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# NRC in 'highest alert' level

*Except in Manila, MM hospitals 70% occupied, critical risk for COVID*

**By Willie Casas and Macon Ramos-Araneta**

**T**HE entire National Capital Region, except the city of Manila, is under the highest alert level for the coronavirus due to a spike in new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, the Department of Health said Monday.

With the Delta variant of the coronavirus being detected across all Metro Manila, Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said the region is on Alert Level 4—meaning

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local hospitals have more than 70 percent of their bed capacity occupied, and the area is under moderate to critical risk for COVID-19.

This developed as the Philippines logged a record-breaking high of 22,415 new COVID-19 cases Monday, bringing the total number of infections to 2,103,331.

The tally overtook the 22,366 new cases logged on Aug. 30, and pushed active cases up to 159,633, the highest since April 13, when there were 165,534 active cases.

The DOH said the country remained a high-risk area for COVID-19, as cases are expected to climb further in the coming weeks.

The Philippines had a 32-percent growth in cases in the past two weeks, compared to 72 percent in the previous monitoring.

In an online briefing, Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said the country also posted an average daily attack rate of 15.79 cases per 100,000 population for the period Aug. 23 to Sept. 5, up from 11.96 cases during the period Aug. 9 to 22.

The Philippines averaged 18,292 daily reported cases from Aug. 30 to Sept. 5, compared to 16,513 cases from Aug. 23 to 29.

"Nationally and some regions show a slowing down in the increase in the number of cases. However, the national case classification and health systems capacity remains at high risk," Vergeire said.

"Cases may still continue to increase in the next few weeks due to higher transmissibility of the Delta variant of concern," she

added.

High-risk areas included the NCR, Calabarzon, Cagayan Valley, Cordillera Administrative Region, Central Luzon, Northern Mindanao, Ilocos Region, Davao Region, Caraga, Western Visayas, and Soccsksargen.

The majority or 95 percent of provinces, highly urbanized cities, and independent component cities remain flagged under alert levels 3 and 4, Vergeire said.

All areas in the NCR have a positive two-week growth rate and a high-risk average daily attack rate, she added.

Only the city of Manila is not under alert level 4, which means an area has been classified as moderate to critical risk and has a health care utilization rate (HCUR) higher than 70 percent.

Metro Manila's average daily reported cases stood at 4,974 between Aug. 30 and Sept. 5, up from 4,400 cases a week before, based on DOH data.

There were 103 new deaths Monday, bringing the COVID-19 death toll to 34,337.

The Department of Health said 20,109 patients recently recovered, bringing total recoveries to 1,909,361.

The country conducted 73,264 tests, with a positivity rate of 28.8 percent, far from the international Nationwide, 76 percent of the ICU beds, 66 percent of the isolation beds, 72 percent of the ward beds, and 57 percent of the ventilators, were in use.

In Metro Manila, 73 percent of the ICU beds, 63 percent of the isolation beds, 74 percent of the ward beds, and 63 percent of the ventilators, were in use.

The increase in cases has affected the supply of oxygen, mechanical ventilators, and medicines, said Dr. Jose Rene de Grano, president of the Private Hospitals Associa-

tion of the Philippines (PHAPi).

Some hospitals in Regions 3 and 4, aside from Metro Manila, have also reached full capacity, he said.

De Grano said many health care workers have also contracted COVID-19.

PHAPi advised those with moderate and asymptomatic COVID-19 to go to isolation facilities or undergo home care with teleconsultations with doctors unless the case is an emergency.

The Lung Center of the Philippines in Quezon City said its COVID-dedicated beds are already 96 percent occupied.

This means out of the 164 COVID-dedicated beds at LCP, 157 are already occupied.

The hospital's occupancy rate at the intensive care unit is already at 97 percent.

Some patients at Ospital ng Imus in Cavite were being treated while they are inside their vehicles or even in public tricycles as the hospital's COVID-19 emergency room (ER) and ward are already full.

The hospital has temporarily stopped accepting patients with COVID-19.

Thirty of the hospital's personnel were still in quarantine after they tested positive for COVID-19.

Other hospitals have also reported they have reached full capacity.

The National Kidney and Transplant Institute (NKTI) in Quezon City said its COVID-19 dedicated beds and intensive care unit are already full.

Patients waiting for the results of their COVID-19 tests are in the ER together with non-COVID patients.

The NKTI said they are also transferring some patients to other hospitals.

The hospital said its dialysis schedule is already full, as well as slots for modular he-

modialysis.

NKTI executive director Dr. Rose Lique said they lack nurses.

The hospital advised non-COVID patients to undergo online consultation with doctors first before going to hospitals.

It also advised COVID-19 patients to coordinate first with their local government units and the One Hospital Command Center as to which hospital or facility they could go to.

NKTI said their supply of tocilizumab which is used to treat COVID-19 ran out the past three days.

At the San Lazaro Hospital in Manila, the supply of remdesivir was running low.

"This is the longest period of time that we see that the number of [COVID-19] cases arriving at the hospital is not going down. We are already starting to feel the [lack of supply] of remdesivir as it is out of stock, although we could still find some with much effort," Dr. Rontgene Solante, infectious disease specialist at San Lazaro Hospital, said.

The DOH supported the implementation of strict granular lockdowns and to shorten the interval between detection and isolation, enforce compliance to the minimum public health standards, and ramp up vaccination efforts to protect the vulnerable population to address the surge in cases.

The department on Monday recorded 279 new Delta variant carriers, including five in the Bangsamoro, confirming that all regions in the Philippines are now infected with the more virulent COVID-19 strain.

A total of 367 samples submitted by 60 laboratories, collecting institutions, and different Regional Epidemiology and Surveillance Units (RESU) were sequenced.

Of the additional 279 Delta variant cases, 245 are local cases, 21 are returning overseas Filipinos, and 13 were being verified.