

WHO advises gradual lifting of coronavirus lockdowns

By CNN Philippines Staff

Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, April 22) — As President Rodrigo Duterte mulls over the fate of the Luzon-wide lockdown, the World Health Organization on Tuesday advised the gradual lifting of lockdown rules to continue curbing the spread of the coronavirus disease.

"This lifting cannot go all at once but should be gradual, in a phased manner," WHO Western Pacific Region Director Dr. Takeshi Kasai said in a virtual press briefing.

He said that while there is no one-size-fits-all solution to stop the spread of COVID-19, there are key principles that need to be assessed before considering completely lifting community quarantine rules.

"We need to address this issue as a risk management. Individual interventions need to be assessed from the technical perspective, its negative consequence, then the perceptions of the people, public, political, and then also in the market," he said.

The WHO regional chief said the lockdowns imposed by several countries have "proved to be effective in slowing down and reducing the transmission," warning relaxing the rules too soon can lead to a resurgence of the viral disease which killed nearly 177,000 people globally.

Kasai added there no concrete solution as to which approach is effective, but what is clear is that the goal of implementing lockdowns is to keep the number of cases below the healthcare capacity.

"We must also remember why we are doing this. We are doing this because we want to protect the people," he said.

To date, the country has recorded 6,599 cases of COVID-19, with the number of those surviving from the disease reaching 654, outnumbering the 437 reported deaths.

Health experts in a meeting with Duterte on Monday recommended a modified enhanced community quarantine, which will allow the easing of the Luzon lockdown in areas with few or no COVID-19 infections.

The majority of them, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said, suggested that lockdown rules be enforced in areas with a high number of COVID-19 cases.

Still, officials are wary of a potential second wave of infections if the lockdown is lifted too hastily.

Over 57 million Filipinos in Luzon await Duterte's decision as the enhanced community quarantine is set to end on April 30. The President is slated to announce his decision on Thursday, April 23.