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National

Chua: MECQ in NCR+ could lead to P2.1B in daily lost income, increase in hunger and unemployment

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by [Genalyn Kabilig](#)

Metro Manila and four nearby provinces would lose P2.1 billion in income per day if the government placed these areas under the two-week stricter modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ), according to acting Socio Economic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua.



Acting Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick T. Chua

Chua recognized that a stricter community quarantine level could have prevented coronavirus infections but would only leave more people hungry and unemployed.

The cost-benefit analysis was presented by Chua, acting National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) chief, to justify the government's decision to declare GCQ (general community quarantine) instead of MECQ in Metro Manila, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna and Rizal. Non-essential travel, mass gatherings, and indoor dining in restaurants are among the restrictions imposed in these areas, collectively known as NCR+, March 22 to April 4, 2021.

"A careful and calibrated approach is needed to care for both COVID-19 cases and the far majority facing hunger and other diseases," Chua said during a virtual press briefing Tuesday, March 22.

If the MECQ was imposed, Chua explained that this could have prevented 266,194 new cases of coronavirus and 4,738 deaths. Around 11,626 severe or critical COVID-19 cases could have also been avoided.

However, hunger, poverty and deaths from other diseases in Metro Manila would also have worsened, according to Chua.

"Kung bumalik po tayo sa MECQ, ito iyong mangyayari sa NCR – mayroon na po tayong 3.2 million hungry people, madadagdagan pa ito ng 58,000. Iyong unemployed na 506,000 na kasalukuyan na walang trabaho madadagdagan pa ito ng 128,000 (If we returned to MGCQ, this will happen to NCR. We already have 3.2 million hungry people and will increase by 58,000. The number of unemployed of 506,000 will also increase by 128,000)," he said.

"Iyong income loss P2.1 billion in NCR and adjacent area 'pag nag-MECQ tayo. Iyong mga mamamatay sa non-COVID 78,000 at iyong mga forgone treatment 75,000 (There would be income loss of P2.1 billion in NCR and adjacent areas if we went back to MECQ. The deaths from non-COVID will reach 78,000 and those who forgone treatment will reach 75,000)," he said.

Given such scenarios, Chua noted that the IATF has balanced all these factors and came out with the recommendations on GCQ with additional restrictions instead.

Among the NEDA recommendations are localized lockdown in a particular barangay or streets, public transportation at 50 percent but with increased frequency, promotion of bicycles as alternative transport, night-time curfew except for workers, essential travel only outside the Mega Manila bubble, prohibition on mass gatherings, as well as wearing of masks at home.

“We need to continue managing risk as COVID cases rise. We do this by focusing on localized quarantine and addressing the sources of highest risk so that jobs and livelihood of the far majority will not be affected,” Chua said.

With the rising COVID-19 cases, he said the issue faced now was not about economy versus health. “It is the total health of the people whether from COVID, non-COVID sickness or hunger,” he said.



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