

## AFS PHI COVID-19 Update

(as of November 25, 2020)

The Department of Health (DOH) is hopeful that the entire country would be able to shift to more lenient quarantine protocols by the first quarter of 2021, should local government units be able to sufficiently comply with standards on prevention, contact tracing and treatment.

The government has set milestones and "safeguard conditions" which would serve a local government unit's metric to shift to modified general community quarantine - the most lenient of the 4 quarantine classifications in the government's pandemic response protocol.

Business establishments under Category III in areas placed under General Community Quarantine (GCQ) and Modified GCQ are now allowed to operate at 75 percent and 100 percent capacity, respectively, as the government relaxes restrictions to further open the struggling economy.

Eight specific economic activities are allowed to increase their operating capacities beginning Nov. 1, 2020. These are: testing, tutorial, and review centers, gym, fitness centers, and sports facilities, internet cafés, dermatological clinics offering aesthetic procedures, full body massage, pet grooming services, drive-in cinemas, and travel agencies, tour operators, reservation service, and related activities. The easing of restrictions for these business establishments is conditioned on their compliance with the minimum public health and safety standards and protocols set by the government. The minimum health protocols known as the 7 Commandments, include:

1. wearing of proper face masks;
2. wearing of face shields;
3. no talking and no eating in public transportation and similar settings like confined areas and crowded places;
4. adequate ventilation (use of exhaust systems, air purifiers or keeping windows partially open);
5. frequent and proper disinfection;
6. symptomatic or COVID-19 positive must be isolated;
7. appropriate physical distancing.

There are currently 112 laboratories certified to conduct COVID-19 testing by DOH using RT-PCR technology, as well as 36 laboratories using GeneXpert, with an additional 96 public and private laboratories under assessment.

The age-based stay-at-home restrictions were eased to 15 to 65 from 21 to 60, public transportation capacities were increased and the one-seat apart rule was imposed instead of one meter, curfew hours may be shortened, malls can hold special activities to attract more shoppers, and the resumption of motorcycle taxi operations is also now being considered.

Schools remain 100% online and face-to-face in person classes are not allowed. This decision will be revisited in the few coming months by the Inter-Agency Task Force to allow in-person classes to both public and private schools.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) informed the public last March 19, 2020 that it is temporarily suspending visa issuance in all its Foreign Service Posts (primarily 9a Temporary Visitor/Tourist visas) effective immediately and will be valid and effective until further notice. As of to date, 9A visa which our foreign students get for entry to the Philippines is still currently suspended. To date, the Philippines has 26,745 active infections, accounting for 6.3 percent of the cumulative total cases. The DOH said almost 91.7 percent of patients currently ill are asymptomatic or exhibiting mild symptoms.

Sources: WHO Philippines, DOH, DFA, ABS-CBN

## AFS Intercultural Programs Philippines

Lot 10-B Block 6, Tupelo St., Phase 1-C  
Greenwoods Executive Village  
Cainta, Rizal 1900 Philippines

Telephone: +63 (2) 8290-1273  
E-mail: [info.philippines@afs.org](mailto:info.philippines@afs.org)  
Website: [www.afs.ph](http://www.afs.ph)

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