of people get vaccinated once because those syringes are ready. Right now, the FDA does not allow hospitals and health care providers to do that. They need to, to help us move. So, look, we can all work together. We can all get all these pieces worked through and work as one – federal, State, local government to get things done. That's the spirit we need to bring to this. So, what I hope we will see is clear answers from the federal government in these next few days. I know the current administration is leaving office in about two weeks, but there's still a lot of good they could do and help us to reach as many people as possible with the vaccine.

All right. Now, what are we going to do? Well, we're going to take a next step in our effort beyond hospitals and clinics and the sites that we've set up already, about 125 sites in New York City, going up to about 160 this week. We to start a new kind of site, a mass vaccination site. We want to create public sites where anyone in the appropriate categories can come 24-seven and get vaccinated. They'll be in all five boroughs. And look, we think if you create sites that anyone can come to any time, they know the vaccines free – I want to emphasize to all New Yorkers, the vaccine is free, it's safe, it's effective. Starting in a few days, these sites will be set up. And what you're going to see are a place where anyone can come any hour of the day, get a free vaccine, get it quickly. Sites will be, again, in all five boroughs, but we need State approval and support to move this effort. We have the capacity. We have the personnel. We need support. And I'm particularly thinking about those folks over 75, and, of course, I'm thinking about all of the essential workers, the public workers, the first responders, the educators, but also the grocery store workers, the folks who have been with us through this crisis, the folks who are at the frontline of help make sure we all get food; transit workers, the folks who bore the brunt of this crisis in so many ways, but we're there for us. I want it to be easy for all of them to get vaccinated. Again, with State support, with State approval, we can move that in a matter of days and open up a whole new front. Some of the sites – so, again, they'll be in all five boroughs.

We'll be announcing sites as they're ready, but some of the sites that are being planned right now – Brooklyn Army Terminal, the Annex Building in Sunset Park, Brooklyn; the Bathgate Industrial Park in the Bronx; La Marqueta in East Harlem. These will all be public sites, City-owned sites and we'll be getting details to you about exact schedules and locations as they come online. And again, this is in addition to all Health + Hospitals facilities, to the vaccine hubs that we've been setting up already, including in public school buildings and Department of Health pop-up sites. We're going to have capacity all over the five boroughs. We want to make it easy and quick and accessible to all.

Now, one more point, and this is a challenge we all face, which is while we've been ramping up the vaccine effort – and, again, we know the capacity of this city, because we saw it time and time again. We saw it with Test and Trace Corps. We saw it with opening schools. We know we can do it, but we've got a new foe now, this new variant that first was identified in the United Kingdom. We all should be worried about this. Thank God, not because it's more deadly, but because it does spread, unfortunately, even faster. We need the federal government to step up here and ban all travel from the United Kingdom to the United States of America. And I'm, obviously, specifically most concerned about the three airports serving New York City. It's time to stop the half measures. I mean, right now, you can still get on a plane in London, not even have proof that you have a negative test and merrily come over to New York City and spread the disease. Why? Why is that going on? Why still after all these challenges and problems is this madness still going on? This new variant is tremendously troubling. Let's have a travel ban right now – a travel ban from the United Kingdom to the United States to protect all of us. Buy us time to get the vaccinations done and protect people. But if we don't have a travel ban, then we're literally inviting this new, horrible variant in the door even more and that makes no sense. So, I call upon the federal government to act now while we can. The amount of inconvenience it causes to travelers pales in comparison to the danger this variant poses to all of us. Let's shut down that danger right now.

All right, today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 210 patients. Obviously, we want to be below 200. That number is still too high. Hospitalization rate 4.07 per 100,000, still too high. Again, that being said, hospitals are doing amazing work right now. Whether you're talking about public hospitals, independent hospitals, voluntary hospitals, they're all doing really extraordinary work. They're holding the line well. They have capacity. So, even with these daunting numbers, kudos to our health care workers, our health care leaders, our hospital systems for the great work they're doing. Number two, daily number of new cases of COVID-19 – today's number, 4,600 – excuse me, 4,064 – 4,064, way, way above where we want to be. And percentage of New York City residents testing positive, seven-day rolling average – today, 9.03 percent. Again, way above where we need to be. We need to turn that tide and the vaccine is the best way to do it.

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: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, by Dr. Katz, by Dr. Long, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today, it goes to Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Mayor, I want to drill down on your argument about flexibility from the State. Are you really making the case that the sole reason that City hospitals have not used all of their allotted vaccine is because you don't have the flexibility to vaccinate people outside the 1-A category?

Mayor: Andrew, I appreciate the question a lot. Look, there's two points here. First, we needed the freedom to vaccinate. We need to listen to our health care leaders. They are saying, give us freedom and flexibility and we'll be able to vaccinate a lot more people who are all high-priority people. But second, of course, we want to always do better, and that's why we're ramping up this effort. The first few weeks, we had to make sure that things were safe, that we really could use this vaccine properly – brand-new vaccine, brand-new reality, different refrigeration reality than we've ever had before, etcetera. We needed to make sure it was safe. We needed to make sure we could do it right. But now, we have got to sprint. So, that's on us. That's on me, personally. I take full responsibility. I know the health care leadership of this city does too. Within each category, we have to do the most possible. And I'll turn to Dr. Katz to emphasize this point off your question, Andrew, we cannot leave out of this discussion the point that there are a number of folks, even in the health care world, who do not yet choose to be vaccinated. So, I want to use up every single dose we have, but we can't give a dose to someone who is not willing to take it. That's part of the challenge here. Dr. Katz?

President Katz: Andrew, last week we walked through the hospitals, through all of the clinical areas and we told people who hadn't been vaccinated, come vaccinate now. We'll cover your patients. On work time, come vaccinate now. We've had amazing, amazing take-up from our physician staff. But among the nursing and support staff, as the Mayor has said, there are people who have justifiable concerns. They need some more time. They worry about the speed the vaccine was developed. They want some more time before they're ready to be vaccinated. So, yes, we have vaccinated at Health + Hospitals all of the clinical people who wish to be vaccinated. Starting yesterday, we were given approval to go broader, outside of the clinical areas, but still the critical functions of the hospital. And also, this week, we will be doing the unaffiliated providers. But by the end of last week, I had vaccinated all of those people in the clinical areas who wanted to be vaccinated at all 11 hospitals. And I know my colleagues in the other hospitals have done that as well.

Mayor: Andrew, again, I want to come back to the common sense here. I want to give the freedom to our health care workers to vaccinate everyone available in their facility at any given moment. So, for example, not just the frontline health care personnel, but everyone who works in the hospital is part of that hospital ecosystem. I want all of them to have the right to be vaccinated. I want everyone who is in a hospital and is over 75 years old to be vaccinated. Again, just think of the common sense here. You've got the vaccine, you've got the staff, you're in the hospital – everybody willing in that building at any given hour should get vaccinated. Let's loosen up these rules. Everyone is still a priority person, but this way we know we keep moving things forward. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: [Inaudible] square that answer with the Governor's statistics that show a hospital, for example, like New York Presbyterian, using 99 percent of its allotment?

Mayor: I'll turn to Dr. Katz and be clear. First of all, Health + Hospitals accepted allotment for many, many other providers far beyond Health + Hospitals. And, obviously, it takes time to get that vaccine out to each of them and for them to be able to use it. And, again, what we talked about here with the federal government, the rules for how you provide the vaccine are cumbersome. You literally cannot put the vaccine into syringes in advance, that slows everything down. We need these rules opened up too. So, Health + Hospitals has been taking in vaccine for lots of different folks and hasn't been able to vaccinate everyone they would like to. Obviously, those are challenges. Plus, some of their supply just came in. But we want to do better. So, Andrew, again, I accept full responsibility. I know Dr. Katz does too. We want to make sure that every dose is used, but we need some help and flexibility to do it. Dr. Katz, do you want to add?

President Katz: Yes. Andrew, the group of unaffiliated physicians and nurses and physical therapists in the community is 50,000 people. And that that group is going to be done in bulk by Health + Hospitals starting this week. So, that's why the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene moved the vaccine to us in preparation of us doing that this week. So, while the numerators that you saw are accurate, and I think both us and Presbyterian have done a great job of vaccinating the people in the highest risk, the denominator reflected this week's work, which we uniquely are doing.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Amanda from Politico.

Question: Good morning. How is everyone?

Mayor: Good, Amanda. Happy New Year to you.

Question: Happy New Year. So, I wanted to follow up on your mass vaccination site plans. So, in DC – Washington DC sent out a portal, saying to the public, if you would like to be vaccinated, please fill out this form saying who you are, what your job is, meaning like do you work at the bodega? Are you a cab driver? Are you a student? And if you have pre-existing conditions. And so, I was curious if New York has to start collecting that kind of data? One, to create an idea of what the demand will be for the average person. But then, two, to help with this mass vaccination plan, where, to your point earlier about making sure that the grocery store workers coming in, how would the average on health care worker who's staffing that vaccination site know whether or not I'm sneaking in versus somebody else who really is on the front line every day?

Mayor: That's a great question, Amanda. Let me – I'm going to turn to Dr. Katz. We had this dialogue in detail yesterday about how the precertification – I'm going to use that phrase to answer your question – precertification has been the model that has been working in our hospitals and this is the right model for a general public effort as well. Exactly what you're saying, you want folks who do qualify to attest to the fact that they qualify to give the details to be all ready to go so when they come in to that center you just need to confirm identity, then go get vaccinated. So, it moves really, really quickly. But we do want that kind of precertification

effort to make sure we're always getting the highest priority folks. Now, that being said, when you think about all of those grocery store workers, transit workers, all of the folks who serve in our schools, first responders, that's a whole lot of people. That's a category of almost a million people – that category 1-B. There are plenty of good New Yorkers would need the vaccine and we can get them into that kind of precertification model so we can move it quickly. Dr. Katz, you want to talk about how you've been doing it?

President Katz: Yes, Mr. Mayor. So, we have built a module that not only would allow people to, as the Mayor says, explain what their risks are, but it will also allow people to self-schedule for their appointments, which is critical. What you don't want – I know it's happened in a few other areas of the country – is the phone lines go down, because so many people are trying to call at the same time. That's not efficient. What you want is the ability for most people who can use the computer to be able to do it online. We'll create a separate line for those people who really cannot use the computer. But the majority of people will be able to find someone who will go online and they will be able to not only put in their eligibility, but they'll be able to choose what site and what time. I mean, we do have to make sure that it's appointments so that we do not overcrowd any existing facility. I mean, that is one of the true challenges of COVID vaccination, is that we don't want to spread COVID while we're vaccinating people to prevent COVID. So, we can't have a waiting room with 50 people in it. But that's why having an online scheduler so that people can choose the site, choose the time, we can control the number of people at any one time in any one site. With the Mayor's leadership, there is going to be a proliferation of sites. So, there'll be lots of choices where people can go, that will help us to spread out those people who need the vaccine so as not to spread COVID.

Mayor: Go ahead, Amanda.

Question: Great. Thank you for that. And then, my second question is around staffing. I understand that this plan hinges on getting approval from the State to move forward on this, but then also the feds to make sure that we're getting an adequate supply to keep up with the demand for the scheduling. Who do you think is going to staff these? I would imagine that there's going to be a period of time where the medical workers are treating COVID patients and may not be able to be vaccinated people. So, who's going to fill in those gaps?

Mayor: I'm going to turn to Dr. Katz and Dr. Chokshi about how we're going to use Health + Hospitals personnel, Department of Health personnel, and folks from the City government agencies across the board, the medical reserve, I mean, there's a lot of – the contract workers – there's lots of different ways to do it. They can give you some of the detail of that. But I think the point about an online system that gives you a clear sense of how many people are going to be where, that makes it very efficient. And remember, when you get to that kind of system, the staffing gets very efficient too, because if you know a certain number of people are coming, they're all pre-certified, you just need to check identity against the pre-certification. The actual vaccine, Amanda, is incredibly quick to give. It's like, you know, anyone who's gotten a flu shot in a pharmacy – it's a matter of a few minutes. And we had a conversation recently about, you know, what can an individual health care worker do in an hour, 25, 30 – even more people can be vaccinated, literally, one after another, after another if the rest of the structure is set up right. Not everyone who's there has to be a health care worker to make that work. The person checking folks in, obviously, can be someone who's not a health care worker. You do need doctors on site to watch people make sure they're okay. After they've gotten the vaccine,

they do need to wait for a while just to see if there's any reaction. Thank God, overwhelmingly, we have not seen negative reaction in folks who received the vaccine almost without exception. But just to clarify, it is not necessarily a labor-intensive activity if you have a pre-certification model. So, on the different strands of staffing, we'll be turning to obviously Ted Long is here, Dr. Long, T2, Test and Trace is going to be a big part of it, huge group, 5,000 strong. They're going to be crucial as well. Dr. Katz then Dr. Chokshi.

President Katz: So, let me start Amanda because I think it's a good question. People worry about with the hospitals having more patients with COVID, how will we be able to do it? And what we're lucky at is the challenge in staffing hospitals during COVID are the very highly skilled ICU nurses, highly skilled respiratory therapists, people who have studied intensivist physicians, people who have studied years to be good at what they are able to do. Fortunately, when it comes to vaccination, a large number of different professional people, registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses can give, physicians can give vaccine. People who are retired, who may not be ready to work on a hospital ward can give vaccines. As the Mayor has said, I think if all of the paperwork were done, and the only thing I had to do was to give – to wipe the person's shoulder off with alcohol, give the injection, take out the injection and put on a band aid. I'm sure I could do 40 people an hour. So then the goal is, but I need all the other things done. I need them to pre-register. I need them to, someone to check that the registration is correct. I need someone to lead them to my chair. I need somebody to prefill the syringe. I give the syringe. I need them, as the Mayor says, to have a place where they can be watched. But I think this is an operation that really can, if you break it into its parts, be done very efficiently.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi again, on all picking up on Dr. Katz's point. Efficiency is going to be crucial. Precertification will be crucial, but talk about the different strands of staffing we're going to bring together here.

Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Absolutely Sir. This is something that we've been thinking about intensively. Before I get into some of the details to add to what Dr. Katz has said. I want to just start with the very big picture, which is there is virtually nothing that is more important than our COVID vaccination effort right now. So when it comes to staffing and ensuring that we have adequate staffing that's the approach that we're going to take to pull out all the stops to get the right people into the right places to administer vaccines. To build on what Dr. Katz has said in terms of, you know, the types of people that we need to do that, it really boils down to two groups. Clinical staff and nonclinical staff. And this is true, whether we're talking about the City's mass vaccination sites, our COVID vaccine hubs or any of the other places where people will be able to get a COVID vaccine in the coming days and weeks. On the clinical staff side, it's all of the people who do the everyday miracle of vaccination. Whether it's pharmacists or nurses that have been doing our seasonal influenza vaccination. But it's also pulling on the contracts that we have available to be able to ramp that up with respect to who can deliver a vaccine. And as the Mayor said, ensuring that the Health Department, Health + Hospitals, and all of the City's clinical resources are brought to bear on this as well. And then on the non-clinical staff side, these are people who do the flow monitoring, making sure that the paperwork is all right so that there is that very seamless process going through a clinic. And for that we can pull from an even broader pool with respect to City staff and many, many people who have raised their hands to help with this effort. The final thing that I'll say is that on the clinical side as well, the Medical Reserve Corps, this is a group of

thousands of nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners whom we are in contact with specifically to help with the COVID vaccination effort.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Doctor. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Bob Henley from the Chief Leader

Question: Happy New Year all. In interviewing Dr. Prezant, the FDNY's top medical officer, I learned that we still do not know the degree to which the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine prevents asymptomatic transmission of this virus. And if it does for how long? Does that mean as a practical matter, those who get inoculated need to continue the masking and social distancing precautions?

Mayor: Yeah. I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. Bob, great question. What I said this – I was asked this kind of question last week. That I want people to think about the first half of this year up through June as the time that we're going to be vaccinating again, every New Yorker who wants it. And that in the process, we want to maintain our good habits. We want to keep wearing masks. We want to keep the social distancing, keep the sense of caution and defense that we've had all along. Bob, look, let's realize, first of all, until you get more and more people vaccinated, obviously we still face the threat of the disease. Second, this new variant, huge curveball. So, we want people to just be in a smart, cautious, defensive posture for the first half of the year. Stick to those good habits because they work. And then when we've got a huge percentage of folks vaccinated and the whole situation around the country, hopefully is improved, that's a time we can think about going back to the kind of way we lived before. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: That's exactly right. Mr. Mayor. And the short answer to your good question is that yes, people do need to continue following all of those public health precautions that have worked over the last few months. Particularly continuing to wear their mask or face covering, continuing to socially distance, and making sure that you're washing your hands frequently. Another thing to just keep in mind about both vaccines is that they are two dose regimens. There is some immunity that's built up a few days after getting the first dose, but it takes until a few days after the second dose to get up to the levels of effectiveness that we have seen in the clinical studies. So throughout that period, but also beyond for the reasons that the Mayor has mentioned, it's going to be very important for us, both as individuals, whether you're vaccinated or not, as well as a community to keep doing the things that have worked for us.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead, Bob.

Question: Okay. Yeah. And so, to the question I heard earlier, the division between nonclinical and clinical. At the Chief Leader we've been tracking the circumstances of people like Priscilla Carol who is a CWA 1180 member, coordinating manager, who died at Elmhurst Hospital, whose job was to hand out a mask. But you know, that those folks didn't necessarily get one. They're technically nonclinical. There's also like 983 Local DC 37, high pressure plant tenders who can be in the midst of the places that Dr. Katz's staff is working. What effort is, is the City making to identify proactively these myriad of titles that may not be – that may be incidental on paper, but are central to how these institutions function?

Mayor: Thank you so much, Bob. I appreciate that question. No, one's incidental. No one in a hospital is a second-class citizen. We need to reach everyone who works in our hospitals, whether they're public hospitals, voluntary, independent, we need to reach them all. By the way, what's a better way to speed up vaccination than to make sure that every single human being who works in a hospital building and is ready to be vaccinated, actually gets the right to be vaccinated? So, I want Dr. Katz to talk about the experience that he's having, but just follow through the logic. If anyone's working in the hospital, they're helping us. If anyone's working in the hospital, they're supporting our health care heroes. If anyone's working in a hospital, they are putting themselves in some kind of proximity to folks with the coronavirus. Also, again, I want Dr. Katz to have the right to vaccinate anyone over 75, who comes into one of his hospitals or clinics for any reason at all. I don't care if they stubbed their toe. I want them to have the right to the vaccine if they're over 75. So, Dr. Katz, could you speak to that?

President Katz: Bob. Thank you so much for always caring about Health + Hospitals employees. It makes me feel great. So, starting yesterday, I can now vaccinate everybody in the hospital as the Mayor has explained. And we will continue to walk through the hospital to make sure that everybody knows that vaccinations are available. They are right at the site, so people don't have to go anywhere. Although they also have the choice, if they wish to get vaccinated at a site that may be closer to their home. We allow that as well. And we allow people to go on their work time. So, we're doing everything possible to make sure that all of the people who work at any of our hospitals starting yesterday, when the State allowed us to move into this category are able to get vaccinated.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is David Cruz from Gothamist.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

Mayor: Hey, David, happy New Year to you.

Question: Happy New Year. So, we're getting reports of widespread vaccine hesitancy among hospital employees with as many as 70 to 80 percent of workers at some hospitals saying they're going to wait and see. So, what is the percentage of hesitant staffers in the City's hospital system and what are the efforts to turn that attitude around?

Mayor: Excellent question, David. I'll start and obviously turn to Mitch. It's a real issue. And we got to look it in the eye. It's understandable after all the pain of 2020, that a lot of people are worried. And just in general, folks who have been through so much we've got to understand that we got to win trust for the vaccine. We've been talking about this now for weeks, winning trust for the vaccine, but the best way to do it of course, is by example. So many people have gotten the vaccine now who had a very good experience with it. It was safe, effective, free, fast, easy. The more people see that the more they feel it. I think you'll see that hesitancy reduce. But in the meantime, we're going to keep educating people, keep giving those positive examples, keep answering questions. People have a lot of questions. That's fair. We want to answer those questions. And Mitch can talk about how that's being done in Health + Hospitals. But again, it's crucial to now link that to the bigger picture. Let's choose a number. I think based on conversations with Dr. Katz and Dr. Chokshi, I would place that number over 30 percent. So,

let's say at least a third of folks in general are still hesitant. That's another reason why you need more flexibility, because if I'm looking at a group of a thousand people and 300 or 400 of them are not yet ready to be vaccinated, I don't need a thousand doses for that group. I need to finish that group and go to the next group. And we've got to recognize that where there is willingness, that's where we need to lean in. And when there's not yet willingness, we'll come back right around. And ironically, David, the more people get vaccinated in any priority category, the more faith it will give everyone else. Dr. Katz?

President Katz: I think the Mayor has explained it well, David. I know it's – at our facilities. It is not 70 percent. That that's too high. But I think around 30 percent is accurate. When I've talked to people, I think you have to, as the Mayor is explained, have empathy, and really think about what the experience has been of a Health + Hospital nurse over the last 10 months. How many times science has corrected itself? How many times it's turned out that there was some new wrinkle and they've gone through every day of that, right? Not everybody has to live the life of the nurse who's told today this is what works. And then tomorrow, oh no, we've learned something more. It's completely understandable with the new virus that every day we would be learning new things. But while we're learning new things, the nurses are actually working right? And they're trying to take care of their patients in the best way possible. So, is it at all surprising that people want a little bit more time to know that this too will not turn out to be wrong? Any time in health care, you adopt something new. There are always the early adopters, right? They can't wait to get it. They're at the top of the line. They want to do it. There will always be a few people who will never want to do it. But the vast majority of people, once you give them enough time, we'll agree to get a sensible intervention. And I have no doubt that after millions of people across the country are vaccinated, the safety record is shown. Months have gone by, consensus remains this vaccine is safe. People will go and get it. We don't need to harangue them at this moment. We can allow them the space they deserve for the heroic work they've done.

Mayor: Amen. Go ahead, David.

Question: And then my question is regarding the Gifted and Talented program and concerns from parents that you have not offered clarity of whether you will proceed with this test. And there are concerns that the lack of a contract signed is indicative that you will not proceed with it? So why have you delayed a response one way or the other in letting parents know about the G and T program, or the G and T test? And when can people actually expect a response from your office?

Mayor: Yes, David, we will speak to that this month for sure. Look, there has been so much, we had to focus on that wasn't business as usual. The central focus has been on the health and safety of our kids and our educators and our staff. And making in-person learning work while doing this unprecedented online effort as well. We're living in the present, getting that right every single day. We did make the announcements, obviously around some of the other elements of the admissions process. We will be having an announcement shortly on the Gifted and Talented piece as well.

Moderator: The next is Nolan from the Post.

Question: Hi morning, everybody.

Mayor: Happy New Year Nolan. How are you doing?

Question: I'm all right, Mr. Mayor and happy New Year to you and to yours as well. I'm just trying to figure out exactly the source of the dispute between you and the Governor over the speed at which the city's public hospital system is administering vaccine? And we put some of these questions to Health + Hospitals yesterday. Didn't get much in the way of hard numbers back. So, I'd like to put them to you today to see if you have them? Which is roughly how many Health + Hospitals employees were eligible for vaccination before the expansion of group 1-A? And how many of them had received it at that point?

Mayor: So, Nolan, again, I want to see us all move forward together. I want to be really clear about this. I want to work with the State. I want to work with the federal government. I think if we all work together, we're going to get somewhere. I am fully responsible for all the efforts of New York City government. I expect us to do better. I'm holding every one of my colleagues accountable and myself accountable. But I also know we do need the freedom and the flexibility to do this the best we can. So, as you heard, Dr. Katz say, once he got the authorization to do more people in his hospitals, he started that immediately. And that will be completed in a matter of days. It's simple when we have an authorization to do something, we can do it very quickly. But we also do need simpler rules from the federal government. That gets back to that point about the syringes. That right there would be a great difference maker, which is why we're appealing to the federal government on that. Mitch, you want to just fill in any specifics?

President Katz: I think one of the misconceptions that people had is that the data that the Governor showed was about the percentage of eligible people who got vaccination. That wasn't what it was. It was the percent of doses. And as I explained earlier in the week, we took on a large number of doses yesterday in order to be able to do this week, the unaffiliated providers. I have every reason from my discussions with other health care leaders to know that we have done as well as the other hospitals in terms of vaccinating those people who are eligible. And again, I go back to last week, we walked through the hospital, all of the clinical areas where we're able to vaccinate. And told people we have empty slots that are available now, come while you are on work and get vaccinated. And it happens that not everybody is yet ready for that moment.

Mayor: Go ahead Nolan.

Question: I guess I posit those questions because the Governor's office is on the record to the Post this morning saying that those tabulations were for weeks one through three. They don't include the vaccines delivered for week four. I think this gets to why technical briefings are important, but that issue to the side. On January 1st, the city as a whole, injected only 148 people with shots on New Year's Day, only 148 people were given shots. The City controls one of the largest hospital systems in the city with Health + Hospitals. That's still just an average of 13 shots per hospital on that day. Why in the best case that the City's public hospital system deliver 13 shots per day on New Year's Day?

Mayor: Nolan, very fair question. Let me say that we can't have another day like that ever again. There are no holidays. There are no nights. There are no weekends going forward. Everything has to be on a 24/7 basis. I do understand on a very human level that after a year of nonstop warfare, a lot of people were very tired and spent by the time they got to the holidays. But that's not an excuse. It should have been better on January 1st. And we certainly saw the same problem

with the pharmacies under the federal program focused on nursing homes. There was a drop-off that holiday weekend that should not have happened. Going forward everyone's getting a clear message from me and I'm responsible. 24/7 everything is going, every day we're going to keep increasing the numbers. So, this week, our goal is to get to about 100,000 doses. And then each week thereafter increase. By the end of the month, I want to see us in all parts of New York City combined at about 400,000 doses a week. Again, these big public sites up and running. We need the support from the federal and State government and the manufacturers. But we're on a trajectory to be able to do hundreds of thousands of people a week and just keep growing from there. Everyone needs to feel that urgency. I certainly do. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning and Happy New Year, everybody, and Mayor de Blasio.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Katie. How are you doing?

Question: Oh, you know, I'm okay, hanging in. My question – I know there's a lot going on. Obviously, we have the vaccination rollout, lots of questions about that, but I'm hearing from lots of people that they're also very concerned about the rising case numbers. It seems like just yesterday, we were kind of stressed out about three percent and now we're over nine percent. So, I guess my question is your thoughts on the rising cases. I know, you know, you send out like a daily tweet with affirmations about hanging in there but is there anything more the City can be doing to keep case numbers down because it's very concerning. I think a lot of people are getting very nervous as these continue to go up. They're going up in schools and all that.

Mayor: Yeah, look, I understand why people are nervous and these numbers are very troubling. Let me say a couple of quick things and obviously to the question, what the City can do, will do, is doing. Katie, first of all, one area where there's been a lot of agreement between the State and the City – and I certainly agree with the Governor's approach on the hospitals – has been that we have seen amazingly good results from our hospitals whether public, whether voluntary, independent all over the state. Hospitals learned so much between the spring and the fall. They are handling these cases really, really well. So, thank God, even as we've seen increased hospitalizations, hospitals are having better results, helping people. I don't want to lose a single New Yorker, but what we have seen is many, many fewer people dying, many more people surviving coming right back out of the hospital, and lots of capacity in the hospitals. This is the big difference here that has obviously changed our assumptions about cases because we're seeing them handled so much better. Second, we've seen that New Yorkers are still doing so much of the right thing.

There's still so many people wearing masks, social distancing, taking the precautions. Dr. Chokshi has been really clear about older New Yorkers and New Yorkers with preexisting conditions needing to really be as isolated as possible. And I know people are heeding that, so that's important. So, the most vulnerable are, we have a lot of evidence, really listening and making those adjustments. Now we have the opportunity with the vaccine to change the entire environment. Again, we need support, we need flexibility, but this is going to be a game changer. So, the City continues intensively to do the outreach work. And, again, I think Dr. Long and everyone at Test and Trace. They're out there educating people all the time, mask distribution, they're out there following up on cases. And every time they follow up on a case, it limits the

spread of the disease. So many people are participating effectively in quarantine efforts and safe separation. The testing, we've had the highest testing numbers we've ever had in the last few weeks, over a hundred thousand a day, one day recently, a number we could not have imagined. That's deepening all the time. And, of course, an ever intensifying vaccination effort. You add all that up. I feel very good about where we're going to be a few weeks from now, particularly if we can go quickly and stay ahead of this variant, which is why I want that a travel ban in place.

Last point, Katie, we're all hopeful. I talked to Dr. Fauci about this. Everyone I've talked to agrees that there's a hope that at the latter part of January, that the impact of the holidays really will dissipate. So, all those gatherings, Christmas and New Year's, etcetera whatever impact they may have had that that will be trailing off by the end of January, just as vaccine distribution is intensifying. That's the hope for how we continue to turn the corner here. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Just to follow up, while I understand Thanksgiving and Christmas and other holidays around December are popular. I don't have much hope that people will stop gathering indoors. You could count a million different things between now and the summer in terms of gathering right [inaudible] where people want to go. So, my question is, I mean, the numbers don't add up to me and the timing doesn't add up to me, looking at the slow rate of our vaccinations here in the city and what will probably be a brutal winter. I guess, what can the City do to double to stop these rising cases? Because it is a huge concern. You're seeing more cases in the schools. You're seeing it at [inaudible] can the City do more than just, you know, tweeting out, keep it up?

Mayor: Again, Katie, I'm going to turn to Dr. Varma. I want to get him in the mix here on one of these pieces, because I think it's really important to remember how all the previous efforts have added up with what's happening now. Clearly, when we're tweeting encouragement to people, that's something that's actually really important to thank people for all they're doing. New Yorkers have been heroic, and they deserve thanks and encouragement, but what is so crucial is all the tangible efforts to keep schools safe, which have succeeded, all the amazing efforts in the hospitals to protect people which are succeeding more than ever before, all of the work of the Test and Trace Corps, all of the work of this vaccination effort, these are all really tangible high-impact things, and they're going to grow each day. Dr. Varma, I want you to speak to this point – we know in addition to the power of vaccine, even the first dose helps to protect people, we also have gotten probably between two and three million New Yorkers who have been exposed to the disease previously in the course of these last ten months, and that is an important piece of this equation as well. If that big a piece of the population has been exposed and is therefore, from everything we've seen scientifically so far, less vulnerable to having a new infection or particularly a harsh new infection, that really does affect the equation. That protects people inherently. And what we're concerned about, of course, first and foremost is saving lives. So, Dr. Varma, you've been at this the whole way through, could you please talk about that combination of the impact of vaccine, but combined with the impact of the millions of people having already been exposed?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Yeah. Thank you very much for the question. I think that what – of course, none of us can predict what's going to happen over the future. And I just want to re-emphasize the most important points are the strong adherence to the measures that we know work well, the masks and the distance are absolutely critical, and then combining that with our testing and tracing. Those have been the reason why New York, while we've had a very severe

and difficult resurgence, has not faced the same challenges that other places have. It's clearly blunted our resurgence and kept things under better control. The Mayor's point is that – is a very important one to keep in mind as well too, because we now have another defense against this disease. We have the combination of a vaccine that specifically when it's targeted at people of highest risk, those who are 75 and older, those who are essential workers, is going to have an impact on reducing our disease.

Now you can combine that with what our estimates are of people who have been previously infected. Now this does get challenging because one of the big unknowns is how much immunity do people get from prior infection and how long does it last? What we think has happened is that probably somewhere on the order of about 25 percent of the population – and there's some, you know, range around that – had the COVID infection at some point since the epidemic started last year. Now we know that some percentage of that population is going to have protection against either a very severe infection or get infection at all. So, when you combine the people who have some measure of acquired immunity with the people who are vaccinated and all of our other measures, testing and tracing and masking, we are confident that we are going to get to a point in New York where we can start to progressively see decline. I think the real unknown and the thing I won't be able to put a finger on is, is that going to be at the end of this month, does that go into the end of February? It's going to depend on a lot of different factors, particularly maintaining adherence, speeding up vaccination, and continuing our testing and tracing.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Yoav from The City.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, you released – in September you released an outline of an economic recovery agenda and kind of promised more details in the weeks and months to come. I'm just wondering as it stands now what is the City's current economic recovery plan and how comprehensive is it?

Mayor: Yoav, we're going to talk a lot about the economic recovery in the month of January and the whole of 2021. The bottom line to me is I feel very, very positive about where the city's going to go in 2021 and beyond. We're already seeing some very promising signs, real investments coming into the city in our technology community, life sciences, a lot of what is going to indicate the future of New York City. I put forward a plan back in September with a focus on health to make New York City the public health capital of the world. I'm going to elaborate on that plan in the State of the City address. We've got a lot we're going to build up in 2021 that will set up our future economy. I think you also would agree the number one way to set up our future is to secure our present. And that means this intensive vaccination campaign to turn the corner on the coronavirus. But we're going to flesh out a detailed plan and not just a plan, a lot of very specific announcements that'll be happening this year about how we build our economy up, bring back jobs, and recover and move forward as a city. I'm very optimistic. Go ahead, Yoav.

Question: Well, just to follow up on that, I mean, we're ten months into the pandemic and the crisis, you know, for the industries like the service industry, the restaurants, the hotels, folks that rely on tourism, what is the current plan to help them other than hoping for assistance from the federal government?

Mayor: Well, a couple of things, Yoav. First of all, that assistance from the federal government is not just about hope, that's about fairness. That stimulus is something that's right for the whole nation. It's the way to have a recovery. That's why people came up with the phrase stimulus to stimulate the economy, to rebuild it, to bring it forward. That's what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did during the New Deal or else this country would have been devastated in a way it would not have recovered from for decades. So, we know intensive stimulus works, and we know we need one now, and we're quite clear Joe Biden is 100 percent committed to that. So that's not an ancillary thing that is central to bring it back to New York City and the entire country. Second, we see a whole host of industries that have continued to be strong even during this crisis and I believe will now get stronger in New York City, including the technology community and especially the life sciences community, which has been poised for a takeoff for several years. It is clearly going to benefit from all of the new research money that's going to be available, and New York City is going to be one of the places that does the most with that. But I think we can build even further upon that, become the public health capital of the world because of what's happened here. The fight that's been waged here, the lessons learned that are applicable to the whole world when it comes to fighting this pandemic. In terms of the hospitality industry, which is really hurting, and I feel for everyone who has been through so much this year, we've obviously proven that we could do something very different with the restaurant piece of the equation. About a hundred thousand jobs have been brought back through the Open Restaurants program. That's now going to be the permanent model. We're going to be working on ways to reinforce the rest of the hospitality industry, but it's not shocking to say that will take more time because that really requires the full securing of the health care situation locally and nationally, even internationally, so travel comes back, but there's so many other pieces of our economy that are strong and will be stronger. We're going to keep building all those pieces up and that's the plan I'll be laying out in the next few weeks.

Moderator: Last question today goes to Jeff Mays from the New York Times.

Question: Happy New Year, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Jeff, Happy New Year to you.

Question: Thanks, appreciate it. So, I just had a couple of questions. I'm wondering, you know, you made some remarks last night about arrogance in terms of the Governor and his remarks about [inaudible] people. I'm wondering if you could expand on that, what you mean by a little bit, and, you know, I guess my bigger question is, you know, you and the Governor have had conflict in the past. This is a public health crisis. You know, people are dying or getting infected every day. Why isn't it possible for you two just to sit down and work the situation out, present a united front and a way of moving forward that will get the most people vaccinated as quickly as possible? When was the last –

Mayor: Jeff, I think that's exactly the right approach. I have spoken with the Governor many times in recent weeks and totally believe that the City and State can do great things together. And I've said it more times than I can count, Jeff, the vast majority of times in this crisis the City and State have agreed, the Governor and I have agreed, we both have been cautious and careful in terms of health care issues, focused on science and data. And I've commended him for that, I think has been the right approach. Look, last night, Jeff, I let my emotions get the better of me

because I really wanted to emphasize that our health care heroes were doing their job and they were worthy of respect and trust. And I really wanted to defend the people that I believe in. And I – you know, all of the folks I've been serving with in this crisis, Dr. Katz, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Long, all the people that they work with on their teams, I've watched these folks work every single day since March 1st, literally tirelessly, to protect people and save lives. And so, you know, I felt that they were not being heard and understood, and I wanted to rise to their defense because I feel that very personally and all the health care heroes. I feel like our health care heroes have done everything we possibly could have asked of them and more, and we need to trust them. And so that's why I got my emotion up. Obviously, I don't intend to do that and that's something I want to avoid, but I think the goal is absolutely what you say, and that has been the functional reality. And I believe that when the Governor and I talk about things, we find a lot of common ground and our teams talk like every hour literally throughout.

So, the bottom line is New York City and New York State have fared a lot better in this crisis, look at the summer and the fall, since we were the epicenter. This city, this state have come a long, long way. And that typically has been where there's been cooperation and listening to each other and figuring out what's needed. So, when I'm calling out for more flexibility and the freedom to vaccinate it's because of what I'm hearing from the people on the ground who do the work, and I'm just trying to stand up for them because I really think they know what's best. Go ahead, Jeff.

Question: Thank you for that answer. A different question on a different topic. I'm just wondering if we could get an update on the number of students that are still waiting for devices so that they can connect to remote learning. I think the last update we had was they were about 60,000 students. Do you have a current number?

Mayor: I will get you one today. My team will get it to you, Jeff. Deliveries have continued to come in. Look, the reality from the beginning is any student who needed a device we got one to, to the maximum supply we had. We then went for resupply, but because remote learning has been the norm all over the country, the supply has been really hard to come by. So, as it comes in, we get it right out to families directly. And then we've had families that have had problems with service, and we've been working with them directly, particularly with kids in shelter, just fix the service or get them new service, get them a different provider. That's been moving constantly. So, we'll get you an update on what's happened the last few weeks, but literally we're going to just keep ordering these devices. And these are really high quality, top of line, brand new devices being given for free to kids who need them. We'll just keep ordering until the demand is 100 percent satisfied. And the last thing I'll say, Jeff, is, look, Lord knows we wish we never experienced this pandemic, but in the course of this pandemic, we probably took one of the most profound actions ever to close the digital divide in New York City. It's now upwards of 350,000 kids, a third of a million kids, got a free device to use in their home. That's actually been a big step forward and it's going to be important for the future because we're going to rely on digital to augment education going forward. So, keeping kids – keeping them connected, making sure to have those devices, this is going to be a long-term part of what we do in this city.

All right, everyone, I'll just finish where I started my trust in our health care heroes, my belief in our health care leadership, the folks who have seen us through time and time again. Put aside politics, put aside personalities, you know, politicians come and go, but our doctors made a decision, our nurses made a decision decades ago in so many cases to serve us, to protect us, to

put their lives on the line. And that's been particularly true during this crisis. We've lost health care heroes. They were at the front line. They were there doing the most extraordinarily difficult things. They were there when people were dying and their families weren't allowed to be in the room with them, but the health care heroes were, and they tried to comfort, they tried to do everything they could. Let's honor them and let's hear their voices. If they need more support, if they need more flexibility, if they're calling for that freedom to vaccinate, let's listen to them, let's follow the people who actually know how to do this better than any of the rest of us. They've proven it time and time again in this crisis, they are the ultimate heroes. Thank you, everyone.

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