

- Medical awareness**'Undernourished children more prone to virus infection and possible death'**

BusinessMirror · 8 May 2020 · A3

SAVE the Children Philippines is calling on local health centers to resume maternal and child health services as the number of babies and young children contracting the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) has already reached 424 with nine deaths.

"No child should die from preventable causes," said Atty. Alberto Muyot, chief executive officer of Save the Children Philippines.

"Children who die from Covid-19 may have been suffering from acute malnutrition, or wasting, caused by hunger with complications such as pneumonia and dehydration due to diarrhea," said Muyot.

He said child deaths due to severe malnutrition caused by hunger and undernutrition is highest in the Philippines at 48 percent, surpassing global rates of 45 percent.

Prior to Covid-19 pandemic, child malnutrition in the Philippines is one of the highest in the world with one in three children below five years old suffering from stunted growth based on the 2018 Expanded National Nutrition Survey.

The survey also reported that at least 48.2 percent of infants age six to 11 months have iron deficiency anemia due to poor feeding practices and inadequate food intake.

Dr. Amado Parawan, health and nutrition advisor of Save the Children Philippines, said adequate nutrition to prevent stunting and micronutrient deficiency will contribute to strong immunity to illnesses especially during disease outbreaks such as Covid-19.

"The Covid-19 pandemic and the enhanced community quarantine did not only create a situation that posed challenges to the nutrition programs for severely malnourished children as operations of health centers have been disrupted. Worse, it has resulted to the inability of families to meet their basic food requirements due to income losses," said Parawan.

The highest Covid-19 cases are among those 15-19 years old at 154, and 112 cases for children below four years old, according to the Department of Health Covid-19 tracker. Nine deaths of children on those age groups have been recorded as of May 6, 2020.

Meanwhile, in Mabalacat, Pampanga, Mayor Crisostomo "Cris" Garbo has launched the "Mother and Child Gabay sa Tamang Nutrition Pack" aimed to provide proper nutrition to both the mother and child in the first 1,000 days in time for Mother's Day.

During the launch, Garbo and

City Nutrition Officer Joronny Gladys Lingat distributed to nutritionally at-risk pregnant and breastfeeding women (with infants 0–6 months old) nutrition packs. The packs include Go, Glow and Grow foods like fresh vegetables and root crops from local farmers of the city, fruits, bread, eggs and iodized salt.

Garbo, a medical course graduate, said the first 1,000 days of a child's life, which begins from conception until a child reaches his or her 2nd birthday, is the most crucial stage of a child's overall health and development.

It is very important, the mayor added, to support a child's nutrition at this stage, through providing proper nutrition to pregnant women, promotion of exclusive breastfeeding and proper infant and young child feeding practices.