

'No parents' consent, no jabs for children'

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WITH the government rollout of vaccines against the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) for children from 5 to 11 years old set on Monday, February 7, four mayors in the National Capital Region (NCR) said they would allow the inoculation only with the consent of their parents or guardians.

Quezon City Mayor Josefina "Joy" Belmonte, Valenzuela City Mayor Rexlon "Rex" Gatchalian, Malabon City Mayor Antolin "Lenlen" Oreta 3rd and Navotas City Mayor Tobias "Toby" Tiangco issued the condition separately even as Vaccine Czar Carlito Galvez Jr. assured the public that the jabs were "safe and have been studied by scientists across the globe."

Galvez, also chief implementer of National Task Force Against Covid-19 (NTF), gave the assurance during the arrival of 780,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine for children at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport on Friday night.

The vaccine czar said that 167,000 children have been registered to take part in the vaccination of minors set on Monday.

The four mayors said they have a

responsibility to their constituents whom they must guide and protect.

Broadcast journalist Dominic Almelor and Girlie Samonte sought a temporary restraining order (TRO) and writ of preliminary injunction against the "unconstitutional" vaccination for kids.

Assisted by Public Attorney's Office (PAO) Chief Persida Rueda-Acosta, the parents filed their petition before Quezon City Regional Trial Court Judge Primo Sio Jr. of Branch 96.

The Department of Health (DoH) memorandum, which was signed by Undersecretary Ma. Rosario Vergeire, states that "in case the parent or guardian refuses to give consent to the vaccination despite the desire and willingness of the minor child to have himself/herself vaccinated or there are no persons that may legally exercise parental authority over the child, the State may act as 'parens patriae' and give the necessary consent."

The State may be represented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) or its counterparts from the local government units, according to the memorandum.

Sio directed Health Secretary Francisco Duque 3rd and Vergeire to attend a 2 p.m. videoconference hearing set on Tuesday.

Also ordered to attend the hearing are the Office of the Solicitor General and DoH's Public Health Services Team, according to Rueda-Acosta who said she would be the lead counsel for Almelor and Samonte.

In response to the petition, the DoH and the NTF issued a joint statement, saying that they respect the parents' right to file a case and that they will wait for the legal process to take its course. However, they will still proceed with the vaccination of children.

The government aims to inoculate 15.5 million children ages 5 to 11.

Endemic phase

Meanwhile, acting Palace spokesman Karlo Alexei Nograles said the government is formulating the National Action Plan (NAP) Phase 5 that would include shifts in protocols and policies on how the country would deal with Covid-19.

He noted that the alert level system and minimum health protocols will likely stay in the near future and vaccination will continue to ensure the protection of the public against Covid-19.

National Economic Development Authority Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon said the NAP Phase 5 will have the "same organization, organization structure" as the government's previous NAP and is meant to guide the country into the transition to the new normal.

Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship Jose Maria "Joey" Concepcion 3rd had urged the government to adopt an "endemic mindset" on the Covid-19 pandemic following its move to relax restrictions for fully vaccinated inbound travelers.

On Friday, Nograles announced that foreign nationals traveling for business or tourism purposes may enter the Philippines without visas starting February 10 if they satisfy certain conditions.

First 1,000 vaccinees

Dr. Kezia Lorraine Rosario of the National Vaccination Operations Center (NVOC) said the first 1,000 vaccinees will be inoculated in six sites across NCR.

These are the Philippine Heart Center, National Children's Hospital, the Philippine Children's Medical Center, the Filoil Flying V Centre, Manila Zoo and the Skydome at the SM City North Edsa.

After the initial rollout on Monday, Rosario said that other parts of the country will also begin their vaccination drives, starting in Central Luzon and Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) and in Cotabato City before the full rollout nationwide by February 14.

Vergeire said the rollout of pediatric vaccination will allow schools to safely reopen in June 2022 as kids are protected from Covid-19.

Vergeire said that getting inoculated will prevent kids from getting multi-system inflammatory syndrome for children (MIS-C), a condition that only affects those who will get infected with Covid-19.

Kids infected with MIS-C may have inflammation in their lungs and other internal organs, which could lead to multiple organ failure.

Modified EUA

Faberco Life Sciences Inc. said that it has applied for a modification of its previously-issued emergency use authorization to include adolescents ages 12 to 17.

The distributor said that it has submitted data on the use of the Covovax vaccine, manufactured by Serum Institute of India under license by Novavax Inc., to the Philippine Food and Drug Administration for consideration.

The vaccine was reported to have had an efficacy rate of 90.4 percent against Covid-19, 93.2 percent against variants of concern, and 100 percent against moderate and severe diseases.

Faberco said that it aims to deliver the first doses of Covovax by March 2022.

Meanwhile, Dr. Benjamin Co, co-lead investigator of a study on the efficacy of the anti-Covid-19 pill molnupiravir, urged Filipinos who are not vaccinated and are exposed to the virus to participate in a trial.

Co said interested participants may call Santiaguel at 0917-8413314 or Co at 0968-558-3091 or 0927-007-6602.