

- Monkeypox

41 placed under quarantine in QC

The Manila Times · 22 Aug 2024 · A1 · BY ARLIE O. CALALO AND KRISTINA MARALIT

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered the Department of Health (DoH) to closely monitor cases of mpox on Wednesday, as the Quezon City government put 41 close contacts of the first mpox patient under quarantine after he was found to have visited at least two establishments in the city.

In a press conference, Mayor Joy Belmonte said the 33-year-old Filipino patient, not a resident of the city, had gone to a dermatology clinic and the AED Infinity Wellness Spa along E. Rodriguez Avenue in Quezon City.

Citing initial information, Belmonte said the patient admitted that he had frequented similar spas in other cities.

The doctor noticed skin lesions on the arms, face, trunk, back and other parts of the patient's body and immediately coordinated with the barangay to transport him to the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine to collect specimens.

At the Palace, the President told Health Secretary Teodoro Herbosa to continue surveillance, especially of areas and people most vulnerable to the disease.

Herbosa said the first mpox case reported by the Philippines this year was a mild variant, not the deadly strain sparking global alarm.

The highly transmissible Clade 1b strain of the virus has killed hundreds of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo and has also been detected in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Sweden.

"It's the old variant," Herbosa said of the virus that struck a 33-year-old Filipino male, referring to the mild Clade 2 variant.

"It's not as alarming as the Clade 1b," he said.

He said the patient had not traveled outside the country and was "still confined" in the hospital.

"For us doctors, that means the virus is circulating in the community," Herbosa said. Nine mpox cases were reported by Philippine authorities in 2022 and 2023, with the previous most recent one last December.

Unlike Covid-19, which is airborne, mpox may only be transmitted through intimate or skin-to-skin physical contact with someone infected or with contaminated materials. Herbosa assured the President that the health department is ready to treat and manage mpox.

International health experts said most mpox cases are mild, but it can be deadly as it can lead to sepsis, a serious condition in which "the body responds improperly to an infection."

City Epidemiology and Surveillance Division (CESD) head Rolly Cruz said they were able to identify the patient's close contacts and they were already quarantined as a first step to contain the disease.

In particular, 28 of them were under self-quarantine, which meant that they would isolate themselves from the rest of their family and stay only in a designated area like a bedroom and, as much as possible, use a bathroom that is not shared with others.

The others were under self-monitoring, said Cruz as he added that their quarantine period would last until September 1.

“After that period, if they are exhibiting no symptoms, that means they were not infected,” he told The Manila Times via Viber.

The city government has already closed down the spa after it was found to be operating without the necessary permits, Belmonte said.

The Department of Health earlier reported the first case this year of mpox, previously known as monkeypox, days after the World Health Organization declared the disease a global health emergency.

The Filipino patient had no travel history outside of the country, the DoH said.

The man became sick more than a week ago, first with a fever, “followed four days later by findings of a distinct rash on the face, back, nape, trunk, groin, as well as palms and soles,” the DoH said.

Belmonte said they had improved their prevention, control, and response protocols against mpox.

Since 2022, the city had already established a response mechanism to address mpox, she said.

Nurses, doctors, and medical personnel, including health care workers in social hygiene and sundown clinics, have been oriented about the virus, the mayor added.

The QCESD organized a quick response team for mpox contact tracing efforts, while personal protective equipment and other logistical needs for contact tracing have been in place, city officials said.

The City Health Department has advised the city’s residents to follow the health protocols set by the DoH, including proper hand washing and avoiding contact with people exhibiting mpox symptoms, as mpox can be transmitted to a person through sexual contact and close or direct contact.