

# Pfizer/BioNTech COVID vaccine less effective in ages 5 to 11 — NY study

TWO DOSES of the Pfizer, Inc. and BioNTech SE coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine was protective against severe disease in children aged 5 to 11 during the recent Omicron variant surge, but quickly lost most of its ability to prevent infection in the age group, according to a study by New York State researchers.

The vaccine's efficacy against infection among those children declined to 12% at the end of January from 68% in mid-December compared to kids who did not get vaccinated, according to the study, which has not yet been peer reviewed.

For those aged 12 to 17, the vaccine's protection against infection fell to 51% in late January from 66% in mid-December.

"These results highlight the potential need to study alternative vaccine dosing for children and the continued importance of layered protections, including mask wearing, to prevent infection and transmission," the researchers said.

The vaccine was around 48% effective in keeping the younger age group out of the hospital, with 73% efficacy against hospitalization among adolescents last month, the data showed. That was down from effectiveness of 100% and 85% against hospitalization for the two age groups as of mid-December.

Dr. Paul Offit, a pediatric infectious disease expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, questioned whether the data were robust enough to say that the vaccine's efficacy had significantly declined, particularly against severe disease.

"It's not surprising that protection against mild illness would wane," Dr. Offit said. "We know that Omicron is somewhat immune evasive for protection against mild illness. The goal of the vaccine is to protect against severe illness — to keep children out of the hospital."

Dr. Offit said the number of hospitalizations were too few to draw any real conclusions, and that there was little information on why the children were hospitalized. He noted that protection from previous infection among the unvaccinated might also skew the numbers.

"Natural infection can protect against serious illness," he said.

Younger children receive a lower 10-microgram dose of the vaccine than 12- to 17-year-olds, who receive the same 30-microgram dose as adults and are eligible for a third booster shot.

Pfizer said it is studying a three-dose schedule of the vaccine in the pediatric population, noting that studies in adults suggest that "people vaccinated with three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine may have a higher degree of protection." — Reuters

# Steer clear of toxic positivity in online consultations

WHEN consulting online, patients and doctors alike should beware of behavioral red flags such as virtue signaling (the conspicuous communication of moral values to garner praise for one's righteousness); social vigilantism (the tendency to propagate one's "superior" belief to correct others' ignorance); and toxic positivity (the belief that people should maintain a positive mindset no matter how dire a situation is).

"[Because] the Internet is an extension of society, we should apply the same standards online as we do in public," said Dr. Patrick Gerard L. Moral, a physician and associate professor of medical ethics at the University of Santo Tomas.

Toxic positivity, added Dr. Moral, silences emotions, deters individuals from seeking support, and pressures them to pretend to be happy. An example of toxic positivity is telling someone who can't support his family that he is at least alive.

"That's why I share that I'm clinically depressed," he said at a Feb. 24 webinar organized by the Philippine College of Physicians (PCP). "I want people to know my life isn't perfect."

Physicians have been using online platforms for their healthcare advocacy since the pandemic. Social media, as pointed out during the webinar, provides a vehicle to receive real-time information, stamp out health misperceptions, and learn from patients and caregivers.

Healthcare providers can practice digital responsibility by being deliberate about what they post and understanding that sensibilities — such as political views and sense of humor — aren't universal. They also need to declare any conflict of interest and shun harassment.

## GREAT EQUALIZER

In the Philippines, the most popular physicians in cyberspace include the cardiologist Dr. William T. Ong, who has a 7 million-strong following on YouTube and is now running for vice-president, as well as Dr. Carlo Nemesio B. Trinidad, a nephrologist from Dagupan Doctors Villaflor Memorial Hospital and creator of the Hello Kidney Facebook page, which has close to 100,000 followers.

"Social media is the great equalizer. It breaks down hierarchies and enables connections," Dr. Trinidad said. "There is the potential to reach millions with a single post or tweet." He added that platforms like Twitter have enabled him to connect with "gods of [the medical] fields" and meet trialists he would otherwise have just read about in books.

Dr. Trinidad cautioned, however, that posting publicly is not for the faint of heart. He narrated how he was trolled when he said *tuob* (or steam inhalation therapy) is not effective against coronavirus.

"People said I was for Big Pharma, that I didn't respect elders," he said at the PCP webinar, adding that he approaches naysayers with diplomacy. "If you mention facts, you may not convince the person you're talking to, but you may convince the lurkers."

The goal for physicians is to be positive influencers, according to Dr. Moral — individuals who are relatable, add context to sensational headlines, and stay informed on current questions.

"At its heart, digital media is about people, relationships, and communication. We have to translate our communication skills into the digital setting," he said. — Patricia B. Mirasol

## How to consult online

DR. PATRICK GERARD L. MORAL, a physician and associate professor of medical ethics at the University of Santo Tomas, shared this guide on the art of digital messaging by Facebook Messenger in partnership with Debrett's London, a professional coaching company.

Knowing how to communicate online will help ease the teleconsultation process.

- Hone your tone — avoid irony unless you are sure the other person will get the joke.
- Keep it concise — stick to a few sentences, especially for someone you don't know well.
- Don't multi-message — don't send five messages if one suffices.
- Share with care — don't forward a message unless the original sender has given permission.
- Know your audience — keep the conversation relevant to the majority.
- Don't leave them hanging — respond, even if only to say you don't know the answer.
- Abide by the quick reply — leave a message unread until you have time to respond.
- Give up the ghosting — end an interaction with a polite explanation.
- Practice good exit-queue — either mute a conversation or offer a brief reason for leaving it.
- Sign off in style — sign off every messaging conversation.

# Ancient erotic pottery teaches Peruvians to prevent prostate cancer

LIMA — A Peruvian cancer prevention group has begun using erotic ceramics sculpted over a thousand years ago to teach men how to self-test for early signs of prostate and testicular cancer.

In an event on Friday at Lima's Larco museum, famous for its collection of pre-Columbian art, men were encouraged to touch genitals of the clay sculpture replicas to learn how to perform a cancer self-test on their testicles and penis.

The sculptures created by the Moche culture that thrived in northern Peru 100 to 800 years after Christ are known as erotic huacos, a pre-Columbian term for handicrafts.

The exhibition, called Touch the Genitals of the Mochicas, was promoted by the private organization League Against Cancer. "Timely detection of cancer of the external genitalia in men, both of the penis and testicles, is very

low," said nurse Giselle Grillo from the League Against Cancer. "Many do not know how to explore their genitals, what palpation is. With this we give an early diagnosis."

According to the organization, some 10,000 cases of prostate, penis and testicular cancer were diagnosed in Peru in 2021. Of that, 45% were in advanced stages with little chance of being cured.

"The aim is to bring closer the knowledge of our ancestors about the human body, expressed through these ceramic vessels that we call the Erotic Huacos," said Larco Museum Director Ulla Holmquist.

In the museum, the hundreds of huacos, some with large male genitalia and others in varying sexual positions, were displayed in showcases while visitors timidly touched them. — Reuters

## OPINION

# Challenges and opportunities in financing cancer care

In a recent forum with the theme "Transformative Innovations on Cancer Care: The Way Forward," Health Secretary Francisco T. Duque III said that the government is pursuing a health systems approach to cancer.

This entails improving cancer care by synchronizing service delivery, the health workforce, registries and information systems, access to technologies and medicines, financing, and governance.

The Cancer Control Council, which he chairs, has also approved the Framework and Strategic Plan of the Cancer Control Program towards the goal of a cancer-free Philippines.

The Department of Health (DoH) also intends to cover care for the entire cancer continuum from primary prevention up until survivorship care without bringing financial hardship to patients and their families.

Prior to the passage in 2019 of the National Integrated Cancer Control Act (NICCA), Mr. Duque said that only breast and childhood cancers were covered by the Cancer Supportive Palliative-Medicine Access Program (CSP-MAP). In 2021, the CSP-MAP provided free medicines for a number of cancer types such as lung, leukemia, head and neck, gynecologic, bladder, renal and gastrointestinal. For 2022, the allocated budget for the CSP-MAP has increased to P786 million. The Malasakit Program, meanwhile, is expected to provide financial assistance to cancer patients who remain uncovered.

While significant progress has been made, there are still challenges as well as opportunities in cancer care in the country. In the same forum, Thinkwell Philippines senior technical advisor Dr. Marife Yap presented the key findings of a study on cancer care financing in the Philippines.

"Public investments in oncology care are further challenged by deep fragmentation, misallocation, and misalignment of human, financial, and technical resources within the health system and Philippine society," Dr. Yap said. "Most of the interventions are geared towards, unfortunately, late diagnosis and treatment. We know that the health-seeking behavior of many Filipinos towards cancer prevention and early diagnosis is quite poor. They will delay seeing a doctor or getting treatment because of financial constraints or the need to work."

According to Dr. Yap, PhilHealth Z-benefit packages can still be further utilized. She pointed out that although 60% of accredited PhilHealth providers are from the private sector, very few seek accreditation to provide the Z-benefit package due to low support value, and selective criteria for early-stage cancers that have high rates of survival. Private sector providers interviewed in the study consider the Z-benefit package for colorectal cancer as the one with the most realistic cost.

Dr. Yap stressed that costing and criteria of benefit packages for cancer should also be updated regularly. She likewise urged the newly established DoH Health Technology Assessment Unit, which is currently focused on COVID-19 vaccines and diagnostics procurement and distribution, to review innovative cancer therapies.

Dr. Yap presented several policy options to increase financing for cancer care in the country. Investments in cancer prevention and early detection should be increased to reduce avoidable sickness and deaths and improve survival rates. Accelerating rollouts of updated and new treatment protocols and rapid access to medicine in clinical practice also provides considerable gains in cancer survival.

Shifting to innovative oncology treatment has both health and economic benefits, reducing duration of illness and productivity losses. Government can ensure swift and adequate access by applying health technology assessment frameworks and regulations that support the rational use of resources while also increasing overall resources for integrated oncology care.

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), which represents the biopharmaceutical medicines and vaccines industry in the country. Its members are at the forefront of research and development efforts for COVID-19 and other diseases that affect Filipinos.



# Filipino adults still struggling with obesity and inactivity

THE Philippines has already surpassed a 2030 projection of diabetes incidence in the country, according to the Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI).

The FNRI pegged diabetes prevalence among adults 20 years old and above at 8.2% as of 2019, exceeding the 2030 projection of 7.8% among adults from 20 to 79 years old in the 2021 edition of the IDF Diabetes Atlas, and matching its projection for 2045.

Even as tobacco use has declined, risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity continue to pose a challenge among Filipinos.

"More than half of adults are also obese based on their waist-hip ratio," said endocrinologist Dr. Aurora G. Macaballug, citing 2003–2019 prevalence data from FNRI, at a Feb. 22 webinar organized by the Philippine College of Physicians.

From 2018 to 2019, the prevalence of high waist-hip ratios of adult males and females decreased slightly from 8.3% to 7.2%, and 63.7% to 63.0%, respectively. "It's bad that it's stable," Dr. Macaballug said, noting that the problem still hasn't been minimized even if it's been identified.

Abdominal obesity, or too much fat around the waist, is defined as having a waist-hip ratio of more than 0.85 for females, and more than 0.9 for males. It is a marker of disease risk. According to Harvard T.H. Chan's School of Public Health, abdominal fat releases agents and hormones that lead to high blood glucose and blood pressure. — Patricia B. Mirasol

## FULL STORY

Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone <bit.ly/Inactivity030222>

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Republic of the Philippines COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS Manila EN BANC

IN RE: MANIFESTATION OF INTENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PARTY-LIST SYSTEM OF REPRESENTATION IN THE 09 MAY 2022 ELECTIONS SPP NO. 21-169 (PLM) ALTERNATIBA NG MASA (ALTERNATIBA) as represented by its Chairperson JUDY ANN CHAN-MIRANDA, Petitioner.

ORDER Acting on the Manifestation of Intent to Participate filed on 30 March 2021 ("Manifestation"), the Commission En Banc hereby directs ALTERNATIBA to publish at its own expense the said Manifestation together with the instant Order in two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Any interested party may file with the Office of the Clerk of the Commission a verified petition seeking to deny due course to the Manifestation within ten (10) days from the date of publication pursuant to Rule 3, Section 7, paragraph 1 of the Comelec Resolution No. 9366, as amended by Comelec Resolution No. 10690.

Submission of proof of publication shall be transmitted via e-mail to the Office of the Clerk of the Commission (clerkofthecommission@comelec.gov.ph). Immediately after filing through e-mail, the same documents shall be sent in four (4) hard copies to the Office of the Clerk of the Commission, 8th Floor, Palacio del Gobernador Bldg., General Luna St., Intramuros, Manila through the fastest means available, including registered mail or any courier service.

SO ORDERED. Given this 22 FEB 2022, Manila, Philippines.

Records, Office of the Clerk of the Commission Case Folder 2 "Sec. 7. Petition to deny due course to a manifestation of intent to participate." 3 Rules and Regulation Governing the (1) Filing of Petitions for Registration; (2) Filing of Disqualification Cases Against Nominees of Party-List Groups or Organizations Participating under the Party-List System of Representation in Connection with the May 13, 2013 National and Local Elections; and Subsequent Elections Thereafter in the matter of setting the last day for the filing of the following: (1) Petitions for Registration of Party-List Groups, Organizations and Coalitions; (2) Manifestation of Intent to Participate; (3) Submission of Names of Nominees; (4) Filing of Disqualification Cases against nominees of groups, organizations and coalition under the Party-List System of Representation and requiring publication of substitute nominees in connection with the 09 May 2022 National and Local Elections.