

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. We are at a crucial moment in this city, crucial moment in our fight against the coronavirus. Now for seven months, the city's waged a battle and I want to say to all of you, New Yorkers have been heroic in this struggle, fighting back against the coronavirus consistently. Now we have a challenge. We see a rise in cases in certain parts of our city, and we have to get ahead of this. We have to bring everything to bear we can. We're going to have to be tough about it and that's why I put forward a plan to address the situation and yes, it involves tough restrictions, nothing we want to do, but the kind of thing we need to do and do quickly to get ahead of the problem, to keep this problem limited, to address it in a matter of weeks and not let it spread further.

So, look, we know so much more now than we did at the beginning of this struggle back in March and April when we had so little testing, when we had so much less knowledge about this disease, our fight was very, very difficult, and yet this city did fight back and get to a much better place. Now we have the advantage of much more knowledge, much more testing, and much more understanding amongst the people of the city of what they have to do and they've shown it time and time again. These realities should be great advantages as we fight back these specific problems in specific areas. But again, it will all come down to you, to everyday New Yorkers doing the right thing for yourselves, for your families, for your communities, by practicing the basic rules, basic vision that has worked for us over and over again, the wearing the mask, the social distancing, just doing the smart, basic things that have everyone does together, we turn the tide in our favor.

So let's give you a picture now of what's happening right now in this city. We have a new map that provides a sense of where the challenges are, where the hotspots are, and right now, again, we have nine ZIP codes where we have seen the positive level for the coronavirus above three percent for seven consecutive days. It remains nine ZIP codes. Then we have our watch list and that's tier two where we're watching areas that are in danger of entering that top tier of a particularly troubled ZIP codes. We have a new ZIP code we're adding to that watch list and that is 11206 South Williamsburg, that brings the watch list total to 13. So, again, we're staying stable with nine in the top category where we need the most action, the most restrictions, 13 that are being watched, and those 13 do not need to end up in that top category. They do not need to experience those deeper restrictions. So, you can see the number of days consecutive over three percent, thank God, not yet into that category, but we're warning people in those communities to really buckle down, to take all the right precautions, to take it seriously. You do not want to see these restrictions in your community. You can do something about it. You don't want to see small businesses closed in your neighborhood. You can do something about it. Right now, there is time to turn things around. That's why we're providing this information to the public in an urgent manner.

So, in terms of the nine ZIP codes I've proposed, I think the way forward, clear sharp restrictions applied quickly. Now obviously with our schools in the nine high risk ZIP codes, those schools, both public and non-public are closed as of this morning. This will be for several weeks, the faster we address the problem on the ground, the faster the community participates, the quicker we can get those schools open again, and as little as two weeks, hopefully no more than four weeks, but we all have a lot of work to do. Now, again, we chose to close the schools out of an abundance of caution, thankfully in our school system, including in the effective ZIP codes, tier one, tier two, we are not seeing any unusual problems, anything out of the ordinary in our schools, thank God. And we continue to do testing outside of schools and in schools, in those effective ZIP codes, testing teachers, staff, watching for problems. I'll give you example, just the last few days we've gotten 1,351 test results from 35 schools in those nine top ZIP codes and only two positive tests among the 1,351 results we've gotten so far.

So, get – excuse me – our educators, our staff school communities are doing a great job. They're doing the right thing. They're being smart about things. Folks understand the hand-wash and the hand sanitizer, the social distancing, the face mask. If sick, they're staying home, people are doing this the right way and it's proven by the testing we're seeing at our schools. So we're going to keep that testing going in the 13 ZIP codes on the watch list, constantly moving from school to school each day, to keep a clear picture on what's going on. Now, the plan related to the nine ZIP codes, obviously presented at the State. We had conversations yesterday morning. I spoke with the Governor and our teams have been talking throughout the day yesterday, constructive conversations, productive conversations that are going to continue into this morning, and we need obviously a clear decision in the course of today. So, we can move forward. The plan I've presented is the template to address this. The State is looking at that template. We understand is their ultimate decision. They can modify as they see fit, but the important thing is to come to a decision quickly so we can get going. We are prepared to implement as soon as tomorrow morning in those nine ZIP codes once we have the sign off from the state.

Now, in the meantime, again, what everyone can do, you're going to have this constant question, how long do these restrictions have to be in place? And I'm going to be talking to a lot of people in the community, I have been already, and my message is the same, you can keep it to a matter of weeks, but everyone has to participate. Everyone has to be part of the solution. If we all do this right, which we did before in much tougher circumstances, we contain this problem to a limited part of the city for a limited period of time, then we reopen in those places and keep moving forward. If we do it wrong, it keeps spreading into surrounding ZIP codes and that endangers the whole city. We cannot let that happen. So, everyone has to be part of the solution.

Now, today is a Tuesday and as always, we talk about testing on Tuesday, get tested Tuesday, look again, what works? Testing, testing, testing, we can say it so many times. You cannot say it enough times, because there's still a huge number of New Yorkers who've never been tested even once. It helps this whole city to get tested because it gives us a picture of what's going on and helps us understand where our challenges are and what to do about them. So again, if you have never been tested, please go get tested right away. If you haven't been tested a long time, please go get tested. It is fast. It's easy. We need New Yorkers, not just in those nine ZIP codes or those 13 on the watch list, but everywhere to get tested. The faster we get the truth, the faster we can act. Now, everybody we're expanding testing capacity throughout the city, constantly getting it where it's needed most, but remember we have over 200 sites all over the city. Everyone has a place near them. Always free, always quick. If you want to know where to go, just go online, nyc.gov/covidtest for locations or call 2-1-2-COVID19, and again, all tests is free.

Now I mentioned the importance of testing at the schools. We've been doing the testing of staff and educators outside schools, and in schools. Starting later this week, we're going to be starting the systematic medical monitoring of schools all over the city. We'll be doing that for every school once a month for the duration of this crisis and it's a way that we get more information, get to watch carefully what's happening. Keep everyone safe. This begins in some schools this Friday, we want to make sure that everyone is participating, that means educators, staff. It means students, everyone. Now, obviously educators and staff are overwhelmingly, ready, willing, and able to get tested, but we need a sign off form. We need a consent form from parents to get a kid tested at their school. So families can now complete the consent form online. You go to your NYC school account and you get that at mystudent.nyc. So just go to mystudent.nyc, your own account, enter in the information on the consent form that automatically makes sure the school knows that your child can be tested.

And look, to all the parents out there. I'm a parent. I want to say this to all of you. This is such a good and smart thing to do. The school community is working very closely with the Department of Health and the Test and Trace Team to make sure everyone is tested, tested quickly, safely, obviously for free. It's a great way to know what is going on in the school and keep everyone safe. You will get the results for your own child, this is a random sample in the sense of it's not every child every month, certain children some month, other children another month. But whenever there is a test of your child, you'll get those results quickly and that's important for your peace of mind. So, all families should participate and sign up on that consent form. The school will be reaching out to you about it as well. If you have any questions or concerns, and obviously we'll talk to people in whatever language they speak to help them understand how this works and to encourage them to sign that form.

Now, families always have questions about testing, want to know more, want to know how it works. Is it fast? Yes. Is it safe? Yes. Is it quick and easy for your child? Not too cumbersome, not too difficult for your child, yes, but we want to not just tell you that we want to show you that, so we've put together a video with one of our eight Health + Hospitals pediatrician and a young volunteer to give you a sense of how things will work. Let's look at the video.

[Video plays in background]

All right, well, thank you, first of all, to Dr. Katie and all our colleagues at Health + Hospitals and everyone who's going to be part of the school testing program. That video really says it all. And look, parents, I want to say to you, as you can see, are very energetic, young volunteer there, had a cool hairstyle too, that he did not have a problem with that test because it's not the long instrument they used to use. It is the much shorter, simpler, just a quick rub around the inside of the nostril and it collects the sample really easily, really quickly. I've had this newer kind of test. It is much better, much simpler. That's what we'll be providing the kids and it's as quick and easy as you just saw there.

Now let's talk since we're talking about kids, we're talking about schools, let's talk about what we need to do to make sure that kids continue to be educated during this pandemic. Now that we have our whole school system open, our buildings open, we have kids in classrooms, we have kids obviously in the blended approach where they're in class part of the week at home, working online for the rest of the week and other kids in all remote, but what does it require? It requires every child has the technology they need. Now in the spring there was an absolutely astounding effort to get technology in the hands of kids who needed it, an emergency effort that was really admirable, and I commend everyone at the DOE and all the partners in the private sector who helped make that possible, 350,000 iPads were distributed beginning of March, and it was one of the greatest efforts to address the digital divide in this city's history. Overall, the Department of Education has 950,000 remote learning devices available for students, some obviously are kept in schools, others are given to kids to take home. That supply has been extraordinary and has reached so much of our needs, but we still have additional need for 100,000 more iPads according to the surveys we've taken from parents and families. So, the additional 100,000 iPads are being procured, now they will be provided to students starting next month. Again, any student who still needs an iPad will get one, or if their iPad broke or there's any problem, we'll replace it. We need the remote learning, whether it's part of the week or all week for a child to work, we need them to make sure they get the technology they need, and we will.

Okay, let's go to our indicators now for the whole city. Indicator number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 threshold is 200 patients. Today's report is 70 with a confirmed positivity rate for COVID of 21.4 percent. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold is 550 cases, today's report 501 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 threshold is five percent, today's report 1.90 percent, and the seven-day rolling average today is 1.65 percent. A few words in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi, all we'll now begin our Q-and-A. We're joined today by Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi, Health + Hospital CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz, Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Jeff Thamkittikasem, Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations. With that, we'll go to Gloria from NY1.

Mayor: Gloria?

Question: Hey Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, how you doing?

Question: Thank you. I wanted to ask you about something that the Governor said yesterday, and I want to get your reaction because I believe there's a little bit of confusion going around, and I saw that you mentioned the amount of testing that had been done at schools that are in the cluster ZIP codes. Part of what the Governor said yesterday was that the virus transmits, and that's a direct quote from him, "in schools because different communities come together in schools and therefore it is a place of transmission." I'm wondering if I could get you to weigh in on that as well as the medical experts on the line about whether or not the city believes that schools are a problem as it pertains to the spread of the virus.

Mayor: Let me start and I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi. Gloria, that is not what we're seeing. We're going by the facts. We're going by the data. We've had the situation room up now for most of a month. Literally every single day reviewing data from every single school, 1,600 schools in the school system, all reports of potential coronavirus being followed up on and on top of that targeted testing initiatives at the schools. What we're seeing in the school system in general is a very low level of coronavirus activity. Now, I'm going to tell you that the facts that I know,

but I want to start with the why, why would that be? Because the schools are now so concentrated in terms of the safety and health measures, what we're doing, we've talked about this gold standard we set, just think about everywhere in the city, everywhere in your life.

Here, we have a place where everyone is wearing a mask scrupulously. I've seen this with my own eyes, from the youngest child to the oldest educator, everyone's wearing a mask together. Everyone's practicing social distancing, nine, ten kids in a classroom. We've never seen anything like that in New York City history. Cleaning constantly, ventilation, you name it, all of these approaches layered on top of each other. That makes it a particularly safe location. Clearly folks who are not feeling well, staying home, been a lot of testing before school began, there'll continue to be more testing. What we saw with the tens of thousands of educators and staffs that we have tested so far, it was a positivity level below one half of one percent. So, the facts keep coming in, and I told you this recent batch of tests at schools in the nine ZIP codes, 1,351 tests of educators and staff came back with only two positives. So, I think the schools are proving to be very safe to the credit of everyone at DOE, everyone at Test and Trace and Department of Health. And this is what we want to continue, because this is crucial to the future of the city is to keep our school systems safe. So, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, would you offer your reflections?

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: Sure, I can start. Yeah, I think the Mayor actually covered everything quite comprehensively. We need to remember that we have many lines of defense to keep our schools safe. We actually have lines of defense that are very similar to what you would have in a healthcare facility, you know, we have people wearing masks. We have people maintaining physical distance. We have extensive hand hygiene, we have environmental cleaning, and then of course we have guidance that's being followed up and tested that people stay home, and avoid going to school if they have any symptoms of illness. Those are critical lines of defense, and it's not just New York City. We have seen evidence from every where around the world, and this is a disease that if people take the appropriate precautions and the institution enforces compliance with those precautions, our kids can get an education and our teachers and staff can remain safe. That is incontrovertible. I know an issue that keeps coming up also is about testing. You know, I'm a real zealot when it comes to testing, because I think it's absolutely critical to controlling our epidemic around the city, and we have evidence from that from around the world. But testing again, isn't our first line of defense in the city. What we're instituting is a medical monitoring program, because it's going to help us understand how much undiagnosed infection is there and are our prevention measures working the way they should. So I just wanted to make sure that we highlight and understand where testing falls in the hierarchy of those lines of defense.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Nothing to add to what's already been said, sir.

Mayor: Thank you, doctor. Go ahead, Gloria.

Question: Okay. Thank you, and if I could, Mr. Mayor, ask you about this back and forth regarding the nonessential businesses. It seems like there was a disagreement about whether or not the city should do this by ZIP code. The Governor seemed to suggest yesterday this was a flawed approach. You know, the virus doesn't travel by ZIP code, it does not recognize ZIP code. So do you have an understanding of what the Governor's problem is with your plan and are you working on that, and do you think that maybe there is a way to do this, that isn't just ZIP code focused, since there is a recognition that yes, people do move around, that people are not confined to one specific area or ZIP code, and that there – maybe there's a smarter way of doing this?

Mayor: I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. Look, we obviously, over the last few days, talked through different models. The Governor had an impulse that I share to say, was there some way to, for example, use census tracts – we found that to be not as helpful as I would have liked because we saw again that we had not only within a ZIP code particular high levels, but we saw it starting to spread to the other areas of the ZIP code. So, the idea here is to of course, focus on the places that are having the toughest situation, but also surround them with activity to make sure that we do not allow spread. So, if you are restricting in the places that are really, really the toughest, you also want restrictions in the immediate surrounding perimeter, and that's why the ZIP code model actually, the more I looked at it, the more sense it made. It was a way to stop the spread from going into more and more neighborhoods, and ZIP code has the advantage, Gloria, that it's not something like everyone knows what the ZIP code is of every building that they go to or every school or whatever, but it's easy to find out. People certainly know their own household ZIP code. It's easy to find out if your store, if your school are in that ZIP code or not, and that was an advantage compared to other demographic or geographic measures we might use.

As to the Governor's team, they – again, good conversations yesterday. They'll continue today. We're looking forward to a decision today. Best of my understanding they did not present a specific alternative. I said, look, here's what I propose. This would work. We all understand what the ZIP code is. This would work. Let's go. We have to act decisively. If they have a different model, it's their call and we'll work with whatever model they choose, but we have to move quickly. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes. Mr. Mayor. Just to add briefly to what you've said – what we have to do is match up the epidemiology of the virus, you know, understanding how it is transmitted, the speed with which that spread can happen, with the practical considerations around how to implement these difficult local restrictions and you know, that's how our team has landed on the ZIP codes as the best geographic way to set the boundaries for what we're moving forward with. I'll say two more things. One is that we know that we have to move swiftly that you know, this, this virus has such a formidable foe and so the plans that we have proposed to the state are meant to be able to be brought into action as quickly as possible, and the second point is just to emphasize one thing that the Mayor said, which is that we have been in dialogue with our counterparts at the state, including health officials at the state level to explain our reasoning you know, to explain why it is that we selected the particular ZIP codes that are of greatest concern, and I think there is a lot of shared understanding about the urgency of the situation.

Moderator: We're also joined by Dr. Ted Long, Executive Director of the Test and Trace Corps. With that, we'll move on next to Jen from the AP.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Jen, how are you doing?

Question: Fine, thanks. I guess my first question would be have the hospitals at all started to prepare for a potential surge in patients? Are any of those plans being reactivated?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll start. I'll turn to Dr. Katz. Jen, what we're seeing so far, and, you know, we obviously are very careful and cautious in our assumptions. What we're seeing so far is actually the number of hospitalizations has not moved much. Although the positivity levels for coronavirus have increased, but still low compared to what they were in the past, so meaning within – among the folks who were in the hospital – but we certainly have to be ready for a higher level of hospitalizations. I would say right now, if this is our starting point, we're in a much better place than we were obviously in the spring, because whatever is happening now has not moved very quickly in terms of hospitalizations. But yeah, we have to be ready in case of any scenario. So go ahead, Dr. Katz.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. The 11 hospitals of Health + Hospitals have been a great barometer of the city activity for COVID. We saw many of the trends ahead of anyone else in the last round. I'm very pleased that right at the moment, there are only two patients in the 11 hospitals who currently are on a ventilator due to COVID. So, it is very low, but we nonetheless course have plans for how we would deal with the surge if it were to happen. Every single hospital based on its experience of what works, and frankly, what didn't work in March and April, has a new plan. We know the details, what wards we would open, who would get, who would staff those wards, what the correct order of it, how we would transport patients. There was a tremendous amount that was learned in dealing with the epidemic in March and April, and we'll be prepared if there is another search.

Mayor: Go ahead, Jen.

Question: I also wondered whether – it's a bit of an offbeat question, I guess – but in trying to refine strategies for containing this latest flare up, has any thought been given to tailoring restrictions by some factor, other than geography, such as people's level of risk, like age group?

Mayor: Jen, I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi. I think one of the things we learned last time, obviously a really, really bad situation in March and April, but we learned a couple of things: move as fast as you can, be decisive, it's much better to put too many restrictions in place and solve the problem quickly than to delay putting restrictions in place. So I think when you parse too much, just as a common sense matter, when you parse too much, you run the risk of too many avenues being left open for the spread of the disease. I think if you say let's really buckle down for a concentrated period of time again, weeks, if done, right, and make sure you're grabbing the whole area that needs to be addressed. You have a much better chance of stopping this problem in its tracks before it reaches the rest of the city. That that's my layman's interpretation, but Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, you want to speak to that?

Senior Advisor Varma: Sure, thanks. I think, you know, the Mayor has summarized it quite well. These restrictive social measures are a bit of a blunt instrument. We reserve them for only situations where our individual measures and our testing and tracing can't keep up with epidemic spread and they have to be applied in an area broader than we might like just simply because of, of the complexity of how societies work and people interact. What you're asking specifically about is an approach that in public health terms, they use the term, the shielding or cocooning, which is it possible to have the most vulnerable people kind of avoid high risk activities and in a way quarantine themselves so that people who are at lower risk and continue their activity, you know, that, that has a lot of theoretical strength to it. But the practical experience for many places in Europe that attempted this early on has really not borne out, and that's because we are all connected to each other. If you're let's say elderly and have medical conditions you need people to help you, and those people are in connection to other people. So, you are really just one or two degrees of separation from other people, and it's really not very effective to try to shield a very large population this way.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thanks for this very good question. I'll just add briefly to say number one, it's absolutely right that geography matters. We know this from our experience with the coronavirus globally. Geography does matter, and that's why the plan that we have proposed focuses on geography in that way. But in addition to what Dr. Varma said there are other ways, you know, that are not mutually exclusive with thinking about geography as a way to address risk. Particularly, you know, higher risk settings whether it's a healthcare setting, you know, a nursing home or other areas where we know, you know, there are higher risk activities, particularly things that are indoors. Those are also places where we can bring to bear additional ways to protect people in those higher risk settings. You know, ensuring that that the bread and butter of our prevention strategies, you know, the so-called “core four” are, are practiced and adhered to in particular, in those settings.

Moderator: Next step is Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

Mayor: Good Henry, how are you?

Question: I'm okay. I've got a couple of questions here. With students who are in these affected areas can still go to schools outside the affected areas, if I'm not mistaken, and if so, does that create an elevated risk?

Mayor: I'll tell you what I think, and Dr. Chokshi can jump in after me. I don't not believe, Henry, I do not believe it creates an elevated risk for a couple of reasons. First is that we see the schools taking extraordinary measures to keep kids and staff safe and it's working. So if kids will be going into a very safe environment and remember the second factor, the screening – we're telling every parent, it is their obligation to screen their child every day. If there's symptoms, your child stays home. If there's a temperature, your child's is home. If the kid gets to school and there's a temperature to child goes to isolation, is sent home. So there really are safeguards to ensure that if an individual child is even symptomatic that, that is addressed right away. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. No, I would just briefly emphasize, you know, particularly today as Get Tested Tuesday, we do have a, a simple and clear message for anyone who lives in the affected areas in particular, which is to get tested immediately whether you're a student or someone else who is in that ZIP code, and we think that will also add the layer of protection as the Mayor mentioned.

Mayor: Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay. So, thank you for answering that. My other question has to do with, just bear with me here for the – I kind of lost it. Let me see if I can –

Mayor: We can bring you back if you want?

Question: Bring me back in about a minute or two, thank you.

Mayor: You got it.

Moderator: Next up is Derick from WABC.

Question: Hi, good morning. I had a question about this incident that happened last night in Borough Park, the warehouse where the FDNY was seen sawing their way inside, there were reports of 500 people inside, and that it's our understanding that despite some fire safety violations there were no summonses issued for violating any of the COVID-19 orders. Could you talk about that? Should there have been summonses issued in that situation?

Mayor: Derick, I am waiting to get the full details. I've only gotten a basic report this morning. The most important fact here is, first of all, there never should have been a gathering like that, and the folks who organized it did something harmful and that has to be addressed and we'll address it, certainly in terms of those individuals. Second, the important point, the FDNY got there to address the situation and disperse people, but in terms of summonses and other consequences, I'll get you an update on that. Obviously, something like that cannot happen, particularly in the middle of a crisis where certain ZIP codes are showing of a particularly high level of this disease, and it's a danger to everyone. People have to be smart to not let something like that happen, and there will obviously be consequences. Go ahead.

Question: And then my second question is related to schools. You had mentioned a short time ago that just a couple of coronavirus cases are linked to the schools. I think you said two out of 1,300 tests were positive in those nine ZIP codes, and so based on that information, why go ahead and shut down the schools if by your own admission, you know, people are following the rules, they're wearing masks. If there's very few cases in the schools, then why close the schools?

Mayor: Yeah, Derick, it's a very fair question. This is an imperfect reality, obviously. The fact is across the whole city, the schools are doing a tremendous job and the numbers bear it out, and it is striking testing, you know, staff and educators in the nine ZIP codes at that level, 1,300 tests plus, and getting only one positive back or two positives back. I mean, that's amazing. So in a perfect world, we'd say, hey, let's just keep things going. But I think the reality is if we're really trying to restrict movement and activity within the ZIP code, if we say here are nine ZIP codes out of 146 in New York City that are particularly problematic, we really want to bring the level of activity down. So, let's close the public and nonpublic schools. Let's close the non-essential businesses. Let's encourage people to stay home. Don't go out unless you have to go out and go back to the reality. We had more in the spring, but in a concentrated area, it just stands to reason that even though the schools were doing quite well, we just want to reduce the amount of overall activity for a few weeks, hopefully only, and really stop this spread quickly.

Moderator: We're going to go back to Henry for his last question.

Question: Thank you very much. Actually, that last question and the first question that I asked you pretty much covers the subject of that question. But I have another question for you, which goes back to the continuing theme of the relationship between the City and the State, this governor and your administration, and whether or not just latest split on how do geographically define the areas of risk is another example of how not being on the same page might make just pandemic more problematic.

Mayor: Look, Henry, I think it's pretty straightforward. First of all, again, mayors and governors, not just in New York, but all over the country, will have differences. We have different jobs to do, different interests to look out for. My job is to look out for the people in New York City, nothing else – my job is to look out for the people in New York City. So, right now, I see a problem in Brooklyn and Queens. I want fast action. I want the State to take action because of the emergency status we're in. If we were not in this emergency status, I'd be taking the action myself would be ready to do that right away. I also want the State to look out for New York City, because there's a larger problem in other parts of the state and the metropolitan area. We see other clusters, whether it's Nassau County, Orange County, Rockland County, I want them acted on for the good of the people in those communities, but also to stop the interplay between different parts of the state that could be exacerbating this crisis. So, my job is to look out for the people in New York City. And I think that reality, you know, city, government, state, governments, federal government often don't see eye to eye have different worldviews, that's normal. But I think if you asked the question here, where have we ultimately gotten? I think the vast majority of times, the City and State have gotten to the right place together. Sometimes we start with different perspectives, but we end up getting where we need to get in the vast majority of cases. So, look, my job here was to put out to the people of the city the reality, that it became clear that we had a bigger problem that required restrictions, no one likes restrictions, but it was time to say it out loud. My job was to say that to propose action, because we need the State's approval. The State has every right to ask tough questions or look at the model and see if they want to alter the model. That is their right under the law. It's just important they do it quickly and decisively so we can all move forward. So, really, the proof's in the pudding, Henry, so long as we keep getting somewhere, so long as we keep making the decisions together and getting to results, that's what ultimately matters.

Moderator: Next step is Marcia from WCBS.

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

Mayor: Good, Marcia. How have you been?

Question: My first question has to do with enforcement. And I know yesterday, the Governor made light of the amount of enforcement that New York City has been doing. And today on NY1, Commissioner Shea was asked about whether he would give a stricter rules to the police officers in the communities about being strict about giving more – more of fines and sentences – fines and things like that. I wonder if you think that more fines for not mask wearing is something that you should be doing, whether you should step up enforcement, and whether you're going to provide NYPD manpower to the Governor's task force?

Mayor: Yeah. No, I spoke to that already. You know, last week, Marcia, we had over 1,000 City personnel out in the most affected communities, including NYPD, Sheriff's Office, Office of Special Enforcement, Health Department, Sanitation Department. They were all out doing

enforcement, as well as doing education and mask distribution. It was 400 officers each day last week. We're going to keep increasing that. And as we have additional ZIP codes we need to deal with, we'll literally keep increasing as much as we have to. Absolutely, we've been doing enforcement for weeks and weeks. In fact, we've closed down businesses, closed down yeshivas, issued summonses, you name it. But what I think is clear here is this is a problem beyond the normal enforcement approach. This is a problem that requires larger restrictions for the community, because we tried in the past and had success in Sunset Park in Brooklyn, in Soundview in the Bronx, in Southeast Queens. We tried an approach that was heavy on outreach, education, masks distribution, of concentrated testing, and enforcement wherever needed – and that worked. In this instance, we saw this problem grow, tried the same strategies, tried more enforcement, it was not turning the tide the way it needed to, because you can only enforce in so many places at so many times. We're now at the point where we need restrictions, hopefully only for a few weeks to really turn the tide here. Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: I also wonder, Mr. Mayor, whether there – because there's a lack of secular education in some of these troubling communities that leads to a lack of compliance, because they don't have the secular education, maybe they don't understand it. Do you think there's a correlation between the lack of secular education and the lack of compliance?

Mayor: I can't – I can't speculate on that, Marcia. I think what we have to do throughout all these ZIP codes is work with everyone. I mean, we've seen tremendous support from community leaders and community institutions. We've seen intensive efforts to educate people on the importance of mask wearing, the importance of social distancing. We've seen masks distribution drives. I think there's plenty of good messaging coming from community leaders and institutions telling people how important it is. I think there are some voices in many communities, not just here in New York City, we're seeing it all around the country – there are some voices telling people not to wear masks, telling them coronavirus is a hoax. You saw a very painful example of that when Dr. Katz and our other health care leadership gave a press conference a week or two ago, and it was interrupted by a community resident, literally saying the coronavirus is a hoax. So, we have some of that out there. But, overwhelmingly, the community leadership has sent a message that's very consistent with what our health leadership is saying, and everyone is working together to try and solve this problem.

Moderator: Next step is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

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

Mayor: Good, Juliet. How are you?

Question: I'm okay. Thank you, thank you. So, you just said a couple of minutes ago that schools and some of these non-essential businesses might be closed for a few weeks. What criteria will you use to reopen and how – excuse me – how systematic would that criteria have to be maintained in order for everything to reopen?

Mayor: Yeah, it's a very important question, Juliet. I appreciate it. Look, what we tend to see with the coronavirus – and I've been trained by our great health care leadership here to look for these patterns – there really are pretty clear patterns. When there's an upswing, it tends to go up over a period of days and weeks. When starts to turn in the right direction, you also see that emerge over a period of days and weeks. So, the two-week scenario is the ideal. And I'm not saying it's likely, but it's the ideal. It's the one we want everyone to shoot for, where from the moment the restrictions go into place, two weeks later you can come out of the restrictions. If the full two weeks has passed and the last seven consecutive days that ZIP code was under three percent positivity seven days in a row, that would indicate a trend, obviously. And that's what we be comfortable lifting the restrictions. Now, again, all this is ultimately the decision of the State of New York, but I'm going to keep being very vocal about what we think will work and what we need. We want those restrictions to just be as long as they need to be, not a day more. So, that's the ideal scenario. The other scenario we put forward is a 28-day scenario, four weeks, where if you can't meet that first standard, second standard is go four weeks, if by the last day, the 28th day, you're down below three percent, again, that should show us that enough of the trouble has passed, that we can lift the restrictions. Now, Juliet, people have to take this seriously. If they don't do the work, if the people in every community don't do the work, it could go on longer, and no one wants that. So, ideally, with a lot of, you know, buckling down, a lot of real teamwork and effort by people in communities, you can get this done in just a few weeks, maybe more like three, four weeks, but our goal is weeks and then get the restrictions off. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. Thank you. Also, has anyone in these ZIP codes – in the nine ZIP codes, has anyone been given a summons for not wearing a mask?

Mayor: Yeah. We'll get you those numbers. As I said, there's been a whole range of summons activity and enforcement activity, whether it is yeshivas that were shut down, stores that were shut down, people who were given summonses for not wearing a mask or anything else. But remember, this is an area where we've been adamant, because we know it works. The goal is to change behavior, never, ever wanted to penalize for the sake of penalizing. We've wanted to change behavior. We distribute the masks. If people take the masks and wear the masks, that's what we care about. If someone refuses, that's going to be a penalty right away.

Moderator: We're on to our last two. First, we'll go to Narmeen from PIX 11.

Question: Hi. Good morning, Mayor.

Mayor: How are you doing?

Question: Good, doing well? I want to also – on what Juliet had said – we'd also like to see the numbers on the summons and fines in those nine ZIP codes. So, if your office could get that to us, we'd really appreciate it. But I also think that there's maybe some confusion or maybe some clarification needed for City residents about what City inspectors for compliance of things, like mask wearing, should or does look like. And I want to give you an example – we were in Borough Park for some time in the vicinity of 14th Avenue and 42nd street. And our observations showed minimal masks wearing. We drove around about a 10-block radius and we only saw a handful of people maybe wearing masks. When they saw our cameras come out, people would take it out of their pockets and put it on. We did not see NYPD vehicles with those loudspeaker messages that we saw last week. And we didn't see any obvious signs of City officials going around giving those summons. I mean, this seems to be an area that is in clear defiance of what the Governor and you are talking about.

Mayor: Look, that's not the way I would define it, because we have been working with community leaders and community institutions, getting a lot of support. We've definitely seen an uptick in mask usage, but it's not where it needs to be. We have had loud speaker messages out now for the last week or more. We're going to continue that, of course. There's a lot of ground to cover. So, I respect that you were in a very good location, that's an area I used to represent the City Council, so you chose well. But, look, we're talking about nine ZIP codes. That's a lot of ground to cover. So, we have our folks out over a very broad area, getting this message out all the time, taking the enforcement action. But I want to be clear, again, I think there's a dissonance that has to be addressed very bluntly here. We did all the same measures in a number of communities, and it worked, and things turned around quickly – again, Sunset Park, Soundview, Southeast Queens. We put out the free masks. We did the education. We did the outreach. We did the intensive testing. We were able to turn the situation quickly. We're not seeing that in these nine ZIP codes. It's past the point where enforcement solves your problem. So, people can keep focusing on enforcement. If there's a role for enforcement, it's past that point. Now, the facts on the ground make clear we need restrictions. Enforcement would have worked as it did in the other places. If it had worked that same way as it did in the other places, we wouldn't be having this discussion. We need something stronger and we need it quickly. We need restrictions to stop this problem. Go ahead.

Question: Mayor, have you found it any of those nine ZIP codes to be any more challenging when it comes to enforcement for any of your City inspectors, any ones that stand out that you believe the City has to work, maybe, harder on?

Mayor: I have not heard that specifically. I think what we've seen is that the more education, the more outreach – yes, we've used those sound trucks, the more messages from community leaders, the more impact it makes. But we are fighting against a situation – as I said, there are some parts of the community where there are negative messages being put out, telling people not to wear masks and that coronavirus is a hoax and all that. We are fighting that problem. We are fighting the problem of people, of course, having had the fatigue of being through this crisis now for seven months. And that's understandable. It's hard to keep your guard up for so long. But what we do know is more and more, we're getting support and help from all facets of the community and that restrictions, unlike any of these other tools, restrictions are crystal clear. If non-essential businesses are closed, if public and non-public schools are closed, it's really obvious if someone is violating and you can take instant action on that. That's the kind of measure we need now.

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hi, I wanted to ask, coming off the businesses question – I know yesterday, you said that you would close down essential businesses. It's contrary to what the Governor and the State – what the Governor said he wants to do. So, if the Governor does not approve the City's plan to close non-essential businesses and these nine ZIP codes, will the City still move forward and enforce the closure of these businesses?

Mayor: So, Katie, I've been really clear, I'm going to be clear again. I don't know how many times I said on Sunday, pending the State's approval, and I say it again yesterday. I also said we would be ready for Wednesday morning. We're not going to put out a plan, seek approval from the State and then not be ready to implement it. We are ready to implement it, starting tomorrow morning. We are waiting for an answer from the State. We cannot act until we get an answer from the State, it's as clear as that. And I'm urging the State to move quickly and be decisive. We were at a moment where we need action. We're not going to defy the State. I've never suggested that in the least. I said, I put a proposal on the table to the State. We will be ready to implement it, but we are waiting for sign off.

Question: Oh, thank you. So, what kind of outreach is being done now? Because I know last night you were asked that this is a pretty confusing situation. I think you said that it isn't, but I think for a lot of businesses in these areas, it is confusing. So, what kind of outreach is being done? Is SBS involved? Are people telling businesses? You know, people might now forget what's non-essential and they might forget if their businesses is essential or what can open. So, what kind of outreach is being done if that does happen?

Mayor: Yeah. No, I want to say, I really have empathy for business owners. They've been through so much, this is the last thing they need. It's the last thing they want to hear. I appreciate that. And I want to see these businesses survive, and the notion of even having to close them for a few weeks is painful for everyone. I have empathy for them and I agree, they don't have the clear information they need. I want to get them the clear information they need, but we had to get this situation addressed. And so, I put the proposal out publicly to move the ball, to get things to happen, because my job is to protect people in this city. And we're going to have a decision soon, I'm convinced of that. We will educate everyone in the communities immediately when we have that decision. Clearly, the word has spread. So, by putting the proposal out on Sunday, it gave people a chance to hear it and get ready for it. We will – then, the second we have a final decision from the State, we'll start educating communities. We'll make clear to people what's expected of them. I want to be very, very clear, we do not want to harm anybody. We want to help stop this disease from spreading to more and more of the city. So, we'll get the word out and then we'll start enforcement. Once we've gotten the word out to everyone, we'll start enforcement right away. And at that point, it will be very, very aggressive, because when those restrictions are in place, it'll be crystal clear what's expected of everyone.

Everybody, as we close down today, I just want to say this. Look, this city has come so far, and we came so far by focusing on the data, by focusing on the science. This is what has differentiated New York City from so much of the rest of the United States, and even from a lot of other countries around the world – devotion to following what the actual facts tell us to do. We saw a problem in these last days. It, unfortunately, consolidated. It was time to say we needed stronger restrictions. So, our decisions are based on the data and the science, but in the end, what really changes things, what protects everyone is when the people get involved. New Yorkers are the people who turned the tide last time under the toughest circumstances. New Yorkers will do it again. So, it's the science and the people. And I think this is what was never understood, unfortunately, in Washington D.C. and a lot of places around the country – devotion to the science and then belief in the people. Once you educate the people, it's up to the people to then take those lessons and act on them. And here in New York City, New Yorkers did that. We're going to do that again and we're going to keep this city safe. Thank you, everybody.

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