



## Lifting of mask, CQ not this year

**By Vito Barcelo  
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THE lifting of community quarantines in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic will not happen within the year, unless the Philippines achieves the herd immunity or 70 percent of the population is vaccinated with anti-COVID-19 vaccines, Malacanang said.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said Monday it would take more

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time before the country could stop wearing face masks and it had to be made by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID), the government's policy-making body in addressing the pandemic.

"I don't think that is going to happen this year," he said.

Earlier, President Rodrigo Duterte expressed willingness to lift the quarantine rules once the situation in the country improved.

However, Roque, in an online press conference, said quarantine restrictions would be lifted on conditions that more Filipinos get inoculated against COVID-19, the number of intensive care unit (ICU) beds in the country increased, and the transmission of the coronavirus slowed down.

The Department of Health earlier said the lifting of community quarantine across the country was a "long-term goal."

"That's not going to happen now or next month," said Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire.

"We're discussing it because we want to have safeguards in place so that we can avoid the risk of having further transmission."

So far, the Philippines has vaccinated eight million people against COVID-19, of which two million already completed two doses.

The government is eyeing to vaccinate 58 million people or 70 percent of the population of Metro Manila and its nearby provinces, as well as Metro Cebu and Davao, to achieve "herd immunity."

But the DOH said the national government was studying the possibility of doing away with community quarantine classifications to give local officials wider discretion in enforcing anti-coronavirus measures.

Interior Undersecretary Epimaco Densing III said in a separate media interview that ending the quarantine classification system would only be possible once the country achieved herd immunity, which means vaccinating up to 70 percent of the 110 million population.

Densing also said the discussions on the matter came after governors had requested more leeway in enforcing granular lockdowns.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año himself said the government would only consider lifting community quarantine classifications once the country achieved population protection or herd immunity against COVID-19.

Duterte approves community quarantine classifications for different areas every two weeks.

The country has four levels of classifications: enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), modified ECQ, general community quarantine (GCQ), and modified GCQ, with the latter being the most lenient.