

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

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Addressed to: National Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging & Infectious Diseases (IATF), Department of Health

INSTITUTING A SYSTEM OF BALANCED COVID-19 SUPPRESSION AND THE GRADUAL RISE TO ECONOMIC NORMALITY

It is now clear that the COVID-19 transmission suppression strategies that many countries are implementing are likely to fall short of achieving and maintaining a COVID-19-free state, which means the economy will continue to suffer if we just continue to rely on suppression strategies, and wait for vaccines or treatments to become available.

Thus, while testing and isolation of cases, and wider social distancing and lockdown measures are being sustained, and until vaccines or treatments become available, a workable system for balancing COVID-19 transmission suppression strategies and gradual resumption of economic activities have to be formulated and implemented as soon as possible to save the country from total economic peril.

The principles that govern this System of balancing are based on the following facts:

- There are certain people who are more resistant to COVID-19 infection and who are able to present with very mild infections with no or mild symptoms. This is age-related, and those below age group 45-50 years old demonstrated increasing resistance.^{1,2}
- Healthy nutrition and lifestyle approaches impact on the incidence of comorbidities and infections.³ Healthy people on a balanced diet and practicing healthy lifestyles, and have no comorbidities, are amongst the more resistant population.²
- There is now accumulating information on certain pharmaceutical/biological approaches to COVID-19 infection prevention, including the use of BCG vaccine and passive immunization with specific convalescent plasma/immunoglobulins, and others in clinical trial stages.^{4,5,6} The use of these will enable people to resist infection, and engage in work.
- There are also a number of candidate drugs that are currently being used (while undergoing clinical trials) to shorten and decrease the severity of COVID-19 disease state, including hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin, remdesivir, favipiravir (DOH considers this drug as a promising candidate), etc.⁷ The use of these drugs will get sick people back on their feet sooner, and prevent further increased in mortality. These people are able to engage in work faster.
- There are people who have developed specific immunity after having recovered from COVID-19. Majority of these recovered people are able to resist COVID-19 reinfections.
- Strict social distancing and restrictions on peoples' movements are effective, and there are means to continue social distancing people even as they engage in their daily undertakings, especially in the workplace. Remote working from home is feasible and many people can continue to work from their home.

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- Testing and isolation of COVID-19 cases can be enhanced, while people resume normal activities.

Given these principles, the following are recommended for strategic development of the System of Balanced COVID-19 Suppression and the Gradual Rise to Economic Normality:

- Identify people who are more resistant and who have the immunity to COVID-19 infection (by age group and gender, resident, occupation, place of work, age and health conditions of family members, etc.).
- Generally, all healthy people within the age group of below 45-50 years old may be allowed to resume normal activity while still sustaining suppression strategies. However, these younger people must be totally separated from the elderly age group of >50 years old. People age 50-65 years old may work from home. The elderly must stay home and be protected from contact with sick members of their household. It may be better that they are housed in special buildings, or that the young workers in the family are best housed separately.
- These selected 'healthy people', as well as the general population, should be compelled and supported to adhere to presumably advantageous nutritional and lifestyle practices, including eating a balanced diet (e.g. lots of nutritious vegetables and fish high in omega 3 essential oils) and consuming suitable supplements such as vitamin C, B complex, zinc. As well as avoiding food that are proven to be harmful to health- e.g. high fructose and high salt diets, and some unhealthy oils, etc..8 Nutritional intervention to increase population immunity must become a comprehensive program of government.
- Industry/private sector/establishments/social media/schools/civil society organizations (whole-of-society) should support the above by promoting healthy nutritional and lifestyle practices.
- Government must quickly, without hesitation, implement the use of the identified pharmaceutical/biological approaches to COVID-19 infection prevention and disease severity modulation- e.g. BCG vaccine and specific convalescent plasma/immunoglobulins, and various drugs now being identified and passing clinical trials. These substances become essential resources and must be made available to meet demands. Government and Industry must collaborate to meet demands.
- These selected people should be treated as the nation's truly precious human resources, and must continue to be protected by compelled adherence to the public health measures known to suppress COVID-19 transmission.
- Continue to increase efforts on testing and isolation of cases, while more and more people resume normal activities. Working from home must be better enabled by technology and industry support.
- Other ways to enhance this System of Balanced COVID-19 Suppression and the Gradual Rise to Economic Normality must be formulated. The central approach is about having the younger (as young as 15 years old) and stronger segment of our population to serve as the lifeblood of our emerging new society and economy, even as COVID-19 gets entrenched in our environment. These young workers are to be maximally shielded from

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COVID-19 infection or disease, and encouraged and driven by all people to serve as the beacon of hope for all humanity.

Government must carefully determine the essential economic and business activities to be restarted and the minimal workforce assignments for conservative level of business/service operations. We should not restart all operations at the same time, but consider methodical phasing. This approach will not be risk-free, so it takes careful and very well calculated moves. Foremost would be to ensure the enabling material resources, programs/campaigns, and effective whole-of-society cooperation and support.

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