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DOH PUSHES FOR SAFE HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS THROUGH COVID-19 RISK-MITIGATING ACTIVITIES

Press Release | 24 November 2020

Holidays in the Philippines usually mean reuniting with friends and relatives, hosting and attending large in-person gatherings, and even traveling. But this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these usual activities are not advisable as these place the public at much higher risk of contracting the virus.

In preparation for the holiday season, the Department of Health (DOH) has released Department Circular (DC) No. 2020-0355 or the *Reiteration of the Minimum Public Health Standards for COVID-19 Mitigation during the Holidays* to provide guidance on how to observe minimum public health standards during the holidays and ensure the health and safety of everyone participating in celebrations and activities.

DC No. 2020-0355 specifically provides risk-mitigation measures for the public to adhere to during the holiday season such as:

1. Limiting the number of people in social gatherings and activities;
2. Avoiding activities that may include traveling;
3. Opting to activities with only a short duration of contact;
4. Practicing BIDA (B-bawal walang mask, I-i-sanitize ang mga kamay, D-dumistansya ng isang metro, A-alamang ang totoong impormasyon).
5. Avoiding contact on high-touch surfaces;
6. Ensuring proper ventilation in venues; and
7. Increasing physical and mental resilience.

During the November 23 media forum of the DOH, Health Undersecretary and Spokesperson Maria Rosario Singh-Vergeire also addressed the public, reminding them of the underlying risks of exposing oneself to overcrowded places. “Exploring congested areas, close-contact settings, and confined places are the three risk factors that pose a high risk of COVID-19 transmission. The threat of the virus is even higher when these factors overlap. Examples of the 3 risk factors include: attending large family, social, or religious gatherings, in-person shopping in malls and bazaars, and indoor gathering of a large group of people that involves singing, shouting and dancing,” she said.

Moreover, USec. Singh-Vergeire urged the public to consider modifying their Christmas activities or resorting to virtual activities to mitigate the spread of the virus, particularly in enclosed spaces and with an exceeding number of attendees from the recommended limit.

Meanwhile, in celebration of Christmas and New Year, the DOH recommends getting together exclusively with household members and virtual gathering with those not residing in the same house as most infections are made through close contact and prolonged exposure.

"Alam niyo po, kahit kayo po ay naka-mask at naka-face shield, pero kung kayo naman po ay pupunta sa mga matataong lugar na halos dikit-dikit na po kayo maaari pa rin po kayo mahawa," USec. Singh-Vergeire said. "The risk is there and it's very high. At kung saka-sakaling kailangan naman talagang mamili, maaari naman siguro po na magkakaroon po tayo ng ibang pamamaraan para magkaroon ng ganitong activities for yourselves."

The Spokesperson acknowledged the holiday spirits of the public but emphasized that enjoying the remaining days of the year COVID-free would be the greatest blessing. "Reduce your risk during the holiday season by strictly complying with the minimum public health standards in all our activities," she said.