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DOH ORDERS REGULAR AND TIMELY SUBMISSION OF RESULTS FROM LABS

Press Release/01 June 2020

The Department of Health (DOH) today announced that it is working with its licensed laboratories to speed up the submission of test results to ensure a more precise collation, validation, and reporting of COVID-19 data.

In today's *Beat COVID-19 Virtual Presser*, Health Undersecretary Dr. Maria Rosario Singh-Vergeire and public health epidemiologist Dr. Troy Gepte both said that as more tests are conducted daily, COVID-19 laboratories continue to be swamped with more samples to process.

While the DOH has also been conducting a mass hiring program which includes data encoders, testing laboratories have also been adapting and improving their ability to submit test results to the Department so that timely and accurate data may be released to the public. "Mahirap maglinis ng information, ginagawa po natin ang lahat ng paraan," said Gepte. "It's a work in progress with the labs to report properly the data."

"Hangga't maaari sana, magawa nating most recent data ang ating hawak-hawak," said Gepte when explaining the advantages of the recent update on the nomenclature of cases to "fresh" and "late" distinctions. "Pero hindi po ganoon kadaling makuha ang information na ito."

According to Gepte, much of the testing is still subject to a manual verification process and paper-based case information forms are still widely used for the advantages they have in parts of the country that do not have fully developed digital infrastructure.

This makes case validation all the more critical to ensure that the publicly available data is accurate, said Singh-Vergeire, but this process takes time.

Singh-Vergeire explained that the DOH can only start the validation process once the laboratories have submitted test results to them, but this puts a strain on the testing system. Fortunately, there are more laboratories being accredited, with 49 currently licensed and 130 with pending applications.

"When all our laboratories submit consistently their daily reports, and they use the COVIDKAYA application, only then can we do close to real-time information-sharing between laboratories and the DOH," she added.

Both the Health Spokesperson and Gepte stressed that this is why it is important to separately understand the fresh and late cases, because separately examining how the trend of the fresh cases progresses over time will provide a more accurate view of how the COVID-19 situation is evolving as the country adjusts to the General Community Quarantine.

“Umpisa na po ng GCQ sa araw na ito sa NCR. Umpisa na rin po ng pagluwag ng mga guidelines magmula pa noong ECQ, ngunit kami ay nagpapaalala pa rin ng ating mga health protocols,” ended Vergeire. “Tandaan po natin, hindi po natin ito ginagawa para lamang sa ating sarili. Para rin po ito sa kaligtasan ng ating mga anak, magulang at mga mahal sa buhay.”

The DOH also recorded only three (3) deaths today- the lowest number to date, and emphasized how key indicators are showing signs that the COVID-19 situation in the country is improving as evidenced by the latest Case Doubling Time for Metro Manila which is at 6.41 days, and by the Critical Care Utilization Rate only at 33% for ICU beds and 19% for mechanical ventilators indicating that we are not overwhelming our health system.