Number of PUIs now 556, says DOH

By MAYEN JAYMALIN

The number of persons under investigation (PUIs) for possible coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) infection rose to 556, the Department of Health (DOH) reported yesterday.

A DOH report showed that 17 new cases pushed the number of PUIs to 556 as of yesterday morning.

Of the total PUIs, DOH said 456 tested negative for the virus while results for 39 others remain pending.

DOH further reported that 420 of the PUIs have been discharged while 133 remain admitted or confined at different medical facilities.

The DOH also said the antiviral drug Favipiravir cannot yet be used in the country even if it has already been approved for treatment of coronavirus in China.

Health Assistant Secretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said all drugs need to pass regulatory clearances before they could be allowed for public use in the country.

“All drugs, before they can be brought into the country, had to pass regulatory processes like it should pass the World Health Organization (WHO) standards and the Food and Drug Administration regulatory protocols,” she said.

“Until we can have those regulatory clearances we cannot say if this anti-viral drug can be used here in the Philippines or not,” she added.

Meanwhile, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Filipinos and foreigners with permanent residency in the Philippines are free to come home any time amid concerns over COVID-19 spread.

In an interview with “The Chiefs” Wednesday night on One News-Cignal TV, Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Brigido Dulay said many Filipinos were still asking if they can come back.

“Filipinos can come home anytime. Of course there’s always the quarantine. Second is you have to base it on the reality on the ground. Can you get even a flight now to the Philippines? There are continuing flights coming from China, Hong Kong and Macau to the Philippines,” Dulay said.

“The point is there are available flights in all of these countries that can bring you back to the Philippines. So they can come back at anytime,” he added.

The DFA said Filipinos in various parts of China who wish to return to the Philippines may do so as commercial flights are still available in certain areas.

The DFA confirmed the availability of Philippine-bound flights from Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Guiyang, Guizhou, Hong Kong, Kunming, Yunnan Province, Macau, Shanghai and Xiamen.

But travelers should be guided by the travel ban imposed by countries where the flights would transit.

Returning Filipinos are reminded of the mandatory 14-day quarantine upon arrival implemented by the Bureau of Quarantine per guidelines of the DOH.

The DFA urged Filipinos in China to coordinate with embassy or consulate officials. They may also contact the WeChat hotlines of the DOH and the DFA. – With Pia Lee Brago