

Concepcion's pooled swabs get DOH nod; saliva testing next

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After pioneering successive COVID-19 testing innovations in the country such as the research on pooled swab testing and ongoing research on saliva-based testing and similar pooled tests, Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship and Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion thanked the Department of Health led by Secretary Francisco Duque III for signing the Interim Guidelines on the Conduct of COVID-19 Pooled Testing in the country.

“Now, the most important thing is that testing will be faster and the capacity will increase. Pool testing is efficient as it would bring the cost to around P750 in the pool of five, versus P750 for only one individual,” Concepcion noted of Department Memorandum No. 2020-0539.

On the ground, various LGUs have already been benefiting from pooled testing since September. From Makati, Southern Iloilo, City of Passi, Pasig City, Pasay City and Quezon City, all these LGUs have been a testament to the cost-effectiveness of pooled testing – running a total of 15,012 tested individuals as of December 2020.

Mayor Abby Binay of Makati said in a statement, “Companies and businesses with large workforces can continue securing the health and safety of their employees by signing up for pooled swab tests. This can be done regularly, especially now that the majority of companies have asked their staff to resume working on-site.”

In another statement, Mayor Joy Belmonte of Quezon City said, “We appreciate the continuous support of Project Ark in our battle against COVID-19. This initiative complements our testing efforts as we slowly gear towards revitalizing our economy.”

Pooled swab testing was studied carefully by the Philippine Society of Pathologists Inc. (PSPI), Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) and the Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC). Private sector partners, through Go Negosyo, supported and funded the research.

Together with its partners, Go Negosyo believes that pooled testing is a gamechanger as it optimizes the availability of test kits, reduces the workload of laboratory staff, eliminates large groups of negative cases, makes PCR testing more affordable and available, provides LGUs and businesses with a better and clearer direction and restores confidence in returning to work while sustaining the gains of the initial lockdown.

Per the DOH memo, pooled testing can reduce the cost of screening a large number of individuals for infectious diseases.

“Using this procedure, samples from multiple individuals are combined or ‘pooled’ then are tested collectively. Select targeted samples are then tested individually if there is a positive result in the group. Strategic testing along with aggressive contact tracing and isolation is recognized as crucial to an effective COVID-19 response,” the memo read.