

# Doctors urge mask wearing as mandates dropped

By Brontë H. Lacsamana  
Reporter

A DECREASE in coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases all over the world has made it safer for the Philippines to lift the masking mandate. Individuals must now make conscious choices about wearing masks (or not) by assessing the risk in every situation, said health experts.

"The wearing of your mask is an informed choice. Since it's now voluntary, you need to empower yourself to assess the risk for every activity you're going to do and every place you're going to visit," said Dr. Marissa M. Alejandria, director of the Institute of Clinical Epidemiology at University of the Philippines (UP) Manila, at a Nov. 11 webinar.

According to the ¾ rule, individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, physically distanced, and in an outdoor or ventilated space can forgo masking.

"We still highly recommend everyone to continue masking as it is a simple, practical, and effective way to prevent the transmission of COVID-19," she said.

On Friday, the Philippines posted 1,227 new coronavirus cases, bringing the total to 4.01 million. Of these, only 17,188 are still active.

BA.5, the predominant variant under Omicron, currently has descendants like XBB, XBC, and BQ.1, whose emergence prove that transmission of the virus is still ongoing.

Dr. Alejandria reminded that masking has two roles: it is a source control that blocks the wearer from emitting droplets, and a filter that keeps the wearer from inhaling droplets.

"The benefit increases with increasing numbers of people using masks correctly and consistently," she said. "There is both a community benefit and an individual benefit."

Maria Rosario S. Vergeire, officer-in-charge of the Department of Health (DoH), reiterated in a media briefing on Friday that the public should always make informed decisions to prevent transmission of the virus, regardless of what the restrictions are.

In November, the Philippine Pediatric Society and the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society of the Philippines released a statement saying that masking, alongside ventilation and distancing, remain vital in preventing COVID-19 transmission in schools.

The primary vaccination rate in the Philippines is about

70%, but the booster coverage is under 50%, which adds to the importance of masking as a precautionary measure, said Dr. Alejandria.

Face masks are also effective in protecting people from other respiratory infections, according to Dr. Ralph Elvi Villalobos, consultant at the division of pulmonary medicine at UP Philippine General Hospital.

"Aside from COVID-19, using face masks can protect from other respiratory infectious illnesses like influenza and pneumonia," he said. "It will also help patients who have to deal with air pollution, asthma, and emphysema triggers."

## RELATED STORY

Read the related story "To mask or not to mask? G20 gathers nations with divergent COVID rules" by scanning the QR code <[bit.ly/Mask11622](http://bit.ly/Mask11622)>

## Vaccination seen to improve workplace productivity

EMPLOYERS will benefit from promoting vaccination as it boosts worker productivity and contributes to economic well-being by reducing the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases, an occupational medicine expert said.

"It's really up to each workplace to try to engage the employees with regard to accepting that vaccination has its benefits — not just for the workforce, but for communities, households, and families," said Dr. Anna Sofia Victoria S. Fajardo, national president of the Philippine College of Occupational Medicine, Inc., at a Nov. 9 event organized by the American Chamber of Commerce and Pfizer.

"This vaccination program ... is worth investing in not just for the economic development and growth of your own companies, but also for our communities and our country," she added.

Reducing out-of-pocket costs for vaccination, sending reminders, and making employees aware of the benefits of vaccination will increase uptake in the workplace, said Dr. Fajardo.

Workplace vaccination, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reduces cost by reducing absences due to illness, resulting in improved productivity. It also improves morale among employees.

## FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code <[bit.ly/Vaccination11622](http://bit.ly/Vaccination11622)>

— Patricia B. Mirasol

## OPINION

# Food fortification

Micronutrients — vitamins and minerals needed by the body in minute amounts — are critical to optimal bodily functions and a deficiency in any of them can cause severe and even life-threatening conditions, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Micronutrients perform a range of functions, including enabling the body to produce enzymes, hormones, and other substances needed for normal growth and development. Deficiencies in iron, vitamin A, and iodine are the most common around the world, particularly in children and pregnant women. Low- and middle-income countries bear the disproportionate burden of micronutrient deficiencies, the WHO noted.

A lack of iron, folate, and vitamins B12 and A can lead to anemia, a condition in which there is a reduced number of red blood cells or hemoglobin concentration, causing fatigue, weakness, shortage of breath and dizziness. This can further lead to difficulties in functioning in work, education and community engagement. The WHO estimates that 42% of children under 5 years of age and 40% of pregnant women worldwide are anemic.

Severe iodine deficiency can lead to brain damage and, during pregnancy, cause a number of issues including still-

birth, spontaneous abortion and congenital anomalies. Less severe iodine deficiency may still cause mental impairment that reduces intellectual capacity. Vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and increases the risk of disease and death from severe infections such as diarrheal disease and measles. Vitamin A deficiency may also occur in women during the last trimester of pregnancy in high-risk areas.

Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of one or more micronutrients (i.e., vitamins and minerals) in a food or condiment to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health. Aside from increasing the nutritional content of staple foods, the addition of micronutrients can help to restore the micronutrient content lost during processing. The WHO recommends large-scale food fortification as a powerful evidence-informed and cost-effective intervention to fight vitamin and mineral deficiencies, including iodine deficiency disorders, anemia and iron deficiency, among others.

National Food Fortification Day is observed annually in the country on Nov. 7 to highlight the persistence of micro-

nutrient deficiencies as a public health problem affecting a significant proportion of the population. Republic Act 8172, otherwise known as "An Act Promoting Salt Iodization Nationwide (ASIN)," was signed into law in December 1995 with the purpose of eliminating micronutrient malnutrition in the country, particularly iodine deficiency disorders, through salt iodization. The law is a cost-effective and preventive measure that requires all manufacturers of salt to iodize the salt they produce, manufacture, import, trade, or distribute.

The ASIN law was supplemented by Republic Act 8976, otherwise known as the Philippine Food Fortification Act of 2000. The law has two components. With voluntary food fortification, the Department of Health (DoH) encourages manufacturers to fortify their processed foods and food products based on rules and regulations the DoH prescribes through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). On the other hand, among the staple foods that fall under the mandatory fortification component are rice and salt (to be fortified with iron), wheat flour (to be fortified with vitamin A and iron), and refined sugar and cooking oil (both to be fortified with vitamin A). These staples were chosen because these are regularly consumed by the population, especially those at risk to micronutrient deficiencies regardless of socioeconomic status.

The Sangkap Pinoy Seal Program (SPSP) strategy encourages food manufacturers to fortify processed foods or food products with essential nutrients at levels approved by the DoH. The DoH seal of acceptance is used by manufacturers after their products have passed a set of criteria for food fortification. This seal serves as a guide for consumers in selecting nutritious foods. The Sangkap Pinoy Seal is granted to manufacturers who fortify their processed food products with iron, vitamin A, and iodine. The Saktong Iodine sa Asin Quality Seal can be seen on salt products with the recommended amount of iodine. The Diamond Sangkap Pinoy Seal is for staples covered by mandatory food fortification.

There are a number of factors that affect an individual's health. Eating right is a step into the right direction.

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.



## Gold steadies as bargain hunters see off dollar's advance

GOLD steadied on Monday as bargain hunting offset pressure from the dollar's advance following the US Federal Reserve's signs that it was not softening its fight against inflation.

Spot gold rose 0.1% to \$1,772.94 per ounce by 01:32 p.m. ET (1832 GMT) after falling 1% earlier in the day. US gold futures settled up 0.4% at \$1,776.90.

The gains in the dollar and US yields were weighing on gold, said Jim Wyckoff, senior analyst at Kitco Metals, adding that bargain hunting by bulls emboldened by previous week's gains could have helped gold's slight recovery.

Gold prices could go sideways to higher in the near term, Mr. Wyckoff added.

The dollar index rose 0.4%, while 10-year Treasury yields also gained, making gold more expensive for overseas buyers.

"Gold appears to have strong resistance with the \$1,800 level, with decent support at the \$1,750 region," Edward Moya, senior analyst with OANDA, said in a note.

Bullion reported its best weekly gain since March 2020 last week on hopes of slower rate hikes after data showed price pressure cooling in the United States.

While gold is considered a hedge against inflation, rising rates tend to dull bullion's appeal as it pays no interest.

Fed funds futures traders see an 89% probability of a 50-basis-point (bp) increase at the central bank's December meeting, with only an 11% likelihood of a 75 bp rise.

Spot silver jumped 1.5% to \$22 per ounce and reached its highest since June 9. Platinum fell 0.3% to \$1,026, off its highest since mid-March reached in the last session. Palladium was steady at \$2,040.64 per ounce. — Reuters

## Oil tumbles on firmer dollar, China virus surge

OIL prices settled around \$3 lower on Monday, dragged down by a firmer US dollar while surging coronavirus cases in China dashed hopes of a swift reopening of the economy for the world's biggest crude importer.

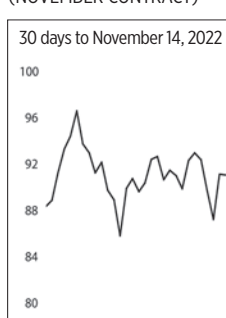
Brent crude futures settled down \$2.85 or 3% at \$93.14 a barrel after gaining 1.1% on Friday. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures settled down \$3.09 or 3.47% to \$85.87 after advancing 2.9% on Friday.

On Friday, commodities prices rallied after China's National Health Commission adjusted its coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) prevention and control measures to shorten quarantine times for close contacts of cases and inbound travelers.

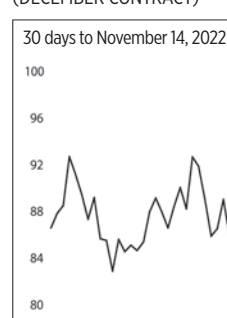
But COVID-19 cases climbed in China over the weekend, with Beijing and other big cities on Monday reporting record infections.

"The surge in COVID-19 cases will only lead to more

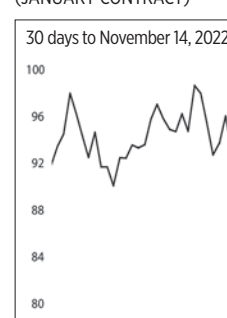
### ASIA-DUBAI (NOVEMBER CONTRACT)



### NEW YORK-WTI (DECEMBER CONTRACT)



### LONDON-BRENT (JANUARY CONTRACT)



Source: REUTERS

lockdowns in the near term... for now China is not a source of bullish support for the petroleum complex," said John Kilduff, partner at Again Capital LLC in New York.

The US dollar also rose against the euro and yen, as investors braced for potential US Federal

Reserve interest rates hikes after a policy maker said too much was being made of last week's cooler US inflation data.

A stronger dollar makes dollar-denominated commodities more expensive for holders of other currencies and tends to weigh on oil and other risk assets.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), meanwhile, cut its forecast for global oil demand growth this year and next, citing economic headwinds.

US domestic supply also continues to rise. Oil output in the Permian in Texas and New Mexico, the biggest US shale oil basin, is due to rise by about 39,000 barrels per day (bpd) to a record 5.499 million bpd in December, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its productivity report on Monday.

Separately, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Friday said India can continue buying as much Russian oil as it wants, including at prices above a G7-imposed price cap mechanism, if it steers clear of Western insurance, finance and maritime services bound by the cap. — Reuters

## Wall St. ends lower as investors gauge Fed's policy path

WALL STREET'S main indexes ended lower on Monday, with real estate and discretionary sectors leading broad declines, as investors digested comments from US Federal Reserve officials about plans for interest rate hikes and looked for next catalysts after last week's big stock market rally.

Losses accelerated toward the end of the up-and-down session, with focus turning to Tuesday's producer price index report and markets highly sensitive to inflation data.

Earlier on Monday, Fed Vice Chair Lael Brainard signaled that the central bank would likely soon slow its interest rates hikes. Her comments somewhat buoyed sentiment for equities that had been dampened after Federal Reserve Governor Christopher Waller on Sunday said the Fed may consider slowing the pace of increases at its next meeting but that should not be seen as a "softening" in its commitment to lower inflation.

A massive equity rally late last week was set off by a softer-than-expected inflation report that boosted investor hopes the Fed could dial back on its monetary tightening that has punished markets this year.

"There is still a sensitivity to Fed speak... One was a little hawkish, one was a little dovish," said Eric Kuby, chief investment officer at North Star Investment Management Corp.



REUTERS

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 211.16 points or 0.63% to 33,536.70; the S&P 500 lost 35.68 points or 0.89% to 3,957.25; and the Nasdaq Composite dropped 127.11 points or 1.12% to 11,196.22.

The S&P 500 last week posted its biggest weekly percentage gain since late June, while the tech-heavy Nasdaq notched its best week since March.

More Fed officials are due to speak later this week along with a slew of data, including on retail sales and housing, and earnings reports from major retailers.

"It just makes sense the market wants to pause and really both try to make sense of the trajectory (of Fed policy) and what the next drivers are going to be," said Yung-Yu Ma, chief investment strategist at BMO Wealth Management.

Among S&P 500 sectors, real estate fell 2.7%; consumer discretionary dropped 1.7%; and financials declined 1.5%.

In company news, Amazon shares fell 2.3% as *The New York Times* on Monday reported the company was planning to lay off about 10,000 people in corporate and technology jobs starting as soon as this week.

Shares of Biogen, Inc. and Eli Lilly gained 3.3% and 1.3%, respectively, after the failure of Swiss rival Roche's Alzheimer's disease drug candidate.

Declining issues outnumbered advancing ones on the New York Stock Exchange by a 2.23-to-1 ratio; on Nasdaq, a 1.61-to-1 ratio favored decliners.

The S&P 500 posted 15 new 52-week highs and 2 new lows; the Nasdaq Composite recorded 72 new highs and 74 new lows.

About 11.5 billion shares changed hands in US exchanges, compared with the 12.1 billion daily average over the last 20 sessions. — Reuters

## SPOT PRICES

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2022

METAL			
PALLADIUM free \$/troy oz			2,004.35
PALLADIUM JMI base, \$/troy oz			2,012.00
PLATINUM free \$/troy oz			1,013.51
PLATINUM JMI base \$/troy oz			1,023.00
KRUGGERAND, fob \$/troy oz			1,772.00
IRIDIUM, whs rot, \$/troy oz			3,940.00
RHODIUM, whs rot, \$/troy oz			13,540.00
GRAINS (November 10, 2022)			
(FOB Bangkok basis at every Thursday)			
FRAGRANT (100%) 1 <sup>st</sup> Class, \$/ton			932.00
FRAGRANT (100%) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class, \$/ton			904.00
RICE (5%) White Thai- \$/ton			433.00
RICE (10%) White Thai- \$/ton			432.00
RICE (15%) White Thai- \$/ton			429.00
RICE (25%) White Thai- \$/ton (Super)			429.00
BROKER RICE A-1 Super \$/ton			395.00
FOOD			
COCOA ICCO Dly (SDR/mt)			1,853.59
COCOA ICCO \$/mt			2,426.53
COFFEE ICA comp '2001 cts/lb			159.72
SUGAR ISA FOB Daily Price, Carib. port cts/lb			18.71
SUGAR ISA 15-day ave.			17.67

## LIFFE COFFEE

New Robusta 10 MT - \$/ton

	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Nov.	1,838	1,793	1,824	1,836
Jan.	1,826	1,786	1,815	1,825
Mar.	1,835	1,781	1,808	1,817
May	1,821	1,776	1,803	1,810

## LIFFE COCOA

(Ldn)-10 MT-E/ton

	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Dec.	2,014	1,988	2,003	2,013
Mar.	1,969	1,940	1,963	1,971
May	1,916	1,891	1,911	1,920
July	1,904	1,882	1,899	1,909

## COCONUT

MANILA COPRA (based on 6% moisture)			
Peso/100kg		Buyer/Seller	
Lag/Qzn/Luc 22		3,700.00/3,750.00	
Philippine Coconut Oil - Crude			
CIF NY/NOLA			57.00
PALM OIL RAIL/NOLA			60.00
COCONUT OIL (PHIL/IDN), \$ per ton,			
CIF Europe			
Nov./Dec.'22			0.00/1,187.50
Dec./Jan.'23			1,132.50/1,202.50
Jan./Feb.'23			1,160.00/1,211.67
Feb./Mar.'23			1,170.00/1,221.67

## LONDON METAL EXCHANGE

LME FINAL CLOSING PRICES, US\$/MT		
		3 MOS
ALUMINUM H.G.		2,452.50
ALUMINUM Alloy		1,860.00
COPPER		8,375.00
LEAD		2,190.00
NICKEL		28,840.00
TIN		22,029.00
ZINC		3,131.50