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Measles cases breach 20,000 mark

MANILA, Philippines — The prevalence of measles nationwide continues to rise despite the ongoing massive immunization drive.

The latest Disease Surveillance Report from the Department of Health (DOH) showed that incidence of measles in the country increased to 21,396, including 315 deaths, from January to March 14.

The DOH said the figure was 4,417 higher compared to the number of measles cases recorded during the same period last year.

The number of measles fatalities also went up by 43 compared to 2018.

Calabarzon accounted for the biggest number of measles cases with 4,401, including 87 deaths, followed by the National Capital Region with 4,266 and Central Luzon with 3,409.

According to the DOH, 60 percent of the measles patients were not given vaccines.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III reminded health workers nationwide to continue making measles vaccines more accessible to the people as the number of those with potential infection continues to increase.

“We have the capability. We have the manpower, the funds and logistics. There should be no excuse (not to give vaccine),” Duque stressed.

“We need to collectively ensure and commit to bring back herd immunity to 95 percent. Let’s be 10 steps ahead so we can prevent the spread of this vaccine-preventable disease,” he added.

Last Monday, Duque called an emergency command conference with the local government officials of Rizal to discuss plans to reduce, if not eliminate, measles cases in the province.

Duque stressed the need to encourage parents to have their children vaccinated against measles since it is the most effective strategy to protect them from the potentially deadly disease.

“It’s going to be worse if we don’t do this,” Duque told the local officials.

From Jan. 1 to March 19, the Regional Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit reported a total of 2,737 measles cases, including 121 deaths in the province of Rizal. Last year, the province only recorded 13 measles cases.

Antipolo City has the highest number of measles cases in the province with 1,007 and 32 deaths followed by the municipalities of Rodriguez with 308 cases and seven deaths.

Eduardo Janairo, DOH Calabarzon regional director, said they have deployed additional health workers to undertake house-to-house immunization in areas with high prevalence of measles.

Janairo said they have already vaccinated over 330,000 or more than 95 percent of the target population in the province of Rizal.