



Situation summary

(Highlights of the current report)

- Out of a total 648,066 confirmed cases reported in the Philippines as of today, 54% are male, with the most affected age group 20-29 years (26%) followed by the age group 30-39 years (23.6%)
- 42% of the total number of cases are from the National Capital Region (NCR), followed by CALABARZON (16.6%), Central Visayas (7.4%), Central Luzon (6.7%), Western Visayas (4.3%).
- Out of the total 12,900 confirmed deaths, 60% are male, with the most affected age group over-70 (35.3%) followed by the age group 60-69 years (27.7%).
- 38% of the total number of deaths reported are from the NCR, followed by Central Visayas (12.7%), CALABARZON (12.4%), Central Luzon (7.8%), Western Visayas (5.6%).
- Currently, there are 205 functional laboratories using RT-PCR or GenXpert performing tests for COVID-19.

648,066

Cases

561,902

Recoveries

12,900

Deaths

Transmission assessment

At national level, the Philippines remains in **Stage 2, localised community transmission** with some geographic areas showing higher transmission intensity and indications of widespread community transmission. There is ongoing evidence of an increasing trend in the number of cases and higher transmission in Region 3, Region 4A, and in the NCR which are at **Stage 3, large scale community transmission**. At national level, the bed occupancy rate for COVID-19 allocated beds is currently at 40% occupancy, with variation between regions.

Epidemiology

As of 19 March 2021, a total of **648,066** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **12,900** deaths have been reported in the Philippines. The case fatality rate is **2%**.

Epi Update COVID-19	Tests 778,688 Tests past 14 days	Cases 73,819 Cases in past 14 days	Deaths 613 Deaths in past 14 days	ICU Occupancy 50%
	9,027,008 Cumulative unique individuals tested	648,066 Cumulative cases	12,900 Cumulative deaths	2,208 ICU beds for COVID-19 cases
	8% Cumulative Positivity Rate			
Health service provision COVID-19	478 Healthcare worker cases reported in past 14 days	1,286 Hospitals admitting COVID-19 patients	27,127 Non-ICU beds for COVID-19 cases	136,635 TTMF beds for COVID-19 cases



Strategic approach to COVID-19 Prevention, Detection and Control

Health service delivery

With the increasing number of cases in NCR, working closely with the DOH One Hospital Command (OHC) is critical in monitoring the compliance of public and private hospitals on COVID-19 bed allocation and current healthcare utilization rate. Furthermore, the adherence to the healthcare pathways resulting in the appropriate referral and back referral systems and efficient and rational utilization of these facilities is important to avoid overutilization of Level 2 and Level 3 facilities and improved bed utilization of intermediate care facilities. WHO Philippines continues to support the Department of Health's initiative to institutionalize OHC in the Philippines. Coordination with the Regional Outreach Pillar has facilitated discussion among the regions and priority areas on appropriate referral and rational utilization of health facilities.

Laboratory and Testing

As of March 19, 2021, there are 205 operational COVID-19 laboratories across the country. The cumulative positivity rate is at 8%. As per record, an average of almost 40,000 tests were conducted per day in the past two weeks. The continuous expansion of access to testing has contributed to the early detection and management of rising COVID-19 cases.

Genomic sequencing done at the Philippine Genome Center (PGC) was key in confirming the presence of three variants of concerns including a novel variant of interest. The current sequencing capacity of PGC is at 750 sequences per week, with turnaround time of 7 days. Recognizing the need for global sharing of information on variants, PGC submits reports to the GISAID. Besides supporting laboratory supplies for genome sequencing, WHO, in coordination with PGC and the DOH Epidemiology Bureau (EB), prepares to support the sampling method and design for the target population to be sequenced as well as genomic epidemiological analysis to guide decisions and actions in the COVID-19 response.

To complement PGC, the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) plans to perform genomic sequencing for outbreak investigation. RITM and EB are now drafting a policy on the strengthening of the influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infection (ILI/SARI) surveillance to integrate genomic sequencing following WHO guidance for the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS). RITM's request to WHO to support provision of needed laboratory supplies and equipment for the planned action is still to be finalized.

Risk Assessment, Surveillance and Contact Tracing

Risk assessment

As the DOH Epidemiology Bureau (EB) is currently reviewing its risk classification process for Local Government Units (LGUs), a joint framework for risk assessment and transmission stage assessment has been developed by WCO for further discussion with EB. This can potentially be helpful to guide public health and social measures needed for specific stages of transmission. In addition, WCO has worked closely with the Regional Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit of National Capital Region (NCR-RESU) to review the procedures for outbreak management in the different cities of Metro Manila.



Surveillance

The DOH Epidemiology Bureau and the Philippine Genome Center had provided updates on the current situation regarding the Variants of Concern B.1.17 and B.1.128 and P.1 as well as the Variant of Interest P.3 (previously labeled as E484K and N501Y). Technical assistance was specifically requested for genomic epidemiology to provide guidance on how the sampling of specimens would be conducted.

Contact Tracing

Closer coordination with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the DOH is being facilitated by WCO to advocate for the use of the Tanod-Kontra Covid (TKC) system to facilitate encoding and analytics in contact tracing and management. Meetings with health officials from Quezon City and San Juan City are ongoing to advocate for the use of the TKC system.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement



Source: https://twitter.com/takeshi_kasai

A VIP launch event and media forum on 15 March involving Secretary of Health Dr Francisco T. Duque III, EU Ambassador HE Luc Véron and WHO Representative to the Philippines Dr Rabindra Abeyasinghe (WR) was a high profile opportunity to communicate about COVID-19 and further strengthen partnerships between WHO, the EU and the Department of Health. The media forum was streamed as a Facebook Live event, reaching nearly 70,000 people and being shared over 470 times. Partners and VIPs were inspired to post on social media about the event, including WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Dr Takeshi Kasai.

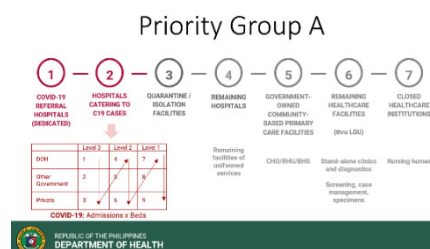
WHO Philippines continues to publish several posts each day about COVID-19 and, via WR, to communicate proactively with the media on its risks / prevention. Offering further technical support on risk communication to the Department of Health and, where appropriate, regions is a priority. Further



contacts on this are ongoing with a notable focus being COVID-19 prevention messaging around Holy Week.

Vaccines

The country received 600,000 doses of donated Sinovac Vaccines from China and 525,600 doses of AstraZeneca from the COVAX facility. To ensure the smooth implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination, the National Task Force on COVID-19 together with the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT) has established Vaccine Operation Centers (VOCs) at national, regional and provincial levels. VOCs' priorities are aligned with the World Health Organization (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) Roadmap in prioritizing the uses of COVID-19 Vaccines and SAGE Values Framework (WHO, Oct 2020).



The COVID-19 vaccination campaign started on March 1, 2021 with the conduct of symbolic vaccination activities in the vaccination sites. Government platforms were utilized to provide communication coverage and information to the public, in close coordination with all telecommunications networks regarding the arrival of the vaccines and the COVID-19 symbolic vaccination activities in various vaccination sites.

As of 15 March 2021, 19.20% or 215,997 out of the 1,125,095 Masterlisted Eligible Population (Priority A1) have been vaccinated. Of which, 14.31% or 161,042 were vaccinated with Sinovac and 4.88% or 54,995 were vaccinated with AstraZeneca.

In addition, there are 929 vaccination sites conducting COVID-19 vaccination in 17 regions. All regions are already implementing the campaign with Sinovac. On the other hand, of all the regions implementing the vaccination program, only Regions 12 and BARMM have not yet started vaccinating specifically with AstraZeneca vaccine.

Logistics

WHO Philippines has committed to donate additional Cold Chain Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment to the Department of Health (DOH) to support the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the country and to protect the health of the vaccination teams. A total of 1.2 million surgical masks were delivered to DOH central warehouse on 18 March 2021. Earlier this month, 8,000 bottles of alcohol-based hand rub were also officially handed over to the government. In addition, the country is expected to receive additional vaccine carriers, temperature monitoring devices, ice packs and face shields from WHO. The Country Office continues to liaise with the COVID-19 Donations Team and Supply Chain Management Service of DOH to ensure smooth handover of incoming donations.

Partner Coordination

The first batch of COVID-19 vaccines committed by the COVAX Facility to the Philippines arrived in Manila on 4 March 2021. A total of 4.7 million doses have been committed to the country by the COVAX facility. This is part of groundbreaking efforts by COVAX to deliver close to 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines globally in 2021 including at least 1.3 billion to the 92 economies eligible for support through the COVAX Advanced Market Commitment (AMC). This global initiative is led by WHO, Gavi - the Vaccine Alliance, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation (CEPI) with UNICEF and PAHO providing purchasing and delivery support.



During this period 10,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX Facility reached Bangsamoro. A total of 5,000 healthcare workers in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi started receiving these vaccines from 11 March through the Ministry of Health - BARMM.



The *Barangay Nanay* Series continues to be aired by the National Nutrition Council (NNC). Episodes 8 to 11 were aired 30 January to 6 March 2021, with the latest episodes presented by Anne Curtis, experts from the DOH, and Civil Society Organization (CSO) Partners. The latest episodes focused on child care, good feeding practices, complementary feeding, micronutrient powder available here: <https://fb.watch/49CzN6F96O/>) and breastfeeding available here: <https://fb.watch/49CEUyWJn7/>). This complementary feeding campaign is supported by UNICEF in response to the pandemic to ensure the continuity of nutrition services through reiteration and promotion of infant and young child feeding practices. Over 2 million people have been reached by the campaign, with close to 1,700 total shares of the episodes via the NNC Facebook page.



UNICEF is supporting the NNC in the conduct of the Nutrition Service Continuity Survey. The study aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of routine nutrition services through the health system. The online survey covers respondents from cities and municipalities and nutrition action officers and nutrition focal points across the country. The coverage of the survey has now reached 90 per cent of its target. Survey results will contribute to understanding and strengthening capacities of the National Nutrition Council regional offices in the context of COVID-19. Survey results will provide data to guide government regional partners in planning for recovery initiatives. Survey results will also help inform targeted nutrition interventions of UNICEF and partners in DOH and NNC priority areas.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement by UNICEF



UNICEF joined the Department of Health (DOH) and partners in the full-scale simulation exercise for the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccine on 9 February 2021. As part of the COVAX Facility, UNICEF is leading efforts to procure and supply doses of COVID-19 vaccines for 171 countries. The post on this activity went viral on Facebook reaching 23 million people, generating 140,000 engagements, and shared 850 times:

<https://www.facebook.com/unicefphilippines/posts/1015965207290572>

UNICEF released a statement on how the COVID-19 pandemic has made children more vulnerable to online sexual abuse and exploitation as they have become more dependent on computers, mobile phones and other devices. The article is available here:

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/02/15/2077797/childrens-world-shrinking-homes-computers-unicef>

UNICEF issued a joint press release with DOH, WHO and partners in the COVAX initiative on the arrival of the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX facility. It was picked up by national and regional media. It is available here: <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/philippines-welcomes-arrival-covid-19-vaccines-covax-facility>



Logistics, Procurement, and Supply Management

Org	Items	Delivered	Expected
UNICEF	Tents for triage and isolation purposes 72m ² and 42m ²	74	
	Modular tents for isolation facility	200	
	Coveralls for health workers	72,380	
	Face shields	33,000	
	N95 masks for health workers	35,680	
	Surgical Masks	406,750	
	Reusable cloth masks	76,500	
	Gloves, heavy duty, rubber/nitrile	1,000	
	Goggles, protective, indirect-side-venti	500	
	Apron, protection, plastic, reusable	500	
	Boots, rubber/PVC, reusable, pair	500	
	Coveralls for cleaning and disinfection personnel	1,000	
	N95 masks for cleaning and disinfection personnel	15,000	
	Cleaning and Disinfection kits	1,196	100
	Water kits	2,738	
	Hygiene kits	7,540	
	Handwashing facilities	210	
	Temporary drinking water facilities	15	
	Temporary sanitation facilities	67	
	Chlorine pool testers for water quality monitoring	12	
	Bulk water storages/bladders	6	