



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Communications Management Unit

Newspaper: Malaya
Date: Oct. 26, 2021
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DOH: Delta variant still a threat

BY GERARD NAVAL

THE Delta variant of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to threaten the country, the Department of Health said yesterday as it contradicted the pronouncements of National Task Force (NTF) Against COVID-19 head Carlito Galvez that the more transmissible variant has already been defeated by the Philippines.

In a virtual press briefing, Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said that in fact, 380 new Delta variant cases were detected last Friday by the Philippine Genome Center.

"We cannot say that we have already defeated Delta because the variant remains here with us," said Vergeire, adding that: "Majority of the sequenced samples are Delta variant cases. This simply means it is still here."

The health official said what Galvez may have meant is that the country was able to respond well to the threat of the Delta

variant, pointing out that cases due to the variant did not reach the previous projections on its potential effect.

"We saw how the Delta variant affected India and other countries. So, we were really expecting that we will really see a large spike in cases and deaths, that we will be overwhelmed. But we weren't able to reach the projected number of cases. Our healthcare system wasn't overwhelmed. We were able to reduce the cases in just about a month and a half after Delta came in," Vergeire said.

Last week, Galvez declared that the Philippines was able to defeat the Delta variant of COVID-19 and attributed the "win" to the "drastic" measures that the country undertook, such as imposing community lockdowns early on.

On Monday, Vergeire reported 380 new cases of the Delta variant, or 50.9 percent of the 746 samples tested on October 22.

This brings to 4,811 the total number of the B.1.617.2 lineage of the coronavirus.

"The Delta variant (B.1.617.2/Indian lineage) remains the most common lineage (30.3%) nationally among sequenced samples," said Vergeire.

The latest genome sequencing also detected 104 cases of the Al-

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pha variant (B.1.1.7/UK); and 166 cases of the Beta variant (B.1.351/South Africa).

This brings the Alpha and Beta variant cases in the country to 3,042 and 3,479, respectively.

MAURITIUS VARIANT

In the latest batch of genome sequencing, the DOH reported that it has detected the first case of the B.1.1.318 variant, which was first detected in Mauritius back in June that caused a clustering of 120 cases.

"This is a variant under monitoring under the classification of the World Health Organization (WHO). It's a variant under monitoring that is currently being studied. There is no cause for panic although we have to remain vigilant," said Vergeire.

She said the case involved a

34-year-old male from Bacolod City, with travel history from the United Arab Emirates, who arrived in the country back in March 5.

He was tested positive last March 10 while his date of recovery was recorded on March 21.

DELTA SUBVARIANT

WHO Philippine representative Dr. Rabindra Abeyasinghe, during the Laging Handa public briefing, yesterday said the agency has not yet classified the Delta subvariant of the coronavirus, or the AY.4.2 that was first detected in the United Kingdom, as a variant of concern or interest.

Abeyasinghe also said there is still no reported Delta subvariant case in the Philippines.

"We are looking very closely at this. Right now, this is not classified as a variant of interest or variant of concern. The WHO continues to monitor the spread of this particu-

lar variant that has been detected," Abeyasinghe said, adding that the is still checking on the subvariant's transmissibility, the severity of the disease that it causes, and its response to vaccines.

"With more evidence, we will share that with the Philippines and other countries. I also want to add that the Philippines is also monitoring variants, and this particular variant has not yet been confirmed in the Philippines," he added.

Abeyasinghe said the Delta subvariant should not be a cause for alarm among Filipinos as he urged the government and the public to be more focused on making the new Alert Level System more functional to sustain the opening of the economy.

"This (Alert Level System) is something that we need to do and the more effectively we do it, we can move and accelerate the economic recovery," he said. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

