

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 25, 2021, 10:00 AM

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, every day, every day I talk about a recovery for all of us. And that recovery starts with getting New Yorkers vaccinated, that starts with getting as many New Yorkers vaccinated as quickly as possible. Our goal, five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. We are on track for that goal. And another good milestone today, we have surpassed 3.5 million vaccinations in New York City since the beginning. More than 3.5 million doses given, number is climbing steadily all the time. So, the exact number, 3,537,937 vaccinations since day one. And I want to thank all New Yorkers who are part of the vaccination effort. You're doing amazing work, everyone right down to all the wonderful grassroots sites we've been talking about in public housing developments, houses of worship, community centers. Everyone is a part of this effort. You're doing something amazing, largest vaccination effort in the history of New York City growing every single day. And that's going to help bring us back.

Because New York City never stops. We just keep going no matter what, that's who we are. And there is a great saying in the theater, I'm going to borrow from this now – there's a great saying in the theater, the show must go on. And the show will go on, on Broadway and off-Broadway when we get to the fall. And we're so excited about that. But the work we have to do now to get the theater community ready, to make sure that this extraordinarily wonderful and important industry is good to go for the fall, we've got to do that now. Six months from now, it's a long time and the world's going to be, I think, a much better place by the time we get to September. But we've got to lay the groundwork for a strong comeback for Broadway and off-Broadway. Our theater community needs it. These are folks who have given their heart and soul to creativity, to making New York City great, to making Broadway, the envy of the world. They deserve it. They deserve the opportunity to come back and do what they love, but our city needs it too. It's part of our identity. It's part of who we are. It's part of what people love about New York City here and all around the world. And it is so important to our future. 100,000 jobs in our theater industry, an economic impact of \$15 billion a year. We need it back on every level. And the hope that comes with live performance, the hope that comes from our cultural community. This is also absolutely crucial. This is going to be a year to turn things around. And our artists, our performers, our cultural community are going to lead the way and encourage people and inspire the people. So, it's time to raise the curtain and bring Broadway back.

So, the next four weeks we'll be setting up dedicated vaccination sites specifically for the theater community, the theater industry. They will be staffed by workers from the theater industry. We're going to make sure it's right where people are used to going, right in the heart of the Theater District. We're also going to have a mobile unit that will serve off-Broadway theaters. It's so important to make sure that people are getting vaccinated now, as we look forward to the

fall. Also, to make sure that testing is available on an ongoing basis, so there will be pop-up testing sites at and near theaters on Broadway and off-Broadway.

Now we're working with the Broadway community now to develop the plans to make the reopening go smoothly. One of the things we need is a crowd management plan. The City will be actively engaged in helping theaters to manage crowds before and after shows. We're going to have an active presence, working with the theater community to make sure that goes smoothly as well. So, we'll – the City of New York, we'll do the vaccinations, we'll do the testing. We'll help with the crowd management, working with the theaters. We'll do everything in our power to bring Broadway and off-Broadway back strong, but we need some help. We need some help from the State of New York. So, I'm calling upon the State to please quickly issue clear guidance for theater workers in terms of masks usage, in terms of how we use proof of vaccination or proof of negative testing, to help ensure that everyone can work and that crowds can come back in the fall. These tools are necessary. They can only be put in action by State measures. And we need that. We need clear delineation on how to keep workers and performers safe. We need a clear approach for identifying spectators, audience who have been vaccinated. We obviously we, the City and the State as well, must work closely with the unions who represent the theater community and all the people do the work to make the shows come together.

So, we need the State to do this. If for any reason, the State isn't, we'll propose our own ideas to the State because it's important to get this right. There's a long lead time for Broadway shows to come back. This is why it's so important to be talking about this today in March, looking ahead to September, to put together a Broadway show is a huge endeavor. And we've talked to a lot of folks in the Broadway community and they say time is the most important factor. They need guidance now so they can be back in force, in the fall helping to spark and lead the comeback in New York City. So, let's do the work now so we can have an amazing Broadway come back in the fall.

Now I want you to hear from some of the voices of the theater community, what this means to them, what it means to all the people that they work with and to this extraordinary part of our city, we all love. First an actor, a director, an educator, has been on stage for over 50 years. He appeared in *The Wiz*, in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *The Full Monty*, and *Hadestown*. Quite impressive. A Tony winner, a Grammy winner, and an Emmy winner. It's my pleasure to introduce André De Shields

[...]

Mayor: Exactly right, it's the perfect metaphor for what we all have to do together this year. And I thank you, Andre – thank you so much for sharing your reflection here. What an example of why we need the theater community back. They need their stages back for the good of all of us. And I want you to hear from another accomplished actor, Brooklyn-born and bred, and someone who has graced the Broadway stage. Most recently, you saw him on Broadway as *Aladdin*. Here to share why it's so important to bring Broadway back, my pleasure, introduce Telly Leung.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Telly. And, as a Brooklynite, you make me proud. And I've got to tell you – I've got to tell you, I love when you say heal the soul, because it's true. You know, as you were talking, Telly, I was thinking about the moments that I have been in a theater and just entranced and just captivated in a moment. I'm particularly thinking back to one of the – I thought, the most extraordinary performances on Broadway in the last few decades, Fela! – the show Fela!. I happened to see it with Patti LaBelle in it. And I remember just being transported. And I think the healing of the soul, as you said, Telly is exactly what happens. In those few hours, you find something inside yourself sometimes you didn't even know was there, and that's because of all of you, the actors and everyone who makes that show come together and uplifts us. We need that healing. We need that ability to transform more than ever this year. So, Broadway needs to come back and we will move heaven and earth to bring Broadway back.

All right, let's talk about another important part of our recovery for all of us. And this is an example of how a horrible, painful time in 2020, also became transformative, because we all started to rethink our approach in the context of crisis. And last year, we re-imagined the streets of New York City, and it was based in crisis, but it became an awakening of something much greater, something that we could do not only today, but for our future. The Open Streets Initiative and the Open Restaurants initiative as well – and, most amazingly, when the two came together – transformed this city. At a time when people needed hope, they needed to see the life and energy of New York City, Open Streets, Open Restaurants gave New Yorkers that energy. It's one of the biggest changes to New York City streetscape since the initiation of the subway. I mean, this is really a profound change for the city to open up and to use our streets differently and to be out with each other, connecting with each other. So, we made the decision after the experience in 2020 to make Open Streets permanent, to take this inspiration and make it part of who we will be for years and years to come. Today, we are opening applications for the Open Streets program, and we're welcoming community organizations all over the city to join into this effort. It's very easy, straightforward application process, go to nyc.gov/openstreets. And we want to have lots and lots of participation in every kind of community, every ZIP code all over the city. We want people to come forward with your applications, because we can do something amazing. And we are going to ensure that it's even better in 2021 than in 2020. We have a chance now to learn from some of the things we did in 2020 and improve upon this amazing, amazing initiative.

So, as Open Streets are determined, we'll keep rolling them out one after another. And here to tell you about it, and I know he truly loves this initiative and what it means for our city, and he's helping to innovate new approaches at our Department of Transportation, our Commissioner Hank Gutman.

Commissioner Hank Gutman, Department of Transportation: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. And thank you for including us in what is already such an inspirational day of announcements. Spring is here and we are excited that the Open Streets program is getting back into full swing as we work to make this hugely popular program even better in 2021 than it was in 2020. While some of our Open Streets never stopped operating, today, we'll be laying out the new guidelines for community partners who want to apply this season to manage an Open Streets project. And, as the Mayor's reminded us, this project was born of the need we, as a city, we, as people had during the pandemic to have safe and open spaces in which we could spend our time

and socially distance. Building on programs that were already in place from our shared street projects and our temporary street closure programs, this city last year created the leading Open Streets program in the nation – the leading, by any measure. It's hard – this program was so successful that it's actually hard to imagine, going forward, New York City without it. And the good news, as the Mayor just said is, we don't have to, because the program is here to stay. And what we're doing is building off of the success, building off of the experience last year to make it better and stronger for this year so that New Yorkers can gather safely, can support their local businesses and restaurants safely as this city and the nation recovers from the pandemic.

As the Mayor noted, you'll see some changes. The signage will be better. We're replacing the wooden barricades with French barricades. And we are increasing our support for our community partners. Today, we're introducing the new application. You can find it, as the Mayor said, and it's worth repeating, nyc.gov/openstreets. It's a simple application. It won't take much time. But the point of the process is to make sure that we can serve better those community partners who are making the Open Streets program work. Another point worth emphasizing is that we are mindful of the fact and focused on the fact that not all communities necessarily have readily available the resources to partner with us in this program. We are planning to address that. So, again, don't let that deter you from applying. The instructions are online and we are working hard to make sure that no community, no neighborhood is left behind in this program. One note to emphasize, the application process is for both the new communities and the new participants as well as the old. So, even if you've been in the program, we'd like you to reapply so that we have the vital information, and, again, can better serve you as we move forward.

Last point is, a key part of this program is that the Open Streets serve and reflect the interests and needs of the communities in which they are located. This is why the community involvement is so important. There's no single cookie-cutter approach. There's no one-size-fits-all. There's no format for this that's being imposed by City Hall or the DOT or anybody else. These are your open streets. This is your program. Our purpose is to serve you better and making sure that we provide the mechanism for these programs to succeed and thrive, building on the success of last year. I just want to give a quick shout out and thank you to one of my deputy commissioners, Eric Beaton, and his team, and all the dedicated women and men at the department of transformation – and, today, it's not a mistake, it is the department of transformation, who are working so hard to transform our streets to better serve the people of this city. So, thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you to all New Yorkers. Thank you to everybody who's participating in the program and I look forward to seeing you at our open streets. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Hank. And thank you to you and all your colleagues. This is going to be even better in 2021, and we are very, very excited about it. And I want you to hear from some leaders who have helped to build this initiative, because, remember, it's something that we didn't have, and it had to be created from scratch in 2020. It took powerful community voices who believed that we could do something different and who listened to the grassroots and helped us innovate solutions. One of them represents a community where there's so much passion and energy to create, and that's in the Lower East Side, and all the surrounding communities in the East Village, and so many other parts of her district, a place we associate with great innovations. It's my pleasure to introduce Council Member Carlina Rivera.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, Council Member. You have a lot to be proud of. You are one of the folks who saw this vision early on and believed it could actually work, even in the midst of crisis. You were right. I think it's important to give credit where credit was due. You were right. And we were able to take your idea and the good work of so many folks at the community level and build something amazing. So, thank you for being one of the really great thinkers and innovators who brought us this idea and allowed it now to become a permanent part of New York City. And we're absolutely going to work closely with you to make sure we keep building it, going forward. And I want to say, everyone, we were going to be joined by the Transportation Chairman in the City Council, Ydanis Rodriguez, who's done extraordinary work on Open Streets and so many other issues, but, unfortunately, we're having a little bit of a technical issue, so he's not able to join us. But I do want to thank Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez for the important role he's played as well on Open Streets and so many other important transportation issues.

And speaking of transportation, now I'm going to switch to another topic, and this is some good news for New York City, and particularly for the people of Staten Island. We have a new Staten Island ferry coming. In fact, tomorrow, it will be launched where it's being built in Florida, and it will arrive here in our harbor early next year. There's a lot more work to be done to finish the ferry, as we keep updating and renovating the fleet. But the good news is, today, I have the honor of announcing the name of the new ferry. And name is for someone to play a very, very important role in history and whose ideas seem more relevant than ever today, and she spent so much of her life on Staten Island. Dorothy Day, an extraordinary activist, a social activist, a journalist, someone who believed in working people and used her faith to support the struggles of working people and those in need throughout her life. She often served as a conscience and, again, foresaw a lot of what we're talking about today in terms of what economic and social justice looks like. She helped to establish the Catholic Worker Movement, which was so influential throughout the last century. And she was a long-time Staten Island resident who loves Staten Island, wrote for the Staten Island Advance, founded a cooperative farm on Staten Island for people in need, created early, supportive housing for folks with mental health challenges and substance misuse challenges. She had a vision of a better and kinder world and was one of those visionaries who saw some of her ideas come to life, but many of them are becoming, as I said, even more pertinent today. So, Dorothy Day, a great Staten Islander and her name will grace the new Staten Island ferry boat.

All right, couple of other really important notes for the day, today we're celebrating 200 years – 200 years of independence for Greece. And Greek Independence Day is a joyous time. Our Greek community here in New York City, such an important, large, vibrant community that has contributed so much to the city, also over hundreds of years. But this moment, Greek Independence Day is a deep in the hearts of all Greek people here in this country and of course all over the world. So, today we celebrate the 200th anniversary, and I want to extend my salute to our Greek community on this very special day.

Another day, coming up, and since this'll be our last press conference of the week, I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy and safe Passover, *a zissen Pesach* to all our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community. Such a beautiful and important time of year. One of course, people gather, and people gather in an atmosphere of love and faith and remember everyone to

do it safely. We're still fighting back against COVID. Thank God we can say with assurance 2021 will be the last year that we'll be dealing with some of these restrictions and we're looking forward to so much of our traditional approach to celebration in 2022, in the meantime wishing everyone a beautiful holiday. Enjoy it with your family, those you love, and enjoy it safely.

All right, now, let's do our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 today's report, 224 patients, a confirmed positivity level 57.81 percent. Hospitalization rate 3.79 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, 3,280. Number three, percentage of the people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.20 percent. I want to say a few words in Spanish going back to all of the things that we're doing to bring back our theater community and our open streets.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi all we'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today as Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, Commissioner Hank Gutman, First Deputy Commissioner Forgione, Commissioner Castillo, Dr. Ted Long, and Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Dan from WABC.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Good morning. Thank you so much for taking my call.

Mayor: Good morning, Dan, how you doing?

Question: I'm doing well, sir. Thank you so much. I'm doing an update in regards to the hotels that are housing the homeless throughout the city. When the pandemics first started, of course, the city acted quickly to separate them from [inaudible] shelters and put them in [inaudible] hotels, more than 12,000 people. Here we are at a point where people are getting vaccinated and a lot of people who live near these hotels who claim that some of them had been problematic in their communities are wondering when they will be leaving the neighborhoods and going back to "normal". What would you have to say to them when they could be going back to shelters?

Mayor: Yes. Thanks for the question. The answer is, we've said from the beginning, this was a temporary measure. We in fact very much want to get out of hotels as quickly as we can. We need to make sure it's safe, that has everything to do with the guidance we get from our health care leadership, and obviously how many people we can get vaccinated. But yes, absolutely the goal is to leave the hotels, go back to the traditional shelters, and I think we'll have a much better picture on that in the next month or two as we see the overall health care situation and the vaccination effort deepens. Go ahead, Dan.

Question: Vaccinations, we spoke earlier about Broadway workers getting vaccinated. What is the plan to vaccinate the homeless? Because essentially if they are vaccinated, they would be able to go back to shelters relatively safely.

Mayor: Yeah, and in fact, Dan, vaccination of the homeless has been going on for weeks and weeks now. So, that's very good news. Now, as you know people come in and out of shelter at different times, so we have not yet been able to reach everyone, but that is certainly one of the positive factors here. We are reaching more and more homeless folks, for their safety, for everyone's safety, and that is going to be a big part of how we can start to move out of the hotels at the right time.

Moderator: Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Juliet. I am excited today as we make our come back on Broadway.

Question: Yes, fantastic and all good luck with that. So, my question is about that. Do you have a target date as to when shows could – or some shows at least could resume? And what else do you think needs to go into getting everything up to speed?

Mayor: Juliet, a really, really crucial question. So, we've been talking to the Broadway community and for a while now the vision has been to bring shows back in September. Obviously that all depends on getting these pieces, right, but this is why I'm talking about it again in March six months ahead, because the lead time to bring back a show is really extensive. And that's one of the things we've heard most from the Broadway leadership is they need answers now to be able to get the shows back as early as September. The vaccination effort will start in April, so we'll have plenty of time to reach a lot of folks in the Broadway community. The actors and the folks who work behind the scenes who make the shows happen, everyone we want to reach. So, I feel very good about September. We just need to do the work now and we need some more of that guidance and clarity from the state so we can lock it in. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay. So, since I know you rely and you need to rely on the State at this point, if you didn't have to, what would you do on not only regarding let's say Broadway, what else would you change as far as having your local control and what would you do differently?

Mayor: Juliet, I, you know, I've talked about this a number of times, there are folks right now who are not eligible for vaccination that I would make a priority right now. I've talked for example, about everyone related to the criminal justice system and the court system. I'd like to get all the vaccines so we can get trials back. I'd like to get jurors vaccinated, so we get trials back so we could get our justice system running again. So, I would change some of the approach to vaccination. As Dr. Varma has said, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz the – some of the recent decisions, particularly on things like fitness classes we wouldn't have made. There's different examples, but in this case with Broadway, it's about the clear guidance on the mask usage on the vaccinations and the testing. Again, if the State's ready to do that, that's great. If they're not, we'll present a vision and just ask the State to approve it so we can keep moving forward. We need to just answer the questions that the folks who put on the shows and run the theaters have, so they can actually envision bringing all of the folks who do the work back, doing the rehearsals, having the audiences come back, we need to check down that list of questions so they're ready to go.

Moderator: Next is Emma from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. So, as you know, the City Council is voting today on some police reform measures and I was wondering do you support ending qualified immunity? And would you veto the bill?

Mayor: Emma, the bill is something we've all worked on really closely. We've been working with the Council on this for months, City Hall, NYPD, City Council all working on this. Of course, we had the extraordinary participation of three folks who really became co-sponsors of this whole process, Jennifer Jones Austin, Wes Moore, and Arva Rice who did extraordinary work. There was almost a 100 hearings and meetings as part of this process to gain input from all over the city. I think it's a very, very strong reform package. I look forward to supporting it. The specific item on qualified immunity, a lot of work went into aligning that with the federal legislation that's passed the house, the George Floyd Act, and I think that is the way it's been aligned is strong. So, I very much look forward to the legislation passing. It's a resolution. It's not something I sign, but it's something I support. Go ahead, Emma.

Question: So, you didn't say if you would sign the piece regarding qualified immunity, how do you sort of square your caution and some of these measures with the fact that you ran for mayor in 2013 on police reform?

Mayor: So again, I'm sorry, I thought I was clear. I do support the legislation that's been advanced. The original form we had some concerns about. It has been aligned to the national legislation. I do support it. The – I think this, Emma, this has been an amazing process. I – here's what I say to everyone who wants to understand what's happened in these last few months, read both reports in full to see the sweep of what is happening here. A whole host of reforms that people have been talking about for years are now happening through this reform process, through these reports, on top of other recent actions, like the discipline matrix and the MOU between the CCRB and the NYPD, like the new approach to hiring precinct commanders with community input, like the additional actions we're taking to empower the CCRB. This is all consistent with what I talked about years ago, and it's deepening all the time. And by the way, most important point I can make, this is today with this action in the City Council, tomorrow we start the work on further police reforms, because this is work that has to be ongoing. It never should end.

Moderator: Next is Steve from WCBS Radio.

Mayor: Steve? Steve, are you hearing –

Moderator: We'll go back to Steve.

Mayor: We'll come back to Steve.

Moderator: Next is Eve from Streetsblog.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, the City Council is voting today on a bill that would create a role for DOT and crash investigations in order to fix streets when bad designs contribute to crashes. The Council has tweaked the bill to deal with some problems you had with its language. So, will you sign off on the revised bill?

Mayor: Yeah, I feel very good about where it is now. We wanted to make sure, and I know Commissioner Gutman embraces this, DOT has an important role to play and it's right to expand that, to learn from each and every crash what we have to do differently. We also had a particular set of needs around what the NYPD does when there's a criminal investigation. I think we've squared that, I think it's good legislation, and I look forward to supporting it.

Question: My second question is a random count was taken on Second Avenue on Tuesday afternoon that showed there were roughly only two times the number of cars is bikes, even though cars have five lanes and cyclists get just half a lane. Would you support wider bike lanes if counts warranted on major streets or even any street?

Mayor: Hey, Eve, I missed the last part, you said would you support and then I couldn't hear you well.

Question: Wider bike lanes if counts warranted.

Mayor: Look, I – you know, I'll certainly turn to the Commissioner on this too, but I would say this is a work in progress as always. We want to keep learning from what people need and what they want. We've been expanding bike lanes intensely all over the city, and if there's more and more bike usage, it makes sense to meet that and address it. So, I'm certainly open. I want to see people as much as possible out of their cars, into mass transit, on bikes, as many options as possible for so many reasons, for fighting global warming, for reducing congestion, for so many reasons. Commissioner, you want to add?

Commissioner Gutman: Yeah, I would endorse what the Mayor said. I mean, we are constantly assessing and re-evaluating how we share our streets. All of the different – all of the different divisions not just between bicycles and cars, but how we deal with deliveries, how we deal with all those issues. And if in fact a trend emerges that shows that we can and should make a switch, we're certainly open to doing that. And again, we've got people who are looking at that on a regular basis. So, keep us informed. Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: We're going to try Steve again from WCBS Radio.

Question: Hey, is this working now?

Mayor: Yeah, Steve, how you doing?

Question: Good. You think a year into this, I could have this figured out, but I'll get there.

Mayor: We're all learning together, Steve. We're all learning.

Question: Yes, first on the Open Streets. I wanted to double back and check, you mentioned more community resources heading to some of the places that may not have that kind of bandwidth to run this kind of thing itself. I know last year, one of the big sticking points was NYPD involvement, and that was basically the reason why Council Member Rivera had to introduce her bill in the first place. So, wanted to see what those community resources are, and if you're thinking as has changed at this point about how saturated these spaces need to be with police officers?

Mayor: Yeah, Steve, at the beginning, we really were dealing with the great unknown and trying to make sure – remember those first months we were profoundly concerned about not creating new gathering places when we were trying to encourage people to keep social distancing. Plus, we were concerned about any danger that might be posed by traffic, et cetera. So, we had to figure it out, but now I think we have a model that's really been proven, and as Commissioner Gutman said, we want to make sure it's accessible to all communities. So, we're working now with the Council on what's the right way to provide resources so that we can get every kind of community involved. We definitely need sponsorship, and one of the things that is necessary to make this work, is there's got to be an organization whether a public or a community organization, you know, involved at the site to make sure it runs smoothly. But I think we got a lot of organizations that want to do that, and we're going to try and figure out how to best help them do it. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: Thanks, and following up on that, do you foresee the overall mileage total of Open Streets going any further than where it was last year? I know a lot of advocates have called on making this more of a network of Open Streets and having them be connected and having it be basically a pathway across the city that people can take without having to deal with cars. Do you foresee larger changes to what the overall network is going to look like and how big it could get?

Mayor: Steve, I'll turn to Commissioner Gutman. What I'll say is we had an idea that started out, a new idea last year that grew in the course of the year, really proved itself. This year we expect to have an even better approach. We want to see where this takes us. I think there's definitely room for more. How much more and how it balances all the other needs of the city – we still have a lot to work through, but clearly, you know, we ended up with the biggest program in the nation and it worked. So, that says to me there's more we can do. Commissioner?

Commissioner Gutman: Yeah, no, I would second that, and I guess the only thing I would add is in part, this will be a function of the appetite of the respective communities. If people apply and have an interest and they are on the streets where we can make it work, we're going to do it. So, the size will be in part, in large part, the principal part, a reaction to the demand by all of the respective neighborhoods. There's no set limit we have in mind.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Henry from Bloomberg.

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

Mayor: I am doing well on this misty day, Henry. How are you?

Question: I'm good. I got to congratulate you. You're skiing downhill here a little bit with a Broadway opening. It's got to be kind of exhilarating.

Mayor: It is. Come back – the city's coming back. It's a good feeling, man.

Question: But you know, I called the Broadway League and they were surprised by your announcement. They hadn't announced September, and they hadn't been notified by you that this was going to happen, and I'm just wondering if there's a little bit of a disconnect or lack of communication that you would one would think that the Broadway League would have been consulted and brought in on this.

Mayor: Well, we've been talking with them and other leaders of the Broadway community for months now, and this reflects the issues they've raised. We wanted everyone to know that we're ready to do our part and the vaccination efforts ready to begin next month. Again, I think everyone's waiting on more guidance from the state so we can put all the pieces together. But no, we want to see this community come back and we know the Broadway community wants to come back. We need to fill in these last blanks so it can happen? Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Well, you know, you've got some pretty heavy health talent surrounding you right now. What is the view of Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi about what needs to be done to open Broadway theaters? Do people need to sit socially distanced? Do people need to wear masks in the theater? Will there be food and drink offered in the theater? Questions of that sort. Have you done any thinking along these lines in advance?

Mayor: Certainly some of the pieces, and Henry we've got Dr. Varma and Dr. Long, I'll turn to them both. I'll say, look, part of what, and I remember the earliest conversations months ago we had with the Broadway community – the number one factor that kept being emphasized to us was time. That is not like some of the other reopenings that we've seen, where it was a relatively quick ramp-up. The Broadway community once they commit to a show, the amount of technical work needs to be done, the rehearsals and all those months and months of preparation. That's why it is so important to lock these things down right now, and I say that because I truly believe between today in March and that date in September, when I believe you'll start to see shows open up almost, six months. I think we have a profoundly different health situation just on the strength of vaccination alone. But in terms of fine tuning, as you're raising good points, fine tuning each of the protocols – Dr. Varma, you were on that original call. We did I think it must've been at least six months ago. Why don't you offer your thoughts on what we need to do to make sure this goes right six months from now in September?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, great, no, thank you very much, Mr. Mayor, and as you referenced, we did have a conversation together with the Broadway League and I'm pleased that we, at that time, had predicted that there was a possibility that probably we could be back by September and it looks like we're probably on track for that. I think a couple of points that are really critical. The first is, as the Mayor has noted, the reason to work on these announcements

now is because of the long lead time. It's not because we think that people can have, we can have a large indoor gathering right now. So, I just want to really emphasize this isn't an indication for people to have large indoor gatherings right now. So, the main criteria are really going to be number one, is there widespread availability of vaccines, such that the supply greatly exceeds demand? So, anybody who wants one, has access to it, has the information that they need, and it's widely available, whether it's a pharmacy or their doctor's office or whatever trusted provider they want. That's number one, and then number two is we do have to bring disease, transmission rates down considerably from where they are right now, because we know that some people will remain unprotected. It's unlikely that that kids will have access widespread vaccination that time period, and we're going to also figure out a way to make sure that disease rates are down as well. Now, once those two things are in place, I think what will ultimately happen, although this really has to be worked out is going to be some combination of testing, as well as vaccination, as well as some protocols to make sure that we can manage, and identify, and keep ill people out. What those specific actions are going to be is going to really depend on where we are with [inaudible].

Mayor: Yeah, and just to pull that piece together, I mean, one of the other things we heard months ago, and it's been reiterated since is that Broadway only works with a substantial audience. So, we need to find, you know, to get to the point of reopening, we need the health and safety measures in place to allow for an appropriate audience size that actually makes it possible to mount these extraordinary shows, and again, you know, we'll figure out whatever appropriate measures have to be taken in the beginning. Those will evolve over time, the most important part is getting the most people in the Broadway community vaccinated quickly. That's sort of, to me, the foundation of everything else we need to do.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Mayor, on the new allegations that Governor Cuomo directed a doctor with the Health Department to deliver special COVID tests at a time when they were scarce to the public. Had you heard anything about that before? And what is your take on what should happen as a result?

Mayor: I had not heard about that before, Andrew. It's another matter that needs to be looked into obviously, but as much as it raises real concerns, this pales in comparison to the nursing home scandal – the fact that there was a cover-up there, the fact that thousands of people died and we still don't know why. Obviously the sexual harassment charges, I mean, there's so much that needs to be looked at here, and we need the truth. But my first concern is for those families who lost loved ones who still don't have the answers, and I think that's the thing we have to really get to as quickly as possible. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: I'm just wondering though, you know, is there perhaps an overcorrection in terms of people forgetting what things were like in March of last year, there was a mad scramble to get anybody tested. If the State had a handful of this technology at their fingertips, do you see a problem with VIPs, with state officials, with family members getting access to those tests?

Mayor: It all depends on how it was done. I heard about, you know, state troopers being involved. I mean, something like that would raise real eyebrows obviously, and real concerns. So, it needs to be looked at Andrew, but again, let's put things in perspective. That's meaningful, but what's most meaningful is getting the truth about what happened with the nursing homes, because we don't know what happened. We don't have the truth. We don't know the extent of the cover-up. We don't know if it was motivated by campaign contributions. We don't know what happened. We just know thousands of people died and we've got to get the truth

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Nolan from the Post.

Question: Okay, good morning, everybody.

Mayor: Hey Nolan, how you doing?

Question: I'm all right, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Good.

Question: And on a point of clarification. Yesterday, Erin pointed out that the bike lanes were supposed to open by the end of the year and not by July. So, I want to admit the mistake and apologize for it.

Mayor: You mean Brooklyn Bridge, right?

Question: Yes, the Brooklyn Bridge bike lane. But I hope you'll still come out for a bike ride when it's when it's finished, if it's finished.

Mayor: I'll give you a rain check. I look forward, it will be finished, and I look forward to riding and Commissioner Gutman will join me.

Commissioner Gutman: Absolutely.

Mayor: All right, go ahead. Nolan.

Commissioner Gutman: But I won't wear spandex.

Mayor: No spandex, sorry.

Question: The visual, I will – on the Broadway reopening. Does the city have a similar plan for off-Broadway venues, particularly those not in Manhattan, like St. Anne's Warehouse, and what is the plan for Lincoln Center in terms of the Ballet, the Opera, the Philharmonic. Is there a plan for all the performing arts venues on the Upper West Side?

Mayor: I'll start, and then I want to turn to Deputy Commissioner – excuse me, Deputy Mayor Vicki Been and Commissioner – I combined their titles – and Commissioner Anne del Castillo, because Deputy Mayor Been and Commissioner del Castillo have been really working intensely

on the issue of the reopening of our theaters and our theater community, and I know this is a labor of love for both of them. So, I want to get them into this discussion. What I'd say Nolan is we want to take this template and use it to bring back our theater community broadly. Broadway is, you know, obviously the leading edge and means so much to the people of this city and it's just globally important, but we care a lot about off-Broadway, which is why we're doing that mobile vaccination effort as well, and we certainly want to reach other theaters because the whole theater community is crucial to the comeback in New York City. So, to speak to that first Deputy Mayor Been.

Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, Housing and Economic Development: Thanks, Nolan for the question. Yes, we working with live performances all over the city to identify what they need, where would be best to have vaccine or testing centers, whether the mobile vans are the best idea, you know, for them, all of those things. We're talking broadly across the five boroughs. Very excited about bringing live performances back all across the city, and we hope that we'll be able to bring some of those, especially the smaller venues back even faster, so.

Mayor: Commissioner del Castillo. Commissioner, are you there? Maybe you're muted. Maybe you're not muted.

Commissioner Anne del Castillo, Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment: I'm here. Yes, sorry, sir. Thank you. Yes, you know, when we're talking Broadway, it's all part of the New York City theater ecosystem, and you know, live venues as of April 1st, will be able to open. Smaller venues can open April 1st and April 2nd, larger venues can open. So, really this is part of being able to provide them with guidance. That's why we need the guidance so that we can support the reopening. We know that there are some theater companies and live performances that are ready to go, but really just need additional guidance on how they stage their performances, how they move audiences through those spaces, and so that is really what where we're pushing for here.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: So, you don't have the power to make – I'm sorry, is this – I don't know if this is back on. Anyways, I was going to say you don't have the power to make actors, dancers, musicians stagehands eligible for vaccination. I just want to sort of put an explanation point in this. You're calling for the Governor to do that, and basically the whole point of building these facilities or making, setting up these mobile vaccination and testing sites near Broadway is to basically force the Governor's hand on it. That's your – that's what you're trying to do?

Mayor: Well, Nolan, I think you a little over interpreted there. First of all, the vast majority of adults in New York City are eligible right now. We want to make vaccination accessible to the Broadway community by putting the centers, putting actual vaccination efforts right in their community, run by members of the Broadway community. It is a variation on what we've said with all the other efforts around the city. The best way to get people connected to vaccination is with leaders and organizations that they know and trust. So, we want to get the Broadway community involved and the off-Broadway community in vaccinating their own folks by definition, a very high percentage of whom are eligible right now.

We also know that in just a matter of four or five weeks at latest, everyone will be eligible. I won't be surprised if that even is sooner, but certainly by May 1st, per the decision made by President Biden. I think it was a good decision. We want vaccination to be rolling now in April and beyond because we've got a lot of people to vaccinate in the entire theater community, and we want them all vaccinated well ahead of September when we foresee the reopening. So, that's what we're trying to achieve here, and I think, I think this is going to be really important. At this moment, everyone who's preparing to reopen anything wants to know they're going to be supported and wants to know that there's going to be help, and that's what we're saying to the Broadway community and the City of New York. We'll be there for you. We will provide the vaccination effort. We'll help you with a lot of the pieces you're trying to navigate right now. We have great health leadership who can help advise the Broadway community. We can bring all these pieces together and bring Broadway back strong for the fall.

And as we conclude today, everyone, we've got some news here which really, really fits what we're talking about today. Really appreciate this, President Biden has, to his great credit, been setting very high goals for the country and his leadership is making a huge amount of difference. Look, I got to tell you we keep moving forward every day now because we have a president who is leading from the front. We have a president who is making important decisions, bold decisions, pushing everyone to go farther, getting us the vaccine [inaudible] and setting the bar high for everyone, and that is making a huge difference. So, we just heard the President announced that the goal will be for this country 200 million vaccinations in the President's first 100 days. He started out just weeks ago with a goal of 100 million vaccinations in 100 days. He's now doubled that to 200 million in a hundred days. This is exactly what we need to see, and this is why I'm really feeling very, very confident about our recovery, a recovery for all of us. You're going to see it come alive this spring, into the summer. I predict a really wonderful summer in New York City with a lot more outdoor activity – jobs coming back, the economy coming back, the life of the city coming back. And then September: our schools come back in full, Broadway comes back and this city writes a story for the ages. The comeback in New York City will be one of the greatest moments in our history, and everyone will be an actor on that stage. Thank you, everybody.

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