

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

**PRESS BRIEFING OF PCOO UNDERSECRETARY AND ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENTIAL
SPOKESPERSON ATTY. MICHEL KRISTIAN ABLAN**
MARCH 25, 2022 (12:19 P.M. – 12:49 P.M.)

USEC. ABLAN: Magandang tanghali po sa ating mga kababayan at sa Malacañang Press Corps.

Ngayon po, March 25, 2022, ang unang araw ng campaign period ng mga kandidato para sa locally-elected positions. Kumpiyansa kami na mananatiling alerto ang ating mga kababayan sa pagsisimula ng local election campaign period. Sumunod po tayo sa mask, hugas, iwas – lalo na po sa iwas o ang tinatawag nating social distancing, airflow, at bakuna, kasama na rito ang pagsunod sa guidelines ng Commission on Elections o Comelec.

Sa mga nag-aalala na mag-i-slow down ang ating COVID-19 vaccination drive sa mga local government units, nananatili po na on-track pa rin po ang ating vaccination program. Ligtas, epektibo at libre po ang magpabakuna. At para sa mga fully vaccinated, hinihikayat namin kayo na magpa-booster para sa dagdag proteksyon. Ang atin pong target ay 90 million fully vaccinated na mga Pilipino bago matapos ang termino ng Pangulo sa June 2022.

Muling nagpulong ang inyong Inter-Agency Task Force or IATF, at ito ang kanilang kauna-unahang face-to-face meeting sa taong 2022. At ito ang ilan sa kanilang napag-usapan at naging mga desisyon at mga aksyon:

- Fully vaccinated foreign nationals shall be allowed entry into the Philippines beginning April 1, 2022, 12:01 A.M.;
- Foreign nationals may enter the Philippines without need of an entry exemption document or what we know as the EED;
- Provided they comply with the applicable visa requirements and immigration entry and departure formalities;
- Provided further that they: Number one, are fully vaccinated, which I will discuss later, except only for minor children below 12 years of age traveling with their fully-vaccinated foreign parent/s; number two, carry/possess an acceptable proof of vaccination; number three, present a negative RT-PCR test taken within 48 hours or a negative laboratory-based antigen test taken within 24 hours, prior to the date and time of departure from the country of origin or first port of embarkation in a continuous travel to the Philippines, excluding lay-overs;
- Provided, that, he/she has not left the airport premises or has not been admitted into another country during such lay-over;

- They have passports, valid for a period of at least six months at the time of their arrival in the Philippines;
- Except for foreign spouses and/or children of Filipino citizens and former Filipino citizens with balikbayan privileges under Republic Act no. 9174, including their foreign spouse and/or children who, number one, are not balikbayans in their own right, and two, are traveling with them to the Philippines; have valid tickets for their return journey to the port of origin or next port of destination not later than 30 days from date of arrival in the Philippines; and
- Obtain, prior to arrival, a travel insurance for COVID-19 treatment costs from reputable insurance providers, with a minimum coverage of USD 35,000.00 for the duration of their stay in the Philippines.

Who then is considered a fully vaccinated foreign national? A foreign national shall be deemed fully vaccinated only if he/she is fully compliant with the following requirements: Number one, received the 2nd dose in a 2-dose series or a single dose vaccine more than 14 days prior to the date and time of departure from the country of origin or the port of embarkation; number two, the vaccine is included in any of the following: Emergency use authorization (EUA) list or Compassionate Special Permit (CSP) issued by the Philippine Food and Drug Administration or as we know as the FDA; or Emergency Use Listing of the World Health Organization or WHO.

Let us now go to the only acceptable proof of vaccination, which shall be presented prior to departing/boarding from the country of origin or the port of embarkation and upon arrival in the country. These are the World Health Organization international certificate of vaccination and prophylaxis; or VaxCertPH; or the national or state digital certificate of the country/foreign government which has accepted VaxCertPH under a reciprocal arrangement; or other proof of vaccination permitted by the IATF.

Foreign nationals who fail to fully comply with the conditions and requisites I just mentioned shall be denied admission into the country and shall be subject to the appropriate exclusion proceedings.

Once admitted into the country, these foreign nationals are no longer required to observe facility-based quarantine but shall self-monitor for any sign or symptom for seven days with the first day being the date of arrival. However, they are required to report to the local government unit (LGU) of their destination should they manifest any symptoms.

Foreign nationals with valid and subsisting Entry Exemption Documents (EED) issued prior to April 1, 2022 shall be allowed entry pursuant to Section C of IATF Resolution 160-B.

With the new rules on the entry of foreign nationals, IATF Resolution no. 131-a dated 05 August 2021 allowing for the interim application for visa issuance shall no longer be applied beginning April 1, 2022.

The Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Justice, the Department of Transportation – One-Stop-Shop, the Bureau of Quarantine, and the Bureau of Immigration are directed to ensure the smooth implementation of this order.

Samantala po, inamyendahan ng IATF ang mga rekomendasyon ng National Task Force Against COVID-19 National Vaccination Operations Center ukol sa criteria ng de-escalation ng provinces, highly urbanized cities at mga independent component cities sa Alert Level 1 na nakasaad sa IATF Resolution no. 163 (s.2022), as amended by IATF Resolution no. 164 (s.2022). Sinama ang municipalities sa maaaring ma-de-escalate sa Alert Level 1. Kaugnay nito, idinagdag ang low risk total bed utilization rate ng mga probinsiya o rehiyon bilang criterion sa component cities at sa mga municipalities.

Sa usaping bakuna: Dumating noong Miyerkules ng gabi, March 23, 2022, ang 942,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines at may karagdagang 936,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines na dumating naman kagabi, March 24, 2022. Nakalaan ito sa pediatric vaccination na binili ng pamahalaan sa pamamagitan ng World Bank.

As of March 24, 2022, kahapon, nasa mahigit 70.7 million na ang naka-first dose habang nasa mahigit 65.5 million na ang naka-complete dose or mga fully vaccinated, ayon iyan sa National COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard. Habang nasa mahigit 11.7 million ang naka-booster shots. Over-all, nasa mahigit 141.2 million na ang total doses administered.

Sa mga tsikiting naman na edad lima hanggang labing-isang anyos, nasa mahigit 736,000 ang fully vaccinated, samantala ang mga batang dose hanggang disisiete anyos ay nasa higit 8.8 million na ang fully vaccinated as of March 24, 2022.

Pumunta naman tayo sa ating mga lolo at lola, nasa mahigit 6.5 million na ang fully vaccinated seniors as of March 23, 2022.

On other matters, mga kababayan, good news naman tayo: The Organization For Economic Cooperation and Development or otherwise known as the OECD, in its economic outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India 2022 report projects a robust growth for the Philippines, with GDP growth of seven percent. This is considered the fastest growth in Southeast Asia, even outpacing China's 5-point 1-percent.

Bago po tayo pumunta sa tanong ng Malacañang Press Corps, kasama nating panauhin ang ating suki dito sa press briefing, si Department of Health Undersecretary Dr. Maria Rosario Vergeire. Alamin po natin ang COVID-19 situation sa bansa. Magandang hapon po. Good afternoon po, Usec. Vergeire, si Usec. Kris po ito.

All right, so while we're having technical difficulties with reaching Usec. Vergeire, we now proceed with Malacañang Press Corps' questions. And the one to lead us for this afternoon is Mela. Go ahead, Mela of PTV4.

MELA LESMORAS: Hi! Magandang hapon po, Usec. Ablan. Magandang hapon po sa ating mga kababayan. Unang tanong po, sir, mula kay Reymund Tinaza ng Bombo Radyo: Sir, simula na ngayong araw ng local campaigning. Sa local elections madalas ang gapangan at bilihan ng boto, ano ang inyong maipapayo o babala sa mga kandidato ganoon din sa mga botante. Paano sila makukumbinsi na huwag ibenta ang kanilang boto at sang-ayon na po ba kayo sa sinasabi ng iba na tanggapin lang ang pera pero bumoto pa rin sang-ayon sa konsensiya?

USEC ABLAN: All right. Maraming salamat, Reymund. Maraming salamat, Mela.

The Palace reminds the Filipino people that vote-buying and vote-selling are prohibited acts under the Omnibus Election Code. So, bawal pong tumanggap at bawal din po bumili ng boto. Anyone found guilty of these prohibited acts under the Omnibus Election Code will face penalties of imprisonment and fine. So iyon po ang stand po natin.

MELA LESMORAS: Opo. Tanong naman po ni Maricel Halili ng TV5 for Usec. Ablan: How should we interpret the meeting of President Duterte with Marcos, Jr.? Will the President endorse him as his presidential bet?

USEC ABLAN: All right. Thanks, Maricel. And thanks, Mela, once again.

All right, so I think Acting Presidential Spokesperson and PCOO Secretary Martin Andanar, my boss, confirmed to the media yesterday or two days ago that a meeting did occur between President Duterte and Senator Marcos. So, that we are sure of. Whether or not this can be interpreted as an endorsement? Of course, the President has not endorsed any candidate. A meeting was just arranged and they met, President Duterte and Senator Marcos, but there is no endorsement in so far as Malacañang is concerned.

MELA LESMORAS: Opo. Sa ngayon naman, Usec. Ablan, handa na po si DOH spokesperson, Usec. Ma. Rosario Vergeire.

USEC ABLAN: All right, we will get back to you, Mela, after our interview with Usec. Vergeire.

Magandang hapon po, Usec. Vergeire and I hope your signal and internet connection is okay. We now proceed po, for our questions. Hold on! Are you okay na po, Usec. Vergeire?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, good afternoon, Usec. Kris. Magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat. I am okay already. I'm ready na po, sir.

USEC. ABLAN: All right. I did some reporting on the COVID-19 situation. But you are our person there po sa DOH, so please kindly update us with the COVID-19 situation, Usec. Vergeire.

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, thank you, Usec. Kris. I have prepared a few slides para po sa ating mga kababayan. Just to give them some information on the current situation of COVID-19 in the country.

Good afternoon again to all of you. Just to provide updates on our COVID-19 situation and vaccination, and reminders for everybody on booster inoculation. Batay po sa graph na nakikita natin ngayon, bumaba na po ng 16% mula noong nakaraang linggo ang bilang ng mga kaso sa ating bansa. Sa kasalukuyan, tinataya po na 454 new cases ang mayroon tayo kada araw. Mas mababa po ito ng kaunti kumpara noong nag-umpisa tayo noong nakaraang Disyembre na nasa 490 cases kada araw. Ito po ay noong bago po tayo tamaan ng Omicron variant.

Ang pagbaba ng mga kaso ay hindi lamang makikita sa Luzon kung hindi, pati na rin po sa Visayas at sa Mindanao. Kaya naman po, tuluy-tuloy lamang tayo sa pagsunod sa ating minimum public health standards.

Magandang balita rin po, dahil bumaba na sa 75% ang ating national admissions mula sa peak na 5,218 admissions noong Enero. Nakikita po na nagpa-plateau na nitong mga nakaraang araw. Nanatili po tayo na nasa low risk sa ating total bed utilization na nasa 17%. Bumaba rin po ang bilang ng ating mga kababayan na naa-admit sa ating ICU na sa ngayon ay nasa 575 admissions na lamang. Bumaba po ito ng 71% mula po noong tumaas ang kaso noong Enero.

Sa kabilang banda, nakakita po tayo ng bahagyang pagbaba sa bilang ng mga available na ICU beds. Ganoon pa man, nanatili pa rin na nasa low risk ang ating ICU utilization na nasa 16%. Muli, buhat po ito sa masusing pagsunod natin sa minimum public health standard at sa masigasig po nating pagbabakuna.

Para naman po sa ating vaccination updates: Tuluy-tuloy lang po ang magagandang balita, dahil kung pababa na nang pababa ang bilang ng ating mga kaso, pataas naman po nang pataas ang bilang ng ating mga kababayan na nabibigyan na ng bakuna. Join the more than 65 million fully vaccinated Filipinos and get vaxxed for good vibes.

As of March 24, naabot na po natin ang 72.8% ng ating target population o humigit-kumulang 65 million ng kababayan ang fully vaccinated. Samantalang 78.5% naman po o mahigit 70.7 million ang nakatanggap ng kanilang first dose. Halos nasa 12 million naman po ng ating mga kababayan ay nabigyan na ng kanilang booster doses. Patuloy po nating pataasin ang antas ng ating pagbabakuna upang tuluy-tuloy po ang ating martsa sa ating bagong normal.

Sa halos magdadalawang buwan ng pagbabakuna ng ating mga nakakabatang populasyon, nasa humigit-kumulang 700,000 kids aged five (5) to eleven (11) years old ang ating

naprotektahan laban sa COVID-19. As of 24 March, 736, 143 children ang fully vaccinated na laban sa virus, habang halos 1.8 million na po ang nakakuha ng kanilang first dose.

Para naman po sa ating adolescent population, nasa halos 8.9 million na ang fully vaccinated at 9.78 million na po ang nakakuha ng kanilang first dose. Kaya naman po para sa ating mga magulang, sa ating mga lolo, lola, tito, tita at mga legal guardians, pakidala na po ang ating mga kabataan sa ating mga bakunahan para mabigyan na po sila ng karagdagang proteksiyon para sa COVID-19.

Isang karaniwang tanong na aming natatanggap ay kung magkapareho po ba daw ang booster shots at saka ang third dose vaccines. Bilang paglilinaw po, hindi po sila magkapareho. Ang third dose o ang karagdagang dose ay binibigay sa isang fully vaccinated (*disconnected*)

USEC. ABLAN: All right. So, I think, Usec. Vergeire's internet connection got disconnected once again. So, we will just get back to Mela Lesmoras of PTV to continue on questions from the Malacañang Press Corps. And then, kapag bumalik po si Usec. Vergeire, she will continue with her presentation.

Mela, are you back?

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Yes, Usec. Ablan. Unahin lang po natin iyong mga—puro DOH-related questions po kasi ito so unahin muna po natin iyong para sa Malacañang.

Tanong po ni Neil Jerome Morales ng Reuters News: May we ask what time and where is President Duterte's proclamation rally in support of his preferred presidential candidate?

USEC. ABLAN: Thanks, Neil. There is no schedule for the President to attend any proclamation rally today. None.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Follow up question naman po ni Tricia Terada mula sa inyong naging presentation kanina: Usec. Ablan, ano pong difference ng recent IATF directive to allow fully vaccinated foreign nationals sa former announcement noong February 16?

USEC. ABLAN: Right. So right now 'no, as long as they're able to present to us acceptable proof of vaccination, then they may enter the country. If you recall, Mela and Tricia, even under then Spokesperson and Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles, we would weekly update the public regarding the countries wherein the government accepts nationals to come in. Ngayon wala na so there is no more listing of which country the foreign national originates from. As long as they are able to present valid proof of vaccination and other guidelines which I mentioned earlier, then they will be accepted in the country. I hope that's clear.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Usec. Ablan, I think Usec. Vergeire is back po.

USEC. ABLAN: All right. Thanks, Mela. Let's see 'no if Usec. Vergeire is back on the line. Usec. Vergeire, are you back ma'am?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes. Usec. Kris and Mela, pasensiya na po at medyo pangit pa ang ating koneksiyon. We can move to our question-and-answer.

USEC. ABLAN: All right. So, you are okay na po, Usec., with your presentation? We'll proceed na po with the question-and-answer?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, sir. Sige po, let's proceed to the question-and-answer.

USEC. ABLAN: All right. With that, let's proceed with Mela to ask Usec. Vergeire. Go ahead, Mela.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Yes. Usec. Vergeire, from Maricel Halili of TV-5: Secretary Joey Concepcion is sounding the alarm over the slow booster uptake in the Philippines and the approaching expiry of COVID-19 vaccines now in the country. What is the DOH doing about this? Similar question with Lei Alviz of GMA-7

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, 'no. So unang-una po, batid natin ano that this is really a challenge for us 'no para atin pong makumbinsi ang ating mga kababayan for the booster doses. Sa ngayon po nasa almost 11 million pa lang po ang ating mga nabibigyan ng booster shots at gusto nating iparating sa ating mga kababayan na napakaimportante po ng booster shots dahil ito po ay nakakapagbigay ng karagdagang proteksiyon para sa atin because we know that the immunity from vaccines wanes over time.

Ang ginagawa po ngayon ng ating Kagawaran, unang-una po, tayo po ay nagsasagawa ng wall-to-wall inventory. Ang ating team simula po noong Marso 'no, early part of March, umikot na po sa lahat po ng ating warehouses para makita o makuha ang actual number ng ating mga bakuna sa baba. Pangalawa, tayo po ay nakapagsulat na at naaprubahan na rin po ang marami ng ating Food and Drug Administration sa extension po ng expiry ng ating mga bakunang mayroon tayo ngayon sa ating bansa. Pangatlo, tayo po ay nagkakaroon ng pakikipag-usap sa mga iba't ibang mga bansa at iba-ibang mga organisasyon kung saan the Philippines is planning to donate vaccines also to other countries para makatulong din po tayo sa kanila.

So these are the things that we are doing aside from doing the continuous demand generation para po mabigyan nang mas malaking value ang ating mga booster ng ating mga kababayan at magpatuloy po tayo sa pagpataas ng mga booster shots na naibibigay sa ating mga kasamang kaba—or mga Filipino people.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Usec. Vergeire, from Mark Fetalco of PTV-4: Sa datos ng Department of Health, ilan na bang indibiduwal sa bansa ang eligible na sana para sa booster shots pero hindi pa nagpapaturok at ano po ang panawagan ninyo sa kanila?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, Mark, 'no. So sa datos natin ngayon, mayroon tayong about 44 million who are already eligible to receive their booster shots. So nananawagan po tayo sa ating mga kababayan na nakatanggap na po ng primary series nila o nakatapos ng first and second dose, kailangan ninyo pong magpa-booster shot para madagdagan ang proteksiyon.

Tandaan po natin, evidences will state 'no especially in terms of Omicron variant na nabawasan po ang mga proteksiyon na binigay sa atin noong mga first and second dose natin dahil apektado po sila ng Omicron variant. There was this escape in immunity na sinasabing phenomenon.

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: So, kapag tayo ay nagpa-booster, naipakita po sa mga ebidensiya na naibabalik po iyong proteksiyon na iyon kapag tayo ay makakatanggap uli ng booster shots. So, nananawagan po tayo dito sa 44 million na eligible po para makatanggap ng booster, tumanggap na ho tayo, pumunta na ho tayo sa vaccination site. Please receive your boosters. This will not just protect you, this will also protect your family and our whole community.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Tanong pa po ni Mark Fetalco ng PTV-4: Kailan po ang target na ilunsad ang special vaccination days sa BARMM at iba pang lugar na mababa ang vaccination coverage?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes. So, mayroon na po tayong nakatalaga na mga dates kung saan tayo magkakaroon ng Bayanihan, Bakunahan or special focused vaccination. Sa March 29 to 31 po mayroon po tayong targeted vaccination sa Cebu or sa Region VII and on March 30, 31 and April 1 we have these special vaccination days in BARMM. So abangan po ng ating mga kababayan, sa mga lugar na iyan pupunta po ang ating mga deployed teams para matulungan natin ang mga regions na ito upang tumaas po ang antas ng pagbabakuna.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Usec. Vergeire, tanong naman po ni Aiko Miguel ng UNTV: What can DOH say about Presidential Adviser Joey Concepcion's suggestion that the term fully vaccinated be redefined as those who have received a booster dose due to the low number of boosted Filipinos?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, Aiko 'no. So, isa iyan sa mga pinag-uusapan natin ano, ng DOH with our experts. But of course, according to our experts they were saying na mukhang hindi talaga appropriate.

Naghanap po tayo ng mga ebidensiya at mga practices na ginagawa sa ibang bansa especially among credible institutions abroad. Ang CDC po, hindi po nila ni-redefine ang kanilang fully vaccinated definition, iyon pa rin iyong primary series, first and second dose. Pero naglagay po sila ng up-to-date, ibig sabihin, if you are fully vaccinated, you need to update your immunization. Kaya doon po sa cards nila mayroon silang fully vaccinated na first and second dose and then inilalagay din po updated or up-to-date ang kanilang bakuna kapag naka-receive na sila ng booster shot.

So, iyan po ang ating tinitingnan sa ngayon, pinag-aaralan. We will be issuing this out after we have completed and finalized our agreements.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Opo. Panghuli na lamang pong katanungan, Usec. Vergeire, from Lei Alviz of GMA-7: Ano po ang paalala ng DOH sa publiko ngayong nagsimula na rin ang local campaign activities?

DOH USEC. VERGEIRE: Yes, Lei, ano. Pareho pa rin ng paalala natin sa lahat ng ating mga kababayan, sa ating local governments and of course to our officials who are running for seats dito po sa darating na eleksiyon: Kami po ay nagpapaalala na nandito pa rin po ang virus. Nakikita na po nating pumuputok ang mga kaso sa iba't ibang lugar sa buong mundo. Sana po hindi po tayo susunod na tumaas din ang kaso dito.

So, everybody should maintain and comply with minimum public health standards. Huwag na huwag ninyo pong kakalimutan na magsuot ng mask kapag kayo ay pupunta sa mga campaign sorties.

Sa atin pong mga kandidato, sana po tayo po ay maging ehemplo ng ating mga kababayan. Tayo ang manguna at ipakita sa kanila na tumutupad tayo sa minimum public health standards at tayo po ay bakunado.

Lagi po nating tatandaan, dalawang kritikal na bagay ang makakalampas o makakatulong sa atin sa paglampas dito po sa pandemyang ito – these would be vaccination at saka ang pagsunod natin sa minimum public health standards.

MELA LESMORAS/PTV: Okay. Maraming salamat po, Usec. Vergeire at Usec. Ablan. Iyan po iyong mga katanungan ng Malacañang Press Corps at iba pang mamamahayag.

USEC. ABLAN: Maraming-maraming salamat, Usec. Vergeire at maraming-maraming salamat din Mela at sa members ng Malacañang Press Corps. Dito po nagtatapos ang ating press briefing.

Natapos na naman po ang isang linggo. See you again on our next briefing. Stay safe and healthy everyone.

Tandaan: Basta't laging handa at sama-sama, kaya natin ang anumang pagsubok.

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