



Fast-track vaccines to provinces - Rody

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte has ordered government agencies to fast-track the deployment of vaccines to the provinces as the number of COVID-19 infections in Mindanao continues to rise.

During a meeting of the government's pandemic task force last Monday, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III reported that Mindanao is presently the highest contributor of COVID-19 cases in the country.

Duque cited the need to act on the rising number of persons being admitted to hospitals to address the pandemic surge in the Visayas and Mindanao.

Duterte then inquired whether the local governments in areas with rising numbers of COVID-19 infections have received vaccines.

Duque told the President the government already has a vaccine allocation plan for every region, province, city and town.

Duterte ordered agencies to move faster in distributing the vaccines to areas with rising numbers of cases.

National Task Force against COVID-19 chief implementer Carlito Galvez Jr. said local governments have been scaling up their daily vaccination capacities as COVID-19 jabs are being consumed fast. He cited Cagayan de Oro, Ormoc, Negros and Iloilo, which he said consume 5,000 to 8,000 doses per day.

"Different sectors are being mobilized and integrated so that they have an increased capacity in the vaccination," Galvez said.

He said the national government, local governments as well as the private, medical and religious sectors are working together to persuade residents to get vaccinated.

Galvez said the government is committed to provide all local government units (LGUs) the needed vaccines to achieve population protection in every region.

Galvez made the statement in response to reports that some LGUs outside the National Capital Region, Metro Cebu, Metro Davao, Bulacan, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga and Rizal are complaining about the limited number of vaccine doses deployed in their areas.

He said the National Vaccination Operations Center maintains a dashboard to monitor vaccine deployment and usage of LGUs.

Galvez said vaccine supplies are monitored on a daily basis to ensure that the LGUs that run out of vaccines would be given priority in the next batch of deployment.

"Our goal to contain the disease and protect the most vulnerable individuals and communities is still the same," he said.

Galvez said more than three million vaccine doses are arriving this June: 1.5 million doses of Sinovac, 250,000 doses of Moderna and more than two million doses of AstraZeneca.

He said these vaccines would be distributed to identified provinces and LGUs nationwide that are running low on supplies.

Meanwhile, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) ordered LGUs to prepare for the arrival of 40 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año reminded local chief executives to undertake the necessary preparations given the vaccine's fragile nature, which needs to be secured in cold storage facilities with -80 to -60 degrees Centigrade to ensure the jabs would not spoil.

"I call on LGUs to start their preparations to be able to properly receive these vaccines," Año said. "Time is of the essence and we must do our duty to safely bring the vaccines to the people."

Año echoed the call of vaccine czar Galvez to LGUs to ensure the presence of third-party logistics and cold chain service providers.

Pfizer vaccines will be delivered in bulk starting August.

The other jabs arriving are Russia's Sputnik V and Moderna of the United States, both needing to be stored below 20 degrees Celsius.

Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chairman Benhur Abalos urged the public to get vaccinated as more cases of the deadlier Delta variant were recorded in the country.

- With Jose Rodel Clapano, Emmanuel Tupas, Ralph Edwin Villanueva