

Lao People's Democratic Republic

in collaboration with WHO

PanStop II

1. Background

The Lao People's Democratic Republic Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness Plan was developed in January 2006 and later the National Avian and Human Influenza Coordination Office (NAHICO) was established to ensure the effective implementation of avian and human influenza activities. To date, two human cases of avian influenza have been reported in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Among various activities, the government is prioritizing the strengthening of its capacity to implement rapid containment of a novel strain of influenza virus with pandemic potential. In this climate, the Lao Government ran a simulation exercise called *PanStop II* on 6 December 2007.

2. Objectives

The purpose of the exercise was to assess the effectiveness of the *Lao People's Democratic Republic National Protocol for Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza*, developed by the Ministry of Health and NAHICO, with technical assistance from WHO, and to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in planning and operational capabilities.



PanStop II participants assess effectiveness of Lao PDR National Protocol for Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza.

3. Participating agencies and organizations

Table 8
Participating agencies and organizations

Ministry of Health
National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE)
Local hospitals
National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)
Ministry of Defence
Social and Cultural Department
District representatives
Centre for Information and Education for Health (CIEH)
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Medical University
Lao Red Cross
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Academy for Educational Development (AED)
National Avian and Human Influenza Coordination Office (NAHICO)
United Nations Avian and Human Influenza Coordination Unit/United Nations Resident Coordinators Office

Total number of participants: 27 role players, 2 facilitators, 2 evaluators, 7 observers and 5 note takers/secretariat.

4. Type of exercise

TTX

The scenario-based exercise stimulated discussions of the actions that would need to be taken in the event of sustained human-to-human transmission of a novel influenza virus somewhere within the Lao People's Democratic Republic. It addressed multi-agency involvement in responding to and rapidly containing the outbreak.

5. Preparation for the exercise

The exercise facilitation team was set up in WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, which designed the conduct of the exercise.

6. Conduct of the exercise

The exercise was conducted in one day. The participants were representatives from the Ministry of Health and other key players identified by the government and WHO Country Office. The exercise was in the format of a TTX, which is primarily a discussion guided by one or more facilitators. Its purpose was to identify issues and solve problems as a group. The exercise was designed in English with presentations translated into Lao. Two bilingual facilitators guided the exercise in Lao. Bilingual evaluators observed the proceedings and progress made towards achieving the objectives and transcribed their observation notes into English.

The scenario described the detection of a novel influenza strain in a small village outside the capital, Vientiane, which had begun to show increased transmission between humans. The outbreak suggested efficient transmission of a probable pandemic strain. The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, in consultation with WHO, decided to attempt a rapid containment of the outbreak.

The first part of the exercise provided sufficient orientation to the concepts involved in rapid containment so that all participants could have a similar understanding. The scenario then stimulated discussions of the actions that would need to be taken in the event of sustained human-to-human transmission of a novel influenza virus within a limited geographical area somewhere in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. It addressed multi-agency involvement in responding to and rapidly containing the outbreak.

7. Key findings

- The objectives of the *PanStop II* exercise were achieved, and some areas for strengthening the *Lao People's Democratic Republic National Protocol for Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza* were identified. In their evaluations, participants were generally satisfied with the information exchange.
- Government and nongovernmental agencies that participated were introduced to the importance of planning for their role in a potential pandemic, particularly with respect to the need for leadership and decision-making at the national level and collaboration at all levels (village, district, province and national government) in the early stages of planning.
- The exercise revealed much common understanding of the issues that the protocol raises, though

several issues need attention to make the protocol operational (addressed in more detail in Section 8, Lessons learnt).

- Successful management and coordination are highly dependent on the timely communication of reliable information. Apart from recognition of some reporting requirements, there seemed to be little consideration of the processes and procedures that need to occur to ensure that sufficient information is collected, analysed and transmitted to support rapid and appropriate management decision-making.

Exercise participants were able to develop or enhance their understanding of the protocol and were able to identify issues.

- While there was broad recognition of the need for a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to the implementation of rapid containment, there was little identification of responsible organizations and their roles, with the exception of the health sector. It is therefore necessary to pre-establish, communicate and practise the coordination and management mechanisms in advance of the event. As the protocol evolves it would be helpful to identify specific responsible positions (not persons) in the agencies, to eliminate any potential ambiguity of responsibility and authority.
- The Lao Government needs to develop a summary for rapid containment as an annex to the protocol to incorporate the following five broad categories of management and coordination activities for rapid containment:
 - policy-level leadership and decision-making
 - operational management
 - planning
 - logistics
 - finance, procurement and administration.

A technical working group (existing or new) should be assigned responsibility for this task.

- The Lao Government needs to develop a logistics plan that addresses the basic issues of storage and distribution so that required materials can be where they are needed in hours not days; and delineates approved, expedited processes for clearing drugs, equipment, supplies and personnel entering the

country. One or more of these could probably be expanded to cover the essential components of a broader logistical plan or, alternatively, an additional annex to the protocol could be developed. Existing technical working groups and their host agencies should be canvassed for personnel who can contribute to the development of a logistics plan for inclusion as an annex to the protocol.

- The Lao Government needs to develop an outbreak communication plan. This is an aspect of risk communication that is considered a key component of a rapid containment operation.
- For future exercises, the Lao Government needs to ensure there is sufficient time and training of the bilingual exercise team so that they can conduct the exercise effectively, make their own observations and prepare the evaluation. In designing future exercises, it is recommended that sponsors and planners pay careful attention to purpose, objectives and scope and ensure that all the sponsoring parties concur with any changes in these, with sufficient time to incorporate them into the planning and design process.

8. Lessons learnt

- Overall, the exercise was successful. By its nature it was somewhat exploratory and therefore provided more orientation and training than evaluation. Nevertheless, through the discussions stimulated by the scenario presentations and with the prompting by key subject matter experts and leaders, exercise participants were able to develop or enhance their understanding of the protocol and were able to identify issues that would impede or enable successful implementation and management of a rapid containment operation.
- As the national protocol continues to evolve, and operational aspects are specified, there will be new opportunities to exercise components of the protocol and to practise different types of exercises, such as the functional exercise, which is better for addressing operational decision-making and coordination.

A report on the exercise was completed in June 2008.¹³

¹³ http://www.wpro.who.int/NR/rdonlyres/61EB5534-5314-429C-91A7-9BAFE220BBD5/0/rce_mr.pdf