

Govt vows to contain polio outbreak

Xayxana Leukai

Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong has advised foreign nationals of all ages wanting to visit Laos for at least one month to ensure they receive at least one polio vaccination.

In addition, Lao citizens of all ages who intend to travel abroad are advised to have at least one polio vaccination one month before leaving the country.

The warnings come after two children died of polio in Longxan district, Xaysomboun province, with the total number of confirmed recent polio cases in Laos having reached seven.

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organisation in Laos reported that polio cases had been identified in the provinces of Borikhamxay and Xaysomboun.

Additional suspected cases in these provinces and other locations are being further investigated. The Lao government responded immediately to the outbreak after it was detected in October 2015 by providing vaccinations to children living in the two affected provinces as well as nearby Xieng Khuang province.

Deputy Manager of the National Centre for Maternal and Child Health's Expanded Programme of Immunisation,

Dr Kongxay Phounphenghack, said the immunisation campaign will continue until three rounds of polio vaccine have been administered, with the programme scheduled to continue until March.

Two rounds of immunisation took place in these provinces in October and November including the completion of one nationwide round for all children under 15, covering a total target population of around 2.4 million.

Under the national outbreak plan, monthly vaccinations are planned through at least March in order to stop the outbreak.

The prime minister declared the polio outbreak to be a National Public Health Emergency on January 13.

This will pave the way for the Ministry of Health and all related departments, private organisations and communities to strengthen their coordinated efforts to engage all local level functionaries in the response.

Declaring the polio outbreak a national public health emergency alerts health professionals across the country to actively look for additional suspected cases and ensure that every child is immunised during each of the planned immunisation campaigns between now and March.

This declaration also calls for the participation of all

subnational administrative and non-health professionals, and local civil society organisations including development and donor partners to support the national government in this immense effort.

As part of the new measures, to prevent further spread of the disease, citizens of all ages who plan to travel outside the country are encouraged to receive at least one dose of polio vaccine before they leave.

International visitors are also encouraged to be fully vaccinated against polio prior to their arrival in Laos.

Polio is a serious disease that leads to lifelong paralysis or death. There is no treatment, but it can be prevented through vaccination.

Worldwide, there were fewer cases of polio reported in 2015 than at any point in history since reporting started.

The global polio eradication initiative was started in 1988 when more than 1,000 children around the world were paralysed from polio every day. In 2015, only just over 100 cases were reported worldwide.

"We stand committed to wipe out polio from the Lao PDR," said Mr Thongsing. "We will ensure that every effort is made to save our children from this serious disease for which a safe and effective vaccine is available."

to Journalists



Director of the Chinese Culture Centre in Vientiane on Tuesday.

Chinese New Year plan

Times Reporters

Chinese New Year celebrations are being planned at the Vientiane Centre from January 30-31, in a bid to build relations and promote cultural exchanges between Laos and China.

New Year is the most important holiday in the Chinese calendar, with the day itself falling on February 8.

Director of the Chinese Culture Centre in Laos, Mr QueXiaohua, told media at a newsconference on Tuesday that more activities would be arranged in Vientiane this year.