

## Belmonte to gov't: Expand vaccination to kids

The Philippine Star · 11 Sep 2021 · 8 · By JANVIC MATEO

Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte yesterday requested the national government to include children in the country's vaccination program against COVID-19.

She issued the statement after vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. told the House of Representatives that the country intends to raise its vaccination target to 90 percent of the country's population.

Belmonte stressed the importance of including children in the vaccination program since minors comprise 30 percent of the city's population.

"What health experts are now pushing for cannot be achieved in our city if we will not allow children or those below 18 years old to get COVID-19 vaccines and protect them as well from getting seriously sick from the virus," she said.

"We understand that there is a vaccine shortage at the moment. But once our country gets a regular supply of vaccines with Food and Drug Administration approval for vaccinating those 17 years old and below, we should consider this right away," she added.

Citing data from the city epidemiology and surveillance unit, Belmonte said the city has already recorded 12,608 cases of COVID-19 among children under 17.

Some 1,327 were active cases between Aug. 26 and Sept. 8, including 48 children less than a year old.

On Thursday, the city government confirmed that 99 individuals aged 18 years old and below were among the 122 residents of Gentle Hands Orphanage who tested positive for COVID-19.

Belmonte said the local government is ready to start inoculating children once it receives the guidelines or "go signal" from the national government.

"We need to protect our children given that they are directly or indirectly exposed (to the virus)," she said.

"Right now, while we are waiting for the recommendation from the national government, we continuously expand our COVID response to include children," she added in Filipino, citing efforts such as expanded swab testing and establishment of more isolation facilities for families.