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DOH: COVID-19 TREND STABILIZING BUT EXTRA VIGILANCE NEEDED TO RETAIN TREND AND CONTINUE REOPENING ECONOMY

Press Release | 18 February 2021

From the observed rise in cases in some areas in the country due to increased mobility during the holiday season, the Department of Health (DOH) reported that it is now seeing a plateau in the number of COVID-19 cases. As of February 15, the country has recorded a total of 550,860 COVID-19 cases, of which 27,588 or 5% of the cases remain active. The active case rate is an improvement from the 8-9% active cases reported previously. The country's recovery rate is also at 92.9% which is a good indicator in the country's management of COVID-19 cases.

In a DOH kapihan session with media practitioners, Director Alethea De Guzman of the DOH Epidemiology Bureau explained that "the epidemic curve shows we are doing so much better now. Although there's some peak in January, it's not as large as when we first started." At the same time, she reminded the public: "The message remains, we cannot let down our guards. It is an individual commitment: This is *my ambag*. *Nag-* face mask, face shield *ako*. *Kailangan tuloy-tuloy ang pag-practice natin sa minimum public health standards para tuloy-tuloy na bumaba at maging manageable ang mga cases.*"

While most regions are showing improvements, the DOH is currently closely monitoring Regions VII, XII and XIII, except Agusan del Sur. DOH is also seeing a slight increase (4% growth) in cases in Region 10 this past two weeks. Meanwhile, based on the projections conducted by the OCTA Research Group, Cebu could reach around 300 cases per day by the end of February if stricter measures are not implemented.

"Border restrictions may be very important to prevent other variants from coming into the country. Ultimately, it's not because you have the variant or not. The messaging is the same: we still need to be vigilant," shared Dr. Guido David of OCTA Research Group.

In closing, the DOH reminded that regardless of the presence of other variants, the Prevent-Detect-Isolate-Treat-Reintegrate (PDITR) strategy remains to be one of the best measures against COVID-19. First, minimum public health standards (MPHS) must be observed to prevent the susceptible from being exposed. To prevent the exposed from infecting others, early case detection through disease surveillance and testing, immediate contact tracing, and completion of isolation and quarantine must be implemented. Finally, to increase recovery among the infected, adequate health care capacity, increased dedicated beds, and strengthened coordination within healthcare referral systems must be ensured.

The DOH further called on the public to remain vigilant and alert to avoid the risk of transmission especially now as the country continues to reopen its economy. "While these stabilizing trends are welcome news to us, we want to reiterate that as we continue to reopen industries to boost the economy and provide livelihood for Filipinos, we must also shift our strategies from risk aversion to risk management," Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Singh-Vergeire said in a separate statement.

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“We know that confidence in the reopening of the economy has long been hinged on controlling the spread of COVID19—that is, keeping active cases low and being able to adequately take care of those who might get sick. If we want to retain these trends and see our economy fully reopen, we should all carry out our individual responsibilities to maintain caution and practice our MPHS,” USec. Singh-Vergeire added.