



Palace: Face shield rule

IATF against limiting shield use to hospitals

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

THE use of face shields whether indoor or outdoors will stay for now following the recommendation of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) to retain the policy as an added protection against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the IATF, after a meeting yesterday afternoon, has decided to recommend

the continued use of face shields despite a statement from President Duterte on Wednesday night that he prefers that the wearing of face shields be limited in hospitals.

The President's statement was bared by Senate President Vicente Sotto, who said that the issue was discussed during a meeting between the Chief Executive and lawmakers.

"Last night, the President agreed that face shields should only be used in hospitals. (He) allowed us to remove ours!

Attention DOH!" Sotto said in a tweet, adding that the President also said that he would ask the Department of Health to adjust the current protocol on the wearing of face shields.

Roque confirmed this. "It looks like the President mentioned a new policy, and of course IATF is recommendatory because it is composed of all alter egos of the President. Nonetheless, this is without prejudice to the IATF appealing the decision of the President, particularly the wearing of shields in enclosed public

spaces," Roque said in a briefing prior to the IATF meeting.

Roque said that pending the decision of President Duterte, the policy on the wearing of face shield will still be in effect.

"The Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) resolved to recommend to President Rodrigo Roa Duterte the mandatory wearing of face shields in enclosed/indoor spaces of hospitals, schools, workplaces,

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commercial establishments such as but not limited to food establishments, malls and public markets, public transport and terminals, and places of worship," he said.

The government mandated the wearing of face shields in public transportation and workplaces in 2020.

Under IATF Resolution 68, issued on September 3, 2020, face shields are "required in supermarkets, public markets, malls, and in venues where government-initiated meetings and critical government services are being conducted or provided."

The resolution also said that wearing of face shields in public places is highly encouraged.

Likewise, under the Joint Memorandum Circular 2021-0001 or the "Clarificatory Guidelines on the Mandatory Use of Face Shields Outside of Residence for COVID-19 Mitigation," the wearing of shields is mandatory only

in specific settings, such as in enclosed public spaces, schools, workplaces, commercial establishments such as but not limited to food establishments, malls, and public markets, public transport and terminals, places of worship, and other public spaces wherein 1 meter physical distancing is not possible and there is a gathering of more than 10 persons at the same venue at the same time.

Health Undersecretary Leopoldo Vega the other day said face shields can be removed when outdoors because the risk of COVID-19 transmission in open spaces is low.

During the Senate Committee of the Whole hearing on Tuesday, Sotto asked Health Secretary Francisco Duque III if they are considering discontinuing the wearing of face shields.

Duque said they would look into the proposals to drop the said requirement once the vaccination rate in the country improves.

Yesterday, Duque said the De-

partment of Health would ask the President to reconsider his position that face shields should be worn only inside hospitals.

In a phone interview, Duque said: "We will appeal if the President can reconsider it. He said it must continue in hospitals. But as to the other settings, it is better for the IATF-EID to get a consensus."

"Of course, we will follow the order of the President. We will deliberate on it in the IATF-EID if we can have a consensus. But we may also appeal to the President regarding his pronouncement," he added.

The health chief said the DOH believes that face shields provide an additional layer of protection amid the pandemic.

"It is always better to have an additional layer of protection, instead of having none. Having more protection is better than reducing protection," said Duque, even as he acknowledged that "it is not really necessary in open spaces with sufficient ventilation." — **With Ashzel Hachero and Gerard Naval**