Situation Summary

Highlights of Current Situation Report

- 349 cases were reported from 23 June-6 July 2021, bringing the cumulative total to 2,356 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with three deaths since March 2020. In total, 2,104 cases have recovered, while there are still 249 active cases. On 28 June, the number of cumulative cases in Lao PDR was revised to remove duplicate cases.

- The cases in the last two weeks increased compared to the two weeks prior to this (9-22 June, n=97 cases), mainly due to increase in Champasack (Figure 1)
  - The 349 cases reported in the past two weeks are from eight provinces (Figure 2). 81% (282/349) of cases in the past two weeks were imported. Local cases were reported in four provinces, Vientiane Capital, Vientiane Province and Luang Namtha, and Champasak, while four provinces, Khammuane, Savannakhet, Saravane and Xayabouly reported only imported cases, with details below.
  - Majority of the 282 imported cases were returnees arriving by land border from Thailand in Champasack (65%; n=183), Savannakhet (23%; n=66), Khammuane (6%; n=18), Vientiane Capital (2%; n=5) and Saravane (n=1), and a truck driver delivering goods who entered via Xayabouly (n=1). Eight imported cases in Vientiane Capital were among arrivals from Russia (n=6), Colombia (n=1), and Tajikistan (n=1).
  - Vientiane Province reported the highest number of local cases (n=43) with no imported cases.
  - The most recent local cluster has 53 cases reported from 27 June-6 July, including ten cases from Vientiane Capital and 43 cases from Vientiane Province. Based on available information, cases in Vientiane Province are linked to a confirmed case in Vientiane Capital, but further investigations on the source of infection, including repeat case interviews and sequencing of samples, are ongoing to provide more evidence.
  - Three local cases in Luangnamtha were detected from exit testing. The cases came from Tonpheung district, Bokeo, where they tested negative before travelling to Luangnamtha to exit to China.
  - One secondary local case from a returnee who is a household contact was reported in Champasack. Further investigations are ongoing.
  - As of 6 July, there is one case admitted in the hospital requiring oxygen support in Vientiane Capital.
- Majority (74%, 1,719/2,320) of the cases are in the 15-34 year age group, with 23 cases (1%) among those 65 years and older (Figure 3).
- Institute Pasteur du Laos (IPL) is conducting sequencing of Covid-19 cases. From 20 April to 6 July, genetic sequencing of a total of 48 samples found majority to be the alpha (B.1.1.7) variant (n=42), including both local and imported cases. Five samples were the delta variant (B.1.617.2), found among returnees from Thailand and Russia, while one sample was of lineage B.1.621, in a traveler from Colombia.
Figure 1. Epicurve of confirmed cases by date of reporting, 20 Apr - 6 July (n=2402)

Figure 2. Geographical distribution of confirmed cases in Lao PDR, 22 June - 05 July (n=306)
Investigation and Surveillance

- Provincial health departments continue to conduct case investigations and contact tracing with support from central level MoH, led by the National Centre of Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE), Department of Communicable Disease Control (DCDC), and with technical support from WHO.
- A central level team with epidemiology and clinical management staff from MoH and WHO has been deployed to support Vientiane Province in case investigation, contact tracing and monitoring, specimen collection, and data management. A separate team including WHO technical staff will also be deployed to support the response in Champasack for case management and epidemiology. Efforts are underway to strengthen the early detection strategy, particularly in high-risk populations and 3C settings to detect possible signals of community transmission in the province.
- VCHD conducted a training on Covid-19 case investigation and contact tracing for district-level epidemiology staff on 29 June, with technical support from NCLE and WHO.
- A meeting with NCLE, Department of Healthcare and Rehabilitation (DHR) and central hospitals was conducted on 24 June to strengthen Covid-19 surveillance in health facilities in Vientiane Capital through testing all ILI patients.
- NCLE with WHO support has provided tablets to be used for collecting data during specimen collection and conducted training to provinces with the objective of improving data quality and timeliness for response.
- MoH has shifted the strategy to conduct facility quarantine for close contacts, prioritizing those who are unable to self-quarantine at home.
- The National IHR Focal Point (NFP) is communicating with NFPS of Viet Nam and China regarding imported cases with travel history to Lao PDR.
- DCDC coordinated and supervised the conduct of provincial multisource surveillance meetings to assess the risk of community transmission in priority provinces, with technical support from WHO. In the past two weeks, assessments were conducted in Bokoe, Luangnamtha, Vientiane Province, Attapeu, Saravane, and Khammuane. A meeting with Champasack is scheduled on 7 July 2021.
Laboratory Testing

- In Vientiane Capital, over 8,400 tests were conducted in the past 14 days, excluding returnees, with an overall positivity rate of 0.2%.
- Enhanced surveillance was conducted in prisons in Vientiane Capital from 22-25 June 2021, with 381 samples collected from six prisons and one drug rehabilitation centre, all of which tested negative.
- As of 26 June, there were also over 7,600 samples collected from 17 factories and 14 markets, all of which tested negative.
- Other laboratories have been supporting NCLE with testing at central level. The following samples were tested by each laboratory:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laboratory</th>
<th>Number of specimens tested from 29 June-5 July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCLE</td>
<td>4765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institut Pasteur du Laos (IPL)</td>
<td>708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre d’Infectiologie Christophe Mérieux du Laos (CIML)</td>
<td>887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao-Oxford-Mahosot Hospital-Wellcome Trust Research Unit (LOMWRU)</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In other provinces, the number of tests conducted in the last 14 days range from 0-2,100 tests, with the positivity rates highest in Saravan and Vientiane Province (Figure 4). Provinces with no or few tests are encouraged to increase testing for early detection.
- Positivity rates among returnees increased in the last 14 days compared to the previous 14 days, and were highest in Champasack (12% of 1,500 tests) and Khammuane (12 % of 156 tests) (Figure 5).

**Figure 4. Total number of tests and positivity rate per province, from 22 June-5 July (n=7,271)**

*excludes returnees
Clinical management and care pathways

- DHR and the Department of Health and Hygiene Promotion (DHHP) are supporting the preparation of isolation facilities in provinces to manage the increase in cases especially in Champasack and Vientiane Province, with WHO providing technical support.
- In Champasack, the previous quarantine center has been transformed to a field hospital, and other potential sites are also being identified. Discussions also ongoing to clarify the care pathways to manage mild and asymptomatic cases in the field hospital, and reserve hospital beds for potential severe cases.
- DHR continues to run training courses for staff who will begin working in facilities caring for Covid-19 patients, including additional sessions for IPC.
- Guidelines for deisolation criteria:
  - For symptomatic cases: 14 days after symptom onset, plus at least 3 additional days without symptoms (including without fever and without respiratory symptoms).
  - For asymptomatic cases: 14 days after positive test for SARS-CoV-2.
  - Cases are requested to self-monitor for seven days after discharge. Some cases are being tested prior to discharge for research purposes.
- One local case was detected in Champasack, with potential source of infection from a confirmed case who already completed isolation and was later identified to have the delta variant. Investigations are ongoing which will be used to inform recommendations for the deisolation criteria.
- With the increase in returnees from Thailand, provinces are also identifying sites for additional quarantine centers with support from central level MoH.

Vaccines

- The coverage of at least one dose by target groups is still low, including among healthcare workers (67%), elderly (7%) and people with chronic illnesses (8%) (Figure 6). The coverage for all three target groups was highest in Vientiane Capital. MoH is discussing with different provinces to ensure that the national deployment plan is being followed.
- At least 1M doses of Johnson&Johnson vaccine and additional doses of AstraZeneca vaccine are expected to arrive soon through the COVAX facility.
- MoH plans to extend target population for vaccination in 2021 from 22% to 50% of the total population.

Figure 5. Total number of tests and positivity rate per province among returnees, from 22 June-5 July (n=3352)
Risk Communication and Community Engagement

- The Centre for Communication and Education for Health (CCEH) continues to share social media posts to disseminate information on Covid-19 prevention measures and vaccination. It gathers Q&A from press conferences chat box, calls to hotlines 165/166, and address trending hot topics and rumors related to COVID-19, symptoms, transmission, vaccines, rapid diagnostic test kits, regulation on zoning, inter-provincial travels and address them through its posts.
- Audio materials for COVID-19 test sites are now available in Mandarin and Vietnamese languages. Will continue to develop and finalize materials related to Point-of entry, border checkpoints and quarantine centers.
- CCEH continues to support the National Immunization Programme (NIP), WHO, and UNICEF to update the information on vaccination sites, second-dose reminders, online vaccination registration platform and vaccine safety. The team provided messages on priority populations, to ensure that elderly and people with underlying health conditions can receive the vaccine.
- guide on vaccination will be added to the broadcast manual.
- Two pilot participatory community engagement workshops were conducted in Sangthong district with facilitators from Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute, Ministry of Home Affairs, Maternal and Child Health Centre, Vientiane capital Health Department and WHO. The 5-day workshops involved assessment and planning with district staff, consultations and activities with communities and health centre staff leading to action plans, which were presented to district and central teams with plans for monitoring and follow-up. Community and health centre objectives included COVID-19 surveillance and ensuring access to essential health services.
- Reprinting of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) posters for provinces is underway. Procurement will also be done for 100 mobile loudspeakers to be distributed to districts.
Epidemiology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epi Update</th>
<th>Covid-19</th>
<th>332 (74.4%)</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imported Cases in past 28 days (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>with no link</td>
<td>Active clusters</td>
<td>Active clusters with &gt;3 generations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>ICU Admissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18,025 NAT Tests past 14 days</td>
<td>349 New cases past 14 days (171.28% 7-day)</td>
<td>0 Deaths past 14 days</td>
<td>0 ICU Admissions past 7 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Health Service Provision Covid-19 | 719 Health care workers trained in COVID-19 Case Management | 0 Healthcare worker cases reported past 7 days | 390 Hospitals admitting COVID-19 patients | 227 Total ICU beds |

Table 1. Cumulative and new (past 7 days) cases and deaths by age and sex.

| Age Group | Female | | Male | | |
|-----------|--------|---|--------|---|
|           | Cases  | Deaths | Cases  | Deaths |
| 0-4       | 25(4)  | 0(0)   | 39(7)  | 0(0)   |
| 5-14      | 30(0)  | 0(0)   | 31(4)  | 0(0)   |
| 15-24     | 521(41)| 0(0)   | 315(40)| 0(0)   |
| 25-34     | 412(36)| 0(0)   | 471(47)| 1(0)   |
| 35-44     | 123(19)| 0(0)   | 166(21)| 0(0)   |
| 45-54     | 65(4)  | 1(0)   | 61(2)  | 0(0)   |
| 55-64     | 18(0)  | 0(0)   | 20(1)  | 0(0)   |
| 65+       | 11(0)  | 0(0)   | 12(1)  | 1(0)   |
| Total     | 1205(123) | 1(0) | 1115(104) | 2(0) |
ILI/SARI sentinel surveillance

- From 26 June – 2 July 2021, 30 samples from sentinel sites were tested (23 ILI, 7 SARI) and all tested negative for SARS-CoV-2 and influenza.
- Sentinel ILI and SARI cases are stable and remain lower than previous years (Figures 7-8). The proportion of ILI consultations per total consultations and the proportion of SARI admissions per total hospitalisations also remain below the 3-year average.

Figure 7. Weekly number of ILI presentations at sentinel sites, as of week 27, 2021 (Source: NCLE)

![Figure 7](image1)

Figure 8: Weekly number of SARI cases reported to the notifiable disease surveillance, as of week 27, 2021 (Source: NCLE)

![Figure 8](image2)
Transmission Assessment:

As of 6 July, Vientiane Capital remains in Stage 2\(^a\) (Localized community transmission), seven provinces in Stage 1\(^b\) (Imported cases), and 10 provinces in Stage 0\(^b\) (No cases).

In Vientiane Capital, locally acquired cases continue to be reported, with the majority identified from close contacts, and only one case with unclear source of infection in the last two weeks. There are no clear signals of large-scale transmission as positivity rate of community testing has remained <1%, and enhanced testing among ILI/SARI cases, healthcare workers, and in prisons, markets and factories did not find positive cases. There was no observed increase in severe Covid-19 cases, SARI cases, or the number of ICU beds and ventilators used in Vientiane Capital, and no clusters of respiratory illness were reported from the community or the hotline.

Seven provinces are in Stage 1. Vientiane Province reported local cases which are all linked to one cluster. Based on available information, the source of infection is linked to Vientiane Capital but further investigations are ongoing. Luangnamtha reported three cases who had travel history and had previously tested negative in Tonpheung district, Bokeo province. Saravane and Champasack reported one local case each, who were both close contacts of imported cases. Savannakhet, Khammuane and Xayabouly reported only imported cases. The remaining 10 provinces did not report any cases in the past 28 days.

There are no clear signals of community transmission in these 17 provinces in the past two weeks, with tests among ILI/SARI cases, and enhanced detection among healthcare workers, POE and quarantine staff all being negative. Trends in SARI cases remain lower than previous years, no observed increase in ICU beds and ventilators used, and no clusters of respiratory illness were reported from the community or the hotline.

The risk of undetected transmission in the wider community remains high. Local and imported cases were confirmed to have the alpha variant, and recent imported cases were detected to have the delta variant. With returnees from neighbouring countries and imported cases expected to further increase, increased occupancy of quarantine facilities and field hospitals increases the risk of transmission within facilities and to the wider community. There is also a continued risk for additional introductions from illegal crossing. Provinces are encouraged to increase sample collection for early detection, including from ILI/SARI cases , high-risk groups and high-risk settings in the community.

\(a\) Assessment done by WHO, with concurrence from Ministry of Health

\(b\) Assessment done by Ministry of Health together with Local Health Departments

Strategic Approach

National and Provincial Public Health Response

- National EOC activated and continuing to meet daily.
- Operational plan for the next 2 years to ensure COVID-19 response is adequately supported within the larger health system.
- There are ongoing efforts to collaborate with relevant Ministries to strengthen the local government’s role and responsibilities for community engagement.
- Continued efforts to monitor and maintain essential health services have been made to ensure performance of the broader health system during COVID-19.
• Transparency and visible leadership: MOH hold regular press conferences and publishes short updates online regularly.

Strategic Approach to COVID-19 Prevention, Detection and Control

• Strategies are in place and updated to facilitate early identification of cases.
• Multisource surveillance is being used at the central level and subnational level to inform evidence-based decision-making.
• Increasing laboratory testing capacity through establishment of regional molecular laboratories. This will increase both the testing capacity and shorten the time for results to be available.
• Continuing to roll out the vaccination campaign in all provinces as per the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan
• Risk communication on COVID-19 and the “new normal”.

Best Practices / Lessons Learned

• Whole of government coordination, through ad-hoc committees, taskforces and EOC.
• Regular, timely and open public risk communications.
• Engagement of other sectors to assist with both the COVID-19 response and the larger socioeconomic impacts caused by COVID-19.

Challenges Encountered

• A rapid increase in imported cases have tested the existing capacities in some provinces with a need to rapidly expand capacities for quarantine and isolation of confirmed cases.
• Ensuring provincial and district hospitals are prepared for an increase in COVID-19 cases including case management capacity, IPC measures and adequate medical equipment and personal protection equipment (PPE), waste management, and clarifying care pathways to ensure facilities are prepared for severe cases.
• Need for bilateral coordination with Thailand so that Lao PDR can adequately prepare quarantine facilities and other resources to manage the number of returnees per day.
• There are limited resources to operate safe isolation and quarantine facilities. Incorporation of best practice for physical distancing, hygiene, WASH standards, mental health needs of people in quarantine and safety/security of those in quarantine centres are needed.
• With ongoing community outbreaks in neighbouring countries, and continued risk of illegal crossing, multisectoral collaboration is needed to implement stricter border measures.
• Strong public health and social measures are in place but there is a need to strengthen implementation and also to consider the socio-economic impact of long-term implementation.
• Introduction of variants-of-concern and rapidly evolving evidence on their impact, which would affect recommendations for quarantine and deisolation duration and preparedness of treatment facilities, among others.
• Efforts are needed to scale-up vaccination coverage of priority groups in all provinces.
Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPI)

- On 4 July, the Prime Minister’s Office released a new notice to extend the implementation of current measures on prevention, control, and response to the Covid-19 pandemic from 5-19 July.
- As of 6 July, there are nine red-zone villages in Vientiane capital. Red zones were also designated in Vientiane province (n=5), Champasack (n=1), and Saravan (n=4) in response to local cases detected.
- On 4 July, the Prime Minister’s Office released a new notice to extend the implementation of measures on prevention, control, and response to the Covid-19 pandemic from 5-19 July.
  - Entertainment venues (bars, karaoke venues, snooker halls), massage parlors, spas, and internet cafes to remain closed.
  - Educational institutions in Vientiane Capital and provinces with community transmission to remain closed.
  - Factories in red zones to remain closed, except for those with dormitories on site or those producing essential materials, or where workers have had two doses of vaccines.
  - Prohibition of movement in and out from red zones except for those approved by local authorities for essential reasons.
  - Prohibition of forms of gatherings or parties.
- Relaxed measures:
  1. Malls, retail shops, supermarkets, and fresh markets are permitted to open with strict implementation of preventive measures including temperature checks, physical distancing, wearing facemasks, and hand hygiene with soap.
  2. Restaurants outside red zones may now provide dine-in services but tables must be organized at least one meter apart, while service of alcohol is prohibited.
  3. Meetings and gatherings are allowed outside red zones but must allow one meter physical distancing and adhere to preventive measures.
  4. Government offices and businesses to consider allowing their employees to resume work as usual, while implementing preventive measures.
  5. Educational institutions, tourist attractions in provinces without any local transmissions are allowed to resume teaching.
  6. Passenger transport between provinces with no community transmission permitted without requiring quarantine but must strictly comply with prevention measures. Passengers travelling into or from Vientiane Capital or other provinces with community transmission are not required to quarantine but must have had two doses of vaccination and strictly follow preventive measures.
- Regarding the concern of high number of returnees from Thailand, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are communicating with their counterparts in Thailand to limit the daily number of returnees if possible, and ensure that Lao PDR will be informed of the number of returning workers.
**Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions</th>
<th>Date first implemented</th>
<th>Date last modified</th>
<th>Geographical Implementation</th>
<th>Partial lift</th>
<th>Lifted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wearing Face Masks, Hand Hygiene, Respiratory Etiquette</strong></td>
<td>3 February 2020</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Closure</strong></td>
<td>17 March 2020</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace Closure</strong></td>
<td>29 March 2020</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mass Gatherings</strong></td>
<td>2 March 2020</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stay at Home</strong></td>
<td>1 April 2020</td>
<td>20 May 2021</td>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Restrictions on Internal Movement (within country)</strong></td>
<td>1 April 2020</td>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Restrictions on International Travel</strong></td>
<td>29 March 2020</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>No&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Others;</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Stay-at-home and interprovincial border measures implemented in some provinces.
<sup>b</sup>Incoming charter flights to Vientiane City are allowed upon approval by the Ad Hoc Committee.

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**Figure 9: Epicurve by week of reporting (n=2,356) and timeline of significant public health and social measures in Lao PDR, 1 March 2020 – 6 July 2021**

*Epi week 28 includes 3 days of data only, 4-6 July, please see daily epicurve for more details*