

# Philippine government ramps up campaign for “living with the virus”

Dante Pastrana  
2 December 2021

The Philippine health department reported today 167 new deaths from COVID-19. The total death toll now stands at 48,712 and counting. Since the pandemic began, 2,833,038 people have been infected in the country. Active cases are at 15,327 with over 1,025 in intensive care and 457 requiring ventilators.

The Philippine government of President Rodrigo Duterte, egged on by the financial elites, is rapidly dispensing with all of its half-hearted mitigation efforts. Like capitalist governments around the world, it aims to force workers and the general populace to “live with the virus” and remove all barriers to the profit-making of the capitalist class.

In November, the Philippine education department launched a pilot program of in-person schooling, comprising 100 public schools and 20 private schools. An estimated 5,245 students, many from kindergarten to Grade 3, participated, according to the news website, Rappler.com.

Three participating schools in Zambales province, however, according to the same website, postponed the opening following five teachers and two staff members testing positive for the Covid-19 virus.

In September, the Philippine government abandoned its quarantine tier system in Metro Manila, the national capital region, just days after daily infections in the country reached 26,208, the highest then recorded. It shifted to a so-called alert-level system, aimed at ending mobility restrictions and based not on the daily infection numbers but on vaccination rates and health facilities utilization. Since then, the alert-level system has been rolled out for nationwide implementation with the capital and other key urban areas at alert level 2, a less restricted level.

The Duterte government never sought to break the chain of transmission, much less eliminate the virus. It

did not conduct mass testing and contact tracing was severely hampered by lack of funds. While it imposed militarized lockdowns around poor communities, exceptions for construction, export processing and business outsourcing were carved out which kept workers in unsafe building sites, factories and poorly ventilated offices.

To the extent that the government sought to regulate the infection rate it was to prevent the largely privately-owned healthcare system from buckling under the wave of patients desperately seeking urgent care.

Two key elements of the government’s pandemic response, related to children, however, quickly drew the ire of the capitalist class. These were mobility restrictions imposed upon those 18 years of age and below, and the shutdown of all schools, public and private, which were shifted to remote learning.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Chua was quoted in a *Manila Bulletin* report in January complaining that restrictions imposed on children dampened demand as families with at least three members accounted for 90 percent of total non-essential spending.

Chua added, “Since children are not allowed to go out of their homes, even to study, family activities are restricted, and thus a big part of the economy is not functional.”

Parents, according to another study, were the largest contributors to the PHP 547 billion (\$US10.8 billion) informal eat-out market, accounting for 48 percent of the spending, equivalent to PHP 277 billion.

Unsurprisingly, a key component of the alert-level system from levels 1 to 3 is the lifting of all mobility restrictions on children. The government placed the national capital region at level 2 in November and is expected to bring the capital to level 1 by December.

The *Philippine Star* reported on October 26 that shift in the national capital region in October from level 4 to level 3 was estimated to have resulted in an additional PHP 14.2 billion in sales over a period of two weeks.

Symptomatic of the drive in the capitalist class to reopen the economy is Joey Concepcion, one of the fifty richest Filipinos. Concepcion has an estimated worth of PHP 8.8 billion pesos and is a key business adviser to the Duterte administration.

According to business news website, *bilyonaryo.com*, in a webinar that presented increased vaccinations as a pretext for a rapid reduction of anti-Covid-19 restrictions, Concepcion stated, “Let’s take a more aggressive role in really vaccinating our citizens, especially in the provincial areas. And if we are able to do that, then if cases do go up—but who cares if cases do go up?”

The report quoted Concepcion as stating that catching COVID-19 should not deter Filipinos from going out and spending as he claimed they were unlikely to die or be hospitalized if they have been vaccinated against the virus.

In April last year, as the pandemic ravaged the Philippines, Concepcion also battled successfully for the resumption of construction work.

Arguing even then that workers must learn to live with the virus, he was quoted in *Rappler.com* as stating that the poor were unaffected by the virus, “Maybe because they are so used to so much exposure that they have a better immunity than us, who are sheltered in a well-protected environment.”

According to the *BusinessWorld*, like the capitalist class around the globe, the fifty richest families in the Philippines saw their collective wealth increase by 30 percent, totalling PHP 3.94 trillion pesos over the course of the pandemic.

The consequences for working people have been terrible.

The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported in August that the Philippine Paediatric Society presented data that 48,411 children aged 18 and younger had been infected with COVID-19. Of the cases in children, 40.2 percent were in the 15- to 20-year-old age range, 23.8 percent among 10- to 14-year-olds, 17.4 percent among five to nine-year-olds, and 18.5 percent among those aged four and below.

The COVID infection rate is likely drastically underreported. A large portion of workers in the Philippines are paid on a day-to-day basis. Under a regime of “no work, no pay,” these workers and their families who, if they are lucky, have received meagre financial aid from the government, have suffered horrendously under the government lockdowns over the past two years.

Two or three families often share a single dwelling and a positive COVID-19 test result of one member places all under quarantine and cuts them off from their desperately needed earnings. As a single COVID-19 test costs over half of the monthly minimum wage earned by a Metro Manila worker, there is every incentive for ordinary people to avoid being tested for the virus, even they are symptomatic.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**