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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Well, good afternoon, everybody. We're starting a little different time today because I just came from Citi Field, I'm going to talk about that in a moment, how important that new effort is out in Queens. But first I want to talk about something very personal and something important for a lot of people who are worried about whether to go and get vaccinated, and so it couldn't be more personal for me. My wife Chirlane got vaccinated yesterday at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, and Chirlane wanted to send a message to folks who are hesitant, to folks who are unsure about the vaccine. That it's something that's important to do, it's something you can trust, it's something that will give you safety and protection. She said something – I just want to read this quote because it really says so much to me. She said, “we want to do this for our families, we want to do this for our loved ones, and of course we want to do it for our city.” That's the spirit that we want to get across to everyone here, that by going out there, getting vaccinated you're going to help move us all forward, but especially protect yourself, protect your family. So, Chirlane is someone who has dealt with some real health challenges over the years. She told me it was an incredible feeling of relief to get that first vaccination, and she wants people to know it's safe. It's the right thing to do. She also was really appreciative to everyone at Kings County Hospital and everyone at Health + Hospitals for the way that they treat everyone that comes there with compassion, and support them, and answers their questions, lets them know that, you know, they will be supported and helped throughout. She had a great experience and I want to urge everyone else to know that that experience is there for you too.

Now, as I mentioned, went to Citi Field earlier today. This is really moving to me, really hopeful sign opening day, but not opening day for baseball yet, but opening day for vaccination at Citi Field, and great energy. I got to tell you, you know, being out there seeing everyone from the Mets, I'm really appreciative to Steve Cohen, everyone at the Mets for opening up Citi Field, for their commitment to doing this. But, just talking to folks who came there to get vaccinated, the good experience they had, the excitement they had of being able to get vaccinated in their own borough. This site is for the people at Queens. There's also a special effort we're making for folks who drive taxis, for-hire vehicles, folks in food service, we want to make sure that some of those vulnerable folks among us get that opportunity.

So, Citi Field's just opened, it's going to be building up more all the time. We're going to get it to a 24/7 basis. That's our goal starting next week. But, look, as of next week, we'll be able to do thousands of doses a week. But what I really want to see us do is get Citi Field to full strength. This site being run by our Health + Hospitals team – this site can do 5,000 vaccinations a day, 35,000 vaccinations a week, 24/7, but we need the supply. So, I know this'll be an encouragement to the people at Queens. The folks I talked to who came there to be vaccinated were just so excited to be a Citi Field. It was a place that they love to be at, a place they trust, a place that makes them feel good and hopeful. This is the beginning of something much bigger.

Now, look, vaccination is the key to recovery. Vaccination is the key to bringing us back, and it's also crucial to having a recovery for all of us. When we talk about recovery for all of us, it is about equity. It's about making sure that everyone gets the opportunity to move forward in the city, and it certainly is epitomized by having centers like Yankee Stadium, like Citi Field, specifically devoted to serving people in the community. That Citi Field site just, you go a mile away from there. You're going to be at some of the hardest hit areas in the city during the coronavirus crisis. It is really important to realize when we put these sites in communities, it makes a huge difference for people and we've got to reach people at the grassroots. That's going to be the difference maker.

Now, when we talk about reaching people in need, I want to tell you about a very moving discussion I was part of last night, a group of leaders in the Orthodox Jewish community gathered with me at Gracie Mansion to talk about issues in the community. There there's definitely still issues of hesitancy around the vaccine, but there's also a lot of seniors who desperately want the vaccine, and we need to reach them, and the most pointed part of the discussion revolved around seniors, who literally experienced one of the most horrific events in world history. Holocaust survivors, people who went through that totally destructive, horrible moment in history, and survived and carried on and kept their faith. Amazing people. I met with Holocaust survivors before the pandemic, and was so struck by their spirit, by the way that they kept moving forward, despite everything they experienced, and for so many people, the presence of Holocaust survivors in our city is a reminder of just how recently that history took place, and we've got to be there for these people, and I got to tell you if you talk to someone who tells you what it was like to be in one of the camps – I've had people roll up their sleeves, show me the tattoo from being in a concentration camp. It's an experience that is searing. So, we're going to initiate an effort right away to make sure that Holocaust survivors get vaccinated. We're going to partner with a number of organizations in the Jewish community, and I want to particularly thank Rabbi Michael Miller and Jewish Community Relations Council of New York City who are going to help us bring together organizations in all five boroughs, so we can have a special effort to reach these New Yorkers who have been through so much, but who still by their very perseverance give us so much hope.

Okay, let's talk about what we do every day, where we stand. So, from the beginning of our vaccination effort, we have asked, we have provided this many doses, 1,071,393. That's how many doses have been given from the beginning. We need to give so many more. Everyone's frustrated that there isn't more vaccine available. It's clear we have to do something different, and this city needs its own supply, a direct supply from the federal government we can depend on, we need fewer rules, fewer red tape, less red tape to hold us back. We need more flexibility. We could be doing so much more. I've talked about the fact that we need more pharmaceutical companies and biotech companies helping to create the vaccine. We need more flexibility around the use of second doses. We just need a direct supply. You know why – New York City is not only covering all of our people. Folks are coming in from the suburbs, in from even other states to get vaccinated in New York City. Our allotment needs to reflect that. The federal government, the state government need to reflect the fact that we are covering a lot of other people's needs too. But really what we need is just direct that seen supply and greater vaccine supply, so we can reach so many more people. The capacity is there. The will is there. The ability is there. People want it, but we need more supply, and this is what I'll be fighting for every single day.

Now, as we get more supply, we're going to create more and more sites. One of the next sites we're going to be announcing, we'll have the exact date and hours very soon, the Empire Outlets and Staten Island, that site will be opening soon. It will be devoted to the people of Staten Island. Want people to know they can go there, and again, the goal is to get that to be as quickly as possible, a 24/7 site with an ample supply of vaccine. Another site that is very exciting to anticipate. It's one we want to partner with the state of New York on, and make a central site for the people of Brooklyn. Of course, talking about Barclays Center. A great conversation yesterday with John Abbamondi, the CEO of BSE Global, that's the company that owns the Nets and the Barclays Center. They're raring to go. They want to make Barclays Center a great site for Brooklyn. Again, this should be a Brooklyn only site. There should be a site that really helps us reach deep into the communities of Brooklyn, including places where we're seeing a lot of vaccine hesitancy and we need to do a lot better, and that's a lot of communities that are near the Barclays Center. So, we're going to be working with the state, working with the Barclays Center and the Nets to figure out how we can move forward. Again, we want to see these sites up and running ideally on a 24/7 basis with the kind of supplier support them. We know these are places that are attractive to people, and the fact that it'll be devoted to Brooklyn residents, and then the Empire Outlets case devoted to Staten Island residents. That's the kind of thing that will make a difference and get people to want to come there and help overcome the hesitancy. But it only works if we have supply. We're the largest city in America, 8.5 million people, we would be the 12th largest state in the country by population. We need a direct supply from the federal government so we can get the job done, reduce the red tape, speed up the process, get vaccine in the arms of New York.

Alright. So, look, even as we talk about fighting back the coronavirus with a vaccination effort, let's remember that the folks are going through so many challenges beyond COVID itself. COVID has created a lot of other challenges, and one of the biggest problems we found in this last year was folks didn't have enough food to eat, lost their livelihood, lost their support systems, needed help. What have we done? We've said every New Yorker will get the help they need. No New Yorker will go hungry. We will do whatever it takes. We created the Get Food program. People have learned to rely on it, trust it. It's made a huge difference and now a milestone to report to you, and it's a milestone that is a sad one, when you think about it, that the need is so great, but I'm also proud of all the people who did such hard work to get food to New Yorkers in need, and we should be very appreciative and proud of our city employees, and nonprofit organizations, and community people who all believed it was their mission to make sure no New Yorker went hungry. The milestone we've reached is we provide 200 million emergency meals since the beginning of the pandemic, 200 million meals for free to people who needed them. It's a staggering number and, and there's been so many elements of this, the grab and go sites in our schools, the delivery to homebound New Yorkers direct to their door. All the pieces have come together to make a difference. We've got to do more. This crisis is not over. People are still hurting to say the least, we need that federal stimulus. We're hoping and praying for that. But, in the meantime, we've got to keep moving forward. We're talking to the City Council right now about how to increase support for food pantry soup kitchens. We're working on another \$25 million and support because we need to make sure every New Yorker gets what they need.

Alright, for anyone who does need food, a reminder, call 3-1-1. If you need to know where there are sites in your neighborhood, if you need to find the grab and go sites at the schools, if you need delivery directly to you, you can call 3-1-1, or you can go to nyc.gov/getfood and find the

sites in your community. Again, to all the city employees, everyone who has stepped up. Thanks to everyone who's done such great work. The folks at Sanitation Department who have stepped up played a really important role here. Thank you to the community-based partners, community-based organizations, the charities, everyone's done outstanding work and we're going to keep doing it until this crisis is over.

Okay, let's go over our daily indicators. Here we go. Number one, daily number of people admitted in New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report: 265 patients, confirmed positivity level 62.5 percent, and the hospitalization rate 5.21 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on the seven-day average, today's report: 3,859 cases, and number three, number of percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, today's report: seven-day rolling average 8.48 percent. Okay, a few words in Spanish, and again, the topic of course will be vaccines.

[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 Dr. Ted Long, Executive Director of the Test and Trace Corps, Dr. Dave Chokshi, Health Commissioner, Director of the Mayor's Office for Food Policy, Kate McKenzie, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Juan Manuel from NY1.

Question: Good morning – good afternoon, Mr. Mayor, and that's a great teleprompter that you have now.

Mayor: Say again, you like the teleprompter?

Question: Yeah, that's a really good teleprompter that you have right now.

Mayor: Well, we're always innovating Juan Manuel.

Question: That's really good. Mr. Mayor, you're asking for a direct supply of vaccine to cut the red tape. Is it that you're having issues with the state, with Governor Cuomo? You don't think the city is being treated fairly, or you don't think the state is managing the supply in an efficient way?

Mayor: Look, Juan Manuel, first of all, if you just simplify the process and just get direct supply in New York City, it's just going to speed everything up. It's going to simplify everything. We also know we're carrying a disproportionate share of the burden. Our job is to vaccinate everyone in New York City, but we also have a lot of people coming in from the suburbs, even New Jersey and Connecticut to get vaccinated, but our supply we get from the state doesn't reflect that reality. We're not getting our fair share. I think it would be a lot simpler if we just got a direct allotment from the federal government, making clear that the actual number we needed, just – we could depend on it, we know it's coming and then we get to work. Because right now we finally have the freedom to vaccinate on a bigger level, meaning the categories of people most in need. Everyone now has been approved. We're ready to go. We have a huge number of sites, hundreds

of sites, but we need the consistency to know exactly how much vaccine we're going to have, and that we can just put it into play, where it's needed most. That's going to make things quicker and better for everyone. Go ahead, Juan. Manuel.

Question: I saw your press conference at Citi Field today and it was a little bit confusing – and I'm sure I wasn't the only viewer a little bit confused – the fact that right now if someone living in Queens wants to get an appointment at Citi Field, there are no appointments available. Is it wise to keep opening up vaccination centers when there's so little supply in the city? And the way to get an appointment is through a multiple number of websites, something that has been proven to be extremely cumbersome and confusing to many New Yorkers?

Mayor: It's a really good question but look it – I would love it if we could take all of the different health care systems and networks and providers and put them entirely under the sponsorship of the city and have just one website for everyone, and we could mandate that, that would be wonderful. That would be ideal, but that's not how things work. These are all individual providers. We have to do our best to simplify the process even while people are working with different systems and we're working all the time to try and get everyone to simplify the approach. The reason it was important to open up Citi Field is, one, to say to residents of Queens, you need to get vaccinated, especially folks who are hesitant, here's a great place to get vaccinated. It's going to be going to a 24/7 basis soon. It's going to be doing thousands of vaccinations a week, but again, with enough supply, we get our fair share of supply, we'll be going to 5,000 vaccinations a day, 35,000 vaccinations a week at Citi Field. That makes a whole lot of sense, and there's tremendous need in the borough Queens, and with food service workers and taxi drivers. So yeah, we got to start getting this engine up to a much higher level, but we need the supply to really take it where it needs to go.

Moderator: Next is Michael from the Daily News.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Michael, you had [inaudible] delay there. How are you doing?

Question: I'm good. So, I have a couple of questions and I want to – excuse me if the premise is off here, I'm just kind of going on what I'm seeing. The Governor announced these two new sites today, one in Jamaica and one at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn. And, you know, given your announcement today at Citi Field, it seems like what he announced, and what you announce would kind of dovetail given the fact that at Citi it's kind of starting out slowly and you have plans to ramp up in the future. I mean, it would have seemed to make sense that the doses that are going to this – your college site in Jamaica, could've, you know, been purposed to Citi Field. So, I guess the question I'm leading up to is, did you guys coordinate at all on this? What's going on as far as that goes? It would seem to make sense that there would have been some coordination between you guys on this. Maybe there was it wasn't able to happen.

Mayor: Michael, first of all, I think those sites are great. I think it's great that there's going to be a site at Medgar Evers and at York. That's fantastic. We need more – we need just more supply, more sites, more reach deep into communities, more efforts to overcome the hesitancy, more ways to make it simple. The city could be doing a lot more if we would get our fair share of vaccine, if we would get it on a reliable basis, we could be doing a lot more. We could be doing it more quickly. That's what we want to do. I respect anything and everything the State does, but I'm trying to get to a simpler approach for the city where we simply get a direct allotment and then we can make the choices within it about where the need is greatest. We know our people we're closest to the ground. It's time, I've said it and others are saying around the state, we got to go back more to what we have historically done, which is let localities figure out what's right for localities, cities, towns, counties around the State. It's time to get back to letting them do what's right for their own people. We know what's best for our people and where the need is greatest, but anything in the meantime the State is doing that reaches especially in communities where there's great need. I applaud it. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: The other question I had has to do with this announcement that I think it's on February 23rd, sports venues will open, and you know, with these variants floating around and you know, all the kind of anxiety that's created, I think – do you think this is a wise move to open sports venues at, you know, later this month with given, you know, the variants and the danger they might pose?

Mayor: Look, Michael, I think first of all, it can be done safely with a lot of precautions, but we have to keep a really careful eye on the situation. We have to always be led by the data and science. It has to be health and safety first. If you're talking about a really limited audience and a lot of precautions right now, I think that can work, but we got to keep watching to see how things develop. Look, I'm someone who believes sports has a really big impact on all of us. It really gives people a lot of hope. I've been thrilled to see sports coming back and to feel like something they latch onto as we fight our way past the coronavirus and, you know, the Brooklyn Nets are really exciting story this year. So, the fact that they will be having, you know, an audience I think is something that people are going to appreciate a lot. But we got to watch carefully to your question, we got to watch carefully each step along the way and be led by the data and science and what is telling us as things develop.

Moderator: Go ahead. Next is Jillian from WBAI.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Jillian. How you been?

Question: I'm okay. I'm okay. I'm glad you started at Citi Field finally.

Mayor: Let me tell it was very refreshing. It let me, I had, I had a very complex experience on Friday. This was very refreshing.

Question: Well, did you wear a Mets cap?

Mayor: Of course.

Question: Okay. I haven't seen it yet.

Mayor: I mean, Mr. And Mrs. Met next to me, it was a rich Met experience.

Question: Well, you've got the full thing. I wanted to point out that the New York Dolls were just nominated for the class of 2021 into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and that's a big deal, they were a breakthrough, groundbreaking. And so, we should all be proud of that –

Mayor: You know your history – you know your history, Jillian. They were a really important band that helped bring us a lot of amazing music and a lot of the punk movement and other things that came in here.

Question: Absolutely –

Mayor: Yep.

Question: Absolutely. They were a predecessor's punk, one of the many. So, my first question to change topics is there's been a series of taxi driver rallies at City Hall, including one today, demanding medallion debt forgiveness. I know you know about that, but this is especially important because of the city's role in the way they colluded with banks to inflate the value of the medallion, that was mostly during the Bloomberg administration, and this is while they were opening the flood gates for app-based drivers with no regulations. So, they really – they're really hard up, you know what's happening in the taxi industry. The Taxi Alliance in a post-COVID survey where they found that 90 percent had active loans and 83 percent were food insecure or close. I mean, they're really hurting. They have a restructuring plan that the Comptroller signed off on and I just wanted to know – what do you think you're going to do? They said that you are pushing a plan that's kind of not very fair and its more lender friendly, and so I just wanted to know what you've thought about, if anything?

Mayor: Thank you. I appreciate your question and it's a very thorough question. I want to say I think you're right to say there were mistakes made or choices made that weren't good choices, but I remind you of the regulation of the industry, and the lending practices, and the brokers came from the federal government, the State government, not the city. When we came in and saw what was happening with the medallions and with the lives of taxi drivers, we stopped the medallion sales after my first year and it's been a very, very painful episode. It really has been. I feel so bad for so many families that just saw their life's work destroyed. We've tried to find

ways to help drivers, but we need something bigger that is not something the city can do directly, but with stimulus funding, I think there's a real chance to do something, and I'm really encouraged by what I'm seeing now in the Senate and the House. If we can get, you know, the kind of stimulus support we deserve, I think it opens the door to coming up with a solution to help taxi drivers and the families who have suffered so much. So, that's to me, the gateway to getting something done and, you know, I'll speak more to a specific approach, but we need to see if we actually are going to get that stimulus support we deserve. Go ahead.

Question: Yeah, they said that you said you were waiting for the stimulus. So, my other question is related to the Orthodox Jewish community, and it's not to take away at all from what you said about the Holocaust survivors and having them vaccinated, but a couple of days ago the Sheriff busted a biker party in East New York that had about 200 people not following COVID regulations. And you're asked a few weeks ago about how there are these micro clusters glowing – growing, sorry, in the same communities over and over again. In mid-January, there was a giant Hasidic wedding in Brooklyn that was organized on the q.t., thousands attended. It was packed, there was no social distancing, no mask squaring, there were pictures and videos that showed all this. The Sheriff had said that they didn't move in because there were multiple entrances, there were tarps obscuring their vision, but also because there's this loosening of a religious exemption, but the picture far show that, you know, the religious exemptions are out the window in this case. So, there's this newspaper called Times of Israel, and I've not heard of it, but they said – they called this the latest example of the city communities lack of compliance and yet another example of it willing to keep secret violations of public health guidelines. So, whether this is correct or not, there's a perception that you've been somewhat lenient with the Hasidic and Orthodox Jewish communities. So, I wanted to know what's the difference between the two situations and going forward, what are you going to do differently?

Mayor: Yeah, I think – I appreciate you saying perception, but I think it depends on who you talk to. There's plenty of people I think would take the opposite view. We're to do one thing and one thing consistently, particularly with the really strong efforts of the Sheriff's Office and they deserve a lot of credit. Wherever there have been illegal gatherings, whether you're talking in communities in Brooklyn, whether you're talking in Staten Island or all over New York City, the Sheriff's Office has been there to break things up, to send people home, and to levy the appropriate fines and penalties, that has happened in all communities. It will continue to happen. I am hoping that people understand that they're creating a danger to everyone involved when there's a large gathering and if there's large gatherings, there will be penalties. If there's a consistent pattern of a large gathering at a site, we will shut down the site, and we've said that ever since that incident Williamsburg and you're right, it was obviously planned to evade detection, but we've made very clear to the folks involved if there's ever something like that again at that site, we will simply shut that site down once and for all.

Moderator: Next is Gersh from Streetsblog.

Question: How are you doing, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: I am doing well, Gersh, because of our mutual love of baseball and softball. I can tell you I felt the feeling today at Citi Field.

Question: I thought you were going to say our mutual love of the subway, because I understand you took a nice ride out to Citi Field on the subway.

Mayor: I do love the subway too and I said to folks, the reporters who were with me, that I will look forward to January 1st when I will just be a full-time subway rider. It's going to be refreshing.

Question: Fair enough. So, I wanted to go back a little bit to something you announced during the week, or talked at least about, Open Culture, the Open Culture Street Program. The DOT put out a list which was mandated by the Council earlier this month of about 110 Open Culture streets, yet only 10 of those streets were segments that were already on existing Open Streets, where there are already, you know, massive volunteer efforts to secure those roadways and keep the cars off of them. So, some people in the cultural community and in the Open Streets community worried that now you've got an entirely new and potentially even bigger volunteer effort needed to open and close the Open Culture streets, running parallel with the open streets. And so, I wonder if you could just talk to me about why you guys made the decision to come up with this entirely new list and include so few existing open streets?

Mayor: Yeah, it's a fair question, Gersh, and we'll certainly have the folks who have been involved in that DOT and cultural fairs, and I'll get you a more detailed answer. But look, I like the all of the above approach here. Open Streets have been incredibly successful and we're going to make them permanent and we're going to look for ways to expand, obviously, where we've combined Open Restaurants, Open Streets, that's been extraordinary, or as we might say today, a home run and the notion of making spaces available for cultural performances for the community as part of our recovery for everyone is really, really exciting to me. I think you're right, sometimes the best location might be overlapping in existing Open Streets, sometimes it might be a different kind of location, but all of these approaches are going to help us have a strong recovery and engage people at the community level. So, we'll follow up with you on the details, but I really think this is going to be an exciting new element of life in this city as we come back. Go ahead, Gersh.

Question: Okay. Well, I was actually going to ask a different question rather than a follow-up. So, last month the city council put out a slate of NYPD reforms that included getting the NYPD out of crash investigations, because as you know, the NYPD – well, first of all, the majority of the officers live in the suburbs and they often see crashes from the driver's perspective, but in addition to that they actually investigate only a tiny fraction of the number of serious crashes in the city and their investigations do not inform the Department of Transportation about what the design problem might have been that might've led to the crash. So, that's why the NYPD reforms from the Council, now, I know you may not have read the bill, the bill hasn't been heard yet, but you and I have discussed this topic before. So, what's your opinion generally on having DOT

professionals rather than law enforcement officials who mostly live in the suburbs, review crashes with an eye towards redesigning safety, the roads for safety?

Mayor: Yeah, I think there's more than one thing going on here. I think we need to figure out the best way to investigate crashes for multiple purposes. There's the criminal justice element of this, which I think is an area you and I have not only talked about a lot, I imagine we agree on a lot. I want to see stronger penalties for people who hurt or kill other people with their automobile. I still think we have farther to go on that front, particularly in State law. I want to see more stringent investigations that lead to consequences. I obviously also want to see that crash investigations lead to structural change where needed, design change or what else is needed. Those are two different elements. There's a part of that that's law enforcement, some NYPD, there's a part of that that's DOT. I think we have to get everyone working together. We've got a lot of examples of getting agencies to actually be on the same page and work in common, this is an example where we need to do more and better. When you say, respectfully, when you say, oh, people live in the suburbs and all, I don't accept that. First of all, very high percentage, almost half of them NYPD officers live in New York City. Second of all, I think even if someone drives a car, it does not stop them from understanding how horrible a crash is and how we have to do things better. NYPD has been very devoted Vision Zero. So, my goal is to just do better with crash investigations, but I think NYPD and DOT both have a role to play.

Moderator: Next is Sophia from Gothamist.

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

Mayor: Good, Sophia. How are you doing?

Question: Good. These 24-hour vaccination sites, it seems difficult to get to them when the subway service hasn't been returned [inaudible] 24/7 service. And with the weather, and the snowstorms, and the pandemic, and having homeless people shut out of the stations is – continues to be a concern. When do you think 24/7 subway service should be reinstated?

Mayor: I think it should be reinstated, but not yet. I think right now we're still bringing back the city. Look, my goal is to vaccinate 5 million New Yorkers by June. If I get the supply, we can do it. And this is another example – God bless the federal and State government, if they just give us the supply, we'll take care of it. We can get 5 million people vaccinated by June. That's going to be crucial to the recovery of New York City. I want to get to a point where we have seen how we handle these variants, we are certain about the trajectory we're on, and we see a lot more people vaccinated. And then, the day going to come where it makes sense to go back to 24/7 subway service. I don't get to make the decision. It's the State, obviously, that makes that decision, but I will say, I'll give voice for 24/7 service when we are certain that we've reached the right point both on a health level and in terms of our recovery. Go ahead, Sophia.

Question: Thank you. And then we wanted to ask about – with indoor dining returning this week, and then the announcement from the Governor that stadiums can reopen. It seems that the

people who will be working at these stadiums and restaurants probably won't have the vaccine. Are you worried about that? And are you going to be indoors this weekend?

Mayor: I am worried for the folks who work particularly in restaurants. The arenas, you know, obviously, that's more occasional when there are games, and there's more space. But restaurants are more confined spaces, people have their mask off a lot of times, unlike an arena where you're expected to have the mask on the vast majority time. I'm worried for folks who serve us in restaurants, who we depend on, working people who are struggling to make ends meet and need that job. We want to keep them safe. And that's why I definitely fought for them to have the right be vaccinated. We don't have enough supply to get everyone as quickly as we should. We've just got to get more supply. I will, at some point, be out there with indoor dining, I don't know exactly schedule yet. But what I'll do for sure is, when I do it, I'm going to let the media know so you can join me. But my central concern right now is that we educate the folks who work in restaurants, we do the kinds of inspections to keep them safe, we keep remaining restaurant owners and ensuring that they're taking the measures to keep everyone safe, and we, more and more, getting that folks who work in response vaccinate as well.

Moderator: Next is Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. I'd just like to ask you, yesterday, a federal judge throughout the restrictions on houses of worship in red and orange zones, saying they were unconstitutional. So, I just wanted to ask if you were going to toss all the fines that you gave houses of worship and, if any houses of worship have paid fines, [inaudible] returned money?

Mayor: It's a fair question. I need to talk to the Law Department about what we think of that decision and how we're going to proceed, and the State is going to proceed on that. We need houses of worship and everyone to think about health and safety first, and whatever happens in the court system, it doesn't change the fact that we've got to be careful. And the precautions that – a lot of house of worship did this, the vast majority of houses worship did this – they limited number of people, made people wear masks, a lot of smart precautions. We cannot let our guard down, especially with variants out there. So, that's my central concern right now, to keep working with clergy and the faith community to keep people safe. Go ahead.

Question: Yeah, well it appears you're not committing to respecting the court's decision of throwing out fines, but I do want to move onto a second question. When you released the list of 33 hard-hit neighborhoods that are getting vaccine priority, a couple of elected officials, including [inaudible] and Councilman Yeger, pointed out that their communities were very hard-hit, so much so that the Governor created these special zones just for these communities, which had a lot of very intense focus for a couple of months with high COVID rates. And they say that they're not on the list of highest-hit communities either. The lockdown was unjustified or they should be on the list – what is your response?

Mayor: My response is, we want to reach everyone. We want to vaccinate everyone. If you look at where vaccination sites are – and when I met with leaders of the Orthodox Jewish community yesterday, we talked about sites that are right there in communities right now, in Crown Heights, in Flatbush, in the Rockaways, in Williamsburg. The sites are there. We need much more vaccine so we can reach people. When we look at the 33 neighborhoods, they do include a number of key neighborhoods with Orthodox Jewish communities. We want to reach everyone.

And I'm particularly concerned about Holocaust survivors who are vulnerable. Obviously, if you're a Holocaust survivor, you're much older. They are vulnerable. They need our help right now and that's why we're going to be doing this very special focused effort to get as many of them vaccinated as quickly as possible as well. But the goal here is to reach everyone while also recognizing that what we learned, particularly, in the worst moments of this crisis and March, April is, some neighborhoods in the city had a particularly horrible experience, lost a huge number of people, and still don't have the health care support they need. And we've got to focus as well on getting the vaccine there and overcoming the hesitancy that a lot of communities feel on top of it.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Nolan from the Post.

Question: Hey. Good morning, everybody. It's good afternoon – my apologies.

Mayor: Nolan – Nolan, look at the clock, brother.

Question: This is what happens when I only have six cups of coffee instead seven. I wanted to ask you a question about the vaccine signup. You've promised that the City would take a second effort at making the form more simpler, but getting computer systems to talk to each other. The two departments doing the City's vaccine efforts have three separate computer systems, which New Yorkers need to navigate in order to set up accounts and different appointments. What progress has made on that point? Is there a deadline for getting these computer systems to talk to each other? If so, when is it? If not, why not?

Mayor: There is progress. We're going to have a further announcement on that soon. Can't give you exact day yet, but it will be soon. But I want to see constant improvement in the experience people having when they sign up for an application – excuse me, sign up for an appointment. Look, in the beginning, we had very different systems. We got a lot of customer feedback. We've changed a lot of the approaches to make them simpler. We've added – you and I talked about this, and I thank you for bringing up – we've added different languages for the appointment application. We made it clear where there are doses, where there are not, so people don't put too much time into pursuing a site where are no doses. There's some real progress, but I want it to keep getting simpler. So, we will have more to say on this soon.

Question: Okay. [Inaudible] excuse me, my apologies. After you left Citi Field today, there were a group of people who went up to talked to an official from Test and Trace, trying to get appointments in order to get vaccinated. You said that people who arrived at Citi Field wouldn't be able to be vaccinated, but they can set up an appointment so they can come back at some point future point in time and get a shot. Unfortunately, there were no appointments to be given, and there were a lot of people were very frustrated, and the scene got a little tense at points. Can you like, how do you prevent this, sort of, chaos in the future? And when you say folks who are going to these testing plants in order to get registered for vaccines, because that's how they can do it fast, and they're being turned away because they can't even get an appointment.

Mayor: First of all, respectfully, I was there. It was not chaos. It was folks who really want appointment and needed to be shown how to get one. This is a situation that needs to be addressed by us getting the supply we deserve. And it just comes back to this, New York City is doing more than our fair share right now. We're vaccinating the folks in New York City, we're

vaccinating folks from suburbs, we're vaccinating folks from other states – we need more vaccine. I don't mind helping other people, but we need a greater share of vaccine than we're getting. We need a direct allotment from federal government so we can do our job. We have an extraordinary ability in this city to vaccinate people. We could be doing a half-million vaccinations per week. It's time to speed this up and we need more help from the federal government, State government to do it. But we said from day-one, Nolan, with any vaccination site, do not just show up. We've said this repeatedly in multiple languages, we're going to keep saying it – don't just show up. We don't want lines. We don't want people just speculating, hoping they can get in. Signed up. And if there's not an available appointment immediately, we're going to keep adding more appointments. And I never expect New Yorkers to be patient, but I do need people to hear that we've got over a million doses given already. It will speed up more, more, as we get more supply. And the best thing to do is keep going online or keep calling that number to get an appointment. That's the right way to do it. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Debralee from Manhattan Times.

Question: [Inaudible] everyone. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Hey, Debralee. How are you?

Question: Well, unfortunately, spent the morning at Citi Field. I regret that for you –

[Laughter]

Mayor: That's an editorial comment there, Debralee.

[Laughter]

Question: Well, it is the Manhattan Times and the Bronx Free Press, to be fair.

Mayor: That's it.

Question: That said, [inaudible] concern is being voiced by parents, you know, who are concerned, certainly, about what the return of the school year will look like in the fall. But I'd like you to discuss what you expect will be the policies around vaccinations for children and if, in fact, it will be a policy, going forward, a requirement, as part of the vaccination profile of public school students in NYC.

Mayor: So, thank you for the question, Debralee. And it's true that, you know, September is a long way away and a lot will happen between now and then, and I expect it to be generally very good news between now and then. What we know is our schools have been amongst the safest places in New York City. What we know as we created a gold standard of health and safety approaches that have worked consistently from the beginning. And those approaches are continue until the time that our health care leaders say it's okay to relax them. So, we don't start with assumptions around vaccination. We also don't know yet when the vaccines are going to be right for kids. Right now, they're not available for kids. We start with the assumption that we're going to make decisions based on the data and the science with our health care leaders every step of the way. But we've already proven schools to be safe. And, by September, I think you're

going to see such a high percent of New Yorkers vaccinated that we'll be in a totally different environment and a much better environment for all of us. Go ahead.

Question: All right. Well, separately, I wanted to have you share with us how [inaudible] the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity, has been involved thus far in the vaccine, the [inaudible] around vaccine and distribution. Moreover, [inaudible] that they're going to be taking on for the latter part of your administration this year, specifically?

Mayor: Yeah. Thank you. The Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity has done really an outstanding job. And when we presented the data that we're seeing about vaccination, we did that with the executive director of the taskforce, Sideya Sherman, and Dr. Torian Easterling, the First Deputy Commissioner of Health Department, and it showed her vividly the disparities that happen so far in vaccination, and the changes that need to make to make sure that vaccination efforts are as consistent as humanly possible across all communities. And we laid out some of the building blocks of how to do that. The taskforce has been crucial in determining the best approach and going out into committees and listening to people as to what they need to hear. And we know there's a huge hesitancy problem. We've seen a lot evidence of hesitancy in Black and Latino communities. We know we need a lot more dialogue. We know we keep having to have people come forward and show it safe, as the First Lady did yesterday. But this is going to be ongoing, and I truly believe, Debralee, that the best way to solve the hesitancy problem and to create more consistency and equality in vaccination effort is to get the kind of supply we need, because then we can create momentum. We're going to be able to really have ample supply in communities at the grassroots, lots of really committee-based centers and sites with community-based organizations, helping to lead them with the names and faces people know. And then, more and more people in everyone's lives, getting vaccinated, creates momentum, creates trust. I want a world in which there's never a need to ever delay an appointment and people can feel real confidence that the vaccine is there for them. So, that's how we overcome the disparities as well over these next few months.

All right, with that, everybody, look – today, an example, again, going out into the communities of this city, making the vaccine available, letting people know it's safe, letting people know it's for them, overcoming that hesitancy. What we saw in Citi Field today, just talk to people about the vaccine, just listen to the relief. Every time I go to people who are just about to get that vaccine, or just gotten it, I say – what does it feel like? They talk about relief. They talk about the freedom of knowing they're turning the corner. Their family is going to be safer. This is what we have to do for millions of New Yorkers, but we need the supply to do that. And we need the freedom to vaccinate so we can move this city forward. And that's how we build a recovery for all of us. Thank you, everybody.

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