

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** September 25, 2020, 11:05 AM  
**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

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

**Brian Lehrer:** It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning again, everyone. And with new coronavirus clusters now showing up in New York City, just as indoor dining is scheduled to resume next Wednesday and the public schools are scheduled to complete their reopening by next Thursday, with Governor Cuomo, chastising the City for being behind other places in the state on police reform and much more. There's a lot to ask the Mayor about in our Friday Ask The Mayor call-in, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our lines are open at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, or you can tweet a question. We'll watch our Twitter feed go by, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor and good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian. And Brian I understand we have an anniversary here. Is this right? 31 years you have been on the air?

**Lehrer:** That's right. It started September 25th, 31 years ago today. That's right.

**Mayor:** I commend you and I thank you. I think a lot of people in this town really depend on you and your show to give them perspective on what's going on. So I want to thank you for 31 good years.

**Lehrer:** Thank you so much. And I see you have a little news to break about outdoor dining. Want to make that announcement?

**Mayor:** Where better to break the news than on your 31st anniversary show? So yes, we have an important announcement. You know, Brian, we've had in the midst of crisis, some really good and powerful things happen. People innovated and created. And that was particularly true in the restaurant industry. And we depend on this industry so much in the city. It's part of who we are, it's part of what we love. So many jobs. We want to save these restaurants. And so I'm announcing that we will make the Open Restaurants initiative permanent and year round. And this is something that a lot of folks in the restaurant industry have said, could we find a way to build upon the success? I want us to go for the gold here. I want us to really take this model and make it part of the life of New York City for years and generations to come. This has been, I think, an extraordinarily positive experiment and it's worked. So we're going to take the Open Restaurant idea that restaurants can use the part of the surrounding sidewalk. And if they choose, can use part of the street as well. We're going to make that permanent. We're going to make it year round. We already have well over 10,000 restaurants participating. Almost 100,000 jobs

have been saved. And we hope, I believe this is going to make it a lot easier for restaurants to survive. And I think there'll be a lot of participation.

I also want to note just a couple of quick things, Brian. We're going to make the combination of Open Streets and Open Restaurants, which has been a huge hit. And that you've seen on weekends that we've had streets closed off entirely. Restaurants could expand well out in the streets, creates kind of a festival atmosphere. That also will be made permanent. We have 87 streets citywide participating. We want to continue that and even go farther. I think this will really help us as an important part of how we recover as a city. And obviously indoor dining beginning next week. We want to make sure that goes well as well. But the bottom line here is that we want restaurants to do well. We want them to be able to use seating in surrounding sidewalk areas, other storefronts areas, if they can come to agreement with the folks in those storefronts as well. We want them to have the right kind of heating over the winter. We want them to be able to enclose their facilities if that's what works for them. But obviously with the restrictions on seating. Or keep them open and heated, and then they can be fuller.

And this is something we're going to get to work on right away making it happen. And we're going to work with the City Council. Some of this will be – will require legislation, other pieces or administrative. But this is a-go. We want this to be something the restaurant industry can depend on. And just we want to see them thrive in the future. And I think this is going to help a lot.

**Lehrer:** If you enclose an outdoor dining space, doesn't it become indoor dining?

**Mayor:** Correct. And that goes to the capacity levels that would apply to indoor dining. So you have a choice. Let's say you have a restaurant Brian, you have that area outdoors. If you say, I want to fully enclose it, it'll be easier to heat it, it'll be a better atmosphere. Great. But you do it with the limits currently in place. Right now that means 25 percent capacity. Hopefully that will grow as we continue to fight back the virus. If you say, conversely, I like it the way it is now, I'm able to fill more seats. Then you have to keep it more open for the flow of air and figure out obviously a way to keep the heating sufficient as well. So that's a choice for restaurant owners. They could do either way.

**Lehrer:** Let's take a phone call Daniel in Bay Ridge you are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Daniel.

**Question:** Hi. Thank you. Mr. Lehrer, and your honor, I would like to specifically ask -- you have bent over backwards for restaurants in New York City and yet comedy clubs and small venues that serve food and drink and have proposed the same capacities and same limits are denied. Even the conversation with the Mayor's Office of Nightlife were denied, even returned emails or phone calls are denied even your honor, considering us. And it's not that anyone is asking as Emilio Savone and the owner of the New York Comedy Club said, no one is asking to cut the line here. We would like to be considered to be reopened at the same capacity as these restaurants. You're not talking about a huge difference. It's one person standing at the front of the place on stage with a microphone and a plastic cover between them and the audience. We want to make a living as well your honor. How do we do that?

**Mayor:** David listen, I appreciate it very much this question. I want to say, I think there's a little bit of a misunderstanding here because I said – I was asked this actually several days ago in my morning press conference. And I said, we absolutely want to address the issue of the comedy clubs. And that's one of the things coming up next on the agenda. Comedy clubs are a big deal in this city. I happen to know a lot of people in the industry. I love this industry. It's a part of what makes New York City so special and we need comedy clubs to come back. So there was never an intention to not hear those voices. If somehow those meetings didn't happen – I believe you, if you're saying they didn't happen, that's wrong. I want to apologize for that. They should have. And I'll tell my team to have those meetings immediately. But more important, we have a regular strategic call with our Health leadership to go over each and every category. And comedy clubs are now coming up after we've dealt with a lot of other really big pieces of the equation. Most notably schools, child care, the restaurant industry, all the reopenings phase one, two, three, four. It's time to address comedy clubs and figure out a way to do it right. So that set of decisions will be made literally in a matter of days. And we're going to work with the State as always. But I do want to see this industry come back.

**Lehrer:** With the positivity rate, going up in some city neighborhoods as high as six percent, is it still time for any indoor dining?

**Mayor:** It's a fair question Brian. We're watching this very, very carefully. I think we have a little bit of a divergence here. We see a set of communities where the positivity levels are just plain too high. And a very aggressive effort, a lot of presence out in those communities as we speak educating folks, providing free masks, where necessary doing enforcement. We've had some yeshivas that had to be closed. It's four right now already. There's a lot of work to do to make very clear that we have to arrest this problem before it gets worse. And it's putting people's lives in danger. But the rest of the city, we're seeing extraordinarily low levels of the coronavirus and that continues to hold. So I think the big answer to you right now is our overall framework is holding and working. We're going to watch carefully as schools reopen, as more and more people are coming back to work, and you're seeing a lot more activity on the streets and all. We're going to watch all that carefully. But right now, overall, the city's doing very well.

**Lehrer:** Reading neighborhood stats from NBC News. The increase in positive COVID cases was largest in the Gravesend/Homecrest area where the positivity rate hit six percent yesterday. Other problem areas include Midwood, just under five percent, Edgemere/Far Rockaway just over four percent, Kew Gardens just under four percent, Borough Park 3.5 percent, Bensonhurst/Mapleton, 3.1 percent. Sheepshead Bay three percent, Flatlands/Midwood three percent and Williamsburg 1.6. Considering the population in most of those neighborhoods, and you already mentioned closing some yeshivas. Do we have enough Yiddish speaking contact traces? And will public schools in those neighborhoods where there are cases that numerous still be opening next week?

**Mayor:** So there's a very rigorous outreach effort in the community in English and Yiddish. And that's everything. That's robo calls that sound trucks, a lot of in-person activity. There's a substantial number of Yiddish speakers who have been brought into the effort. Test and Trace has been hiring directly from the community. We are going to keep doing that though. I think

this is an indicator we will be fighting for a little while here. We are going to keep bringing on more people who can speak and connect with the community. But we have a lot of community leaders deeply engaged with the City government to address this issue. So they are people who are trusted in their own community including doctors and nurses from the community who are really sounding the alarm here. We say a variation of this problem with Measles last year. It was addressed with a lot of community support and participation. So I think we will see the same pattern here. The second part of your question Brian, from what we are seeing so far in the schools where remember all staffs are back in their schools. So that's well over 100,000 staff in the schools all over the city, all levels. And then in the course of this week with pre-K back, 3-K back, special education District 75 back, upwards of 90,000 students coming through the schools, we are seeing continually low levels in schools and we are tracking it schools by school. So we do not see a nexus yet where public schools in those particular communities are having issues. And a lot of the times again, the kids in a particular school do not come from the immediate surrounding area. They come from other places. But we are going to watch school by school. We are also doing testing outside some key school locations to keep an eye on the situation very specifically.

**Lehrer:** Liz in Brooklyn you on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Liz.

**Question:** Hi Brian. First I want to thank you for mentioning all the neighborhoods that are above the Mayor's three percent threshold for reopening. I think that's a really important thing to point out. And it's really hard to get that data you know, just for a regular person in the public, to know what zip codes are above or, you know, whatever percentage they happen to be. So one, I'd like to ask the Mayor to make that data available. Some other data I'd love to have be available to the public is all of the cases in all of the schools. That's not something we have accessible to us right now. With regard to testing, 41,000 or it could be just 40,000 of the teachers that were supposed to be going into buildings as I understand it, have not been tested or we don't have their results. For the 100 cases that were reported yesterday. And they're is, you know, could be as many as 400 cases, 300 of which are undetected in the schools right now. In LA all teachers and students are going to be tested. And just, I know that the Chancellor has said, well, we don't have the infection rates of LA. But we parents of New York City would really like to have the most top notch possible Test and Trace program which they, it seems have in LA. That is partnered with Stanford.

Brian, I have a couple more things to say, so please forgive me. I'm part of a group called Parents for Responsive Equitable Safe Schools Press NYC. And we have a letter campaign going to the Chancellor – I mean, to the Chancellor, the Mayor, and here's what we are asking for. One an honest reckoning by the Mayor and DOE that they have ignored failed the children and families of our school. We need to be shown that their top priority is protecting human health during a pandemic rather than opening school buildings at any cost. We want to see a commitment to full remote instruction until they prove schools are safe and provide evidence from experts. In addition to the LA testing model, we want to know that all air exchange rates in all of our rooms, hallways, bathrooms are six or higher, which means, you know, every ten minutes they're being exchanged. You know, that is absolutely not anything that any classroom teacher or principal knows right now.

**Lehrer:** And Liz, I'm going to jump in just for time, because this is taking a long time and I do want to give other people a chance. But Mr. Mayor Liz has put a number of specific things on the table there, including the very last thing, the air exchange rates, and whether you have a standard of six, I think she called it or air exchange every 10 minutes for public school rooms.

**Mayor:** Okay. There's a lot there. So I'm going to go very quickly through it, Brian, but I think it's important to answer these points. Because I think there's some that are very helpful, important. Some of them are actually misleading. Liz, I do thank you. Obviously you care deeply about this. I think there are some facts here that are not accurate. Starting with the situation in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is all remote and they say they will be testing people. And I respect that, but we don't have evidence of that being something yet fully reaching the levels that are being suggested. So I'd be careful to not assume too much. And they're working on an entirely different model than we're working on anyway.

**Lehrer:** But that's the standard, right? Is that before they do reopen, they've announced that they're going to test everybody who would enter the school. Is that not correct?

**Mayor:** Again, what I've seen and I don't pretend to be an expert on everything LA. What I've seen is that they are going to be doing all remote for the foreseeable future. And they're really, I'm not seeing a specific plan to come back. So I want to question that entire assumption and everything someplace else, you know – we all have the tendency as humans to believe things, other places are better. I would just be careful. They were not even in a position to consider in-person learning. So look, on things like ventilation, air exchange rate. This is being governed over by the Health authorities of this city who have led the way in bringing the city back from the coronavirus. Everything is done with the Department of Health, looking at the standards around the world of what works. And Brian, this is what I think has been lost in this entire conversation. I understand for sure why people are afraid and worried. And that's why we gave for parents absolute positive choice. It's you can go all remote if that's what you prefer. And we gave for educators and staff, if they had a medical accommodation need, they could apply for it. And the overwhelming majority of those have been approved.

So this is a respectful, humane approach, but it also recognizes the fact that we need to and can make schools safe by layering every measure we've seen around the world, we literally set a gold standard here. A lot of places, most places that have even been successful in reopening schools do not require masks for every child and every adult. You saw an opening day, even down to four year olds, people wearing their mask and wearing them effectively. A lot of places are not doing the social distancing. We're doing ten kids in the New York city classroom. Could you have ever imagined that being the norm? That's what we have. Daily cleanings, ventilation, every single room online was checked, rechecked, outside experts brought in to make sure it's sufficient ventilation.

So we're going to continue to do all of these measures and in fact, we did have an initial group of 17,000 teachers and staff who were tested and the response on that, the positivity rate was 0.32 percent. 17,000 initial tests yielded 55 people with positive coronavirus tests, which is far below anything we've seen anywhere. So we're going to keep doing this. We do put out a lot of public information. Liz, you should leave your information with WNYC and we'll have folks follow up

and show you all the Department of Health information by zip code, showing positivity levels. The information Brian quoted on these problems in certain neighborhoods. We put out that publicly and we're going to put that out daily so long as we're having those problems with neighborhoods, we're going to highlight it publicly. We want people to see it.

So the, the fact is we will be transparent, you know, next week is when school is up and running full strength. We're going to be putting out regular reports on the number of cases in schools, but we are seeing actually very few and we're seeing good coordination between the schools and our situation room to identify a case and move on it quickly, get test and trace involved. So I just disagree with the underpinnings of Liz's analysis, although I think she makes some good points. The underpinning is why don't we go all remote, no going all remote we'll deprive the kids of this city of the education they deserve, including the kids who need it the most. It will exacerbate disparity, and it will not help this city and our children to continue to be all remote for those who choose it, it is there. But I'll tell you, there's a hell of a lot of parents who want their kids in school, and we owe it to him to do that and to do it safely.

**Lehrer:** Let me follow up with another schools issue with in-person learning scheduled to start in a matter of days, exactly how many additional teachers have been hired to address the staffing shortage, which was a major contributing factor to the latest delay and how many more need to be hired by next week?

**Mayor:** So, Brian, we've got a process now. I've been meeting at the war room at Department of Education daily with the Chancellor's team and they're doing extraordinary work and they're working nonstop. We've got arguably the most complex hiring challenge any city agency has ever faced because of remote and blended in-person, blended at-home, changing numbers. But what's happened is what you saw on Monday, that every school had the staff they needed pre-K, 3-K, District 75 special-ed, 1,800 sites far beyond what any other school system in America has, just those 1,800 sites would go farther than any school system in America, all had the staff they need. That work is being completed now for Tuesday when K-5 and K-8 schools open, and for Thursday when middle school and high school open. So what I'm going to do is when we have everyone assigned, every seat filled, we'll announce that number, the final number, but we want to not have a situation where as we make these adjustments and we find ways to create effective models and efficiency and one thing or another, we get to a better number all the time. I'm going to announce it when we get to the final thing. The most important reality here is to have every school has the compliment they need for opening and I feel very good about the effort. A lot of effort has been put in. I feel good about the direction it's going in.

**Lehrer:** Well, if you won't release a number of how many more teachers you need to hire or get in place by next Tuesday or next Thursday, are the chances greater than zero that you will have to delay in person school again over staffing?

**Mayor:** There's no reason to delay. That's the easiest way to say it. I'm monitoring this constantly, talking with the union leadership every day. We're all watching the specifics together because this is unprecedented. It's never been attempted before. I feel very good. The pieces keep coming together hour by hour, and we are ready to go for Tuesday and ready to go for Thursday.

**Lehrer:** You're saying there's a zero chance that staffing would be a cause for further delay?

**Mayor:** You know, Brian, the problem – I don't do hypotheticals because we are dealing with a health care dynamics and everything else. I'm not going to do that. And I'm honestly, I don't think that's productive.

**Lehrer:** I'm just saying there is a zero chance that – staffing –

**Mayor:** The truth is, the truth is that we are getting the people we need in place, period.

**Lehrer:** Sophia in Sunset Park, you're WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Sophia.

**Question:** Hi. Thank you, Brian. And thank you Mr. Mayor for taking this question. I know we're talking about a lot of intersecting crises here and early on the show were talking about jobs. I'm calling to ask about a big public plan that could put New Yorkers to work to address climate change, can address these intersecting crises that we're talking about here. I'm one of more than 4,000 residents that said against the billionaires behind the industry city rezoning that we're trying to rezone or replace our working waterfront and to advance an old business plan that the coronavirus crisis made obsolete. And I'm calling today to ask, he's promised to explore alternative community plans like "The Grid" developed by [inaudible], which envisioned [inaudible] activating our waterfront and a big public plan to confront climate change. Will you keep your word and will your administration prioritize a public waterfront plan? And just one more thing to up the ante, can you come up commit to a halting next Wednesday's vote on the Steiner Studios, which is near that property –

**Mayor:** Wait, wait, I'm sorry. Sophia, when you made your transition, I couldn't hear you well –

**Lehrer:** Her second topic is the Steiner Studios, location where there's another vote coming up and to listeners who don't know the background of Sophia's first question, the big proposal for rezoning and development of work sites at Industry City on the Brooklyn Waterfront was defeated or died in City Council this week and so that means thousands of additional jobs, if they were ever going to be real, will not be coming. It also means that a certain amount of gentrification that the neighborhood was trying to avoid presumably will not be coming. Mr. Mayor, you had not taken a position on Industry City. You had originally supported the Amazon HQ2 for Queens when that was a similar controversy in the city. So how do you feel about this going down and will you commit to the alternative development proposal that some people in the neighborhood had come up with, which is what Sophia is asking about?

**Mayor:** Sure. So let me pull those pieces apart for a minute. I don't think by any stretch is the same thing as Amazon. I have real problems with Amazon. I've been very blunt about that and I think they stabbed New York City in the back, but it was an entirely different proposal was I think a lot in it that would have been much more important to the future of the city than anything we were talking about at Industry City. And obviously, look, we all should be concerned about jobs right now and we should be concerned about the city coming back, but it's also incumbent upon developers to respond to communities and provide public benefits, community benefits that

a community can believe in, and this was a private application. I really want to emphasize this, Brian, it was not sponsored by the City of New York. I didn't get involved because it was a private sector company coming forward. I believe their obligation was to build community support, that obviously did not happen, and the project was a withdrawn. I haven't seen the alternative proposal. I'm happy to review it and see what we can do. I can tell you though there will not be a rezoning in Sunset Park, there will not be a major land use action there. The timeline has already passed for that. The only one that would have been possible was that private application.

So although we certainly want to work with the community and see what we can do to get something started, and next 15 months we've got a lot of specific major land use actions that will be moving and will be the focus. So those have to right now get the precedent, but to Sophia's bigger point, which I think is very resonant with what we're trying to do with the Green New Deal here in New York City, we do need to, and although I haven't seen the plan for community, I imagine I'm going to agree with a lot of it. We do need to reorient so much of what we do in the city to addressing climate change including the new reality of jobs - that green jobs - that will be created in fighting climate change, and we should be reorienting as much of our economy as possible in that direction. That's what we talked about yesterday with the Governors Island center that's going to be a, you know, globally important research center and focal point for developing new green approaches and strategies. I think this is very - really important to the future of New York City. So obviously we want to work with the Sunset Park community on that as well.

**Lehrer:** We've got just a few minutes left. Governor Cuomo yesterday referred to you specifically saying New York City is behind other places in the state and coming up with a police reform plan. Here's a few seconds of the Governor -

***Governor Andrew Cuomo:** Step up and lead. 146 jurisdictions are doing it. Why isn't New York City doing it? The Mayor can lead it. City council president can lead it. Comptroller could lead it. Public Advocate could lead it. If none of them want to lead it, I will find someone to lead it.*

**Lehrer:** And he referred to the problem of rising crime in the city and related it to the slow progress that he sees on reinventing the police. One more tiny clip -

***Governor Cuomo:** If you don't do it, everybody gets hurt.*

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, your response to the Governor?

**Mayor:** He doesn't have facts straight. It's just quite clear. And look, if he wants to make personal attacks, he can do that, but he does not have his facts straight. Seven years of nonstop reform, and it's time we have an honest conversation about this and stop these games. We in the year 2018 had a 100 - I'm sorry, 2019 - had 180,000 fewer arrests in New York City than the last year of the Bloomberg administration. We created a strategy to reduce unnecessary arrests while driving down crime. We created a strategy to end mass incarceration. Governor didn't do that. The State didn't do that. We did that. We have an incarceration level in this city now, you have to go back to the 1940s to have so few people in jail. We put in place retraining the entire NYPD, de-escalation training. In the year 2018, there were only 17 instances in which an NYPD officer

fired their weapon in an adversarial situation. 17 for the entire year for the biggest police force in the country. That came from retraining and new strategies.

I go through a whole list of things, implicit bias training, creating a police force that's now majority people of color, changing the leadership to bring in people who represent the fullness of this city and represent these values of change. And then you say, okay, what about the last few months? Commissioner Shea announced the end of the anti-crime unit, that in many communities have been faulted for exacerbating tensions between police and community. He said, there's a much better way to fight crime and work with communities. Commissioner Shea and our team here at City Hall in response to president Obama's call for re-invention ideas. We took that pledge. We ran with it. We put out a new disciplinary matrix to ensure that whenever an officer does something inappropriate, that there were very specific penalties. I fought for years, and with all due respect to the Governor, I would like to remind everyone who was fighting for the repeal of the 50-a laws so we could provide full transparency on police discipline. That's what I was doing. And we finally got that repeal and we've pledged to put out disciplinary records for all existing officers.

**Lehrer:** Let me jump in –

**Mayor:** These are exactly hold on, Brian, one more point. These are exactly the things that make up profound reform all in the context of a neighborhood policing philosophy that was revolutionary unto itself. This is what we've been doing all these years. So we're going to present all of this to Albany. There's no police force in New York State that has done this many things to create reform and to reinvent themselves. So those are the facts.

**Lehrer:** That's not going to satisfy a lot of reform advocates who want more since the Movement for Black Lives took shape in its current form this year. And apparently it's not going to satisfy the Governor who wants every locality in the state to submit plans for reform going forward, not just what you've done in past.

**Mayor:** And we just announced a new disciplinary matrix publicly, which we put out a profoundly different and better approach to discipline. And I have not seen a lot of discussion of it, honestly. Every one of these changes, when I tell you about the massive reduction in arrest, massive reduction in incarceration, retraining the entire police force, de-escalation implicit bias, where are the headlines on all of these things? Is it that no one wants to actually talk about the substantive changes because they're not as interesting as talking about the problems? All of these changes are real. Again, no police force in New York State comes close to having achieved these many reforms and they do matter and there's more coming and you're going to see it all and we'll present it all to the state. But I think the Governor should take his personal feelings out of the situation and actually engage and respect the NYPD and the changes it's made and respect the fact that this administration from day one has been focused on change and reform.

**Lehrer:** And now we are out of time and I know you have to go to. Thank you as always Mr. Mayor, talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Brian.

###