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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Something all New Yorkers should be proud of – people all around this country, all around this world are looking at New York City right now. And New York City is regarded as a major success story in the fight against the coronavirus. We were down for the count, we were the epicenter, and we have come back in a remarkable fashion because of you. I want to always be clear. The credit goes to New Yorkers. It goes to every single one of you who did the hard work of fighting back this disease. And we have been, throughout, guided by data, guided by science. We've done this the right way because we actually paid attention to the facts. We've talked to you about the facts and you listened and you acted. So, this is what we need to keep doing. We need to be vigilant. We need to be focused on continuing this fight until it's done.

Now, what I want to talk about today is a new phase that we're announcing, in the way we're going to provide you with the information to keep fighting this fight, to give you the best, most accurate information about what's happening, and to do it in a way that helps you recognize what you have to do because that's what's been the key ingredient. Now, the success we've had is absolutely connected to the level of testing that we've achieved. And it's been hard work. And it's often been lonely work for New York City because we haven't gotten the support we needed from the federal government. But New Yorkers have been getting tested and we want to double down on that because it's been crucial to our success. So, we need everyone to go get tested and we are today doing a special effort, a special outreach effort, a special blitz – Get Tested Tuesday. Everyone who has not yet got tested, especially who has not been tested at all, please get tested. If you haven't been tested in a long time, it's a good time to get tested. We have testing locations available at, check this out, over 200 sites across the five boroughs. There are lots and lots of options. Every single one of them will give you that test for free. It is easy. It is safe. So, we want to get this word out in every way we can. I'll be out there flyering today to let people know how important it is, to engage my fellow New Yorkers. But today, Get Tested Tuesday, a great day, if you haven't done so, to go out there and get that test.

Now, we, obviously, are focused every hour, every day on keeping the infection level low in New York City. That's what's been working for us and New Yorkers are doing great, but we have a real concern about travel. We have a concern about people coming in from outside, from the states and the areas that have been most deeply affected. We have a concern about New Yorkers going to those places and then coming home. So, look, let's start at the beginning. We've come so far and we need to, once and for all, defeat this disease. I'm going to urge all New Yorkers at this point to avoid travel to any of the states that are having a particularly bad problem with the coronavirus. Now, again, I understand for some people there's an emergency situation, a family

crisis, or something they have to do for business, and they don't have a choice, but I just want to urge people, if you have a choice, go to a place – if you're going to travel, go to a place that is not on the New York State list of states that are experiencing a profound coronavirus problem. If you have a choice in travel, don't go where the problem is for your own safety, for your family's safety, for all New Yorkers' safety because, of course, if you go there, there's a chance you bring that disease back. Now, if you do go, take the law seriously. You have to quarantine upon your return. So, we're focused on New Yorkers who travel and come back and we're obviously focused on folks who come in from outside New York City for whatever reason, that everyone has to focus on the mandatory 14-day quarantine.

Now the Sheriff's Office, as a lot of you know, has been doing extraordinary work to address this law, to make sure people know it is their obligation, been out there at checkpoints around the city, reminding people that it is the law to fill out that questionnaire about their travel, to give us a way to contact them and then to comply with the quarantine. And I want to remind everyone that failure to comply with the quarantine is a Class-B misdemeanor. It's serious stuff, but clearly, it's been talked about a lot in recent days. A lot of people haven't gotten the message. A lot of people don't necessarily take it as seriously as they need to. So, we're going another step today. Today I'll be signing an executive order and that will require hotels and short term rentals to have travelers from the restricted states fill out these forms before giving them access to their room. So, I want to be very clear about this – under this executive order that I'm about to sign any hotel, any short term rental must get that form from the traveler complete with the contact information and if they don't have that form from the traveler, they should not give them access to their room. Period. This is going to be now a rule here in New York City, because we have to get serious about the fact that there's a real danger here. We have to confront it. We have the right tool to confront it, which is the quarantine, but now people have to take that seriously. So, this executive order would be another step to make clear to everyone how serious it is. And there are real consequences for those who don't comply.

[Mayor de Blasio signs executive order]

Okay. Now, the executive order will add another tool to our arsenal, the ways we are going about making this very clear to folks. And, again, this is going to be part of a series of stepped up actions to make clear just how serious this quarantine is. And you're going to see the sheriff and his team out there a lot around New York City. They're doing an extraordinary job. Here to tell you what else we'll be doing to make sure that people quarantine appropriately, Sheriff Joe Fucito.

New York City Sheriff Joseph Fucito: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to make a very brief statement. Keeping New York infection rates low is one of the most critical public safety and health initiatives facing the city, and we must continue to do our part, to keep each other safe. For New Yorkers, I offer simple advice, avoid traveling to areas with high rates of coronavirus and if travel is necessary, comply with the quarantine requirements. For travelers to New York City, the new executive order is designed to safeguard the health of all residents. The Sheriff's Office in coordination with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene wants to have a measured response that gives visitors all the convenience to complete the state travelers forms and comply with the quarantine and all the authority of law to ensure it's obeyed. Failure to

comply with the Mayor's emergency order is a Class-B misdemeanor and noncompliance with completing the form or following the quarantine mandate is a crime. In addition to criminal penalties and monetary fines, you may be subject to civil commitment until you comply with these important provisions of law. For travelers, this is a threshold moment. What you do and how you act can save someone's life. So, please take a moment and put a stranger's needs before your own desires. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation and please be governed accordingly. Now, the Mayor has asked me to describe a little bit of what our enforcement actions will consist of. We are going to continue to have checkpoints throughout different entry points into New York City. And we're also going to investigate large gatherings that are illegal even before COVID-19 hit New York City. It is important to note that we must work together to stop the coronavirus and that means following social distancing mandates. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Sheriff. Again, thank you to you and your team. The work you're doing literally is life saving and we're so appreciative for it. Now, everyone, again, what's important is to use the laws, use these rules to fight back this disease, keep the infection rate low. That's what's going to save lives, that's what's going to allow us to bring back New York City, to give people back their livelihoods. It all connects. So, we are doing all this to get us to a better place. What we're absolutely certain of is that the information we share with the public has been crucial. The public, in this case, has been so deeply desirous of more and more information, more clarity. People all over New York City want to know what's going on, they want transparency, they want clarity. It's helping them make the right decisions. So, one of the things that we've been focused on throughout this crisis is how to present the best possible information to all New Yorkers.

Starting today, we're going to provide a bigger timeframe for the information we provide. We're going to show the last four weeks of data together. It'll be broken out into categories that make it a lot clearer what's going on and where we stand in the battle against the coronavirus. Now, right now, New York City makes more data available in a more transparent fashion than any city in America. And I think that is directly related to the success we've had. The fact that people take that information and they act on it. So, we will continue to improve it and update it. And one of the areas we've looked at is our indicators. Now, basically from the beginning of this crisis, we've used more or less the same type of indicators. But as we've looked at the situation, we recognize that there is a changing reality. Some of the thresholds we have set in the past, need to be tightened up because we need to go farther. It's great that we fought back the coronavirus this far, but we're not done. We want to push it down even more. So, we're going to be changing some of our approach to the indicators to make clear what we need in this moment and to give you the most accurate information. Here to tell you about the changes, our Health Commissioner, Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. From the beginning, core components of our response have been transparency and data. We set indicators that we have watched like hawks. However, thanks to what New Yorkers have done the context has changed. With lower transmission we need more precise indicators that allow us to zero in on how COVID is spreading. So, we will be making changes to the data on the Health Department's website starting today. First, we will keep hospital admissions for COVID-like illness on our dashboard as a general marker of disease activity. But we will add the

percent of patients with COVID-like illness who actually test positive to make this indicator more precise. As we head into flu season, we need to be able to distinguish flu patients who often have COVID-like symptoms from COVID patients to have an accurate read of what is happening in our communities. Precision is the name of the game. And so, we will also change reporting of the percent of COVID tests that are positive to include two decimal places. For example, you'll see 1.80 percent rather than two percent. And we'll lower the threshold for positive test results from 15 percent to five percent. The higher threshold was an appropriate benchmark for reopening as we transitioned to lower levels of disease transmission. The new lower milestone will alert us earlier if we need to be concerned. We will also add an indicator on new daily cases reported in the city. We'll use a seven-day average to smooth out day to day fluctuations in this new indicator. Along with the percent positive results, this will give us a more complete view of COVID circulating in our city. We want to see the absolute number of new cases remain as low as possible. Other indicators do not have the utility that they once had, like the Health + Hospitals ICU capacity.

I do want to take a moment to emphasize how much removing this indicator means to me. Having served at H + H during the peak, I remember how tested our ICU capacity was. It's a marker of our progress that we're able to change out this indicator. The current context is also informing updates to our website. To date, we have shared aggregate numbers that span the duration of the pandemic, which we will continue to do, but we recognize that there's interest in knowing what is happening in the more recent past, both at the city, as well as the neighborhood level. So, we will present case and fatality numbers and rates for the most recent four-week period. Our website will also soon feature antibody test results by ZIP code, with the capacity to organize the data by age, borough, neighborhood, poverty, and sex. We will be the first jurisdiction in the nation to present our antibody data this way. While there is still much to learn about the science of COVID-19 antibody testing, it is an important element to consider when understanding the epidemiology of COVID.

Finally, I just want to recognize the staff at the Health Department who work incredibly hard to make this data available to New Yorkers. Sound data is the lifeblood of our response and it can save lives. So, thanks to my staff and thank you to all of you for getting this information to New Yorkers.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dave. And Dave, to you and your whole team, thank you. This is really good work and I know work you've put yourself into immediately to figure out what is the best way to give information to all New Yorkers and the best way to present our reality as it continues to evolve. And thank God it has been evolving in a good direction because everyone's hard work. So, here are our newest indicators.

Indicator one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – so, again, the threshold remains 200 patients, today's report only 44 patients. That's great. And now we'll be talking every day about the actual percent testing positive for COVID-19. That is 13.3 percent. So, again, folks come into the hospital, present symptoms, might be COVID, we're using the overall number of the people who present symptoms, but then we're also giving you the updated number once the tests are provided to see what we came up with. So, 13 percent actually testing positive for COVID-19 within that group.

Okay. A new metric now, number two, new reported cases over a seven-day average. Okay, so this is brand new. We're setting a threshold here of 550 cases [inaudible] over time, of course, daily counts of how many new cases of people testing positive for COVID-19. This one works simply, we take seven days of data and divide by seven, come up with a daily average and report the most recent daily average. So, threshold of 550, today's report 328 cases.

And then finally, percentage of people tested positive citywide for COVID-19, new threshold, five percent. So, again, we've gone from 15 percent down to a much more stringent five percent. We think this is now the right threshold for our current condition, where we want to keep beating this disease back even more. Happy to say today's report, 1.56 percent. So, these new indicators I think will give us a really good clear picture. And today that picture is a very positive one thanks to all of you. Okay. A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi, all. We will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Sheriff Joe Fucito, and Senior Advisor Jay Varma. The first question today goes to Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Hi, everyone. Nice to be back in the lineup today. Thank you very much for calling on me. My first question is about what you just talked about and the new cases. I'm wondering, has Test and Trace connected any coronavirus case whatsoever to an out-of-town visitor in the last couple of weeks. Since you put in the checkpoints, since people have been filling out forms at the airport, is there even a single solitary case that has been traced to an out of town visitor?

Mayor: So, appreciate the question, Andrew. The reality with the checkpoints is obviously very new. I want to emphasize that. The work we're doing to reach travelers has been ramping up day by day, but, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Varma might have the facts in front of them. If not, we'll get it to you today, for sure. But I can assure you, making sure that we are vigilant about people coming in from the states where unfortunately this disease is raging I think both doctors will affirm to you how crucial a strategy that is. So, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi – why don't you start, Jay, and we'll go to Dave.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Sure. Thank you very much for the question. I think we'll have to look into your specific question about whether a person who was identified immediately from quarantine has become a case. But just to give you a frame of reference, over the past month, about 15 to 20 percent of all of the cases in New York City have occurred in people who recently traveled to somewhere outside of New York City. So, we – that is one of the reasons the Mayor has been so forceful in his approach to making sure that we identify people who've traveled and that we monitor them to make sure they don't develop illness and spread it here in New York.

Mayor: Dave?

Commissioner Chokshi: I agree with that. Nothing to add, sir.

Mayor: Okay, great. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Second question has to do with schools. You have been talking about how there's a lot of time to resolve the questions that principals, teachers, and parents have, but, with each passing day, there's less than a lot of time until the scheduled first day of school. As things stand today, how would you assess the likelihood of in-person classes taking place on September 10th, especially in light of what you're seeing in other places, whether it's elementary and high schools in other States, or even the university of North Carolina, which resumed in-person classes and then had to shut down after a quick spike?

Mayor: Yeah, it's a great question. It's an important question, Andrew. First of all, I know that people are going to be concerned when they watch other states, but please be careful about apples and oranges here. A lot of the stories we're getting are from states that have not controlled the disease. Many of them – not all of them, but many of them did something very unwise, ignored the science, ignored the data, opened very quickly, and, unfortunately, a lot of people are suffering as a result. So, I just want to emphasize, if you're talking about schools and places where the coronavirus is raging, unfortunately don't be surprised if you see a bad result. We, again, are one of the strongest places in the country right now when it comes to fighting the coronavirus. We have one of the lowest rates of infection anywhere in America. We are far, far below any standard set internationally, nationally for the level of infection you would need to get below to be able to open schools – you heard it today, 1.5 percent. So, by that measure, we do not compare in the least to what's happening in other places. Second, we're throwing in the kitchen sink here, Andrew, to keep the schools safe. I cannot even give you the whole list because it's so long of all the measures being taken to make sure schools are safe and clean and healthy – one measure layered on top of another, on top of another. So, when you say each day, we're getting closer – well, that's a true statement, but I'll tell you what's happened the last few days. We guaranteed there'd be a nurse in every public school building – that wasn't true in the past, it will be true now. We have a hotline now, it'll be available to all principals, for rapid resupply. We've described the amount of supplies are being laid in before the first day of school. We have the electrostatic cleaning, we've never had that before – that's going to be in every school. There's a lot of pieces that have been put in place in just last few days. We also have the facts about how many teachers are going to be ready, how many students are going to be ready – that's information just from the last week or so. So, a lot is coming together. Everything's focused on September 10th and there's time to resolve a lot of outstanding questions. So, I'm very actually impressed by all the work that's been done by our educators, by the folks at Department of Education, working with the unions, even when there's disagreements, people have been working together to solve problems and we'll keep doing that right up to opening day.

Moderator: Next up we have Peter Haskell from WCBS radio.

Question: Hi, Mayor. This is Marla Diamond, actually from WCBS. Yesterday you promised that there would be ample PPE, sanitation, and ventilation and all City schools, but we're hearing apprehensive parents and educators saying they don't trust the DOE's ability to handle in-person

learning. And now, more families are often out of blended learning. What can you say to those who have lost confidence, the DOE to handle schools reopening?

Mayor: Well, first of all, Marla, I talk about what we're hearing from parents overall and they're being very, very clear. We did a survey of 400,000 parents – I mean, that's an astounding number of parents and students, in fact. You know, we reached out to all DOE families, got 400,000 responses, 75 percent said they wanted in-person learning to be a part of their child's experience. We gave parents the opportunity to opt out, the numbers are very similar to what the survey says. I think what's clear here is the vast majority of parents are speaking loudly and clearly – they know their child will get a lot more from in-person learning, even if it's a few days a week. They want it to be safe. So, Marla, here's my message to parents – I'm a parent myself, I'm watching these preparations like a hawk. I would send my kids without hesitation to a New York City public school, because I see so many measures in place. Social distancing measures – I was out in the classroom in Far Rockaway, a classroom with only 10 desks in it. Imagine what it will mean that you're having 10 kids to a classroom, for example; social distance at all times; everyone, adult and child, with a face covering; cleaning constantly, including the electrostatic cleaning. There are so many measures in place – kids are not going to the cafeteria for lunch, they're eating at their desk. There are so many measures here that are being taken. So, my message would be the PPE's – of course, there'll be the PPE's. We used to – in March, April, we had a horrible challenge with PPE's. We don't anymore. Thank God we're getting a good supply now. Any teacher, any staff member, whatever they need, they'll get with PPE's. There'll be plenty available for each school. We want kids to come to school already wearing a face covering. We want kids wearing a face covering wherever they go in school, out of school, but any kid who needs one will get one upon arrival at school. So, I think that's a lot of measures that are being taken, and, Marla, again against the backdrop of a city that has gotten progressively safer, thank God. Go ahead.

Question: Mayor, where will the City get the money to keep schools well stocked with PPE and cleaning supplies past the start of the school year? Where do you – how can you assure that they'll get this given that the City is in a fiscal crisis and you're talking about thousands of layoffs?

Mayor: Marla, first of all, health and safety first. So, anything related to the health and safety of our children and families is going to go to the front of the line in terms of how we invest. Second, look, we need action to avert a host of challenges in this city. Looks like the stimulus is dead right now, and I'm appalled that it's dead, but I'm going to still hold out hope that at some point Washington will get its act together. Albany – longterm borrowing, that immediately would avert layoffs and keep us stable so we can keep doing this work. So, I'm going to keep focused on where we get the help and relief so we can move forward. In the meantime, the health and safety of our kids and our families – literally job-one.

Moderator: Next up, we have Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing today?

Mayor: Good, Marcia. How are you?

Question: So, I'd like to talk to you about restaurants. So, 25-to-27,000 restaurants in New York City who are afraid that come the fall, when it gets cold, they're not going to be able to stay open. They're not going to be able to make money. Many are afraid that they're going to fail. There's a recent survey by the New York City Hospitality Alliance that said that 83 percent of these restaurants couldn't pay their rent in July. I wonder if you have a plan for indoor dining that will allow them to stay open, if you've talked to Governor Cuomo about allowing them to reopen, or are you afraid that come the cold months we're going to have more business failure, which will adversely affect the City's economy?

Mayor: Well, Marcia, it's a huge concern. There's no question. Now, look, again, it all starts with health and safety. It starts with keeping the infection rate low. And what we've seen around the world – and I'm going to have Dr. Varma jump in in a moment, because he's really studied this. Unfortunately, bars, indoor restaurants, nightlife have been a huge nexus for the coronavirus, particularly resurgences of the coronavirus. So, I'm very cautious on this point. I know the Governor's very cautious on this point. There's been a lot of communication between City and State. We're both going to be very, very careful about any kind of indoor dining. Right now, I'm going to look at the glass half full outdoor dining has helped almost 10,000 restaurants to bring in a whole lot more revenue. Takeout and delivery has, you know, been a part of what restaurants could do from the very beginning of this crisis, that will continue no matter what. And the most important thing, Marcia, is to get to the point where we have a vaccine and then we can really come back. But we're going to be very, very careful. Dr. Varma, why don't you explain some of our caution here?

Senior Advisor Varma: Thank you for the question. I think as the Mayor said, this is a really difficult choice. We, all of us who are New Yorkers love the dining and restaurant scene here in New York City. But we also value our safety. And when you look at the data really from across the world, there is no doubt, one very common setting in which infections occur – and not just individual infections, but what we call super spreading events where one person can transmit to five, 10, 15, or 20 people – and those are settings where there was indoor dining and drinking. And the reasons for that are clear, we know that any place that is indoors is riskier than any place outdoors and we know that anywhere where you can't wear face protection is riskier than a place where you can. And, of course, when people are eating and drinking, they can't wear that type of facial protection. We just saw just in the past 24 hours, that Hong Kong, for example, is experiencing its third wave. And what was their first step that they took? It's to limit indoor dining and restaurants. So, we are really watching what's going on around the world. And as Commissioner Chokshi and the Mayor had said earlier on, we're using that data to guide us. So, that's really what we need to do to maintain the stability of case counts that we have right now.

Mayor: Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: Mr. Mayor, my second question has to do with the opening of gyms. I know the Governor said that gyms could reopen and that they could reopen as early as next week or, you know, September 2nd, but you have said you simply don't have the inspectors to do it. What is your plan for allowing gyms to reopen? And when do you expect to have enough inspectors so that you can inspect the places and guarantee that they're safe?

Mayor: Marcia, that's a great question. This is all about health and safety first. We will make the decision, because one thing that the Governor's executive order – we're waiting to see, of course, the final wording, but what was put out in the press release certainly makes clear local discretion in a lot of this. So, based on the reality in New York City, we won't start before September 2nd and we're going to move those inspections as quickly as we can, but I want to be real clear the priority, especially given the proximity of September 2nd to September 10th – priority is going to be on the inspections we need to do for childcare centers in schools. So, we're going to work through how to balance that, but there's no question in my mind, most important thing we can do with our health inspectors is focused on childcare centers in schools.

Moderator: Next up, we have Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I hope you're doing better than your Red Sox.

Mayor: Reuvain, we've been trying to work together – you had to do that to me, didn't you?

Question: Sorry. Sorry. Tropical Storm Isaias took out thousands of City trees, killing one person and critically wounding another. Now, some elected officials are saying that the years they've been reporting dead or dying trees to the Parks Department, but the Parks Department is just keeping the seven-year cycle of pruning, even if there are complaints. Many of the trees downed in the storm were obviously hollowed out or have disease bark. So, my question is, going forward, will the Parks Department actively inspect trees and make any other changes to ensure that such tragedies don't happen again?

Mayor: It's a fair question, Reuvain. It's very fair, for sure. Look, I think the reality has always been that the Parks Department has tried to do a lot with the resources they had. And we got something very unusual here – we got the highest winds we had seen since Sandy. So, we've got to figure out, going forward, with very tight budget situations, how to prioritize. But, of course, again, health and safety first. So, we'll ask the Parks Department to look at what we've learned here. Figure out what it means in terms of priorities, going forward. I think it's a real issue. Go ahead.

Can you hear me? Couldn't hear you there, go ahead.

Question: Sorry. I'd like to follow up on the recent public discussion on whether government should be looking to accommodate wealthy New Yorkers and keep them here. It's particularly timely now, not only caused the City's financial straits, but those who left in March are reaching the 183-day mark where they may be able to say that they're taking residency elsewhere. So, you've opposed the idea of trying to appease the wealthy and your press secretary recently mocked the New York Times article on the subject tweeting, “kick rocks, billionaires.” So, my question is, as someone who believes in heavily tax in the wealthy and redistributing their money to poor people, won't help those poor people if the wealthy New Yorkers are kept here and pay their taxes here rather than to another city and state?

Mayor: Of course, and a reality here is I think a lot of folks who have done really well want to be in New York City. There's a lot of folks who are wealthy and are New Yorkers and are proud of New York City and want to be in New York City. There's a lot of people that came here from all around the world and want to be here. I think that's going to continue no matter what. We've also, as I said, a few days ago, a lot of people in recent years, New Yorkers became wealthy because the economy was so strong. So, I think what you're going to see is a natural reality that lots of people continue to want to be here, but we cannot create a reality – here's what really worries me – where the discussion is, you know, let's be so careful never to say something about the disparities in our society, or income inequality, or the fact that wealthy are not paying their fair share in taxes – let's not mention that out loud because it might spook them, it might offend them, and then they'll move someplace else. That's no way to go about addressing the challenges we face. I think, in fact, and you've seen it in a lot of the corporate sector in recent years, more and more, very successful people are recognizing that the disparities in our society are unsustainable – and that's before the coronavirus, which made those disparities even sharper. So, in fact, I think there are a lot of wealthy people who recognize that if we continue on the path we've been on, it's not going to work. But the notion that we can't talk out loud about the disparities and the fact that, in fact, the wealthy are not paying their fair share in taxes and they should be paying their fair share in taxes now more than ever, we've got to be able have that conversation. And I think they can handle that and they'll make the decisions about where to live based on where's the best place to live, and this is still the greatest city in the world. I have no question about that. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next up we have Jillian from WBAI.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Jillian. How are you?

Question: I'm well, thank you. So many questions, so little time. I wanted to follow up on something that I asked about a few weeks ago. The State announced it would be expanding a pilot program to test wastewater for COVID, as an “early warning system.” As I noted last time I asked, experts say the current indicators are lagging and the City's especially well positioned to use this technology because of our infrastructure of the 14 treatment centers and where they're located. And I understand we've already been testing for other bacterial and viral outbreaks for some time. I'd like to hear from Dr. Chokshi, because I felt like Dr. Varma – sorry, was rather dismissive of my question. So, to what extent is the City undertaking this real time level of testing and when will the public have access to the data?

Mayor: So, I'm just going to jump in before Dr. Chokshi. I have a really good memory, Jillian, I do not believe in the least Dr. Varma was dismissive of your question. I thought he actually answered your question, I remember when you asked it. So, Dr. Choksi, why don't you start and then, Dr. Varma, just like in a debate, if someone's name is invoked, they get their opportunity for rebuttal. We'll get Dr. Varma as well. Go ahead.

Commissioner Chokshi: Sure. And thank you for the good question. I think it highlights what is the theme from this morning, which is we have to look at multiple sources of data for as many

early warning signals as possible. That's why we've changed some of our thresholds. We've added degrees of precision to all of the indicators, you know, that we're already following. But to your point about wastewater epidemiology specifically, it is something that the Health Department is actively looking at. We have a group of environmental health experts who do sampling of water, of air, of many other parts of our environment to figure out the different signals that we have, not just for COVID-19, but for other diseases as well. There are some technical challenges, specifically with using wastewater for COVID-19. And so, we're in touch with the CDC and many others around the world who are trying to evolve those methods. So, it's something that we will add to our [inaudible] of indicators and early warning signals.

Mayor: Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: No, I just want to emphasize it's not – the data that is being presented today by the Commissioner and the Mayor, the information that we have validated – it's not just information that comes in and we try to make a decision based on. It's information that we've looked at carefully to understand how we make critical decisions. I'm absolutely a believer in taking every possible data source that we have available to us and using it, but we should only use it to make decisions if we actually have real evidence of its effectiveness. And so if you go back and look at the studies that have been done on wastewater, whether it's for polio eradication or for, now for COVID, they have to correlate what happened in the past with what's going to happen in the future. And you have to make decisions based on that and see how they work. And that's really one of the challenges that we have. These are all great studies that have looked back in time, but they haven't actually shown a direction in changing your policy based on that. So it's just a long way of saying that we're absolutely looking at this and working on this as the Commissioner has said. But before we introduce it into real time decision making, we have to trust the information is telling us what we know it's telling us.

Mayor: Go ahead Jillian.

Question: Thanks. A lot of questions – yeah. Can you hear me? Okay. I'm getting a lot of questions from listeners, friends, even my family about the glut of apartments that are now on the market. I think they're estimating about 13,000, the highest number in 14 years. And with construction resuming, the glut will inevitably grow. The majority of both the existing and future units are luxury or market rate, but the Emergency Tenant Protection Act doesn't really distinguish when it's invoked between, you know, rent levels. So the median household rent for the million stabilized apartments is about \$30,000 a year and about 60 percent of section eight units are stabilized. Can you give any details if you have a contingency plan in case this happens and the vacancy rate is nullified? And what's going to happen to the 20,000 plus controlled apartments because they are seniors living on fixed incomes mostly, and they're controlled by the State auspices?

Mayor: It's a very important question, Jillian. I think I can say this with assurance, especially given the Legislature we now have in Albany. And I worked long and hard with countless others to ensure that we finally had a Democratic State Senate and we've got two leaders in Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Carl Heastie in Albany who are both clearly progressive in fighting for the needs of tenants. So it's literally inconceivable to me that there would be any diminution of rent

stabilization or rent control. I think it's a fair question to say, could we be in an unprecedented situation? I think that's a very fair question. I thought what you were going to say is with all of these vacancies occurring are rent levels in the market, going to start to go down. I do think rent levels are going to start to go down. I think you're seeing evidence of it already. But it's a fair question, could it be a legal trigger? Even if that is possible, I don't have a doubt in my mind that the Legislature will immediately create continuity with our current approach to rent stabilization and rent control. We absolutely need that in New York City. If there was any question about that, I, and many others would be in Albany fighting for it immediately. But I'm quite confident they will help us continue to protect tenants.

Moderator: Next up we have Debralee from Manhattan Times.

Question: Hey, good morning, everyone.

Mayor: Good morning, how are you doing?

Question: I'm well, thanks. And wishing you all well as well. I wanted to follow up on some of the earlier conversations and expand the conversation to parents who have had their children abroad, because of concerns with COVID over the summer, but perhaps because they were simply following tradition and having their children visit with family members outside of the country. And I'm specifically thinking about the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and other countries that have in fact allowed for families to visit. And they are now preparing for their children to return. In other years they perhaps have waited until just before school started to have the children return to expand on summer plans and have them enjoy time there and certainly provide for childcare. What guidance is the City providing to these families and how much of an outreach is the City planning, if it hasn't already to really bring home the messaging on quarantine and also again on specific health guidelines for these children who have been away?

Mayor: That's a great question. And look, Debralee, you're – you know, you understand life in New York City and our neighborhoods. This is a big part of it. And it's something I think a lot of New Yorkers live and experience, other New Yorkers are not aware of. It's true in my own family, going back a generation that my mom used to go some summers to Southern Italy to be with her family there. Lots of young people, certainly a lot of our communities have the opportunity to send their kids to their grandparents, for example, for the summer. And they do it. And this is the kind of thing you're absolutely right, we need to plan around. So I'm going to turn to Dr. Chokshi who, as a parent himself thinks about this. And as the husband of an educator thinks about this. But I think it's an important point, if a child is coming back from a place where there is a coronavirus problem, it's really no different than someone coming back from one of the states in this country where there's a coronavirus problem, and there needs to be precautions taken. Go ahead, Doctor.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. That's exactly right. And I think that the key point is the one that you just made. Whether someone is coming back from Texas or the Dominican Republic if it is a place with a higher level of coronavirus transmission, then it's very important given the focus on health and safety, given the rigorous approach that we're trying to take to protect our educators, as well as our students, that those returning students and family members, follow the

quarantine. And that's part of the reason that we have a built in flexibility to the school reopening plan as well, to allow for people to, for some period of time or for a longer period of time, stay at home and receive instruction and start the school year in that way.

Mayor: Go ahead, Debralee.

Question: And this is also something that is perhaps germane to some neighborhoods more than others. This speaks to many of the restaurants in the area, particularly those that are availing themselves of the newly opened outdoor spaces. I have not seen a presentation specifically directed at this, and if I need to be redirected, please, please let me know. But hookah is something that is pretty prevalent in a number of the restaurants that again are concentrated in the Bronx and Northern Manhattan. What are the specific guidelines that are being offered? And if folks need to find out more, how are they being directed? Because I found that a lot of restaurant owners are simply providing these services in the same manner that they did before without specific instruction in this new time and space. And that seems to be for other residents quite a source of concern.

Mayor: So Debralee, just to clarify the question – you're saying because of the health concerns of someone, of people like sharing a hookah pipe or something like that?

Question: Yeah. I mean, I'm not sure that that's something that has been – when we talk about restaurant spaces, if that specific service that's available in restaurants and bars has been something that's been delineated by the Health Department as, are there specific differences in how people should be using hookah, if at all? I just, that particular service, other than just drinking and eating, it's something that happens in many restaurants and people may not necessarily know that there perhaps should be a directive around it? Or you know, a specific guideline? I'm not sure that people know whether there should be any differences in how it's used or how they avail themselves of hookah. And it obviously is something that is shared at a table with patrons.

Mayor: Okay. So, I'm going to ask the doctors, Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Varma, either one of you have some guidance on this?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. This is something that we are actively looking at with respect to not just hookah, but use of tobacco products, you know, outdoors. Whether it's e-cigarettes, cigarettes, or hookah and other water pipes. They're really two health risks that we have to consider very seriously. The first is, as you pointed out in your question, the risk of coronavirus transmission, if a pipe is being shared, if another tobacco product is being shared. And the second is the direct effects of tobacco themselves, both for the person who may be using it as well as others in the vicinity who are being exposed. So I think for now, what I would say is that we're actively looking at it and my message to New Yorkers would be to make sure that we focus on being cautious, particularly around the risk of coronavirus transmission and the direct effects of tobacco.

Mayor: Dr. Varma. Anything to add?

Senior Advisor Varma: Nope, nothing else for me.

Mayor: Great. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our last two, we'll start with Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Oh, hi. Good morning all. How are you doing Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: I'm doing well Juliet. How about you?

Question: I'm fine. Thank you. So my question, regarding how you count coronavirus patients -- are they strictly just Health + Hospitals numbers? And if so, how do you quantify patients that are in the private hospital systems?

Mayor: No, no, it's everybody and Dr. Chokshi, do you want to speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. The simple answer is it's broader than Health + Hospitals. It's all hospitals in New York City.

Question: Okay. Okay, good. I wasn't sure of that. And also, I did want to ask the Sheriff, he was mentioning some of the penalties regarding not filling out the quarantine form? He mentioned something about civil commitment. What is that?

Sheriff Fucito: That's a practice that's been around for over a hundred years, that where the court can compel you to be quarantined. So if someone is so egregious in disobeying the Department of Health's recommendations, by court order, they can be committed to a hospital until the quarantine is complete.

Mayor: Okay. Go ahead.

Moderator: And for our last question, we'll go to Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing Red Sox aside? Yankees are doing well, Red Sox are doing poorly.

Mayor: Are you adding -- you're adding salt to the wound. This is not our year. Not our year, I've come to that conclusion.

Question: Adding salt to the wounds. No question about that. Let me ask you a question about data, first of all, because the antibody zip code equation, if you will, is really a lagging indicator. Why can't we see test results per zip code? Why can't we know the infection rate as it's happening more or less per zip code, so that we would know when we've got an outbreak in a local area such as Sunset Park?

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thanks for the very good question. And as part of the updates to the website that we've described exactly what you're asking for will be a part of the information that's shared. So, case rates broken down by borough, as well as zip code, as well as testing rates. And so, all of those are broken down geographically. And another part of the update is to offer more recent data, the most recent four weeks that we have also broken down in, in that geographic manner.

Mayor: Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay. Thank you. My second question has to do with the amount of jobs in the city. And, you know, we see that the police department is taking a lot of retirements. There are thousands literally of police officers who have either requested or have taken retirement. And by my rough estimate, that amounts to maybe a half a billion dollars in savings right there. There was a study by the Citizens Budget Commission, which said that there were about 22,000 attrition jobs per year. So that's the 22,000 number that you have, you know, sort of waived in front of us for October. And I'm just wondering, number one, whether anybody has been hired since March, which of course would blunt that attrition number? And secondly, why isn't this part of your arithmetic as you go forward? Maybe we don't need to fire 22,000 people due to the fiscal crisis.

Mayor: Henry, you've sort of put a couple important pieces together. I'm going to try and come up with a simple, clear answer here. Office of Management and Budget, I can't tell you how impressed I am by their work over the years. And it, they are a much better agency than they were in the past first, under the leadership of Dean Fuleihan, now, Melanie Hartzog. I think they both really revolutionized the work of OMB. I find it to be a very agile, thoughtful agency, constantly looking at facts and changing conditions. So I say that to say to you, of course, they take into account attrition levels. Of course, they take into account retirements. When you have a big change, if you have, for example, a larger number of retirements, that's going to change the equation in some ways. But the other thing they have to think about here is actually getting the work done that is most essential to get done. So before we talk about the October layoffs, up to now the challenge has been to keep the budget balanced while providing for the four things that we keep talking about. Health, safety, a roof over everyone's head, food on everyone's table. And that means if an agency, for example, has had a lot of attrition, but they are crucial to those missions, you're going to have to find a way to get enough workers back into that agency to keep the work going. That's a constant balance that they work to achieve, but what they had to do, what we all did together, what the Council and I did was we had to end up reducing our budget radically from where we were in the spring. And certainly attrition was a part of that. I think the way to wrap it all together is to say, all of these pieces are looked at all the time. If you have attrition and you cannot fill those roles and still provide the most basic services to New Yorkers, then you don't fill the roles. If you have to fill some of them, you feel some of them. But what we are now about to confront is far beyond any of those normal tactical moves. This is a whole other reality. On October 1st, you're talking about mass layoffs, such as we have not seen in generations in this city. I hate to say that to you, Henry. I wish I didn't have to. I thought, I think most of us thought there would be a stimulus by now. There is not. We're deep discussions with Albany about long term borrowing, and that could avert the crisis. Our work with the labor unions on savings could avert the crisis. But the loss of revenue in a very short period of time in

such a shocking manner has caused a reality where we have to get ready for layoffs on a huge level. Again, we're going to work every day to avert that, but that's what we're staring down the barrel of right now. So, it's unprecedented, but I have faith that we will navigate it. And really with the help of Albany in particular, we could end up in a much, much better situation.

Okay, everybody, look, I just want to close out with this simple idea, the message today and so much of what we've talked about is about science and it's about data. And you know, there's a lot to like about science and there's a lot to like about data. And there are some voices in this country trying to deny the power of science and data, but here in this city, we honor it. We recognize that the facts have actually set us free. The facts have been what has allowed us to make the right choices. So, there's a famous phrase – knowledge is power. New Yorkers have knowledge of what's going on. And they act on that knowledge. We make it a point to keep letting people know exactly what we're seeing. Put out that information constantly to empower people to do the right thing, to protect themselves, their families and all New Yorkers. And then New Yorkers do their job and they do it so well following through. So, we're going to continue to give you the very latest information so you can continue to do the great work you're doing and continue to make this city one of the envies of the nation as we beat back this disease. Thanks, everybody.

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