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Measles spread under control but outbreak declaration stays

MANILA, Philippines — Health Secretary Francisco Duque III on Monday said the spread of measles was now “under control” but the declaration of an outbreak of the disease in several regions would stay for now to prevent a resurgence of cases.

According to Duque, the Department of Health (DOH) has seen a “significant” reduction in the number of measles cases nationwide, particularly in the National Capital Region, Calabarzon, Central Luzon and Central and Western Visayas, where outbreaks were declared in February.

Data from the DOH’s Epidemiology Bureau showed that from April 7 to 13, 775 new measles cases were reported throughout the country, compared to the 1,280 cases recorded from March 27 to 30.

Cases grew nearly 5 times

But the total number of measles cases this year grew by nearly five times.

From Jan. 1 to April 13, the DOH recorded 31,056 measles cases with 415 deaths, compared to the 6,641 cases with 59 deaths in the same period last year.

“So far it’s under control but I still don’t like to say that the outbreak’s over,” Duque said on the sidelines of a mass immunization of children at Baseco Compound in Manila’s Tondo district on Monday.

“I don’t want [to lift the outbreak declaration] because the parents might become complacent. Our efforts would continue until we reach 95 percent [vaccination coverage rate],” he added.

Duque said the coverage rate for children 6 to 59 months old was already at 93 percent.

The DOH has not released data on the coverage rate for the entire population because the school-based immunization of children has been put on hold due to the summer break.

Duque said there had been an improvement in the public perception of vaccines and the government’s immunization program.