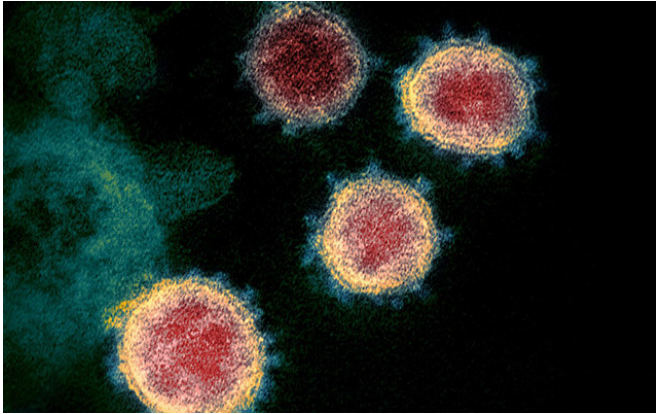


Philippines orders children back indoors amid fears of virus surge

23 July 2021



A colorized scanning electron micrograph of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Credit: NIAID

The Philippines sent millions of children back into lockdown Friday as hospitals prepared for a surge in coronavirus cases fuelled by the highly contagious Delta variant ravaging neighbouring countries.

Nearly half of the 47 cases of the more virulent strain detected so far were locally acquired, the health department said, raising fears of a sharp uptick in infections that have topped 1.5 million since the start of the pandemic.

"The Delta variant is more infectious and deadly," said presidential spokesman Harry Roque as he announced tougher rules for the national capital region and four provinces where cases have spiked.

Along with tighter capacity limits on indoor dining, beauty salons and religious gatherings, children aged five to 17 have been told to stay home.

It comes two weeks after the government lifted a ban on minors going outside that had been in

place since March 2020 but often flouted.

The government has previously justified the draconian measure by citing the risk of youngsters catching the virus and infecting their elderly relatives.

Independent research group OCTA, which advises the government on its pandemic response, called Thursday for "localised lockdowns" as well as extended curfews and a stay-at-home order for children.

The group "believes that a surge in its early stages has started in the National Capital Region," OCTA's Ranjit Rye said in a statement, warning it may be driven by the Delta variant.

The health department said checks were underway to ensure hospitals had enough beds, medicine, oxygen tanks and staff to deal with a possible surge in cases.

Record infections earlier this year had threatened to overwhelm [health care facilities](#).

Border restrictions have also been tightened for travellers from Thailand and Malaysia where authorities are battling to contain Delta-fuelled outbreaks.

India, Indonesia and Pakistan are also among the countries on the travel ban list.

It comes as the Philippines struggles to vaccinate its population of 110 million due to tight global supplies and logistical challenges.

Just over five million people are fully vaccinated while 10.5 million have received their first jab.

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