

18 DECEMBER 2021, Saturday



DENR

NEWS ALERTS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Back to Mother Nature

Barring any resurgence of Covid-19 cases, DENR readies reopening of more Protected Areas, National Parks for visitors



[BYJONATHAN L. MAYUGA](#)

DECEMBER 18, 2021

4 MINUTE READ



Kayakers navigate the limestone cliffs of El Nido, Palawan, part of the El Nido-Taytay Managed Resource Protected Area, which covers over 36,000 hectares of land and 54,000 hectares of marine waters.

AS the Philippine economy gradually reopens with the continuing decline in Covid-19 cases logged on a daily basis by health authorities, ecotourism in Protected Areas (PA) is slowly reclaiming its luster for pandemic-weary Filipinos in need of a much-deserved break from months of on-and-off community lockdowns.

Ecotourism in PAs, or areas set aside for conservation, offers people an opportunity to commune with nature, while avoiding crowded areas in the face of the continuing threat of new Covid-19 variants.

The good news is more PAs are expected to resume ecotourism operation soon, an official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said.



Back to Mother Nature

So far, 55 of the 93 PAs that offer ecotourism in various parts of the country have reopened. More of these ecotourism sites will soon start accepting visitors on the assumption that, hopefully, the current national trend in Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations maintains its present course amid the looming Omicron variant threat.

Meriden E. Maranan, chief of the National Parks Division of the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), said with the issuance of Executive Order 151 "Approving the Nationwide Implementation of the Alert Level System for Covid-19 Response" in November 2021, tourist attractions are already open in areas under Alert Levels 1 to 4.

As such, she said, more PAs opening to visitors is expected as long as concerned local government units (LGUs) where ecotourism activities will take place will not raise any objection.

VIA e-mail, Maranan said ecotourism activities in PAs were severely affected due to the quarantine restrictions during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Prior to the pandemic, an average of 4,367 jobs were supported annually through ecotourism development in protected areas, which decreased drastically by 32 percent [2,948 jobs] during the pandemic," she said.

Nevertheless, Maranan said, patrolling and protection activities of "Bantay Gubat" and "Bantay Dagat" volunteers were continuously conducted during the closure of the PAs to the public.

Tour guides, transportation and catering services providers were the sectors most affected by the closures of PAs, she said.

"With the reopening of the parks, we are optimistic that tour guides and other service providers that are relying on ecotourism in Protected Areas would soon resume operations. Further, partnership with communities is vital as we recover from the pandemic. At the DENR, we continuously build their capacity in managing our resources as well as in exploring other alternative livelihood activities," Maranan said.

Adherence to protocols

HOWEVER, she pointed out that further health and safety protocols that may be issued, especially with the emergence of the Omicron variant, will be followed strictly in our PAs to avoid the spread of the virus in the country. The first two cases of the more transmissible Omicron variant in the Philippines were logged by the Department of Health on Thursday afternoon.

According to Maranan, from the total income generated by PAs and National Parks (NPs), 64 percent is derived from ecotourism activities. The reopening of ecotourism sites, she said, will help PAs and NPs to recover from financial losses and serve as additional sources of funds for their operations.

Aside from the income generated in the operation of ecotourism in PAs and NPs, Maranan said, the practice instills conservation education and awareness among the visitors and reinforces ecosystem services through a number of benefits while providing livelihood to communities.



Back to Mother Nature

“Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Protected Areas receive roughly 4.5 million visits annually, and generated approximately P225 million per year from entrance fees and use of facilities. During the pandemic, Protected Areas have received a total of 1.2 million visitors only and generated approximately P59.6 million,” she noted.

According to Maranan, the number of visitors and income generated has decreased drastically by 72 percent and 73 percent, respectively.

“With the reopening of Protected Areas and easing of travel restrictions, we are expecting that the number of visitors and income from ecotourism in Protected Areas will increase,” she said.

Maranan noted that while the nationwide Alert Level System has already been adopted, park managers or Protected Area superintendents are bound to adhere to local guidelines and ordinances issued by various LGUs, explaining why many PAs and NPs are still closed to visitors.

“Meantime, we take this as an opportunity to enhance the skills of our PA staff and the communities through various relevant training. Further, this is also a chance for our biodiversity to recover from the impacts caused by some activities in the area.

The DENR-BMB is currently strengthening its partnerships with the Department of Tourism, the Department of the Interior and Local Government and other development partners through the National Ecotourism Steering Committee and Ecotourism Technical Working Group.

Maranan said among the areas for collaboration with concerned national government agencies are the updating of the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan, operationalization of the Reformulated National Tourism Development Plan, and adoption of guidelines on the operation of ecotourism under the new normal to be anchored on the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases’ guidelines and issuances of various relevant agencies.

“These plans will serve as guides for our park managers in the operation of Protected Areas under the new normal,” she said.

In the meantime, as to securing clearance from LGUs to resume operation, Maranan said that since each LGU has specific protocols and guidelines in terms of managing the pandemic, the Protected Area Management Board, where LGUs sit as members, is the most appropriate venue to discuss the necessary clearance for the resumption of PA operation and opening.



Ilocos Norte hatches potentials for birdwatching tourism

By Leilanie Adriano December 17, 2021, 7:52 pm



BIRDING. Local birdwatchers and photographers visit Paoay Lake for the yearly Asian bird census in this undated photo. a birdwatching tour circuit was launched on Friday (Dec. 17, 2021) at the Paoay Lake Natural Park in Nanguyudan village, Paoay town, considered as one of the migratory bird sites in the country. *(Photo courtesy of Ilocos Norte Tourism)*

LAOAG CITY – The province of Ilocos Norte, which is working on the development of new tourism attractions under the new normal, has birdwatching or "avitourism" for its latest offering.

Meant to boost local employment and livelihood in communities, a birdwatching tour circuit was launched on Friday at the Paoay Lake Natural Park in Nanguyudan village, Paoay town, considered as one of the migratory bird sites in the country.

Evangeline Dadat, officer-in-charge of the Department of Tourism in Ilocos (Region 1), said during the launching on Friday that "this newly develop roadmap promises a safer eco-tourism in the province that will surely entice both local and foreign visitors."

As Ilocos tourism is now being slowly introduced to the "new normal" market, she hopes that these birdwatching or birding activities will also serve as an eye-opener in the conservation of natural heritage.

"Today, birders from different countries enjoy the birding activities which jive with the cultural aspects of the province. The blended natural ecology of Ilocos Norte offers different species with their varying habitat from vast sand dunes to tropical rainforests," she added.

In previous years, a team of birdwatchers started monitoring the presence of migratory birds escaping the cold front of temperate regions into Paoay Lake.

Based on the yearly Asian Waterbird Census, Paoay Lake has been providing shelter to some bird species namely Little Grebe, Great Egret, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Philippine Duck, Tufted Duck, White-browed Crake, Common Kingfisher, White-collared Kingfisher, White-throated Kingfisher, and the Great Cormorant.



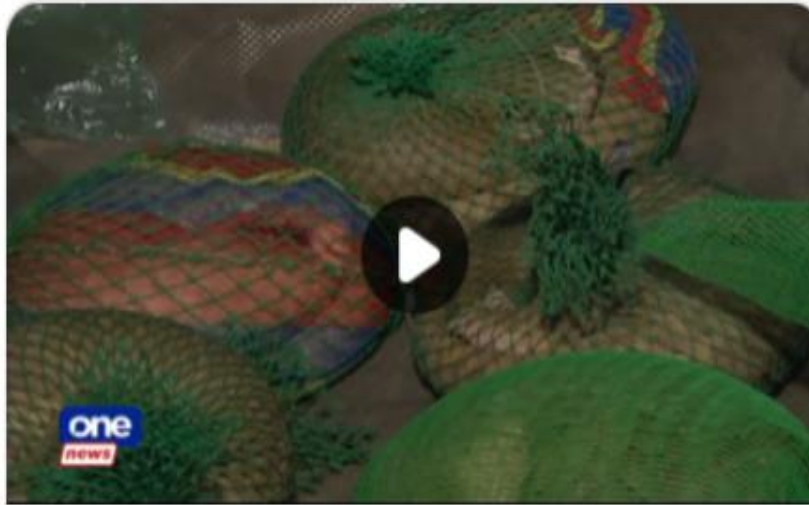
Ilocos Norte hatches potentials for birdwatching tourism

Backed by the Department of Tourism, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, through the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, has been working closely with organizations of birdwatchers and other wildlife enthusiasts to protect migratory bird sites.

Migratory bird sites are often threatened by human activities, such as overexploitation and conversion of ecosystems for development purposes.

According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Philippines has 117 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) covering 32,302 square kilometers that act as a refuge for as many as 115 globally threatened species of water birds.

In the Philippines, the peak months for birds migrating to the South are usually from September to November, while those traveling North often occur between February and April, the DENR said. *(PNA)*



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Villar and Filipino-French NGO forge ties to boost Las Piñas-Paranaque Wetland Park protection

Published December 17, 2021, 3:05 PM

by [MB Online](#)



Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, leads the “Meet and Greet” event at Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park with French Ambassador Michèle Baccoz, and Together Ensemble Foundation President Hubert d’Aboville. Others who joined the event are the following: French Embassy Cultural Councilor Marc Piton, Together Ensemble Foundation Vice President, Ramon Moreno, DENR NCR Regional Exec.

Director and LPPWP-PAMB chairperson Jacqueline Caancan, multi-awards French Film Director Joanna Vasquez Arona, Wild Bird Club of the Philippines Pres. Mike Lu, Ecological Minister of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Manila Rev. Fr. Ricardo Valencia Jr., Architect Aaron Lecciones who headed the design team for the LPPWP Wetland Center complex, Exec. Director Amy M. Lecciones from the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands (SCPW) and Atty. ArmiCorpuz, Chief of Staff of Sen. Villar.

Senator Cynthia A. Villar and the Together Ensemble Foundation have agreed to work together to further maintain and preserve the Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park (LPPWP), which was listed in the Ramsar Convention as Wetland of International Importance.

In her remarks during the meet and greet event between the LPPWP- Protected Area Management Board and French Ambassador to the Philippines Michèle Baccoz, and the Together Ensemble Foundation, led by its President Hubert d’Aboville and Vice President Ramon Moreno, Villar said they were happy and honored that they visited and toured Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park, a protected area, which is located in her hometown in Las Piñas City and Parañaque City. She thanked the French ambassador and the Foundation for showing interest in putting up worthy projects at LPPWP that will augment their protection strategies in the area.

Baccoz, who described the Las Pinas Parañaque Wetland Park as magnificent and fantastic nature protection initiative, related: “We need to build one or more concrete actions next year to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Together Ensemble Foundation, which will be part of the calendar of



Villar and Filipino-French NGO forge ties to boost Las Pinas-Paranaque Wetland Park protection

the major events of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the France to be celebrated from July to December 2022.”



Senator Villar with French Ambassador Michèle Baccoz (in red) and “Together Ensemble Foundation” President Hubert d’Aboville and Vice President Ramon Moreno.

“Fifteen days ago, we mentioned the symbolic planting of 75,000 trees on the site to commemorate the 75th anniversary, or perhaps building a monument symbolizing Franco-Filipino cooperation to mark the two anniversaries. This meeting will allow us to further expound on these good ideas or even come up with new proposals,” added Ambassador Baccoz.

She also noted that agricultural sector plays a major role in the development of France and the Philippines. “I am confident that we will able to build further on this through the ideas we will be keen to share as the basis for one or more events for the second half of next year,” the French ambassador also told Villar, who sits as chairperson of the Senate Agriculture and Food Committee and the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

Villar said they poured in time, resources, and continuously take pains to protect this sanctuary and make it as it is today. She said it is constantly exposed to threats, particularly reclamation.

She took potshots at entities unmindful of the environment benefits of Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park, which she describes as a “valuable” piece of real estate.

“We are also opposing these reclamation projects on this side of Manila Bay because it will impede the free flow of water of the 6 rivers in the area- Paranaque River, Las Pinas river. The Zapote River,



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Molino River, Bacoor River and the Imus River. If that will happen along with the phenomenon of climate change, disastrous flooding will result in the vicinity in case of torrential rains and that will definitely cause suffering and misery to the two million of people living in three cities,” warned Villar, who heads the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

Villar authored and passed in Congress Republic Act 11038 or the Expanded NPAS Act declaring the Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park a legislated protected area, joining other 106 legislated protected areas in the country.

As one of their initiatives, they are setting an appropriate area of Manila Bay as buffer zone to add an extra layer of protection to Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park .

Along with DENR, the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines, the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands and the Villar SIPAG Foundation that built the Visitors’ Center and the Wetland Center, the senator vowed to continue to take the forefront in fighting to protect the LPPWP , the last natural bastion in Metro Manila.



[Rapid News PH](#)

17 hrs ·

Mahigit 50 residente at miyembro ng environmental groups ang nagsagawa ng protesta noong Huwebes para tutulan ang dredging activities ng isang trading company para sa pagtatayo ng causeway at jetty port sa baybayin ng bayan.

Sinabi ng mga nagprotesta na ang pagtatayo ng isang daungan sa isang lugar na masasakop rin ang mga bahagi ng kalapit na bayan ng San Felipe ay maaaring maging panimula sa pagmimina ng itim na buhangin, na tinatawag itong “destructive and illegal”.

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For more details:

<https://rapidnewsonline.com/mga-residente-sa-zambales-nagp.../>



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/115015826622320/posts/477406370383262/?app=fbl>



Wood burners cause nearly half of urban air pollution cancer risk – study

Exclusive: Wood smoke is a more important carcinogen than vehicle fumes, finds Athens analysis



Scientists warn that as well as polluting the air outside, wood burners triple the level of harmful pollution inside homes. Photograph: Parmorama/Alamy

[Damian Carrington](#) *Environment editor*
[@dpcarrington](#)

Wood burning stoves in urban areas are responsible for almost half of people's exposure to cancer-causing chemicals found in air pollution particles, new research has shown.

The polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in tiny pollution particles are produced by burning fuels and have long been known to have carcinogenic effects. The new study examined the sources of the PAHs and found wood burning produced more than the diesel fuel or petrol used in vehicles.

The analysis was done in Athens, Greece, but the researchers were clear that this was not an unusual case. They said that home wood burning was a significant issue for urban air quality throughout [Europe](#) and that excessive exposure to wood smoke could cause severe health effects.

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“Athens is not an exception – it's more representative of a rule,” said Athanasios Nenes, at the Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas in Patras, [Greece](#), and the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland, and one of the team behind the new study. “On the one hand, it's: ‘Oh, my goodness, this is terrible.’ But on the other hand, it points to something people can actually do to reduce this risk without too much effort. You basically stop burning wood. That's the bottom line.”



Wood burners cause nearly half of urban air pollution cancer risk – study

Research published in the last year has shown [wood burning in homes is the single biggest source of small particle air pollution in the UK](#), producing three times more than road traffic, despite just 8% of the population using wood burners.

Even new wood burning stoves meeting the “ecodesign” standard still emit [750 times more tiny particle pollution](#) than a modern HGV truck. Wood burners also [triple the level of harmful pollution inside homes](#) and should be sold with a health warning, according to scientists.

You basically stop burning wood. That’s the bottom line

Athanasios Nenes

The new research, [published in the journal Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics](#), took background samples of the air in Athens every day for a year. These were analysed for 31 PAHs and a wide range of other chemical markers.

Specific compounds are associated with different sources of pollution and these enabled the scientists to calculate the proportion of PAHs produced by each source. They found 31% of annual PAHs came from wood burning, mostly in the winter, 33% from diesel and oil, and 29% from petrol (gasoline).

Some PAHs are more carcinogenic than others, however, and when this was taken into account, the proportion of the cancer risk to people as a result of wood burning rose to 43%, with diesel and oil at 36% and petrol at 17%.

“We know that [smoke from] wood burning is much more toxic than other types of particles,” said Nenes, and the results clearly highlight wood burning as a principal driver of long-term carcinogenic risk.

The level of PAH pollution in Athens was the same order of magnitude as found in studies of other European and North American cities, the researchers said, with much higher levels usually reported for cities in China.

The average annual concentration of the PAHs in the Athens study was below EU limits but double the World [Health](#) Organization’s reference level. Based on WHO data, the PAHs in Athens would be expected to cause 5 extra cancer cases for every 100,000 people, the researchers said.

“Given [the carcinogen exposure] and the extended usage of [wood] burning throughout Europe, eg France, Germany, Ireland and the UK, European action and policies aimed at the regulation of [wood] burning emissions are immediately required, as they can lead to considerable benefits for public health,” the scientists said.

Nenes said PAHs were not the only carcinogen in wood smoke, and it also had many other compounds that damaged health. “Wood smoke is particularly potent and causes all kinds of ailments from cancer to oxidative stress, which leads to heart attacks and strokes, obesity, premature ageing, diabetes – anything that has to do with inflammation in the body. So overall, I’m really worried about wood burning.”



Wood burners cause nearly half of urban air pollution cancer risk – study

Gary Fuller at Imperial College London, who was not part of the research team, said: “We tend to think that burning wood is somehow harmless, because wood is a natural product. These measurements remind us that wood burning is not pollution-free. The UK data on emissions of benzo(a)pyrene, one of the main PAHs, shows an increase of 16% since 2000 due to home wood burning.”

Prof Alison Tomlin at the University of Leeds, UK, said the move to electric cars would reduce PAH exposure from traffic. “However, unless suitable mitigation methods are developed to reduce PAH emissions from domestic wood burners and boilers, they will continue to pose a significant health risk.” she said.

The Athens study showed much of the PAH exposure occurred on winter days with low wind and rain, meaning the wood smoke did not disperse. Tomlin said implementing “no-burn days” at such times could be a useful short-term measure. “However, enforcing such a policy, or even wider restrictions on wood burning in densely populated areas, could be challenging,” she said.

Earlier in December, Utrecht council in the Netherlands announced [subsidies of up to €2,000](#) (£1,700) to encourage people to replace their wood burning stoves and fireplaces in order to clean up the city’s air.

Earlier research by Nenes and colleagues found that [wood smoke emitted at night time oxidised](#) into more harmful compounds much faster than had been expected. This means the pollution becomes more dangerous to health while it is still concentrated near the source, rather than oxidising over a few days as it disperses.



[Drastic ecological changes in African rainforest could affect the entire planet. Here's why. - CNN V](https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2021/12/16/ecological-changes-affect-large-africa-rainforest-vpx.cnn)

edition.cnn.com

1:37 AM



Duterte to visit Odette-hit areas this weekend

By [CNN Philippines Staff](#)

Published Dec 17, 2021 8:54:42 PM



Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, December 17)— President Rodrigo Duterte will visit areas hit by Typhoon Odette this weekend.

In a situation briefing with government officials on Friday, the President announced he would be flying to Surigao and other provinces in the Visayas and Mindanao.

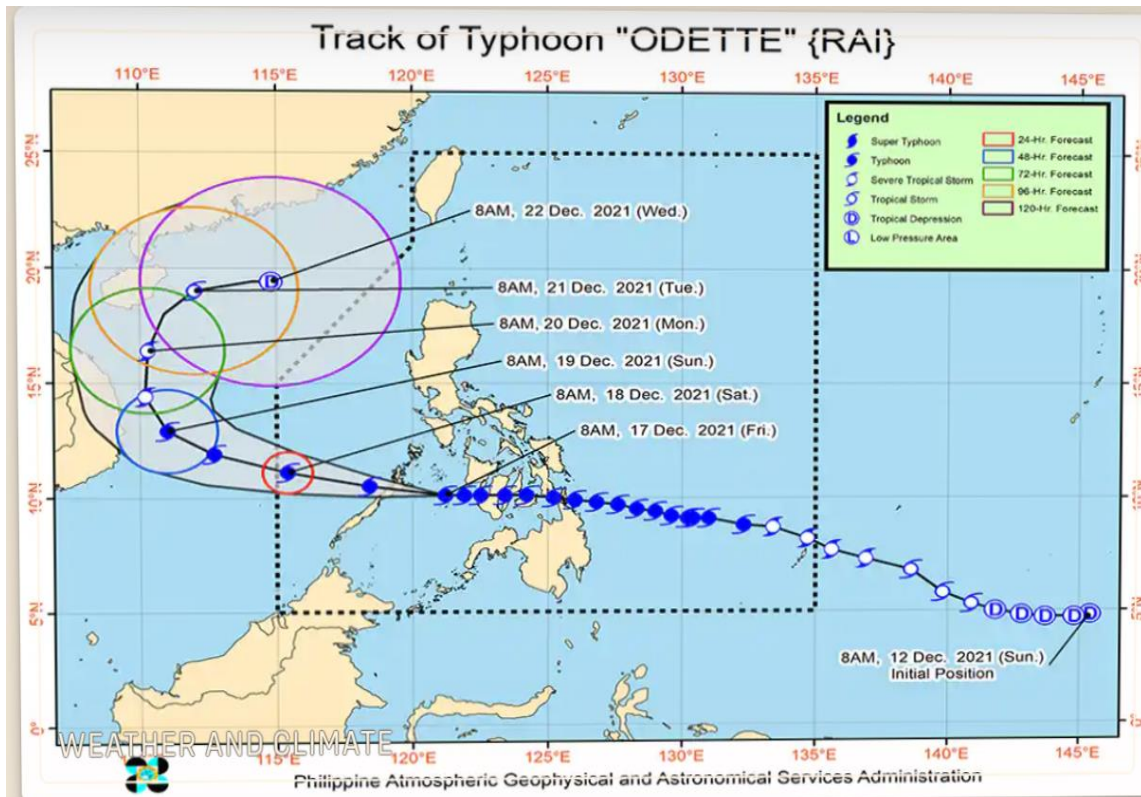
"I'm flying tomorrow to the area (Surigao). Also I would hit maybe Leyte, and if there is enough time, Bohol," Duterte said.

The chief executive added that he's also planning to check on Cebu, Bacolod, and Iloilo on Sunday.

Odette made at least nine landfalls in the country — the latest in Roxas, Palawan. Some local officials have estimated billions of damage due to its onslaught while disaster management officials are still verifying reports on casualties.

Meanwhile, Duterte said the government is still trying to raise funds for the typhoon response. He admitted that the national budget has been "immensely depleted" due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"*Itong COVID, naubos ang pera natin* (Because of COVID, our funds were depleted). So we're trying to scrimp how much we can raise so that we can marshal it to the areas affected," the President said.



'Odette' now over Palawan; 11.8K families affected

DEC 17, 2021, 1:54 PM



James Veloso
Writer/Columnist

"Odette" has so far affected some 11,859 families in Visayas and Mindanao, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported Friday.

After devastating parts of Eastern and Central Visayas, typhoon "Odette" is now making its way across Palawan Island, according to the state weather bureau.

As of 10:00 a.m., "Odette" was located 90 kilometers South Southwest of Cuyo, Palawan packing maximum sustained winds of 155 kilometers per hour (kph), gustiness of up to 215 kph, and strong winds extending outwards up to 480 kilometers from the center, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomic Services Administration (Pagasa) said in its 11:00 bulletin.

The typhoon was moving westward at 25 kph.

Pagasa has placed the following areas under Signal No. 3: the northern portion of Palawan including Cagayancillo and Cuyo Islands; and the southern portion of Iloilo and Antique provinces in Panay Island.



'Odette' now over Palawan; 11.8K families affected

Signal No. 2 has been raised in the following areas: the southern portion of Mindoro provinces; the western portion of Romblon; the central portion of Palawan including Kalayaan and Calamian Islands; Aklan, Capiz, and the rest of Iloilo and Antique in Panay Island; Guimaras Island; the northern and central portions of Negros Oriental; and Negros Oriental.

Meanwhile, TCWS No. 1 was hoisted over the following areas: Masbate including Ticao and Burias Islands; Marinduque; the southern portion of Quezon; the rest of Mindoro Island; the rest of Palawan; the rest of Romblon; Batangas; Cebu including Bantayan and Camotes Islands; Bohol; Biliran; the western portion of Leyte and Southern Leyte; Siquijor; the northern portion of Zamboanga del Norte; and the northern portion of Misamis Occidental.

"Odette" has so far affected some 11,859 families in Visayas and Mindanao, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported Friday.

Some 192 evacuation centers are currently assisting 4,989 families while the rest are taking shelter with their friends and relatives.

The NDRRMC is currently validating reports of one death and two injured.

Meanwhile, 73 seaports are non-operational or have suspended trips due to bad weather.

The number of stranded passengers has reached 4,503 along with 2,245 rolling cargoes, 75 ships, and three motorbancas in Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, the Zamboanga Peninsula and the Caraga region.

The NDRRMC also reported that 83,026 families or 332,855 individuals were preemptively evacuated.

These include 3,162 families in Western Visayas; 867 families in Central Visayas; 58,109 families in Eastern Visayas and 20,888 families in Caraga. (With report from PNA)

18 DECEMBER 2021, Saturday



DENR

NEWS ALERTS

COVID-19 NEWS

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



582 bagong nadagdag na COVID-19 cases sa PH – DOH

By [Bombo NewsCenter](#)

-December 17, 2021 | 10:45 PM



Nasa mahigit 500 ngayon ang nakalap ng Department of Health (DOH) na karagdagang kaso ng COVID-19 matapos maitala ang nasa 582.

Ito ang pinakamataas na bilang mula nitong nakalipas na December 5.

Sa kabuuan ang mga tinamaan ng virus sa Pilipinas ay umaabot na sa 2,837,464.

Samantala mayroon namang naitalang 494 na mga bagong gumaling.

Ang mga nakarekober sa coronavirus ay may kabuuang 2,776,727.

Habang nasa 74 ang mga nadagdag sa listahan na mga pumanaw.

Ang death toll sa bansa dahil sa deadly virus mula noong nakaraang taon ay nasa 50,570 na.

Sa ngayon nasa mababa pa rin ang bilang ng mga aktibong kaso na umaabot sa 10,167.

Sa kabilang dako mayroon lamang isang laboratoryo ang hindi nakapagsumite ng datos sa COVID-19 Document Repository System (CDRS).

Tuloy pa rin naman ang paalala ng DOH sa publiko ukol sa pag-iingat laban sa COVID-19.

“Dapat natin ipagpatuloy ang tamang pagsunod sa minimum public health standards at laging magsuot ng facemask na may face shield, mag physical distancing, at maghugas ng kamay. Agad rin na magpabakuna upang makakuha ng dagdag na proteksyon laban sa COVID-19,” bahagi ng DOH advisory.

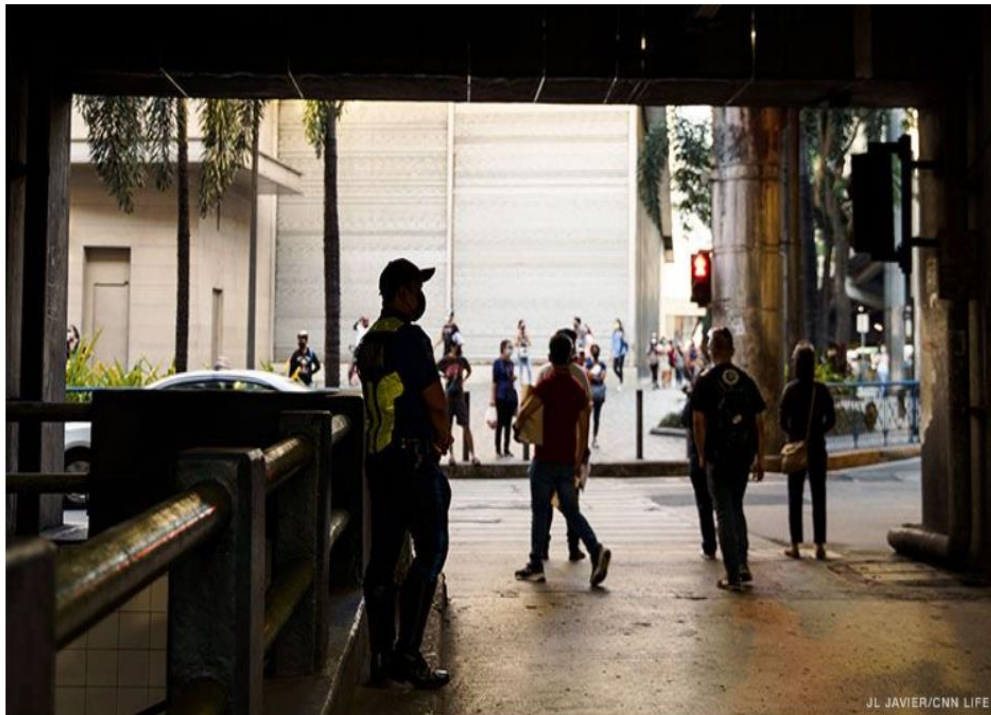
Source: <https://www.bomboradyo.com/582-bagong-nadagdag-na-covid-19-cases-sa-ph-doh/>



Expert urges Filipinos to take extra precaution amid Omicron threat

By CNN Philippines Staff

Published Dec 17, 2021 6:55:29 PM



(FILE PHOTO)

Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, December 17)— A health expert on Friday reminded Filipinos to take extra precaution and not let their guards down as the country faces the threat of the Omicron variant and a possible holiday surge.

"Kailangan mag-ingat pa rin po tayo. Ang silver lining lang kasi, bakunado tayong lahat, pero kung magpapabaya po tayo, pwede rin po tayong magkaroon po ng surge during the holiday season," health reform advocate Dr. Tony Leachon told CNN Philippines' Balitaan.

[Translation: We still need to take precautions. The silver lining is we're vaccinated, but if we become complacent, we can still have a surge during the holiday season.]

Leachon, however, said he believes the country is "more prepared" for the pandemic situation this year compared to 2020. He cited the increasing vaccination rates and declining hospital admissions.

"Hindi kasing-grabe 'yung pangamba ko kaysa last year. Kasi same time last year, uma-average tayo ng 2,000 to 3,000 cases. Ngayon kasi, naga-average tayo ng less than 500 at ang positivity rate natin ay less than 1... tapos safe zone na 'yung hospitals natin," he noted.



Expert urges Filipinos to take extra precaution amid Omicron threat

[Translation: My apprehension isn't as bad as last year's. Because same time last year, we were averaging 2,000 to 3,000 cases. Now we're averaging less than 500 and our positivity rate is less than one, plus our hospitals are now safe zones.]

The country's COVID-19 tally climbed to 2,837,464 after the Department of Health listed 582 new infections in its latest bulletin. Of the new cases, 54% or 315 were reported on Dec. 4 to 17, the agency said.



Omicron papalit sa Delta bilang dominant COVID-19 variant

By [Danilo Garcia](#) (Pilipino Star Ngayon)
- December 17, 2021 - 9:16pm

MANILA, Philippines — May posibilidad na palitan ng Omicron ang Delta bilang dominanteng Covid-19 variant sa Pilipinas tulad ng nangyari sa ibang bansa, ayon sa World Health Organization (WHO).

“It’s very likely that the omicron variant is going to replace the delta variant as much as the delta variant replaced the earlier variants-- alpha, beta variants,” ayon kay WHO Philippines representative Rabindra Abeyasinghe.

Unang nang klinasipika ng WHO ang omicron bilang ‘variant of concern’ nitong Nobyembre nang makarating na sa 78 mga bansa.

Sinabi ni Abeyasinghe na napakaliit ng pagkakataon para mapataas ang kahandaan sa paglaban sa variant at dapat maprotektahan ang pinakamahihinang populasyon ng bansa.

Pangunahing proteksyon pa rin ang pagpapabakuna ng mga Pilipino at pagpapalakas ng vaccination efforts ng pamahalaan. Bagama’t sinusupportahan ang booster shot, kailangan na maprayoridad ang populasyon na wala pa kahit unang dose ng bakuna.



Philippine vaccine shots top 100M

December 17, 2021 | 7:12 pm



PEOPLE waited for their turn to be inoculated with the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at SM Megamall at the start of the government's three-day vaccination drive on Nov. 29. — PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

The Philippines has given out more than 100 million vaccine doses against the coronavirus, having fully vaccinated 43 million Filipinos or 56% of the government's target, according to the presidential palace.

About 60 million were first doses, while at least a million were booster shots, the Department of Health's (DoH) vaccination dashboard showed. The government seeks to fully inoculate 54 million people by the end of the year.

"This, however, must not lull us into complacency," acting presidential spokesman Karlo Alexei B. Nograles said in a statement on Friday. "We will continue to ramp up our vaccination efforts and call on those unvaccinated to get their jabs as soon as possible to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community."

Businesses should comply with the 50% capacity limit for indoor activities and 70% limit for outdoor operations, he said. People should observe health protocols.

"The coronavirus is still around with the looming threat of the Omicron variant," Mr. Nograles said, adding that people should continue to wear face masks, keep distance, avoid large crowds and use hand sanitizers.

Meanwhile, Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario S. Vergeire said the seventh close contact of the Nigerian who tested positive for the Omicron coronavirus variant in the Philippines was negative of COVID-19, just like the others.



Philippine vaccine shots top 100M

DoH reported 582 coronavirus infections on Friday, bringing the total to 2.84 million.

The death toll hit 50,570 after 74 more patients died, while recoveries increased by 494 to 2.78 million, it said in a bulletin.

There were 10,167 active cases, 539 of which did not show symptoms, 4,015 were mild, 3,415 were moderate, 1,815 were severe and 383 were critical.

The agency said 54% of the reported cases occurred from Dec. 4 to 17. The top regions with cases in the past two weeks were Metro Manila with 75, Calabarzon with 47 and Western Visayas with 29.

It added that 12% of the reported deaths occurred in December, 15% in November, 31% in October, and 24% in September.

DoH said eight duplicates had been removed from the tally, eight of which were reclassified as recoveries, while 59 recoveries were relisted as deaths.

Four laboratories did not operate on Dec. 15, while one failed to submit data.

The agency said 22% of intensive care units in the Philippines were occupied, while the rate for Metro Manila was 24%.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) said the Philippines had been formally included its so-called Solidarity Trial Vaccines, as two candidate vaccines were being tested on volunteers to hasten development and roll-out.

“This announcement today is a milestone,” WHO Representative to the Philippines Rabindra Abeyasinghe told an online news briefing.

“It is our responsibility to be a part of the solution to this unprecedented global crisis,” President Rodrigo R. Duterte said in a recorded video. “Let us push for the success of this vaccine trial and work together for the protection of the people’s health and well-being.” — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan**



WHO Europe urges caution over double coronavirus surge

December 17, 2021, 3:21 pm



CAUTION. People walk past a sign requiring people to wear face coverings in London, Britain on Dec. 9, 2021. The World Health Organization's (WHO) Regional Office for Europe on Thursday (Dec. 17, 2021) urged people to exercise caution this holiday season in the wake of highly transmissible coronavirus strains. *(Xinhua/Stephen Chung)*

COPENHAGEN – The World Health Organization's (WHO) Regional Office for Europe on Thursday urged people to exercise caution this holiday season, as the region is now coping with two highly transmissible coronavirus strains that have the potential to overload the already overburdened health systems.

"The European region was the epicenter of the pandemic even before the emergence of Omicron, with surging cases of the Delta variant," Hans Kluge, regional director of WHO Europe, said in a statement.

According to WHO Europe, the threat posed by coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) is as serious as ever, with the highly transmissible Delta variant dominating throughout the region and the Omicron variant spreading rapidly with uncertain consequences.

Kluge said experience has shown that it is effective to "exercise caution" alongside the "current tools at our disposal," such as vaccines, booster jabs, testing, masks and distancing, which are proven "stabilizers" and enough to "help us to manage the virus and keep people safe."

"We have come a long way since last year. We have seen inspiring examples of solidarity. We know what works. We know how to keep ourselves and others safe. The emergence of Omicron



WHO Europe urges caution over double coronavirus surge

doesn't change that. WHO Europe is in regular contact with experts across the region and will share further information as soon as it is available," he said.

Kluge attacked mounting misinformation, most recently seen around the Omicron variant in the region.

He urged people to "seek out reliable sources of information that provide advice based on the latest evidence and scientific consensus." (*Xinhua*)

18 DECEMBER 2021, Saturday



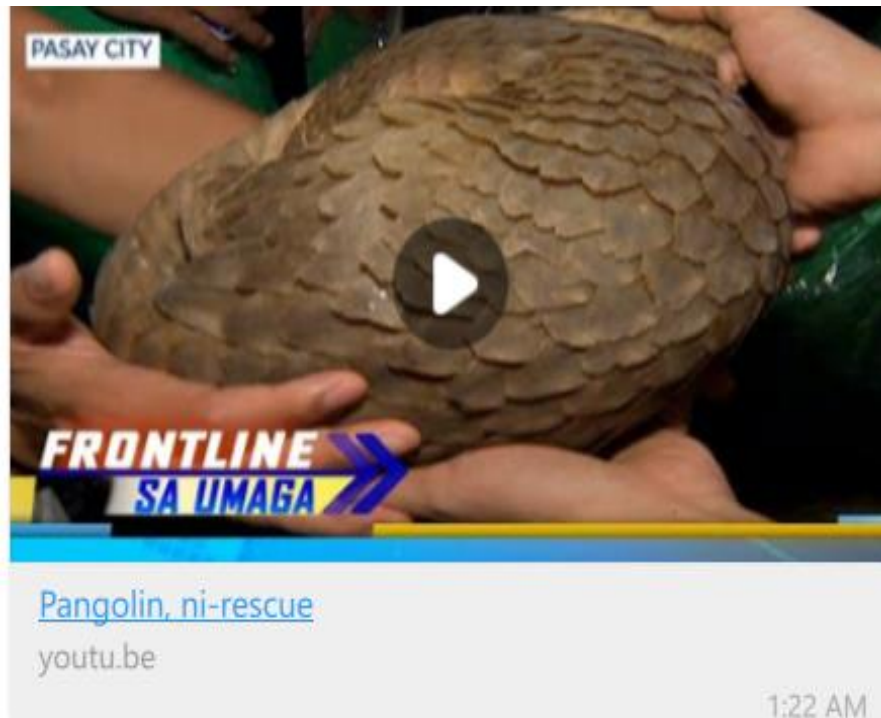
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