



US shares 55M doses; PH among global vaccine recipients

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

THE United States Embassy in Manila yesterday said the Philippines will be among the recipients of 55 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to be shared globally by the US.

The announcement came after the White House laid out a plan to share the 55 million doses globally, with roughly 75% of the doses allocated to Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia including the Philippines, and Africa through the COVAX international vaccine-sharing program.

The plan fulfills President Joe Biden's commitment to share 80 million US-made vaccines with countries around the world. The president sketched out his priorities for the first 25 million doses from that pledge earlier this month.

"As part of this 55-million

dose tranche, the Philippines will receive vaccines both through the COVAX-allocated 41-million dose portion and through the direct US government 14 million-dose donation to friends, allies, and other recipients," the embassy said in a statement.

"As we continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic at home and work to end the pandemic worldwide, the Biden administration has promised that the United States will be an arsenal of vaccines for the world. Part of that plan is donating vaccines from our domestic supply and the President has pledged 80 million doses to be allocated by the end of June," the White House said in a statement posted by the embassy on its social media account.

The United States has come under pressure to share more

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of its vaccine supply with countries that are still struggling with the deadly virus and its variants. With more and more Americans getting the shots, the White House increasingly has turned its attention to getting vaccine out internationally.

Of the 55 million remaining doses, some 41 million will be shared through COVAX, the White House said, with approximately 14 million going to Latin America and the Caribbean, some 16 million to Asia, and roughly 10 million to Africa.

The other 25%, or roughly 14 million doses, will be shared with "regional priorities," including Colombia, Argentina, Iraq, Ukraine, the West Bank and Gaza.

The 55 million doses will be taken from the US supply of Pfizer Inc, Moderna Inc, and Johnson & Johnson shots, though if AstraZeneca's vaccine gets a green light from the Food and Drug Administration, it would likely be added to the mix as well.

The White House said it wanted the doses to be prioritized for health care workers and those who are most at risk.

International partners are eager to get US help. Biden has announced the United States will buy 500 million doses of Pfizer's vaccine and donate them to the world's poorest countries.

Aside from the Philippines, the other recipient countries in Asia from the 16 million doses through the WHO-run COVAX facility are India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bhutan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Taiwan, Cambodia and the Pacific islands.

Countries in Latin America, Caribbean and Africa will also receive their share

from COVAX.

The 14 million other doses will be provided directly not only to the Philippines but to Colombia, Argentina, Haiti, other countries that belonged to the Caribbean Community, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Panama, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, Oman, West Bank and Gaza, Ukraine, Kosovo, Georgia, Moldova and Bosnia.

The embassy also said 'the Philippines will receive vaccines as part of the initial 25 million dose US government donation announced by the White House earlier this month.

Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez yesterday said the country has reserved 50 million doses of booster shots being developed by the US firm Moderna.

The country is expected to receive 250,000 doses from Moderna on June 27, including 50,000 doses bought by the private sector.

He said the country is buying 20 million doses of Moderna vaccine with the rest of the vaccines to be delivered in ranches until the end of the year.

Romualdez said in addition this, the country expects 800,000 to 1 million doses of vaccines next month to be sourced from the first 80 million doses of global vaccine commitment of the US. He said the Philippines is also set to receive a portion of another 500 million vaccine doses that the US will donate.

The Food and Drug Administration on Monday night said Russia's Gamaleya Institute is seeking an amendment to the emergency use authorization (EUA) granted to it, to lengthen the time interval between the two doses to make the vaccine more effective.

FDA Director General Eric Domingo said Gamaleya Institute wrote to his office about lengthening the time interval between two doses from the current three weeks to a longer period similar to AstraZeneca, which is four to 12 weeks apart.

Domingo said the longer the time interval between doses, the higher the efficacy rate of the Sputnik V.

He said Gamaleya also informed the FDA that it is planning to register the vaccine as a single-dose drug similar to Johnson & Johnson's.

He said both Gamaleya and Johnson & Johnson's vaccines are "adenoviral vector vaccine."

Adenoviral vector vaccine introduces a piece of protein in the body that triggers the immune system to produce antibodies and activate immune cells to fight infections.

Domingo said FDA is waiting for the Gamaleya to submit data to support their applications and determine if it is acceptable.

The Philippines has so far received 180,000 doses of Sputnik V.

National Task Force against COVID-19 (NTF) chief and vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. on Monday night said 20 million or about half of the vaccines being bought by the country from Pfizer Biotech will be used for those aged between 12 to 15 years old.

Galvez, in his report to the President, said the supply agreement with Pfizer for 40 million doses of vaccines involves delivery by the third and fourth quarter of the year, in time for the government's plan to start vaccinating persons younger than 18 years.

Pfizer, Moderna and Sinovac are among the pharmaceutical firms that have introduced vaccines for minors.

On June 8, the FDA approved the emergency use of Pfizer's COVID-19

vaccines for minors or those aged between 12 to 15 years old.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año told local government units (LGUs) to start making preparations for the sensitive Pfizer vaccines which will start arriving in August.

Año, a key member of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases, reminded the LGUs about the storage temperature requirements for Pfizer vaccines which is minus 80 to 60 degrees Celsius. He said LGUs which have completed their preparations should coordinate with the regional offices of the Department of Health so these can be assessed by health officials.

The Office of Vice President launched a two-day drive-through vaccination hub in Manila in partnership with the city government, prioritizing tricycle, pedicab and delivery drivers.

Robredo and Mayor Isko Moreno were at the vaccination site at the activity grounds of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Malate, Manila.

Robredo said no politics is involved in the vaccine express hub, when asked if she and the mayor are planning to team up for the 2022 national elections.

"It's very important that partner LGU (local government unit) is not looking at 2022. The pandemic has no political color. When we proposed this (partnership) to the city of Manila, they said immediately said yes. They have us all the support we needed and we're elated," she told reporters.

Moreno also played coy when asked to comment, saying he partnered with Robredo for the initiative because of the threat to health caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which has also affected the economy. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor, Victor Reyes and Wendell Vigil*