

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Summary

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) remains a low HIV prevalence country. The first HIV case was detected in 1990. By the end of December 1998, a total of 367 HIV/AIDS cases had been reported.

The majority of people with HIV infections lived in areas close to the border with Thailand and China, including the capital city of Vientiane. An estimated 1200 people had been infected with HIV in 1998 (prevalence of <0.1% in people aged 15 to 49 years). The majority of reported HIV/AIDS cases were among heterosexuals (96%). Estimates suggest that men and women are equally affected by HIV. It is estimated only about one fifth of the HIV are actually reported.

Serological surveys indicate very low HIV prevalence rates in most population subgroups (<1%), and HIV has not been detected at all in some subgroups. Few data on STI are available, and behavioural surveillance is not routinely conducted. Ad hoc surveys among men at high-risk for HIV/STI infection show that only 40% reported lifetime condom use.

Surveillance Structure

- The expanded WHO AIDS case definition (1994) for AIDS is used.
- All HIV and AIDS cases are notifiable to the Ministry of Health.
- STI are not included in the list of notifiable diseases.
- HIV Sentinel surveillance is not yet in place. Available data on HIV prevalence are from blood donors and ad hoc surveys. During 1995-1996, these surveys covered bar workers, military personnel, truck drivers, and refugees. In 1996, surveyed populations included hospital patients, volunteers, students, pregnant women, and citizens returning from overseas. However, sample sizes in most subgroups are too small to draw conclusions about HIV prevalence.

HIV/AIDS

Reported HIV/AIDS cases as of December 1998

The first case of HIV was diagnosed in 1990. By the end of December 1998, 367 HIV infections had been reported; this included 105 AIDS cases and 45 HIV/AIDS deaths (Table 1). The majority of reported HIV/AIDS cases (96%) were among heterosexuals (Table 2). The majority of HIV infections have been found in areas close to the border with Thailand and China, including the capital city of Vientiane.

Table 1: Reported cases of HIV/AIDS by year of diagnosis in Lao PDR as of December 1998

	1990	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	Total
AIDS	0	1	0	5	4	4	16	48	27	105
HIV/AIDS	1	8	11	18	17	31	71	108	102	367

Table 2: Distribution of cumulative reported HIV/AIDS cases by sex and mode of transmission in Lao PDR as of December 1998

	HIV (%)	AIDS (%)
Sex		
Male	53	50
Female	32	31
Unknown	15	19
Mode of transmission		
Homo-/bisexual	0	0
IDU	<1	0
Heterosexual	96	96
Blood products	0	0
Mother to infant	3	4
Other/unknown	0	0

Active HIV/AIDS surveillance

Seroprevalence surveys carried out in early 1990s showed only sporadic cases of HIV infection. In 1993, HIV seroprevalence ranged from 0.17% (one case) to 1.16% (3 cases) among FSWs in two sentinel sites. In 1994, 4 HIV infections were detected among refugees and returnees from Thailand and China.

Recent seroprevalence data do not indicate any significant spread of HIV infection in the general population (Table 3). No cases were found among the military, police, students or pregnant women during the early 1990s, and no infections were detected in blood donors until 1994. Lao PDR citizens returning from other countries appear to have the higher HIV prevalence (Table 3).

Table 3: HIV seroprevalence in selected population subgroups in Lao PDR, 1995 through 1998

	Number of HIV cases / sample size			
	1995	1996	1997	1998
Blood donors	12 / 3564	3 / 4349	1 / 10444	2 / 2171
Bar workers	0 / 303	1 / 421	2 / 137	0 / 21
Military	0 / 266	0 / 38	0 / 1	1 / 14
Refugees	1 / 120	-----	-----	-----
Hospital patients	12 / 170	28 / 308	81 / 729	48 / 513
Students	-----	2 / 246	0 / 103	1 / 132
Returning citizens	1 / 6	0 / 1	16 / 336	20 / 467
Employed people	0 / 3	0 / 61	0 / 119	2 / 141
Volunteers	2 / 337	9 / 543	5 / 234	13 / 314
Prisoners	-----	0 / 20	2 / 12	4 / 10
Long distance drivers	-----	-----	0 / 1	1 / 8
Labourers	-----	-----	0 / 1	2 / 38
Villagers	-----	0 / 45	-----	8 / 96
Pregnant women	1 / 4	2 / 502	0 / 80	0 / 15
Other	2 / 2	26 / 54	1 / 11	0 / 142

Estimates and projections for HIV/AIDS

An estimated 1200 HIV infected persons were living in Lao PDR in 1998 (prevalence of <0.1% in people aged 15 to 49 years). Half of the HIV infections are believed to occur among women, and heterosexual contact is the dominant mode of transmission (Table 4). Underreporting of HIV/AIDS remains high, and the reported number of HIV accounts for only 20% of estimated cases.

Table 4: HIV/AIDS epidemiological features of HIV/AIDS in Lao PDR (1998 estimates)

HIV	Prevalence	1200
	Prevalence rate in adults (15-49)*	<0.1%
	Women among HIV infected population	50%
HIV Infection by mode of transmission	Sexual contact	95%
	Injecting drug use	3%
	Others	2%
	Estimated reporting rate for HIV	20%
	Estimated reporting rate for AIDS	60%

* Estimated population aged 15 to 49 years in 1998 was 2 335 600.

STI other than HIV

Reported cases Information is not available .

Active STI surveillance Limited data on STI prevalence are available. A prevalence rate for reactive syphilis of 1-2% was found during syphilis screening at the National Institute for Hygiene and Epidemiology in 1996. Some surveillance of syphilis among pregnant women, bar workers and truck drivers/boat operators was carried out in Khammouane and Champassack provinces in 1997. Syphilis was found in 0.4% and 1% of pregnant women, 0.6% and 2.9% of bar workers and 1.7% and 6.3% of truck drivers/boat.

Estimates for STI Insufficient information does not allow for estimates to be made.

Gonococcal antimicrobial resistance Information is not available.

HIV and STI Risk Behaviour Surveillance

Behavioural information is not routinely collected. Ad hoc surveys conducted in 1992 suggest that 40% of the "urban high-risk population of men" reported lifetime sexual contact with men, and 10% reported multiple sex partners during the previous year. Lifetime condom use was only 40- 50%.