



NCR's granular lockdown needs Duterte's go-signal

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Malacañang said President Duterte has yet to give the go-signal for the pilot implementation of the granular lockdown in Metro Manila starting September 8 after the National Capital Region's (NCR) current

quarantine classification of Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) expires on September 7.

Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque made the statement after the Inter-agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases approved the implementation of granular lockdown in the National Capital Region (NCR)

starting September 8.

In a text message, Roque said the new IATF policy has yet to get the green light from the President.

"New quarantine responses still for approval of PRRD (President Duterte)," he said Sunday morning, September 5.

Malacañang said the government's pandemic task force was now "moving

towards" the direction of granular or localized lockdowns as these are more effective compared to the regular quarantine classifications that the public has grown accustomed to.

Last month, Roque said experts thought that a different tactic in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic was already necessary since the enhanced community quaran- ►8

COVID-19 UPDATE IN PH	
2,080,984	CONFIRMED CASES
20,019	NEW CASES
34,234	DEATHS
1,889,312	RECOVERED
As of September 5, 2021	



NCR's granular lockdown... 1 ◀

tine (ECQ) risk classification seemed to be no longer working.

Personal ECQ

OCTA Research fellow Dr. Guido David expressed concern that the implementation of granular lockdowns in Metro Manila may not be effective to curb the latest coronavirus disease (COVID-19) surge in the region.

"Based on historical evidence, granular lockdowns in the face of a massive surge have not been effective. I suppose this will need to come with a lot of hope and prayer for it to work," David said in a Twitter post on Saturday, Sept. 4.

"Other countries have tried this [but] our hospital system is not as strong as those in western countries," he added.

David was reacting to the announcement of Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez that the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases has already approved the implementation of granular lockdown in Metro Manila starting Sept. 8.

Under this scheme, the locked-down area may only be a group of houses or a subdivision, instead of an entire barangay.

"If the decision has been made, we just have to support it. [We must] continue to work together and hope for the best. I will continue to monitor trends in the NCR [National Capital Region] and the Philippines. Stay safe everyone. Your fate, and your family's fate, is in your hands when you go out of your homes," David said.

He, instead, encouraged the public to "go for personal ECQ if they can."

OCTA has been pushing for a two-week extension of the modified en-

hanced community quarantine (MECQ) in Metro Manila as the number of COVID-19 cases has yet to decrease.

Metro Manila's reproduction number is currently at 1.39.

It has been decreasing over the past week but the number is still above 1, which means the rate of COVID-19 infections remains high.

OCTA said that as long as the reproduction number does not drop below 1, Metro Manila will not see a reduction in the actual number of new COVID-19 cases.

David also clarified that the implementation of ECQ is not the only measure to curb the spread of transmission.

"We have been calling for mass testing since last year. This would help a lot. I think they [government] will bank on the vaccinations this time," he said.

COVID peak

David warned that the peak of the current COVID-19 surge in the Philippines might happen "five weeks from now."

David pointed out that the COVID-19 infection rate in the country has been decreasing but at a slow rate, due likely to the presence of the highly transmissible Delta variant or the higher mobility even with restrictions in place.

"[The] reproduction number in the Philippines is down to 1.32. At the current rate, the number of new cases in the country will hit its peak five weeks from now. But this can happen sooner, especially if new cases in the NCR [National Capital Region] peak soon," he said in a Twitter post on Saturday, Sept. 4.

"Right now, the entire NCR is a

hotspot," he pointed out.

In a Teleradyo interview on Sunday, Sept. 5, David said that the Philippines might reach around 30,000 daily COVID-19 cases by next week.

"Maaring umabot tayo ng 30,000 [cases] sa buong Pilipinas by end of September sa trajectory, pero di namin nakikita ang 43,000 [cases] sa Metro Manila alone (We may reach 30,000 across the Philippines by the end of September on the trajectory, but we don't see 43,000 cases in Metro Manila alone)," he said.

"It could happen baka (maybe) today or tomorrow. Nandyang ang possibility, definitely by next week mukhang mahihigitan natin 'yan [record-high daily tally] (There is the possibility, definitely, by next week we will likely be able to surpass the record-high daily tally)," he added.

The Philippines reported its record-high number of cases of 22,366 on Aug. 30.

Lifting of travel ban

David said the decision of the government to lift travel restrictions on 10 countries "could affect the numbers."

"But if they impose border restrictions for international travel, hopefully, it will not affect the situation as much as what is already happening in the country," he added.

OCTA has been hoping that the reproduction number will decrease to below 1 to see a reduction in the actual number of daily reported COVID-19 cases.

Reproduction number refers to the average number of secondary infections by each infected individual and is the primary indicator used by OCTA to study COVID trends in the country.

ECQ 'not effective'

Although she agrees with the

government's decision to impose granular lockdowns instead of community quarantine in areas with a high number of coronavirus cases, Vice President Leni Robredo highlighted the need for intensified testing, tracing, and isolation.

"Kung magga-granular lockdown tayo, okay naman iyong granular lockdown pero hindi pwedeng 'yun lang. Kung magga-granular lockdown tayo, buhusan na natin ng test, buhusan na natin ng trace. Iyong mga nakalockdown buhusan na natin ng ayuda para para maging effective siya (If we are going to do granular lockdown, it's okay but that's not all. If we are going to do granular lockdown, let's have more testing and tracing. And for those placed under lockdown, let's pour in cash aid so it will be effective)," she said on her Sunday radio show.

Under granular lockdowns, the local government units (LGUs) will only restrict the movement of residents in a specific street, zone, village, and building where there are high cases of COVID-19.

Robredo noted that the hard lockdown or enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) last year and April this year had their intended effects on the country because the number of cases slowed down then.

"Pero itong panghuling lockdown, hindi umepekto. Nakita natin eh. Hindi siya umepekto kasi hindi natin naramdaman iyong pag-slow down (But this latest lockdown was not effective because we did not feel the slowdown) in the number of cases," she said.

"Iyong mga tao, kulang 'yung ayuda. Iyong mga tao talaga magpipilit talaga iyan magtrabaho kasi kulang ang ayuda (The cash aid is not enough. People will really go out to work because the cash aid is not enough,"

she added.

The vice president pointed out that a lot of things are missing in the government's pandemic response, particularly in testing, tracing, and isolating.

On Saturday, September 4, the Department of Health's (DOH) case bulletin showed that the country logged a 28 percent positivity rate when the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends less than 5 percent positivity rate.

Robredo said this only shows that the Philippines is not doing enough tests to curb the virus' transmission. This is despite the highly transmissible and contagious Delta variant becoming the dominant strain in the country.

"Ang daming hindi detected. Ang problema nang hindi detected, kapag hindi mo 'yan naisolate, naghahawa 'yan ng iba (A lot of cases are undetected. The problem is, if they are undetected, you cannot isolate them and they will infect others)," she added.

Despite her call for better pandemic response handling, she agrees that businesses should be allowed to operate as long as they "conform to strict standards."

Robredo had earlier said the August surge is real because of the high number of COVID-19 cases her Bayanihan E-Konsulta initiative is handling on a daily basis. Last week, they had to set a 400-per-day cap on online consultation requests because their medical and non-medical volunteers are already overwhelmed.

On Saturday, the Philippines reported 20,741 cases, the second-highest daily tally since the pandemic began. This also marked the second straight day of more than 20,000 cases. That brought the total number of cases in the country to 2.06 million.