

Children's vaccination begins

The Manila Times · 7 Feb 2022 · A1 · KAITHREEN CRUZ AND FRANCIS EARL CUETO WITH BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

THE Department of Health (DoH) repeated its assurance that vaccines against Covid-19 to be administered to children between five and 11 years old are safe and effective.

The pilot rollout for the pediatric shots is set for today, February 7, with the nationwide rollout scheduled a week later.

The Food and Drug Administration has granted emergency use authorization for Pfizer's reformulated vaccine.

Health Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje said in a radio interview Sunday the Pfizer vaccine will only contain 10 micrograms in a 0.2 milliliter (mL) dose, compared to the 30 micrograms for a 0.3 mL dose given to minors ages 12 to 17.

Five to 11-year-olds will still receive two doses, 21 days apart, Cabotaje said.

Densely populated areas and those with high numbers of new Covid-19 cases, including the National Capital Region (NCR), will be prioritized.

Cabotaje said there are enough doses to start jabs in the key target areas.

About 5.28 million doses are expected to be shipped to the Philippines this month.

Cabotaje emphasized pediatric vaccination is not mandatory, and parental consent is a requirement.

Parents who cannot accompany their children must provide an authorization letter naming a guardian accompanying the child.

Children with symptoms of Covid-19 or those recently exposed to positive cases of the virus will not be inoculated. Children who have been infected with the virus will have to wait 14 days before they receive the vaccine.

Those with comorbidities are advised to seek clearance from their physician or pediatrician.

Parents will be briefed by health workers at vaccination centers on what adverse effects children may experience after receiving the vaccine and what they could do to minimize the side effects.

Cabotaje said walk-in vaccinations

FAMILY DAY may be allowed soon, but preregistration will be preferred during the pilot stage and initial implementation.

At least four city mayors in the NCR said they will allow the pediatric inoculations only if there is consent from parents or guardians.

Mayor Josefina "Joy" Belmonte of Quezon City, Rexlon "Rex" Gatchalian of Valenzuela, Antolin "Lenlen" Oreta 3rd of Malabon and Tobias "Toby" Tiangco of Navotas issued the condition even as vaccine czar Carlito Galvez Jr. assured that the jabs were "safe and have been studied by scientists across the globe." Galvez, who is also chief implementer of National Task Force Against Covid-19, 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.

He said that 167,000 children have been registered for vaccination.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año agreed with the mayors that approval of the parents is a must.

Another Metro Manila mayor, Abigail Binay of Makati, said chocolates and other treats will be given to the 5 to 11-year-olds scheduled for inoculation.

"The sweet treat is meant to reward them and, at the same time, make them happy," Binay said.

Last week, broadcast journalist Dominic Almelor and Girlie Samonte sought a temporary restraining order against pediatric vaccination, saying it is "unconstitutional" assisted by Public Attorney's Office chief Persida Rueda-Acosta. The parents filed their petition before Quezon City Regional Trial Court Judge Primo Sio Jr.

The petitioners are pinning their case on a DoH memorandum signed by Undersecretary Ma. Rosario Vergeire, stating that if a parent or guardian refuses to give consent to the vaccination, the state, represented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, may act as "parens patriae" and give the necessary consent.

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

Also ordered to attend are the Office of the Solicitor General and DoH's Public Health Services Team.

Rueda-Acosta said she would be the lead counsel for Almelor and Samonte.

Meanwhile, Sen. Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go reiterated that pediatric vaccines are effective and safe, and are the best weapon available to safeguard families against Covid-19.

Go on Sunday said vaccinating children "is an important part of the national immunization program as it provides them with the extra protection they need against the virus." The government aims to vaccinate over 39.4 million children up to 17 years old.

The government has designated six vaccination centers in Metro Manila: the Philippine Heart Center, Philippine Children's Medical Center, National Children's Hospital and SM North Edsa (Skydome) in Quezon City, Manila Zoo in Manila City, and FilOil Gymnasium in San Juan City.

As of February 4, the country has received 217,778,400 doses of Covid-19 vaccines and administered 128.4 million shots.

Around 59.8 million Filipinos have been fully vaccinated while 60.65 million individuals have received their first dose.

A total of 8.012 million booster shots have been administered.