



United Nations
Network on Migration
Working Better Together

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS IN THAILAND SITUATION REPORT SEPTEMBER 2022



Supporting COVID-19 vaccination efforts along the Cambodia border with Thailand (© IOM 2022)

Background

South-East Asia is comprised of source, transit and destination countries and is characterized by migration inflows and outflows. Due to its unparalleled economic growth in the last decade, Thailand is a lucrative destination for labour migrants, mainly from South-East Asia. According to the Thailand Migration Report in 2019, the number of migrants in Thailand reached 4.9 million. The majority of the migrant population are from bordering countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures put in place across Thailand, migrant communities have faced an array of challenges. For many, it has resulted in loss of employment, as well as limited access to services and facilities.

Highlights

- Globally, the World Health Organization reported that the number of cases and fatalities from the BA.4 and BA.5 variant of COVID-19 was on a downward trend and more countries are relaxing their entry requirements.
- Daily cases in Thailand continued to decline during September, hovering around 1,000, with the lowest figure reported on 19 September (242).
- In Thailand, the Centre for COVID-19 Surveillance and Administration (CCSA) announced on 27 September that from 30 September, the Ministry of Public Health will designate COVID-19 as an 'infectious disease under surveillance' instead of its previous 'dangerous infectious disease'. The Emergency Decree will not be extended, and the CCSA will be dissolved.
- The COVID-19 alert level remained at level 2 in Thailand in September, with revised measures for quarantine for close contacts and isolation of positive cases.
- On 30 September, the CCSA reported a cumulative total of 4,681,309 infections and 32,764 deaths. Overall, 4,642,083 patients recovered (99%).

THAILAND

COVID-19 SITUATION UPDATES

At the end of September 2022, the Department of Disease Control (DDC) under the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) reported that the cumulative number of cases had reached 4,681,309 (+30,390) and 32,764 (+461) deaths.



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

By the end of September, DDC reported that 143,530,959 (+818,565) doses of the COVID-19 vaccine had been administered including 60.1 million (82.4 per cent of population) first doses, 46.2 million (77.4%) second doses and 41.3 million (46.3%) third doses.

COVID-19 Vaccination in Thailand

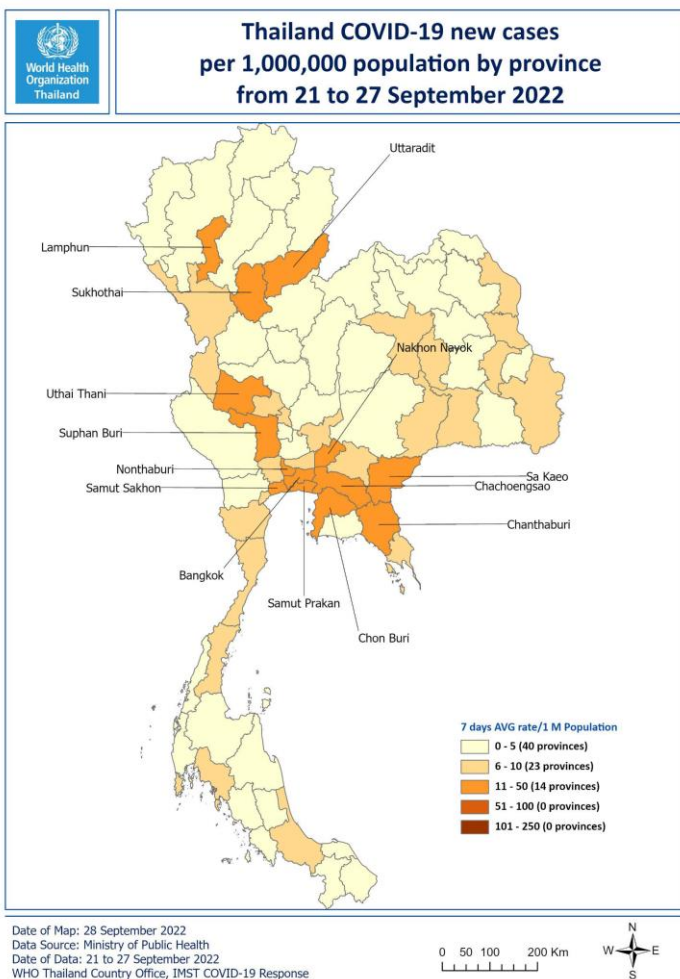


Figure 1: Distribution of new COVID-19 cases per million population by province (WHO)

Nationally, the average number of new cases per million population continues to decrease from 7.91 to 6.7. All provinces (77) are reporting an average rate of less than 50 new cases per million population (+1). Suphan Buri had the highest average rate at 37 cases per million population. All provinces (+8) also reported an average rate of death of less than 1 case per million population at the end of September.

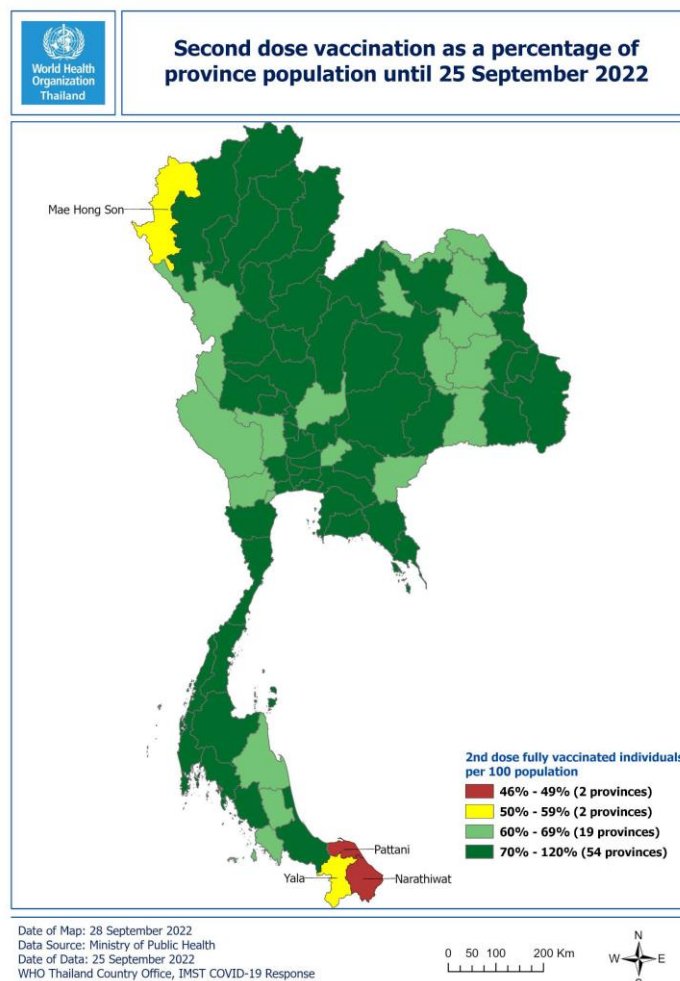


Figure 2: Second dose COVID-19 vaccination coverage by province (WHO)

54 (+1) out of 77 provinces in Thailand reported more than 70 per cent second dose vaccination coverage. Narathiwat and Pattani provinces continue to report less than 50 percent second dose coverage (see Figure 2).

The Vaccination center at Bang Sue Grand Station remained open until 30 September. The CVC, the biggest vaccination center in Thailand, continued offering free booster shots of Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines until 30 September 2022. Non-Thais, including migrant workers, will be required to show their CID number, which was used for registering on the “Mor Prom” application, or their passport number.

Thailand continues to develop its own COVID-19 vaccines which it plans to roll-out in 2023-2024.

1. Chulalongkorn University has developed an mRNA vaccine which is expected to be available in 2024.
2. A plant-based vaccine, initiated by Baiya Phytopharm Co. Ltd and Chulalongkorn University has been under development and intended to be registered in 2024.
3. The Government Pharmaceutical Organization of Thailand is coordinating with the PATH Centre for Vaccine Innovation and Access, USA to develop an inactivated vaccine.

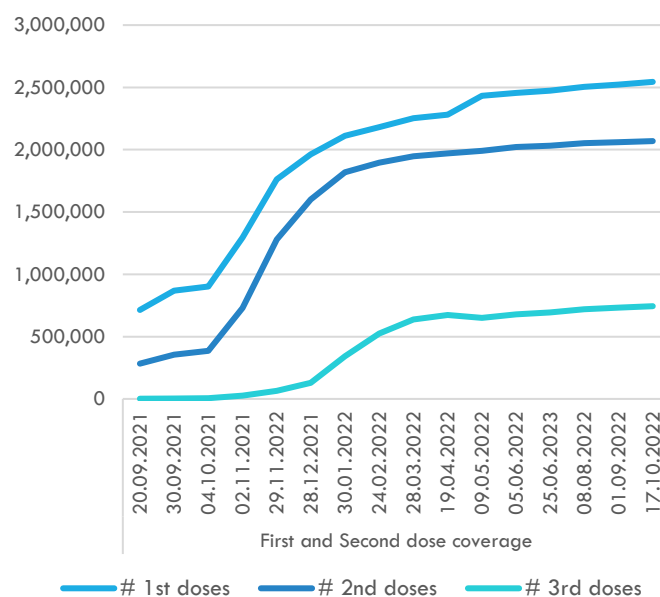
It is intended that producing homegrown vaccines will achieve self-sufficiency and boost national competency in COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing.

COVID-19 VACCINATION AMONG MIGRANTS




Data released by the MOPH Department of Disease Control (DDC) on 1 September reported that a total of 5,404,306 (+53,048) doses of COVID-19 vaccine had been administered to foreign nationals residing in Thailand.

Since booster doses are not compulsory, migrants appear to be reluctant to forgo a day's wage by taking a day off (or more if side effects are experienced). Employers are encouraged to offer support in facilitating this process.

Number of first, second and third doses administered to foreign nationals in Thailand



The latest data also indicates that 2,212,537 (+16,483) doses were to Cambodian, Lao and Myanmar (CLM) nationals, who continue to represent the top three nationalities, as follows:

	Myanmar	Cambodian	Lao
			
Total	1,540,489	449,810	222,238
Since August	(+14,172)	(+1,508)	(+803)

Data from 1 September for CLM nationals shows that:

- First dose coverage is at 57 per cent (2,212,537)
- Second dose coverage is at 46 per cent (1,808,634)
- Third dose coverage is at 15 per cent (599,834)

Coverage is based on a CLM population denominator of 3.9 million as estimated in the 2019 Thailand Migration Report. The number of additional foreigners vaccinated in August was lower overall compared to the previous month.

NUMBER OF DOCUMENTED MIGRANT WORKERS

No further data has been released by the Foreign Workers Administration Office of the Department of Employment since its

recent update reported in July 2022. The number remains as before: 2,099,097.

Myanmar



1,503,639
(+126,015)

Cambodian



382,626
(+27,912)

Lao



184,920
(+10,236)



POLICY UPDATE

Policy updates: COVID-19

At the end of September, the CCSA resolved not to extend the invocation of the Emergency Decree, imposed at the start of the pandemic, as part of Thailand's transition to the post-pandemic phase beginning on 30 September 2022. Other public health measures including entry requirements implemented during the pandemic will also cease starting from the same date. This means visitors coming to Thailand will no longer need to show their COVID-19 vaccination certificates or COVID-19 test results.

Persons found to have been infected with the COVID-19 virus belonging to the green group (those with mild or no symptoms and are not part of the 609 at-risk group) will also no longer have to self-isolate. Instead, they are encouraged to strictly follow distancing, mask wearing, hand hygiene and testing (DMHT) measures for five days. Those who are high-risk contacts will have to self-monitor for 10 days and conduct self-ATK on day 5 and day 10.

Mask wearing in crowded areas is still encouraged but no longer mandatory. The general public is still urged to follow DMHT measures during the transition to the post-pandemic phase.

Overall, MOPH has predicted that COVID-19 will gradually ease into a communicable disease similar to influenza, implying that it is easily transmitted but would not cause severe symptoms in those who are fully vaccinated.

The national vaccine drive is mainly focused on procuring booster shots to children aged 5-11 years old, medical personnel, and the 608 vulnerable groups to ensure the safety of the public. However, every fully vaccinated person can still receive their booster shots at local vaccination centres. The Central Vaccination Center at Bang Sue Grand Station continued offering free booster shots daily until 30 September 2022.

Policy updates: Migrant workers

Regarding the regularization window in Thailand, newly registered migrant workers under the Cabinet Resolution dated 5 July 2022 – whose name lists have been approved by the Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, with support

from their employers – must pay the work permit fee, purchase the necessary health insurance and submit an application to receive a work permit by 15 October 2022 in order to maintain their eligibility to work in Thailand until 13 February 2023.

On 20 September 2022, the Cabinet approved a draft Ministerial Regulation to remove COVID-19 from the list of prohibited diseases for migrant workers coming to work in Thailand. The draft Ministerial Regulation is a revision to the Regulation of the Ministry of Interior on prohibited diseases for migrant workers entering or having a residency in Thailand B.E.2563 (2020), in which COVID-19 has been removed from the list of prohibited diseases of the Immigration Act, B.E. 2522 (1979), following a reclassification of COVID-19 from a “dangerous communicable disease” to a “communicable disease under surveillance”.

On 13 September 2022, the Cabinet approved the extension of the duration of service of four Official Myanmar Certificate of Identity (CI) Centers until 13 February 2023, including the Centers in Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, Ranong, and Chonburi. The extension of service aims to support Myanmar migrant workers who currently do not have CIs, whose CIs have expired or will expire in obtaining the identity documents as part of their stay and work permit application to continue working in Thailand up to 13 February 2025.

Updates on border control measures



THAILAND - MYANMAR BORDER

No further updates since those reported in August 2022.

CAMBODIA



POLICY UPDATE

No changes in policy relating to COVID-19 were reported in September 2022. On 3 October, the Royal Government of Cambodia lifted all restrictions, and no more COVID-19 documents are required, such as proof of vaccination or testing.

Updates on border control measures

In September, Ou Beichon PoE in Banteay Meanchey was closed. Thai authorities did not allow Cambodians to cross and were instead encouraged to enter via Poipet or BongTrekoun PoEs. Not much information was released to migrants regarding these changes, causing surprise for those who had arrived ready to cross at Ou Beichoan PoE. However, some migrants have been allowed to cross on a daily basis, and more are trying to cross during the night.

Ou Beichoan was one the most active PoEs during the pandemic, and IOM offered permanent support including installation of shelters, toilets, handwashing, distribution of food and IEC material. All government officials have left the location, and only permanent infrastructure remains in place.

In September, Pchum Benh festivity was celebrated in the country, and internal movements increased. The number of people crossing the borders and returning from Thailand also increased.

COVID-19 CASES IN CAMBODIA

In September, 257 (including 2 imported) confirmed cases were reported, with no fatalities. These figures bring the cumulative totals to 137,877 cases (21,234 imported) and 3,056 deaths.

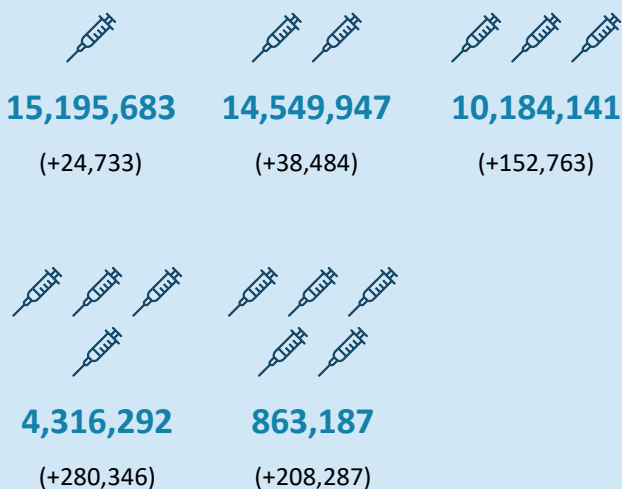
The lowest number of cases was reported on 8 September (2) and the highest on 21 September (35), resulting in a daily average of 8.6 cases.



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

By the end of September, the Cambodian Ministry of Health had reported vaccination coverage as follows:

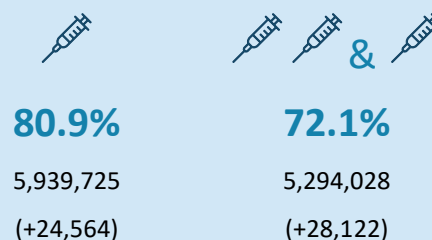
COVID-19 Vaccination in Cambodia



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

The Lao Ministry of Health reported the following figures at the end of September:

COVID-19 Vaccination in Lao People's Democratic Republic



MYANMAR



POLICY UPDATE

Since 1 August 2022, travelers taking international flights are required to show the RDT COVID-19 test results together with fully vaccinated records on arrival. RDT tests will be done by the Ministry of Health upon arrival in Myanmar.

COVID-19 CASES IN MYANMAR

In September the Ministry of Health reported 7,945 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 31 deaths, bringing the cumulative totals to 623,183 and 19,469 respectively. The number of confirmed cases and deaths has dramatically increased. It is suggested that these figures show only the tip of the iceberg, since most people do not test nor report positive results to the local authorities. The Myanmar Ministry of Health is accelerating its COVID-19 vaccine programme in response, as well as its mask-wearing campaign in markets and crowded areas.

COVID-19 VACCINATION

As of 30 September 2022, a total of 30,585,934 (+207,949) individuals above the age of 18 have received COVID-19 vaccination. A cumulative total of 6,633,366 under 18-year-olds have been vaccinated in Myanmar since the start of the pandemic.

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

COVID-19 CASES IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The Lao Ministry of Health reported 1,045 (-1,666) new COVID-19 cases in September, with one death. The cumulative number of cases has reached 215,880, with 665 deaths.

ACTIVITY UPDATES FROM UN NETWORK ON MIGRATION MEMBERS



RESPONSE

IOM

IOM Thailand

IOM and its partners continue with activities under its project 'Supporting the RTG's COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-out' with funds from WHO and the Australian Government. Despite observed reluctance towards receiving booster doses, the network of Migrant Health Volunteers continues with its outreach and awareness raising activities to encourage and facilitate vaccination in four provinces around Bangkok. Reluctance appears to stem from an unwillingness to forego a day's wage, potentially more if side effects are experienced, to travel to a vaccination centre. Perceptions also exist that booster doses are not compulsory, compared to the first and second doses.



Figures 3: MHV conducting a COVID-19 vaccine awareness session in Bangkok (IOM Thailand @2022)

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) team analysed data from Round 2 of the COVID-19 Vaccine Perception Survey. The survey covered 2,725 respondents, of whom 1,362 were Myanmar nationals and 1,363 Cambodian nationals. Preliminary findings include:

- 67% of respondents in Round 1 stated they were vaccinated with one or more doses, and 18% with one dose (85% overall). In contrast, Round 2 found that the number reporting being fully vaccinated (at least 2 doses) had increased to 95%, with 2% reporting having received one dose.
- The most common reasons for vaccine hesitancy included concern about possible side effects (49%), having a chronic

disease (38%) and fear of being arrested or deported while getting the vaccine (24%). Vaccine hesitancy regarding respondents' decision to vaccinate their children or elderly parents were largely related to children being too young to receive the vaccine (75%), elderly parents having a chronic disease (60%), and concern about potential side effects (30% for vaccine hesitancy regarding children, 53% for vaccine hesitancy regarding elderly parents).

- Key challenges regarding COVID-19 information material included the presence of complicated or technical language (74%), inability to read the provided information (62%) and lack of material in respondents' native language (59%).
- Nearly half (46%) of all fully vaccinated respondents had also received a booster vaccine dose.

IOM will share the final report of the findings from this second round once available. The results from this survey are encouraging in terms of vaccination coverage; however, discussions continue as to how these reflect against data published by MOPH.

IOM Myanmar

IOM reached 2,934 returnees in September 2022 by providing services such as support for testing, providing food allowances, assisting with transportation allowance from points of entry to quarantine center, distribution of COVID-19 preventive items to migrants and partners, and equipping PoEs.

With IOM's support, 12,041 (M-8192, F-3849) returnee migrants were tested for COVID-19 with Rapid Diagnosis Test (RDT) and PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests at their entry points in Kawthaung (border with southern part of Myanmar and Thailand), Muse (Northern Shan State, border with Myanmar and China), Myawaddy (Thailand and South-east Myanmar border), and Kan Pai Ti (Kachin State, border with Myanmar and China). Among them, 156 COVID-19 positive returnee migrants received food allowance until they recovered. Additionally, the food allowance was provided to a total of 1,009 migrants during their quarantine days. During this reporting period, IOM supported essential medicine and medical supplies to the Ethnic Health Organization clinic at Laiza in Kachin and KBC clinic in Shan (North) for strengthening the COVID-19 health response activities in Non-Government Controlled Areas.

For strengthening public health measures at points of entry, IOM conducted stakeholder meeting with partner organizations, CBOs, and CSOs from 21-22 September 2022. As a meeting output, IOM and participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of IOM's supporting activities for returnees during their arrival. During this meeting, IOM finalized the Standard Operating Procedure for COVID-19 referral, health screening package, and continuation of treatment (such as TB and ART treatment) for migrants.

IOM Cambodia

With the kind support of the Government of Japan, IOM Cambodia is implementing COVID-19 response activities in three provinces bordering Thailand: Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Oddor Meanchey. This is a UN joint project together with UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, which is targeting returning migrants and local government at points of entry, quarantine and treatment centres and areas of return. Activities include food distribution, improvement of WASH facilities, and delivery of PPE and waste management items.

In September, 2,762 (F: 1,329) returnees received dry food packages, including noodles and drinking water. Overall, by 30 September, IOM Cambodia had delivered packages of dry food as part of the UN / Japan joint project – reaching 13,758 (F:6,160) returnees, including 574 children. This has been done in four points of entry and reception centers (Kamrieng Migrant reception centre, DOUNG, Osmach PoE and Poipet transit center) in three provinces (Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Oddor Meanchey). The packages include crackers, water and noodles.

Also, in September IOM started community awareness campaigns together with the Provincial Department of Health. Six sessions were conducted in Oddor Meanchey province, reaching 605 beneficiaries (F:306). During this event, 753 (F 436) people were vaccinated against COVID-19. The sessions included information on COVID-19 prevention and access to vaccination. In cooperation with PHD, health staff also provided booster doses during the campaigns.



Figures 4 and 5: COVID-19 awareness sessions and vaccination support activities (IOM Cambodia @2022)

UNICEF

In Thailand, 1,228 adults and 1,628 children received information about COVID-19 vaccine and prevention in the third quarter of 2022, through a mobile cinema screening project organized by UNICEF in collaboration with Sermpanya Foundation and the Tak Provincial Public Health Office. The project comprised 17 screenings in migrant communities and 12 screenings in migrant learning centres, reaching the target audience through a collection of videos alongside question-and-answer sessions with health workers. The screenings targeted migrant communities along the Thai-Myanmar border, in support of Government efforts to improve vaccination coverage, providing information about COVID-19 vaccination and prevention to isolated and vulnerable communities. Over the course of the screenings, 2,022 adults and older children also received hygiene supplies, and 1,101 children received colouring books about addressing COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

UN WOMEN

In Thailand, UN Women continued its support to the Suwannimit Foundation and its networks, including Mae Tao Clinic and the Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child Rights (CPPCR) in Mae Sot, Tak province, providing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support training for community volunteers on how to facilitate mental health awareness activities in community to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. IEC materials were disseminated in the migrant communities, and activities supported migrant communities to access COVID-19 vaccination. In September 2022, 323 men and 455 women in migrant communities were vaccinated, including first, second, third and fourth doses.