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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Look, from the very beginning of the coronavirus crisis, this city made a decision. We decided to focus on the science. We decided to be – to be driven by the data. We decided that the facts actually mattered. We would make our decisions based on the data and the science, and we would stick to it. And that's what we continue to do. We didn't have all the information in the beginning we should have had. We didn't have the testing capacity we deserved, but we knew that the direction was right. And the more we've learned, the more information we've gotten, the more testing we've gotten, the better we've done as a city. So, this is all what has sustained us. But we've also known from the beginning this was a crisis with an end in sight, because from the very beginning it was clear that the scientific community would band together and eventually there would be a vaccine. So, we know that the vaccine will be the difference-maker and we know that time is coming near. And so, New York City is working very closely with the State of New York to prepare for that day. And we have a lot to do. It's one thing to think about a vaccine or talk about a vaccine. And it's a very different thing to actually reach millions and millions of people. That's going to take a lot of hard work, a lot of logistical work, a lot of communication and education. But that preparation is happening right now. So, we'll be ready for that day.

Now, the vaccine will be a crucial part of our rebirth. The vaccine will open up the doors to our bigger economic recovery. We need to be ready and then we need to move quickly. And that's what we're going to talk about today, how we will make that happen. We don't have the exact date. No one has the exact date when the vaccine will be ready. But what we do know is it will be sooner rather than later. What we do know is that we have to have a plan that is fair and prioritize. And what we do know is we have to make the vaccine available to people, regardless of ability to pay. It has to be free for those who need it. So, the vaccine plan is being prepared by this city with those assumptions in mind. And there's some things that we know that are good, and there's some things we know that are not so good. Right now, we know that we have a very mixed message, mixed reality in Washington D.C. and that it's hard to rely on our federal government the way we would have in past years. That means it's all the more important that we are self-reliant and self-sufficient here in New York City, working closely with New York State. The good news is that despite the confusion that comes out of Washington, we have a lot of history to work with. We have lot of knowledge of how to use vaccines positively as a public health tool. This city has a long and illustrious history of reaching people and protecting them, protecting them with vaccines. And in this case, that takes on such greater value and greater meaning than ever before, because it will also be the gateway to bring in life back to normal and to getting people their livelihoods back and their freedom back. So, this opportunity, this moment goes far beyond anything in recent memory in terms of the impact of vaccine would

make. But history does teach us a lot about how to go about giving out a vaccine effectively – and Dr. Chokshi will talk about that in a moment. We have to make sure a vaccine is safe. We have to make sure it's effective. We won't do anything until we're certain of those facts. And we have to make sure that we have a sufficient supply. And, as the supply grows, we're going to work on the priorities it will take to manage that supply properly.

So, first of all, the first phase, when we have a sufficient supply, will be to focus on those who need the vaccine the most – the frontline workers – the folks we depend on – health care workers, first responders, essential workers, the folks who are making this city run no matter what. And, of course, the most vulnerable New Yorkers, the folks who are in greatest danger from this disease – that's the first phase. The second phase is the general public and making the vaccine available widely. And the good news, again, is we have a public health infrastructure in this city that is so battle-tested, certainly in years before having done huge vaccine efforts, but particularly in the last seven months. Our public health apparatus in this city has learned such powerful lessons, has gone through such tough battles, but has done it so effectively. So, we all wish we hadn't gone through this, but I'll tell you something that everything that we've been through up to now has prepared us like never before to deal with the greatest challenges. And I tip my cap to everyone in our Department of Health and in Health + Hospitals, Test and Trace, all of the folks who have been part of this work because they've walked through the fire and they've learned so much in the process.

Now, of course, when we get to phase two and we're talking about widespread vaccination, we're going to use everything we have – our hospitals, our clinics, both Health + Hospitals and Department of Health clinics. We're going to use community centers, schools, you name it. And we're going to engage everyone in the health care world, public and private, including private physicians, pharmacies, urgent care centers, community vaccination efforts, whatever it takes. There's going to be a lot information out, a lot of education, a lot of giving people the answers they need, listening to people, taking their questions, getting them answers from clinicians who can really help them understand, doing it in many languages, getting that information out through trusted community leaders. It's going to be a huge, huge effort, but we can make it work. And here to give you a sense of what we will do and what we learned from our own history in this city, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Imagine a virus arriving in New York City and a Herculean effort is launched to vaccinate millions of New Yorkers in a matter of months – one of the largest campaigns in history. The Health Department organizes employees, medical providers, and volunteers, goes door-to-door in apartment buildings to educate community members and partners with clinics across the city to handle lines of people waiting to be vaccinated. Well, this very event occurred decades ago in 1947 for smallpox in New York City. Turning to COVID-19 and the present, I do want to state at the outset, we are certainly not approaching the challenge of distributing a COVID vaccine in New York City with arrogance. This virus has humbled us before, but the New York City Health Department has a record from smallpox to influenza of mounting successful vaccination campaigns. We have the tools, the staff, and the experience at the ready to serve this mission and a commitment matched to the magnitude of the challenge.

Coordinating closely with our State and federal counterparts, we can leverage our well-established vaccine network to provide services across the city at hospitals, community health centers, urgent care clinics, and pharmacies. In fact, we are already doing this, starting with our historic flu vaccination campaign this season. And with our new first deputy commissioner and chief equity officer, Dr. Torian Easterling, we will ensure that equity is at the center of our response. Trusted local clinicians and community-based partners can address skepticism and help us navigate a history of health care provision that has two often failed Black and Brown New Yorkers in particular. Trust is an essential ingredient for turning a vaccine into a vaccination. The models exist – for instance, we have employed community vaccinators during flu season. At a church in Greenpoint last week, a neighborhood identified as having low coverage, dozens of community members were vaccinated in a matter of hours. The Governor has announced detailed plans, including ensuring that any vaccine distributed in New York is sufficiently vetted and the State has outlined thoughtful questions to the federal. We await those answers as well. In the meantime, we are activating our resources to prepare for an eventual first phase of distribution. This includes first closely tracking the science to understand when we will have a vaccine that is safe and effective. Second, enrolling and educating doctors and other clinicians. Third, adapting our databases to track orders and uptake. And forth, developing detailed operational plans related to vaccine distribution, storage, and administration. In other words, we're marshaling the entirety of our public health infrastructure to meet this challenge.

We have the expertise and we have the experience, but most of all, we have New Yorkers, communities, and individuals who have pulled together so many times during this crisis. I know they're going to rise to this occasion in history just as they have for generations. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Dr. Choksi. And I want to thank you – I think what our Health Commissioner said is reassuring, and it's encouraging, and it's true – that history, that really is something we all should feel proud of and we should feel encouraged by. The fact is, New Yorkers, not just in this time, but generations before have shown the amazing ability to handle any and all crises and to band together. So, I think you're going to see in some places, perhaps around this country, around this world, a high level of resistance to the science, the data, the engagement of the vaccine, I think here, we're going to do a lot better than a lot of other places, because we've been talking about the science and the data from day-one, because there is a lot of faith and trust in our health care team and the grassroots health care providers who are out there and every community. This will take real work. I want to be clear, it's going to take real work to turn the vaccine and the vaccinations as Dr. Choksi said. But I sure like our starting point in this city and I think this is going to be an example of New Yorkers really doing the right thing to protect each other.

And speaking of doing the right thing, it is so important to keep doing what's worked in this city. And people really have been great overall in terms of social distancing, mask wearing, and better and better at getting tested. And, you know, we're going to keep getting this message out. Remember, we don't expect most people to see a vaccine until at least a few months into 2021, but testing is here and now and everywhere. So, keep getting tested because it tells us so much, it helps us so much. It also gives you so much in terms of knowing what's going on with your health and your family's health. And testing is expanding continually, we're seeing more and more New Yorkers taking advantage of it. And in the cluster zones where we've been particularly

focused in the last couple of weeks, numbers are coming in strong – over 23,000 tests since September 30th. And those test results continue to be encouraging. We continue to see in Brooklyn and Queens improved results, we still – excuse me, we still have a ways to go. But that big-picture reality, the City of New York is clearly leveling off. We're seeing better numbers for the whole city. We're seeing real improvements in some parts of those zones. Other areas have more work to do, but still most have shown improvement. And it absolutely correlates to the number of people getting tested. The more people get tested, the better look we get, and, in many cases, the quicker we're going to be out of restrictions because we get a better look at what's happening with the whole community. So, that is good news for sure. We're waiting on an update from the State of New York. I think the Governor will be speaking soon on what is going to happen next with the red and orange zones. And we're going to be working closely with the State to implement whatever decisions they make.

Let me talk about one more topic before I go to our indicators. And this is a topic that is on the minds of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, and they happen to be the youngest New Yorkers. And it is for many of them the most exciting night of the year, and that is Halloween. I think back – I'm having lots of memories flood my mind right now of carving pumpkins with my kids and going out trick or treating with them and having trick or treaters come to the door of our house in Brooklyn. And it is one of the most joyous nights of the year. And this year, it's going to be different, but it's going to happen. So, I want to make very clear – Halloween is happening in New York City and Halloween will be safe in New York City. We want to do it differently. As with everything we've experienced this year, we understand it's not business as usual, but it can go on and it can be fun and it can be exciting for our youngest New Yorkers. And they deserve it – they deserve it after everything they've been through. So, let's talk about what makes sense for trick or treating this year. First of all, the most important thing we have learned throughout this whole crisis, outdoors is better than indoors. So, with trick or treating, should all be outdoors, only outdoors – no trick or treating inside apartment buildings, for example, do everything outdoors. Second of all, a costume – the mask you have in a costume is not the same as the kind of mask we use to protect ourselves and each other. So, for a child wearing a costume, put a mask on top of the costume on the outside of costume to protect them and protect everyone. No indoor gatherings, no indoor parties. And do things in small groups – again, basic rules we've learned – small groups are better than bigger groups. Maintain social distancing. When folks are laying out the treats in the bowl for kids, stand back, give them some space. And it's much better that any candy be, of course, in a bowl, not handed individually. So, real common-sense things. These are the smart rules that will keep our kids safe, keep our families safe. Also, Commissioner Chokshi told me there was one additional rule, it is a legally binding mandate – parents, you cannot take candy from your child's bag. Okay? The Health Department is watching. Okay. Thank you, doctor. So, everyone let's have a great Halloween. Let's make it safe though – outdoors and safe.

Okay – our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold is 200 patients – today's report 77, and a confirmed positivity rate for COVID of 29.8 percent. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold is 550 cases, today's report 493. Number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, that threshold is 5 percent – today's report 1.56 percent. And today's seven-day rolling average number is 1.68 percent.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today we have Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Health + Hospital CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz. Our first question today goes to Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. I know we're waiting for the Governor to make it official, but assuming he, in particular, relaxes restrictions on Central Queens, places like Forest Hills, what would the City then do to enforce the ongoing progress that you've made in those zones? And what have you seen in terms of how enforcement has changed?

Mayor: Yeah, Andrew, I want to respect your question, but I'm going to say, I wouldn't start with the word enforce. I would start with the fact that a lot of people have been educated in this crisis from the beginning. But especially in these red and orange zones, the fact that this disease could come back, that restrictions could be put in place again – I think that's been a real wake up call to people, and I think a lot of folks are going to act differently from this point on. And that's what we really need to encourage and support first and foremost – the social distancing, the mask wearing, being smart about the number of people in gatherings. So, we're going to educate, we're going to support that. Of course there will be enforcement efforts as well. But I don't think we're going into the same situation we were in, you know, a couple of months ago. I think folks are going to be sobered by this experience and you're going to see a different approach. Go ahead.

Question: The Boston School District decided to go all remote because their percentage level went above their threshold, which I believe was 4 percent. I know you've had good success with your blended program so far in New York City, but how confident are you that in-person school will be able to continue going forward?

Mayor: Andrew, I will never pretend to know what the future brings, but I will tell you that based on the experience we've had so far, I'm very confident. We've had really extensive testing and the results have come back consistently as a very, very low positivity rate in our schools, obviously much lower than what we're seeing in the city as a whole, and the city as a whole is lower than almost any place in America. You know, schools are moving forward, kids are learning, so many kids, parents, educators are so happy to be back in school. So, I really like where we are and I think we're on a good track.

Moderator: Next up is Rich from WCBS Radio.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call.

Mayor: How are you doing Rich?

Question: So – I'm doing all right. So, I'm just wondering what motivated you to talk about your vaccine plan today? What what's the immediate need for that since we're a while from getting the vaccine, I guess?

Mayor: Well, we've been working on this obviously for a while and it was helpful to hear the State's plan, the outline that the Governor put forward, which I think was a good one, but we want all New Yorkers to know that we're getting ready right now. There's – the doctors will tell you the we may be in a situation where it's relatively soon where the first supplies are available for that Phase One for the first responders and health care workers and the most vulnerable New Yorkers. So, that's a lot of work just to get ready for that phase. We want people to know that work is being done. What the State put forward, I think it was very helpful, but of course it comes down to localities to turn it into action. So, we're showing people how we're going to approach this and we'll be giving a lot more detail as we go along. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. yeah, and so one other thing, following up a little bit on what Andrew just said, in regard to the schools. Last time I checked in with you, you only had to close two schools and I'm just wondering how many schools have been – had to have been closed at this point?

Mayor: So, okay, I'll get this precise as best I can, Rich. Let's put aside schools that are closed in red and orange zones. Of course those schools are reopened once those restrictions are lifted. So, for the rest of the schools, the city, well over 1,400 schools, the latest information I have from last night is five schools are on a 14-day shutdown. One of those is coming out of its shutdown tomorrow. So, then that would be four, and we have a number of schools who have been 24-hour shutdowns and then cleared, and they come right back online. We've had classrooms shutdown in two-week quarantines, but what has been very striking and was a question we had in the beginning, Rich, was how often would a school need to be shut down for two weeks? It has been a rarity. Right now, again, five today out of over 1400, one of them about to come out of that status and go back online. So, the good news is that's a rarity and we want to keep it that way with intensive measures to keep the school safe, all the cleaning, the face mask wearing, the social distancing. We see it really working in our schools.

Moderator: Next, we have Gloria from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask just – I realize you're laying out these plans about the vaccine distribution process, obviously no vaccine yet in sight. The Governor talked about this a few days ago, as you know, and he talked about it as it specifically being a State-led effort. So, I guess because of the number of times we have seen different plans or disagreements or different approaches for me when the Governor about how to handle different parts of this crisis, what can you tell New Yorkers today so that they can feel confident that when this vaccine does arrive, that the City and State will actually be on the same page about how to get this done?

Mayor: Again, I just will say at the outset, I had this conversation with the Governor on Friday and we both agreed on this point, overwhelmingly the City and the State have agreed. I think it's

become a fascinating topic to a number of you to talk about when there's a disagreement. I would challenge you to look at all the times when there was an agreement which is overwhelmingly the case. So, if there's ever something where I think I have to do or say something to defend the interests in New York City, I'm going to do that, but overwhelmingly the City and State have agreed, and the State's plan is a good plan, and we're in communication with the State. We're working with the State. We have to implement it, and this is the reality throughout this crisis. I wish this would be discussed a little bit more, a federal government, a state government can come up with a vision or rules, but it's always localities that have to implement them, and state governments don't do that. That's true everywhere in the country, city governments, local governments, county governments, run schools, run policing health care system. States don't do that. We have to put it into action, but we feel a lot of agreement with the plan the State has put forward, and our health care leadership is working closely with the State to make it come to life. Go ahead, Gloria.

Question: Thank you, and my other question is about some of the daily indicators in the last couple of days, I believe you said today, we're at 493, the threshold being 500 for the number of cases. I believe the positive of the seven-day rolling average was in the twos yesterday, seems to have gone to gone down today. It seems like we're getting close to some threshold numbers particularly that three percent, which would trigger a shutdown of the schools. I wonder if everyone can just speak to that. Where are we in terms of that? Is there something that is driving up those numbers and are you going over plans or how you would respond if we get close to that 500, and that three percent?

Mayor: As I said the other day, I was asked, I, I want to, unfortunately I have to tell you, I think one of those facts is not accurate, which is the number that I gave yesterday for the daily testing was in the twos. It was one of the only ones we've seen in the twos recently, but the rolling average was in the mid-level one range. So, the rolling average has been really consistent in the last few weeks in the neighborhood of 1.5 to 1.75. Today's seven-day rolling average, 1.68. We've been in that kind of general neighborhood for a good amount of time now, and that is a leveling off. But with the threshold question on the new reported cases, I was asked this last week and I said, or earlier in the week, and I said, look, that number doesn't live in isolation, we're looking at all three indicators. Yes, the case numbers went up, but they went up in part because of intensive new testing efforts. But you see the hospitalization levels, still pretty stable, the positivity levels among those hospitalized still pretty low, and most importantly, the seven-day rolling average, certainly in a zone, in a range, we can work with. So, no, I think the news has been good and shows that leveling off, and no, we do not need to plan any additional steps beyond what's being done with the restrictions right now, because the numbers are telling us that we are leveling off in a good way at this moment.

Moderator: Next up we have Dana from the Times.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hi, Dana. How are you doing?

Question: I'm all right, thank you. Given the somewhat dissonant messages coming from you and the Governor regarding vaccine plans, and who's in charge of implementing them, do you think some sort of joint press conference might reassure New Yorkers who are skittish about getting a vaccine?

Mayor: I'm happy to do whatever will be helpful to New Yorkers, but again Dana, I talk to a lot of people. I used to tell you this, everyone in the media, this when I went and had many town hall meetings, and I don't have the benefit of having those town hall meetings the same way, but I sure talk to a lot of people. I really don't think every day New Yorkers are particularly concerned about this concept, which is so interesting to the political class and the media of when the City and State have a disagreement, because again, the City and State have overwhelmingly agreed. I just said, you know, we, we have been working closely together on the vaccine plan are a hundred percent comfortable with what's been put out with the State, but again, I, unless people want to ignore this fact that localities have to do the implementation and we have to figure out a way to do that, the State doesn't come in and do that. They don't have the personnel to do that. They're not structured that way. We have to do that. So, it's actually our responsibility to tell people how we're going to make that work and to work with the State to make sense of it, but anything that helps get the message across I want to do and the moment when we have a vaccine it's going to be a profoundly important moment. So, I'm certainly going to be talking with the Governor and his team about the best way to get the message out and we'll work together on that. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks Mr. Mayor, and then on an entirely different topic, Friday is the deadline for federal departments to submit their list of proposed budget cuts to so-called "anarchist jurisdictions," to the Office of Management and Budget. Have you separately calculated how much federal funding New York City is at risk of losing?

Mayor: We are not at risk of losing funding. I just want to be as clear as a bell on this. What President Trump is attempting here is blatantly unconstitutional. You know, we had our Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson here few days back talking about the constitutional underpinnings of how money gets distributed. The Congress makes those decisions, not the President, the President can't reach into what's been allocated and take it away because he disagrees with one part of the country. So, nothing has actually materialized in a meaningful way to affect our funding. I think this is an election ploy by the President to try and rally his base. It will not work. It will not hurt our funding, and if they do anything tangible to stop our funding, we'll see them in court, and I guarantee you, we will beat them in court.

Moderator: Next up is Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I understand that the Governor – he has a press conference scheduled soon – there's a possibility that he may announce that he's allowing schools to open, assuming there's a rigorous testing program, which would be overseen by the City. So, my question is if the Governor indeed does announce that how soon would the City be ready to implement such a program and with students who have already been sick previously, still need a negative test?

Mayor: I'm going to turn to the doctors on your second question. On the first question we have not been given any details from the State as to what they intend for schools. We have a huge testing apparatus, and we're going to work with the whole community to help ensure that people are tested. Depending on what the Governor specifically intends, we may need some material help from the State, either in terms of testing capacity or funding, we may need something to help us achieve it quickly. But in terms of the overall ability to move a lot of testing quickly, we're in a strong position.

In terms of the standards, and again, we don't have any written guidance from the State to work with yet, but in terms of the standards, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Varma, why don't you jump in?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sure, I can start Mr. Mayor. To the second part of your question, Reuvain, the most important thing is if a student is not feeling well, if they have symptoms and they're feeling ill, they should stay home. That is first and foremost. If they have not gotten a test than they should be they should be tested. The only exception to that is if they have gotten a test within the last 90 days, and it was positive. In those cases, we do not recommend that the student get retested. But most cases will be of a student feeling ill, making sure that they stay home, and if they haven't gotten a test in the last 90 days to make sure that they do get tested.

Mayor: Dr. Varma, you want to add?

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: No, nothing.

Mayor: Okay. Go ahead, Reuvain.

Question: Councilman Chaim Deutsch tweeted that there was a store that received in his district – that received the summons simply for having their doors open. They were just open for takeout, and I'm wondering if you're familiar with this incident, and if in general, there's a feeling that some inspectors are just looking for technical violations and flooding places with tickets even who are following the rules. I'm wondering if you're familiar with this particular incident or the complaints in general?

Mayor: Reuvain, I'm not familiar with that incident, but I'm going to make sure we follow up on that incident. I don't want to see any store penalized on a technicality that isn't about health and safety, obviously. So, we'll follow up on that case, but let me talk about the bigger situation. The meeting I had night before last with community leaders. You know, I think there was a tremendous concern that there was enforcement that was arbitrary, and we don't want that. This is something we'll be talking with the State about of how to strike the right balance. We all understand we need enforcement especially when there is willful decision not to follow the rules and to put people's lives in danger. But you know, the vast, vast majority of store owners don't do that nor any other community institution. As we've worked with the community overwhelmingly, we've had support from community leaders and organizations to make sure everyone is healthy and to follow social distancing and work with these rules and work together, to get people tested and to get out of these restrictions as quickly as possible. I really want to see us get ahead of these restrictions for everyone's good, and so if the enforcement is becoming the kind of enforcement that you know, I've talked about for years, where it was to arbitrary towards small

businesses in general, long before the coronavirus, we don't want that, and we don't want to penalize people who are struggling to keep going during such a tough time. So, we'll be talking with the state about how to create that balance properly.

Certainly my message to all my agencies will be, I don't want to see people penalized if it isn't something that's truly important, and I also heard from the community leaders, a real concern about discrimination, and I want to speak to that because that's absolutely unacceptable. We cannot in this moment have any enforcement or anything else that is unfair or unequal. Concerns were raised about whether stores of one background were being treated differently than stores or another background. We can't have that. That's just not acceptable. There's – I want to tell you it's, to me personally, offensive that anyone would show discrimination towards the community in this moment, and all of us need to understand that we're fighting a challenge together, shoulder to shoulder, and so we're going to send a very clear message to all agencies to make sure that enforcement is fair and is equal for all and anything that might trigger discrimination, we have to fight vibrantly intensely. We cannot allow discrimination against this community. It's a community that is suffering through this crisis and we all want to work together to help every community to get out of this crisis together.

Moderator: Next, we have Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Mr. Mayor with the Governor moving to eliminate some lockdown restrictions in Queens, I wonder how – what your prognosis is about how long it will take to eliminate all the lockdown restrictions in all the mini-clusters.

Mayor: Marcia, I want to start, and I'm asking people to loyally report this, I want to start with a really clear sentence. I've said it from the day I proposed a course of action to address this crisis. The State has to make these ultimate decisions. I will always say what I think is important to protect the people in New York City, but the State has to make these decisions and we respect that that's the State's law and rule, and we're going to follow their lead. I am hopeful based on the numbers that this is only a matter of a few weeks, but again, we have to every day see those numbers, those numbers have to keep coming back better and better consistently, and the State has to believe in those numbers too. So Marcia overall trend, I'm seeing some real progress and I'm particularly seeing an uptick in testing, and that's been really good, and some of the neighborhoods that never needed to go into red and orange zones, like Williamsburg, for example, are places where there was a particularly high level of testing. Absolutely need to see people get tested. State will decide, but I like the numbers we're seeing now. We're moving in the right direction. Go ahead.

Question: My follow up question is this, are you seeing any uptick in any other communities that could also be potential mini-clusters? And if so, what are you doing about those?

Mayor: We are not seeing anything like what you've seen in the current red and orange zones. We definitely see areas where we need a lot more testing and we will be sending more testing into different communities in the city where we are not seeing the kind of testing levels we'd like, we definitely see areas where we want to do more education and mask distribution. But we are not seeing anything that parallels what we've seen in these red and orange zones.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First we'll go to Michael from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Michael, before you get started, I want to – I owe you credit that you raised some important issues to us a week or so ago, and I'm glad you did. I want to thank you for that. I think, you know, we followed up on those two issues and I think we were able to make progress on both of them.

Question: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate that. I had two questions for you, one has to do with the upcoming early voting and I'm wondering what your senses and feeling is on how this will proceed as far as just the nuts and bolts of it? Are you in contact with the Board of Elections on issues like, you know, do they have enough poll workers? I know, you know, the NYPD talked about kind of some of their preparations yesterday. What's your sense of that at this point? And what other preparations is the city itself taking aside from, you know, what the NYPD is doing to ensure that early voting goes smoothly?

Mayor: Yeah, Michael, we're obviously doing a lot to try and educate people and answer concerns and questions. I'm going to be early voting myself, and I want to really encourage people to take advantage of early voting. I think Election Day is going to be a huge, huge turnout, and you know, we obviously don't want to see people more in lines than need to be, and we want to see everyone vote and sometimes long lines discourage people. So taking advantage of early voting, taking advantage of voting by mail and that deadline's coming up soon, we're going to encourage all that. We're going to try and do a lot of public education through DemocracyNYC because public education has not been a strong suit of the Board of Elections. We're obviously going to be responsive to any help the board needs. Obviously I wish – as you know – I wish we ran the board directly because I think we could get a lot more done in terms of making the process smoother, but whatever the board needs in terms of support to make this work, we stand ready.

Question: My next question has to do with the you know, the vaccine plan you just outlined, and I was wondering if you could give us some more specifics. I don't know if you mentioned it or it was the slide mentioned it but you know, there was mention of that the cold storage, where is the city is at in terms of, you know, how many facilities do you have set up as far as infrastructure goes? What specific preparations is the city taking to ensure that that's, you know, we'll be ready to go once that vaccine's ready to go?

Mayor: Yeah, I appreciate that question, Michael, look, this is exactly what I'm saying about, you know, here's where the rubber hits the road at the local level. We have to do all that real logistical work to make sure that the idea of a vaccine turns into the reality of vaccination and it's a lot of work and it can only be done locally. So as you heard from Dr. Chokshi that our Health Department has a lot of experience with this and that's going to really come in handy now. So Dr. Chokshi, could you talk about some of those logistics and how we're going to store the vaccine?

Commissioner Chokshi: Absolutely, sir. So for the different potential COVID-19 vaccines, there are three different ways that we would think about cold storage, which is also sometimes known as the cold chain. The first is refrigerated vaccine, that's you know, two to eight degrees Celsius. The next is frozen storage so that's a few degrees below zero, and then there's what's called ultra-cold storage, which is several degrees below zero beyond that. So we have to look at first how vaccines are making it through the clinical trials process to understand which ones will be available sooner rather than later, and match those up with what we know exists with respect to different cold storage locations. For example, we know that hospitals and clinics can very easily satisfy the first two dimensions of what we talked about with respect to storing vaccine, but the ultra-cold storage is one where there are more limited options with respect to being able to store that type of vaccine. So we're in regular communication with the manufacturers of the vaccine to understand exactly how the cold chain process will work for all dimensions from that refrigerated side to the ultra-cold side.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to Julia from The Post.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor, hope you're doing well.

Mayor: How you doing Julia?

Question: I'm doing good. On the vaccine plan, you and the Commissioner expressed a lot of confidence about being able to roll it out smoothly, but I wonder if you take any pause or learn any lessons from two things, one, the fact that you've only been able to get 20 percent of parents to fill out consent forms for testing, and two some of the troubles you ran into with the measles vaccinations last year?

Mayor: Julia it's a smart question. I appreciate it because we do try to learn from every situation. Both of those topics are pertinent, but I would say to you, what we learned from the measles situation was a strong, small, a very small number of people spreading an anti-vaccine message definitely is something that we have to deal with. But we also learned that we could overcome that with a lot of information, particularly from trusted voices, from community voices, from health care providers. So I would say the measles example is cautionary for sure, but it had a happy ending that we figured out how to get the word through in a way that people heard and believed and acted on, and obviously that's why we were able to end that crisis. The situation schools is nascent. We're still in a time where everyone's getting used to the new reality of schools. We've seen a steady, positive response from parents in terms of signing up for testing.

Again, I talked about this, I think it's going to take more dialogue than might have been true in something in the past because there's so much confusion, and a lot of it has come from the national level. There's so many unanswered questions that we need to talk to people. We need a parent, if they want to talk to a doctor, we're going to help them do it. If they need to talk to someone in their own native language, we're going to let them do that. You know, we want to help people get their questions answered and that takes time, but as those conversations happen, more and more people are signing up. I think also, final point, the vaccine, because it is the

decisive element here - a test tells you what's going on, but it doesn't solve your problem, a vaccine actually solves your problem and people know that from the flu and so many other examples. Once people see it is safe and it's working, I think word of mouth takes over and more and more momentum builds and more and more people want that vaccine. Go ahead.

Question: Okay, second question is on testing and kids and students. I know you've cited, you know, the incredibly low positivity rate, I think it's like 0.17 percent in schools, but according to this State, the city's reported actually 2,000 positive cases for city kids, whether they're at home in school, in private school, in religious school, that gives us a two percent infection rate since September. Does that give you any pause that in-person, specific DOE rate, is a fraction of the overall number of kids affected? And do you know if it's that high for a specific reason such as yeshivas?

Mayor: No, I respect the question, but I have to say this is a case of stretching statistics in a very inaccurate manner. The fact – that if you're looking over all of September and all of October, and that's the number of cases you've had in that entire time, that means at any given point you're positively level was very low. And the fact is we're talking about not only over a million public school kids, but then hundreds of thousands of more charter school, public – excuse me – private school, religious school, and it's a huge universe in which so, you know, I'll get the exact number, if you take every kind of student in New York City, but you're talking, you know, 1.3, 1.4 million kids, to have that few cases over two months is an incredibly low positivity level. And I think it actually is a number that says how well we're doing. Dr. Chokshi, why don't you weigh in on that too because I think I'm counting accurately, but let's hear it from a real doctor.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, you're right, Mr. Mayor, that the only one point that I would add to this is that the best scenario is when we are able to identify cases before they go into school. And so that's what that testing represents is a number of kids who are being tested in the community as well as through our school based testing program. And so each of those cases that is identified before someone shows up in the school setting means that we know that they'll be able to stay home, to isolate, and that helps us to interrupt the spread of COVID-19.

Mayor: Dr. Varma, and I turn to you on this point, you've really led the way looking at school systems around the world and what we needed to learn from them, and then comparing our results to school systems, not only in the United States, but around the world. So based on the information you just heard, what would you say?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, thank you for the question. I think there's a couple of important points. The first as the Mayor has noted, the approach that we're using is really among the most rigorous that you see anywhere in the world. I have personally reviewed protocols used for many countries in Europe and in Asia, and can attest to that. Second, we've received a number there've been a number of published and their internal reports coming from various parts, not just from the United States, but elsewhere in the world, which also continues to bear out, whether you look at the U.K., you look at Germany, you look at Australia, it bears out that when you have all of these measures in place, schools can in fact be made safely. And the third thing is, is to extend on the Mayor's point about comparison numbers. The – it's important to understand what the testing in schools, the school testing survey tells you, and what it doesn't tell you. The

most relevant comparison point is if we took, you know, randomly sampled a hundred New Yorkers off the street, how many of them would have infection if we tested them? And that's because that's analogous to what we're doing in the school, where we're taking a random survey of the school population and testing them and what we see so far, again, we always have to be cautious, what we see so far is that you are less likely to encounter somebody with infection in a school than you would be outside the school and not just by a little, but by a lot. And that isn't evidence of the fact that what we're doing in our schools, telling people to stay home if they're sick, making sure they wear a face covering, doing all of the measures that we know, those have measures are working right now. We can't rest, of course, on our laurels. This is something you have to do every single day rigorously, but everything we see right now is reassuring and very much in line with what we see elsewhere in the world.

Mayor: Thank you so much doctors. Let's conclude today with this point that we're preparing now in this city to continue to lead the nation in addressing the coronavirus. We were the epicenter. We overcame that. We became one of the safest places in America. We had a problem in some parts of our city. We went at it aggressively and we're making progress. We said we could reopen the largest school system in America, and we did it, and we did it safely as you're hearing from the doctors. Now we prepare to ensure that people get vaccinated in a safe, effective manner and that's going to be a model for this country as well, and for the world. We're going to be the public health capital of the world because of everything we went through, everything experienced, but all the triumphs that New Yorkers achieve, we're going to have the ability to say here, in this heroic city, we figured out how to do it right and we can teach the whole world how to do it right, and that is going to be one of the pillars of the New York City of the future. That's going to be one of the things that makes us strong, that creates new jobs, that gives us new meaning as a city that we will beat this disease and then help others ensure that no disease ever does this to any city anywhere again. Thank you, everybody.

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