

THAILAND OPEN BORDERS, SAFE BORDERS—KEEPING WATCH FOR OUTBREAKS

Thailand has been strengthening their disease tracking systems for over a decade. A new border health project will better detect potential health threats in border areas, using advanced molecular detection and a network of laboratories to provide fast and accurate results.

At a hospital on the edge of Thailand, near the border with Laos, a healthcare worker examines a traveler complaining of fever. He knows that dengue fever is common, but he can't be sure that's it. Dengue often shares symptoms with [Zika virus](#). And then there are other possible causes—some more frightening than others.

It used to take a long time to receive laboratory test results because samples had to be shipped to Atlanta. Thailand can now conduct tests and give results quickly in the field. "Using advanced molecular detection means test results are ready in a matter of hours. This is a huge improvement," notes Dr. Christopher Gregory of GDD Thailand.

The worker gathers clinical information and draws blood. If it's dengue, he'll know soon. If not, he'll send the sample to a central laboratory to test for antibiotic-resistant infections. If further testing is needed, the sample will travel to the Ministry of Public Health's central laboratory in Bangkok. Eight hospitals and clinics near the borders of Laos and Myanmar will soon be screening patients with fever through this coordinated monitoring program.

STOPPING OUTBREAKS BEFORE THEY CROSS BORDERS

This year, Thailand wrapped up a pilot project on the Laos border that collected data on hospitalized patients with sudden onset of severe fever. In 2016, the project will expand to include Tak province on the Myanmar border. The project aims to improve pathogen and outbreak detection, determine the burden of high priority diseases, evaluate diagnostic tests, and enhance laboratory capacity.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

Partnerships are at the core of protecting health at Thailand's borders. The Thai Ministry of Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency all provide critical pieces of the program. A thirty-five year history of trust and collaboration between Thailand and CDC makes it easier to overcome challenges that arise.

Thanks to coordinated monitoring efforts like these, we can continue to identify and contain infectious disease outbreaks in Thailand and across the globe before they become epidemics.

This project receives support from the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency and is conducted in partnership with the Thai Ministry of Health.

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CDC and Defense Threat Reduction Agency staff at a pre-implementation site visit to Mae Sot General Hospital, Thailand, January 2015.

Read the full story: http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/gdd/stories/thailand_open_borders_safe_borders.html