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DENG VAXIA SCARE AFFECTS OTHER GOV'T HEALTH PROGRAMS

ZAMBOANGA CITY—The Dengvaxia scare has seriously affected the conduct of health programs in Western Mindanao, including deworming, as parents have prevented health workers from administering the anthelmintic drugs to their children, officials said.

Dr. Joshua Brillantes, assistant health director for Western Mindanao, said the Dengvaxia scare had slashed program accomplishment by more than half.

"Because of Dengvaxia, all our programs are affected and that is why we have to strengthen our (information drive among) parents, especially for other Department of Health (DOH) programs like deworming," Brillantes said.

"For this year, around 60 percent of parents refused to sign the consent [for deworming]. The [reason] we found out was [the] Dengvaxia [controversy]," he added.

Parents won't sign waivers

The DOH had targeted to administer the anthelmintic drugs albendazole and mebendazole to about 848,947 children aged 5 to 18 in the Zamboanga provinces and this city.

But so far, only about 46 percent, or 381,293 children, have been given the drugs be-

cause many parents refuse to sign waivers.

Elisa Melindo, 42, said she told the class advisers of her two children that she would not allow health workers to

give them deworming tablets.

She said she had shunned all drugs from the DOH.

"Be it a vaccine, a chewable, a syrup, I said no. I have my options to bring my sons to a

refutable hospital or our family doctor for deworming or whatever it is in the DOH program. I don't trust their services now after the Dengvaxia [controversy]," Melindo, a beautician, told the Inquirer.

Like Melindo, 50-year-old government employee Monique Canillo said she also did not allow health workers to give the deworming tablet to her 7th-grader son.

"Sorry but I am saying no to deworming this time," Canillo said.

* VACCINE - DENG VAXIA

DOH programs doubted

She said that like other parents, she now doubted the DOH health programs.

She said she would rather bring her son to his pediatrician than risk his health in the hands of government health workers.

Dr. Sitti Nurusamsi Amilasan, head of the infectious disease cluster of the DOH in Western Mindanao, said the Dengvaxia scare pushed the accomplishment to just 46 percent of the target number of schoolchildren for deworming.

"The number has gone down," Amilasan said. Last year, the program accomplishment was about 92 percent, she said.

Amilasan maintained that albendazole, which is being administered with a single dose of 400 milligrams, and mebendazole, which comes in 500 mg dispensation were both safe.

She said these were recommended to fight all soil-transmitted helminthiasis, or worm infection among children.

Amilasan also said that none of the children who were given the medicines had gotten sick, contrary to the fears of parents who had rejected them.

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Measles outbreak

In Davao City, the chief of the City Health Office (CHO) also tried to ease fears of some parents that the measles vaccine used in an outbreak response was dangerous to their children's health.

Dr. Josephine Villafuerte said the measles vaccine was unlike Dengvaxia, which worsens symptoms in vaccinated people who have not been ill of dengue.

Suspected cases

The immunization is the city's response to a spike in the number of suspected measles cases in Davao since last November. Four children have since died, according to Assistant Health Secretary Abdullah Dumama.

Dumama did not elaborate.

The CHO said 224 suspected cases had been recorded but only 17 had been found to be positive measles cases so far.

Sixteen of the cases were call center agents. Villafuerte did not comment when asked about the 17th case except to say it was a child. INQ