



Bulk vax quota to NCR Plus 8 blamed for COVID surge in Western Visayas

By Willie Casas
and Macon Ramos-Araneta

THE mayor of Iloilo City on Monday blamed the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the Western Visayas to the allocation of most vaccine doses to Metro Manila and its surrounding provinces.

At a briefing Monday, Mayor Geronimo Treñas said national government officials must listen to local executives.

"We have been informing the Secretary [Carlito] Galvez we need medical personnel, equipment, COVID-19 meds, and vaccines because ultimately what will give protection to our constituents would be the vaccine," Treñas said.

The city has so far administered first doses to some 45,000 residents out of its target 450,000. Some 9,000 have received their second doses, the

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FEW TAKERS. Empty chairs are seen inside a mall vaccination site on June 21, 2021. Four Manila vaccination sites had low turnouts of vaccinees after the city government announced that it would no longer allow walk-ins starting this week. Later on Monday evening, the national government said it would now allow "walk-ins" to join the vaccine rollout under its "no wrong door" policy. **Norman Cruz**



Bulk...

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mayor added.

"OCTA had recommended that 90 percent of these vaccines will be allocated to NCR Plus 8 and now, this is the result of their recommendation," he said, referring to the independent OCTA Research Group that makes recommendations to the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF).

"It's about time that we should also listen to the local leaders. It's the local leader who understands what's happening to us," Trefias said. "It's not OCTA who understands what's happening to our constituents."

The mayor said several cities outside the NCR Plus 8 (Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, Metro Davao, Bulacan, Batan-

gas, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga, and Rizal) are in critical condition because of OCTA's recommendation.

OCTA member Guido David said the decision to give priority to NCR Plus 8 was made by the national government, saying the group is not an official advisor but merely submits recommendations to the IATF, which may or may not decide to follow them.

Senator Grace Poe urged the IATF to immediately act on the appeal of Iloilo province and other high-risk local governments to augment their resources for COVID-19 relief to treat the rising influx of patients.

Poe called for immediate action in addressing the resource shortage in Iloilo as well as in areas bearing the brunt of the virus surge.

At the same time, she said the critical areas should get more vaccines to arrest the virus spread and ease the pressure

on the health systems of local government units.

Meanwhile, the Department of Health (DOH) denied allegations that Davao province, President Duterte's bailiwick, has received most of the Pfizer vaccines delivered to the Philippines.

In an online press conference, Health Undersecretary Abdullah Dumama Jr. said both Davao and Cebu received 210,000 doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccines.

"There is no difference in the number of doses deployed to Cebu and to Davao... There is no favoritism here," Dumama said in Filipino.

"This is not just for Davao City. This is for the entire Davao region and other nearby areas," he added.

Officials said Davao received a large number of doses because the region has the cold storage facilities needed to handle the Pfizer vaccine.