



## DOH eyes looser controls in Metro Manila

**BY GERARD NAVAL**

THE Department of Health (DOH) yesterday raised the possibility of further lowering the community quarantine classification of Metro Manila, a day after it said that the region is now classified as "low risk" due to declining number of COVID-19 cases.

In a radio interview, DOH - Epidemiology Bureau (EB) Director Dr. Alethea de Guzman said: "That possibility is being studied by the DOH along with our sub-technical working group on data analytics. We will look into the possibility of staying under GCQ or possibly lowering it already."

The National Capital Region is currently under general community quarantine (GCQ) with some restrictions until June 30.

On Wednesday, the DOH said the NCR, which is the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, can already be considered as "low risk" because of the decline in new cases by 23 percent in the last two weeks, and a low average daily attack rate (ADAR) of 5.7.

De Guzman said they will also look at the current healthcare utilization rate (HCUR) in Metro hospitals when they evaluate the pandemic situation and make their recommendation.

She said they need to consider also the number of COVID-19 dedicated beds available for patients.

"The status of healthcare utilization is also one of the basis. We want to see if there are still hospitals and ICU beds that are still getting overwhelmed," she said.

As of June 21, the NCR registered an HCUR of 36.29 percent, while ICU bed utilization rate was at 45.83 percent, both of which are deemed as "low risk".

Meanwhile, members of the OCTA Research group yesterday warned that the country's hospital and healthcare system will suffer heavily and even be "pulverized" if the Delta (India) variant of the coronavirus spreads in the country.

As of last week, the DOH has reported at least 17 cases of the Delta variant in the country.

Father Nicanor Austriaco and Ranjit Rye, in separate briefings, stressed that the Delta variant is worse than the other variants of

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COVID-19.

Austriaco and Rye said that if a person infected with the original COVID-19 variant from Wuhan, China can spread the virus to two to three persons, and a person with the Alpha variant from the United Kingdom can infect four to five persons, the Delta variant that was first detected in India can infect six to eight persons at a time.

"The Delta variant is a game changer. Once it enters the country, it can pulverize the healthcare system because of the high number of people it can infect. The number of new cases would shoot up because it is very infectious," Rye said during the "Laging Handa" public briefing.

Rye said hospitals must be upgraded and be ready for any eventualities, while Austriaco said hospitalization rates will increase by 30 percent if the Delta variant enters the country, citing the experience of the United Kingdom.

In a virtual briefing in Malacñang, Austriaco said that apart from stricter border controls to prevent the entry of the deadly variant, the country must also implement better and enhanced contact tracing capacity.

"We hope for the best. We have very strong border controls but we hope that the government is also preparing for the worst case scenario," he said.

Rye said it would be better if the government already assume that the Delta variant has spread in the country so it can prepare hospitals and medical facilities and keep the country's borders closed.

He said the country should also prepare for the Delta Plus variant, which is said to be worse than the Delta variant. There is not much information or data about the new Delta Plus variant.

Rye said the government also needs to strengthen its testing, tracing, isolation strategy as well as its vaccination program while ensuring the continued implementation and compliance with the minimum public health standards.

"It is not yet time to ease border restrictions and our protocols, and it is not timely to remove our means of protections. In fact, we should continue to wear protections until we are vaccinated and even after we have been inoculated because we still need to follow minimum public health standards because of these threats and the Delta Plus," he said. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

### LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the public that an **EXTRAJUDICIAL SETTLEMENT** has been executed by the heirs of the late **LILIA O. QUIMSING**, on 11 June 2021, at Makati City, before Notary Public Atty. Mary Zoelli R. Velasco, per Doc. No. 226; Page No. 47; Book No. II; Series of 2021.

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Notice is hereby given to the public that an **EXTRAJUDICIAL SETTLEMENT** has been executed by the heirs of the late **AVELINO U. TAYAG** and **TEODORA CONCEPCION EVANGELISTA TAYAG**, on 08 June 2021, at Makati City, before Notary Public Atty. Mary Zoelli R. Velasco, per Doc. No. 132; Page No. 28; Book No. II; Series of 2021.