

DOH confirms dengue deaths

after taking Dengvaxia

By **MAYEN JAYMALIN**

The Department of Health (DOH) yesterday confirmed that the deaths of 14 children vaccinated with the anti-dengue vaccine were mostly due to dengue.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III revealed that findings of forensic experts of the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) indicated that dengue shock syndrome led to the deaths of most of the children.

"PAO exhumed the bodies of the children and, so far, the indication is that their deaths were consistent with dengue shock syndrome," he pointed out.

He added that experts from the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) are also checking the clinical records of the children.

Both the findings of PAO and the PGH panel of experts would then be compared. Pending the results, the DOH could not as yet conclude that the deaths were related to Dengvaxia vaccination, Duque stressed.

"The death is consistent to dengue shock syndrome, but the charts of some of the children showed co-morbidities which means there are other illnesses. So we are trying to clear out if the other disease did not cause or hasten their deaths," he said.

He related that the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines classified dengue shock syndrome under grade four of dengue symptoms. People with this

syndrome suffer from severe plasma leakage and severe bleeding affecting the lungs, heart, kidney and liver.

The DOH, he also said, continues to provide assistance to children who got sick after being vaccinated with Dengvaxia.

It has met with Parang Elementary School students in an effort to address the issue on Dengvaxia. At least 350 of its pupils were among the first to be vaccinated with Dengvaxia during the Aquino administration's immunization program.

School principal Marciana de Guzman said there were children who got infected with dengue even after receiving the shots.

Also yesterday, the DOH installed insecticide nets inside the public school in line with the government's anti-dengue campaign, as it encouraged the public to search and destroy mosquito breeding sites to protect themselves from dengue infection.

In Dagupan City, Duque said he welcomed the PAO investigation and those of other agencies that include the

* DENGUE

* VACCINES - DENGVAXIA

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Department of Justice, Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption and National Bureau of Investigation.

He stressed in an interview with *Bombo Radyo* that the DOH continuously monitors the health status of children who received the vaccine in 2016 for all other possible side effects.

"Our surveillance is continuous. We will monitor children injected with Dengvaxia during the previous administration in 2016 when it started," Duque said.

At a forum of the Pampanga Press Club at Clark Freeport yesterday, DOH regional officers also reported a rise in the number of children who have fallen ill since receiving Dengvaxia.

Cindy Canlas, DOH regional chief for communicable and other diseases, said the cases rose from 52 to 170 in Central Luzon since December, although 91.94 percent of the 170 do not need hospitalization.

"Most of them are 10 to 14 years old and a majority are females," she said, adding that "164 cases or 96.5 percent

were vaccinated with three doses of the anti-dengue vaccine."

These cases, she added, have been categorized as Adverse Event After Immunization, although these have yet to be confirmed by the Regional Institute of Tropical Medicine.

She noted that the DOH started monitoring the Dengvaxia-vaccinated children in December last year, following the admission of vaccine manufacturer Sanofi Pasteur that the vaccine could lead to severe cases for those without any history of dengue.

Elenita Gorgolon, DOH regional director, admitted during the forum that her office faces a "nightmare" within the next five years, noting the projections that at least 400 of the 205,058 children who got the Dengvaxia shots in the region are likely to fall ill, some severely.

She urged parents to immediately report any illness that their children may suffer within the period, informing them that hospitals already have the rapid diagnostic test equipment that could confirm possible dengue cases within the first five

days of fever.

Gorgolon said the DOH has entered the identities of the 205,058 kids in a database accessible to both government and private hospitals.

- With Eva Visperas, Ding Cervantes