



## WHO told: Rush gauge of test kits

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THE government will ask the World Health Organization to expedite the evaluation of locally-developed test kits used to confirm the presence of COVID-19 in patients, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said Friday.

Developed by the University of the Philippines National Institutes of Health, the test kits are cheaper than the Japanese kits used by the Department of Health.

Duque said the UP-produced test kits would be vetted by the WHO "strictly for sensitivity and specificity."

"We will have to apply the most stringent standards of accuracy and sensitivity," Duque said.

"We hope to be able to expedite the validation process with the WHO so that as soon as it is validated, we can make these local test kits available for all hospitals for use under a physician's discretion," Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said.

The Philippines is also waiting to hear from WHO experts on the building of laboratories that can be used for patients who are suspected carriers of COVID-19, Duque said.

The Research Institute for Tropical Medicine in Alabang, Muntinlupa is the sole reference laboratory for COVID-19 testing as of now.

"We want a faster turnaround time rather than let patients wait it out longer in the hospitals where they

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have been classified as patients under investigation," Duque said.

Palace Spokesman Salvador Panelo said the Philippines has no positive case of Covid-19 at the moment because of the three confirmed cases, two have recovered and the third has died.

On Thursday, President Rodrigo Duterte called on Filipinos to trust and cooperate with the government in its fight against Covid-19.

President Duterte has imposed a travel ban on all foreign nationals from mainland China, its administrative regions, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as Taiwan.

Filipinos and foreigners with permanent resident visas are allowed to return to the Philippines but need to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine.

The DOH on Friday reported that another patient under investigation who was among those being monitored died of a heart attack, but clarified that the patient was negative for COVID-19.

"We are glad that most of our PUIs tested negative for 2019-nCoV. While this is very welcome news, we at the DOH will continue our preparations for the possibility of local transmission," Duque said.

As of Friday, Duque said a 25-year-old woman repatriate was admitted to Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital due to fever and ear pain.

The patient, who tested negative for Covid-19, was managed as a case of outer ear infection.

Duque said the patient will be brought back to the New Clark City to complete the 14-day quarantine procedure.

Another repatriate, a 25-year-old woman, will be referred to the Bataan General Hospital and Medical Center today for further evaluation and management after exhibiting anxiety-related symptoms.

Duque said the other repatriates under quarantine remained free of the Covid-19 symptoms.

As of noon Friday, there were 386 patients under investigation who tested negative for the virus, and 66