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WHO may end COVID crisis



by **Vito Barcelo, Othel V. Campos** and 1 others — May 28, 2022, 1:40 am



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But says dropping its emergency status doesn't mean pandemic is over

The World Health Organization (WHO) is working to declare an end to the COVID-19 outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern but admitted doing so "doesn't necessarily mean the pandemic itself will be over."

“What we are trying to work toward this year is to end the emergency; to take the death and devastation of COVID-19 out of all countries, not just some countries,” said Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO’s Technical Lead for COVID-19.

“Many countries have announced that their emergency is over, but that the pandemic is not. I think that’s an important distinction,” she said at the sidelines of the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of WHO.

This developed as Metro Manila and various provinces across the country will remain under COVID-19 Alert Level 1 from June 1 to 15, Malacañang said Friday.

Acting deputy presidential spokesperson Kris Ablan announced the decision of the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Meanwhile, the government also lifted the protocol on pre-departure COVID tests for arriving fully-vaccinated international travelers starting May 30, 2022.

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said the updated protocol is part of its measures to revive the pandemic-hit economy.

“We are glad that the propositions we have worked on have been approved by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases and are now up for implementation. As we make it more convenient for tourists to visit the country, the public’s health and safety will remain the DOT’s priority,” she said, referring to the Department of Tourism.

The country’s COVID-19 task force has also removed the medical insurance requirement for students attending the limited in-person classes, Malacañang said on Friday.

Government earlier this year allowed colleges and universities under COVID-19 Alert Level 1 to hold face-to-face classes at full capacity, but those attending physical classes must be enrolled in PhilHealth or any insurance provider.

Also on Friday, the government said almost 2 million COVID-19 vaccine doses are expected to expire if they are not used by June 30.

Health Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje said the 2 million doses is not yet the final count.

Aside from Metro Manila, the following areas will be under the most relaxed COVID alert level:

Cordillera Administrative Region: Abra, Apayao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, Baguio City
Region 1: Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Dagupan City.

Region 2: Batanes, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, City of Santiago

Region 3: Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Angeles City, Olongapo City

Region 4-A: Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Rizal, Lucena City

Region 4-B: Marinduque, Oriental Mindoro, Romblon, Puerto Princesa City

Region 5: Albay, Catanduanes, Naga City

Region 6: Aklan, Capiz, Guimaras, Iloilo, Bacolod City, Iloilo City

Region 7: Siquijor, Cebu City, Lapu-Lapu City, Mandaue City

Region 8: Biliran, Eastern Samar, Southern Leyte, Ormoc city, Tacloban City

Region 9: Zamboanga City

Region 10: Bukidnon, Camiguin, Misamis Oriental, Cagayan de Oro City, Iligan City

Region 11: Davao City, Davao Oriental

Under Alert 1, establishments and public transportation can operate at full capacity, while schools can also implement in-person classes.

The IATF approved Resolution 168 exempting all fully vaccinated and boosted foreign nationals from the RT-PCR test requirement.

Based on the resolution, the visitor must be at least 18 years old and must have received the primary series of COVID-19 vaccines and at least one booster shot.

Also exempted from the pre-departure RT-PCR requirement are foreign nationals aged 12 to 17 who have received their primary COVID-19 vaccines and children below 12 years old and traveling with fully vaccinated parents or guardians.

The same exemption guidelines apply to Filipinos traveling to the Philippines.

"The DOT sees this development as a win for the local tourism industry as welcoming more tourists in the country will yield more revenues for our MSMEs and restore more jobs and livelihoods in the sector," Puyat said.

Meanwhile, DOT no longer requires travel insurance for arriving passengers, but having one is still highly encouraged. All types of vaccinations certificates, regardless of

country of origin, will also be accepted.

Based on recent data, a total 517,516 foreign tourist arrivals have been recorded in the Philippines from February to May 25, 2022.

Americans topped the roster at 104,589, followed by South Korean at 28,474, and Canadians at 24,337. Australian nationals, British, and Japanese tourists came next on the list at 23,286, 20,846, and 13,373 arrivals respectively.

“We will have the final numbers by end of May. But until June, we are expecting 2 million to expire if they remain unused by the end of June,” Cabotaje said.

Cabotaje said the DOH has submitted a demand forecast of 34 million doses.

Cabotaje said more than 73.7 million people have already been vaccinated with at least one dose while 69.1 million have been fully inoculated against the virus.

Cabotaje said the country is vaccinating around 200,000 people per day. She said that 36,000 frontline healthcare workers and around 83,000 senior citizens have received their second booster dose.

The DOH earlier said that getting a second booster dose will strengthen immunity against the virus as well as the Omicron subvariant BA.2.12.1, of which there are a total of 17 cases detected in the country.

People seeking to be vaccinated must present their vaccination card showing the date of their first booster dose and any valid government-issued ID.