



Delta strain: 'Scary, dangerous'

Fleeting contact enough to infect people, variant potential India-like surge

By Willie Casas

THE Delta variant of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is "very dangerous" as it can spread with just "fleeting contact," a health expert warned on Tuesday.

"What's scary for me is...what's being reported by the health department in Australia is that it only takes fleeting contact with people who are infected for other people to get infected," said Dr. Edsel Salvana, an infectious disease expert who also advises the government on COVID-19.

During President Rodrigo Duterte's address to the people late Monday evening, Salvana said the Delta variant has the potential to lead to a massive "India-like" surge.



"The Delta variant is really very scary and this is all the more reason why we really should police our borders.

It only takes one variant to get in and we can have an India-like surge. A person infected with the Delta variant can infect up to 8 more people while those infected with other variants can infect only two," Salvana said.

Experts have maintained that COVID-19 can be contracted after 15 minutes of close contact with an infected individual, but this new variant seems different, he said.

"This is fleeting contact. What that means is that you really have to protect yourself at all times, otherwise,

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this is going to get out of hand," Salvaña said.

Salvaña said the Delta variant, which originated from India, was reported to be "about four times more infectious than the original virus from Wuhan, and two times more infectious than the UK variant."

He said it also "seems to make people sicker and also younger people are getting sicker."

Salvaña said 17 cases of the Delta variant were from returning overseas Filipinos but there is no community transmission yet.

"Our quarantine protocols did protect us. It doesn't seem to have made itself into the community yet, and we want to keep it that way," he said.

The problem then is if there are places which do not observe the quarantine guidelines, which instruct 10 days of isolation at a facility and four more days at home, he said.

"It only takes one to see another spike and it can be at the level of what happened in India. We know that lots and lots of people died. This has to be a whole of nation approach. One person can save us or one person can doom all of us," he said.

The Delta variant caused a catastrophic wave of coronavirus cases in India that overwhelmed its healthcare

system.

It is fast becoming the globally dominant variant of the disease, the World Health Organization's chief scientist said last week. In May, the World Health Organization (WHO) termed it a "variant of concern," citing its high transmissibility.

The Philippines banned travelers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, United Arab Emirates, and Oman this month as it aims to keep out this variant of COVID-19.

Meanwhile, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Director General Eric Domingo said the current COVID-19 vaccines are still "useful" even though they may be less effective against some coronavirus variants.

Domingo said data from Pfizer showed that for the Alpha variant, the coronavirus variant first reported in the United Kingdom, shows that its vaccine retained its high efficacy rate of 93 percent.

For the Delta variant, Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine's efficacy rate slightly decreased to 88 percent.

For AstraZeneca, its efficacy rate against the Alpha variant is at 66 percent, while its efficacy against the Delta variant is at 60 percent.

"We could still use it. It could still give protection," Domingo said.

He said studies on the efficacy of vaccines from Janssen, Moderna, Sinovac, Sinopharm and Sputnik V against the Delta variant are still ongoing.

Domingo urged the public to get vaccinated as this is added protection against the respiratory illness.

The Philippines logged 3,666 new Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, but the Department of Health traced this to the low turnout of laboratories on June 20.

The latest figure, however, brought the total coronavirus infections in the country to 1,367,894.

The DOH reported 60 new fatalities, bringing the COVID-19 death toll to 23,809, or 1.74 percent of all cases.

The number of new recoveries was pegged at 6,810, bringing total recoveries to 1,291,389 or 94.4 percent of total cases.

Active cases stood at 52,696 or 3.9 percent of all cases.