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With most areas in the country under Alert Level 1, Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship Joey Concepcion believes it might be time to consider easing the country out of a public health emergency status and focusing more on the economy.



Shoppers flock to bargain stores along Ilaya Street in Divisoria, Binondo, Manila, on Oct. 14, 2021. (Photo by Ali Vicoy)

Concepcion said this days after the Inter-agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases placed the [National Capital Region \(NCR\) and many other areas under Alert Level from June 1 to 15, 2022.](#)

According to the IATF, 62 percent of the country’s entire cities and municipalities are under the least strict alert level classification during the first half of June 2022.

In a statement, Concepcion likewise suggested streamlining restrictions in the Philippines would reframe the country's approach to the pandemic, especially with the economy now entering a crucial stage in its recovery.

"This would be the right time for us to focus on the health of our economy. The faster way to economic recovery is to approach it now with our victories in mind," he said Sunday, May 29.

"An obstacle right now is the mindset that we are still under an emergency, but it seems we have already learned to live with Covid," he added.

Given how freely people are now moving around, the Go Negosyo founder believes that the government should now have a standardized set of restrictions all over the country, like requiring face masks in all common areas and a fully vaccinated status for indoor establishments.

"We would bounce back much faster if we apply a specific, easy-to-understand approach on restrictions," he said.

Concepcion also pointed out that the Philippines has maintained low infection and hospitalization rates even as cases have surged in Asia.

"The LGUs (local government units) have done their best to get people vaccinated," he said.

"It was not for lack of trying, but because of many other factors, not the least of which is vaccine hesitancy," he added.

Concepcion advised the next administration to address the excess supply of vaccines by giving these as second boosters to economic frontliners. A second booster shot is currently only recommended for healthcare workers, senior citizens, and those who are immunocompromised.

He added that several policy changes also point to a less heightened public health emergency in the country. Incoming tourists no longer need a Covid-19 test if they have at least one booster vaccination.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that it is working to declare an end to Covid-19 as a public health emergency of international health concern. However, it clarified that it is not the end of the pandemic. The country now remains generally at low-risk levels, and only a weak surge is expected over the next few weeks,

To protect the economy, Concepcion suggested continuing an alert level system based on healthcare and ICU bed utilization rates rather than on infection rates.

"There will be surges, and we will just have to apply what we already know about treating and containing the cases, but we should not be alarmed when infection numbers rise as long as our hospitals are within safe limits," he said.

Restrictions, he said, make it more difficult for businesses to generate the revenue and the taxes needed to pay back the country's debts which is P12.69 trillion as of March.

He added that even though the national government is proposing several measures to address external factors such as the rising prices of commodities because of the war between Russia and Ukraine, the economy cannot slow down any longer.

"This would be disastrous not just to our growth but in case another pandemic happens, and we need money to buy testing equipment and vaccines," Concepcion said.

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