



Regional COVID-19 spike

THE virus transmission rate in the Philippines has slowed down in the past two weeks, especially in Metro Manila, but this doesn't mean COVID-19 will not rear its ugly head again.

Stricter quarantine and lockdown measures have successfully reduced the daily number of COVID-19 cases in the country to around 5,000 to 6,000 from the high numbers in April. A report of the independent OCTA Research Group said Metro Manila recorded an average of 829 cases a day from June 9 to 15, or down 13 percent from the previous week. The cases correspond to an average daily attack rate of six per 100,000, putting Metro Manila under a moderate risk classification.

The declining rate, though, is not an

assurance that the Philippines is now far from experiencing another spike. On the contrary, the population should still exercise caution due to the threat from the Delta variant of the virus that earlier swept India.

"We should continue to be cautious."

Neighboring countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, which have porous borders with the Philippines in the south, have been recording a surge in COVID-19 cases in the past two weeks. Indonesia's Ministry of Health has just confirmed that the Delta variant is the cause of the recent spike.

Indonesia, which has the most number of COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia at 1.95 million, is reporting daily cases near 10,000 in the past two weeks, its highest since late February.

The cases just soared to 12,264 yesterday. The Jakarta government in response extended quarantine restrictions for another 14 days to June 28 to contain the spread of the virus.

Malaysia also stretched its own lockdown period until June 28 after COVID-19 daily cases hit over 5,000 in the past three weeks. Malaysia has logged over 678,000 cases as of yesterday.

The current high infection rate in these two Southeast Asian nations could spill over to the southern part of the Philippines, a concern that Philippine authorities must closely monitor. Malaysians from Sabah can easily travel to the southernmost part of the Philippines and trade with Filipinos living in the Sulu Archipelago and vice versa. The same is true in the Davao-General Santos-Tahuna-Bitung (North Sulawesi) sea route of the Philippines and Indonesia.

COVID-19 can easily pass through international borders as we have seen in the past. The Philippine should be vigilant to stop a new source of transmission in the south.