

Thailand's and Myanmar's COVID-19 New Wave

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Thailand had largely controlled the COVID-19 by mid-2020 with a successful story. A new wave of COVID-19 outbreak was identified in Samut Sakhon, a province at the south of Bangkok, Thailand in December 2020. Thailand confirmed 315 new COVID-19 cases, the majority of which were local transmission, contributing its total cases to 7,694 cases and 64 deaths since its first reported case last January 2020. Samut Sakhon reported 541 additional cases of COVID-19 on January 4, 2021. The new domestic COVID-19 outbreak was hypothetically associated with illegal border migration from neighbouring Myanmar. The government of Thailand had designed 28 provinces, including Bangkok, as COVID-19 high-risk zones and recommended suspension of some businesses and crowded activities, whereas some ministries and agencies had already issued several new restrictions. Several field or mobile hospitals for admission of the high-risk COVID-19 exposed individuals for quarantine, laboratory testing, and clinical symptom observation had been established in these 28 provinces. The Education Ministry of Thailand had ordered all governmental and private schools and vocational training centers to close down from January 4, 2021 until the end of January 2021. The Thai Retailers Association had also announced that all shopping malls throughout the country should close at 9 pm. daily, an hour earlier than the usual closing time, whereas the authorities in Bangkok, Thailand had earlier closed entertainment venues, gyms, massage parlours and nurseries, but keeping open shopping malls, restaurants and public parks.

Myanmar demonstrated a dramatic increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the second wave on August 16, 2020 in Rakhine State, compared to the first wave of COVID-19 that reported its first case on March 23, 2020, whereas Yangon has become a major epicenter in the COVID-19 second wave. Interestingly, a more infectious strain with G614 mutation of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) has been identified in Myanmar. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations: South-East Asia Region and Western Pacific Region) countries, including Thailand are highly interconnected to each other and the rest of the world via trade and migration.

In conclusion, due to weak health systems in Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, and Timor Leste, listed as vulnerable by the United Nations (UN), the COVID-19 new outbreak in Myanmar can easily spread this contagiously infectious disease to the ASEAN countries. Calls to form an ASEAN Center for Disease Prevention and Control are urgently needed.

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