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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW**

**Brian Lehrer:** It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning, again, everyone. We begin this hour as usual on Fridays with our weekly Ask The Mayor call in, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0 or a tweet a question, just use the hashtag, #AskTheMayor.Thanks, as always, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you very much, Brian. How you doing today?

**Lehrer:** I'm doing all right. Thank you. You know, there was so much publicity around whether the city would pass the three percent average positivity rate last month, because that was the school closing threshold, did I see Mr. Mayor that now the city is about five percent?

**Mayor:** You're right about that, Brian, and it's something we should all be very concerned about and I want to take this opportunity to really remind people that our Health Commissioner Dave Chokshi said earlier in the week, if you are over 65 years old and-or have those serious pre-existing conditions like diabetes and heart disease, we are really imploring folks to just stay in, not go out, not engage other folks, except for absolutely essential purposes like a medical appointment. It's a real serious situation and we're working with the State now to figure out additional measures we have to take. The one thing I would say, just to talk about today's indicators, the one thing we still see, thank God, is the hospital admission situation and the intensive care unit situation is different than one would have expected and better than one would have expected here in the city. 134 hospital admissions today but we've been constantly monitoring, the hospital system is holding very well right now. ICU still have a substantial capacity and the hospital treatments for folks with COVID are definitely greatly improved from the spring. We're seeing many fewer people need ventilators. We're seeing more people on the ventilator come through okay. Thank God many fewer people passing away. So qualitatively a very different situation, but the numbers certainly are cause for real concern.

**Lehrer:** You know, I read that Los Angeles County is now above 12 percent positivity up from 7 percent, just a week earlier, and they're doing things like roping off playgrounds again and closing even outdoor dining, like back in the spring, because they've passed a threshold of less than 15 percent ICU capacity. Are you considering anything like that for New York? I certainly heard you say that our ICU capacity, thank goodness, is okay right now.

**Mayor:** Right, I've been talking to the Governor repeatedly about the challenges – and they're real – here in the city, and in fact, even more profound in some other parts of the State. We're talking about what measures need to be taken. Obviously, we will do whatever it takes to keep people safe at the same time we're very much focused on. The Governor talked a lot earlier in the

week about the hospitalizations and that being the key thing to watch. So, we're balancing, you know, what measures we need to take, obviously real concern for folks' livelihoods too, given that for so many working people now they have lost all the positive benefit that came from those stimulus checks earlier in the year, those checks have run out. There's no guarantee of a new stimulus yet. A lot of people desperately need whatever work they can to keep their families going, and so we're trying to balance all those factors, but this is literally a daily and sometimes multiple times a day conversation that I'm having with the Governor, my staff is having with his staff, to work out what steps need to be taken.

**Lehrer:** So, you're not ruling out something as severe in a few weeks, maybe, as roping off the playgrounds again, which the city did do, not just Los Angeles earlier this year, right?

**Mayor:** I want to be very careful in how I word it. We, again, we have a very different situation that when the one we had in the spring. We're going to look at a variety of measures. I don't want to rule in or rule out anything because we are having those conversations with the State and obviously ultimately they make the decision on most of this. So, let me get through those conversations a little more and I'll have more to say when we solidify the planning, but look, I think it's fair to say what I'm hearing from my health leadership. I know the Governor is hearing from his is, you know, this is a very serious situation and we're going to work together to figure out the measures we have to take.

**Lehrer:** Let's take a phone call Angelina in Brooklyn, a pre-K teacher, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Angelina.

**Question:** Hi, how are you, this is very exciting, hi Mr. Mayor, hi Brian –

**Mayor:** Hi, Angelina. How you doing?

**Question:** Good, I'm okay. So I'm a 3-K for All teacher in Queens, Jamaica, and my question is why haven't you been totally clear with the public, with the press, that the 3-K, pre-K kindergarten and District 75 students do not get tested?

**Mayor:** Angelina, it is a difference there, I appreciate the question, it's an important question. Pre K, 3-K kids, three-year-olds, four-year-olds, obviously we have seen the least problem with the coronavirus and it's – you know, obviously we're concerned about that age level and what it takes to do testing and all, that's not what we've been doing. We have not seen a problem with that. We do test, and this is part of the new protocol going back into schools Monday, we will be testing K-5 kids. We will be testing District 75 kids. Every parent needs to have a consent form on file or have their child bring it with them next week to be able to attend school, and on top of that there's of course the opportunity for a medical exemption if a family believes there's a valid reason and it's confirmed by the DOE, but we from the beginning, believe in – our health care team has affirmed this, that the three-year-olds and four-year-olds were not the group of kids who needed to be tested.

**Lehrer:** Angelina –

**Question:** So, how do you feel about – I mean, what do you say? I have two questions, but this is just a continuation on the first one, because I know a lot of pre-K teachers are concerned, their

students are coming back five days a week, we'll have about 13 students if the room capacity holds it, we'll have 13 students, and you know, how – what do you say to the pre-K teachers to make them actually feel better? And this is also going to be another question for the UFT that, you know, how – like, what are our protections now? Because we're going back to school five days a week with more kids and our kids aren't being tested and we're in a red zone area?

**Mayor:** Yeah, well, Angelina, a couple of things, I would not start with the assumption of more kids. We believe that because we're going to say very, very consistently that everyone in the school system has to claim their seats now once and for all and that's next week, and I've been real blunt about this, and the Chancellor has too, any family that their child is signed up for in-person learning and the child doesn't show up next week, we're telling the family we're about to move them then to remote learning, unless they give us a clear explanation of why and a commitment of their child's going to start attending immediately. I think, Angelina, we have had a certain number of – a substantial number of tens of thousands of families who have been basically trying to hold a place for the future. We don't want that anymore. We can't have that. We need to get to five-day-a-week for as many families as possible or at least more days. So that's going to reduce the numbers I think a meaningfully. And the other thing to remember, Angelina, is that the amount of precautions in a New York City schools, this is literally the highest standard in the world, including everyone wearing a mask all the time and the constant cleaning, all the measures, the social distancing. We have facts now for two straight months of extraordinarily low levels of transmission in our schools, our schools are clearly safer. This is what our health care leaders say. Our schools are safer than pretty much any place else in New York City. So, I really think everyone in the school community can feel secure because so many measures are in place to protect everyone.

**Lehrer:** Angelina, thank you so much for your call, please call us again. A follow-up you said that with the relatively small number of in-person learners, it's less than a third of all the kids in the system who've opted in, some schools might even be able to go five days a week and keep social distancing, but I've read that some principals are telling parents, even if they have the space, they don't have the budgets to hire enough teachers. They would need more teachers, I guess, for the in-person plus remote, is that a concern you're aware of?

**Mayor:** I've heard those rumors and I want to make very clear to everyone in the Department of Education, to all our principals, all our educators, this is a decision that the Chancellor and I have made. It's not up for debate. We need to provide the most in-person instruction possible to our children. Our children have gone through so much this year. Those whose families choose to have the children in the classroom deserve the maximum number of days and we're prioritizing it. Any school where there are not enough seats for every child to go five days, the priority will go to special needs kids, to kids who are in shelter and temporary housing, to the kids who are in public housing, it will be prioritized by the economic and educational need. So this is something that has to happen. It can happen. The numbers speak for themselves. We already know there are schools, that right now we'll come back Monday with five-day-a-week for all their students. And in the course of the next few weeks, there'll be more and more.

And Brian, the crucial thing to recognize is once you take out the students who really haven't been attending and their parents are just in effect holding a seat or just not communicating with DOE at all, when you take those kids out of the equation, the numbers will go down. I wish they wouldn't, but they will. We know this and again, I say very clear to the parents, you have to give

us that consent form to test or a medical excuse, otherwise we can't see the child who doesn't have one or the other of those things. The numbers will go down and we will have the opportunity because of the sheer numbers to seek kids five days a week. If a classroom was 24 kids, and now the classroom is eight or nine or ten kids because of social distancing, but the number of kids who you have in your school is 25 percent or 30 percent, 35 percent of what you had before. You can make that equation work. The math is straightforward. If we need to get some schools additional teachers, we will, we've been very clear and we can move substitutes, including substitute who previously were working in middle and high school who now are freed up for a period of time. So we'll fill those needs, but we have to get this done. Parents need it, kids need it.

**Lehrer:** Let's stay on the school [inaudible] and talk to Fazeen calling from Astoria, Fazeen you're on WNYC with the Mayor.

**Question:** Hi good morning, Mayor and Brian Lehrer. I'm an avid listener to your show and I do have a question for the Mayor. So in regards to the consent form, the children returning on Monday must have this consent. My concern with the consent form is there is no alternative provided for your child to be tested through their doctor, through a pediatrician, or for the parent to be present at the time of the test. How come this alternative is not being presented otherwise, what you now have will more children who are currently in blended will now be removed from blended and switched to strictly online?

**Mayor:** It's a fair question and what I'd say is this, we are happy to work with any parent to see if we can accommodate, but the bottom line of course, is we'd have to protect the health and safety of the whole school community and the testing has been quintessential to how we've been able to keep our schools safe. This is one of the reasons why New York City public schools are considered among the safest in the country right now, and as I said, our health leadership will tell you our school buildings are some of the safest places to be for anyone in New York City right now. So testing has been crucial to that. What I'd say is, if a parent says, look, I think there's a medical reason why my child shouldn't be tested. That's very clear. You can get an exemption. The DOE has to approve it, but that's a very available path. Obviously the virtue of the consent form is it means that we can do the in-school testing as needed and it's done, and we know it happens. If you're dealing with a parent's personal pediatrician, for example, how and when does that happen becomes difficult, unwieldy, we can't have people not getting tested, but if a parent says I have a particular need, we of course will try and work with that parent to see how we can address that need. And that's something that's a conversation that should be had with the school, with a principal, assistant principal, parent coordinator at the school to see how we can work on that.

**Lehrer:** Fazeem, I hope that answers your question, and let me follow up just on this notion that – I mean it's news, it's real right? That schools are reopening for pre-K, 3-K through five, plus District 75, special-ed, on Monday. But I've been told that at a Manhattan District Two meeting on Wednesday, Chancellor Carranza said schools in the state designated red and orange zones will not be part of Monday's reopening plan. So, that would be South shore of Staten Island and the only red or orange zone I think at the moment in the city is that, so can you confirm this?

**Mayor:** Well, no, it's I – this is a little bit of a telephone game here I think Brian, because I don't know what happened at that meeting. I can tell you what the Chancellor and I said at the press

conference on Sunday, when we announced this plan, which really should be the reference point. Next week, we intend to open schools in that orange zone area of Staten Island. We have some additional work to do. We haven't fixed the day yet. We will do that very quickly, obviously. But we still intend to move forward for next week.

**Lehrer:** All right, how about Blair in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Blair.

**Question:** Hello there Mr. Mayor. Question, with so many more people now driving to work to avoid mass transit, plus the dire need for revenue enhancement, along with it – we need to deal with the fact that 30 percent of New York car owners register their car elsewhere. Isn't it time to have a resident parking in New York City as we find in so many, many other United States cities?

**Lehrer:** Resident only parking –

**Mayor:** Yeah, residential parking permits. It's a very good question. First I'd say, I appreciate you raising the point about folks who register out of state, which is really something people should not do, and we obviously have a pandemic going on, but this is something I would love to work with the state to break through once and for all, because it's just not fair to everyone else and, and deprives us of revenue we need, and it's obviously an attempt to evade, you know, New York State regulations.

But on the parking permits, we've looked at this several times, in the last seven years. So far, it seems to be complicated enough that, and there's enough unintended consequences that certainly our transportation leadership and planners have not believed it ultimately works for New York City. It may be different now. So you raised an important point. I grew up with it, actually, in Massachusetts and it worked well, but I do think scale matters here in the context of New York City. It's harder to implement at this scale, but I'm going to go back and talk it through in light of the impact of the pandemic and see if our transportation team thinks it's time to evaluate that again.

**Lehrer:** Thank you for your call. I want to ask you about crime in the city. The last number I saw for shootings is up 94 percent compared to last year, and there have been more stories in the press about random attacks like pushing people onto the subway tracks more than in recent years after years of success at getting those numbers, especially shootings down. Why can't the city do any better this year, despite the pandemic?

**Mayor:** I think it's not fair to suggest that it's been a static situation, Brian. Actually, what we've seen over last months from the end of the summer till now is a steady increase in the thing we need the most, which has gun arrests and more and more success by the NYPD and getting guns off the street. The challenge has been – I've talked about the perfect storm that has – literally, we've never seen anything like this, and we will not see it again, thank God. We know 2021 will by definition be better than 2020, in every way for all of our society, including our ability to fight crime because everything came unglued when there was no – there weren't jobs, there wasn't school, there weren't houses of worship. Everything came unglued, and we know that led to a much tougher situation for the NYPD to handle. Over the course of the summer into the fall and NYPD reinvigorated its neighborhood policing efforts, got tighter with community residents and groups to help fight crime. That helped. Gun arrests went up, that's helping. What we are seeing

now is going to be a lot better poised next year to from the beginning of the year, address a situation without multiple hands tied behind our backs of a total pandemic situation, plus so many officers who are out sick, it really got very, very difficult, but we're going to go into next year, I think in a much better position and really double down on neighborhood policing, because that was a strategy that worked.

**Lehrer:** How much is there attention, now, if any, between wanting to cut down on mass incarceration and the risk of police violence, which has been so much in the news this year, of course, versus wanting to cut down on shootings by civilians in the short run?

**Mayor:** It's an important question. What I'd say is we have to understand for the vast majority of New Yorkers their concern is they need safety in their lives. They want it to be fair. They want police to be respectful and obviously act in an unbiased fashion, but they need police presence to keep their community safe. That's what I hear all over the city – I've been hearing at town hall meetings for seven years – it's quite clear and consistent. The balance we have to strike is to pick up where we were pre-pandemic, maximize neighborhood policing, more respectful policing, more communication between police and community, keep reducing incarceration overall, which certainly is our plan, and that's why we're going to be able to close down Rikers Island once and for all. But in the short term, there'll be a problem because the court system has not – it's not their fault, but they've never been able to sustain themselves over the last 10 months and you can't move the criminal justice system and move people through trial, and determine their outcome without a court system functioning, which is a huge x-factor as discussion. So I think what's going to happen is as the vaccine is distributed and let's agree that you know, it's coming in this month to begin, I think we'll start to feel larger effects of it January into February, but maximally feel it as we go into the spring, then I think you'll see the court system come back to fully over time. Then you see the whole process start to move and we're able to address each case, which will reduce of course, people waiting for trial. I think we can get back to the strategy that was working. I think it'll just be something we have to do in stages in the course of 2021.

**Lehrer:** And I've seen the priority list for vaccinations start with frontline medical workers and go next to people in nursing homes at risk and those congregate care facilities. What about people in jails and prisons? Shouldn't they be also high considering the outbreak rates there?

**Mayor:** We're watching that carefully. I looked at the numbers a couple of days ago to date, thank God we have seen a pretty steady situation, but we're concerned because of the physical setting to say the least. So to date, we have not been seeing a major problem in our city jails, but certainly since our correction workers, correction officers are essential workers, they would be in the priority group. The city and state are working on the exact delineation, but absolutely the most vulnerable folks are in nursing homes. Let's be clear if – anybody in our entire population – so nursing home workers, nursing home residents, crucial as well as everyone is the most sensitive healthcare workers, crucial, and we got to help and protect the people who help all of us, especially with the rates of infection going up. That's where you have to begin. There's a lot more healthcare workers, first responders that need to get vaccinated, of course. That group would include our correction officers. We've got to figure out the inmates in that mix too, and then the other big category to be really concerned about is the group of people. Dr. Chokshi is giving a due warning to, that anyone over 65 and folks – and/or folks who have those preexisting conditions have to be high up the list. So we're going to work through all those priorities, and as

quick as we get it in, we're going to do the vaccine and we're going to turn it around. So I think we'll be able to make a lot of progress on all those priorities December, January, into February.

**Lehrer:** Joe on Staten Island. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Joe.

**Question:** Yes. Yeah, hi, Brian. Hi, your honor. You're probably aware of the contentious situation that's happening at Mac's Grill about being closed down for flouting the COVID restrictions. The other nights at a protest, the Proud Boys showed up and also at this protest was Council Member Joe Borelli who spoke to the crowd without at all admonishing what is known nationwide as a hate group and potentially a terrorist group. Will there be any censure for Council Member Joe Borelli for participating in a rally with a known hate group?

**Mayor:** It's an important question because that is a hate group, and you know, this is a point where we need to put this era of hatred behind us, and obviously the people this country spoke clearly on Election Day that they're ready to put the hatred behind us. So no elected officials should be supporting or encouraging the Proud Boys.

I don't know the details. So, I don't want to speak about the Councilman specifically – you're the first person actually to say to me that there may have been that presence at that gathering. We were obviously concerned to make very clear as you started that the law has to be followed and that that bar needs to be closed, but I will follow up to find out what happened there. I'm concerned, and obviously the bigger point you're raising is right. You know, we should all be not dependent at all on party affiliation. Everyone should be condemning what the Proud Boys stand for.

**Lehrer:** How much pushback are you – well, not just pushback, but like what we saw at that restaurant, resistance in defiance of indoor dining restrictions are you expecting, or are you seeing right now?

**Mayor:** Well, we're generally not, and we haven't from the beginning you know, this individual, this particular site, they obviously wanted to get publicity for themselves. They made a big deal of it, but they're shut down now. Let's be clear. Remember when we first had to – it's sad, but when we first had to put the restrictions on bars and restaurants in the spring and the days after we had compliance officers out, we saw the overwhelming compliance. We've seen it ever since. The times when we've had to shut people down have been very few, and I think everyone's watching this situation, looking at these numbers. I expect whatever the rules become that they will overwhelmingly be honored.

**Lehrer:** Briar in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Briar.

**Question:** Hi, good morning to both of you. I have a question about land use issues as it pertains to Lower Manhattan. I'm a resident of the Lower East Side and I work in Chinatown, and my question is if the SoHo and NoHo rezoning, the upzonings currently being proposed, is really about racial justice and truly affordable housing, then why haven't you listened to the working class communities of color and Chinatown and the Lower East Side and our demands for the Chinatown Working Group Plan, which is a community-led rezoning plan designed to protect our neighborhoods, which are just adjacent to the newly proposed upzoning, and so I know which will impact our communities too. We need to protect us from speculative

overdevelopment and displacement, and why is it too ambitious, which are your words, Mr. Mayor, to follow the lead of impacted communities and working people when it comes to city planning?

**Mayor:** Well, Briar, I appreciate the question. Obviously, very quickly, SoHo, NoHo is one of the most elite neighborhoods in New York City, and the fact that we'll be able to now get upwards of, I think it's 900 to 1,000 units of affordable housing in there is exactly the kind of thing we need to do more of in the city and make sure that people have the opportunity to live in every neighborhood and keep our economic diversity. I think in light of the pandemic its certainly – I'm very comfortable reviewing the Chinatown plan anew, because we have a brand new situation now and the Chinatown community has gone through so much difficulty this year. Really disproportionately. So previously I did feel it was to taking into account a lot of factors and reaching a lot of places that I thought were too much, but you know, I'm perfectly comfortable giving it another look. I'm not saying what the outcome will be, but I'm perfectly comfortable giving it another look and seeing what our current evaluation is.

**Lehrer:** Briar, thank you very much. Here's a question via Twitter. What's the motivation – oh no, that's that was hers. Sorry, let me go back to my Twitter. Here it is.

**Mayor:** It's live radio, Brian. Live radio, these things happen.

**Lehrer:** That's right. Thank you for understanding. Question from Twitter. Listener asks, please ask the Mayor why they haven't considered CUNY campuses as health system testing sites with priority appointments for faculty, staff, and students – 19 practically empty campuses as we are all working, teaching, learning remotely spread across all five boroughs?

**Mayor:** That's a very good question. We had a lot of conversations with CUNY earlier on and CUNY is controlled by the State of New York, and my understanding is they made the decision that they wanted to keep their facilities – the potential to have them open to various points, and that's where we left it. In terms of testing sites. It's a great question that we obviously have, you know, we have over 200 testing sites all over the city and we're now, you know, our problem is much less sites than just pure testing capacity. We are working to get to a hundred thousand tests a day, but even with that, you know, there's so much demand right now, all over the city. I'll check and see if we need additional sites in the areas where the CUNY campuses are. I think that's a good question and worth another look.

**Lehrer:** I've read that the Health + Hospitals Corporation testing sites do not have real time waiting times on a map. Like I believe some of the private sites do, is that true? And if so, can those be established?

**Mayor:** So I'm going to get you the exact place to go online, but for our H + H facilities they now just this week have put up a system so that you can know what the wait time is at each testing site and people can make their plans accordingly, and I want to emphasize, as I say this to Health + Hospitals sites, the hospitals, and the clinics so it's 11 hospitals, 70 clinics have consistently had much less wait time than some of the other sites like CityMD. Again, we thank CityMD for what they're doing. This is not anything but appreciation for them, but a lot of them have had really, really long lines. H + H tend to have shorter lines and move faster. Everything's for free, of course, and so we're encouraging people to check that you can go to



nyhealthandhospitals.org, and you can get that up to date number on what's happening at each site, and then make your plans accordingly.

**Lehrer:** Number meaning estimated waiting time?

**Mayor:** Yes. They'll literally show for various sites what the estimated waiting time is.

**Lehrer:** Okay, before you go as someone who was in the Democratic presidential primaries as a progressive, I'm just curious if you have any comment on the Biden cabinet picks so far. Are they progressive enough in your opinion?

**Mayor:** Look, he's obviously put together a group that balances the different wings of the Democratic Party. I will say, I want to give Joe Biden credit from the beginning. He sent a message of welcome to the progressive wing. He certainly worked with Bernie Sanders to bring Bernie's movement into the election, and we saw it happen in terms of the votes around the country, and I think he has been responsible, aggressive wing in terms of building a team that reflects a lot of the progressive voices. Do I want more? I always want more, you know, I think the party needs to keep moving in a direction that addresses the needs of working people, and we have to change things, and I honestly believe if we don't change things consistently, if it leaves the door open, unfortunately for Trump and Trumpism because we saw the frustrations at work in people of all races had around this country, and when, when working people feel left out, they will look for other alternatives in the Democratic Party and we can't let that happen. So more progressives are better, but I think he's made an earnest effort to create balance so far.

**Lehrer:** Have you been approached or anything in the administration?

**Mayor:** No, and I'm focused right here doing this job because we've got 13 months left in this administration. We've got to bring this city back and this is my full focus to get this done and hand off to the new mayor, a city that's well into its recovery.

**Lehrer:** And there's certainly a lot of work to do. Mr. Mayor, thanks as always talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Brian.

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