Gov’t won’t stop use of Pfizer vaccine despite warning

BY JOCelyn MONTEMAYOR

GOVERNMENT will continue to use COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech despite reported side effects of heart inflammation among young adults and adolescents who received the drug, an official of the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (DOST-PCHRD) said yesterday.

Jaime Montoya, DOST-PCHRD executive director, said the Food and Drug Administration has taken note of the warning of the US FDA about rare cases of myocarditis or heart inflammation which occurred in a group of men 30 years old and younger and would include it in their data and advisory on the Pfizer jab.

The US FDA on Friday added a warning to the literature that accompanies Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID vaccine shots to indicate the rare risk of heart inflammation after its use. For each vaccine, the fact sheets for healthcare providers have been revised to include a warning that reports of adverse events suggest increased risks of myocarditis and pericarditis, particularly after the second dose and with onset of symptoms within a few days after vaccination, the FDA said.

The Philippines last week signed a supply agreement with Pfizer for the purchase of 40 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Delivery is expected to start in August.

GOV’T

has so far received some 2.5 million doses of Pfizer under the COVAX Facility. It was set to receive its first supply of Moderna vaccines on Sunday night.

Montoya said the US FDA’s move is no reason to stop administering the Pfizer vaccine.

He said based on the US FDA information, the inflammation is temporary and would not lead to death.

He added that further studies are being done to determine if the inflammation was really a result of the use of the vaccine or it may have occurred due an existing viral infection that the vaccine recipient was not aware that he has.

As of June 11, more than 1,200 cases of myocarditis or pericarditis have been reported to the US Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), out of about 300 million mRNA vaccine doses administered.

The US cases appear to be notably higher in males and in the week after the second vaccine dose. The US Center for Disease Control identified 309 hospitalizations from heart inflammation in persons under the age of 30, of which 295 have been discharged.

Health regulators in several countries have been investigating cases of myocarditis and pericarditis, more frequently found in young men, after a shock of Pfizer or Moderna, vaccines that are based on the mRNA technology.

The latest update from FDA follows an extensive review of information and the discussion by CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices meeting on Wednesday.

1.2M DOSES ARRIVING

The National Task Force (NTF) against COVID-19 said the Moderna shipment of 249,600 doses expected Sunday night requires a storage temperature of 2 Celsius to 8 Celsius and shall be given in two doses with a 28 day interval.

Of the total, 150,000 doses were bought by the national government and the 99,600 doses by the International Container Terminal Services Inc.

The government is also expecting a million doses of vaccines from Sinovac today. It will be the fifth delivery this month, for a total of 12 million doses since February.

The country has received some 16.2 million doses of donated and procured vaccines as of June 27 and more than 9 million individuals have been vaccinated.

Ceremonies for the administration of the 10 millionth vaccine have been set for today in Navotas City.

The government targets to vaccinate 50 million to 70 million by the end of the year.

Montoya, meanwhile, said the DOST is monitoring clinical trials on at least three possible oral medicines against COVID-19.

He declined to name the companies developing the “pills” but said one of the trials is being held in the country.

Montoya also reiterated the government’s call for everyone to get vaccinated. He said the more people are vaccinated, the faster the country could return to a life that is more normal or closer to the pre-pandemic level. – With Reuters