

# Experts draw road map to normalcy

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TO help the country's transition towards normalcy, Go Negosyo founder Jose Maria "Joey" Concepcion 3rd and the Advisory Council of Experts (ACE) have drawn up a list of recommendations that they will submit to President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.

"The President's vision for our country inspired me to take action and ask some of our country's foremost experts to help lay down parameters for a transition strategy for a better normal, one that encourages

economic activity without risking the public's health," Concepcion said.

His sentiments were shared by the ACE, which is composed of some of the country's foremost authorities on public health, molecular biology, disaster resilience, data insight and analysis and economics, which reiterated the importance for the government to prepare a pandemic exit strategy. In the panel are former National Task Force Against Covid-19 special adviser Dr. Teddy Herbosa, Covid-19 Technical Working Group chairwoman Dr. Nina Gloriani, Vaccine Expert Panel member Dr. Rontgene Solante, infectious diseases expert Dr. Benjamin Co, Philippine College of Physicians President Dr. Maricar Limpin, health reform advocate Dr. Tony Leachon, OCTA Research fellows Dr. Michael Tee, Prof. Ranjit Rye, Dr. Guido David and Fr. Nic Austriaco, economist Romy Bernardo, and Go Negosyo Senior Adviser Josephine Romero.

"Neighboring countries' practices and data show that we can do so without living in constant fear that we will forever live in a state of pandemic," the group noted.

The list of Concepcion, the former presidential adviser for entrepreneurship, and ACE includes suggestions such as an alert level plan similar to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council's color-coded system.

The "traffic light" system uses colors to denote the different stages of readiness, their corresponding pre-requisite metrics using health care utilization rates (HCUR) and average daily attack rate (ADAR), and mask rules for each region.

Green means masking outdoors becomes optional but will remain mandatory in closed spaces and inside public transportation.

Yellow means the local government decides masking rules with consideration to its HCUR and ADAR, and based on the capacity of the region.

Red means masks are mandatory in both indoor and outdoor situations.

The panel also recommended that at least 70 percent of those who have completed their primary vaccines are given a booster dose; the government should define each resulting restriction on activity based on its regional applicability, incentivize good pandemic status with relaxed masking rules and prioritize the granting of Certificates of Product Registration (CPR) for Covid vaccines. For those who may not be in the priority segment but nevertheless wish to be protected through vaccination, Covid vaccines can be available through commercial channels. This requires the lifting of the state of public health emergency to encourage the pharmaceutical companies to apply for their CPRs as their emergency use authorizations

(EUA) expire. There may also be a need to buy vaccines that cover the highly-contagious Omicron variant. The private sector will need to know whether or not the vaccines already have their CPRs or are still covered under EUA, as it may need another tripartite agreement for vaccines that are under EUA, it said. This will allow those who can afford vaccines to get a prescription from a licensed doctor and get their shots in clinics, hospitals, drugstores, and pharmacies. Meanwhile, the poor can be assisted by the government to procure their vaccines. “The wearing of face masks and vaccinations remain our most important defenses against the pandemic,” Concepcion said. “Under this system, we maintain economic activity, keep our countrymen safe, and incentivize regional governments who do well in their pandemic response.”