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CABINET SECRETARY KARLO NOGRALES
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CABSEC NOGRALES: Magandang tanghali po sa ating mga kababayan at sa Malacañang Press Corps.

Una po sa lahat, nagpapasalamat kami sa kooperasyon at pakikipagtulungan ng lahat – mula sa mga opisyal ng Simbahan hanggang sa mga deboto – sa taimtim na paggunita sa Pista ng Itim na Nazareno sa gitna ng tumataas na bilang ng COVID-19 sa bansa. Ito po ang mensahe dito: May saysay ang pakikiisa sa pagsunod sa minimum public health standards. Ganito po tayo magtatagumpay laban sa coronavirus, lalo na ngayon na ang ating bansa, ayon sa Department of Health (DOH), ay nasa critical risk classification.

Umpisahan natin ang briefing: Sa regular Talk to the People kagabi, ito po ang ilan sa mga salient points: Binigyan-diin ni Pangulong Rodrigo Roa Duterte na patuloy ang kaniyang pakikipagpulong sa mga opisyal at pakikipag-usap sa publiko sa gitna ng tumataas na kaso ng COVID-19 sa bansa. Kasama ito sa trabaho. Wika ng Pangulo, ‘Your government is here for you, and we assure the public that government services will remain unimpeded even in the face of the rising number of COVID cases.’ Ayon sa Pangulo, ‘in the process tamaan man kami ng COVID-19, *simbakulang*, kasama ito sa aming trabaho.’

Samantala, ini-report ng DOH na 60% ng samples na kanilang na-sequence ay positibo sa Omicron variant. Kaugnay nito, papaigtingin natin ang pagpapatupad ng Prevent-Detect-Isolate-Treat-Reintegrate (PDITR) strategies habang patuloy nating pinapaalala sa publiko ang halaga ng Mask, Hugas, Iwas, plus Ventilation, plus Bakuna.

Alinsunod naman sa naunang utos ng Pangulo, ayon sa Department of the Interior and Local Government, nasa 748 PNP personnel ang na-deploy sa 270 DOH-BOQ-DOT hotels that currently house 18,562 returning overseas Filipinos under quarantine.

Ini-report din kagabi sa Talk to the People ang target ng Administration na mabakunahan ang siyamnapung milyong (90-M) Pilipino bago matapos ang June 2022. Sa bilang na ito, nasa 28 million to 30 million ang kailangang mabakunahan na hindi pa bakunado, kasama na rito ang tatlong milyong unvaccinated seniors.

Binanggit din kagabi sa Talk to the People na inaprubahan na ng Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ang compassionate special permit ng Bexovid, ang first generic version ng Pfizer Paxlovid.

Ano po ang implikasyon nito? Magiging mas mura ang gamutan at maa-access ang gamot na ito sa DOH at government hospitals. Mababawasan ng Bexovid ang risk ng hospitalization or death by 89% kung maibibigay sa pasyente sa loob ng unang tatlong araw ng sintomas. Mamaya ay makakasama natin si Health Undersecretary Leopoldo “Bong” Vega para pag-usapan ito.

Inulat rin ng FDA na may dalawang manufacturer ng self-administered COVID-19 test kits ang nag-a-apply ng special certification. Ito ay kasalukuyan nilang ini-evaluate.

Samantala, muling umapela ang Pangulo sa mga Pilipino na magpabakuna kontra COVID-19. Kaugnay nito, ayon sa National COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard, as of January 10, 2022, nasa mahigit 114 million na ang total doses administered; nasa mahigit 62 million ng ating mga kababayan ang nakatanggap na ng first dose, habang halos 53 million ang fully vaccinated. Nasa mahigit 3.5 million naman ang nakatanggap ng booster dose, as of January 10, 2022.

Hindi kami magsasawa sa pagpapaalala: Ang mga bakuna natin laban sa COVID-19 ay may Emergency Use Authorization mula sa Food and Drug Administration; lahat ng ito ay ligtas at epektibo. Lahat, anuman ang brand, ay nagbibigay ng proteksyon laban sa severe at critical cases ng coronavirus.

I-share ko lang po sa inyo na ang aking ina ay bakunado ng dalawang doses ng AstraZeneca at nag-booster na rin po siya ng AstraZeneca. Ito ang proteksyong baon-baon nya mula pa sa umpisa.

Wala pong bayad ang mga bakuna; they are all free! Puwede na po ang walk-in. Para sa mga nabakunahan, puwede na kayong magpa-booster shot gamit ang Sinovac, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna at Sputnik pagkatapos ng tatlong buwan; at dalawang buwan naman kung ang gamit ay Janssen.

Kanina nabanggit ko na na mayroon po tayong tatlong milyon na senior citizens na hindi pa po bakunado.

Pakiusap po namin sa mga lolo at lola, at sa kanilang mga mahal sa buhay: For yourselves and your families, please, please get vaccinated. Our seniors are vulnerable to COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization, and I quote, “*Senior citizens are at highest risk of deaths due to COVID-19.*” And in the country, “*Seven out of ten deaths are in patients 60 years old and above.*” Mas kailangan po nila ang dagdag-proteksyon na ibinibigay ng bakuna, kahit ano pa ang brand nito.

Inuulit namin: Hindi na po problema ang suplay ng bakuna. In fact, nasa 2,703,870 doses of Pfizer vaccine na donasyon ng Estados Unidos sa pamamagitan ng COVAX Facility ang ating

natanggap noong Linggo, January 9, 2022. Habang noong Biyernes, January 7, dumating ang 150,540 doses ng Moderna vaccine. Ito ang unang dalawang vaccine deliveries para sa taong 2022. Suma-total ay mayroon na tayong 213,487,520 total vaccines delivered simula February 2021.

Samantala, naglabas ng isang Joint Memorandum ang Department of Health at Department of Trade and Industry na naglalagay ng purchase limit or cap sa Paracetamol, Carbocisteine, at iba pa naka-flash sa inyong screen.

Halimbawa, makikita ninyo sa infographics na ang 500 milligrams na tableta ng Paracetamol, nasa dalawampung tabletas lamang ang maaaring bilhin ng isang consumer habang nasa animnapu naman per household.

Nakasaad din sa Joint Memorandum na ito na pinagbabawal ang online selling ng mga nasabing gamot, unless otherwise permitted by the FDA.

Pumunta naman tayo sa COVID-19 Update. Ayon sa January 10, 2022 COVID-19 Case Bulletin ng DOH: Nasa 33,169 ang bagong kaso ng COVID sa bansa. Sa bilang na ito, 97.1% ang mild at asymptomatic.

Napanood ninyo kagabi sa Talk to the People, ang severe at critical cases ay comparatively lower than that observed during our September peak. ‘Yan po ang kailangan natin i-emphasize. May mga nagsasabi na bakit pa kailangan magpabakuna o magpa-booster kung mahahawa ka rin sa COVID?

Please allow us to reiterate that the protection provided by vaccines comes not just in the form of reducing the likelihood of infection; it also comes in the form of reducing the risk of developing severe COVID symptoms. Kapag bakunado po kayo, malaki po ang chance na kung mahawa man kayo ng COVID, magiging mild lang ang symptoms ninyo.

Isang bagay ang hindi maitatanggi: Gumagana ang lahat ng bakuna, anuman ang brand ng mga ito. Vaccines work regardless of brand. Let me repeat our figures: Ninety-seven point one percent (97.1%) of our 33,169 new COVID cases exhibit mild symptoms or are asymptomatic. Kaya kahit mas marami tayong kaso ngayon kaysa noong Setyembre, mas mababa ang bilang ng kaso ng severe at critical cases dahil ito sa malawakang pagbabakuna.

Sa iba pang datos, nasa 46% ang ating positivity rate habang nasa 93% naman ang porsiyento ng gumaling at nasa mahigit 2.78 million ang naka-recover. Malungkot naman naming ibinabalita sa inyo na kahapon ay mayroong 145 ang naidagdag sa bilang ng mga pumanaw dahil sa coronavirus. Nasa 1.74% ang ating fatality rate, at ito ay nanatiling mas mababa sa 2% global average.

Samantala, patuloy ang pagtaas ng ating hospital care utilization rate. Nasa 52% ang utilized ICU beds sa Metro Manila, habang nasa 38% naman sa buong bansa; 54% ang utilized isolation beds sa Metro Manila, habang nasa 41% sa buong bansa; 67% ang utilized ward beds sa Metro Manila, habang 41% naman sa buong bansa; 25% ang utilized ventilators sa Metro Manila at 17% sa buong bansa.

Kaugnay nito, ito po ang mensahe namin: Tumulong tayong protektahan ang ating healthcare system. Sa mga walang sintomas o may mild or moderate na sintomas, puwedeng mag-isolate sa bahay. This will help us prioritize healthcare facilities for those with severe and moderate cases of COVID, or high-risk COVID cases with comorbidities.

Paalala lamang po: Ang home isolation ay papayagan kung, una, hiwalay ang inyong kuwarto sa ibang mga miyembro ng pamilya; pangalawa, kapag may sariling banyo ang kuwarto; at pangatlo, kapag walang kasamang matanda, bata o may comorbidities.

So let's do our part to prevent the spread of COVID. If you suspect that you have COVID, stay home, isolate at makipag-ugnayan sa inyong LGU o sa doktor tungkol sa telemedicine. Makikita sa inyong screen ang ating telemedicine partners.

Bago po tayo magtapos, some updates lang po regarding Typhoon Odette relief operations: Iniulat po ng Office of Civil Defense na nasa mahigit 122 million pesos na ang kanilang naibigay na assistance habang mayroon 487.5 million fund for shelter assistance ang inilaan ng Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development at ng national Housing Authority.

Sa Bagyong Odette pa rin, nagpahayag ng pagsang-ayon ang Pangulo sa suhestiyon na magtayo ng mini-saw mills o tistisan ng kahoy sa mga lugar na sinalanta ng Bagyong Odette.

On other issues: The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported that foreign direct investment (FDI) net inflows rose for the fifth straight month in October 2021, registering a 98.9% growth from US\$430 million in October 2020 to US\$855 million in October 2021.

Dito po nagtatapos ang ating opening statement. Guest po natin ngayon si Department of Health Undersecretary Leopoldo “Bong” Vega. Usec. Vega, ano po ba itong Bexovid? At paano po ito makakatulong sa mga pasyenteng may COVID-19? At paano po maa-access ang gamot na ito? The floor is yours, Usec. Bong Vega.

DOH USEC. VEGA: Magandang hapon po sa lahat, Sec. Karlo, sa lahat ng nakikinig ngayon. At sa aking mga kasama ho sa Department of Health at saka ibang ahensiya ng gobyerno at saka media partners po natin, magandang tanghali po sa inyong lahat.

Unang-una, Sec. Karlo, at least ngayon, nailagay tayo sa isang situation na mayroon tayong pag-asa or hope compared noong 2021 at 2020 kasi mayroon na tayong mga bagong gamot na puwede nating makuha sa 2022. Una nito ay itong antiviral drug 'no na nagawa po ng Pfizer at ang generic name nito is Nirmatelvir. At ito ay unang nakita po at na-examine at na-research doon sa Pfizer, sa USA, at nakita nila sa data ho nila sa lahat ng mga pasyenteng nabigyan po nito, nag-reduce ang kanilang hospitalization and death to about 90%. Ang unang antiviral kasi na lumabas sa market, sa merkado ay iyong Molnupiravir, isa din iyong antiviral drug na ginawa ng Merck. Pero ngayon sa kakalabas ngayon ng mga resulta, mga 30 to 40% ang kaniyang reduction in hospitalization and death.

So itong Bexovid ngayon ay ito iyong trade name ng Nirmatelvir o sa US, ito iyong Paxlovid. Itong antiviral na po ito, ito ay maibigay sa mga pasyenteng with mild and moderate lalung-lalo na sa mga high-risk, ano, kasi talagang bababa ang kaniyang hospitalization and even death.

Ngayon, itong Paxlovid to be given in five days at nasa isang package nga iyan, itong Bexovid o Paxlovid for the next five days. Ito ay talagang makakabigay ng medyo pag-asa sa ating 2022 lalung-lalo na itong pagharap natin sa COVID-19. At least mayroon na tayong mga gamot aside from the vaccination that we are pursuing.

So iyon, Sec. Karlo.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Maraming, maraming salamat, Usec. Bong Vega. Please stay on board for questions from the media. And we'll now go to Usec. Rocky for those questions.

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Good afternoon, Sec. Karlo, and kay Usec. Vega. Magandang hapon din po sa ating mga kasama sa MPC.

Una pong tanong mula kay MJ Blancaflor ng Daily Tribune: May we request for Palace reaction daw po, Vice President Robredo says the national government should use incentives to encourage the unvaccinated to get COVID-19 jabs instead of threatening to arrest them.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Opo. Mayroon naman po tayong mga incentives na binibigay. Kung naalala po ninyo at the start, noong umpisa pa lamang nitong dumating sa ating bansa iyong mga vaccines 'no, nagkaroon ng mga incentives ang iba't ibang ahensiya ng gobyerno katulad ng Department of Transportation – nagbigay sila nang libreng sakay 'no sa kanilang MRT, LRT and PNR line during the first days 'no. Ang Department of Tourism was also... nagbibigay din po sila ng incentives during that time sa mga free access sa ating mga tourism establishments, tourist spots 'no. So kung hindi ako nagkakamali, libreng makapasok sa Fort Santiago noon. And then doon sa private sector din, nagbibigay din po sila ng mga insentibo noon tulad ng mga restaurant 'no – nagbibigay sila ng mga diskuwento.

Right now, kung titingnan natin, nag-shift na tayo sa alert level systems ano at sa alert level systems po natin, mayroon din po tayong binibigay na incentives based on our alert level system.

Kung matatandaan ninyo sa Alert Level 2, sa Alert Level 3 at maging sa Alert Level 4, ang incentive po for fully vaccinated ay makakapasok po sila sa mga indoor establishments that we have defined sa alert level systems natin. Katulad na lamang sa Alert Level 2 at Alert Level 3, pinapayagan natin iyong indoor capacities, halimbawa ng dine-in establishments, mga restaurant, puwedeng pumasok doon ang mga fully vaccinated lamang.

Doon sa MICE events, sa tourist attractions, sa cinemas, movie houses even religious gatherings, personal care establishments, gyms, fitness studios, even film production – ang pinapayagan natin sa indoor are only fully vaccinated. So ito po ‘yung incentives for fully vaccinated, makaka-access po sila sa mga indoor establishments that are well-defined under our alert level systems.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Second question po niya: Some groups daw po are opposing the IATF guidelines on shortened quarantine isolation period for fully vaccinated health workers who got exposed to COVID-19 or acquired COVID-19. They say that it will further accelerate the spread of infection and may also endanger the patients and that it shows that medical frontliners are treated as modern-day slaves. How will the Palace address these concerns?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Hindi naman po. Actually, kung babasahin ninyo iyong resolution, iyong latest resolution ng IATF, nakalagay po doon na—for instance ‘no, for those who are isolated dahil nga mayroon silang mild or asymptomatic na COVID, so mayroon tayong rules on number of days for isolation ‘no. Shinorten lang natin under extreme circumstances but always, always po if it is recommended and with clearance from the hospital. Kasi iyong mga hospitals mayroon po silang tinatawag na Hospital Infection, Prevention and Control Committees – so it is these committees ng hospitals that will determine kung puwede bang ma-shorten.

For instance, iyong sa pagku-quarantine, naka-quarantine dahil na-expose. So it is the hospitals, the health experts in those hospitals, those committees na mag-a-assess doon sa mga na-expose na health care workers kung fit na ba sila to be brought back in circulation ‘no. So iyon po, under our resolution, it’s very clear – it has to pass through those committees. And again, it is only done in extreme circumstances kung kinakailangan dahil nga po need nga po noong hospitals na iyon ‘no and para hindi mag-suffer ang health services from those hospitals.

Maybe we can ask Usec. Bong Vega to add and chime in to that.

DOH USEC. VEGA: Thank you, Sec. Karlo. Unang-una itong IATF resolution ay nakabase naman sa certain basis ‘no and these are pre-reviewed data coming from the US at saka sa Europe. Alam naman natin na itong Omicron even with the spike in cases are mild and they found out that because of this high transmissibility, ang incubation period niya is about 2 to 3 days lang compared iyon sa original Wuhan virus COVID-19, iyon ang mas mahaba iyong incubation period 5 to 7 days kaya matagal mong kailangan ma-isolate at ma-quarantine.

Now itong pag-ano natin sa health care workers, eh alam natin kasi 93% na kasi bakunado and they are protected in a way against the virus especially this Omicron for hospitalization and even death ano. And ang reason naman na naging 5 days ‘yan especially for the asymptomatic is because we believe that on the 5th day if you are vaccinated, the viral load is very low and you can no longer transmit the virus to—or you are not contagious. So ito ‘yung talagang dahilan kung bakit inuna natin ang health care workers kasi madali silang ma-monitor ng kanilang Infection and Control Committee diyan sa hospitals. So they are being monitored and besides they are also fully vaccinated, 93% even with booster.

Now ang gagawin po namin, nagpu-propose na rin ang DOH na i-streamline natin ‘to sa general public ano because—para to harmonize the isolation and quarantine protocols we would like this proposed by the Department of Health and of course this proposal will be sent to the IATF for consideration and approval na mag-a-isolate na ho tayo once—kasi 60% naman natin ngayon dito sa bansa eh ano na eh, Omicron, and basically we can actually isolate the asymptomatic cases for—especially if you are vaccinated for 5 days, similar to the health care workers.

Over to you, Sec. Karlo.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Thank you. Usec. Rocky?

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Susunod pong tanong mula kay Leila Salaverria ng Inquirer: Secretary Galvez daw po said the increasing number of cases is hampering the vaccination drive because health care workers and LGUs are focused on caring for those in the hospitals and because the health care workers are getting infected or exposed. How will the government address this? How does it plan to ensure there will be enough personnel to conduct the vaccination especially since the President has ordered the NVOC to increase the vaccination rates outside the National Capital Region?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes. According to Secretary Charlie Galvez doon sa Talk to the People kagabi, they in the NVOC and Secretary Galvez will be looking in augmenting ‘no. So magkakaroon ng proposal for manpower augmentation to make sure na mas maraming pong manpower... iyong mga manpower requirements natin to increase our vaccination on the ground especially sa mga regions, especially sa mga provinces ay gagawin po ng NVOC and through Secretary Charlie Galvez with the full support of the President.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Sec. Karlo, ang susunod na magtatanong via Zoom si Mela Lesmoras ng PTV.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV4: Good afternoon, Secretary Nograles, at kay Usec. Vega ay kay Usec. Rocky. Secretary Nograles, unahin ko lang po 'yung sitwasyon nga sa NCR dito sa pagtaas ng COVID-19 cases. Sabi rin kasi ng OCTA Research, nasa severe outbreak na ang NCR and even the DOH reported last night na patuloy na rin iyong pagtaas ng cases dito sa NCR na nangunguna rin nga sa may pinakamaraming kaso ng COVID-19. My question is: Is the government po still on top of the situation at magku-qualify na ba iyong sitwasyon ngayon para sa higher alert level sa NCR?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes. Actually, kung titingnan mo, to be very transparent about it, mayroon kasi kaming decision metrics and this can be found in IATF resolution number 152. So, dito makikita po natin, lagi kong sinasabi na tatlo iyong tinitingnan namin dito iyong two-week growth rate at iyong Average Daily Attack Rate. So, kung titingnan natin halimbawa sa Metro Manila, nasa high na po tayo sa two-week growth rate at nasa high din po tayo sa Average Daily Attack Rate. Kaya nga po ang risk classification po natin is critical. So, iyon iyong nasa top rightmost, naka-color gray diyan sa ating graphic. And because of that nasa critical high risk na po tayo, titingnan naman po natin iyong total bed utilization dito sa left-hand side of this chart. So, sa left-hand side of this chart, makikita natin iyong total bed utilization and kahit, bagama't nasa critical na po tayo, ang total bed utilization natin ay hindi pa po pumapalo sa 71% and up, and that is the reason why we are in Alert Level 3. So, makikita ninyo, nasa between 50 to 70% po ang ating total bed utilization at using this chart, you go to the rightmost hand side, you will see na even under critical, nasa Alert Level 3 pa rin po ang category natin.

So, ito iyong binabantayan natin iyong total bed utilization, kapag pumalo po ito ng 71% and higher or 71% to 84%, dito na po natin masasabi na dapat i-Alert Level 4 na po ang Metro Manila. As of the moment, hindi pa po tayo nagbi-breach noong threshold na iyan and that is why iyong Metro Manila still remains under Alert Level 3.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Opo. Thank you so much for this chart, Secretary Nograles. And speaking of alert level system nga po. Kailan po ba magpupulong ang IATF members para naman isapinal iyong magiging bagong alert level system sa Pilipinas at sa NCR at anu-ano po iyong inaasahang magiging bago pang pagdidesisyon ng IATF para mas matugunan pa iyong pagtaas ng COVID-19 cases sa bansa?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Sa Thursday ang next IATF meeting natin. And the reason why we are pushing it on Thursday which is January 13, is pagdidesisyon din po namin iyong magiging classification ng iba't ibang bansa, kung siya ba ay green, yellow or red list. So, we have to get the data as close as possible to January 16. Kasi January 16 na po mag-uumpisa iyong new

classification of countries, especially iyong red list. So, as close to January 16 as we can, kaya January 13 po ang aming IATF meeting para mag-usapan una iyong alert level system classification ng buong bansa and that is for January 16 to January 31 at ganoon din po sa pagre-red list, yellow list at green list natin na countries from January 16 to January 31.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: At panghuli na lamang, Secretary Nograles. Kung mapapansin po kasi natin talaga marami na ring tinatamaang muli ng COVID-19 sa mga government officials and workers at marami na ring apektadong ahensiya. Paano po ito nakakaapekto sa government services? Ano po iyong mensahe ninyo sa publiko sa gitna na sitwasyon?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Kaya nga po sa Talk to the People kagabi, si Pangulo na mismo ang nagsalita at ang sinabi nga po niya that government services must not be unhampered, must not suffer, must continue in light of and especially because of the rising cases ng COVID-19. So, mayroon po tayong mga sinusunod na mga protocols. Mayroon po tayong sinusunod na mga memo circulars halimbawa, na pinapalabas din po ng Office of the President na bagama't kailangan nating mag-reduce ng work force, the head of the agency and the head of department must make sure na even with the reduction of work force, dahil nga po may mga tinatamaan na ng COVID sa ating mga kasamahan sa gobyerno ay dapat hindi pa rin po magsa-suffer ang public services.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Maraming, maraming salamat po, Secretary Nograles, kay Usec. Vega at Usec. Rocky.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Mela.

Sec. Karlo, susunod pong magtatanong ay si Leila Salaverria ng Inquirer ito po iyong tanong niya: How will the government ensure that the forthcoming elections will not distract the vaccination drive, which is another concern that Secretary Galvez had raised?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes. Of course, what we in the national government will do is make sure that hindi maha-hamper ang aming trabaho, we will continue to focus on that. On the deliverables na binanggit nga ni Secretary Charlie, may mga targets po tayo, naka-set po iyong targets na iyan and we will continue to deliver sa national government. But the reality siyempre is that we have to coordinate with the local government units 'no. And ang reality din po, pagdating naman sa local government units, many of them are elected public officials. Of course, may mga appointive public official sa LGUs, but siyempre iyong local chief executives are elected at may election nga na forthcoming. So we will have the DILG to ensure that local government units deliver as far as vaccination efforts are concerned and even as Palace response to COVID-19 is concerned, we will make sure that vaccination and our COVID response is not politicized and that everybody stays and remains neutral specially sa pamamahagi natin ng vaccines, dapat walang pinipili iyan. And we will make sure that the targets are met.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Susunod pong tanong mula kay Jopel Pelenio ng DWIZ: Ayon sa OCTA Research, by next week there is a possibility that healthcare utilization rate in Metro Manila would increase to more than 70% at sapat na daw po para itaas sa Alert Level 4 ng NCR. But despite on this, sinabi ni MMDA Chairperson Benhur Abalos that there is no need pa nai-raise sa Alert Level 4 ang Metro Manila. Any reaction regarding this?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Opo. So, based on that chart that we showed you, based sa IATF resolution number 152, tama po iyan hindi pa po tayo nagbi-breach noong threshold for Alert Level 4. So, hangga't tumama iyan sa 71% to 84% that's the only time na mag-Alert Level 4 tayo, unless tumama po diyan, we will continue to be on Alert Level 3. That being said, we have to manage our hospital beds to make sure na ang priority para sa hospital beds should be severe, critical, the elderly, iyong may comorbidities and iyong vulnerable. Iyong mga mild at asymptomatic ay kailangan i-step down natin sila to TTMFs natin or iyong ating isolation facilities at kung puwedeng mag-home isolation at mag-telemedicine, telehealthcare ay doon na natin sila dadalhin kung angkop naman, suitable for home quarantine or home isolation. Para ma-reserve po natin ang ating beds for those who need it – severe, critical, vulnerable, elderly and those with comorbidities. Perhaps, we can ask Usec. Bong Vega as well to talk about iyong pagpa-prioritize natin ng beds for those who needed most. Usec. Bong?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Yes, thank you, Sec Karlo. I think we all understand that the metrics that we are using for high classification is the two-week growth rate. Iyan iyong measure ng growth ng epidemic at saka iyong ADAR, which is the Average Daily Attack Rate. This is measure of the risk of infection, lahat iyan mataas. In fact, iyong two-week growth rate natin more than 200% and ang ating ADAR is more than 7. So classified talaga ang Pilipinas, because of the high new cases that we have and the active cases, as high-risk classification including the NCR. Pero kakaiba talaga ito sa ating nakikita 'no compared of last year when we were on a high-risk classification with the two metrics, iyong HCUR natin mataas din. In other words, it correspondently directly also increase, with the increase in the number of new cases.

Pero ito ngayon, tumataas iyong ating dalawang metrics pero iyong HCUR natin, hindi sumasabay gaano 'no. Parang nag-decouple siya from the rise in new cases and with the rise of hospitalization.

So ito iyong dapat titingnan natin, we should not think, focus on the number of cases kasi alam natin exponential talaga itong Omicron, highly transmissible and it can produce mild diseases.

Pero what is very important to note is ilan ba iyong HCUR natin in terms of ICU, ilan ba ang napasok sa ICU? Ilan ba ang nagagamit natin sa... gumagamit ng ventilators at saka oxygen? Kasi ito iyong mas... itong parameter talagang ito or itong metric na ito, ito iyong makikita natin kung gaano ka-serious talaga itong Omicron.

So for the latest, with the very high, high-risk tayo sa two metrics, ang ating HCUR ngayon is 57% with 52% nasa ICU. So alam natin na tataas talaga ito if we are not able to bring it down. And the sheer volume of the rise can also have an increase in the HCUR. So I think, we are, the government is ready; the Department of Health is ready in terms of the isolation and the intensive care units should be available because for the last two years this is what we have been doing – trying to expand and increase the hospital capacity.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Usec. Vega. Sec. Karlo, tanong mula kay Kris Jose ng Remate/Remate Online: Reaksiyon daw po sa sinabi ni vice president candidate at Mayor Sara Duterte na hindi raw dapat maharap sa diskriminasyon ang mga unvaxxed residents matapos magpatupad nang mas mahigpit na restriction ang gobyerno laban sa mga ito. Malinaw naman daw na hindi mandatory sa lahat ang magpabakuna laban sa COVID-19. May choice din daw ang mga unvaxxed residents na hindi magpabakuna. Hindi rin sang-ayon si Mayor Sara sa exclusion or restriction sa mga unvaccinated.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes, of course, we respect the opinion of Mayor Inday Sara Duterte. On the other hand, the President is only trying to protect the unvaccinated from harm. Nakikita naman natin sa datos na iyong kapag unvaccinated, mas mataas po ang chances na magiging severe or critical COVID iyong mga unvaccinated.

So as father of the nation, the President is only trying to protect the unvaccinated and this is for the common good.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, Sec. Karlo. Susunod pong magtatanong ay si Tricia Terada ng CNN via Zoom.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Hi! Good afternoon, Secretary Nograles, and to Usec. Vega and kay Usec. Rocky. Sir, doon lang po sa protocol for home isolation, mayroon po ba tayo, sir, incentive or paano natin iku-convince iyong publiko na nakakaranas ng sintomas to stay at home? Kasi, sir, ‘di ba marami naman po ang walang privilege of earning while staying at home. Marami iyong no work, no pay. So paano natin sila, sir, i-encourage kasi ‘di ba iyong mindset is, iniisip na lang na it’s just a common cold or flu, bakit mag-a-isolate eh baka mawalan sila ng means of earning for that day. Anong plano ng government for these people experiencing symptoms who are living on a day-to-day basis lang po talaga?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Well, during the meeting sa IATF, sa gaganapin na meeting ngayong Thursday, isa iyan sa mga pag-uusapan natin ‘no. First of all, iyong package, health package na puwede nating ma-offer for those who undergo home isolation. At dapat maging kabahagi natin dito, kasama natin dito iyong PhilHealth and, of course, the healthcare provider that’s accredited by PhilHealth para sa mga nagho-home isolate ‘no – that’s number 1. So in terms of the health aspect, pag-uusapan namin iyan sa IATF.

Pangalawa naman po, for those who are employed 'no, then obviously kapag nagkasakit then it has to be clarified by the Department of Labor and Employment ano iyong puwedeng ano ng employer, ano iyong regulations natin for employees who call in sick that we have to isolate siyempre and it's for the good of that person, as well as the company and the employer and all of the employees that that person remains isolated at home. And ano iyong—dapat very clear din 'no for the Department of Labor and Employment, very clear for the employee and for the employer kung ano iyong magiging roles nila.

And then, of course, dapat pag-usapan din po natin kung paano iyong self-employed 'no or those who are not employed. Ano ba iyong puwede rin po nating ibigay na incentives sa kanila. So this is something that pag-uusapan namin sa IATF.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Sir, do we still have funds if ever ma-iron out po itong mga healthcare packages or incentives?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Well, we're working on a new budget right now. Its 2022, so it's a fresh budget. Then, of course, the challenge would be to look in the budget, in the general appropriations law ano iyong puwedeng ma-charge iyan if ever we come up with a decision in terms of this concern.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Sir, I understand, hindi pa natin nari-reach iyong threshold for Alert Level 4. But in any case, sir, if the situation worsens, can we afford an Alert Level 4 scenario?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Yes. As mentioned by Usec. Bong Vega and I'll pass it off to him that we have been preparing naman, our hospitals, and which why there's a call to increase the bed capacities 'di ba. There's a call to increase the capacities of our TTMFs or isolation facilities. And then, of course, we are doing real time updating on our healthcare workers din, then iyong augmentation ng healthcare workers. So all of these we're doing in preparation for that eventuality. Of course, we'll try to manage it in a way na hindi tayo darating sa Alert Level 4 by, again, stepping down or mag-i-step down tayo. Kung mild naman at asymptomatic, we'll have to step them down to the isolation facility or kung puwedeng mag-home quarantine so that we have more beds reserved for those who need it most. But if it reaches to the threshold, then we should be prepared.

So, Usec. Bong Vega?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Yes, thank you, Sec. Karlo. Alert levels are totally different what we had before; ito iyong mga lockdowns, ano, ECQ and wala talaga, mahirap talaga iyon kasi kailangan talaga ng support coming from the government. And there was no balance between, you know, the economy and the health.

So ito ngayong Alert Level 4 or alert levels ay ito iyong nag-i-emphasize na we are not here for a general lockdown but rather on granular lockdowns 'no. Iyong ma-identify iyong streets or houses ng local government units so that mabuhay naman iyong kabuhayan ng ating mga kasamahan. So in other words, trying to balance things of.

So I guess with itong Alert Level 4 natin, kung darating man talaga ito, eh ang Department of Health naman, we have been expanding our infrastructure. In fact, the other day, na-inaugurate natin iyong 130 beds na for moderate and severe cases. It's a modular hospital. It's a big one and together with housing about 90 healthcare workers in dorm facility for them to be there 'no during the time that they are on duty.

So we've trying to expand this. In fact, in terms of expansion of these modular hospitals, we have one right now which we have inaugurated yesterday. Previously, we have one at Lung Center and in the QI managed by Jose Reyes and in Batangas. But also soon to be opened up would be the one in Zamboanga, the one in Iloilo; and the Davao modular hospital has already been functional since four months ago.

So, I guess we tried to really improve the setup of the hospital, the capacity internally by providing more beds allocated for the intensive care units. And of course, we supported the augmentation of the health care workers plus the medicines and the other needs of the intensive care units.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Thank you, Sir. Sir, with 33,000 cases, are we doing enough lockdowns, kasi I understand mayroon pong 63 barangay lockdowns affecting over a hundred households? Would that be enough, Sir, to contain or at least to solve this rising number of cases?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Yes. Sorry, Sec. Karlo. I just wanted to say that, you know, itong mga infections na ito, they occur in clusters. They occur in clusters and it's easy for the LGU actually contain them. Once they are contained so para iyong transmission naman nila hindi kakalat sa ibang barangay. So ma-identify kaagad iyan because they do occur in clusters.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILIPPINES: Thank you very much Dr. Vega and to Secretary Karlo.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Thank you, Triciah. Usec. Rocky?

USEC. IGNACIO: Yes. Sec. Karlo, ang susunod na tanong mula kay Bernadette Reyes ng GMA News: Bakit daw po pinapayagan ang shorter quarantine for flight crew kahit na may mga flights na na-cancel dahil sa mga nagkakasakit sa mga flight crew?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Ang pinayagan lang po ng IATF based on our resolution are for health care workers ‘no and I think my team has a slide to show, this is coming from DOH. Ito po: So for the general public, the general population na hindi health care workers working in hospitals... kasi at least iyong health care workers working in hospitals mayroon silang Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Committee na napag-usapan natin kanina, na sila nagdi-determine if puwedeng mag-shorten ang quarantine or ang isolation ng health care worker.

But for non-health care workers, these are the rules that should be followed based on DOH ‘no. So makikita ninyo iyong dito sa top part, this is number of days of isolation for COVID-19 cases – meaning to say positive sa COVID-19. And for fully vaccinated or unvaccinated even, kapag positive case pero asymptomatic, mild or moderate: At the advice of your doctor or 10 days ang isolation. Kapag severe and critical, again, at the advice of your doctor or 21 days.

Dito sa baba, ito naman po ‘yung quarantine for close contacts – ibig sabihin hindi ka positive pero mayroon kang na-close contact na positive sa COVID at dapat kailangan mong mag-quarantine how many days: For fully vaccinated it’s 7 days or at the advice of your doctor; kapag unvaccinated or incomplete ang vaccination, it’s 14 or at the advice of your doctor.

So this is for the general population. Meaning to say, ang binigyan lang ng pahintulot ng IATF na shorter quarantine and shorter isolation are health care workers working in hospitals and it is the Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Committee ang authorized lang po na mag-shorten. Anybody else including flight crew must follow these protocols for the general population.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Susunod na tanong niya, although iyong second question po niya iyan na nga po, Sec. Karlo, na-discuss ninyo na iyong about sa quarantine protocols. Iyong sunod po niyang tanong: Bakit daw po iba ang standard sa flight crews? Is it because of the need to fly more flights? Paano ma-assure iyong safety ng passengers na hindi daw po sila mahahawa?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Again, wala pong ina-approve ang IATF na ibang standard for flight crews. Flights crews belong to the general population, so they have to follow the same standards as we flashed in the screen a while ago. Only health care workers working in hospitals that has its own Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Committee are allowed by our IATF to have shorter quarantines – again in extreme circumstances lang po.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. From Jayson Rubrico ng SMNI News para po kay Usec. Vega: Sa halos isang linggong pagpapatupad ng Alert Level 3, ano po ang assessment ninyo sa behavior at mobility ng mga Pilipino dito sa National Capital Region? Mas nag-iingat ba ang mga Pilipino ngayon sa gitna ng pagkatala ng all-time record high ng COVID-19 cases?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Salamat sa inyo, Sec. Karlo. Can I answer?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Go ahead, Usec. Bong.

DOH USEC. VEGA: Ah, yes. Unang-una, kung pansinin ninyo ngayon talagang natatakot na iyong mga taong lumabas ngayon because of the high transmissibility nitong Omicron. So kaya kung papasok ka sa mall o papasok ka ngayon sa mga establishments, talagang kumukaunti at saka workplace nga kumukaunti rin. And dito nga sa DOH ay marami na ring buildings na nag-close because naging positive. So itong Alert Level 3 ay nakadulot din ng takot ano sa iba nating mga kababayan na lumabas because of this high transmissibility of the Omicron virus.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Sec. Karlo, sunod na tanong mula kay Cresilyn Catarong ng SMNI News: Ano po ang masasabi ninyo sa itinutulak na cha-cha at term extension para sa presidente, House of Representative at iba pang posisyon sa local?

CABSEC NOGRALES: May paparating na eleksiyon sa May 2022 at sa palagay ko wala nang oras ang Kongreso sa panukalang ito. At isa pa, mayroon tayong mas mabigat na laban – at ito po iyong laban against COVID-19.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Sunod pong tanong mula kay Margot Gonzales ng SMNI News: Ano daw po ang komento ng Malacañang hinggil sa hacking incident na napaulat sa mga server ng Comelec? Pangamba ng mga political aspirants, baka malaki ang magiging epekto nito sa voting system o kakalabasan ng mga datos come May elections. Sabi naman po ng Comelec, bini-verify pa nila ang report.

CABSEC NOGRALES: We will await any update to be pronounced by Comelec regarding this ‘no. Siyempre nababahala rin kami, obviously we are also worried ‘no about this kung totoo man ito. So antabayanan na lang siguro natin, hintayin natin na magpalabas ng official statement ang Comelec tungkol sa report na ito.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Sec. Karlo, mula po kay Red Mendoza ng Manila Times: Binabaliktad daw po ng ilang kritiko iyong sinabi ninyo sa isang interview yesterday tungkol sa capability ng government to push mass testing with people saying na I quote: “Kung gusto, may paraan. May kakayahan ba ang government na gawin ang mass testing?” [Garbled] ginugusto ng mga ‘di umano ay kritiko ng gobyerno kahit sobrang limited ang resource natin.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Responsible testing po ‘yung ginagawa natin ‘no, responsible testing kasi we have to be mindful na hindi unlimited po ang resources ng pamahalaan at ng Pilipinas and we have to be smart in where we will put our resources. Kailangan bumili ng bakuna at napakita naman po natin that mas cost effective po iyong bakuna – mas marami ang mababakunahan natin, mas marami pa po tayong maiiwasan na maging severe at critical na cases ng COVID ‘no. At kailangan din po natin bumili ng mga antiviral katulad ng na-report na

po ng FDA, tulad ng nasabi ni Usec. Bong Vega. Kailangan din po natin mag-augment ng mga manpower natin for health care workers and of course it comes with increasing our functional bed capacities, ang ICUs natin, the infrastructure and we need to increase the bed capacities ng ating mga hospitals.

Marami pong aspeto ang labang ito against COVID and we have to be very smart kung saan natin ilalagay ang pera ng taumbayan, ng taumbayan, ng sambayanang Pilipino. Kailangan matalino tayo sa pagpili saan natin ilalagay. Nandiyan naman iyong testing, nandiyan naman po ang PhilHealth nagku-cover ng mga testing ng mga symptomatic at mga positive na COVID cases. So this is what we call na smart testing 'no, responsible testing – hindi tayo puwede na iti-test na lang lahat na napakarami. We have to be able to smartly, wisely determine ano po iyong testing na gagawin natin na [garbled] po ng pera ng taumbayan, sa pamamagitan ng PhilHealth at iyan lang iyong dapat nating i-focus iyong resources natin.

Testing is part of the PhilHealth package and then we are also pushing PhilHealth again as I said earlier na kahit na sa home isolation ay kasama dapat sa PhilHealth coverage po iyong test ng mga nagho-home isolate. And we have to find and identify in our credit who will provider that.

Dahil iyong pagbayad po ng PhilHealth doon sa libreng testing ay hindi naman mapupunta doon sa pasyente, dapat mapupunta iyan sa provider. So ito rin ang isa sa pag-uusapan namin sa IATF, iyong provider na magpo-provide ng testing na dapat covered ng PhilHealth para doon sa mga nagho-home isolate na positive sa COVID cases 'no.

So, maybe USec. Bong Vega would again like to add to this issue about mass testing versus responsible testing.

DOH USEC. VEGA: Thank you, Sec. Karlo. Ang policy naman ng Department and Health and IATF noong testing is targeted testing naman talaga or responsible testing, kasi kung magma-mass testing tayo, ang daming mga negatives niyan, sayang naman ang resources nga natin kung wala naman kayong exposure at saka walang symptoms, siguradong negative iyan.

So, really, it's targeted testing pati na sa antigen test natin na pinapayagan ng Department of Health, kailangan symptomatic kayo para mas accurate iyong result mo, kung positive ka niyan, positive ka talaga at saka mataas ang specificity at saka kapag close contact ka rin. So, in testing, parating targeted talaga to a certain population.

USEC. IGNACIO: Tanong pa rin po mula kay Red Mendoza ng Manila Times, para po kay USec. Bong Vega: Ang grupo po ng mga healthcare worker ay nagrereklamo na hindi raw sila kinonsulta sa bagong directive ng DOH sa isolation and quarantine protocols sa mga healthcare workers. Dagdag nila na parang insulto raw itong department order na ito guidelines na ito, ano po ang masasabi ninyo dito?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Hindi naman insulto kasi, unang-una, dadaan iyan sa hospital administration nila at saka hospital infection and control committee, who will discuss it with them. Kasi ang proposal naman iyan na naibigay, naaprubahan ng IATF is through the discretion of the hospital infection and control committee. Kung pagtingin nila eh, hindi pa kailangan siguro mag-report back ang isang tao dahil may symptoms pa, then they can do so. So, ito ang sinasabi natin na talagang binibigyan natin ng paunang [garbled] ang isolation ng mga asymptomatic na healthcare workers, kasi alam natin na fully vaccinated sila and they have a certain protection.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. USec. Vega sunod pong tanong niya: May mga nagsasabi na hindi raw nakoko-control ng gobyerno ang pandemic dahil sa sobrang taas ng COVID-19 lalo na at marami ng healthcare workers ang nagkakasakit. Plano rin ba daw po ng DOH na mag-mass hiring at gawing permanent ang mga healthcare worker, tulad ng pinu-push ng grupo?

DOH USEC. VEGA: USec. Rocky, unang-una no government can control the COVID storm; medyo iyan talaga mahirap and very unpredictable on how to go about it. Pero ito ang sinasabi natin na ang ating hiring naman, kung pangangailangan ng mga healthcare workers sa different regions ay ginagawa po natin iyan. In fact, since last year, nagdi-deploy kami ng mga augmentation sa mga regions like before noon sa Cebu, dito sa Metro Manila, Northern Mindanao and Southern Mindanao. So, iyon ang ano natin talaga, nag-augment tayo ng healthcare workers. In fact, itong bagong GAA natin mayroon pa rin tayong funds for the augmentation of the healthcare workers.

Pangalawa, nakipag-usap na rin kami sa uniformed personnel, through Sec. Charlie Galvez na gagawing national policy na, na ang deployment especially in times of need ng different hospitals, treatment facilities or even testing sites na magpa-deploy ng mga uniformed personnel coming from the BFP, AFP and the other areas of the military. So ito iyong ginagawa po natin, talagang deployment talaga from other health sectors that are less, least affected to areas na talagang nangangailangan.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Susunod pong tanong, Sec. Karlo, mula po kay Joyce Balancio ng ABS-CBN: May isa umanong courier company na nagpapasok sa mga empleyado nila kahit positive sa COVID-19 dahil kulang sila sa manpower. Iyong mga empleyado nila may mga biyahe, kaya nakakasalamuhang kliyente pa. No work, no pay din sila, kaya kahit may sakit pinipilit nilang pumasok. Kahit iyong mga puwede namang mag-work from home, napipilitang pumasok sa office nila dahil may bawas sa suweldo kapag daw work from home. Ano ang violation nito? Ano ang dapat gawin sa kumpanya? Ano ang paalala ng IATF sa ganitong mga kumpanya?

CABSEC NOGRALES: Palagay ko, una sa lahat, may mga violations iyan sa Labor Code. So, labor law violations mayroon na iyan. And as far as IATF is concerned sa mga issuances ng IATF at dahil sa paglabag, kung diumano kung totoo itong nakuha nilang report, kung itong

kumpanya na ito, sinumang kumpanya ang lumalabag sa mga resolutions at kautusan ng IATF, maging ang Pangulo, ay paglabag po iyan sa Notifiable Disease Act. Kasi positive, tapos pinapapasok, oh di nagkakahawaan. By the name itself Notifiable Diseases Act ay dapat may tungkulin po una sa lahat ang korporasyon, ang kumpanya na sundin ang kautusan ng Pangulo pati iyong resolutions ng IATF.

Pangalawa, kailangan nilang i-report. Hindi na nga nagri-report, hindi na nga niri-report, tapos ang ginagawa kabaligtaran, ipapa-report iyong positive. So, at the very least, mayroon ding violation iyong Notifiable Disease Act. So may mga parusa po na nakalagay dito at kapag korporasyon po, siyempre iyong Chief Executive Officer, the President, General Manager or such other officer in charge will be held liable. Iyong business permit at license to operate shall be canceled. May mga labor laws violation din po iyan and other similar laws. Bahala na po iyong prosecutor sa kanila.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Susunod pong tanong mula kay Joseph Morong ng GMA News, iyon pong unang tanong niya for USec. Vega, nasagot na ni USec. Vega about doon sa hospital capacity at saka iyong projection po ng OCTA Research.

Iyong third question po niya, USec. Vega: Do you have reports of healthcare workers going back to work as early as five days after being diagnosed with COVID?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Thank you, USec. Rocky for the query coming from Joseph Morong; Unang-una, wala pa kaming report coming from the infection and control committee na pinapabalik iyong healthcare worker to work after a few days, less than five days of isolation. Pero gusto kong i-report ngayon na dito po sa Metro Manila, we have almost na-quarantine, na-isolate na healthcare workers, mga aabot na yata ng 6,595 out of 91,838 healthcare workers. So, mga 7.2% ito under quarantine.

So ang ginagawa ngayon ng mga hospitals lalung-lalo na sa mga bigger centers ay nag-close sila ng ibang services para ma-redeploy iyong mga areas na nangangailangan for COVID ng kanilang mga personnel. So, ang nakikita natin is nagko-close iyong mga some services like elective surgeries, OPD and the rest, like diagnostic, para lang maka-cover ngayon sa mga healthcare workers na na-isolate o naka-quarantine.

USEC. IGNACIO: Opo. Pahabol lang po ni Joseph Morong ulit. USec. Vega: How would you describe daw po the level of manpower of healthcare workers [garbled] need for workforce because of the surge?

DOH USEC. VEGA: Yes. Alam natin ang unang challenge talaga natin ay iyong unang tinamaan, iyong mga healthcare workers, because they are more exposed. Saka iyon nga 7.2% sa kanila dito sa NCR ay naka-isolate and quarantined. Kaya ang ginagawa po natin ngayon sa Department of Health, pinatuloy namin iyong mga augmentation ng mga healthcare workers

simula noong 2021 at saka para dito sa 2022. So roughly naka-position na kami ng mga 7,000 plus healthcare workers na augmentation for the different hospitals, isolation centers and testing centers.

USEC. IGNACIO: Thank you, USec. Vega. Thank you Sec Karlo. Thank you MPC.

CABSEC NOGRALES: Maraming, maraming salamat, USec. Rocky, USec. Bong Vega at sa mga miyembro ng Malacañang Press Corps.

Mga kababayan 8 out of 10 Filipinos are hopeful that the worse of the COVID-19 is behind us according to the latest Social Weather Station survey. While the COVID cases continue to rise, we share this outlook, given how the data shows us that our vaccination program has successfully protected our population from the worst effects of the virus.

Tulad nga ng sinabi ng Pangulo kagabi, kaya natin ito; magpabakuna lang po tayo. Malinaw po, mga kababayan, na nasa atin ang desisyon na may magagawa tayo laban sa COVID. Kahit matinding makahawa ang Omicron, hindi po tayo helpless; we can do something about it: Magpabakuna na po tayo anumang brand ito, para maging ligtas, para sa karagdagang proteksiyon natin ng ating mga mahal sa buhay at ng ating komunidad.

To quote Pope Francis in his recent state of the world address, *“Healthcare is our moral obligation.”* Dagdag pa ng Santo Papa, *“We have realized that in those places where an effective campaign has taken place, the risk of severe repercussions of the disease has decreased. It is therefore important to continue the effort to immunize the general population as much as possible.”*

Nasa Diyos po ang awa, nasa tao po ang gawa. Patuloy po tayong manampalataya sa Diyos na lumikha. Ipagpatuloy din po natin ang ating pagbibigay malasakit sa isa’t isa upang protektahan ang ating mga sarili, ang ating pamilya, ang ating komunidad at ang ating bansa mula sa bantang ito ng COVID-19.

Maraming salamat po. Ingat po tayong lahat and God bless us all!

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