

Headline	211 measles cases in Region 6 in 2018 - DOH
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211 measles cases in Region 6 in 2018 – DOH

■ **By IME SORNITO**

ILOILO City – The Department of Health (DOH) recorded 211 cases of measles in Western Visayas last year.

Negros Occidental had the most number of cases at 69,

followed by Bacolod City (67).

Iloilo province had 27 cases; Iloilo City, 19; Antique, 17; Capiz, seven; Aklan, three; and Guimaras, two.

The number of measles cases in 2018 was 21,000 percent higher than that in 2017 which had only one case (in Aklan province).

The vaccine scare triggered

by the Dengvaxia anti-dengue vaccine controversy could have contributed to the sharp spike in cases, said Dr. Mary Jane Roches Juanico, medical coordinator for the Child

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Health Program of DOH Region 6. French pharmaceutical company Sanofi Pasteur said its Dengvaxia works as expected in people already exposed to the dengue virus; but in those who haven't, the vaccination is linked to an elevated risk of severe disease developing from a subsequent dengue infection.

The government's measles vaccination program targets children from six months old to 59 months old.

"The measles vaccination program coverage in the region is low. Most of our cases involve children," said Juanico.

From Oct. 22 to Nov. 23 last year, DOH conducted a measles-rubella vaccination campaign in 25 local government units (LGUs) in Western Visayas which high measles cases. The target was 339,181 children but the number of children vaccinated was only 195,356 (58 percent).

"Parents knew the importance of measles vaccination but they were overcome by their fear," lamented Juanico.

This year, DOH-6 will

have a supplemental measles vaccination in the region. There would be house visits.

"*Mabira-bira kami sang* health education," said Juanico.

Winning the public's trust back to the government's vaccination programs would not be easy, she added.

Those turning down DOH's measles immunization would commonly offer this common excuse: they would first check with their children's pediatricians, said Juanico in an interview last month.

But others were more blunt, she said, and would challenge the measles vaccine's safety.

"We really remind parents and caregivers that measles is a serious illness," said Juanico. /PN