



Sotto slams mandatory use of face shield, but DOST welcomes President's decision

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Senate President Vicente Sotto III slammed President Duterte's decision to retain the mandatory use of face shields, saying health experts, who recommended it, have yet to prove its effectiveness in lessening COVID-19 infection. **►8**

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"Health experts? They have not submitted evidences. It's all talk!" Sotto said in message sent to reporters Tuesday, June 22.

Sotto even went further, saying that the move reflects the government's pandemic response, which "is not good."

"Now I want to believe the LGU (local government unit) reports, saying the handling of the pandemic is not good at all," he added.

While Sotto slammed Duterte's decision, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and its vaccine expert panel (VEP) welcomed the move.

DOST backs decision

DOST Secretary Fortunato "Boy" T. de la Peña and VEP chair Dr. Nina Gloriani thanked the Chief Executive for listening to the country's health experts who strongly recommended the continued use of face shields.

"I think this is best at this point. Our medical experts also gave that advice to us," De la Peña said in a Viber message after Presidential spokesman Harry Roque announced that the President declared the wearing of face shields, both indoors and outdoors, "is still mandatory."

The decision was made upon the advice of health experts and as a precaution against the highly transmissible Delta variant of the coronavirus disease (COVID), which was first detected in India.

Gloriani, who strongly opposed the lifting of the face shield policy, heaved a sigh of relief.

"This is what we want as medical experts for mainly two reasons: our immunization coverage is still very low at around 5 percent, and the variants are there to deal with," she said in a Viber message.

"The face shield adds to the pro-

tection, especially sa (for the) eyes. With the mask alone, one may get 90 percent protection, but with the face shield, that goes up to over 95 percent to even 99 percent protection, plus distancing and short exposures in enclosed spaces," she explained.

She urged the public to continue practicing the minimum public health precautions, especially now that the Department of Health (DOH) reported four new additional cases of Delta variant, pushing the total to 17 cases.

Show us proof – Sotto

Displeased with the decision, Sotto also tweeted about the issue after Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque announced on social media Monday night that the President decided to still require the use of face shields both indoors and outdoors "on the advice of health experts and in view of the Delta variant."

"So-called health experts daw says face shields will remain, everywhere! Now, I know why the handling of the pandemic is not good!" Sotto wrote.

But Sotto said the DOH has yet to submit to the Senate a list of countries that, like the Philippines, require the use of face shields.

Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III also echoed Sotto's call for explanation on the effectiveness of face shields.

"As far as I know [the Philippines] is the only country in the world requiring the use of both face mask and face shield, requiring face shield use even outdoors where the heat and wind can easily disable the COVID-19 virus," Pimentel said.

"Let us not allow the face shield to be just another requirement to be used to regulate behavior under pain of penalty for not following requirement.

[The government] should explain the science behind this decision as best as it could," he added.

Last June 17, Sotto said Duterte, during a brief meeting in Malacañang, had agreed to limit the use of face shields in hospitals. This was, however, opposed by the government's pandemic task force co-chaired by Health Secretary Francisco Duque III.

Duque previously maintained there is scientific basis that face shields provide an added protection against the novel coronavirus.

Small price to pay

In his weekly public address, Duterte apologized for causing confusion on the face shield policy, saying he never told senators "with finality that we will do away with the face shield."

"I will apologize to the Filipino people. But with the kind of aggressive infection that poses a very grave danger to – It (wearing of face shield) is a small inconvenience," he said.

"That is a very small price to pay rather than gamble doing away with it and courting disaster," he added.

The President said the Philippines cannot afford a second wave of coronavirus infections since the economy has not yet recovered from the effects of the pandemic.

"I'm constrained to go back to the old practice because of the threat posed by the new variant (Delta). I cannot afford to place the nation, the national interest of the Republic, [in danger] by just sometimes adopting this and being lenient," Duterte said.

"It would be disastrous for this country. That is why the stricter you are, the better," he added. (With a report from Argyll Cyrus B. Geducos)