

COVID spike due to community transmission – DOH

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MANILA, Philippines — Community transmission is now primarily driving the increase in coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 cases in the country, the Department of Health (DOH) said yesterday.

At a press briefing, DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said they have been studying the factors that contributed to the rising trend of COVID-19 cases.

“There are many factors that we are studying. There are cases that came from the repatriates, or what we call the ‘imported.’ Others are from workers and the closed institutions,” she noted, referring to detention facilities and even the Metro Rail Transit Line 3.

But Vergeire revealed that they could no longer see the link of current infections to any positive case. This means that the infection is coming from everywhere.

“We call it ‘community transmission.’ Most of what’s happening right now is because of community transmission,” she added.

According to DOH, “this is precisely why everybody needs to religiously subscribe to our minimum public health standards.”

“It may sound repetitive but we will not stop reminding everyone to wear masks, observe physical distancing, sanitize. This is DOH’s call to everybody, whether you be in the private or public sector,” she said.

The DOH added by going out, a person is also exposing his loved ones to an “unseen enemy.”

“Protect yourself. By doing so, you protect your family, you protect your community, you protect the nation,” the agency maintained.

Surveillance

Public health expert and epidemiologist Troy Gepte said the overall response to COVID-19 must focus on two things.

One is surveillance to be able to establish where and when a COVID-19 infection took place and who were affected.

“We have good examples from the local government units. They have tried to zero in not on whole city but on specific areas like barangay, neighborhood and even household,” he claimed.

Gepte added the response, which he described as “very straightforward,” must also be firmed up.

“We identify cases, find contacts, quarantine those contacts and for the cases, we put them in quarantine, either at home or in quarantine facilities,” he said.

He added the county has a lot of temporary treatment and monitoring facilities but they are “perfectly underutilized.”

‘Asymptomatic should be quarantined’

As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to increase, the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) has proposed that asymptomatic to mild positive patients be placed in quarantine facilities to “unload” hospitals.

According to PGH spokesman Jonas del Rosario, it is really the “mandate of quarantine centers to take care of asymptomatic to mild patients.”

He said the moderate and severe ones can be managed at the hospitals as quarantine facilities do not have the full capacity to handle them.

Del Rosario noted they understand the concerns of these facilities which wanted some assurance that they have “some backup” from hospitals.

“God forbid something happens to these patients whether they deteriorate again, we might have a problem. Quarantine centers are actually (wary to handle) such patients,” he told The Chiefs on One News Tuesday night.

Del Rosario noted that PGH’s admission of COVID-19 cases has been “slowly creeping up,” with up to 150 to 160 admissions over the past 10 days.

This has exceeded the 130 beds that the hospital had allocated for confirmed COVID patients. The highest number of cases it had admitted was 172.

He said that by transferring these patients to isolation facilities, more spaces for moderate to severe patients will open up.

Del Rosario disclosed they have recommended to the Inter-Agency Task Force that there should be an agreement between these facilities and hospitals over the transfer of patients.

“What has to happen is a sort of an agreement between a hospital and a quarantine center so that the center will not feel like ‘you’re dumping your patients to us and we are not equipped,’” he added.

The PGH is eyeing a partnership with the Philippine International Convention Center which has an isolation facility.

But Del Rosario admitted that some patients, although they have already recovered from the virus, do not want to be transferred to an isolation facility where they have to undergo quarantine for 14 days.

“It’s actually another hurdle that we have to overcome because our patients, when we try to transfer them to the quarantine facilities, some refuse. Maybe they feel more comfortable that they are in hospital or maybe they are already used to the environment and the people they are

with,” he said.

He added that in explaining the situation, they assure the patients that they are not being sent to the facility if they would be at risk.