

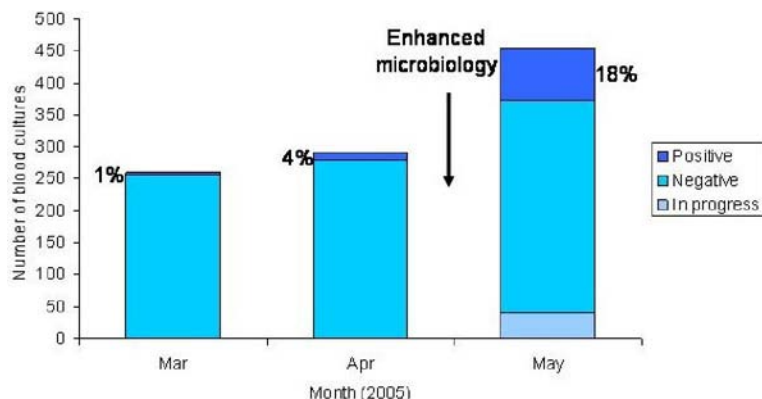
IEIP Brief

2nd Quarter, 2005

Editors: Sonja Olsen
Sarika Pattanasin

An Update on Activities at the International Emerging Infections Program, Thailand

After 4 fantastic years in Thailand, I return to Atlanta in July. What a remarkable time to be working on infectious diseases in Asia! When we arrived, in the swirling uncertainties of the post-911 anthrax crisis, IEIP was just a concept, but one that had strong endorsement from Atlanta and was quickly embraced by the Thai MOPH. SARS arrived on our doorstep in early 2003, and the threat of avian influenza has loomed large since early 2004. SARS showed us the remarkable power of swift science and aggressive public health. Avian influenza threatens to destroy our new self-confidence. We have mourned the deaths of dear friends and colleagues, and shared the successes of others. IEIP has never had a brighter future, with expanded sites, new funding opportunities, and strong leadership in Sonja Olsen and Khanchit Limpakarnjanarat. I plan to stay on the IEIP Brief mailing list and watch what happens. – *Scott Dowell*



Enhanced microbiology has led to an increase in both the number of cultures and the pathogen yield.

Research

Two large research projects will end this summer. The febrile illness study will end in June after completion of 3 years and the encephalitis study will end in August after completion of 2 years. Although there will be continued laboratory and analysis work to be done, study enrollment will cease. Several new research projects are now being considered. With the recent Congressional allotment of \$25 million for avian influenza activities, IEIP regional work on avian influenza will likely grow rapidly in the near future.

Outbreak Response

Thailand has had no confirmed human cases of avian influenza reported since October 2004. However, the changing epidemiology and virology in Viet Nam, as well as the recent poultry outbreak in China, highlight the importance of continued vigilance. The Thai Surveillance Rapid Response Teams (SRRT) continue to recognize avian influenza as a public health priority and the Thai Ministry of Public Health is collaborating with ASEAN+3 countries to combat the continuing threat.

Training

Six IEIP staff and collaborators presented abstracts at the 18th Annual Epidemiology Seminar in Bangkok May 25-27. For the second year in a row an IEIP staff member, Pongpun Sawatwong, won the Outstanding Award on Methodology of Epidemiology (picture, above). Khun Pongpun compared the performance of a rapid influenza test to the gold standard tests of viral culture and immunofluorescence assay using data from a prospective study of influenza in Sa Kaeo Province. He found that the test works very well in a clinical setting in rural Thailand, an important finding for the Ministry of Public Health who has incorporated rapid kits in their expanded influenza surveillance system.

Surveillance

The first annual meeting on surveillance activities was held May 24 in Bangkok, and 71 collaborators from Sa Kaeo, Nakhon Phanom and Bangkok were in attendance. There were lively discussions about the enhanced microbiology project which is being applauded by local physicians. For the first time ever, clinicians have real time hemoculture results to guide patient treatment. In Sa Kaeo there is already an increase in the number of cultures requested as well as those that yield a pathogen (see picture, left), and we are well on target to get several thousand cultures each year. Several large decisions were also made, including the agreement to stop surveillance for acute hepatitis. Both provincial sites suggested that diarrhea be considered as a replacement syndrome.



Pongpun Sawatwong won the Outstanding Award on Methodology of Epidemiology.