



# Gov't hoping for a 'maskless' Christmas; Duterte backs use of face shield in hospitals only – Sotto

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As more people get vaccinated against the coronavirus, the government is hoping the nation will celebrate the forthcoming holiday season without the mandatory masks.

To attain this, Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the government aims to administer more vaccines to attain "population protection" initially in the National Capital Region (NCR) and other high-risk areas before the end of the year.

Containing the virus spread may pave the way for the easing of the mask-wearing rule in these places.

"Kaya po 'yan 'no. Kaya nga po we are aiming for population protection or iyong containment na sinasabi ni Fr. (Nicanor) Austriaco kasi alam na natin na sa mga bansang nakamit na nila

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At present, around 2 million people have been fully vaccinated since the government's vaccination drive started last March. The country has so far secured more than 14 million doses of coronavirus vaccines, including the latest shipment of 1.5 million doses from Sinovac.

## Face shields only in hospitals

Meanwhile, President Duterte has agreed that face shields should only be worn in hospitals.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said President Duterte's stand came up during their meeting in Malacañang Wednesday night, June 16. Other senators were also in their meeting.

"Last night, the President agreed that face shields should only be used in hospitals. [He] allowed us to remove ours! [Attention] DOH!" Sotto tweeted on Thursday morning, June 17.

Senator Joel Villanueva, who was also in the meeting with the President, confirmed this information.

"I second the motion. I was there," Villanueva also tweeted.

The proposed removal of face

shields, especially when outdoors, will be high on the agenda of the meeting of the government's pandemic task force Thursday.

Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles, the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases is scheduled to meet Thursday to discuss matters including the proposal to ease the face shield policy. A decision on the matter will be announced after the meeting.

Nograles stated this after President Duterte had expressed support to limit the use of these protective shields only in the hospitals.

"If it's true, I'm happy that the President is now reconsidering the situation," Domagoso said during the symbolic vaccination of seafarers at the Palacio de Maynila.

"Mararamdaman mo na yung pangulo ng bansa may tenga sa kanyang mamamayan (You will feel that the president of the country has ears for the citizens)," he added.

Domagoso reiterated that face shield costs money and might only be a burden to minimum wage earners.

The mayor explained that face

shields could cost an individual P300 a month which is equivalent to several kilos of rice.

"In these trying times, alam mo makapagpagaan lang tayo, yung maibisan lang natin yung mga suliranin ng utaw (if we are able to ease the problems of our people), i think it's a baby step to success, and I'm happy and excited," Domagosos said.

During the Senate Committee of the Whole hearing on Tuesday, June 15, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III maintained the importance of wearing face shields against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

He said fears of the COVID-19 infection will be addressed once a significant number of Filipinos have already been vaccinated.

Sotto has been asking the government should consider lifting the face shield policy, saying the Philippines is the only country that requires its use outside homes.

Its effectiveness as a protection against the coronavirus is "not proven," he had earlier told reporters. (With a report from Noreen Jazul)





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iyong containment eh hindi na sila nagmamaskara – at least sa outdoors 'no gaya po ng Israel at ilang lugar sa Amerika (We can do it. We are aiming for population protection or containment mentioned by Fr. Austriaco because we know that countries that attained containment have dropped the use of masks at least outdoors such as Israel and some places in America)," he said during a televised press briefing Thursday, June 17.

"So that is what we're aiming for 'no. Tama po si Fr. Austriaco, a maskless Christmas," he added.

The government has initially prioritize the vaccine rollout in the so-called NCR Plus 8 that includes Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, Metro Davao, Bulacan, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga, and Rizal to curb the rapid surge in coronavirus cases.

Prior to Roque's comments, Austriaco, a molecular biologist, said the NCR Plus 8 could achieve COVID-19 containment by October at the rate of 250,000 doses administered per day. Herd immunity can be achieved in

these areas with a daily vaccination rate of 250,000 from June 1, 2021 to November 2021.

Austriaco, in the same online press briefing, said reaching the goal of "no-mask Christmas" could be "possible," citing people can enjoy the festive season similar to the time prior to the pandemic.

He also shared a picture card of singer Jose Mari Chan with the caption "Imagine a No-Mask Christmas" before wrapping up his presentation.

To attain COVID 19 containment, Austriaco explained that around 40 to 50 percent of the population must be vaccinated. In NCR Plus 8, around 33.3 million doses are needed to vaccinate 16.65 million, or 45 percent of the 37 million population.

Around 70 to 80 percent of the population, on the other hand, must be vaccinated to reach herd immunity. This means 25.9 million of 37 million population of NCR Plus 8 must be inoculated. At least 51.8 million doses are needed.