

## QC's COVID-19 situation 'alarming,' Belmonte says; 17 cases of UK, South African variants detected

Manila Bulletin · 11 Mar 2021 · 1 · By JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

Quezon City's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation has reached an "alarming" level following a record of around 218 new daily cases in the past week and the detection of at least 17 cases of various virus variants, Mayor Joy Belmonte said yesterday.

Belmonte said the detection of 13 cases of the United Kingdom (UK) variant and four cases of the South African variant could have caused the "rapid spread and surge" that the city is currently experiencing.

"Hindi lang sa sinasabi na nagkulang tayo sa pagsuot ng mask, ng face shield, ng social distancing [kaya tumaas ang kaso]... hindi naman ganyan kataas o kalala yung pagkukulang natin to the point na nag-ko-cause sya ng surge na ganito kalaki (It's not only because we fail to wear face masks and face shields and observe social distancing as it would not really reach a point that there would be a surge as big as this)," Belmonte told reporters in an online press conference.

"So, sa tingin ko, talagang malaki ang kinala

man ng presensya ng variants na ito sa biglang pagkalat ng sakit na ito (I believe the presence of the variants has something to do with it)," she added.

The city's current COVID-19 situation is already "serious," Belmonte admitted, forcing the local government to impose granular lockdown in several areas to contain the spread of the virus.

From 12 areas, there are now 14 areas under lockdown in the city, where people, including workers, are not allowed to go out for 14 days.

"We only identified 12 lockdown areas. Kaninang umaga, pagkagising ko, 14 na po sila. Ganyan po kabilis ang pagkalat ng virus na ito (When I woke up, 14 areas are already on lockdown. That's how fast the spread of the virus is). We have some barangays as well na yung barangay hall mismo ay locked down (that the barangay halls are even on lockdown)," she said, noting that three barangay halls have been temporarily shut down to test their employees for COVID-19.

Data presented by Belmonte showed that the city saw a 190.66 percent increase in its new daily cases. From February 2 to 8, the number is only at 75. But from March 2 to 8, it already reached 218.

The city's positivity rate also increased during the same period by 132.5 percent – from 4.0 percent to 9.3 percent.

The top three barangays that reported the highest number of increased daily active cases are Batasan Hills (83), Commonwealth (65), and Pasong Tamo (56)

"Yes, it's a serious increase. Yes, we should be alarmed. Yes, we should be disturbed," Belmonte said. She told her constituents to avoid going to crowded places.

No city-wide lockdown needed yet Although the city is already experiencing a COVID-19 surge, Belmonte said a city-wide lockdown is still not needed.

"I mentioned (before) that 200 (daily cases) is already a red flag to us. Ibig sabihin noon kailangan na nating bantayan talaga ang ating hospital," she said.

“But then, the worst we ever reached is 400... ‘Yan yung talagang nabulabog na yung buong city. Wala na talaga tayong malagyan sa mga pasyente (That’s the time that the whole city was already alarmed because there was no more facility to accommodate new patients). But we are not yet in the stage where we should be [imposing a] lockdown [in] our city,” she added.

Belmonte said the city is “just on a stage where we should be adopting restrictions that we believe will help curtail the spread of the virus.”

Enclosed areas Belmonte said the local government is mulling to impose restrictions on various establishments and lessen the operating capacity of enclosed establishments, such as bars, restaurants and churches.

“Should this be acceptable to stakeholders as well given further studies of the data, [we would do this],” Belmonte told reporters in an online press conference.

“Because we’ve also seen in the data [that] while yes restaurants, bars and other areas, such as churches, have, in other countries, been sources of outbreaks, we also have to see if this is true in our country,” she added.

Belmonte said the most common places of COVID-19 transmission are households, communities and workplaces.

Data presented by the mayor showed that from February 25 to March 4, 2021, a total of 213 cases of infections are acquired through household transmission, 126 through community and 84 through workplaces.

Only 24 cases are acquired at malls, 13 at markets, 11 at groceries and six at churches.

“At the moment, it is safe to say the city government is considering restrictions, but we’re also trying to be guided by our current data, so we can make restrictions in the right places,” she said.

“Because I also believe that we should not sacrifice our economic again,” she added, noting that current situation “demands stricter restrictions on the part of the government.”

For Belmonte, imposing a lockdown is still “the most effective way of addressing the surge” in COVID-19 case.