

## IATF includes 10 cities in vaccine priority list

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The government has placed at least 10 cities in its priority list for vaccine distribution to help them contain the spread of COVID-19, especially the highly contagious and possibly deadlier Delta variant.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. identified the cities as Bacolod, Iloilo, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Naga, Pangasinan, Quezon City, Taguig, Zamboanga, Dumaguete, Tuguegarao, General Santos, Naga and Legazpi, citing the high incidence of COVID-19 cases in these areas.

In Cagayan de Oro, for ample, Roque said the Interagency Task Force for the anagement of Emerging fectionous Diseases (IATF) is nding ventilators to boost e hospitals' capacity to aid riously ill patients.

According to Roque, the highly urbanized cities dubbed as "10 Plus" are included in the NCR Plus category now being monitored by the IATF due to the high incidence of COVID-19 cases. Roque is supportive of the call of Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) chairman Benhur Abalos to maintain the priority status for Metro Manila since it is the center of com-

He added the current measures against COVID-19 as well as the ongoing vaccination should be further intensified due to the possibility of a surge in infection.

Rogue underscored the importance of containing the virus in Metro Manila, where the number of cases remains substantial.

He also assured the public that the vaccines provided in vaccination sites, including those in SM-MOA Arena in Pasay City, are safe and effective.

Roque said unscrupulous individuals were reportedly distributing flyers, claiming that vaccines are fake.

At yesterday's briefing, UST professor Fr. Nic Austriaco, a molecular biologist, cited the need for greater protection against the new variants, especially the Delta and Delta Plus which mutated in India.

Part of an exit strategy, Austriaco said, is to build a COVID-proof wall around the National Capital Region by vaccinating a majority of the people in the NCR area.

"And so this is the pattern, it starts at the NCR and moves to the provinces. So, we vaccinate the NCR, we prevent the virus from traveling to the

important now because we are building a wall around the Philippines by vaccinating the NCR+8," he said.

Austriaco emphasized that the NCR+8 strategy "does not mean excluding the rest of the country."

"It means prioritizing the NCR+8 but there are still ongoing vaccinations to vaccinate the most at risk in the rest of the country and the distribution now, from what I can get from the data, is about 65 percent to the NCR+8 and 35 percent to the rest of the country," he said, referring to the vaccination distribution strategy.

To achieve containment, Austriaco said about 40 to 50 percent of the population should be inoculated. For herd immunity, he added the target is 70 to 80 percent of the entire population.

"And containment will protect us against future surges, it will allow further reopening and it will allow 'no mask' gathering of vaccinated persons and I pointed out that outbreaks will still occur but they will not spread rapidly. So, the surge potential of the pandemic will be severely diminished," he said.

"It is really attainable at this time that we will reach

munity in the NCR+8 by Christmas and this is something that we do together," Austriaco said.

If containment is attained, he said the government can relax minimum health standards. There will be no more requirements for mask, social distancing, if herd immunity is achieved, he said.

"In the same way, today, we do not test or quarantine people from measles because we already have herd immunity for measles in Manila, in the entire country. And I pointed out last week that we should encourage our *kababayans* to imagine a 'no mask Christmas,'" he said.

Meanwhile, the government is re-calibrating and deploying more SARS-CoV-2 vaccines to the Visayas and Mindanao regions as the NCR is now classified as low risk.

At a press conference following a vaccination site visit with medical experts from Israel in Taguig City yesterday, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said vaccines originally allocated to Metro Manila would be distributed to the Visayas and Mindanao.

"It's good that NCR is now at low-risk classification based on the daily attack rate or the number of new cases per day

crease in the number of cases has started to go down, which means the transmission of the case is slowing down. Therefore, it will give us more comfort to redeploy the vaccines to some areas which have been originally allocated for NCR," Duque disclosed.

"We have to be agile, we have to be able to adjust, given the situation of the vaccine scarcity. We have to be sensitive to areas experiencing a spike or a surge so we need to redeploy every now and then," Duque explained.

Aside from vaccines, he said, the DOH is also providing more medicines and medical supply to the Visayas and Mindanao.

Health Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje said they have been getting requests for additional vaccines even after the DOH allocated vaccines to various areas based on prioritization.

Cabotaje said there is still a limited supply but the government is exerting efforts to deploy more vaccines.

— With Mayen Jaymal

# COVID-19

## TALLY OF PHL CASES

AS OF JUNE 24

<b>ACTIVE CASES</b>			<b>51,410</b>
<b>CONFIRMED</b>	<b>6,043</b>		
<b>DEATHS</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>24,036</b>	
<b>RECOVERIES</b>	<b>4,486</b>	<b>1,302,814</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,378,260</b>		