

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning New York City. This day is finally here, in less than 14 hours, it will be 2021. I could not be happier. I bet a lot of you feel the same way. We are so ready to kick 2020 out the door. And I just am feeling totally energized that the new year is going to be here and great things are going to happen. Tonight is going to be very special. Don't believe any doubting Thomases that say because there's not going to be a million people or more in Times Square that it's not going to be special. It's going to be actually arguably the most special, the most poignant, the most moving New Year's Eve. Everyone, watch it on television, don't go down there. Watch from home. But it's going to be powerful and think about it. We're going to be honoring our health care heroes and first responders and folks who did amazing work this year. Folks from the Cure Violence movement who did great work this year. All out there, small group observing the festivities and enjoying the festivities. But they'll be the people we truly have in our hearts because they're the folks who saw us through this year.

But think about the performers too. Amazing cast of performers, New York City's own, the Bronx's own Jennifer Lopez. That's for the Bronx. This is a great moment to have her highlighted as we bring in the new year. And my personal favorite, Gloria Gaynor will be singing, I will survive. I can't think of a more amazing, special and appropriate song for this occasion. I'm going to tell you, it's going to be very powerful, very special. Everyone, tune in. I guarantee you that Chirlane and I will push the button on time. In fact, we will be tempted to push the button early and start the new year early, but we will get there for sure. 2021, right around the corner. And we're going to do great things in 2021.

And I'm going to talk about that today. I want to start with the most important New Year's resolution I could possibly offer you in the month of January 2021, we will vaccinate a million New Yorkers. A million people we will reach in January. This city can do it. The amazing health care professionals of this city are ready. We are going to set up new sites all over the city on top of the many, many sites that are already operational, we're going to expand from our hospitals and our clinics to community clinics, to locations we'll set up all over the neighborhoods of the city. Our goal is to get to upwards of 250 locations citywide. This is going to be a massive effort.

This is going to be part of the largest single vaccination effort in the history of New York City. It's going to take a lot of work. It's going to take tremendous urgency and focus. And we will need help from the federal government. We will need help from the State government. We will need help from the vaccine manufacturers, but we're making clear to the whole world, we can achieve a million vaccinations in January. We get that help, we'll make it happen. We have the ability to make it happen on the ground. And we are anxious to get it done. Look, President-elect Biden said it right. This whole country is behind the pace it needs to be. We're going to need to go faster to beat back the coronavirus, to restart our economy, to protect people's lives, to recover. We've got to go faster. New York City will lead the way. We have the will. We have the sense of urgency. We have the capacity. We have the know-how. This is a chance for New York City to shine. And help achieve the President-elect's goal.

It is so clear that there's no reason, there's no reason for anything but urgency at this point. And that every single person we reach takes us one step closer to recovery. Now we are doing better than most of the country. That's the good news. But we're nowhere near where we need to be. 88,000 New Yorkers have been vaccinated so far. That's great. 88,000 people is nothing to sneeze at. But we need to go into overdrive now. We need every day to speed up and reach more and more people. And we're committed to doing that. So, we know that we have the ability. We're going to do this with a really decentralized grassroots effort. We're going to go all over the city. We are going to create new hubs of activity. So, number one, new COVID vaccine hubs will be created all around the city on top of the locations we have, Two, Test and Trace sites will start to be locations for vaccination as well. Test and Trace has been very successful reaching to every corner of the city, protecting people. We're going to take that same capacity, use it to help us achieve more vaccinations. And three, we're going to scale up the capacity of local organizations that can do this work. We have so many tremendous partners on the ground. So many community-based organizations that could be part of this. And have the ability to reach people, move people, motivate people. They are going to be a part of this in a big way.

So, all of this will be coordinated by our vaccine command center, lot of moving parts. But we can get it done again. Again, we need the federal government to be there with us, to be committed to this goal, to help us achieve it, to give us flexibility. We need the State government to work with us to keep this moving. We need the manufacturers to keep providing the doses. But that can be done. All those things can be done and we're going to make together, something very special happen here. What we will not allow to happen in New York City is for people to jump the line, use their wealth or their privilege to get vaccines that they should not be getting. We're already seeing this, unfortunately, around the country. Congressional staffers, jumping the line, even if they're not in a category that should be a priority. We're seeing pharmaceutical company executives jumping the line. We want the people who need the vaccine most to get it first. And we're going to stick to those priorities. And we're going to be aggressive about it. So, right now, of course, the focus on health care workers, the folks who have kept us safe, our heroes, who we need the most to keep safe, going forward. Focus on nursing home staff and residents. We're going to keep building out from there faster and faster. But we're going to make sure the distribution is based on equity and fairness. And as we get out into communities, that we focused on the communities hardest hit that unfortunately bore the brunt. They had the most cases, they had the most deaths and have the most need. So, we can do it in New York City, all of us together. And the person who's going to help us to lead the way with the incredible effort of his team, the Health Department, and they have a lot of great history, a lot of great success

historically in vaccinations. Very, very proud to introduce on this auspicious day, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. Well beating a virus is a team sport and we need every position on the field to come together. I saw this in such a poignant way yesterday when I visited a nursing home in my neighborhood in Queens. Residents and staff alike were getting vaccinated. I heard one resident say she couldn't wait to get her shot, but she asked her regular nurse to stay by her side while she was getting it for moral support. These are the small and large ways our health care heroes have quite literally moved the needle for the past couple of weeks. Resulting in over 88,000 vaccinations to date. But we will need to further accelerate our efforts to turn vaccines into vaccinations. One key to doing this as the Mayor mentioned is expanding points of access across our entire city. Our goal is to double the access points for vaccination within a month from hospitals to community health centers, to urgent care clinics, totaling at least 250 sites across the five boroughs.

Part of our strategy includes launching the first dedicated City vaccine hubs in the coming weeks. These are City operated vaccination clinics stood up rapidly as points of distribution in school gymnasiums and other sites. The first sites will launch in mid-January administering 45,000 doses per week with plans to expand over time if we get adequate supply of vaccine. We are picking the locations of these sites to help ensure access in our priority neighborhoods for the places and the people who have been hardest hit by this vicious virus, most often communities of color. In addition, the City has built an unprecedented testing apparatus through the Test and Trace Corps that can also be leveraged to administer vaccines at certain sites. Again, with a focus on hardest hit communities.

Finally, the most essential partners have always been community organizations. Activating them by providing nurses and pharmacists to vaccinate onsite, in communities will provide capacity for several tens of thousands of vaccinations per week by the end of January. This is the kind of thing we do every year during flu season, supporting events at churches and community centers. But this would be like our flu campaign in overdrive. Growing capacity through these initiatives, along with our existing hospital, clinic, and pharmacy infrastructure gets us to the ability to administer a total of one million doses by the end of January. I do want to specify that these are aggressive goals. And this historic vaccination campaign is a team sport as I mentioned. We'll need blocking and tackling to run at the pace that we want from a number of partners, but particularly our colleagues in State and federal government. Swiftly extending guidance on the populations eligible for vaccination is particularly important. From hospital workers and nursing homes to other health care workers, first responders and of course our seniors. And we need a sufficient supply of vaccine with a clear roadmap of what New York City can expect to receive from the federal government, not just for next week, but for the months ahead. But if these elements of the game plan come together, we can move fast and travel far.

Finally, we need New Yorkers themselves to choose to get vaccinated, but we'll help you by making sure your vaccine questions get answered, endeavoring to dispel misinformation, and doubling our access points to make it more convenient for you. Mr. Mayor, it's a particular honor for me to be able to join you on this last day of 2020. I wanted to conclude with some brief tailored messages. To my fellow health care workers, thank you so much for all you have done during this really tough year, but if you've gotten your vaccine, I have one more task for you, be

sure to tell the story of why you got vaccinated and reach out to people who may still have unanswered questions. Our website nyc.gov/covidvaccine has the resources you need. To hospital leaders, COVID-19 is not taking the weekend off, so I strongly urge you to schedule vaccination clinics over the weekend, too. And to all New Yorkers, I remain quite concerned by the increase in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths across our beloved city. It's not too late to cancel your New Year's Eve gathering plans and stay safe by staying home. And finally, to the year 2020, good riddance. I'm looking forward to a better year ahead.

Mayor: Well said, Dave. Listen, I want to say to our Commissioner Dave Chokshi, thank you for your extraordinary work this year, for your team's amazing work, some of the other colleagues here as part of this press conference today, Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, and Senior Advisor Jay Varma, and CEO of Health and Hospitals Mitch Katz, you've all been heroes this year. You really have been. You're all very modest people, so maybe I'm making you blush, but the fact is all of you have been heroes of 2020. All of you are going to be part of the history of this city, and you're going to be in the history books as people who made a tremendous positive difference for the people in New York City and your whole teams. Thank you, and I'm thanking you – I'm thanking you as individuals, but I'm also thanking you for the amazing teams you've assembled and the amazing work you've all done.

And listen, talking about team, I'm going to pick up right word Dave started, talking about team. This is going to be a team effort to reach one million vaccinations in January. We're going to work with the whole community. We're going to work with the whole health care world. We're also going to call all city agencies to be part of this. So, as Dave mentioned, you know, you talk about a school gymnasium, Department of Education is going to be a part of this. Think about public housing, NYCHA, our community centers. We're going to be out there in NYCHA developments over the months ahead there are going to be a crucial piece of this as well. We are going to focus intensely on the communities that need help the most, communities that bore the brunt, and our public housing residents certainly bore the brunt of this crisis. So, in January and beyond, you're going to see this grow, be more and more grassroots, more and more people getting involved, leaders, agencies, institutions, parts of the community, you name it. This is going to be an extraordinary effort. I wanted to do a special thank you to the State of New York. We've been working really closely with our State partners over these last weeks, determining how to do something that's never been done before. This is a brand-new vaccine, brand new type of vaccine. We've had to be really smart and careful about getting it implemented. We're working well with the state to figure out the steps and we're working together to figure out how to do this as quickly as humanly possible. So, thank you to everyone in the State government who has worked so hard throughout this year, Governor Cuomo and his whole team, we appreciate all the work we've done together. And we are going to, together, find a way to push harder and we're all together going to push the federal government to do its share and the manufacturers to do their share, so we can really go into overdrive here.

All right, now, there's a lot of good news, a lot of good news ahead. 2021 is going to be a good news year, but 2020 is going to go down in history as one of our saddest, toughest years, arguably the toughest year in the history of New York City. Thank God we all came through those of us who made it, but we got to remember those who didn't make it. We got to remember those we lost, and we've got to be there with their families every day. All the families who lost loved ones, my heart goes out to you. You're in our thoughts and prayers all the time. We know this has just been incredibly difficult to go through this pain without the chance to mourn in so

many cases, without the chance to be with loved ones. So, it's important that we have a day of remembrance. It's important that we have a day going forward in the future of the city to always remember what happened in 2020, to remember those we lost, to honor them, to honor their families. And, of course, at the same time, remember all the heroism, all the people who did so much good to protect people. The day we lost our first New Yorker to COVID in this year was March 14th, 2020, next March 14th, 2021 will be a day of remembrance in New York City. We need to recognize 25,000 of our fellow New Yorkers gone. That's something we have to always mark going forward. And we got to remember them by one, being there for their families, by two, honoring those who did so much to try to save them and three, by working to make this city better all the time in their memory. So many we lost were victims of the disparities and inequality in our society and this is not a shocking statement to anyone who's been watching. So many people we lost had never gotten enough health care in their lives and didn't get their fair share no matter how hard they worked. So many people we lost were victims of still too much discrimination and racism in our society. We lost people of every background. We lost people of every income level. Every neighborhood, this tragically was a disease that affected everyone, but it did not affect everyone equally. So, on March 14th each year, we remember also the painful lessons we learned but it's a time to rededicate ourselves to making a difference and changing things. A day to look back, but it will always also be a day to look forward and say, how can we do better so we never lose people again, and we have a city that is there for everyone going forward.

So before – I now move forward to what we do every single day, which is our daily indicators. I do want to take a moment since it's a very special time of year, obviously we've had holidays of many faith, traditions, Christmas, and Hanukkah, and so many important holidays that people have celebrated, so many times when people restored faith and hope. And we of course are looking forward to tonight and tomorrow, but here we are still in Kwanzaa, and it's so good to talk about Kwanzaa and the Kwanzaa principles. And this is something we're really highlighting this year. We're going to do in a very big way next year, because these principles say so much to us, so much positive, so much helpful, and that is really moves us forward and helps us think about where we need to go. Each – at the beginning of the day, the phrase Habari Gani, which means what's the news? And then the answer is the principle of that day, today is Kuumba, and that means creativity. And I want to celebrate the creativity of New Yorkers, the resourcefulness, the ingenuity of New Yorkers in the year 2020. It was unbelievable. The things people did this year to help each other. Talk about making a way where there was no way. In the year 2020, New Yorkers had to create like never before, whether you're talking about what our health care heroes have to do to protect people and save our hospital system and our first responders, what they had to do and the incredible challenges they overcame. Or you're talking about the way this city ended up creating its own ventilators, its own PPE, its own processing labs for tests, things we didn't have before. We created them all here, New York City know-how and we did it in record time. That's what New York City is all about. And just the way people helped each other and the way people expressed their own personalities, their own hope, their own belief, whether it's the design of a face mask or the ways people celebrate and supported each other, the cultural activities put together to support people, give them hope. This was a year for creativity if there ever was one. So, a lot to be proud of when it comes to the creativity of our people and we're going to see it blossom in 2021.

Now we're going to go to our indicators. I'm going to, again, as we go through indicators, put a bit of a qualifier on that we've seen some pretty aberrant numbers the last few days. We

obviously had the situation, a lot of people getting tested in advance of the holidays and then during the holidays test numbers were uneven, so you get a different kind of sample. But that being said, even though these numbers look somewhat skewed, they are still very cautionary and it's important we focus on them. So, first, number one, daily number of people admitted to the New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report 199 patients. Obviously, the goal was 200, so we're just there. We want to drive that down. Hospitalization rate per 100,000, still way too high, 3.93, we want to get that back under two. Number two, daily number of new cases for COVID-19 seven-day average, today's number 3,259, way too high against the goal of 550. And number three, percentage of New York City residents testing positive for COVID-19 seven-day rolling average, very high number today, 8.87 percent. Again, that is probably aberrant based on uneven testing with the holidays, but still cautionary and troublesome and something we need to focus on, something we all need to act on. We want to get that number below five percent and keep driving it down. So, what can you do? You just heard your doctor, the people's doctor, tell you if you're thinking about going to some kind of large holiday gathering, just don't do it. I will borrow from Nike and modify the phrase, just don't do it. It doesn't make sense. Next year, you'll be able to celebrate all you want if we get this right, but if people keep getting sick because of doing the wrong thing, it's not going to speed our days of recovery to say the least. So please avoid large gatherings tonight. Keep it small, keep it simple. Stay home, stay close. Let's be healthy. Let's help each other. A few words in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that – and Feliz Año Nuevo while I'm at it. With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, by Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, by Dr. Katz, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today goes to Hazel Sanchez from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Happy New Year to you.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Hazel, how you feel?

Question: I'm good. I'm good. You've probably seen that video of a group of bicyclists attacking a man in his mother inside his SUV. I spoke with a driver, Max Torgovnick, he's a lifelong New York City resident and he says he feels, he deserves answers from the city as to what allowed this to happen? And what is the city going to do to make sure it doesn't happen again?

Mayor: Hazel is absolutely unacceptable. And, you know, you have these teenagers doing something that's just wrong, period. At least one has been arrested. The others will be. Look, we got to teach our young people better all the time. It's incumbent upon all of us, but we also have to have consequences. So, there will be consequences in this case. I don't want to ever see anything like this happen in New York City. Go ahead, Hazel.

Question: And getting back to the vaccinations you're launching an aggressive campaign to vaccinate New Yorkers in January. Why wasn't this kind of plan ready to be rolled out in December when you knew the vaccine would be arriving?

Mayor: Hazel, what we said from the beginning was we were going to get this right. Our doctors have spoken about this many times. This was a brand-new vaccine with realities we never experienced before, including the need for ultra-cold refrigeration and very tight standards about how it could be utilized. One of the things we're saying here is that we need the federal government to really be committed to speeding this process and looking at all those standards. We want everyone to be safe, but we have to have a focus on speed and urgency. So, the first weeks were about getting it right, making sure everything was safe and proper, but we knew we wanted to go a hell of a lot faster. So, I'm perfectly comfortable at the first weeks were about really testing to make sure everything worked right and you've seen the results. People have been getting these vaccinations safely, effectively. We've had very, very few side effects. We've had a very successful experience. We've shown the world that. Now it is time to take off. Now is time to race and we're ready to do it. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Matt Chayes from Newsday.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Happy New Year – early.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Matt. How you feel?

Question: I'm doing okay. How about yourself?

Mayor: I am ecstatic. Dreaming of this day.

Question: Excellent. You love to hear it. Under your NYC Vaccine for All campaign, will the vaccination itself be available to a person in one of those 27 neighborhoods at a greater rate, on a faster timeline, or in any different way whatsoever than a person not in those 27 neighborhoods? Yes or no?

Question: Excellent, you love to hear it. Under your NYC Vaccine for All campaign, will the vaccination itself be available to a person in one of those 27 neighborhoods at a greater rate, on a faster timeline, or in any different way whatsoever than a person not in those 27 neighborhoods? Yes or no?

Mayor: So, first let me frame it. We're going to follow, of course, the guidelines that originate with the federal government and then are codified by the State, and we're going to work with the State to keep expanding those guidelines constantly. So, to get to the point where we're talking about every-day people, senior citizens, folks with preexisting conditions, that still, of course, has to happen within the State guidelines. But we're going to work with the State to speed that along, because we want to be able to always jump ahead to the next group of people when we find there's more vaccine available. And we have gone through one group, we want to immediately move on to the next group. So, we need that State guidance to do that always. But the bottom line is, we're going to make sure that the priority neighborhoods get the vaccine when it is for the general public. They have to be the first wave because they're where the most people suffered, there were the most cases, there were the most deaths. By definition, that's where you need to protect people the most. Go ahead, Matt.

Question: I have another question, but I do need to stay on this one. You say that they have to be the first wave, will they be the first wave in New York City?

Mayor: Yeah, we've been saying that for weeks and weeks. Matt, let me flip the equation here – where else would you go, but where the need is greatest? Of course, when it comes to going out to the grassroots, we're going to go to the places that suffered the most and are still the most vulnerable. Absolutely. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Samantha Lehman from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor. And Happy New Year.

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

Question: I'm good. How are you?

Mayor: Couldn't be better.

Question: So, let me ask you on a personal note – I know you said that the new year's resolution was going to be to get those million vaccines next month, but on a personal note, do you have any resolutions?

Mayor: All I can tell you is I want to make 2021 an amazing year in New York City. I have so much energy right now, I'm going to burn my way to the finish line this year. And on December 31st, 2021, we're going to look back and say, we did amazing things in New York City in 2021. We turned the tide. We started our recovery. We reached people and protected people in ways never seen before. That's my resolution. I feel very, very confident we can do that. Look, a million is a big goal. I want to be clear about this, saying out loud – this was not something we did lightly – saying out loud, I'm going to say it again, our goal is to vaccinate 1 million New Yorkers in the month of January, 2021. That's a very big goal. That's a very tough goal. That's a very ambitious goal, but it's a necessary goal. And all we're saying to everyone else out there that we rely on is, join us and we can do it. We're going to drive and drive and drive and we're going to get this done. Go ahead.

Question: I know you spoke about this on CNN already, but have you gotten a chance to see the new video that the NYPD put out about the incident at the Arlo Hotel? And can you talk a little bit more about what you think should happen to this woman?

Mayor: Yeah, this has to end. I have not seen the new video, but I'll tell you bottom line on this – we've seen a series of things like this around the country. It's almost become tragically comical how much you can rely on the fact that someone will unjustly accuse a young man of color in America. I mean, it's just crazy. It's very personal for me. I have a son of color who is about as good a human being as you could possibly imagine. And yet, I know, he will be looked down on and disrespected throughout his life – and it's not fair, and it's not right, and it has to end. But it's also just – it's destructive. You know what? Think about this. And I had this experience as a father. What do you do as a parent? You try and give your child hope, and faith, and a belief in themselves, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. If you're a young black man or any young man of color in America, and you're looked down on and treated like there's something wrong with you, how are you going to succeed? How are you going to believe in yourself? How are you going to believe your society is going to be fair to you? This is why we got rid of the stop and

frisk – broken approach to stop and frisk that was used years ago, because it was denigrating to young people of color, certainly young women as well, but particularly young men of color. It was denigrating. It was taking away their self-esteem. How do you build a better city and a better country if you're robbing the majority of our people of their self-esteem? So, this just has to end and the way for it to end this for every one of us to condemn it, to not accept it in our personal lives, and, when someone does something like this, they have to suffer consequences and there needs to be a real action here by the criminal justice system to make sure there are consequences in this case.

Moderator: The next is Erin from Politico.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Early Happy New Year.

Mayor: Happy New Year, Erin.

Question: I think we're all glad to have this year over with soon. I'm hoping you can just tell us a little more about how the logistics will work in terms of this vaccination campaign. For instance, if we're doing a million shots, what segment of the population do you expect that to get us up to? Will it be anyone over 65? Or, any essential worker? Or, where will that get us up to in the line? And is this going to be by appointment or is it just going to be people lined up? And, kind of, where the number's going to come from with, you know, I think you said 45,000 a week at the gymnasium type sites – that doesn't add up to a million. So, how are you going to –

Mayor: Hold on, Erin. You've got a lot going on there, let me try and pull out the core of what you're saying. Suffice it to say our Vaccine Command Center will be constantly providing updates and that the specific, how each center will relate to the overall number, how the different categories – suffice it to say, you'll be hearing more and more about that with each day to come. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but I did not expect him to be able to give you the perfect chart of how all million will be done in January yet. I also want to say at the outset, it's a voluntary effort, meaning you will decide how many people in each category, depending on how many people volunteer in each category. The more people come forward among health care workers or first responders, the faster it goes in those groups. But if fewer people come forward, you move on to other groups. That's what we want to set up, the ability to keep moving to the next group. It is voluntary. I am hopeful, Erin, that as people see how successful this is how safe it is, how effective it is that classic word of mouth thing will happen – more and more people hear from people in their lives, more and more people want it. But we want the ability to jump ahead constantly to the next group. So, I can't tell you exactly which groups we're going to cover, because it really depends on that uptake rate. But what I can say, as I turn to Dr. Chokshi, is the first priority remains – the folks who are most vulnerable, particularly in settings that have been dangerous, like nursing homes; the folks who serve us, who we need to stay safe so they can keep us safe. And then, as we work through all those categories, we start out into the general community for the folks who are most vulnerable. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, you said all of the high points. I'm just going to pull out a couple to elaborate on. One is, we're in what's called Phase One-A right now. As the Mayor mentioned, this is primarily health care workers, as well as nursing home staff and residents and those in other long-term care facilities. The estimate for New York City is that we actually have a million people just in those categories. And so, our goal of putting the 1 million for January is to be able

to say we want everyone in that category who is eligible to get vaccinated to actually have the ability to get vaccinated. In order to do that, we do have to expand out the eligibility from where it is currently, which focuses on hospital workers as well as nursing home staff and residents. We want to get to other community-based health care workers, including home health workers, for example, and do that as rapidly as possible. And that's the other key point that the Mayor has already emphasized, which is for us to move quickly, as is our intent, we have to be able to expand the circle of eligibility swiftly as well so that we can match up the capacity that we have with that eligibility.

Mayor: You know, I want to also turn to Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, who's done just outstanding work organizing the command center, the Vaccine Command Center, because one of the crucial things here is to constantly move with what's going on at the grassroots level and all of these locations. They have to all be tracked and we have to constantly make moves to reach deeper into each population, then go on to the next. So, in terms of the work of the command center and how we're structuring that, Deputy Mayor, why don't you jump in?

Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog, Health and Human Services: Sure. Good morning, sir. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes.

Deputy Mayor Hartzog: Okay, good. Just wanted to answer the question a little bit more in detail, we have existing capacity per week for about 150,000 doses that's through hospitals system largely. What we're going to be doing over the course of January is actually doubling that capacity, growing to 300,000 by the end of January. And that includes three major components – our community vaccination partners, these are partners who contract – we contract with, they go into community-based organizations, as the Mayor talked about, in our hardest-hit communities and we can scale that capacity to a 100,000 per week. Then we have our own community hubs, that's another 45,000 per week [inaudible] on board. And then, our Test and Trace Corps. That's going to bring another 4,000. So, that's how we get to that overall doubling of capacity.

Mayor: Excellent. Thank you. Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Thank you. And then, I also just wanted to ask about – we have a story out today about the 219 – I'm sorry, 298 City employees who have died from the coronavirus, you know, disproportionately Black and Latino. And there have been, you know, a number of complaints that folks didn't feel that there were well-protected enough, obviously some of that dates back to the spring. But just wondering if there's anything more the City can be doing, especially with this second wave now underway to protect its own frontline workers?

Mayor: Yeah. We're absolutely adamant about protecting our folks. And, look, we lost so many people and that's why this day of remembrance is so necessary. But let's remember what happened, we all were here alone in New York City. We pleaded back in January for testing, we didn't have it. We didn't even know – we had no way of knowing that throughout February, the disease was already spreading widely in the city. We did not have testing capacity from the federal government. We did not have PPE from the federal government. We were left on our own and we did our damndest to reach people and protect people. But I think history is going to show very clearly, you cannot deal with an international pandemic on a local level. You need

support from the national government. And we lost people that, had that support been there, those folks would still be here today. So, it's horrible. But the minute we were able to get the information we needed, to get the testing we needed, get the PPE supply, we made sure that folks got what they needed and we've continued to build that. That's why we have a reserve now where we have a lot of PPE in stock at all times and why we are constantly working to protect people, most especially by getting them vaccinated. And this brings us right to the urgency of this moment. We need to protect everyone, but we want to vaccinate as many of our frontline public workers as possible, as quickly as possible so they're safe and their families are safe. Go ahead.

Question: The next is Stacy from FOX 5.

Question: Hi. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. And Happy New Year.

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

Question: I'm well, thank you. Knowing that, you know, the city – you're laying out this plan to have a million vaccinated in the next month [inaudible] there's still this perception among a lot of health care workers, some of the private health care workers we've talked to, some dentists, even the NYPD, having their delay in the vaccine, that here in New York the vaccine is being delayed for these groups where they're seeing their colleagues, other dentists or other pediatricians in New Jersey or Connecticut getting the vaccine. And they're still waiting here not just to get it, but even to get an update on when they can get it. And knowing, you know, talking about group one-a about the health care workers and the nursing home staff and residents being able to get it in that group, and what about these other health care workers who still feel like the city is, you know, and the State perhaps is leaving them behind the curve?

Mayor: Yeah. Stacy, we're ready. We want to get this done immediately. I want to see all health care workers reached. I want to see all appropriate first responders reached. I mean, there's no question the more people we reach the faster, the better. It's just plain and simple. So, we need, again, that cooperation all around to just smooth this out and make it simple. But we have amazing capacity in this city. There's just, you know, the ability of New York City in general is legendary, but our health care world in particular showed us in 2020 they could do amazing things in the city. We have the tools, we simply need the right authorizations, and we need the supply of vaccine and we can make it work. So, everything you're talking about, that can be resolved in the month of January if we get the support we need. We have this very rigorous goal, and within that goal is the ability to reach a huge number of health care workers and first responders, and that's what I want to see happen. Go ahead.

Question: So, when you say the support we need, are you referring just to supply of the vaccine and perhaps for Dr. Chokshi will, you know, dentists and the private health care workers, pediatricians, or, you know, even you know, dermatologists, whatever it is, will those doctors being for sure included in the one million in January?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, thank you for the question, and, you know, allow me to answer it by starting with the fact that I'm a primary care doctor myself, and I know that people who have been practicing in the community, whether it's a pediatrician or a dermatologist you know, people have been taking care of patients over the last few months and doing so with a risk of

exposure in delivering that care. So, I certainly understand the need for that prioritization. The state, earlier this week, did issue guidance saying that those community-based health care workers, independent providers are eligible for vaccinations starting next week, and so we are prepared to ensure that those workers will have access to the vaccine beginning next week as well. That will ramp up to the other categories as they get approved by New York State. I mentioned, for example, home health care workers, the rest of the health care workforce, which totals well over half a million people across New York City, and so we want those categories to be expanded as quickly as possible, so that again, we can match up our capacity and get them vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

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

Question: Hey, good morning, everyone, and Happy New Year, Mayor de Blasio. It's your last year. How do you feel about that? Well, that's not my question, don't count that as a question. I'm just kidding.

Mayor: Katie, you caught yourself there, I'm impressed.

Question: Don't count that. I have much more important questions to ask. So the first one is to get the, using a sports metaphor, I'll take the [inaudible] is, focusing back on the priority zones that you've identified. Some people have criticized it because the list was formulated in the summer, and it doesn't take into account the second wave that we're we experienced in the fall and maybe continue to experience. So, will you be adding other places to this list or what's the plan there?

Mayor: Yeah, it's a great question, Katie. We're definitely going to look at a reality of the second wave too. Absolutely can add, I think we will add. We want to look at the whole picture. I will unfortunately remind all of us that what happened in the first wave, indescribably horrible, that the second wave has been worrisome, but nowhere near what we went through in the first wave, and we got to really understand that that first wave laid bare, where the vulnerabilities are and the amount of people we lost, and the fact that so much of it had to do with folks who had not had enough health care in their life historically. That's where the danger still is. So we got to keep focused on that, but absolutely, we're going to look at the neighborhoods and look at the priorities with all the latest data and we'll make revisions as needed. Go ahead.

Question: And my second question – can you, can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, there you go.

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yep.

Question: Sorry. My second one is about this vaccination plan that you've announced particularly specifically the using school gymnasiums. Will these be in schools that are open or

will be in schools that are closed, you know, middle school and high schools, and will that affect any kind of future reopening plan for these schools?

Mayor: Will not affect reopening plans. What we will do is obviously to be worked out over the coming days. But the fact is that we're going to use every and any space we need – that is a part of what the city government has and, you know, hospitals, local nonprofits, we're to use whatever we need, whatever it takes, and there's lots of ways to put this together in a way that both allows all the other operations to keep going around it, but allows us to get the vaccinations to people who need them. So, I'm confident we can strike that balance, but those details will be worked out in the coming days.

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

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask—

Mayor: Yoav, you sound like you're at the North pole, man. What's going on?

Question: I'm at Lowe's Hardware.

Mayor: Okay, get your mouth closer to the phone or something. I can't hear you well.

Question: Okay, is this better?

Mayor: Try.

Question: Okay. I just want to follow up on the DOI report [inaudible] and the fact that they didn't look to the incident where the police car drove into the group of protestors on May 30th. You said you were going to look into that. Have you had a chance to speak to DOI?

Mayor: I talked to Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and asked him to have that conversation with them, and I have not gotten that feedback, honestly. I'll check into that today and we'll get you an answer. Go ahead, Yoav.

Question: They told me that the way the executive order was written, it instructed them not to do any investigations that would interfere with other investigations, and they're not planning to look into it.

The other issue that I asked about would be internal [inaudible] investigation and the NYPD told me that they can't – they're not going to release that information because of the 50-a lawsuit. So I'm just wondering is that where things stand, that we can't find out whether those officers were disciplined or not?

Mayor: Okay, I'll do my best as the non-lawyer, Yoav. Last I heard from the Law Department that lawsuit still is standing in the way of the disclosure of a lot of information we're ready to make public about disciplinary records. I don't believe that that's going to go on that long. I believe at some point, this case will be resolved and it will make clear that our ability to release records is now quite clear under the new state law, and we will release those records, but I don't think the lawsuit has gotten to the point where we can do it yet. Again, we'll confirm that back to

you later day. My goal is abundantly clear. I'm very appreciative that the legislature finally got rid of what was wrong with the 50-a law and gave us the ability to be transparent. That transparency about police disciplinary records is going to help us move forward as a city. It's going to help people trust their police. It's going to help us be safer. So, I am very much forward today where we can do the fuller release. As soon as we get clearance from the courts, we're going to progress with that. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today, it goes to Steve Burns from WCBS 880.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor. Honored, I guess, to have the last questions of 2020 here. Happy New Year's Eve to you.

Mayor: It is a position of great honor, Steve. Happy New Year to you.

Question: Yes. Yes, it is. I'll try and do it justice. First on the vaccine distribution plan, where they've gone so far, hospitals, nursing homes are obviously controlled environments, but when you move them out to say a school or public housing lobby, a place where the public can access them, what goes into the verification of knowing that this person is eligible right now, they have the job they say they have a, so when you move it into those public spaces, how do you verify, you know, that this is someone who should be getting it right now?

Mayor: It's a good question, Steve, and look, I want to start and I'll pass the Dr. Chokshi by saying the idea of using whatever spaces will get us out in the communities at the right time, again, depending on the priorities, and as we get through one priority going on to the next, going on to the next, but the more we get to the grassroots, the more successful we're going to have reaching people. We have to do it in a way that works and, you know, think about – schools are in every community for example. If what we need to do is have people come in on the weekends to a school, we can do that. You know, if we find a certain case, we don't think the school day makes sense, we can still do vaccinations on a weekend. Public housing, again, you have community centers, we can dedicate space specifically for vaccination. So, I would just want everyone to hear the fact that this is only going to work if we get out to the grassroots, but we're going to do it in a way that is safe and smart now to the verification of people, and there are categories, I want to state the obvious as I pass to Dr. Chokshi anyone who has identification, including IDNYC has a birth date on it, and that tells you immediately one of the categories, that's going to be a priority, which is older folks. But for other types of priorities, conforming, Dr. Chokshi, can you give us a flavor of how you're going to do that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. Thank you, and I'll just add a couple of points as well. The first is to build on what the Mayor said, you know, between hospitals and what we'll be doing out in the community, including at schools, there are many other access points that that are also controlled environments, whether they're urgent care centers or pharmacies. These are the places where the everyday miracle of vaccination happens, whether it's our influenza vaccines or vaccines for children, and so we're going to be taking advantage of all of those access points in between those two poles that are described.

With respect to eligibility screening. You know, I want to take a step back and just you know, speak to my fellow New Yorkers to say we all need to think about this, yes, as an issue of fairness and justice, but also just think about who is being prioritized and why. We want nursing

home residents to be prioritized because we know they're most at risk. We know we want our health care workers prioritized because they are the ones that we're depending upon when we get sick, and this is an incredibly important message to have spread as widely as possible. So that people take that into account as they think about where their turn is in line. The state will have some additional requirements with respect to eligibility screening, which of course we'll be sure to follow, and that will you know, become more important as we expand out the categories, which we hope will happen as rapidly as possible.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: Thanks, and on an entirely different topic, I'm sure you saw the Governor is allowing a limited number of fans to see the Buffalo Bills playoff game in a couple of weeks, and he said that could be a pilot for similar events in venues. Would you be on board if that kind of a pilot program were to be tested, say at Madison Square Garden, or a few months down the line at Yankee Stadium or Citi Field? would that be something you'd be open to?

Mayor: I'm pro-outdoors. Anti-indoors is my initial view of the world, and I think, I think I've listened to the teachings of Dr. Chokshi and I think he is said a thousand times to me and Dr. Varma and my other colleagues, Dr. Katz, etcetera -- outdoors, crucial difference from indoors, mask on crucial difference from not having a mask on. As I understand the plan. This is, you know, outdoors, plus distancing, plus mask, plus testing. That's a good, thorough plan. That's great, and I'm really happy for those Bills fans, and I think the Governor did the right thing because it's a thorough plan, but also, you know, as a fan, I can say 25 years is a long time to wait to get back to the playoffs. I know people in Buffalo are really, really excited at this moment. So, I think this has been done the right way, the careful way, but with indoors, I would be much more cautious until we get to the point where there's really very, very extensive vaccination. Now we want to make that again, happen very aggressively, but I think we got to walk before we run. Let's get people vaccinated. Then we can start talking about the future of indoor venues.

With that, everyone, look, we're New Yorkers. We're proud. We are often the center of the universe. Tonight, we're definitely the center of the universe. Eyes of the whole world will be on New York City tonight, and it's going to be a joyous night if ever there was one. Goodbye 2020, here comes something better: 2021. I know that when we look back, we're going to say, as painful as the year was New Yorkers should be proud. Everyone out there, you should be proud. This city showed the world how to be strong, how to be resilient, how to look out for each other. It was an incredible display of all that is good in New York City. 2021, we're going to show people what it looks like to recover to come back. We're going to do what New York City has done so many times before to show people, not just a comeback, but making things better than they were before. Fairer, stronger, more inclusive of all of us. We will do that in 2021. I'm not even saying we can do that. We will do that in 2021. That's who we are as New Yorkers. I have total faith in the people of this city. So, I cannot wait to get started. We are now just about 13 hours away. It's going to be amazing, and to everyone, a very, very Happy New Year, Feliz Año Nuevo a todos, [inaudible], any language you want to choose of all the languages spoken in this beautiful city, it all says the same thing: we are turning the page and going someplace better. Thank you, everybody.

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