



**2020 IDRIM
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**



THE CONTINUUM OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE



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ABSTRACT

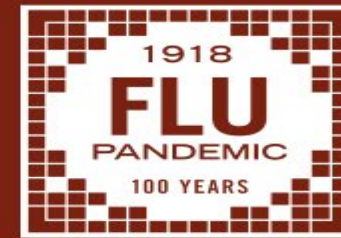
Disaster Risk Reduction Specialists have always prepared for All Hazards including Emerging Infectious Diseases. The rapid spread of emerging infectious diseases was enhanced by global air travel as evidenced by imported cases of COVID-19 in the Philippines from Wuhan, China. The COVID-19 that started as an epidemic in China was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. This presentation will discuss the strategic preparedness and response plans laid down by the Philippine Government Inter-Agency Task Force led by the Department of Health, joined by the Department of Transportation, Department of Interior & Local Government, Department of Public Works and Highway, Department of Labor, Department of Foreign Affairs and Department of Information & Technology. This presentation will also discuss the challenges the country is faced with in containing the SARS-CoV-2 and trying to maintain a balance between saving lives and resuscitating the economy in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

OBJECTIVES

- **To provide an overview of the epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 in the Philippines.**
- **To present the strategic plans designed by the Philippines Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.**
- **To discuss the challenges that the Department of Health and Healthcare System are faced with in the midst of the pandemic.**
- **To present the IATF initiatives in balancing saving lives and resuscitating the economy in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines that started out with a great strategic preparedness and response plan in January led by the Inter-Agency Task Force, now ranks # 21 in the world and #1 in Southeast Asia with the most Covid-19. The sudden spikes in COVID-19 cases may have been attributed to the early termination of the stay home orders, reported new cases among repatriated Overseas Filipino Workers and Locally Stranded Individuals (LSI) due to poor compliance with Centers for Diseases and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Health (DOH) guidelines, e.g. social distancing, use of face mask and good hand hygiene as well as crowded living condition in certain areas and higher viral loads. According to a report from the Department of Health (DOH), the Philippine Genome Center & Research Institute for Tropical Medicine confirmed the G614 variant of SARS-CoV-2 found in COVID-19 cases from Quezon City. The G614 variant has replaced the original D614 virus found in Europe & America which has higher viral loads that translates into higher level of infectivity.



WE REMEMBER. WE PREPARE.

[cdc.org](https://www.cdc.org)

20th Century FLU Pandemic & 21st Century COVID-19 Pandemic

[mycanyonlake.com](https://www.mycanyonlake.com)

[news.un.org](https://www.news.un.org)



Covid-19



Figure 1. The continuum of pandemic phases^a



^a This continuum is according to a "global average" of cases, over time, based on continued risk assessment and consistent with the broader emergency risk management continuum.

COVID-19 Pandemic Phases (Image & Concept: credit to the World Health Organization)

The continuum of COVID-19 Pandemic Phases represents a distribution curve of the global pandemic cases over time based on continued pandemic risk assessment globally and the curve shows the increase and decrease of pandemic cases across the pandemic continuum. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the four phases overlap with the stages of pandemic risk assessment, i.e. preparedness, response and recovery.

For example, the COVID-19 outbreak that started in China rapidly spread from Wuhan to other countries, e.g. Japan, Thailand, South Korea, France, Italy, U.S. and the Philippines during the interpandemic phase and the number of cases increased through the Alert phase with the largest number of confirmed cases in 188 countries/regions during the pandemic phase that overlapped with the response stage of the risk assessment, e.g. as of September 22, there are 31,352,177 confirmed COVID-19 cases with 965,529 deaths in 188 countries/regions and 291,789 confirmed cases with 5,049 deaths in the Philippines that ranks #21 in the world and #1 in Southeast Asia with the highest confirmed cases. The new global cases of COVID-19 will eventually decrease during the transition phase that overlaps with the recovery stage of risk assessment spectrum, going back to the inter pandemic phase.

EPIDEMIOLOGY OF COVID-19

- **On December 31, 2019, the WHO in China Office was informed of 44 cases of Pneumonia of Unknown Etiology (PUE) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province and closed the Seafood Market. [1] T Epidemiologist went to Wuhan to conduct surveys, collected nose and throat specimens for lab analysis to find out who got infected and identified the source of the outbreak, tracked and used surveillance data including antibody testing.[2]**
- **On January 30, the Philippine Department of Health (DOH) reported its first three cases of COVID-19 in the country. The 1st was a 38 years old female from Wuhan. The three cases were confirmed positive and classified as imported transmission. [3]**
- **March 7- 1st localized COVID-19 transmission case in the Philippines was reported by Department of Health.[3] & on March 9, The United Nations resident Coordinator Office (RCO) activated a Crisis Management Team in the Philippines**
- **On 6/23 -new cases among repatriated Overseas Filipino Workers & Locally Stranded Individuals.**
- **August 18- Philippine Genome Center & Research Institute for Tropical Medicine confirmed the G614 variant of SARS-CoV-2 in Quezon City. The G614 variant has replaced the original D614 virus in most Europe & Americas, associated with higher viral loads that translates into higher level of infectivity.**

[1] WHO Situation Report, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200121-sitrep-1-2019-ncov.pdf?sfvrsn=20a99c10_4

[2] <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/about-epidemiology/index.html>

[3] www.doh.gov.ph & <https://www.who.int/philippines/news/detail/29-07-2020-who-field-visit-to-baguio-city-and-benguet-province-models-for-contact-tracing-and-covid-19-response-in-the-philippines>

INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE

- **On January 28, 2020 the DOH convened the first Interagency Task Force (IATF) on Emerging Infectious Disease (EID) meeting, with representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Local and Interior Government (DILG), Justice (DOJ), Labor and Employment (DOLE), Tourism (DOT), Transportation (DOTr), and Information and Communications Technology (DICT).**
- **The Resolutions aim to ensure support to Filipinos in China & ensure transportation and quarantine (14 days) plans for Filipinos from Hubei; proposed temporary restrictions in issuance of visas from Hubei; and discouraged non-essential travel of Filipinos to China.**
 - **January 31, 2020 -the IATF imposed travel ban covering China, Macau and HongKong.**
 - **February 11-travel restrictions were imposed on Taiwan, transit port from China & lifted on February 14.**
 - **February 26- suspended entry of foreigners from Korea.**
 - **March 8 -President Rodrigo Duterte issued Proclamation No. 922s.2020 declaring a State of Public Health Emergency in the Philippines prompting a whole of government approach to COVID-19 pandemic. [1]**
 - **March 12-President raised Code Alert Level for COVID-19 to Code Red Sublevel Two that imposed stringent Social Distancing measures in the National Capital Region (NCR) for 30 days.**
 - **March 16- President placed Luzon under Enhanced Community Quarantine and issued Proclamation No. 929s.2020 declaring a State of Calamity throughout the Philippines for 6 months.**

<https://www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/health-update/IATF-RESO-14.pdf>

DOH COVID-19 RISK REDUCTION MEASURES

- **The Manila Water Foundation in partnership with Procter & Gamble inaugurated 4 hand washing facilities and 2 existing in Quezon City to launch “WASH in Pandemic” to enable an environment for proper hand washing.**
- **The Bayanihan to Recover as One Act, also known as Bayanihan to Heal (Republic Act No. 11469) allocated PHP 53.48 billion to support healthcare workers by providing PPEs, accommodations and hazard pay, a crucial core.**
- **The DOH partnered with Quezon City local government deployed the first end to end telemedicine.**
- **Ensured patient’s privacy and confidentiality of personal information by sharing COVID-19 patient’s data based on Mandatory reporting of Notifiable Diseases & Health Events of Public Concern Act, to public health authorities knowledgeable of duty to maintain data privacy.**
- **On August 6, the Philippines has taken the top spot in testing capacity in Southeast Asia, with a total 99 licensed testing laboratories & conducted 1,643,539 tests, an average of 28,938 tests/day within the last 7 days.[Our World in Data]**

<https://www.doh.gov.ph/2019-nCov?page=2>

<https://www.doh.gov.ph/2019-nCoV?page=6>

RISK REDUCTION MEASURES

- **In July 2020, a WHO delegation led by Regional Director for Western Pacific, Dr. Takeshi Kasai with DOH Officials visited Baguio City & Benguet to identify best practices in contact tracing and management, e.g. use of analytical tools, cognitive interviews skills. President Duterte appointed Baguio City Mayor Tagalong as new Philippine “Contact Tracing Czar.”[1]**
- **WHO assisted the DOH Epidemiology Bureau in developing “COVID KAYA,” a case and contact reporting system for epidemiology & surveillance.[2]**
- **The Who supported the DOH by providing PPEs for healthcare workers and provided online Infection Prevention training to frontline health workers, used by USAID and UNICEF to cover 5,500 healthcare staff.**
- **Rapid identification, treatment and isolation of positive COVID-19 cases. WHO supported the DOH’s Research Institute for Tropical Medicine with lab supplies and extraction kits and assisted with DOH accreditation of COVID-19 labs. [2]**

[1] <https://www.who.int/philippines/news/detail/29-07-2020-who-field-visit-to-baguio-city-and-benguet-province-models-for-contact-tracing-and-covid-19-response-in-the-philippines>

[2] <https://www.who.int/philippines/news/feature-stories/detail/100-days-of-covid-19-in-the-philippines-how-who-supported-the-philippine-response>

HEALTHCARE CONTINUITY MEASURES

- **The DOH launched the Coordinated Operations to Defeat Epidemic (CODE) “Mask Para Sa Masa”(Mask for the Masses), an active case finding strategies to prevent and eliminate clusters of community transmission of the virus.**
- **The DOH advised, “when in doubt, isolate” a vital safety measure to stop transmission specially when the individual had close contact with suspects, probable or confirmed cases of COVID-19.**
- **The East Avenue Medical Center unveiled its 6 storey Center for Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Disease (CERID) with a 40 patients capacity ER, an OR and L&D to cater for COVID-19 patients.**
- **The DOH and Department of Local Government (DILG) launched the “BIDA And May Disiplina:Solusyon sa COVID-19” #DisciplinaMuna campaign, geared towards discipline among members of the community that highlights effective health measures such as social distancing, use of face mask, hand washing to mitigate the risk of COVID-19.**
- **The DOH in collaboration with Pandemic Action Network & CDC Foundation joined the global call to make masks use mandatory in observance of World Mask Week to enlist policymakers, leaders, and influencers to adopt and reinforce pro-mask policy.**
- **The DOH strongly advised the public from buying and selling plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients to mitigate the risk of transfusion transmissible infection, e.g. HIV, hepatitis & malaria.**
- **The One Hospital Command Center was launched in Makati to facilitate a comprehensive & coordinated response to COVID-19 by ensuring effective and efficient health facility referral in Metro Manila.**

MEDICAL SOCIETIES CALL FOR A TIME OUT

- **The DOH and Health Professionals Alliance Against COVID-19 collaborated on the recalibrated strategies in response to the call of medical societies for a “Time Out” to address the following critical areas:**
 - **Health workforce deficiency**
 - **Contact tracing and isolation protocols**
 - **Transportation and workplace safety guidelines**
 - **Proper distribution of social amelioration**
 - **Testing capabilities to ensure appropriate tools in detecting COVID-19 infection**
 - **Cascading protocols to local government and private sector**
- **President Rodrigo Duterte approved the government Inter Agency Task Force proposal to place National Capital Region, Laguna, Cavite, Rizal, Quezon and Bulacan under “Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine” (MECQ) from August 4 to August 18.**
- **President Duterte approved the hiring of 10,000 medical professionals with robust life insurance. Under the MECQ, public transportation in Metro Manila has been suspended while businesses such as retail shops operate under 50% capacity.**

<https://www.doh.gov.ph/2019-nCov?page=2>

<https://www.doh.gov.ph/2019-nCoV?page=6>

ECONOMIC CONDITION

- **Unemployment rate rose to 17.7% in April, 2020 with number of jobless Filipinos up to 7.3 millions as lockdowns closed down businesses. [1]**
- **According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, “the number of people without work increased by 5 million from a year ago with construction, recreation, accommodation and food were among the sectors that have the largest annual drop in employment.[1]**
- **12.5 million Filipinos were not at work despite having jobs due to strict lockdowns orders and suspended public transportation.[1]**
- **To help marginalized workers recover from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Labor & Employment released P6.3 million in livelihood assistance to fishers, tricycle drivers, motorcycles shop workers, women’s group and other displaced workers from Mindoro and Romblon.**
- **When asked about whether the economy or health response is a higher priority for the government, Department of Finance’s (DOF) Assistant Secretary Tony Lambino stated, “It has become very clear that it’s not a binary choice, kailangan po natin gawin pareho, kailangan po natin tulungan ang ating mga kababayan na makabalik sa kanilang trabaho at paghahanapbuhay,” (we need to do both and help our countrymen to be able to return back to work and earn a living) to restart their lives while protecting the lives of others at the same time.)**

[1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-05/pandemic-drives-philippine-jobless-rate-to-record-high>

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

- **In an effort to revive the economy by restoring public transportation and lessening the bus and jeepney drivers' unemployment rate, Department of Transportation (DOTr) Undersecretary Artemio Tuazon cited a survey of International Union of Railways and issued a new policy reducing the physical distancing in public transportation based on the WHO minimum recommendation of one meter study done in 1980.**
- **The DOTr will adjust distancing requirement every two weeks from 0.75meter on Monday 9/21), to 0.5m on September 28 and 0.3m on October 12.**
- **Transportation Assistant Secretary Goddes Librian stated that other measures compliment social distancing, such as, use of face mask & face shield, no talking, no eating, no cell phone, proper disinfection, no symptomatic passengers as well as recommendation for air exchanges to reduce transmission of coronavirus.**
- **The DOTr policy was opposed by the DOH and other Cabinet members highlighting different views within the IATF.**
- **Other medical and nursing professionals think that instead of decreasing social distancing in public transportation, why not increase the number of buses and jeepneys while observing the 1meter social distancing.**

<https://rappler.com/nation/dotr-says-reduced-distancing-public-transportation-science-based>

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1338600/experts-think-public-must-dance-with-covid-19>

CONCLUSION

The 3,000 daily cases of COVID-19 since September 8 continues to overwhelm the country as the total confirmed cases reached 291,789 with 5,049 deaths as of September 22. Despite all the hard work and efforts of the IATF led by the DOH to flatten the curve, the government leaders have been criticized for not doing more to control the COVID-19. The public is polarized in their views of the way the government is managing the pandemic. Perhaps it would help the government to shift its paradigm by re-calibrating its actions based on real time data, science and strict compliance with the CDC guidelines to protect the health of the public while it attempts to re-open its business establishments.

According to Natalia Linovitskaya of the Russian Embassy in the Philippines, once the safety and efficacy of the Sputnik-V vaccine were proven, the Russian Federation started sharing information with the Philippine government, a priority partner in Southeast Asia. The agreement between the Russian Direct Investment Fund and the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD) of the Department of Science and Technology (DoST) was signed on August 19, 2020. And on September 9, 2020, the House of Representative Committee on Appropriations the PCHRD Executive Director stated that a local clinical trial would ensure quick approval by the FDA and distribution in the local market.

Hopefully, with the Sputnik-V vaccine in conjunction with the government IATF efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategic measures of the Department of Finance and private business entities will set the Philippines forward to health and economic recovery.

<https://rappler.com/nation/coronavirus-cases-philippines-september-20-2020>

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1338168/robredo-disputes-duterte-theres-more-to-fighting-covid-19-than-masks-pesticides>

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/09/22/opinion/analysis/russian-embassy-russian-covid-vaccine-proven-safe-reliable-and-effective/770605/>