



## PH secures 40 M Pfizer doses, its biggest vaccine purchase so far

By MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

After months of delay, the country has finally purchased 40 million doses of Pfizer vaccines to boost its efforts in combating the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a landmark move that saw the government's biggest vaccine procurement this year, the National Task Force (NTF) Against COVID-19 announced yesterday.

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Vaccine czar Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said he and Health Secretary Francisco Duque III signed the supply agreement with Pfizer-BioNTech, the manufacturers of the vaccine, on June 19.

"We are very happy to report that the government and the management of Pfizer have finally concluded our negotiations. Secretary Duque and I signed yesterday (Saturday) the supply agreement for the biggest and most decisive deal we had for 2021," Galvez said.

According to the vaccine czar, the deliveries of 40 million doses of Pfizer vaccines will begin in August, or eight weeks after the signing of the supply agreement, with the shipments to be delivered in tranches.

"The vaccine demand has begun to ease up for many big and rich countries as most of them have already acquired more than enough vaccines for their population and have vaccinated many of their citizens. This has allowed the manufacturer to commit to us these deliveries," he said.

Galvez did not mention the amount of money involved in the vaccine procurement but he noted it will be financed through a multilateral arrangement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

He explained that the loan funds from multilateral partners such as the ADB follows a direct disbursement scheme wherein payments are paid directly by the fund manager to the vaccine manufacturer.

"Through this scheme, the Filipino people can be assured that our transactions on vaccine procurement will be transparent as the funds will not pass through the hands of any government official or agency. Wala pong dumadaan na pera sa amin (There is no money that passes through us)," he emphasized.

The vaccine czar said the scheduled delivery of Pfizer will coincide with the opening of the national immunization program to the general population including those under the 12-15 age bracket.

Earlier this month, the Food

and Drug Administration (FDA) amended the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, allowing it to be used for those with ages 12 to 15.

However, the NTF clarified that the adult population and the vulnerable sector will still be given priority in the vaccination program.

### LGUs told to brace for arrival of Pfizer jabs

Local government units (LGUs) should prepare in advance for the anticipated arrival of "sensitive" Pfizer vaccines to avoid mishandling and wastage, the National Task Force (NTF) Against COVID-19 said.

"We again emphasize for LGUs to ensure third party logistics and cold chain service providers for very sensitive vaccines like Pfizer, Moderna, and Sputnik V. We don't want any vaccine to be wasted because of spoilage and mishandling," Galvez said.

Pfizer has one of the most sensitive storage temperature requirements among all vaccines approved for emergency use in the country. It needs to be stored in a cold chain facility with a temperature of -80 to -60 degree centigrade (frozen solution) to maintain its efficacy.

Meanwhile, Moderna and Sputnik V require -20 degree centigrade storage requirement.

Galvez said the NTF intends to deploy the Pfizer vaccines "as soon as possible" in places where there are observed spike of cases, including in rural communities. The vaccines will start arriving in tranches in August.

"However, this will not be possible if the receiving LGU is not ready to handle these types of vaccines," he noted.

Through its "hub and spokes" strategy, the government equipped LGUs around the country in handling sensitive vaccines by partnering with third-party logistics providers to set-up cold chain facilities in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

Cold chain facilities were established in Marikina City in Luzon, Cebu in Visayas, and

1 ◀ Davao in Mindanao to handle the storage of the vaccines. These areas are considered as "hubs" where the vaccines are stored prior to the deployment in "spokes" or the areas where supply is needed.

However, some LGUs, particularly in Metro Manila have established their own cold storage facilities to enable them to handle the vaccines.

### Vaccine supply

With the latest supply agreement, the Philippines has now secured the delivery of 113 million doses from five vaccine manufacturers, namely: Sinovac with 26 million doses, Moderna with 20 million doses, AstraZeneca with 17 million doses, Sputnik V with 10 million doses, and Pfizer with 40 million doses.

The COVAX facility has also committed to deliver 44 million doses to the country this year, bringing to 157 million doses the total number of doses secured by the Philippines.

Meanwhile, around 16 million doses from Novavax and Johnson & Johnson are still under negotiation.

At present, around 14 million doses of vaccines have been delivered in the country.

The government plans to inoculate around 70 million Filipinos by year-end to achieve the so-called "population protection" where a majority of the population gets immune from the disease through vaccination.

"The vaccines from Pfizer will significantly boost our national immunization program and will enable us to realize our goal of achieving herd immunity by year-end. This is another positive development that will give a happy and better Christmas for all Filipinos," an optimistic Galvez said.

The signing of the supply agreement came after Galvez and Duque signed the "term sheet" for the procurement of Pfizer jabs in May.

The supply agreement serves as the "final stage" in the vaccine procurement as it will determine how many doses of vaccines will be allocated for a purchasing country or company.