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3rd mass vax drive short of 5M goal, low urgency for booster shot blamed

by [Willie Casas](#) — February 18, 2022, 12:55 am in [News](#), [Top Stories](#)

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The government acknowledged Thursday that its third nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive may fall short of its 5 million target, due in part to the low public urgency for booster jabs.

Extended until Friday, the “Bayanihan, Bakunahan” program has so far vaccinated about 2.6 million of its 5 million target, said Health Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje, during a press briefing.

"It's still slacking a bit... It needs to be sped up. We might not reach the 5 million target," she said.

"The uptick is not yet that quick, especially for the booster. They see this as important, but the... urgency is lacking. They do not see that they should get the booster immediately," she said.

The first two rounds of "Bayanihan, Bakunahan" administered 10.2 million vaccine doses from Nov. 29 to Dec. 3, and at least 6.4 million jabs from Dec. 15 to 22.

Cabotaje, chairperson of the National Vaccination Operations Center, said authorities have moved vaccination sites closer to residents, while some local governments also offer house-to-house inoculation.

She said the government will assess if the Bayanihan, Bakunahan drive should continue nationwide or if it should just target specific areas and sectors.

For example, Cabotaje noted only 68 percent of senior citizens, who are at risk of developing severe COVID-19, have been fully vaccinated.

"We might do a vaccination drive only for senior citizens," she said.

The government is also considering the use of company clinics as vaccination hubs, she added.

The Philippines has so far fully vaccinated about 61.9 million of its 109 million population.

At least 9.3 million have received booster jabs, Cabotaje said.

The Department of Health (DOH) reported Wednesday that five regions had the lowest vaccination rates in the country.

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) topped the list, with vaccination coverage of only 24.64 percent, followed by Soccsksargen, 53.69 percent; Central Visayas, 56.93 percent; Mimaropa, 60.13 percent, and Caraga, 61.19 percent.

Cabotaje said vaccine hesitancy, especially among senior citizens, is among the reasons for the low vaccination rate.

Meanwhile, the government is also ramping up pediatric COVID-19 vaccination so students can safely return to school by August 2022.

“We are really trying to vaccinate our children so that they will be safe also when they go to school. I think by August for this next school year, the plan would be that schools will really open,” Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said in an ANC interview.

“We’ve started already with the pilot implementation for face-to-face classes and the whole objective would be that eventually, by this next school year, everything will be starting,” Vergeire said.

The pilot testing of face-to-face classes started on Nov. 15, 2021 in several areas in the country.

Some 100 public schools—subject to strict health protocols—have participated.

Several private schools from areas deemed low risk for COVID-19 also started their own pilot face-to-face classes on Nov. 22, 2021.

So far, only those in kindergarten to grade 3, as well as senior high school, are included in the pilot run.

Education Undersecretary Nepomuceno Malaluan earlier noted that more grade levels will be included in the conduct of expanded face-to-face classes.

The government is currently conducting a COVID-19 vaccination drive for minors aged 5 to 11, on top of the inoculation of those 12 to 17, which started in November 2021.

The government on Wednesday night received the third batch of reformulated Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines for kids.

The government-procured reformulated Pfizer vaccines for children aged 5 to 11 arrived Wednesday night at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport-Terminal 3 via Air Hongkong flight LD-456.

The latest vaccine shipment consisting of 780,000 Pfizer doses brings to 223,229,820 the total number of COVID-19 jabs delivered to the country.



Willie Casas

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