

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

RP's H1N1 flu cases now 193

Virulent strain feared

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA
Inquirer.net

THE Department of Health warned on Monday, June 15 that the highly contagious Influenza A(H1N1) virus could later develop into a more virulent strain even as it downed 46 more Filipinos over the weekend.

"Don't underestimate the virus' potential for mutation," Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said.

Duque said the new cases confirmed in the weekend brought to 193 the number of people af-

flicted with the virus. He said the good news was that all of the confirmed cases involved a "mild" strain of the virus.

But he said the mild nature of the current strain should not lead the public to complacency. He said the DoH was set to implement beginning on Tuesday, June 16 a new response system

to mitigate the spread of the virus in communities.

In response to a new World Health Organization protocol, he said the popular antiviral would now be administered more to high-risk patients such as those with diabetes, tuberculosis, HIV, compromised immune systems. ■

Help for A(H1N1) victims in Ecija villages

by ANSELMO ROQUE
Inquirer.net

CABANATUAN CITY, Nueva Ecija—The governor of Nueva Ecija has announced that the provincial government is giving food assistance to the Jaen town victims of the Influenza A (H1N1) virus who have stayed home and financial assistance for workers who have been deprived of income.

"It's about time that we should help those who were advised to do self-quarantine due to the onslaught of the H1N1 virus," said Governor Aurelio Umali in an interview over dzRH radio on Tuesday, June 16.

He said he is heeding the request of Benjamin Lopez, provincial health officer, to provide food assistance to the families of victims of the virus in the affected villages of Hilera, Pakul, and Lambakin in Jaen town.

He also said financial assistance will also be given to the workers who were temporarily disabled by ailment.

"I asked Dr. Lopez to identify the workers who were affected by the virus and lost income to support their respective families," Umali said.

He did not detail, though, how much financial assistance would be given and what kinds and amount of food would be distributed.

He said this will be taken up in a subsequent meeting with the health personnel of Nueva Ecija.

Latest report by the Department of Health said that 20 cases in Barangay (village) Hilera in Jaen tested positive for the H1N1 virus while 83 had flu-like symptoms.

Nearby barangays of Lambakin and Pakul had 52 and 39 had fallen ill with flu-like symptoms.

In a statement, Umali urged politicians and other leaders to take a back seat in handling the H1N1 virus problem and leave it in the hands of health authorities.

"It is imperative that we should have only one voice in cases like this. We should leave it to the experts and we should not meddle in order to get mileage for own personal gains," he said.

He said he was informed a month ago of some cases in Nueva Ecija, including two patients in other towns of Nueva Ecija who tested positive for the virus, but he felt it prudent to let the provincial health officer do his job and take a back seat but always ready to lend assistance.

In Jaen town, Mayor Santy Austria lamented that the whole town is now stigmatized following the declaration by the DoH that the H1N1 virus cases have attained community level in Hilera, one of its barangays.

Julita Hermosa, Barangay Hilera chief, Ruperto Castro, school principal, gave an insight into what it is like to be in a place hit by the H1N1 virus.

"There is no general alarm here as residents knew that they would get well (on) proper medication and rest when afflicted by the virus. They said it was just like the (type of) flu they (are familiar with)," they said.

They also said there was not one case of near-death from among those who caught the virus in their barangay.

They also said all the cases reported in their barangay have now either recovered or are fast recovering due to the full assistance being given health personnel who have been assisting them every day.

SAYS WORKERS GROUP

.7M voters abroad to sway 2010 polls



URGING more Filipinos abroad to register for the 2010 elections, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) on Monday, June 15 said it expects some 700,000 overseas absentee voters "to significantly influence" the outcome of next year's presidential elections.

"We are counting on over a million overseas Filipinos to sign up as absentee voters, and at least 70 percent of them to actually cast their vote. This is enough critical mass to considerably affect the selection of the next President," said TUCP secretary-general and former Senator Ernesto Herrera.

Herrera said TUCP has feedback from labor posts abroad, indicating a surge in the number of overseas Filipinos, mostly migrant workers, who want to enlist as absentee voters for the first time.

"Obviously, overseas Filipinos are eagerly anticipating the elections and raring to vote," said Herrera, former chairman of the Senate committee on labor, employment, and human resources development.

He said the low absentee voter turnout in the 2007 mid-term elections was not surprising because the country's top two posts were not at stake then.

"Next year, however, we expect (absentee) voter turnout to easily surpass the 64 percent (turnout) in the 2004 presidential polls," Herrera said in a statement e-mailed to media outfits.

Herrera urged overseas Filipinos "not to give up their right to choose the country's next leaders that offer the greatest hope for real change."

Qualified overseas Filipinos have until August 31 to register as absentee voters. The new listing began on February 1.

"We have high hopes that by the August 31 deadline, a little over a million overseas Filipinos will have already registered as absentee voters," Herrera said.

As of June 3, a total of 92,175 overseas Filipinos had registered as absentee voters for the first time, bringing to 463,249 the total number of listed (absentee) voters.

The total would have been higher, as the Commission on Elections is mandated by law to remove 132,820 absentee voters for failing to participate in the 2004 and 2007 polls.

In the 2004 presidential elections, a total of 364,187 overseas Filipinos were listed as absentee voters, but only 64 percent or 233,092 actually voted.

In the 2007 mid-term elections, a total of 503,894 overseas absentee voters were listed, but only 16 percent or 81,732 turned out to vote. ■

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