

OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19**AGHAM AT KAALAMAN PARA SA BAYAN!****OFFICERS**

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E-MAILgpconcepcion@gmail.compaase2020manila@gmail.com**WEBSITE**www.paase.org**PAASE BULLETIN # 1****ON PAASE STRATEGIC ACTION GROUP 3: MASS TESTING & FAST-TRACKING**

Addressed to: National Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging & Infectious Diseases (IATF), Department of Health, Department of Justice (BJMP-IV Regional Infirmary), Local Governments of CALABARZON, University of the Philippines Los Baños

PROPOSAL FOR PILOT TESTING CENTERS FOR COVID-19 IN CALABARZON

Outside of Metro Manila, a region that has registered the most number of cases is CALABARZON, with about 220 confirmed cases as of the beginning of April 2020, with the highest number of cases in Rizal (77) and Laguna (58), being the closest to Metro Manila which is the country's covid-19 hotspot. Batangas, Cavite and Quezon have above about 37, 30, and 11 cases each, respectively. On the same period. As of April 1, the number of PUIs and PUMs in the whole region are more than 1,400 and 16,500, respectively. Thus, there is an urgent need for increased and rapid testing. This will also address correct patient diagnosis and treatment and collect data that will inform policy for containment and mitigation.



The Philippine American Academy of Science and Engineering (PAASE) supports plan to enable the existing network of DOH TB DOTS and BSL II laboratories to conduct COVID-19 testing using the FDA-approved Cepheid Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2 testing kit, a rapid near-patient test for the detection of COVID-19 virus. Thus, we propose that we start with a few pilot locations in the provinces of Batangas and Laguna (Phase I), and eventually expand in the provinces of Cavite, Rizal and Quezon (Phase II).

- There are 86 Cepheid GeneXpert machines in CALABARZON and a regional network of trained personnel (e.g. Medical Technologist; GeneXpert technicians; City/Mun Health Officers), which can be easily deployed for COVID-19 testing.
- Cepheid Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2 testing is nucleic acid, RT-PCR based and is comparable to the gold standard test currently being used. It is a lot faster than the currently used system that takes at least 5 days. The Cepheid Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2 test results can be available in 45 min, and can be used in point-of-care situation. It is safer to handle because the system is fully integrated (within the cartridge) so there is much less exposure for health workers.
- There are at least two public facilities (BJMP IV-A Regional Infirmary TB DOTS, Batangas Medical Center) and a few private BSL II Laboratories in CALABARZON, which could be made into hubs for Cepheid Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2 outside of the few DOH accredited COVID-19 testing centers nationwide.

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- The rapid test using Cepheid Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2 can be part of a comprehensive testing system - as a first screen test to be followed by a validation.
- The personnel will be using the GeneXpert Usage Tracker, forms required by their respective agencies and other documentation forms recommended by PAASE Data Analytics group.

ACTION POINTS

- Will seek collaboration of UPLB in terms of lobbying for support to concerned agencies; work with all agencies involved – BJMP, DOH, LGUs – by assisting in the accreditation; providing technical expert assistance and if warranted, provision of equipment under a mutually agreed terms to run the testing labs
- Request authorization from DOH to allow us to coordinate with the heads of the BJMP IV-A Regional Infirmary TB DOTS and the Batangas Medical Center.
- Meet virtually with heads including other experts at UPLB.
- Assist in the transformation of at least two existing BSL II TB laboratories into COVID -19 Testing Centers using the Cepheid Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2 testing kit.

References:

- Covid-19 Case Tracker. Department of Health. <https://www.doh.gov.ph/covid-19/case-tracker>
- GeneXpert Systems, from https://www.cepheid.com/en_US/systems/GeneXpert-Family-of-Systems/GeneXpert-System
- Demo/Prototype Dashboard (GeneXpert Usage Tracker) in <https://youtu.be/O-NcpZ6FjhE>

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