



HIV/AIDS HEALTH PROFILE

HIV and AIDS Estimates	
Total Population*	6.5 million (mid-2007)
Estimated Population Living with HIV/AIDS**	3,700 [1,800-12,000] (end 2005)
Adult HIV Prevalence**	0.1% [0.1-0.4%] (end 2005)
HIV Prevalence in Most-At-Risk Populations**	IDUs: <5% (2005) Sex Workers: 0-1.1% (2001)
Percentage of HIV-Infected People Receiving Antiretroviral Therapy**	49% (end 2005)

*US Census Bureau **UNAIDS 2006

among service women found that chlamydia/gonorrhea prevalence was 45 percent in the capital Vientiane, 43.6 percent in the border province of Bokeo, and 27.9 percent in the southern province of Champasak, indicating the vulnerability of these women to HIV.

Lao PDR is undergoing rapid socioeconomic changes, including increased international tourism, leading to sexual behaviors that may place some Laotians at increased risk for HIV infection. For instance, a report cited by UNAIDS found increasing sexual activity among young men in Vientiane in 2004, nearly 60 percent of whom reported having multiple partners in the first six months of the year and more than one-third of whom reported paying for sex. Many of Lao PDR's men who have sex with men (MSM) also report having sex with women. Women are considered to be particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of their low literacy, education and health status. Women whose husbands have multiple sex partners and visit sex workers are particularly vulnerable.

Compounding Lao PDR's vulnerability to an expanding HIV epidemic is a low level of knowledge about the disease among the general population. According to one study reported in the World Bank-sponsored Lao PDR Gender Profile, 23 percent of respondents did not know that HIV was transmissible by blood, and more than half did not know that it could be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Implementing programs to increase knowledge and awareness is difficult in Lao PDR because the country is home to 47 different ethnic groups with multiple native languages and a variety of cultures.

According to the World Health Organization, Lao PDR had 69 new tuberculosis (TB) cases per 100,000 people in 2005, one of the highest incidence rates in the region. Although HIV-TB co-infection is relatively low, with only 0.7 percent of new TB cases occurring among HIV-infected individuals, the country is in danger of a combined epidemic. HIV-TB co-infection poses a challenge to providing treatment and care for both diseases.

National Response

The Lao PDR government initiated its response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in 1992, when participants at an AIDS conference agreed that the spread of HIV was inevitable and would likely occur via young male urban or international migrants who returned to their villages and via women who became commercial sex workers out of economic necessity. The National Committee for the Control of AIDS is in charge of policy matters related to HIV/AIDS prevention and control. The committee consists of 14 members from 12 government ministries. The National Action Plan on HIV/AIDS/STIs for 2006–2010 focuses on achieving universal access to treatment, care and support.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) currently faces a concentrated epidemic with an adult HIV prevalence of 0.1 percent. Since the first case was identified in 1990, the number of infections has continued to grow. In 2005, UNAIDS estimated that 3,700 people in Lao PDR were living with HIV.

Lao PDR's low HIV prevalence does not necessarily indicate low risk. Moreover, the HIV-prevalence rate is increasing. Because of its geographical location in the heart of the Mekong region, injecting drug use, and unsafe sexual practices, Lao PDR is in danger of an expanded epidemic. Nearly 5 percent of injecting drug users (IDUs) were found to be HIV-positive in 2005. Although only 0 to 1.1 percent of sex workers were HIV-infected in 2000, a 2004 survey of the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)



The National Socioeconomic Development Plan for 2006–2010 addresses HIV/AIDS, indicating the government's commitment to expanding the national response. Since implementing the plan, national authorities have worked to target people most likely to be exposed to the disease; scale up prevention, treatment, care and support; and improve strategic information. Activities to fight HIV/AIDS, including behavior change communication interventions, peer education, life skills training, and a 100 percent condom use program, have been integrated into Lao PDR's general development programs. The Ministry of Education is promoting HIV/AIDS and sex education by training school principals and teachers in these areas, so they can transfer their knowledge to students. The objective is to reduce risky sexual behavior to help keep down the number of new HIV infections in the country. According to UNAIDS, as of 2005, 49 percent of HIV-infected women and men were receiving antiretroviral therapy.

Lao PDR receives support in its response to HIV/AIDS from various international donors, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The Global Fund approved a sixth-round grant from Lao PDR to scale up HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment in 2006. The U.S. Government provides one-third of the Global Fund's funding.

USAID Support

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Laos in fiscal year 2007 received \$1 million for essential HIV/AIDS programs and services. USAID programs in Laos are implemented in partnership with the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The Emergency Plan is the largest commitment ever by any nation for an international health initiative dedicated to a single disease – a five-year, \$15 billion, multifaceted approach to combating the disease in more than 114 countries around the world. To date, the U.S. has committed \$18.8 billion to the fight against the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, exceeding its original commitment of \$15 billion over five years.

USAID provides assistance to Lao PDR through the Regional Development Mission/Asia (RDMA). The United States has worked with the Lao PDR government since 1998 to monitor the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The funding in recent years has enabled the expansion of USAID activities to include improving market research and strategies for condom sales, implementing prevention and treatment programs for STIs, and conducting surveillance and interventions for populations at risk for HIV infection.

In Lao PDR, the Center for HIV/AIDS and STIs has identified four provinces as HIV/STI "hot spots," namely Vientiane, Savannakhet, Champasak, and Luangphrabang. USAID/RDMA works closely with the Provincial Committees for the Control of AIDS (PCCA) in these provinces and follows a strategic approach focusing on HIV prevention activities and targets the country's two most at-risk populations: MSM and female sex workers (FSWs). Although USAID/RDMA does not directly support care and treatment activities, all prevention activities are linked to other care and treatment programs through referrals.

Through the PCCAs in the four provinces, the RDMA provides comprehensive behavior-change interventions for FSWS, their clients and potential clients. The RDMA focuses on condom social marketing and outreach and peer education activities among FSWS and MSM in target provinces. In addition, the RDMA uses funds from the regional HIV/AIDS budget to conduct supply chain and drug-management assessments in Lao PDR.

In fiscal year 2007, RDMA's key results in Lao PDR include:

- Providing a minimum package of prevention services to FSWS and MSM in four hotspots;
- Expanding its MSM program in three sites by leveraging contributions from The Global Fund;
- Expanding the distribution network for STI pre-packaged treatment in 30 private clinics;
- Launching an STI intervention for Vietnamese FSWS in two provinces and extending its program to reach migrant populations near the Laos-Thailand border. These expansive activities allowed RDMA assistance to have a greater geographic impact while reaching more people in the target populations;
- Launching a radio program reaching clients of sex workers with HIV-prevention messages; and
- Developing a manual on peer education for monthly outreach sessions for FSWS, which is also being adopted by other donors. These public outreach efforts have further extended the impact of the RDMA's interventions to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS in Lao PDR. As a result of these prevention activities, the RDMA reached 110,465 individuals.

Important Links and Contacts

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USAID HIV/AIDS Web site for Lao PDR: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/ane/laos.html

Mekong Regional HIV/AIDS Initiative Web site, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/ane/aneregion.html

For more information, see USAID HIV/AIDS Web site http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids

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