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DOH ENCOURAGES SAFE FAMILY-FRIENDLY HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS, RECOMMENDS ENGAGING INDOOR ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

Press Release | 15 December 2020

Creating Christmas cards, putting up house decorations, singing of Christmas carols, storytelling, and playing pretend games are among the activities that the Department of Health (DOH) recommended for parents to do with their kids to keep them engaged inside their houses during the holiday season.

During the virtual media forum held on December 14, DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Singh-Vergeire was joined by Dr. Victoria Nolasco of the University of the Philippines' Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics who, apart from sharing child-centered activities, also recommended how Filipino families can creatively celebrate the holidays without putting anyone at risk of contracting the virus.

"A recent study¹ published in The Journal of Pediatrics as cited in The Harvard Gazette found that children, just like adults, are silent spreaders of COVID-19 virus. Kids may even have a higher load of virus compared to adults confined in the intensive care unit. It is hard-wired in their brains to explore, touch objects, and even put these items in their mouth which opens the risks for virus spread," said Dr. Nolasco.

Dr. Nolasco shared that it would be safer and more prudent to virtually celebrate with relatives via video chat to minimize virus exposure. If face-to-face gatherings need to be pushed through, better to hold it in open areas with good ventilation. Locations with minimal air circulation may serve as the virus' breeding grounds.

"Social distancing must still be observed among immediate family members who have been cooped up with the same members for the past few months. Spending the holidays with extended family members or relatives heightens the risk as these people are also bringing in exposure from their workplaces, residential areas where they came from, and people they have interacted with during their commute or travel," Dr. Nolasco explained.

While Filipino families are also fond of doing long-table food spreads, it is best to skip this practice this year and opt to allocate food individually. In the same fashion, exclusive use of utensils must also be ensured even if it's just a small family celebration.

When it comes to gift-giving, Dr. Nolasco advised other ways of expressing affection beyond giving material gifts and taking them to outdoor trips: providing children with constant love, support, and affection. So is actively listening to their needs. "These are the factors that make a resilient and stable adult who can be successful in life in the future," Nolasco said.

Usec. Vergeire and Dr. Nolasco encouraged families to recheck how they have planned their holiday celebrations especially Christmas Day since it is just less than two weeks away. Making sure that the guidelines and experts' recommendations are factored in is part of the parents' responsibilities for a safe holiday celebration amid the pandemic.