



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

August 27, 2021

HON. ALAN PETER S. CAYETANO
District Representative
Taguig - Pateros, 1st District

Dear **Hon. Cayetano**:

This is in reference to your letter dated August 20, 2021 regarding the request to administer booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the frontline health workers and the immunocompromised.


The Department of Health is one with you in ensuring that the health, safety, and well-being of every Filipino is taken into consideration during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, this is an ongoing work for the DOH that is treated with utmost urgency. Currently, we are continuously working with the Department of Finance to earmark funds for booster doses and the DOH experts for the development of projections based on currently available evidence.

While at present we do not yet recommend the use of booster doses because available evidence has not yet provided definitive clinical value, the FDA and HTAC ensure that we are abreast of the most recent evidence. We assure you and the public that we will be prepared to provide boosters once evidence provides us a go signal.

For further queries and concerns, you may contact our technical team through dpcbcovid@doh.gov.ph and PHSTUsec@doh.gov.ph.

Thank you very much for your continued support.

Very truly yours,


FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, MSc
Secretary of Health



Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives

18TH CONGRESS

20 August 2021

**THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE INTER-AGENCY
TASK FORCE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF EMERGING
INFECTIOUS DISEASES (IATF)**

San Lazaro Compound, Tayuman, Sta. Cruz
Manila

THRU: **SEC. FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III**
Secretary, Department of Health
Chairperson, IATF

SEC. CARLITO GALVEZ JR.
Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity
Chief Implementer, IATF

SEC. KARLO ALEXEI B. NOGRALES
Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Cabinet Secretary
Co-Chairperson, IATF

RE: **Request to administer booster/additional Coronavirus Diseases
2019 (COVID-19) vaccine doses to the frontline health workers and
the immunocompromised**

Dear Honorable Secretaries:

We write to urge you to immediately administer booster/additional COVID-19 vaccine doses to the frontline health workers and the immunocompromised in view of their high risk of exposure and distinct vulnerability to COVID-19.

We need to provide additional protection to those who are in the first line of defense fighting the pandemic and to the most vulnerable amid the rising number of infections due to the emerging strains such as the Delta variant.

This is aligned with recent pronouncements and recommendations made by health authorities in a growing number of countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Israel, France, Germany, China, Russia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Singapore who are set to implement or are already implementing the same.

Workers in frontline health services must be offered vaccine booster shots since they are constantly exposed to the virus while they perform their duties. Providing them with additional protection will allow them to continue taking care of Filipinos who require medical attention from COVID and non-COVID diseases and shield us from a possible collapse of the healthcare system.

Please note that it has almost been six months since the frontline health workers received their vaccines in March 2021. In a study conducted by Chinese researchers, antibodies triggered by Sinovac Biotech's CoronaVac, which has been the most widely used COVID-19 vaccine brand in the Philippines, declined below a key threshold from around six months after a second dose for most recipients, but a third shot had a strong booster effect.¹ Even the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has recognized that "many vaccines are associated with a reduction in protection over time, and... that additional vaccine doses could be needed to provide long lasting protection."²

On the other hand, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that immunocompromised persons are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 because they are more at risk of serious, prolonged illness and they may not build the same level of immunity to two-dose vaccine series compared to people who are not immunocompromised. Hence, CDC has recommended that people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised should receive an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine after the initial 2 doses. This includes people who have³:

- been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood;
- received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system;
- received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system;
- moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome);
- advanced or untreated HIV infection;
- active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress immune response.

Our neighboring countries with similar circumstances as ours have started providing booster/additional doses to their population. Indonesia has begun giving third shots for frontline medical personnel and health workers who are fully vaccinated with CoronaVac, amid concerns over its effectiveness against the more transmissible Delta variant.⁴ Thailand has started implementing the same, and even extended the coverage to the elderly, citizens with underlying diseases and foreigners residing in high infection areas.⁵

We must stay ahead of COVID-19 and protect our fellow Filipinos against this virus through responsive and proactive policies. The continued increased risk that COVID-19 and its variants pose to the frontline health workers and to the immunocompromised, coupled with their inadequate, reduced or waning vaccine protection⁶, warrants that booster/additional vaccine doses be made available to them.

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/antibodies-sinovacs-covid-19-shot-fade-after-about-6-months-boosters-study-2021-07-26/>

² <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/08/18/joint-statement-hhs-public-health-and-medical-experts-covid-19-boosters-shots.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html#print>

⁴ <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2021/08/02/indonesia-begins-to-give-third-covid-19-shots-to-1-5-million-health-workers.html>

⁵ <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2152031/three-months-on-govt-inlet-pilger-deal>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/news/item/10-08-2021-interim-statement-on-covid-19-vaccine-boosters-doses>

We are aware that we have vaccinated just a fraction of our population because of the inadequate supply of vaccines. But the protection of the frontline health workers and the immunocompromised is a moral imperative and a practical necessity. They belong to a different public health category with unique vulnerabilities, which demands a different treatment. Hence, this earnest request on their behalf.

Thank you for your kind attention. Together, we will heal and recover from this pandemic.

Sincerely,



ALAN PETER "COMPAÑERO" S. CAYETANO



MARIA LAARNI L. CAYETANO



LUIS RAYMUND "LRAY" F. VILLAFUERTE, JR.



RANEO E. ABU



DAN S. FERNANDEZ



MICHAEL T. DEFENSOR



JOSE ANTONIO "KUYA" R. SY-ALVARADO