THE PHILIPPINE STAR
news
SATURDAY | MARCH 10, 2018
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WHO underscores importance of vaccination

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

Two million to three million children are saved by vaccines all over the world every year, an expert from the World Health Organization (WHO)-Philippines underscored yesterday as health officials report that parents are now avoiding immunization for their children due to the Dengvaxia vaccine controversy.

Jun Ryan Orbina, a science and public health communication specialist, said vaccination plays a pivotal role in public health as it combats illnesses.

But Obina said for a program like immunization to succeed, it is important to gain public trust, which "is not easily created."

"We invest in public trust but public trust can be easily destroyed by one shape of event," Obina said in his presentation during the "SalinSiyensya" forum of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicines (RITM) for the media in Quezon City.

This was echoed by RITM director Socorro Lupisan, who also highlighted the need to "correct misconceptions in the news" about vaccination because the immunization programs of the Department of Health (DOH) are now suffering.

"We have a lot of outbreaks in the country because immunization coverage has decreased... so we really need to regain the trust of mothers to public health and immunization," Lupisan said.

Obina urged the media keep in mind that "vaccines are safe and they work" when they write about immunization.

"We'd like to stress that we need more positive angle and attention to immunization, particularly for routine immunization of infants or children," he added.

Late last year, the Philippines became the 44th country to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus.

Obina said if the misconceptions and misinterpretations on vaccination will continue, the achievements in public health like the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus might also be compromised.

He reiterated the "benefits of immunization far outweigh the risks... but what catches media attention are the risks because the benefits themselves are not very visual in nature."

"The key message that we hope our key media friends will also emphasize... is the risks are so small but the benefits are very big," Obina said.

* VACCINATION
* WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)