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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS ISSUES HEALTH GUIDANCE AHEAD OF
HOLIDAYS, ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO KEEP NEW YORKERS SAFE
FROM TRIDEMIC**

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. As we come to a conclusion of this year, it's a far different cry from the start of the year on January 1st, and I want to really thank Dr. Ted and Dr. Vasan for just a partnership throughout much of our Covid, our monkeypox, our polio, and all the different circumstances that were attached to it throughout this entire year. They helped us navigate the turbulent waters of uncertainty, and even now Dr. Vasan is going to go over some of the issues that we are facing as we move into flu season and as we move into dealing with some of the other respiratory issues that we are facing.

This has been a three years' journey. The handoff came in January when the former mayor handed off to us the entire crisis we were facing, but I believe the combination of our healthcare professionals and everyday New Yorkers... Sometimes we forget the role that everyday New Yorkers played in dealing with Covid and some of the other crises that we were facing. New Yorkers don't like people telling them what to do, but we were able to state to them we needed you to wear your mask, we needed you to get vaccinated, we needed for you to social distance, and they complied. They understood the urgency of the moment and they stood up. And because of the experience of our frontline workers, everyday New Yorkers, we were able to really push back on Covid and what it presented, the challenges it presented to our city and our state.

But we're at a very significant moment right now and Dr. Vasan reminds us all the time during the holiday season. We come together to be with our families and loved ones, and during that time we really need New Yorkers to hear the directions that are going to come from these two medical professionals of how do we enjoy the holidays and spread love without spreading the virus. And we could have that combination. Everything from if you're feeling ill to stay home so you don't spread it to your loved ones. Make sure that if you are in surroundings that you're unsure about that you wear a face covering. And it's crucial to make sure that you are vaccinated and you're taking the booster shots. And I'm sure Dr. Vasan will lean into that more so we'll get a full understanding there.

This year, particularly around the flu, from the briefing we received the numbers are higher than it traditionally is around this year. And when you combine it with the other elements that we are facing, the other RSVs, Covid-19, it's just making it extremely challenging for New Yorkers. But we could get it done right if we get covered and we do it right. The chart that we are showing now is showing some of the challenges we have with RSV positive results received electronically, and it shows where we peaked and where we stand currently. And so it's important for us to make sure we take the next steps.

But today we are also excited about announcing that kids six months through 4-years-old can get the updated Covid-19 Pfizer vaccine at any of the 11 public hospitals. We know the virus mutates, and this is going to allow us to deal with how that virus is mutating. The only city... Dr. Ted thank you, with our mobile units. 75 mobile units where you can get the necessary.... If you've tested positive, we start the flow of giving Paxlovid antiviral medication, that is given out. But in addition to that, 50 of those 75 units that we have will be also dealing with flu and other issues as well. So, this is a real once... We led from the front on this issue, and we're going to continue to make sure that Tamiflu and other items are available as we move forward.

And so our community and faith-based leaders really came together. When you look at the numbers, they speak for themselves. Five million at-home tests was distributed through this network. Twelve million masks were distributed. We came together as a city and combined our efforts to make sure that New Yorkers were prepared, and we will continue to do so as we move forward during the seasons that's in front of us. New Yorkers can go anywhere to the 250 walkup sites to obtain free at-home Covid-19 tests. This is something that we're going to continue to lean on. If you test and if you find yourself to be positive, it's best to just stay home and utilize the services that we put in place. So it's clear. The directions, get vaccinated, get boosted, stay safe, and make sure you enjoy a safe holiday season. I'm going to turn it over to the dynamic duo, Dr. Vasana and Dr. Ted.

Commissioner Dr. Ashin Vasana, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And I'm happy to also run through the slides as we talk. It's good to be here today. Happy holidays to everybody. You know, more than anything, we want everyone to have a safe and healthy holiday, to be able to enjoy this holiday season. I say this all the time. It feels like the holidays have been snatched from us the last couple of years, and this is our chance to snatch it back, and there's some smart and safe things we can do to make sure that that happens for as many people as possible. We're obviously grateful that New Yorkers can come together this year with their friends and loved ones.

(...)

We also know that assessing risks to ourselves and others is essential to our personal health, to our community health, and to our overall well being. The fact is, as the mayor has shown and the slides will show, this holiday season, our city, like the country, is experiencing unusually high and concurrent spikes of Covid-19 and other seasonal infections, especially influenza and RSV. Here we see our Covid test positivity. As you can see, it's been slowly increasing. I think this is a product of the changing weather. It's a product of increased social mixing and congregation

around the holidays, and it's a product of us getting back to some semblance of normalcy in the way that we move about the world and live our lives. And so some of this is to be expected, but it is something we're watching very carefully. The mayor already showed the slide around RSV, and that's encouraging because over the last several weeks we are seeing a demonstrable decrease in cases. And then if we can go to the flu slide, we see a pretty dramatic incline and a much earlier onset of flu cases than we've really ever seen before. Encouragingly, this week we're starting to see a little bit of a flattening in transmission, but it's still too early to tell whether we've hit our peak.

So, there are sensible precautions we can all take to protect each other. A couple weeks ago I issued a health advisory that urges New York City residents to use high quality masks when indoors in public settings and in crowded outdoor settings. This is meant to reflect the reality that we are back to moving about the world in ways that feel somewhat normal, doing our holiday shopping, using the subway, going to school. And it's important that we take precautions as we do so, especially so we can spend time with loved ones this holiday safely and secure in the knowledge that we're doing everything we can to keep ourselves and our families safe.

This is especially important for people who are or who are getting together with people at increased risk for complications from Covid, RSV, or the flu, such as those who are 65 and older, people who are immunocompromised, and/or have an underlying chronic health condition. The advisory also strongly recommends people six months or older get their Covid-19 primary series vaccination if they haven't already, and should receive their updated bivalent booster, if eligible. You can get your booster shot and your flu shot at the same time. And the fact is that the vast majority of people hospitalized with Covid and dying from Covid today are unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated. And recent data suggests that the bivalent booster reduces risk of hospitalization by over 50 percent.

So while we're asking New Yorkers to do their part, as a city we've developed a winter plan to navigate this season safely. This includes closely tracking case, hospitalization, and death data for Covid-19, flu and RSV, including emergency room use and available space in hospitals and intensive care units. We're looking at data trends and rapid changes, such as large increases in cases in a short period of time here in New York City. We're also watching New York City and global data on Covid variants so we can quickly respond to any variant that may cause more severe disease or spread significantly faster than the multiple variants currently circulating and causing people to fall sick today.

With all of that assessment, we're also making it as easy as possible for New Yorkers to protect one another by organizing community pop-up events offering the Covid booster and flu vaccine. In the last three months, the Health Department has organized more than 50 events where more than 2,000 flu shots and 800 boosters were administered. This is in addition to the 187 mobile clinics at congregate settings like shelters and supportive housing and nursing homes, where more than 1,400 boosters and 100 primary series vaccinations were given out since September. During the month of November alone, we've partnered with 67 community-based organizations, we've engaged over 80,000 community members at more than 900 in-person street level outreach events, and we've held over a hundred in-person community conversations, 30 virtual conversations. And through these efforts, we've made almost 25,000 vaccine referrals and more

than 6,000 testing referrals and nearly 40,000 referrals to other health and social services, because we know that so many people have delayed care and deferred care during Covid.

We're also zeroing in on those most at risk of severe illness by calling people 65 and older who test positive for Covid to get them immediate access to Paxlovid. Through Covid Therapeutics Outreach Program, our nurses have consulted with nearly 32,000 sick New Yorkers who are 65 and older to get them access to Paxlovid. We're also sending text messages to remind people to get their bivalent booster, especially for those over 65. And we're requesting that all healthcare providers reach out to their patients who are at increased risk for severe illness. At Health + Hospitals alone, they've, I believe, issued more than 2 million emails to patients to come in and get their Covid booster. And this is coupled with the 75 mobile Test and Treat units, 50 of which have rapid RSV and flu tests on site.

So New York City is at our best when we come together to fight whatever faces us. Sometimes the best way to come together, though, is to spend a little bit of time apart. For people who are sick, they should stay home and avoid close contact with others and talk to a provider about testing, care, and treatment. You can call your provider or call 212-Covid19 to ask about treatment and to even arrange same-day treatment delivery.

We can come together for our friends, our neighbors, and our loved ones in other ways, too. Call in and check in on other people who may be sick or alone during the holidays. And finally, let's not forget mental wellbeing. Whether it's the stress of finding presents, hosting gatherings, or being alone during the festive period, or remembering those we've lost or the many other things that the holidays can trigger, please remember to take care of yourself. We have plenty of resources handy. If you need to reach out for help, you can call NYC Well at 1-888-NYCWELL, or call NYC Well or 988, the National Suicide Prevention Hotline if you're experiencing a mental health crisis. Finally, we wish you all a joyous, healthy, and safe holiday season and look forward to taking your questions.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you. Dr. Ted?

Dr. Ted Long, Executive Director, NYC Test & Treat Corps: Do you want to do a Q&A?

Mayor Adams: Yep. We're open to Q&A. You know that this is a stressful time. I'm trying to figure out what I'm getting Kate and Bernadette for the holiday. Under a lot of stress.

Question: On RSV, a relative of mine was recently hospitalized, and it turned out had RSV, but what I've heard—and I was hearing something second and third hand, so I'm not sure exactly what happened—but the testing for RSV didn't happen until a few days into this stay and what I've heard was that they were short, they didn't have the test and then got them. So, I was wondering, is this an issue in general? This might be an isolated incident, but it seemed odd to me that they wouldn't have it with all the talk we've had about how problematic RSV can be. Are you guys hearing that or seeing that shortage of RSV tests?

Commissioner Vasan: In most settings, RSV is included as a part of a viral panel, and that includes Covid, flu, RSV, and several other viruses that we test for. So, I don't know about the

specific case you're referring to. In general, that's not what we're hearing from our frontline facilities, that they're short of testing, but important data point and happy to follow-up.

Dr. Long: And just to give you the Health + Hospitals experience. So, at our 11 hospitals, we all do the viral panels, as Dr. Vasani said, and at all of my 50 community health centers, we do the same viral panel. At 50 of our mobile Test and Treat units, we do the RSV rapid tests, which is a rapid version, of course, of the PCR test that we do in the hospitals and in the clinics. But we do it everywhere.

Question: I was wondering if you could give us an update on hospital capacity, and specifically pediatric beds?

Commissioner Vasani: It's a great question and something we're monitoring very closely. In addition to working with the data that the hospitals report to the state, we're also doing surveys with the Greater New York Hospital Association. It's a program we developed during Covid called Sit Stat, which is getting more granular levels on staffing capacity. And right now the vast majority of the 49 reporting hospitals in New York City are not reporting severe staffing shortages in either the ER or in pediatric hospital beds, but we have some spot issues. I mean, I think when you start to think about staffing, you think about, well, weekend staffing and night staffing. And so this is something we're monitoring really closely. We're nowhere near the kinds of staffing issues we've faced in previous waves of Covid, but it is something we're trying to get ahead of and we're in constant conversation with the state. I was just on the phone with them today about this issue, and with our federal partners about relief in the event that we have to pull on these emergency staffing contracts that we've had to pull on in previous waves.

Question: You talked about these spikes in all three viruses. Can you just give us the numbers? What are they now and what are they up from? And also you talked about the vast majority of deaths being unvaccinated. What percentage is that?

Commissioner Vasani: Okay, we're happy to get you the final numbers. I mean, basically the case rate over the last seven days is 300 per 100,000. What does that mean? That means it's a fairly significant level of transmission. It's a high level of transmission if you look at the Covid community levels indicator by the CDC. And we've been in that level of transmission for a large part of the summer. It dipped down early in the fall, and then it's come back up as the weather has gotten colder and people have started mixing more. So, not altogether unexpected.

The hospitalization rate is 19.9 per 100,000. Again, not something that we've seen as sort of critical. This is part of why when we are announcing this winter plan of how we're assessing these three viruses, we're not looking at absolute thresholds as ways to say, "Hey, we're in high, medium, low, or red, yellow, green." It's rather, "Let's look at trends and let's look at rapid changes and let's look at how to predict what might happen in New York City based on what's happening in other parts of the globe," rather than, "Hey, we've hit this absolute number." Because those numbers are having a little bit less relevance to things like staffing now because we're not seeing as many people hospitalized from Covid due to Covid-like illness as we have in previous waves. We can get you the rest of the numbers as well. I don't want to belabor them.

Question: And the vaccination question ?

Commissioner Vasan: I'm sorry. What was the question?

Question: What are the percentage of people dying that are vaccinated versus unvaccinated?

Commissioner Vasan: We'll get you the numbers, but it's over 80 percent.

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