



# Face shield requirement guided by science - DOH

by MAYEN JAYMALIN

Defending anew the wearing of face shields as required protection against COVID-19, the Department of Health (DOH) said yesterday that the government policy is guided by science and expert medical opinion.

Dr. Beverly Ho, DOH-Disease Prevention and Control Bureau director, stressed that using face shields to increase protection against the chance of transmitting COVID-19 is based on the recommendation of scientists and medical experts.

"We have been working with several independent experts, groups from scientific and medical fields to ensure that our initiatives and policies are all based on evidence and global practices," Ho said in a

virtual briefing.

"Our response is guided by science, from the PDITR (Prevention, Detection, Isolation, Treatment and Reintegration) strategy to the vaccination program," she added.

Ho's statement was in response to the criticisms from Senate President Vicente Sotto III and other groups against the use of face shields, particularly in outdoor settings.

Sotto even called for a legislative investigation to seek proof that the face shield policy is effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Ho said the DOH and their partner experts used systematic reviews in their process of recommending the use of face shields.

"With this, we assess the whole totality of evidence and not a piecemeal type, wherein

we will look for one article and that would represent the so-called evidence. There is a process. Our experts are using that process so that we are fair," she said.

But Ho said the DOH is open to policy changes if these are based on new scientific evidence. "If new studies will come out that will significantly alter the meta-analysis results, then we are open (to it)," she said.

## OCTA backs face shield

Yesterday, the OCTA Research Group expressed support for the government's decision to retain the policy requiring face shields in outdoor and indoor public places.

"We support the decision of the President to require the wearing of face shields for

now," OCTA fellow Guido David said in Filipino during a Lagging Handa briefing.

"We were not able to examine the studies conducted by experts, but we took it at face value that what they did has basis," he added.

Noting issues on efficacy and practicality, OCTA fellow Ranjit Rye earlier cited the need for more work and data to assess the policy.

Medicine professor Michael Tee, another member of the group, said face shields can serve as an additional protection to the public even as he recognized concerns such as its impact on the environment.

In rejecting proposals to scrap the policy, President Duterte cited on Monday the emergence of more aggressive COVID-19 variants for his decision.

## Accelerate vaccine rollout

Meanwhile, OCTA fellows lauded the current pace of the vaccination rollout in the country but urged the government to accelerate it further.

David said the Philippines may achieve sufficient level of protection before the end of the year if the current pace of around 195,000 vaccinations per day is sustained.

"We hope that we can accelerate this further, increase the number of jabs per day, so we can have a higher level of protection before the end of the year," he added.

The OCTA fellow also recommended including Bacolod, Iloilo City, Cagayan de Oro, Baguio and other areas experiencing surges in the priority list in vaccine deployment.

The government earlier identified Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, Metro Davao, Bulacan, Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga and Rizal – or the NCR Plus 8 – as priority areas for vaccine deployment.

Rye expressed support for the government's strategic choice to prioritize some areas, reiterating their position that vaccinating those in high risk areas first will benefit the whole country as it would prevent the spread of the virus.

Given the threat of more infectious variants, Rye said the government, private sector and the general public should be ready to respond in case of surges.

He recommended providing additional budget for bio-surveillance, testing, tracing and isolation.

– With Janvic Matute