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Page/s: A1

GRANULAR LOCKDOWN PILOT-TESTING SET; STAY-HOME LIFTED FOR GCQ

By Willie Casas, Othel V. Campos, Macon Ramos-Araneta and Maricel V. Cruz

THE government will lift a stay-at-home order in Metro Manila this week as it pilot

tests "granular lockdowns" in a bid to rein in COVID-19 cases and revive the economy, an official said Monday.

More than 13 million people in the National Capital Region—the country's economic heartland—have been in lockdown since Aug. 6 amid record infections fueled

by the hyper-contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus.

The move to ease restrictions from Wednesday comes after nationwide daily cases exceeded 20,000 for the past three days—double the number at the start of

Next page

GRANULAR LOCKDOWN LEVELS

Alert Level 4—No one would be allowed to go out of their homes except health care workers.

Alert Level 3—Only 30 percent of residents would be allowed to go out.

Alert Level 2—Only 50 percent of residents would be allowed to go out.

Alert Level 1—The least restriction under the new normal.

Source: DILG Secretary Eduardo Año





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Page/s: A2

Granular...

From A1

the latest lockdown—straining hospitals as they grapple with a shortage of nurses.

"Localized lockdowns will be piloted in Metro Manila," said presidential spokesman Harry Roque, explaining that a household, building or street could be targeted.

"It will be literally a complete lockdown if you are subject to granular lockdown -- even the food will be delivered to you."

There were no further details about how the more targeted measures would be enforced, but Roque said except for areas under a granular lockdown, Metro Manila would be under a general community quarantine (GCQ), the second loosest lockdown level.

The lighter restrictions in the NCR, which accounts for about a third of the country's economy, will enable many hard-hit businesses to reopen and spur local tourism.

Based on previous guidelines, restaurants will be allowed to accept diners and beauty salons permitted to operate -- albeit at reduced capacity.

Limited numbers of faithful will be allowed to attend in-person church services.

President Rodrigo Duterte said recently the country could not afford more lockdowns, after previous measures shattered the economy, left millions out of work, and sank the government deeper into debt.

But with only about 19 percent of the targeted population fully vaccinated and hospitals filling up fast, authorities have had few options to slow the spread of the virus.

The country's infection caseload has passed 2 million, with over 34,000 deaths.

The granular lockdown set to be piloted starting Wednesday in several areas in Metro Manila will have four levels that determine the activities allowed.

In an interview Sunday, Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said the pilot testing would be carried out until Sept. 30 and assessed every two weeks.

Only certain areas such as barangays, streets or subdivisions identified as high risk for the coronavirus would be placed under a granular lockdown, unlike community quarantines declared for an entire region or province, he added.

The strictest is Alert Level 4 where no one would be allowed to go out of their homes except health care workers.

Under Alert Level 3, only 30 percent of residents would be allowed to go out and 50 percent under Level 2, Año said.

Alert Level 1 would have the least restriction under the new normal.

It was unclear how these restrictions would be enforced.

Some local government units in the NCR have already implemented granular lockdowns in their respective areas.

Based on police data, there are 51 barangays in Metro Manila currently under a granular lockdown.

From Aug. 6 to 20, Metro Manila was placed under the strictest enhanced community quarantine amid the rise in cases of the highly infectious Delta coronavirus variant.

Metro Manila will go down to a GCQ from Sept. 8 until the end of the month, while 10 other areas in the country will

be under a modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) during the same period, Malacañang said on Monday.

The government earlier said agencies have agreed to replace region- or province-wide quarantine restrictions with localized lockdowns that may be limited to certain houses, streets, or villages.

Authorized persons outside their residence (APORs) will be allowed to leave areas under granular lockdown but will not be permitted to return while restrictions are in effect, Roque said.

"It will be literally a complete lockdown if you are subject to granular lockdown," he said.

The national and local governments will provide food aid to residents under granular lockdowns, Roque added.

The Inter-Agency Task Force on COVID-19 will release other granular lockdown guidelines that considered inputs from mayors later Monday or on Tuesday, Roque said.

"We will look at whether or not these intensified localized, granular lockdowns will be more effective," he said. *(See full story online at manilastandard.net)*

