

One hundred thousand COVID-19 RT-PCR tests performed by the Institut Pasteur du Cambodge

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The Institut Pasteur du Cambodge (IPC) remains fully committed to working together with the Ministry of Health to combat COVID-19 in Cambodia. As of 26 October 2020, IPC has performed more than 100,000 (one hundred thousand) COVID-19 molecular diagnostic tests by RT-PCR in the Virology Unit. Those tests have contributed to the identification and/or confirmation of 287 (two hundred eighty seven) positive individuals reported by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to the World Health Organization (WHO) since the start of the pandemic.

IPC is a Cambodian non-for-profit research institution established in 1953. IPC carries out life science and health research on infectious diseases, and supports public health surveillance through high-quality laboratories and epidemiology/clinical research capacities. As a member of the Institut Pasteur International Network (IPIN), IPC also works closely with several national and international partners to further increase capacity and capability in Cambodia and beyond. The Virology Unit was established in 1995 and, since 2008, it hosts a high-level (BSL-3) biosafety laboratory with multiple diagnostic test capacities to identify and understand endemic and emerging infectious diseases.

IPC was prepared to test for COVID-19 by mid-January, 2020 and detected the first COVID-19 case on January 27th. In addition, IPC was integral in the response and testing of passengers from the MS Westerdam in February, 2020. In March 2020, scientists at IPC were able to successfully isolate the virus. In April 2020, IPC received designation as WHO Global Referral Laboratory for COVID-19, a crucial role in addressing the public health risks emerging from the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to routine molecular testing, IPC is also actively involved in global validation and verification of novel testing protocols and diagnostic kits for SARS-CoV-2, and in research projects facilitating the understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Molecular testing capacity continues to increase in Cambodia. The National Institute of Health (NIPH) began performing COVID-19 RT-PCR in May 2020, and, most recently, the provincial hospital in Siem Reap began testing using Cepheid GenXpert technology. Additional laboratory capacities for COVID-19 tests are coming online soon. IPC helps to support the training of laboratory personnel and works closely with WHO and other partners.

In parallel to direct RT-PCR tests, scientists at IPC implemented serology capacities for seroprevalence studies. On top of responding to the current COVID-19 pandemic and to current influenza (H3N2) and

chikungunya epidemics, scientists at IPC continue vital research in Cambodia for a number of important infectious diseases (seasonal and avian influenza, dengue, malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, rabies, etc..), and for novel emerging zoonotic diseases, as well as other critical research projects (immunology, entomology). The maintenance of these research efforts is paramount to understand pathogens with high public health impact in Cambodia, the Great Mekong Sub-Region, and around the globe.

The Direction of the Institut Pasteur du Cambodge would sincerely like to thank: Dr. Veasna Duong (Head of Virology Unit), Dr. Erik Karlsson (Deputy Head, WHO Global Referral Laboratory coordinator), Dr HORM Srey Viseth (senior scientist), and all of the staff members who work on a 7 days a week basis since February for the benefit of the Cambodian population. The Institut Pasteur du Cambodge also thanks the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization, all development partners and donators for their continued support.

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