

THAILAND

Zero SARS Transmission Country

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Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), a newly emerging infectious disease, has been spreading in several regions of the world, becoming a major health problem with extensive social and economic impacts.

Since early March 2003 Thailand has been scaling up systematic responses for prevention and control of SARS. As the result of intensive implementation of the interventions so far,

Thailand has been able to maintain the status of a country without local transmission of the disease, therefore a safe place for travels and visits.

SARS situation in Thailand

Thailand has put in place an intensive surveillance system designed for the highest sensitivity to detect SARS. Reports of illnesses suspected of SARS are publicly encouraged.

From 11 March to 15 May 2003, after investigation of almost two hundred reports, 8 probable SARS cases (3 foreigners and 5 Thais) and 24 suspect cases (7 foreigners and 17 Thais) were identified.

These cases were taken care of the hospital under strict isolation and infection control.

Two of the probable cases died, other six recovered and were later discharged; all suspect cases have been discharged.

All these cases were imported. None of persons in close contact with the cases have developed an illness suspected of SARS. Therefore, Thailand remains the country without local transmission.

SARS prevention and control in Thailand

Prevention and control strategies have been established with goals to detect all cases suspected of SARS, as well as their contact persons who might have contracted the infection; and to contain all infections that might result from these individuals, with maximum effectiveness and precaution.

These strategies include:

Intensive surveillance on travelers

Surveillance on travelers from SARS affected areas has been intensified to ensure early detection and effective control of imported infection.

The surveillance is implemented with the following measures.

1. Pre-departure screening

The passengers are temperature checked and queried on the history of SARS risk exposure. Passengers with illnesses suspected of SARS will be allowed travel.

2. Detection of Illness on board

Air crew will carefully observe passengers on board. If a passenger is found to have symptoms suspected of SARS, he or she will be taken care of according to WHO recommendations on air travel, and will be reported to alert the port health authority at destination before landing.

3. Filling out health questionnaire

Passengers from SARS affected areas are required to provide information which facilitates medical screening on arrival and assist post-arrival tracing, if necessary.

4. Screening passengers on arrival

Passengers on arrival from SARS affected areas will undergo medical screening at port of entry. Travellers without fever will proceed on to the immigration control without delay. Individuals with fever will receive detailed medical check-up. Those found to have symptoms suspected of SARS will be hospitalized for medical care under strict infection control.

5. Notification of illness during stay in Thailand

Travellers from SARS affected areas are urged to consult local physicians whenever they become ill during the stay in Thailand. The physicians will subsequently notify the Ministry of Public Health, and the information will enter SARS surveillance for further follow-up.

Strengthened national disease Surveillance and control of SARS

National disease surveillance system has been intensified to early detect, investigate and contain possible spread of infection from all cases suspected of SARS and their contacts persons. The system is strongly supported by extensive involvement of local health personnel, health volunteers and community leaders nationwide.

Strengthened hospital capacity for management of SARS cases

All cases suspected of SARS are treated until recovery in hospitals under stringent infection control to prevent the spread of infection to the family and the community while ensuring maximum protection for health care personnel attending to the cases.

Public information and education

The Ministry of Public health provides daily updates on SARS situation, knowledge of the disease, and advises on disease prevention including travel advisory through media, to keep the public well informed, so as to avoid unnecessary confusion and panic.

SARS response in Thailand is a nationwide endeavor. Prevention and control measures are being implemented with extensive multi-sectoral cooperation. All concerned governmental agencies are involved in a concerted manner to ensure that all essential measures are efficiently carried out and maintained.

The private sector has been admirably cooperating with the public sector in the fight against this emerging disease to sustain long-term benefit to the public.

Royal Thai Consulate-General
700 North Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611-2504
Tel: 312-664-3129
Fax: 312-664-3230
thaichicago@ameritech.net
<http://www.thaichicago.net>